



# SUMMARY POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN FROM ETHNIC COMMUNITIES PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2024



Implemented by:



International Foundation  
for Electoral Systems

Women's representation in multiethnic and multicultural society is not only about gender equality but also about reflecting the full spectrum of the nation's cultural and ethnic diversity. In a country with a rich blend of ethnic communities—Macedonian, Albanian, Roma, Turkish, Vlach, Bosniak, and Serbian—ensuring the inclusion of women from all these groups is crucial for fostering a more equitable and representative political landscape.

Social Inclusion of women from smaller ethnic communities varies and is result of the country's historical, socioeconomic and political development. However, women within these communities who aspire to run for office face dual challenges: first, overcoming patriarchal structures within their own parties, and then competing with candidates, both men and women, from larger coalition parties that have more resources at disposal.

The purpose of this analysis is to explore barriers faced by women from ethnic communities when engaging into politics and provide recommendations for the future and ahead local elections 2025.

To capture ethnic diversity and various size of political parties the following terminology is used:

- Smaller ethnic communities include all ethnic communities in North Macedonia besides the Macedonian and the Albanian community.
- Smaller political parties includes all active political parties that have not more than two members of the parliament. Smaller political parties include a wide spectrum of parties with membership from different ethnic backgrounds. These parties may be predominantly Macedonian or Albanian, or they may be organized around issues specific to particular ethnic communities, such as Roma, Turks, Vlachs, Bosniaks, and Serbian.

## **WOMEN FROM ETHNIC COMMUNITIES AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION-PROFILE AND TRAJECTORIES**

A woman from a smaller ethnic community who is willing to get involved into politics can pursue various options such as:

- **To engage in a majority political party,**
- **To engage in an ethnic community based political party,**
- **Create new political party, or**
- **Run as an independent candidate.**

Each of the options have certain specifics, challenges and advantages however a none of the options provides “one-size fits all” solution as political representation of women from ethnic communities is characterized by community-based politics, numerical fragmentation and a significant gap in the permeation into the political field between the women from the larger ethnic group and the smaller communities.

# WOMEN FROM NON-MAJORITY COMMUNITY AND PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

Women from ethnic communities account for more than 20% of the total resident population however their presence on the parliamentary candidates lists and as a member of the parliament is much lower than their actual place in society. There are few factors that contribute to such condition.

## ***The unfavorable effects of the electoral system***

The Law on Financing of Political Parties method for allocation of state funding tends to disadvantage smaller political parties. In the context of North Macedonia, the less funding a party receives, the less likely it is that these funds will be used to empower women and promote equal opportunities within and beyond the party.

The unfavorable effects of the law for political finance of the political parties coupled significant fragmentation in political representation among smaller communities, is pushing smaller parties into pre-election coalitions. In this context, the general struggle women face in accessing leadership positions within their political parties becomes a major disadvantage, especially for women from smaller communities. Male party leaders typically secure the highest eligible positions on the coalition list, effectively sidelining women.

## ***The unfavorable effect of the law on financing of political parties***

The Law on Financing of Political Parties method for allocation of state funding tends to disadvantage smaller political parties. In the context of North Macedonia, the less funding a party receives, the less likely it is that these funds will be used to empower women and promote equal opportunities within and beyond the party.

The unfavorable effects of the law for political finance of the political parties coupled significant fragmentation in political representation among smaller communities, is pushing smaller parties into pre-election coalitions. In this context, the general struggle women face in accessing leadership positions within their political parties becomes a major disadvantage, especially for women from smaller communities. Male party leaders typically secure the highest eligible positions on the coalition list, effectively sidelining women.

## ***Candidate selection and political campaign***

For the 2024 parliamentary elections only 42 per cent of candidates were women and out of these 8.2 % were women candidates from the ethnic communities. Political parties have mainly maintained a numerical approach to gender participation as none of them introduce more women than the minimum legal requirement on the candidate list.

Dwelling further in the candidate selection and political campaign heled revealing following findings:

- Only 58% of respondents reported that their parties implement internal gender representation quotas. About 60% described the process of preparing candidate lists was fair, transparent, gender-balanced, and merit-based,
- 1.3 % of respondents characterized the process of preparing candidate lists as unclear, driven by favoritism, and predominantly male-dominated.
- Women have not experienced instances of violence and of discrimination, both within their party and within their coalition.
- In few instances women candidates were sidelined during the political campaign.
- In smaller settlements, activities and meetings would be mostly conducted by men
- 54,8% declared active participation in strategic meetings where their opinion is sought
- 38,8% were only invited to attend some meetings
- 33% of women never met with members and supporters of another party from the coalition.
- Only 19% of the women had interactions with media representatives during the political campaign



## CONCLUSIONS

Women politicians from smaller communities face significant challenges, including restrictive gender quotas, the coalition effect, leadership gender bias, and unfavorable seat and resource distribution.

These factors result in their underrepresentation in both candidate lists and parliamentary seats. Despite their guaranteed rights to participation, smaller communities face unequal opportunities in political engagement, and women from these communities do not have the same access as other women politicians.

