



# Participation of community women in political and public life in North Macedonia





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Title: Participation of Community Women in Political and Public Life in North Macedonia

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I am proud to endorse this publication on the participation of community women in political and public life in North Macedonia, a report that shines a light on the barriers, contributions, and aspirations of women who, too often, remain underrepresented in decision-making spaces. This research is more than an exploration of data; it is a testament to the courage and resilience of community women, and it underscores the necessity of creating avenues for their voices to be heard and their leadership to flourish.

The findings in this report are both sobering and inspiring. Despite the numerous challenges they face, these women continue to make invaluable contributions within their communities and beyond. Yet, they confront obstacles at nearly every step, from discrimination and prejudice to limitations in resources and support structures. This publication lays out these realities with clarity and provides a roadmap for addressing them. We are reminded that meaningful participation and representation are not just ideals but essential ingredients for a democratic and just society.

Community women deserve equal opportunities to influence political and public life, and it is our duty to work toward a society where these opportunities are the norm, not the exception. This report is a call to action for policymakers, civil society, and communities to rally around the vision of an inclusive society that empowers all women to participate fully.

This publication should serve as both a resource and a catalyst for change. The insights and recommendations within these pages will inspire action, foster collaboration, and bring us closer to a world where diversity in leadership is celebrated and where all women are empowered to shape our shared future.

With this report, the OSCE Mission to Skopje reaffirms its commitment to championing the rights of community women. We are dedicated to amplifying their voices and removing the barriers that stand in their way. The path to true equity requires sustained effort, and we are here for the long haul, working with our partners and communities to make this vision a reality.

Ambassador Kilian Wahl,  
Head of OSCE Mission to Skopje



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# I. Executive Summary

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Women have significantly weaker political positions than men in terms of political engagement and influence in both wealthy countries and developing regions. Women from non-majority communities often experience dual discrimination based on both their gender and ethnicity.<sup>1</sup> This disadvantaged position is similarly observed among women from non-majority communities in North Macedonia. Consequently, this study aims to offer a comprehensive examination of the levels and circumstances surrounding the political participation of women from non-majority communities in North Macedonia, emphasizing the multifaceted inequalities faced by community women in their attempts to join political and public life. The study employs a blend of quantitative and qualitative research methods, encompassing primary data collection through a field survey involving 1002 respondents and six interviews and secondary data analysis.

## 1. Secondary Research: Summary

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The limited involvement of women in public life is a direct outcome of entrenched patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Public life tends to be dominated by men, while women are primarily expected to fulfill caregiving roles within the home and family.<sup>2</sup> Although this pattern is a widespread characteristic in the country, it is more pronounced within Roma and Albanian communities than in the majority Macedonian community.

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- 1 UNICEF, 'Promoting the Rights of Minority Children and Women: A Review of UNICEF's Policies and Practices - Minority Rights Group', 2010, accessed 11 December 2023 Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4d8ae7782.pdf>
  - 2 '2018 Public Perceptions of Gender Equality and Violence Against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey', UN Women | Europe and Central Asia, accessed 11 December 2023, Available at: <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/05/2018-public-perceptions-of-ge-and-vaw-in-the-western-balkans-and-turkey-0>.<https://eca.unwomen.org//digital-library/publications/2019/05/2018-public-perceptions-of-ge-and-vaw-in-the-western-balkans-and-turkey.>, "plainCitation": "2018 Public Perceptions of Gender Equality and Violence Against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey", UN Women | Europe and Central Asia, accessed 9 December 2021, <https://eca.unwomen.org//digital-library/publications/2019/05/2018-public-perceptions-of-ge-and-vaw-in-the-western-balkans-and-turkey.>, "noteIndex": 56, "citationItems": [{"id": "UH-8qxhRd/f18xxxMj", "uris": ["http://zotero.org/users/3878557/items/UNF7GUHB"], "uri": ["http://zotero.org/users/3878557/items/UNF7GUHB"], "itemData": {"id": "865", "type": "webpage", "abstract": "The \"2018 Public Perceptions of Gender Equality and Violence against Women\" Infosheets provide insight of current and dominant attitudes and perceptions (and the factors that influence them



In terms of the legislative framework, North Macedonia possesses a relatively robust and expansive normative and institutional framework aimed at promoting gender equality. Significant progress began post-2000, propelled by various factors such as the introduction of quotas for the underrepresented gender on MP candidate lists (2002) and women councilors in local self-government (2004); the attainment of candidate country status for EU membership (2005); and the enactment of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2006). However, challenges persist in the implementation and advancement of this normative framework.<sup>3</sup>

The implementation of a mandatory quota to ensure the representation of the less-represented gender on the candidate lists of political parties for parliamentary and council positions in local governments has led to an increase in the presence of women in politics. Nevertheless, most of these positions are held by Macedonian women, with women from Albanian community following closely behind. In contrast, women from the smaller communities are largely excluded from such opportunities, especially visible when assessing the representation of Roma women in decision-making positions. Conversely, the representation of women in political roles without designated quotas, such as in the government or mayoral seats, is notably lower or entirely absent.

The International Indicators for Gender Balance show an imbalance in women's representation and disparities in many fields in North Macedonia. The Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), which monitors gender-based gaps across four dimensions, such as economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment-ranks North Macedonia at 73<sup>rd</sup> place among 146 countries, with a 71.1% gender gap.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Primary Research: Summary

### 2.1. Political participation – general state regarding level of engagement, ambitions, and motivation


The political participation of women across communities is largely equivalent to voting in elections. Consequently, 72% or more of the women from all communities lack direct involvement and personal ambitions for getting involved in politics. The prevailing reason for their decision not to enter politics is a lack of interest by all respondents. The

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3 Evaluation of human rights and rule of law during the presidency of the OSCE. Helsinki Committee of Human Rights. April, 2023.

4 Global Gender Gap Report 2023, World Economic Forum (weforum.org). Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>





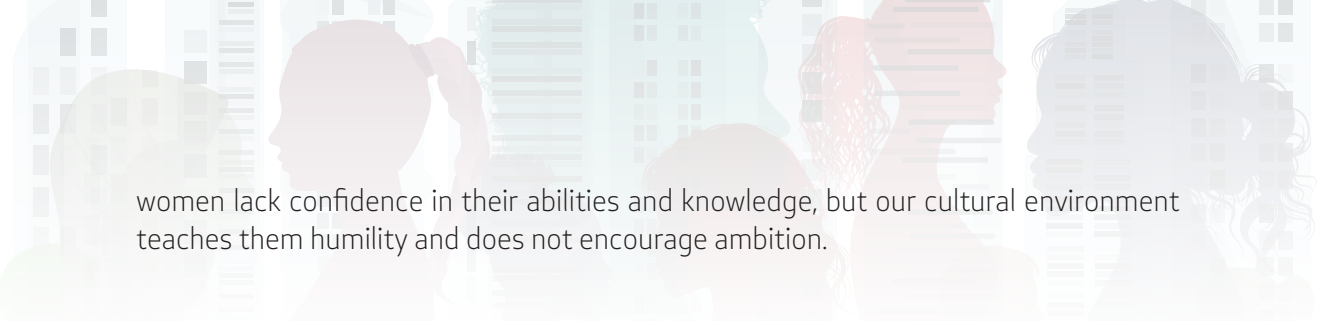
interviewed politicians stated understanding in this regard and specifically emphasized that politics is “dirty”, especially for female politicians. On the other hand, the two main motivations for women who are involved or aspire to get involved in politics across different communities are the desire to influence and improve the situation in society and the need to influence and improve the situation in their community. The need to improve society is also the primary motive among the interviewed politicians, while the need to improve their community was specifically emphasized by the interviewed politicians from Roma community.

The exercise of the right to vote in the last elections was lowest among Roma women, with a 63% turnout, compared to the other communities where the turnout was between 73% and 95%. When voting, personal political conviction and consistent political values are the sole basis for most women across communities, although this percentage is lower among Albanian women (47%). Some of the interviewed politicians described the level of freedom women have in expressing their political beliefs as low, particularly among women from smaller, more closed environments, regardless of ethnic background.

Engagement with political parties is around 10% for women from all communities, except for Bosniak and Macedonian women (25% and 17%, respectively). However, women’s engagement in political parties is generally limited to just membership. When discussing how the interviewed politicians entered politics, five out of six stated that they were recognized by the party leader, with no previous active or significant engagement within the political party.

Around half or more of the women from all communities want their interests to be considered when a political decision is made, with a lowest percentage among Roma women (44%). Still, Roma and Vlach women indicate the highest degree of disinterest in this regard (54% and 52%, respectively). The percentage of women who declared low to no interest in reacting if a political decision goes against their interests is highest among Roma (65%). The interviewed politicians emphasized the importance of familiarizing women with their political rights and encouraging them to stand up for their rights.

Women believe that the skills and knowledge they possess are not sufficient enough in order for them to hold high political positions. The highest confidence is noted for the most local position proposed, that of Municipal councillor, where women from all communities are divided on whether they possess the necessary knowledge and skills. Roma women are an exception; only 6% believe they meet the requirements for this political position. This uncertainty grows with the higher political position proposed in the survey; hence Roma and Vlach women feel unqualified for roles such as Prime Minister or President of the country. The interviewed politicians also believe that



women lack confidence in their abilities and knowledge, but our cultural environment teaches them humility and does not encourage ambition.

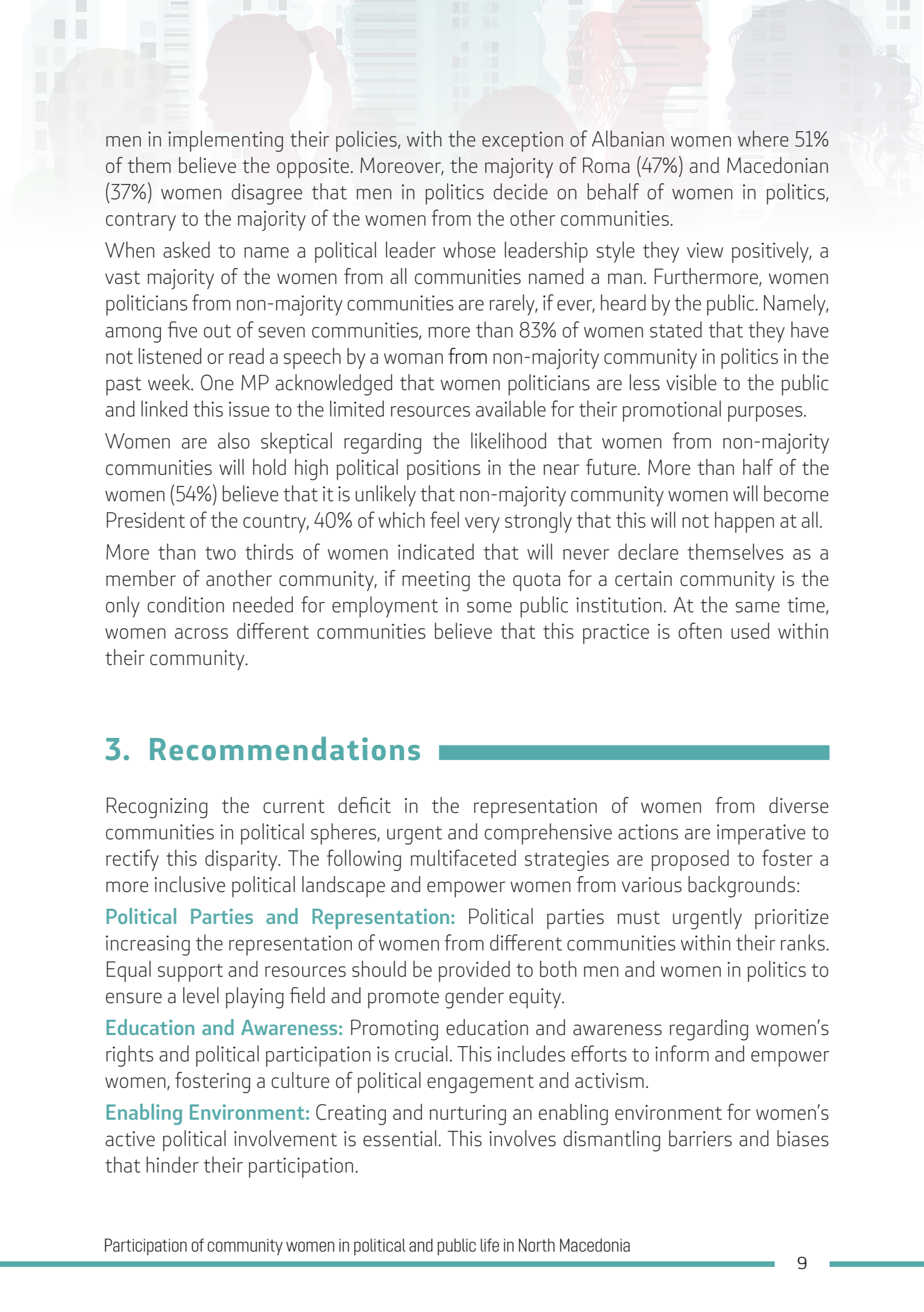
## 2.2. Perception on the community women in politics – ethnic and cultural perceptions, perspectives, and challenges

A significant percentage from all communities (ranging from 10% of Serb to 36% of Albanian women) perceive that Roma community is treated more discriminatorily compared to others. This perception is also shared with 92% of Roma women. All the interviewed politicians claimed that they faced or are still facing some form of discrimination, mostly related to their gender, but in some cases, a combination of both their gender and ethnic background.

Most women agree women are underrepresented in political and public life in North Macedonia. This perception is similarly reflected regarding the representation of the women from non-majority communities in political life, with the majority stating that they are practically invisible. Women across communities almost unanimously agree that it would be better for the country if there were more women involved in political life. On the other hand, majority of the women across communities also share the opinion that women should, first and foremost, be good wives and mothers and take care of the home—ranging from 41% of Serb women to a high of 84% of Roma women. The interviewed politicians agree that women are underrepresented in politics, identifying a lack of ambition and persistence for inclusion in this sphere and the scarce access to resources that women in politics have as some of the main reasons. One MP also concluded that that our politics and society equate ethnic diversity with the representation of only Macedonian and Albanian communities, thus excluding the rest. All of them also note that society expects women to carry the whole weight of caretaking for the home and family, and women traditionally obey these expectations, thus discouraging them from active political engagement.

Women across communities are divided in the opinion of whether women from non-majority communities in politics have the power to influence decisions. The highest percentage of positive responses is noted among Serb women (40%) and lowest among Vlach women (26%). The interviewed politicians agreed that the power to influence politics, not just for women from non-majority communities but for women in general, is lower compared to men. They further argue that this is significantly influenced by different lifestyle and traditional gender roles practiced by men and women in our society, directly related to the decision-making practices.