The political participation of smaller ethnic communities is hindered by certain aspects of the electoral system, which favor political parties representing larger communities. These include the unequal distribution of public funding and the seat allocation formula, both of which disproportionately benefit larger groups.

While all women politicians face some degree of direct and structural discrimination rooted in the electoral system and their political party structures, they do not form a homogeneous group. In society, power dynamics prioritize party affiliation first, ethnicity second, and gender third.

Women from smaller ethnic communities not only face the same challenges as other women politicians, but also encounter additional disadvantages based on their ethnicity. These challenges affect their acceptance within both their community and broader society. As a result, these factors significantly reduce their chances of being elected and contribute to the persistent underrepresentation of women from smaller communities in leadership and elected positions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***Affirmative actions and electoral reform: making informed choices***

Affirmative action in electoral rules is one approach to ensuring the effective participation of women and individuals from national minorities. In addition to constitutionally guaranteed representation of minorities in Parliament and/or special parliamentary committees, the Venice Commission outlines following key principles:

- political parties representing national minorities should be guaranteed reserved seats,
- electoral thresholds should not hinder the representation of national minorities, and
- the design of electoral districts (in terms of number, size, shape, and magnitude) may be tailored to promote minority participation in decision-making processes.

The participation of national minorities in politics should not be limited to ethnic-based parties. Within larger political parties, provisions that mandate minority representation on internal party committees and candidate lists are considered good electoral practice.

Provisions for reserved seats that are separately allocated to national minorities are quite common in the region such as in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Slovenia, Romania

A new seat allocation key which allocates the “remainder seats” on an equal basis to all parties that pass the threshold to enter Parliament rather than on a highest average formula could result in the possible distribution of a greater number of seats to small parties and with this increase the chances of women from these parties placed on the lowest possible positions on the candidate lists to be elected on the parliament.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe recommends that member states should “*consider the introduction of “zipper systems”, alternating both sexes*” This would result in more favorable placement of women on the candidate lists

Introduction of gender-targeted public funding in electoral legislation to promote women's participation could be considered as a measure that would make it easier for women, especially from underrepresented groups, to access eligible positions on the candidates lists.

### ***Increasing the admissibility of woman politicians from smaller political parties***

To enhance the acceptance of women politicians from smaller communities, it's essential to raise their public profile in addition to strengthening social connections and economic empowerment. Political change alone is insufficient without a corresponding shift in societal attitudes towards women.

### ***Contrasting gendered disinformation and hate speech***

Hate speech and gendered disinformation are a threat to the very fabric of society and should not be allowed to shape the socio-political landscape. There are many measures including the enhancement of capacities of law enforcement and criminal justice officials and real commitment from the political parties to abstain from engaging into negative campaign technics.

The traditional media should address their role with regards to perpetuating and amplifying by introducing gendered editorial policy, gender-balanced editorial boards, identification and recognition of gender discriminatory speech and raise the awareness of the journalists for gender-balanced reporting.

## ***Gender equality versus equal opportunities***

The Parliamentary Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and Women Parliamentarians' Club efforts should continue and further enhance including initiatives that fight negative perception attached to gender initiatives.

Given that the EU accession negotiations started in July 2022 these efforts provide the bases for incorporation of the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and the EU gender acquis into relevant national legislation.

## ***Political parties and gender mainstreaming***

Contrary to the only numerical approach substantive equality , equality of opportunities between women and men can be further enhanced through the functions of redistribution, recognition, participation and transformation. This includes implementing of the following measures:

- Redressing disadvantage (the redistributive dimension): Introduction of self-imposed quotas, such as the "zipper system," on candidate lists for parliamentary and local elections
- Addressing stigma, prejudice, stereotyping and violence (the recognition dimension): in practice, all instances of violence should be dealt with and sanctioned by the party, regardless of eventual further litigation in court.
- Enabling participation and giving a voice to those disadvantaged (the participative dimension): women section should be empowered within the party with increased importance in decision-making.
- Accommodating difference through structural change (the transformative dimension): This could lead to initiatives such as setting internal gender quotas for all positions within the party structure

## **Recommendations ahead of local elections 2025**

**Political parties should develop outreach strategies with the view of increasing the level of acceptability and recruitment of women candidates in rural and remote/isolated areas.**

**Women from smaller political parties and from ethnic communities should advocate for dedicated (earmarked) budget, out of the political party budget for 2025, that will be under the financial autonomy of the women section.**

**Political parties should initiate development efforts directed to capacity building of women party members in general, and candidates for upcoming local elections in particular. Development efforts could take place through mentorship programs**

**For women politicians from ethnic communities, strong and lasting family support is the bedrock of their political engagement. Hence, building family resilience in front of abuse and slander that sometimes come with increased public exposure could help navigating hard times and securing enduring support.**

This analysis is made in the frames of the Electoral Support Programme of the Government of Switzerland, implemented by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). The views, opinions and content expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect those of the donor, the project or the implementer.