Women across communities believe that women politicians would make political life less corrupt, less violent and would strengthen social welfare in the country. The majority of women do not believe that women politicians cannot be as influential as



men in implementing their policies, with the exception of Albanian women where 51% of them believe the opposite. Moreover, the majority of Roma (47%) and Macedonian (37%) women disagree that men in politics decide on behalf of women in politics, contrary to the majority of the women from the other communities.

When asked to name a political leader whose leadership style they view positively, a vast majority of the women from all communities named a man. Furthermore, women politicians from non-majority communities are rarely, if ever, heard by the public. Namely, among five out of seven communities, more than 83% of women stated that they have not listened or read a speech by a woman from non-majority community in politics in the past week. One MP acknowledged that women politicians are less visible to the public and linked this issue to the limited resources available for their promotional purposes.

Women are also skeptical regarding the likelihood that women from non-majority communities will hold high political positions in the near future. More than half of the women (54%) believe that it is unlikely that non-majority community women will become President of the country, 40% of which feel very strongly that this will not happen at all.

More than two thirds of women indicated that will never declare themselves as a member of another community, if meeting the quota for a certain community is the only condition needed for employment in some public institution. At the same time, women across different communities believe that this practice is often used within their community.

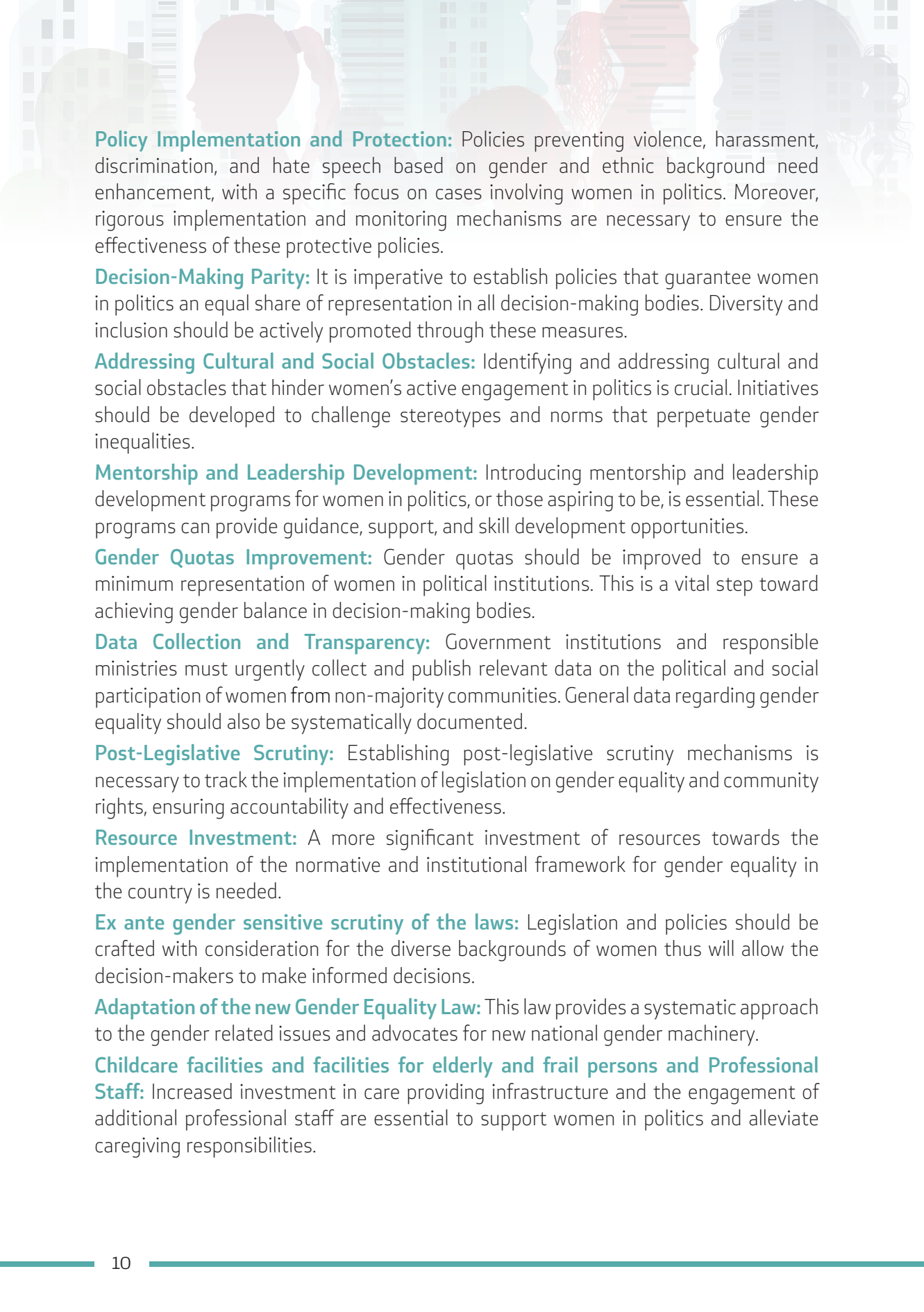
### 3. Recommendations

Recognizing the current deficit in the representation of women from diverse communities in political spheres, urgent and comprehensive actions are imperative to rectify this disparity. The following multifaceted strategies are proposed to foster a more inclusive political landscape and empower women from various backgrounds:

**Political Parties and Representation:** Political parties must urgently prioritize increasing the representation of women from different communities within their ranks. Equal support and resources should be provided to both men and women in politics to ensure a level playing field and promote gender equity.

**Education and Awareness:** Promoting education and awareness regarding women's rights and political participation is crucial. This includes efforts to inform and empower women, fostering a culture of political engagement and activism.

**Enabling Environment:** Creating and nurturing an enabling environment for women's active political involvement is essential. This involves dismantling barriers and biases that hinder their participation.



**Policy Implementation and Protection:** Policies preventing violence, harassment, discrimination, and hate speech based on gender and ethnic background need enhancement, with a specific focus on cases involving women in politics. Moreover, rigorous implementation and monitoring mechanisms are necessary to ensure the effectiveness of these protective policies.

**Decision-Making Parity:** It is imperative to establish policies that guarantee women in politics an equal share of representation in all decision-making bodies. Diversity and inclusion should be actively promoted through these measures.

**Addressing Cultural and Social Obstacles:** Identifying and addressing cultural and social obstacles that hinder women's active engagement in politics is crucial. Initiatives should be developed to challenge stereotypes and norms that perpetuate gender inequalities.

**Mentorship and Leadership Development:** Introducing mentorship and leadership development programs for women in politics, or those aspiring to be, is essential. These programs can provide guidance, support, and skill development opportunities.

**Gender Quotas Improvement:** Gender quotas should be improved to ensure a minimum representation of women in political institutions. This is a vital step toward achieving gender balance in decision-making bodies.

**Data Collection and Transparency:** Government institutions and responsible ministries must urgently collect and publish relevant data on the political and social participation of women from non-majority communities. General data regarding gender equality should also be systematically documented.

**Post-Legislative Scrutiny:** Establishing post-legislative scrutiny mechanisms is necessary to track the implementation of legislation on gender equality and community rights, ensuring accountability and effectiveness.

**Resource Investment:** A more significant investment of resources towards the implementation of the normative and institutional framework for gender equality in the country is needed.

**Ex ante gender sensitive scrutiny of the laws:** Legislation and policies should be crafted with consideration for the diverse backgrounds of women thus will allow the decision-makers to make informed decisions.

**Adaptation of the new Gender Equality Law:** This law provides a systematic approach to the gender related issues and advocates for new national gender machinery.

**Childcare facilities and facilities for elderly and frail persons and Professional Staff:** Increased investment in care providing infrastructure and the engagement of additional professional staff are essential to support women in politics and alleviate caregiving responsibilities.



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## II. Methodology

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This research delves into the participation of women from various communities in political and public life, offering recommendations for effective measures and mechanisms to enhance their involvement in the country's political and public life. Employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, the study incorporates both primary and secondary data analysis. The data collection process involved:

- A comprehensive literature review
- Examination of relevant legislation
- Face-to-face surveys conducted on a representative or national sample
- Conducting semi-structured interviews.

### Secondary Research

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This research methodology involves gathering information from various sources, including pertinent studies, policy and research papers, reports from civil society organizations and international entities, scientific articles, and publications. In the context of this study, pre-existing relevant data were considered. This existing data was succinctly summarized and organized to enhance the overall efficiency of the study. Additionally, an examination of the legal and institutional framework pertaining to gender equality was carried out.

The review incorporated data from government entities, ministries, the State Statistical Office, and other pertinent sources. The secondary research delves into contemporary trends and challenges faced by women from non-majority communities. It adopts a longitudinal perspective, tracing levels of socio-economic participation among women from non-majority communities over the years for which data is available.



## Primary Research

- **Survey**

The in-person survey conducted at the national level obtained pertinent data, which were subsequently analyzed and transformed into comprehensive information. The survey questionnaire comprised closed-ended questions designed to assess various facets of women's political participation. The quantitative data collected underwent processing using software tools such as SPSS Statistics and Microsoft Excel, employing basic descriptive statistical methods like frequencies and cross-tabulations. Prior to processing, the database underwent thorough checks to rectify input errors and omissions common in this type of research.

The primary data research analyzes and translates first-hand data into comprehensive information measuring various aspects of women's political and public participation at the national level. The survey explores the levels and conditions for political and public participation of women from different communities, their perception on women engagement in politics, and compares the obtained information.


The data collection utilized a random multistage stratified sample of women representatives of seven communities at the national level. The methodology employed was face-to-face Computer-assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). The survey encompassed a sample size of  $N = 1002$ , with a marginal error of 3% and a confidence level of 95%. Complete and valid questionnaires were collected in the period from 16.06.2023 to 10.07.2023. To ensure the authenticity of responses, a bilingual version of the questionnaire, available in Macedonian and Albanian, was implemented.

**Table 1. Demographic structure of respondents**

		Total sample	Percent
		Count	Column N %
Total	Total	1002	100
Age	18-29	206	20
	30-39	162	17
	40-49	257	27
	50-59	213	20
	60-69	164	16
Community	Macedonian	564	64
	Albanian	258	26
	Roma	39	3
	Turkish	42	4
	Serb	30	1
	Bosniak	35	1
	Vlach	34	1
Place of residence	Urban environment	783	59
	Rural environment	219	41
Region	Vardar	66	8
	East	84	8
	Southwest	91	10
	Southeast	82	8
	Pelagonia	101	12
	Polog	129	14
	Northeast	91	8
	Skopje	358	33

• **Interviews**

As a supplementary method of data collection, semi-structured interviews were undertaken to address more abstract aspects of the research. These interviews yielded more comprehensive insights, delving deeper into the political participation of women from non-majority communities. Open discussions during the interviews unveiled additional information about various phenomena related to this subject. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview questionnaire facilitated the collection of data that went beyond the initially anticipated questions in the field survey.

The background of the page features a row of silhouettes of six women's heads and shoulders, facing right. They are rendered in various colors: light green, light purple, light blue, light red, light orange, and light grey. Behind the silhouettes is a faint, stylized city skyline with rectangular buildings of varying heights.

The sample for these interviews comprised 6 women who were selected based on their political engagement and ethnic background. Conducted in August 2023, the interviews focused on the domains of political and public participation, chosen for their high relevance to the research topic. These interviews took place after the completion of the field survey and the initial review of its results, allowing for discussions that considered additional information.

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews underwent processing through content analysis and discursive analysis methods. Reliability was upheld by utilizing codes developed to represent identified themes, which were systematically applied to the data. The analysis of the interviews involved examining recurrent patterns, enabling a detailed interpretation. The findings from these analyses were seamlessly integrated into the text to illuminate various facets of the political participation of women from non-majority communities.





## Introduction

This research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on gender equality in North Macedonia, specifically focusing on the political engagement of women from non-majority communities. The primary goal is to evaluate the public involvement of women from non-majority communities by examining their participation and perceptions of political life in the country. Globally, women occupy a mere 24% of parliamentary seats, a significantly lower percentage compared to men.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, North Macedonia has witnessed a consistent increase in the number of female parliamentarians. Following the constitution of the Parliament after the July 2020 parliamentary elections, there were 41 women MPs, or 39,1%, which was less than the previous parliamentary term (2016-2020), when women made up 40% of MPs.<sup>6</sup> However, women's representation in executive roles remains inadequate, with no women holding top positions like prime minister, president, or president of the Parliament. In the 2020-2024 Government composition, only five out of 20 Government positions were held by women, and only two out of 81 mayors were women. In areas without established quotas, women's participation often hovers around the minimum legal requirement, with an even more dire situation when considering the political participation of community women.

Given the multifaceted challenges women encounter in the public life in North Macedonia, this study aims to outline the level and conditions of political participation among women from non-majority communities in North Macedonia. The research is structured to first explore the context of political participation women from non-majority communities, followed by a review of domestic legal frameworks. Subsequently, the study presents primary data collected through surveys and interviews. Finally, it offers conclusions and recommendations for policies, mechanisms, and actions to enhance the political participation of women from non-majority communities in North Macedonia.

5 'SDG 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls', UN Women, accessed 9 December 2023, Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality>,"plain-Citation":"SDG 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls', UN Women, accessed 9 December 2021, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality>,"notelindex":1},"citationItems":[{"id":"UH8qxrD/xwTdlKDI","uris":["http://zotero.org/users/3878557/items/662ERCNM"],"uri":["http://zotero.org/users/3878557/items/662ERCNM"],"itemData":{"id":884,"type":"webpage","abstract":"How can women help achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls?","container-title":"UN Women","language":"en","title":"SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls","title-short":"SDG 5","URL":"https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality","accessed":{"date-parts":["2021",12,9]}}],"schema":"https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"} <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/gender-snapshot/2023/GenderSnapshot.pdf>

6 International database of national parliaments: | Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform, accessed 9 December 2023, Available at: [https://data.ipu.org/node/171/basic-information?chamber\\_id=13391](https://data.ipu.org/node/171/basic-information?chamber_id=13391)



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## IV. Secondary Research: An Overview of Political Participation of Women from non-majority communities

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### 1. Context

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North Macedonia gained independence through a national referendum on September 8, 1991, marked by ethnic divisions and a boycott by ethnic Albanians seeking equal recognition.<sup>7</sup> Despite the lack of consensus, the Constitution was adopted in November of that year, which declaratively put ethnic Macedonians in a more favourable position as opposed to other ethnic groups.<sup>8</sup> The Preamble was amended in January 2019 as part of the Prespa Agreement and Ohrid Framework Agreement, removing language favoring one ethnic group.<sup>9</sup> Ethnic tensions, particularly between Macedonians and Albanians, escalated a decade after independence, leading to a violent conflict in 2001.<sup>10</sup> The Ohrid Framework Agreement, signed in August 2001, introduced many institutional changes regarding inter-ethnic relations, which remain in place to this day.<sup>11</sup> While

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7 Cvete Koneska, 'After Ethnic Conflict: Policy-Making in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herze', *Southeast European Studies*, 2014; Gëzim Krasniqi, 'The "Forbidden Fruit": Islam and Politics of Identity in Kosovo and Macedonia', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 11, no. 2 (1 June 2011): 191–207, 2011.

8 Gëzim Krasniqi, 'The "Forbidden Fruit": Islam and Politics of Identity in Kosovo and Macedonia', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 11, no. 2 (1 June 2011): 191–207, 2011.

9 EWB, 'Government of Macedonia Adopts Drafts of Four Constitutional Amendments', *European Western Balkans* (blog), 2 November 2018, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2018/11/02/government-macedonia-adopts-drafts-four-constitutional-amendments/>.

10 EWB, 'Government of Macedonia Adopts Drafts of Four Constitutional Amendments', *European Western Balkans* (blog), 2 November 2018, Accessed 11 December 2023, Available at <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2018/11/02/government-macedonia-adopts-drafts-four-constitutional-amendments/>.

11 'Ohrid Framework Agreement | OSCE', 2001, Accessed 11 December 2023, Available at <https://www.osce.org/skopje/100622>.



the OFA focuses mainly on the rights of Albanian population, other communities have been largely excluded from these arrangements and policies.<sup>12</sup> Women, as a specific category of citizens, have also been excluded from such documents and policies that regulate inter-ethnic relations.

The most recent official census in 2021 revealed that from the resident population, 58% of respondents identified as Macedonian, 24% as Albanian, 4% as Turk, 3% as Romani, 1% as Serb, 1% as Vlach, 1% as Bosniaks and 8% as other. Data from the census show that in the total resident population of the Republic of North Macedonia, 50.4% are women and 49.6% are men.<sup>13</sup>

The country's Constitution and national laws explicitly ensure full equality between men and women and address community rights, although not through an intersectional lens that acknowledges the different nature of challenges faced by women from non-majority communities. The absence of any legal distinctions in terms of capacity between genders implies that women face no legal restrictions in political participation, property ownership, initiating legal proceedings and more. However, despite legal provisions ensuring equality, women frequently find themselves marginalized from political activities and struggling to exercise their rights. The challenges faced by women in rural areas surpass those experienced by women in urban areas.<sup>14</sup> Their limited inclusion in decision-making processes, restricted access to health services, and fewer economic opportunities contribute to an increased vulnerability to violence.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, cultural and social obstacles, particularly affecting Roma women, add another layer of complexity to the situation, especially considering that the educational attainment of Roma individuals is notably lower, with Roma women facing the greatest disparities, which later impacts their possibilities to join political and economic life.<sup>16</sup>

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12 Bogdan Lucian Aurescu and Claire Bazy-Malaurie, 'Adopted by the Venice Commission at Its 114th Plenary Session (Venice, 16-17 March 2018)', 2018, 18.

13 Census of the population, households and apartments in Republic of North Macedonia, 2021. Accessed 11 December 2023, Available at <https://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2022/2.1.22.10Popis-mk-en.pdf>

14 Lindita Nezir and Abdulla Azizi: Between Law and Traditions: The Practice of (Non) Participation of Girls from the Albanian Community in Macedonia in the Family Property Inheritance, 2018. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at [https://revistia.org/files/articles/ejis\\_v4\\_i1\\_18/Lindita.pdf](https://revistia.org/files/articles/ejis_v4_i1_18/Lindita.pdf)

15 Marina Tosheska, 2021. The position of rural women in Macedonian society, Association for Rural Development Local Action Group AGRO LEADER. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at [https://lagagrolider.mk/sites/default/files/polozhbata\\_na\\_ruralnite\\_zheni\\_vo\\_makedonskoto\\_opshtestvo.pdf](https://lagagrolider.mk/sites/default/files/polozhbata_na_ruralnite_zheni_vo_makedonskoto_opshtestvo.pdf)

16 'Leave No Child Behind Building Equity for Children | UNICEF North Macedonia', 2012 accessed 11 December 2023, [https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/media/3081/file/MK\\_2013\\_SitAnChildrenFindings\\_Report\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/media/3081/file/MK_2013_SitAnChildrenFindings_Report_ENG.pdf). accessed 8 December 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/reports/leave-no-child-behind-building-equity-children>. "plainCitation": "Leave No Child Behind Building Equity for Children | UNICEF North Macedonia", accessed 8 December 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/reports/leave-no-child-behind-building-equity-children>. "noteIndex": 64, "citationItems": [{"id": "UH8qxhRd/N5Cctkcm", "uris": ["http://zotero.org/users/3878557/items/F63HLANL"], "uri": ["http://zotero.org/users/3878557/items/F63HLANL"], "itemData": {"id": "823", "type": "webpage", "title": "Leave no Child Behind Building Equity for Children | UNICEF North Macedonia", "URL": "https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/reports/leave-no-child-behind-building-equity-children", "accessed": {"date-parts": [{"2021", 12, 8}]}, "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}]}



The CEDAW Committee further notes that Roma women are particularly vulnerable to intersectional discrimination in their access to health, justice and other rights.<sup>17</sup>

The country has clearly committed to achieving gender equality and women empowerment by becoming a signatory of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the UN Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), the Istanbul Convention, and by implementing EU related reforms in line with the National Programme for Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA).

However, although ratification of international agreements and the Constitution under Article 9 specifies that “all citizens are equal in their freedoms and rights, regardless of sex, race, colour of skin, national and social origin, political and religious beliefs, property and social status,” it lacks specific provisions for the protection of community women. This omission renders women from non-majority communities susceptible to various levels and forms of discrimination, even though Article 110 of the Constitution explicitly prohibits discrimination against citizens ‘on the grounds of sex, race, religion, nationality, social or political affiliation’.<sup>18</sup> To thoroughly understand the impact of constitutional protections, there is a need to review the legal framework in support of the commitments made in the Constitution.

Multiple studies conducted in the field also confirm the discriminatory position community women experience in North Macedonia in multiple aspects. The 2023 Barometer on equal opportunities published in 2023 notes discrimination on the basis of ethnicity as the second most prevalent form of discrimination pointed by more than half of the respondents (53%), while gender-based discrimination was indicated by 40% of the people.<sup>19</sup> With these figures in mind, the position of the community women in the country who are exposed to double discrimination, based on ethnicity and gender, is far from optimal.

Further inspection of the basis for discrimination reveals that women with disabilities are more vulnerable compared to men with disabilities in accessing their political rights. An analysis on political participation of persons with disabilities indicates that 69% of citizens without disabilities would vote for a man with a physical disability to become a Member of Parliament, and but this percentage declines by 11% when considering women with disabilities,. This public perception reflects that stereotypes persist not only with regard to disability, but also on the ground of gender combined with disability.

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17 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW (2020) Views adopted by the Committee under article 7 (3) of the Optional Protocol, concerning communication No. 143/2019. Accessed 25 June 2024. Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n20/344/18/pdf/n2034418.pdf?token=8Qcmtxc6gHuyfCe-bXr&fe=true>

18 Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at <https://www.sobranie.mk/ustav-na-rm.nspix>

19 Commission on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD), Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) (2023) Report: Barometer of Equal Opportunities. Accessed: 25 June 2024. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/0/560037.pdf>

Moreover, the research also notes that similar to the general public, political parties are also more likely to support men with disabilities than women with disabilities.<sup>20</sup>

Reviewing the general state from different aspects, the 2022 Gender Equality index emphasizes that although there is a rising trend in North Macedonia concerning gender equality, with a score increase of 2.5 points for a period of three years, the progress has a slow pace (2022 - 64.5 points and 2019 – 62 points; out of a maximum of 100). Regarding the index score of the domain of Power, a certain improvement is also noted due to the improvements in almost all indicator in the subdomains of political, economic, and social power. However, this domain is the second domain in which North Macedonia records the lowest scores, indicating the highest gender inequality.<sup>21</sup>

## 2. Normative and institutional mechanisms addressing gender equality in North Macedonia

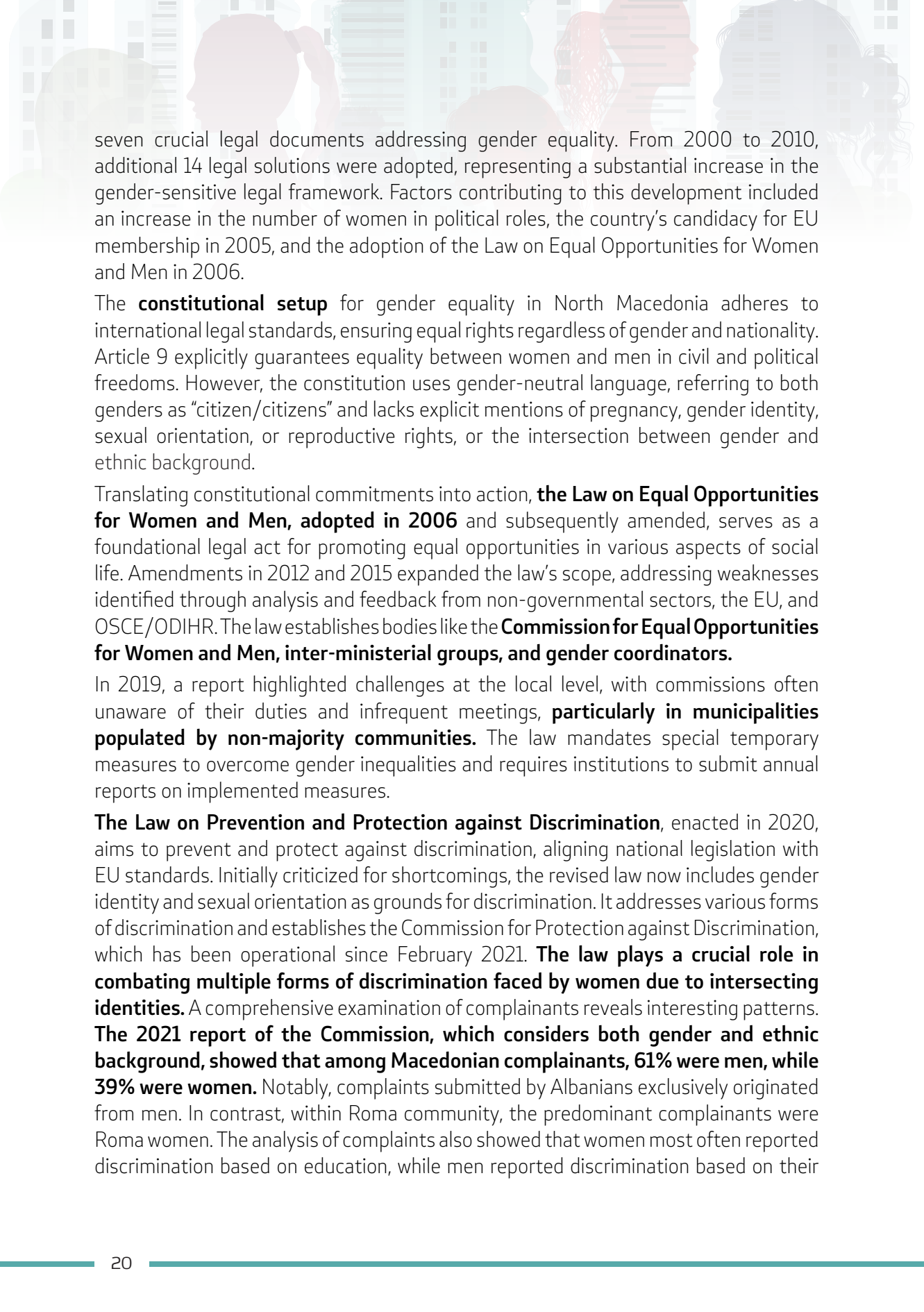
During the 1920s and 1930s, women began to come together and collaborating on a global scale to advance women's rights and advocate for gender equality across various domains. Supranational initiatives, including international institutions and tools aimed at achieving gender equality and enhancing the situation of non-majority communities, were established. These global efforts significantly impacted the formulation of national laws and the trajectory of gender equality norms and institutional mechanisms. In alignment with international trends, North Macedonia has progressively developed its legal and institutional framework concerning gender equality over the years.

Inherited from the previous political system of SFR Yugoslavia, the gender-sensitive legal solutions for women's rights and gender equality in North Macedonia were initially limited. Policymakers in the newly formed sovereign state had to develop and promote these solutions. In 1991, during the referendum for secession from Yugoslavia, the first President, Kiro Gligorov, used gender-sensitive language in his address, marking the initial steps towards building a democratic state that constitutionally upheld equality for all citizens, regardless of gender, religion, or nationality.

Analyzing the historical legal framework, a notable period of significant enrichment occurred in the first decade of North Macedonia's independence (1991-2000), with

<sup>20</sup> Elena Kochoska (2018) Analysis of the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities. OSCE Mission to Skopje. Accessed 25 June 2024. Available at: [https://www.osce.org/files/Analysis%20of%20the%20Political%20Participation%20of%20PwDs\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/Analysis%20of%20the%20Political%20Participation%20of%20PwDs_ENG.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Marija Bashevskaja (2022) Gender Equality Index for North Macedonia, 2022. Accessed 25 June 2024. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Gender%20Equality%20Index%20for%20North%20Macedonia%20%282022%29.pdf>



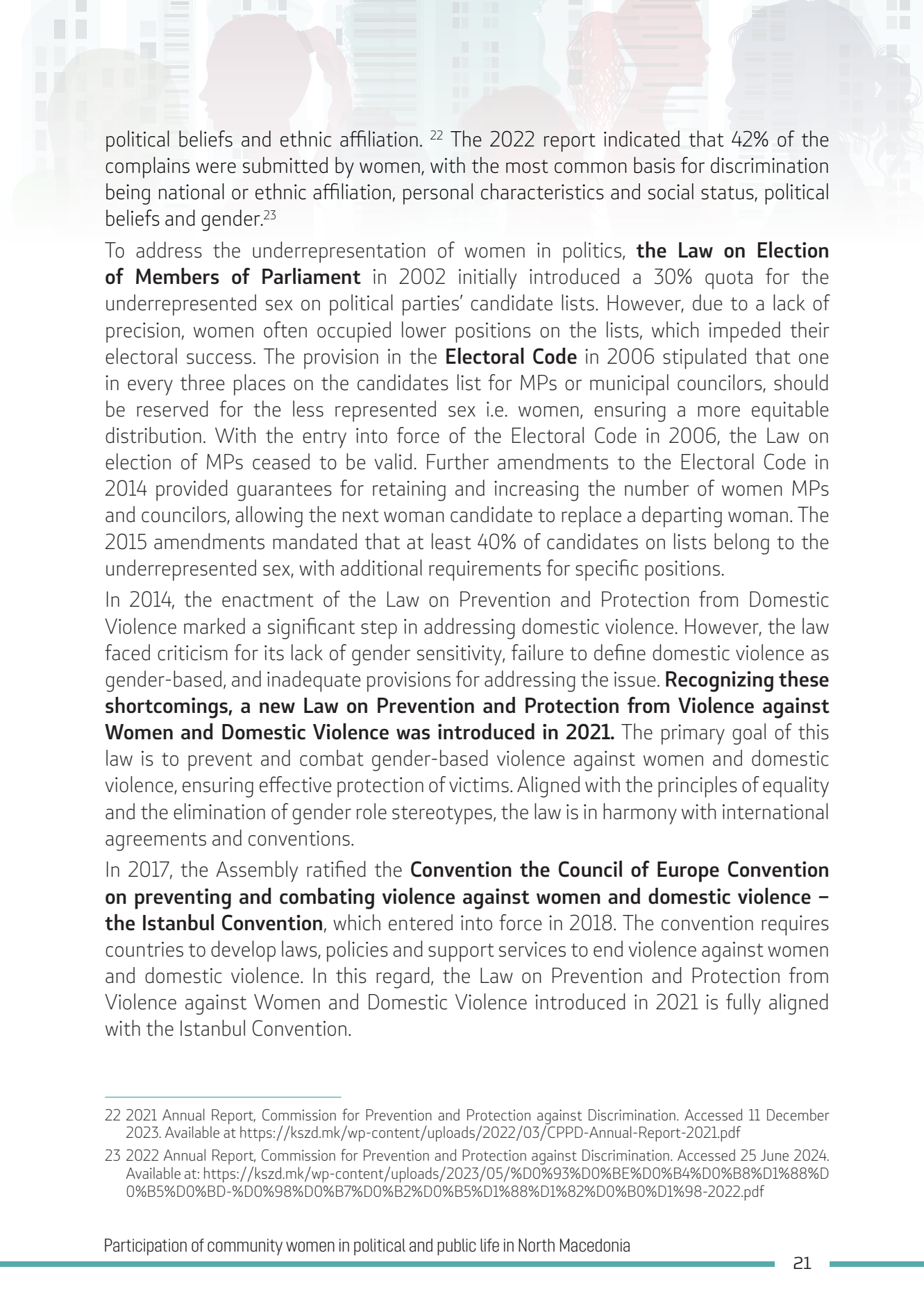
seven crucial legal documents addressing gender equality. From 2000 to 2010, additional 14 legal solutions were adopted, representing a substantial increase in the gender-sensitive legal framework. Factors contributing to this development included an increase in the number of women in political roles, the country's candidacy for EU membership in 2005, and the adoption of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in 2006.

The **constitutional setup** for gender equality in North Macedonia adheres to international legal standards, ensuring equal rights regardless of gender and nationality. Article 9 explicitly guarantees equality between women and men in civil and political freedoms. However, the constitution uses gender-neutral language, referring to both genders as “citizen/citizens” and lacks explicit mentions of pregnancy, gender identity, sexual orientation, or reproductive rights, or the intersection between gender and ethnic background.

Translating constitutional commitments into action, **the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, adopted in 2006** and subsequently amended, serves as a foundational legal act for promoting equal opportunities in various aspects of social life. Amendments in 2012 and 2015 expanded the law's scope, addressing weaknesses identified through analysis and feedback from non-governmental sectors, the EU, and OSCE/ODIHR. The law establishes bodies like the **Commission for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, inter-ministerial groups, and gender coordinators.**

In 2019, a report highlighted challenges at the local level, with commissions often unaware of their duties and infrequent meetings, **particularly in municipalities populated by non-majority communities.** The law mandates special temporary measures to overcome gender inequalities and requires institutions to submit annual reports on implemented measures.

**The Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination**, enacted in 2020, aims to prevent and protect against discrimination, aligning national legislation with EU standards. Initially criticized for shortcomings, the revised law now includes gender identity and sexual orientation as grounds for discrimination. It addresses various forms of discrimination and establishes the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, which has been operational since February 2021. **The law plays a crucial role in combating multiple forms of discrimination faced by women due to intersecting identities.** A comprehensive examination of complainants reveals interesting patterns. **The 2021 report of the Commission, which considers both gender and ethnic background, showed that among Macedonian complainants, 61% were men, while 39% were women.** Notably, complaints submitted by Albanians exclusively originated from men. In contrast, within Roma community, the predominant complainants were Roma women. The analysis of complaints also showed that women most often reported discrimination based on education, while men reported discrimination based on their



political beliefs and ethnic affiliation.<sup>22</sup> The 2022 report indicated that 42% of the complains were submitted by women, with the most common basis for discrimination being national or ethnic affiliation, personal characteristics and social status, political beliefs and gender.<sup>23</sup>

To address the underrepresentation of women in politics, **the Law on Election of Members of Parliament** in 2002 initially introduced a 30% quota for the underrepresented sex on political parties' candidate lists. However, due to a lack of precision, women often occupied lower positions on the lists, which impeded their electoral success. The provision in the **Electoral Code** in 2006 stipulated that one in every three places on the candidates list for MPs or municipal councilors, should be reserved for the less represented sex i.e. women, ensuring a more equitable distribution. With the entry into force of the Electoral Code in 2006, the Law on election of MPs ceased to be valid. Further amendments to the Electoral Code in 2014 provided guarantees for retaining and increasing the number of women MPs and councilors, allowing the next woman candidate to replace a departing woman. The 2015 amendments mandated that at least 40% of candidates on lists belong to the underrepresented sex, with additional requirements for specific positions.

In 2014, the enactment of the Law on Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence marked a significant step in addressing domestic violence. However, the law faced criticism for its lack of gender sensitivity, failure to define domestic violence as gender-based, and inadequate provisions for addressing the issue. **Recognizing these shortcomings, a new Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence was introduced in 2021.** The primary goal of this law is to prevent and combat gender-based violence against women and domestic violence, ensuring effective protection of victims. Aligned with the principles of equality and the elimination of gender role stereotypes, the law is in harmony with international agreements and conventions.

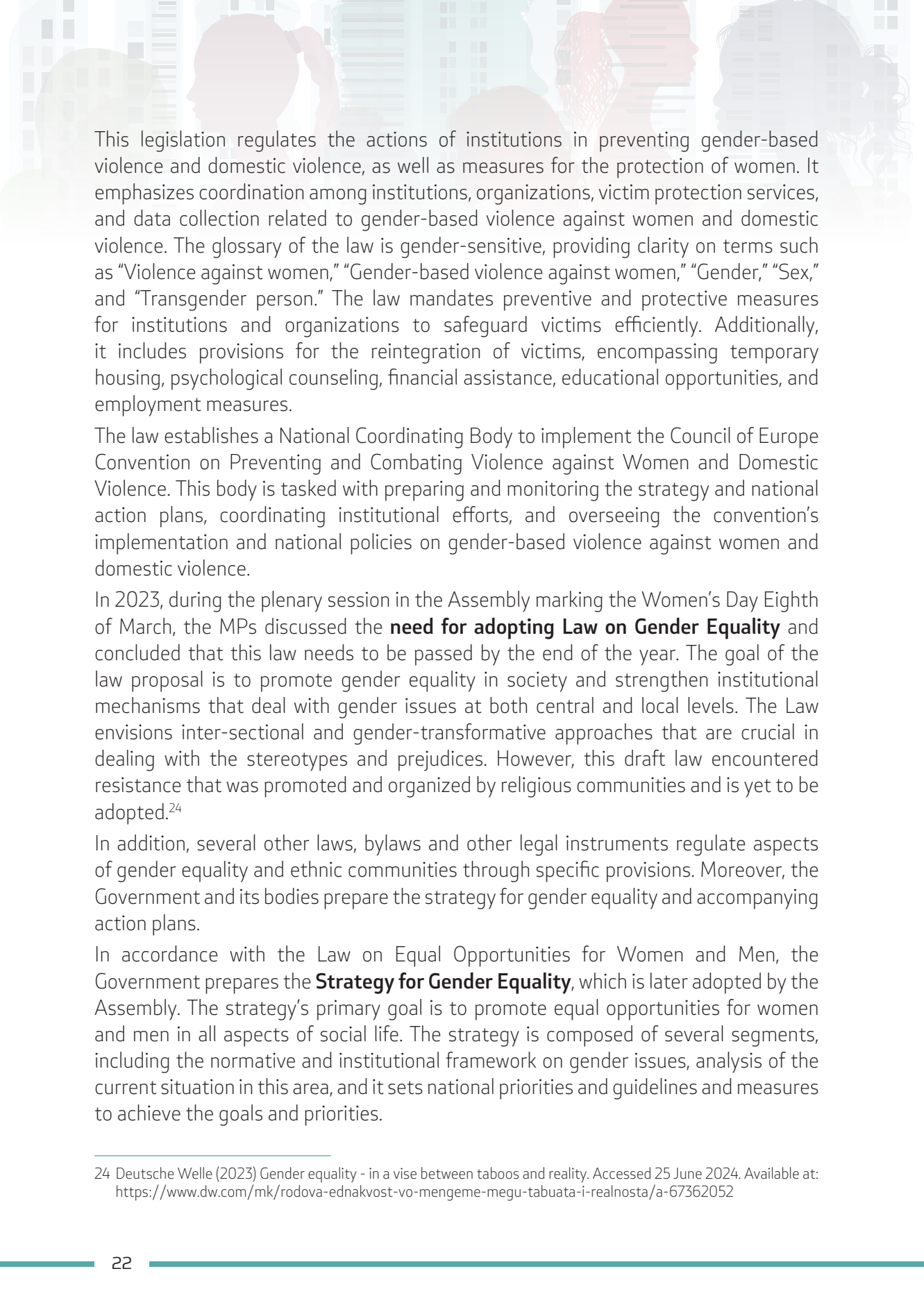
In 2017, the Assembly ratified the **Convention the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – the Istanbul Convention**, which entered into force in 2018. The convention requires countries to develop laws, policies and support services to end violence against women and domestic violence. In this regard, the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence introduced in 2021 is fully aligned with the Istanbul Convention.

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22 2021 Annual Report, Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at <https://kszd.mk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CPD-Annual-Report-2021.pdf>

23 2022 Annual Report, Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. Accessed 25 June 2024. Available at: <https://kszd.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/%D0%93%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D0%98%D0%B7%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%88%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%98-2022.pdf>





This legislation regulates the actions of institutions in preventing gender-based violence and domestic violence, as well as measures for the protection of women. It emphasizes coordination among institutions, organizations, victim protection services, and data collection related to gender-based violence against women and domestic violence. The glossary of the law is gender-sensitive, providing clarity on terms such as “Violence against women,” “Gender-based violence against women,” “Gender,” “Sex,” and “Transgender person.” The law mandates preventive and protective measures for institutions and organizations to safeguard victims efficiently. Additionally, it includes provisions for the reintegration of victims, encompassing temporary housing, psychological counseling, financial assistance, educational opportunities, and employment measures.

The law establishes a National Coordinating Body to implement the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. This body is tasked with preparing and monitoring the strategy and national action plans, coordinating institutional efforts, and overseeing the convention’s implementation and national policies on gender-based violence against women and domestic violence.

In 2023, during the plenary session in the Assembly marking the Women’s Day Eighth of March, the MPs discussed the **need for adopting Law on Gender Equality** and concluded that this law needs to be passed by the end of the year. The goal of the law proposal is to promote gender equality in society and strengthen institutional mechanisms that deal with gender issues at both central and local levels. The Law envisions inter-sectional and gender-transformative approaches that are crucial in dealing with the stereotypes and prejudices. However, this draft law encountered resistance that was promoted and organized by religious communities and is yet to be adopted.<sup>24</sup>


In addition, several other laws, bylaws and other legal instruments regulate aspects of gender equality and ethnic communities through specific provisions. Moreover, the Government and its bodies prepare the strategy for gender equality and accompanying action plans.

In accordance with the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the Government prepares the **Strategy for Gender Equality**, which is later adopted by the Assembly. The strategy’s primary goal is to promote equal opportunities for women and men in all aspects of social life. The strategy is composed of several segments, including the normative and institutional framework on gender issues, analysis of the current situation in this area, and it sets national priorities and guidelines and measures to achieve the goals and priorities.

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<sup>24</sup> Deutsche Welle (2023) Gender equality - in a vise between taboos and reality. Accessed 25 June 2024. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/mk/rodova-ednakvost-vo-mengeme-megu-tabuata-i-realnosta/a-67362052>





The Gender Equality Strategy for the period 2022-2027 was adopted in July 2022.<sup>25</sup> This strategy is the fourth strategic document in the field and builds on the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2013-2020, the National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2007-2012 and the National Action Plan for Gender Equality from 1999. The new strategy (2022-2027) envisages three general goals, such as the establishment of an effective and efficient system for the promotion of gender equality at the central and local levels; improving the position of women in all areas of public and private life; and suppressing gender stereotypes and building a culture of non-violence and non-discrimination based on sex, gender, and gender identity. The National Action Plan for Gender Equality covering the period 2022 -2024 is currently being implemented.

In accordance with the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is obliged to monitor the implementation of the Strategy and publish annual reports on the activities and results of its implementation. The last report submitted by the ministry to the Assembly was the **report on the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy for 2019**.<sup>26</sup> However, the shadow report showed that the ministry report on the implementation of the National Action Plan 2018-2020 did not follow the indicators provided in the Action Plan, and the reporting style does not give a clear and comprehensive overview of the progress of gender equality in North Macedonia or the degree of implementation of the National Action Plan 2018 -2020.<sup>27</sup>

The incumbent<sup>28</sup> Government of the Republic of North Macedonia is committed to gender equality, combating gender stereotypes, and eliminating gender-based violence, as outlined in its 2020-2024 Work Programme. The programme emphasizes an active policy to increase women's representation in executive and elected governmental positions. Specific policies include supporting women farmers, promoting gender equality in sports, implementing employment measures to reduce women's labor market inactivity, and launching a program for the reintegration of women victims of violence.

Additionally, the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination (2022-2026), adopted by the government, defines goals, measures, and indicators to promote rights and equal opportunities. It envisions realizing human rights, equal opportunities, and non-discrimination for all, with a mission to protect against discrimination based on personal characteristics, especially targeting vulnerable social groups such as ethnic

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25 The Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2027 was adopted, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at: [https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/pocetna-ns\\_article-mtsp-izglasana-strategijata-za-rodova-ednakvost-2022-2027-godina.nsp](https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/pocetna-ns_article-mtsp-izglasana-strategijata-za-rodova-ednakvost-2022-2027-godina.nsp)

26 Annual Report on the Implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy for 2019, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at: [https://www.sobranie.mk/2020-2024-aktivnosti-ns\\_article-prezentacija-na-evaluacijata-na-strategijata-za-rodova-ednakvost-2013-2020.nsp](https://www.sobranie.mk/2020-2024-aktivnosti-ns_article-prezentacija-na-evaluacijata-na-strategijata-za-rodova-ednakvost-2013-2020.nsp)

27 Shadow report on the implementation of the gender equality strategy for the period 2018 and 2019, Reaktor, 2020. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/ilF79>

28 This report was drafted during 2023



communities and women. The strategy spans various areas, including work, employment, education, science, sports, culture, social security, judiciary, administration, and access to goods and services.

The Government's National Strategy for Reduction of Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010-2020) addresses poverty and social exclusion, with a strong focus on the economic empowerment of women. **It introduces affirmative measures to reduce the social exclusion and poverty rates of women, particularly those from rural areas, ethnic communities, and victims of domestic violence.** The strategy acknowledges the need to enhance institutional capacity for improving health, especially for vulnerable groups, including women. Increased gender equality is a highlighted outcome, with measures aimed at boosting women's participation in the labor market and reducing the employment and wage gap.

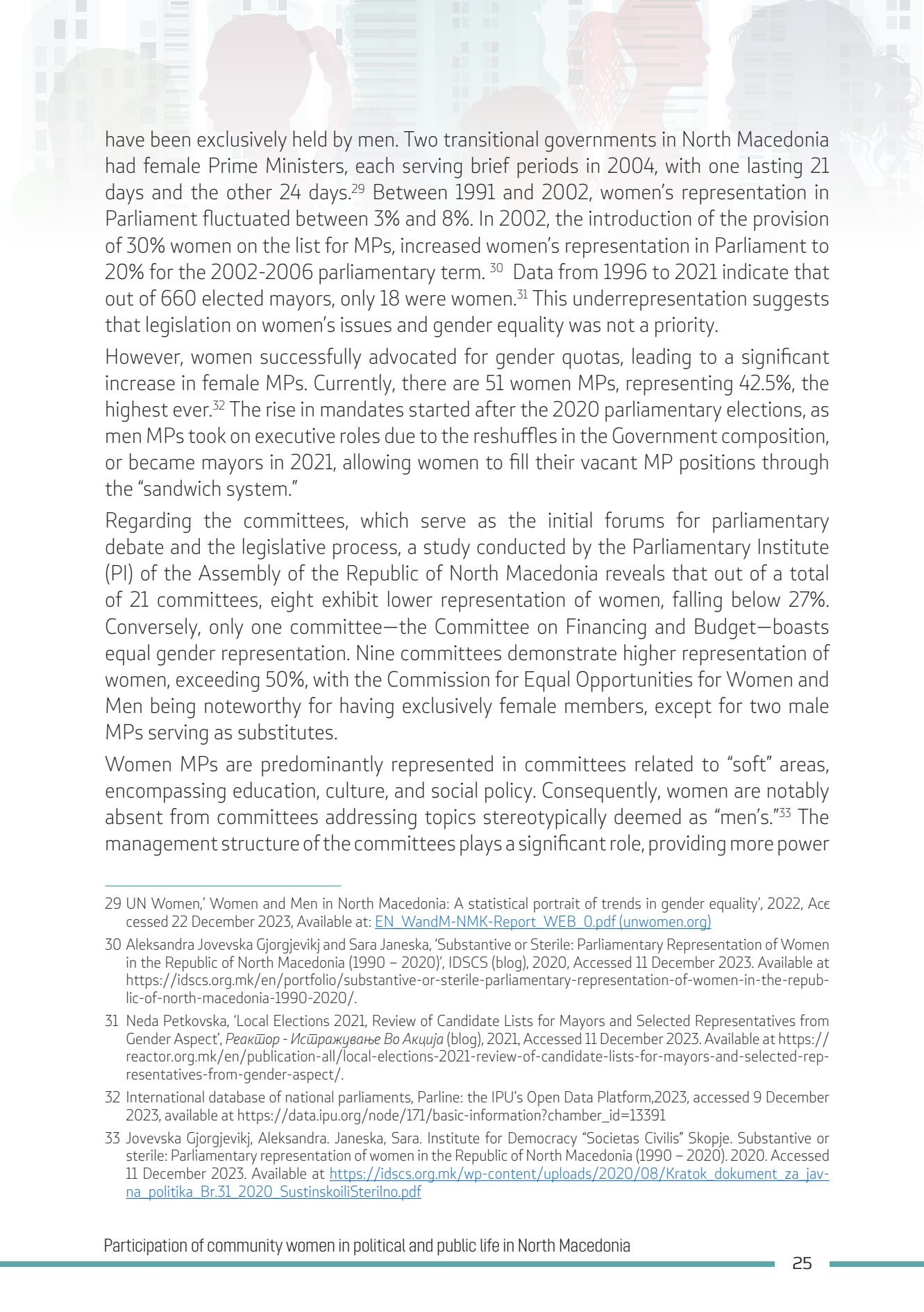
The Action Plan for Implementation of the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence aims to design, implement, and coordinate a comprehensive national policy to prevent and eliminate violence against women. It covers the period 2018-2023 and focuses on harmonizing national laws with the Convention, establishing services for victim protection, and preventing gender-based and domestic violence through a series of activities.

Lastly, the National Strategy for the Development of the Concept of One Society and Interculturalism (2020-2022) aimed to build a society with developed interculturalism, recognizing all differences and ensuring equality, social justice, and equal opportunities for women and men. The strategy incorporated a gender perspective and a non-discrimination principle based on gender and ethnic background into its priority goals, with a dedicated goal exclusively focused on promoting social cohesion and integration with guaranteed gender equality, non-discrimination, and equal opportunities for all.

The next section highlights how the comprehensive legislation and strategies adopted by the Parliament and Government translate into actual participation of women in the political life of the country and whether this extensive normative framework proactively ensures participation of community women.

### 3. Community women participation in political life

Women in the country have been largely excluded from public and political spheres, remaining anonymous in important political events. Despite gaining voting and election rights in 1946, their political involvement has been minimal. Since independence in 1991, key leadership positions like prime minister, president, and parliament president



have been exclusively held by men. Two transitional governments in North Macedonia had female Prime Ministers, each serving brief periods in 2004, with one lasting 21 days and the other 24 days.<sup>29</sup> Between 1991 and 2002, women's representation in Parliament fluctuated between 3% and 8%. In 2002, the introduction of the provision of 30% women on the list for MPs, increased women's representation in Parliament to 20% for the 2002-2006 parliamentary term.<sup>30</sup> Data from 1996 to 2021 indicate that out of 660 elected mayors, only 18 were women.<sup>31</sup> This underrepresentation suggests that legislation on women's issues and gender equality was not a priority.

However, women successfully advocated for gender quotas, leading to a significant increase in female MPs. Currently, there are 51 women MPs, representing 42.5%, the highest ever.<sup>32</sup> The rise in mandates started after the 2020 parliamentary elections, as men MPs took on executive roles due to the reshuffles in the Government composition, or became mayors in 2021, allowing women to fill their vacant MP positions through the "sandwich system."

Regarding the committees, which serve as the initial forums for parliamentary debate and the legislative process, a study conducted by the Parliamentary Institute (PI) of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia reveals that out of a total of 21 committees, eight exhibit lower representation of women, falling below 27%. Conversely, only one committee—the Committee on Financing and Budget—boasts equal gender representation. Nine committees demonstrate higher representation of women, exceeding 50%, with the Commission for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men being noteworthy for having exclusively female members, except for two male MPs serving as substitutes.

Women MPs are predominantly represented in committees related to "soft" areas, encompassing education, culture, and social policy. Consequently, women are notably absent from committees addressing topics stereotypically deemed as "men's."<sup>33</sup> The management structure of the committees plays a significant role, providing more power

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29 UN Women, 'Women and Men in North Macedonia: A statistical portrait of trends in gender equality', 2022, Accessed 22 December 2023, Available at: [EN\\_WandM-NMK-Report\\_WEB\\_0.pdf \(unwomen.org\)](#)

30 Aleksandra Jovevska Gjorgjevikj and Sara Janeska, 'Substantive or Sterile: Parliamentary Representation of Women in the Republic of North Macedonia (1990 – 2020)', IDSCS (blog), 2020, Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at <https://idscs.org.mk/en/portfolio/substantive-or-sterile-parliamentary-representation-of-women-in-the-republic-of-north-macedonia-1990-2020/>.

31 Neda Petkovska, 'Local Elections 2021, Review of Candidate Lists for Mayors and Selected Representatives from Gender Aspect', *Реактор - Истражување Во Акција* (blog), 2021, Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at <https://reactor.org.mk/en/publication-all/local-elections-2021-review-of-candidate-lists-for-mayors-and-selected-representatives-from-gender-aspect/>.

32 International database of national parliaments, Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform, 2023, accessed 9 December 2023, available at [https://data.ipu.org/node/171/basic-information?chamber\\_id=13391](https://data.ipu.org/node/171/basic-information?chamber_id=13391)

33 Jovevska Gjorgjevikj, Aleksandra. Janeska, Sara. Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" Skopje. Substantive or sterile: Parliamentary representation of women in the Republic of North Macedonia (1990 – 2020). 2020. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at [https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Kratok\\_dokument\\_za\\_javna\\_politika\\_Br.31\\_2020\\_SustinskoiSterilno.pdf](https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Kratok_dokument_za_javna_politika_Br.31_2020_SustinskoiSterilno.pdf)



to shape agendas and, consequently, more freedom to incorporate gender-related issues. According to the Parliamentary Institute, only six out of the 21 committees have female chairpersons, and six have female MPs serving as deputy presidents.<sup>34</sup> Women generally do not hold leading positions within the parliamentary administration, although they compose the largest number of employees.<sup>35</sup>

Beyond committees, the presence of female MPs in other Assembly structures as decision-makers is crucial. Therefore, increased representation of women in the role of coordinators of parliamentary groups and their participation in coordination meetings where the Assembly's agenda is formulated is highly important. In the parliamentary composition (2020-2024), encompassing five parliamentary groups by December 2023, only one parliamentary group has a woman serving as a coordinator. The parliamentary group of the Alliance for Albanians (AA) appointed Ilire Dauti as coordinator in December 2021. However, within less than a year, in September 2022, MP Dauti resigned and was succeeded by a man MP from the ranks of her party. Women are more commonly seen as deputy coordinators, with the "We Can" Coalition and the Democratic Union for Integration - DUI each having one deputy coordinator, while the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and the Coalition "Renewal for Macedonia" have two deputy coordinators.

Despite quotas and the "sandwich system," women from all communities remain less represented than men. Out of the six non-majority communities explicitly mentioned in the Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, only three have women MPs representatives in the Assembly: nine women MPs from Albanian community, one woman MP of Bosniak community and one woman MP from Roma community. Additionally, there is one woman MP representing the Jewish community (one MP) and another representing Macedonian-Muslim community (one MP). These numbers indicate that women from non-majority communities hold around 10% of the seats in the Assembly. Not a single committee in the Parliament is headed by a woman from the non-majority communities. In comparison, there are 38 women MPs members of the majority community, and six of them chair committees. The introduction of mandatory quotas in 2002 facilitated the election of the first Albanian woman MP, addressing the need for greater representation of the less represented gender in political party candidate lists. There are no women or men with disabilities (officially declared) currently holding the position of MP, which leaves women from this community unrepresented and in a more disadvantaged position as opposed to other societal groups.

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34 Jovanovska, Eva. Koroveshovska, Fani. Parliamentary Institute. Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia. The number and the cross-party cooperation as a factor for strengthening their influence. 2023. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at <https://cutt.ly/QwtUTen9>

35 Vlora Rechica, The Routledge Handbook of Parliamentary Administrations: North Macedonia's Parliamentary Administration, 2023. Routledge handbooks.

**Table 2. Women MPs through numbers (1990 - 2023)**

Date	Women
2023-03	51
2021-11	50
2021-07	48
2020-10	47
2020-08	46
2020-07	43
2019-12	48
2019-08	47
2018-08	46
2017-10	45
2017-05	41
2016-12	38
2014-07	41
2014-04	40
2014-01	42
2013-01	34
2012-01	42
2011-06	38
2009-12	39
2009-01	38
2008-06	36
2007-01	35
2006-07	34
2002-09	21
1998-01	9
1994-01	4
1990-01	5

In terms of women's representation in the Parliament, the Women's Parliamentary Club, an informal consultative body, has played a significant role in the advancement of the rights of women, both in terms of legislation and inter-party cohesion. The body was established in 2003 within the framework of the regional project of the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe, with the support of local partners Macedonian Women's Lobby, National Council for Gender Equality Macedonia and the Department for Promotion of Gender Equality at the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy.<sup>36</sup> The inclusion

<sup>36</sup> Women's Parliamentary Club, web site of the Parliament, Accessed 2 December 2023. <https://www.sobranie.mk/detali-na-klub.nspx?groupId=c547f202-efee-4bd8-a01b-46e04c3849e0>

of women from non-majority communities in this body fluctuates throughout the years, depending on the number of women MPs in the Parliament.

**Table 3. Women MPs from non-majority communities in the Women’s Parliamentary Club**

Period	Women from non-majority communities	Women from the majority community
2020–2023	13 <sup>37</sup>	38
2016–2020	5	41
2014–2016	8	34
2011–2014	8	34
2008–2011	6	36
2006–2008	7	29

Looking at the 2020 elections, the highest level of female representation in political parties both nationally and in specific constituencies was observed in the candidate lists submitted by DUI, with an overall representation of 48% and 60% in EC4. In EC1, EC2, and EC5, there was equal gender representation at 50%, while in IE3 (40%) and IE6 (45%), it fell below the 50% mark.<sup>38</sup> Election results indicate that the majority of parliamentary seats were secured in EC6, where the representation of women on the candidate lists was less than 50%, whereas in IE4, which has the highest representation of women, DUI did not win a parliamentary seat.<sup>39</sup> This does not necessarily imply that a higher number of female candidates translates to fewer votes for the party. In these constituencies and in previous election cycles, DUI did not secure parliamentary mandates. Rather, it suggests that women often run on unsuccessful lists to fulfill legal obligations without altering the actual situation. It is noteworthy that only 24% of the submitted lists had a female list holder.<sup>40</sup> Overall, parties adhere to legally mandated quotas, but there remains room for improvement in terms of the positioning of women within candidate lists.

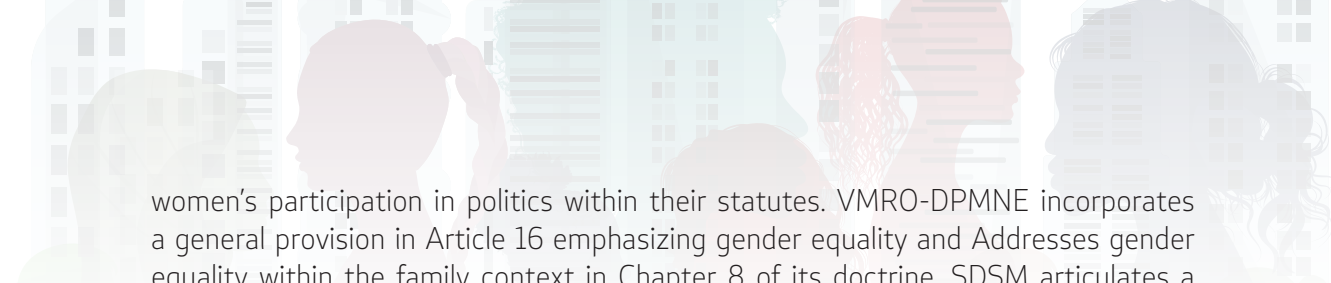
An analysis conducted by the Institute for Democracy of several political parties in North Macedonia reveals varying degrees of commitment to gender equality and

<sup>37</sup> 11 пратенички претставнички на три од шесте заедници изречно наведени во Преамбулата на Уставот (9 Албанки, 1 Бошњачка и 1 Ромка) и 2 пратенички претставнички на две помали заедници (1 Еврејка и 1 Македонка Муслиманка).

<sup>38</sup> Support for electoral reforms. Parliamentary elections 2020 – Analysis of candidate lists through the lens of social and political involvement. 2020. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available <https://electoralreforms.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Candidate-List-Analysis-MK.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



women's participation in politics within their statutes. VMRO-DPMNE incorporates a general provision in Article 16 emphasizing gender equality and Addresses gender equality within the family context in Chapter 8 of its doctrine. SDSM articulates a commitment to equality between men and women in Article 2 of its statute and features the Women's Forum as a specific entity but lacks mechanisms to increase women's participation. The Alliance for Albanians prohibits discrimination based on gender in Article 24 of its statute and includes the Assembly of Women as part of the structures of the party, with the president of the assembly involved in various governing bodies of the party. Alternativa commits to at least 30% women's participation in party bodies, demonstrating a concrete statutory commitment. DUI established the Women's Forum in Article 80, with its decisions proposed to the General Council and ensures the president of the Women's Forum is included at both central and local levels. Levica expresses goals related to gender equality in Article 5 of its statute and currently surpasses legal quotas for women's representation in 2020 parliamentary elections<sup>41</sup>; furthermore, the party's Statute under Article 53, forecasts establishment of Anti-Fascist Women's Front (AFJ) as a permanent working body that propagates left-wing feminism.

LDP identifies the protection and promotion of individual freedoms and rights as its main goal and incorporates a gender-sensitive approach in Article 88a, including a Women's Forum with representation in governing bodies. DOM ensures the right to equality for all citizens, irrespective of gender, in Article 1 and commits to at least 40% gender representation in party bodies. The BESA Movement in its statute focuses on advancing women's position as a universal right and operates a Women's Forum integrated into party structures at various levels.<sup>42</sup>


There is a need for parties to update their websites regularly for transparency and improved insight into their gender-inclusive actions. Furthermore, an overview of women's representation in leadership structures within these parties identifies room for improvement, with variable levels of gender diversity observed. In SDSM, the position of Deputy President is held by a woman. Out of four vice-presidents, three are men, and one is a woman, in the central board of 123 members, women represent up to 49%, while eight women are part of the 17-member Executive Board. In VMRO-DPMNE, the Executive Committee comprises 27 members, with nine women and 18 men. The Central Committee includes members of the Union of Women, but specific details are unavailable. In Levica, women are represented by 24% in the Central Committee with 46 voting members. The presidium, with seven members, includes only one woman. In Alternativa, among seven vice-presidents include only one as a woman, while within the

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41 Nikola Donev, A gender-sensitive Assembly and gender equality on the political stage: An overview of the current situation in North Macedonia, 2023, IDSCS. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at: [https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/1\\_WEB\\_A4\\_ENG-4.pdf](https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/1_WEB_A4_ENG-4.pdf)

42 Ibid.





presidency of 40 members, 30% are women. For DUI, limited information is available, with only the president's office details accessible on the website, all held by men. Media reports suggest the election of a female vice-president, Arbana Pasholli, in October 2022. With regards to Alliance for Albanians, incomplete information on the website makes a comprehensive analysis challenging. Online sources indicate the election of Bujare Abazi as vice president in January 2023. Analyses further highlight a lack of diversity in the leadership and structures of political parties. Among the 23 parties currently in Parliament, only two are led by women – (LDP and DOM).<sup>43</sup>

While women's representation in the Parliament is at an all-time high, where there are no quotas, women's representation is lower or non-existent. There is a lack of adequate representation of women in executive ministerial roles. In the initial government of 1991, no women were selected for ministerial positions. The inclusion of women in ministerial roles increased during the formation of the second government in 2004, with two women appointed as ministers, constituting 15.4% of the ministerial positions. In the last Government composition, the number of women is five out of 20 Government positions, including four ministers and one deputy PM.<sup>44</sup>

This is particularly the case in executive-level positions, where the participation of women is generally low, while the participation of women from non-majority communities is almost non-existent. In the governments' compositions in the period 1991 - 2021, 24 women (15%) versus 139 men (85%) represented the executive branch. When it comes to the ethnic composition of women in ministerial positions, 20 are Macedonian women, two Albanian women, and one woman representative of the Jewish community. There were no Roma women or women representatives of smaller communities in the governments' compositions.<sup>45</sup> After the July 2020 parliamentary elections, the Social Democrats formed a coalition with the DUI, thus gaining the majority in the Parliament and gaining the mandate to form the government. However, despite gender equality being high on the agenda of SDSM and part of its strategic goals,<sup>46</sup> the government composition did not reflect this commitment. Women held only four ministerial positions in this government and one deputy Prime Minister, none coming from a non-majority community. Three of these positions included ministries typically considered "soft", such as the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Culture. Out of 16 ministries, only

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43 Ibid.

44 Women and Men in North Macedonia: A statistical portrait of trends in gender equality, UN Women, Skopje, 2022. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at [https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/EN\\_WandM-NMK-Report\\_WEB\\_0.pdf](https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/EN_WandM-NMK-Report_WEB_0.pdf)

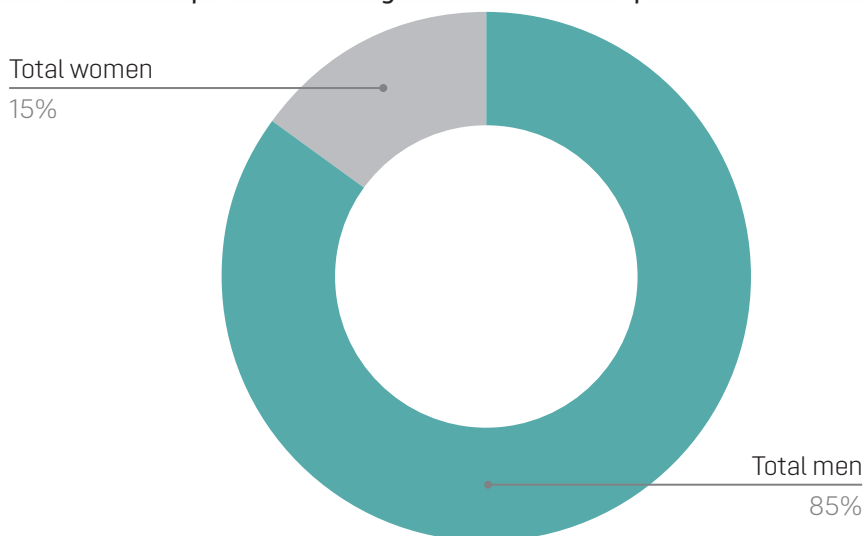
45 Is the new composition of the Government of R. N. Macedonia following the principle of fair representation of women and men in leadership positions and reflects the gender diversity of the society it represents?, Reaktor, 2020. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at <https://shorturl.at/doCPZ>

46 Petkovska, 'Local Elections 2021, Review of Candidate Lists for Mayors and Selected Representatives from Gender Aspect'.



two women held the position of deputy minister, and only one came from Albanian community.<sup>47</sup>

**Graph A.** Gender composition of the governments in the period 1991 - 2021




An examination of the gender composition in institutional leadership roles, particularly those appointed by the government, revealed that only 29% of these governing structures consist of women. Notably, a significant disparity is evident in the positions of institutional directors, where merely 5% of the appointed individuals are women. Women from non-majority communities are particularly underrepresented in these leadership positions.<sup>48</sup>

Women actively participate in political parties during election campaigns, yet they often face exclusion from nominations and power-sharing. Real influence is concentrated in the hands of party leaders and their predominantly male inner circles. The selection of mayors is crucially tied to political parties, and their nomination strategies significantly impact the limited success in achieving greater female representation. In municipalities where winning chances are historically low or politically challenging, parties typically nominate women. However, the government's commitment to a 50/50 gender representation remains merely a declaration.<sup>49</sup>

47 Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, web site. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at: <https://vlada.mk/vlada-ministerstva>

48 Misha Popovikj and Marko Pankovski, 'Who's Governing There?', IDSCS (blog), 2019, Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at <https://idscs.org.mk/en/portfolio/whos-governing-there/>.

49 Evaluation of human rights and rule of law during the presidency of the OSCE. Helsinki Committee of Human Rights. April, 2023.



Insufficient protection for women in politics is another significant factor contributing to low female participation. Political parties lack fundamental safeguards for women members, activists, and representatives, as their statutes or codes of conduct are silent on gender-based violence. In North Macedonia, 65% of women politicians have encountered some form of violence while performing their party duties.<sup>50</sup>

The representation of women in local executive roles has consistently been low over the past few decades. In the seven local elections held since the country gained independence, only 18 women have been elected as mayors compared to 642 male mayors over a 25-year period. In certain years, such as 1996 and 2009, no women secured the position of municipal mayor. The highest percentage of female mayors elected was 7.4% (6 women) in 2017. Despite their limited presence as mayors, women actively participate and voice their opinions during election campaigns. The most significant number of female mayoral candidates was in 2013, and in 2017, 37.5% of mayoral candidates were women, with six out of every 16 female candidates winning. In 2021, only two women were elected as mayors, one of whom is the mayor of Skopje.<sup>51</sup>

One of the reasons for the limited access of women to decision-making positions is the insufficient support they receive as candidates for leadership roles. The scarcity of women in decision-making roles at both local and central levels is closely linked to inadequate internal support within political parties, widespread hate speech directed against women in politics, and prevailing gender roles, stereotypes, and prejudices in society.<sup>52</sup>

The 2021 elections underscored a deficiency in gender equality within the country, but this was not surprising. Despite political parties being pivotal in political organization and participation, they lack published data on women's membership and engagement. The grim reality of women's political involvement was highlighted by the dismal number of women candidates in the 2021 local elections. Out of 299 mayoral candidates, a mere 25 were women, constituting only 8%. While women comprised 45% of all councilor candidates, they led only 19% of the candidate lists.<sup>53</sup> Notably, political parties of non-majority communities featuring women in mayoral candidate lists, were limited to one Albanian woman each from DUI and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), with no other women from non-majority community contesting mayoral positions.

The results were particularly disheartening, as among the 80 municipalities plus City of Skopje, only two have women mayors. The City of Skopje appointed its first


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50 Not for violence, Accessed 11 December 2023, Available at: <https://nezanasilstvo.mk/>

51 Women and Men in North Macedonia: A statistical portrait of trends in gender equality, UN Women, Skopje, 2022. Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at [https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/EN\\_WandM-NMK-Report\\_WEB\\_0.pdf](https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/EN_WandM-NMK-Report_WEB_0.pdf)

52 Ibid

53 Petkovska, 'Local Elections 2021, Review of Candidate Lists for Mayors and Selected Representatives from Gender Aspect'.



female mayor since the country's independence, and the other is the mayor of Staro Nagorichane, a rural municipality in the east, accounting for a mere 2.5% of the total mayoral positions. Both women mayors are from the majority community. In the 2017 local elections, women secured six municipalities, with two from the ethnic Albanian community overseeing Tetovo and Arachinovo.

Despite a lack of comprehensive data on municipal councils' gender and ethnic composition, available information from the 2017 local elections reveals that out of 1,388 elected councilors, only 415 were women, falling short of the 30% threshold for such bodies. This underscores the continued dependence on quotas for women's political representation.

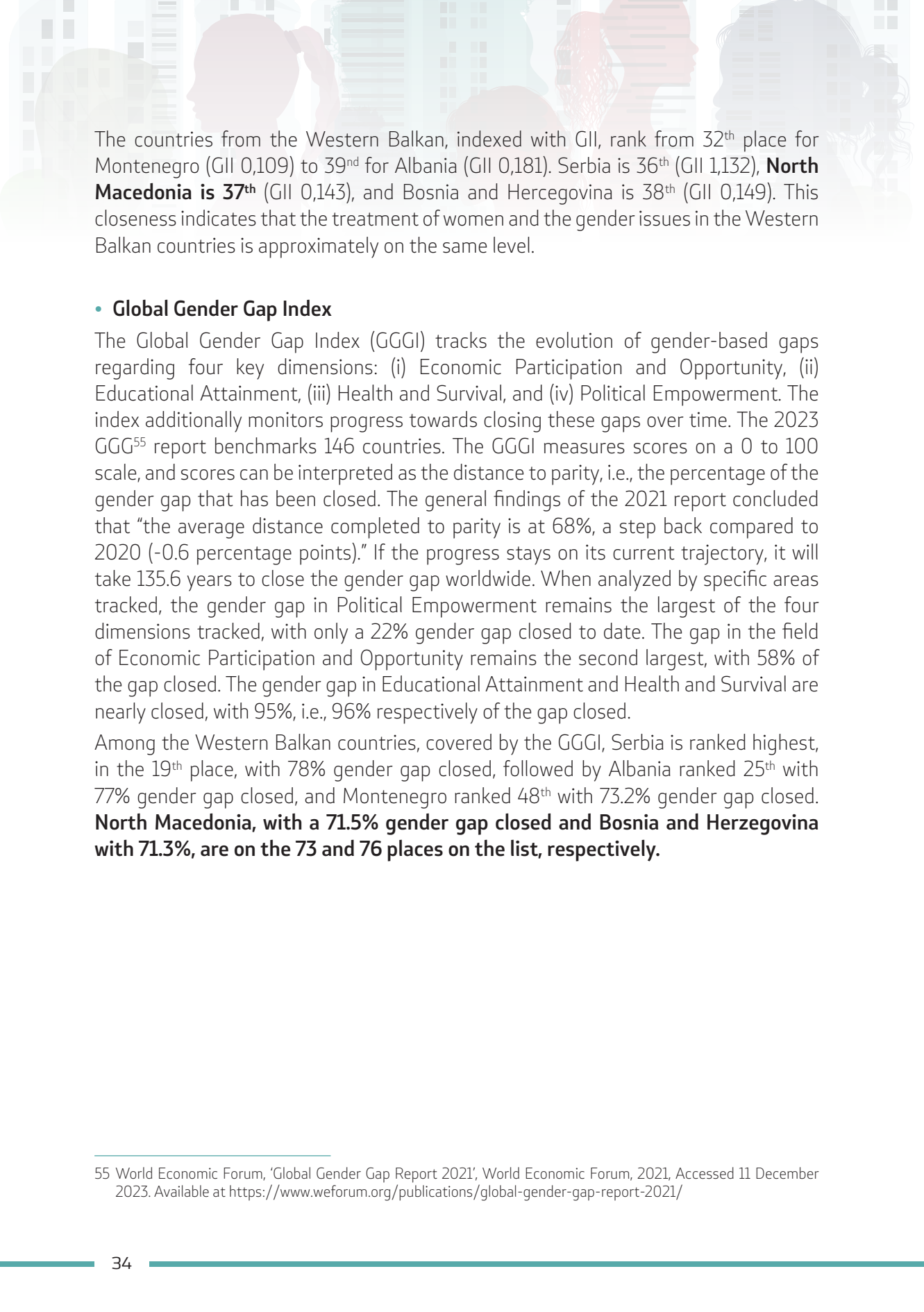
While the legal framework supporting equal opportunities for political participation is deemed satisfactory, its practical implementation often falls short. The involvement of women in politics, particularly those from ethnic Macedonian and to some extent ethnic Albanian backgrounds, is notably limited. In the Parliament, representation of women from the smaller communities is significantly low, with only one Roma, and one Bosniak woman. Additionally, there is an absence of significant Turkish, Vlach or Serb women, as parliamentary representation from the smaller communities is exclusively comprised of men forming coalitions with larger political parties. This underrepresentation of women extends to the executive and local levels, where women in general are inadequately represented, and those from the smaller communities are virtually nonexistent.

### • Gender Inequality Index

The UNDP Gender Inequality Index (GII) measures gender inequalities in three important aspects of human development: a) reproductive health, measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates; b) empowerment, measured by the proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and the proportion of adult females and males aged 25 years and older with at least some secondary education; and c) economic status, expressed as labour market participation and measured by labour force participation rate of female and male populations aged 15 years and older.<sup>54</sup> The higher the GII value, the more disparities between women and men and the more loss to human development. The GII tracks the position of women in 162 countries and highlights insights into gender gaps in major areas of human development. Notably, the ten countries ranked highest in terms of gender equality are from the European continent.

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<sup>54</sup> UNDP, 'Gender Inequality Index (GII) | Human Development Reports', 2020, Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at [http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii?utm\\_source=EN&utm\\_medium=GSR&utm\\_content=US\\_UNDP\\_PaidSearch\\_Brand\\_English&utm\\_campaign=CENTRAL&c\\_src=CENTRAL&c\\_src2=GSR&gclid=CjwKCAiAnO2MBhApEiwA8q0HYRcdfW6RB0uwjzpFpnl7KeHqc1AzUBUpCWc-sB-4wysD2oD8\\_g4R65BoCNjgQAvD\\_BwE.12,8](http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii?utm_source=EN&utm_medium=GSR&utm_content=US_UNDP_PaidSearch_Brand_English&utm_campaign=CENTRAL&c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR&gclid=CjwKCAiAnO2MBhApEiwA8q0HYRcdfW6RB0uwjzpFpnl7KeHqc1AzUBUpCWc-sB-4wysD2oD8_g4R65BoCNjgQAvD_BwE.12,8)}, "issued":{"date-parts":[{"2020"}]}}, "schema":"https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}



The countries from the Western Balkan, indexed with GII, rank from 32<sup>th</sup> place for Montenegro (GII 0,109) to 39<sup>nd</sup> for Albania (GII 0,181). Serbia is 36<sup>th</sup> (GII 1,132), **North Macedonia is 37<sup>th</sup>** (GII 0,143), and Bosnia and Herzegovina is 38<sup>th</sup> (GII 0,149). This closeness indicates that the treatment of women and the gender issues in the Western Balkan countries is approximately on the same level.

- **Global Gender Gap Index**

The Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) tracks the evolution of gender-based gaps regarding four key dimensions: (i) Economic Participation and Opportunity, (ii) Educational Attainment, (iii) Health and Survival, and (iv) Political Empowerment. The index additionally monitors progress towards closing these gaps over time. The 2023 GGG<sup>55</sup> report benchmarks 146 countries. The GGGI measures scores on a 0 to 100 scale, and scores can be interpreted as the distance to parity, i.e., the percentage of the gender gap that has been closed. The general findings of the 2021 report concluded that “the average distance completed to parity is at 68%, a step back compared to 2020 (-0.6 percentage points).” If the progress stays on its current trajectory, it will take 135.6 years to close the gender gap worldwide. When analyzed by specific areas tracked, the gender gap in Political Empowerment remains the largest of the four dimensions tracked, with only a 22% gender gap closed to date. The gap in the field of Economic Participation and Opportunity remains the second largest, with 58% of the gap closed. The gender gap in Educational Attainment and Health and Survival are nearly closed, with 95%, i.e., 96% respectively of the gap closed.

Among the Western Balkan countries, covered by the GGGI, Serbia is ranked highest, in the 19<sup>th</sup> place, with 78% gender gap closed, followed by Albania ranked 25<sup>th</sup> with 77% gender gap closed, and Montenegro ranked 48<sup>th</sup> with 73.2% gender gap closed. **North Macedonia, with a 71.5% gender gap closed and Bosnia and Herzegovina with 71.3%, are on the 73 and 76 places on the list, respectively.**

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<sup>55</sup> World Economic Forum, ‘Global Gender Gap Report 2021’, World Economic Forum, 2021, Accessed 11 December 2023. Available at <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2021/>



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## V. Primary research

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The objective of the primary data research is to further analyses and translate first-hand into comprehensive information measuring various aspects of women's political and public participation at the national level. The survey explores the levels and conditions for political and public participation of women from different ethnic communities, their perception of women's engagement in politics, and compared the obtained information. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were also conducted as a complementary data collection method to cover more abstract aspects of the research. Through the interviews, more in-depth data were obtained, while through open discussion, more information on some phenomena around political and public participation of women from non-majority communities came to light.


While the legal framework for equal opportunities for political participation is satisfactory, it does not always translate directly into practical implementation. **The analyzed primary data confirmed low level of political and public participation of women in general, while the level of participation still varies among different ethnic communities. In this regard, women from smaller communities are significantly less present in the political life of the country and the conditions for their possible future involvement are also less promising.**

The following series of questions investigate women's state and perspective across different ethnic communities, regarding their political position in society and their ambitions and readiness for involvement. Data from the primary research show that although women in general are on the margins of the political life, the views and situations also differ among communities.

### 1. Political participation – general state regarding level of engagement, ambitions and motivation

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Women have mainly participated in their local government institutions or central level institutions through voting, as declared by 60% of our respondents, while 33% declared that they haven't participated in any form. In general, women from all non-majority communities have participated more through voting, while less through other forms of



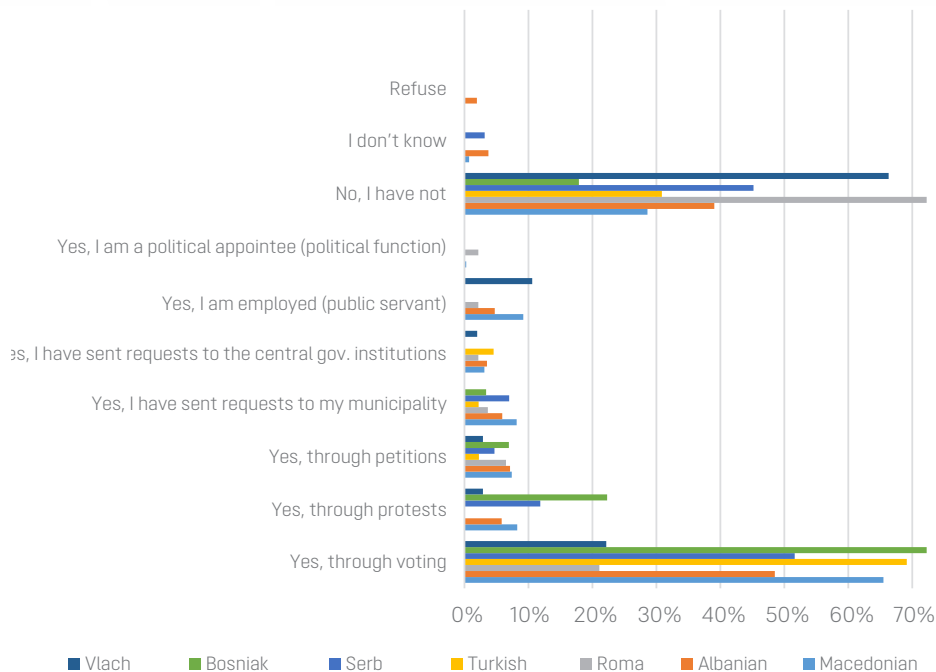
participation. However, this percentage diverges among different communities. Half or more than half of the women from Macedonian (66%), Albanian (49%), Turkish (69%), Serb (52%) and Bosniak (77%) communities stated that they exercise their political suffrage, while this percentage is overwhelmingly lower with Roma (21%) and Vlach women (22%). Consequently, the percentage of Roma (79%) and Vlach (66%) women claiming that they do not participate in politics in any form is higher compared to other communities, followed by Serb (45%) and Albanian (39%) women. The other forms of political participation are rarely or not at all popular among women in general, with exception of protests, which were practiced by 22% of the Bosniak and 12% of Serb women (Graph 1).

Women's dismissive attitude when it comes to direct participation in politics is further confirmed by the next question in the survey. Asked if they are involved in politics or have any interest in getting involved in the future, more than 72% of women from every community responded negatively. This percentage is highest among Vlach women (87%). A considerable affirmative response on this question is noted with the Bosniak respondents (27%), shadowed by Macedonian (15%), Roma (13%) and Vlach (13%, Graph 2).

The level of involvement in politics was also discussed with the interlocutors during the interviews. All of them unanimously agreed that the participation of women in politics, especially those from non-majority communities, is significantly low. One of the MPs, member of a non-majority community in the country, raised a pertinent dilemma in her statement: *"In conditions where 50 percent of the world's population are women, how can women not be in leadership positions or even not discuss whether it is necessary to include them in politics at all."*

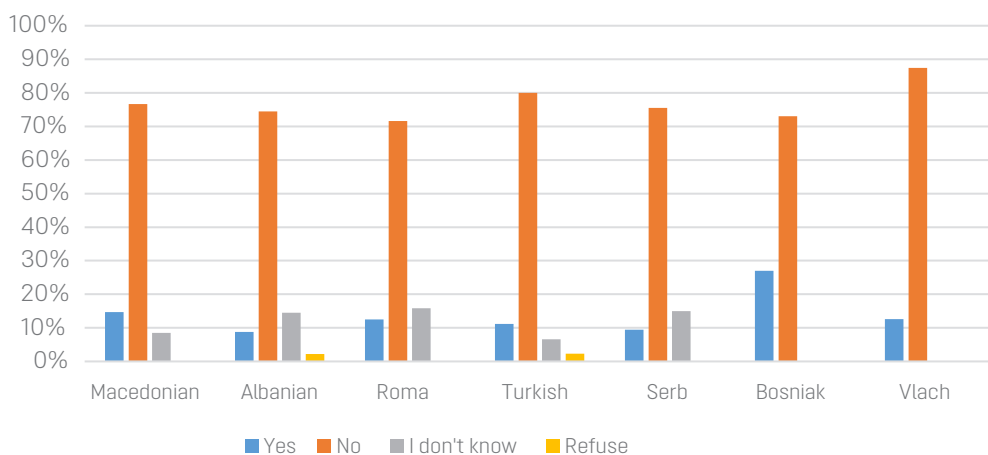
**In general, the political participation of women among different ethnic background is, equivalent to voting on elections.**

**Graph 1.** Have you ever participated in any form or way in your local government institutions or central level institutions? (%)



**Women across communities lack direct involvement and personal ambitions for getting involved in politics.**

**Graph 2.** Are you involved in politics or do you have interest in getting involved in the future? (%)





Further investigation shows that women that stated that are not involved and have no interest in getting involved in politics, regardless of their ethnic background, do not reference their gender nor ethnicity/religion among the two main reason behind their decision. The prevailing answer across communities, as the main reason, is that they simply lack interest in politics. The percentage of women that stated this reason is varies from 27% among Bosniak women to 66% among Turkish women (Graph 3).

Additionally, issues related to self-esteem concerning their education/qualification, their age, and the perception that “politics is dirty”, are also mentioned as the primary reasons across ethnicity, with certain percentage differences among the communities. For instance, 22% of the Turkish and 13% of Roma women consider themselves as underqualified for politics, whereas this percentage is lower for Albanian (8%), Macedonian (5%) and Serb (3%) women. Bosniak and Vlach women do not share this perception about themselves (Graph 3).

Except for the Turkish community, there are women in every other community believing that they are not in the optimal age to consider involvement in politics, ranging from 5% among Macedonian women to 13% among Serb women. “Politics is dirty” is the first excuse for 5% and 6% of Turkish and Bosniak women, respectively, for 7% of Macedonian and Albanian, 9% Serb and 12% Vlach women. Household responsibilities are mentioned as significant obstacle only among the Bosniak women (19%). Disappointment that the political scene is already occupied by certain people who are constantly perpetuating the political position is mentioned as the main factor among 19% of the Bosniak, 7% of Vlach, 6% of Macedonian, Roma and Serb, and 3% of Albanian women (Graph 3).

The responses are more diverse among different communities when asked to state the second reason behind their decision not to get involved in politics. In general, the perception that “Politics is dirty”, lack of education/qualifications and age barriers are frequently cited across almost every community. Namely, the viewpoint that “politics is dirty” is most common among Vlach (31%), Bosniak (30%), Macedonian (26%) and Turkish (22%) women. Additionally, 26% of Roma women, and 13% i.e. 12% of Serb and Vlach women respectively, consider that they lack education/qualification to be involved in politics, whereas this percentage is under 8% among the other communities. Age is also considered a barrier among all women, but with percentage variations. The age factor as the second obstacle to involvement in politics is highest among Roma (21%) and Vlach (26%) women. Bosniak (18%), Albanian (12%) and Macedonian (11%) women reference family and household responsibilities as higher burden for political involvement, compared to women from other ethnic backgrounds where the percentage is below 10 (Turkish - 8%, Vlach - 6%, Graph 4).

All interlocutors interviewed on the subject expressed an understanding of the rationale behind women’s responses, and what they specifically emphasized is that politics in our

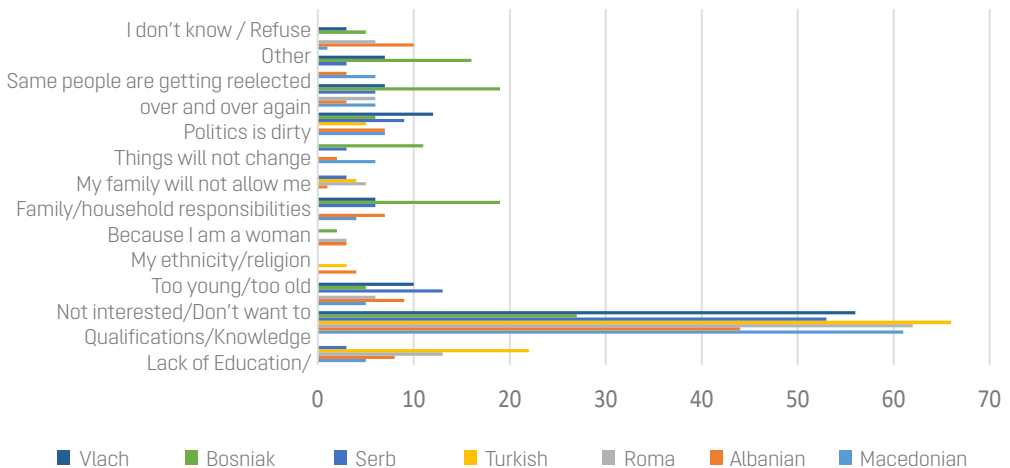


society is “dirty”, especially for female politicians. They shared first-hand experience of inconvenience and hate speech that they went through during their professional careers as politicians, just because they are women. One of the MPs, member of a non-majority community stated: *“Apart from what you say, they [the political opponents], focus on your dress code, make up, whether you are fat or skinny, heels or no heels, torn tights – not torn tights, botoxed... there is no solution for this issue... if the political environment has political parties with bots linked to social network, you just have to accept that it will pass in two to three days.”* An Albanian MP further stated: *“Politics is very harsh on women, as a lot of the times you will be judged on how you look and not what you say. As a woman you have to invest in your looks and also in what you say, so that they don’t say that she is there just because of looks.”*

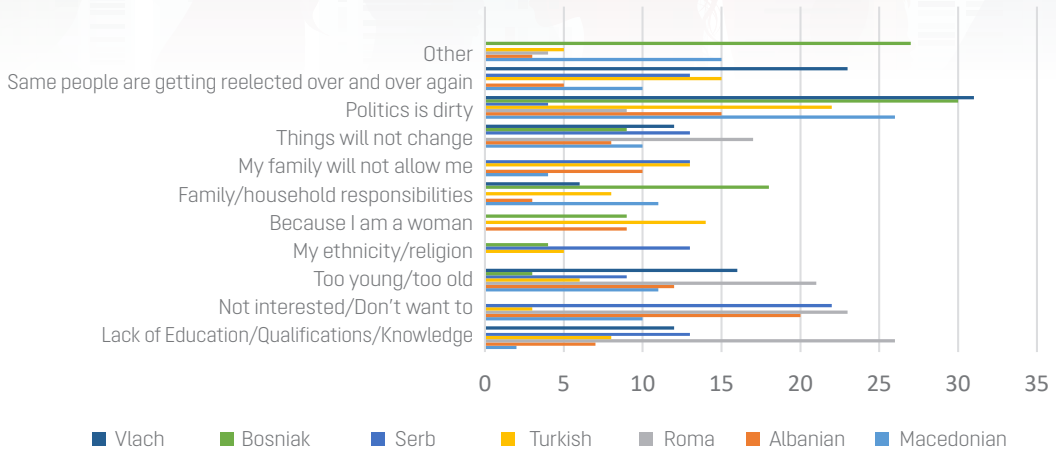
However, an ethnic Albanian government representative stressed the utmost importance for women to surpass the reasons they use as an excuse not to get involved in politics, overcome those obstacles, and take the decision-making process in their hands: *“Women have created this monster in their head about joining politics, which is fed by family, partners, husbands, mother in laws and so on... we must surpass this fear... Politics has become a dirty work, something dirty, but politics is an instrument we can use to effectively improve our conditions, we must surpass the fear.”*

**Women do not state their gender and religious/ethnic background as the first reason behind their retention from politics.**

**Graph 3.** If no, what is the reasons behind your decision not to get involved in politics? (first reason)




**Graph 4.** If no, what is the second reason behind your decision not to get involved in politics? (%)



On the other hand, when investigating the ambitions of the women who stated that they are involved or are willing to get involved in politics, two motivations prevail among all respondents across different communities, i.e. a) the need to influence and improve the situation in society and b) the need to influence and improve the situation in their community. A closer look at the results regarding the two alternatives indicates that the vast majority of Albanian (69%), Roma (67%) and Vlach (61%) women stated the urge to improve the situation within their community, whereas the need to influence and improve the situation in society in general follows (Albanian – 59%, Roma – 52%, Vlach - 39%). The situation is reversed with the other communities where the majority recognized the need to influence and improve the situation in society as primal motivation for involvement in politics (Turkish – 79%, Serb – 76%, Bosniak – 70% and Macedonian – 66%), shadowing by the need for intervention within their own community (Macedonian – 50%, Serb – 50%, Bosniak – 26% and Turkish – 21%, Graph 5).

A significant number of women from almost all communities are also motivated to get involved in politics to improve human rights, including women’s rights in the country. More than half of Vlach (61%) and Roma (52%) women support this reason, as well as 42% of Macedonian women, 32% of Albanian, 24% of Serb and 21% of Turkish women. On the other hand, only 4% of Bosniak women are driven by the motivation to improve human rights, including women’s rights in the country. The need to improve the situation of non-majority communities is an incentive for 52% of Roma, 26% of Macedonian, 23% of Vlach, 17% of Albanian and 13% of Bosniak women. Being active



on the political scene in the country is a personal ambition for only 23% of Vlach and 6% and 5% of Macedonian and Albanian respondents respectively (Graph 5).

The percentage of women who answered that they would get into politics for some kind of personal gain is also notable among almost all communities. Namely, 50% of Serb, 48% of Roma and 31% of Macedonian women would get involved in politics for personal employment or for the employment of a close member of their family. Moreover, 32% of Roma, 23% of Vlach, 21% of Macedonian and 12% of Albanian women would enter politics for some other personal gain (Graph 5).

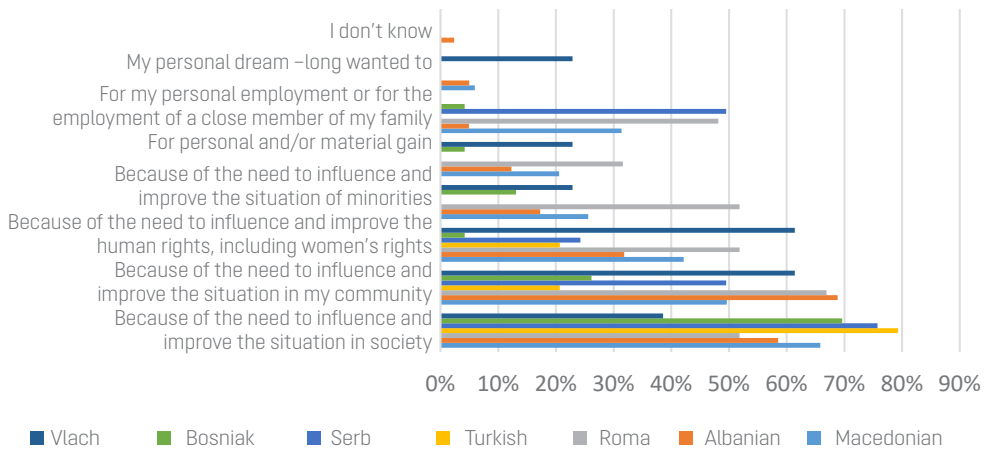
Our interlocutors discussed their reasons for getting involved in politics, and their answers overlap to a certain extent with the respondents': the need to help progress in society; to improve the position of women in the country; and to improve the situation in their own communities, prevail among the given answers. A director of a public institution, who is a member of a smaller community, stated: *"I felt the need to make changes and I thought that through active participation in politics, changes could be essential, visible and durable, especially for the smaller communities like mine, living in our country."* similarly, an MP member from a smaller community said: *"Now [as a politician] I can have discussions and comments regarding those women who are very little visible, who live in rural areas, in isolated areas, first of all I mean the ghetto areas, with an emphasis on Roma women, who are less and less visible and we must work with specific programs."*

The interviewed women politician also addressed the reason and motivation for women to involve in politics in general, and their responses overlap with the survey findings. An MP from the Albanian community emphasized: *"Women don't enter politics for personal interest, because women fight, think and prepare a lot before joining politics, and when they enter politics, they enter with a big baggage of experience."* An MP member from a smaller community further stated: *"It seems to me that women are more and more aware of the fact that "I am the one who decides for myself and I want to be part of the political processes so that I get to decide for myself and on behalf of all the women in Macedonia"*.

Additionally, an Albanian politician in her statement highlighted that the need for women to be directly involved in the decision-making processes was the prime motivation for her: *"When I worked as a journalist during the wars in the '90, I understood that what happens on the ground is a consequence of what is decided by politics... My motivation was to be there where decisions are made, that's what pushed me to be part of politics."*

**The need to influence and improve the situation within their community is main incentive among the vast majority of Albanian, Roma and Vlach women, whereas the largest part of women from the other communities the incentive is to influence and improve the situation in society in general.**

**Graph 5.** If I get involved in politics, I will do it because: (%)



The vast majority of women across communities stated that they voted in the previous elections. Specifically, the results by ethnic community show that 95% of women from the Turkish community voted in the last elections, as did 91% of Vlach, 88% of Macedonian, 85% of Serb, 75% of Bosniak, 73% of Albanian, and 63% of Roma women. It is notable that the specific percentage of women who voted from each community is higher than the recorded general turnout at the national level in the last elections (local elections 2021 - first round turnout 51,44%, second round 49,56 %).<sup>56</sup> However, this political engagement is significantly lower among Roma women, in comparison to the women from other communities (Graph 6).

When voting, personal political conviction and consistent political values are the sole basis for majority of women across every community. This percentage is the highest among Serb (86%), Bosniak (77%) and Macedonian (77%) women, and lower among Albanian (47%) and Roma (54%) women. However, among some of the ethnic communities, a significant percentage of women rely on the political conviction of the male members of their family when voting. Hence, almost one third of Turk (31%) and Albanian (30%) women, and one quarter of Roma (23%) and Bosniak women (23%), declared that they vote the way the male members of the family vote. This percentage

56 Pankovski et al. (2021) *Manual for local elections in the Republic of North Macedonia 2021*, Konrad Adenauer Foundation in the Republic of North Macedonia, Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" – Skopje. Available at [https://izbornaarhiva.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/belegexemplar\\_2021\\_the\\_republic\\_of\\_north\\_macedonias\\_2021\\_local\\_elections\\_handbook\\_mkd\\_version.pdf](https://izbornaarhiva.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/belegexemplar_2021_the_republic_of_north_macedonias_2021_local_elections_handbook_mkd_version.pdf)

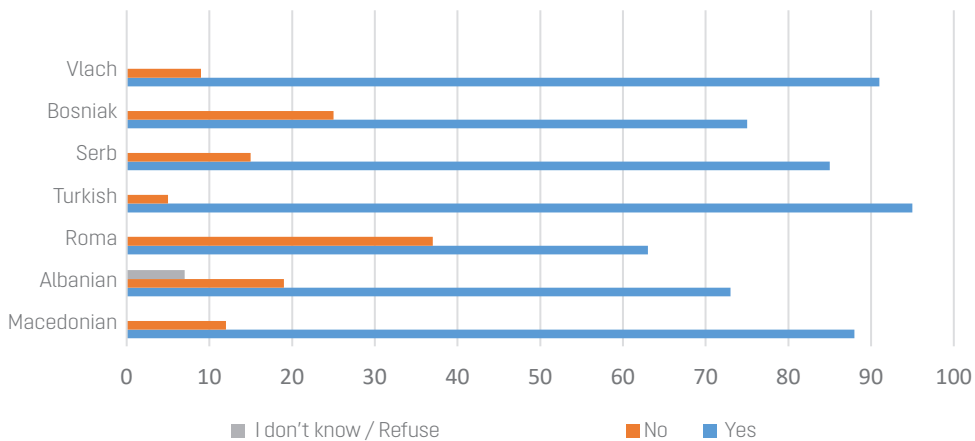
among the other communities is significantly lower to none (Vlach 8%, Macedonian 4%, Serb 0%. Graph 7).

Voting in a way that will provide personal benefit (employment, business, etc.), is registered almost among all communities. Thus, 16% of Roma women, 14% of Serb, 11% of Albanian, 10% of Macedonian and 9% of Vlach women declared that they vote in a way that will provide them with personal benefit. Personal benefit as an incentive for voting a certain way was not declared by Bosniak women. 20% of Vlach women are not sure why are they vote in elections, a sentiment shared also by 9% Albanian, 8% Macedonian and 7% Roma women (Graph 7).

In line with these findings, the interviewed director of a public institution, a member of a smaller community, defined the level of freedom women have in expressing their political beliefs through the right to vote as low: "I believe that women have only partial freedom to independently express their political views and vote according to their own convictions. I also think that in relation to this issue there are also differences between different communities."

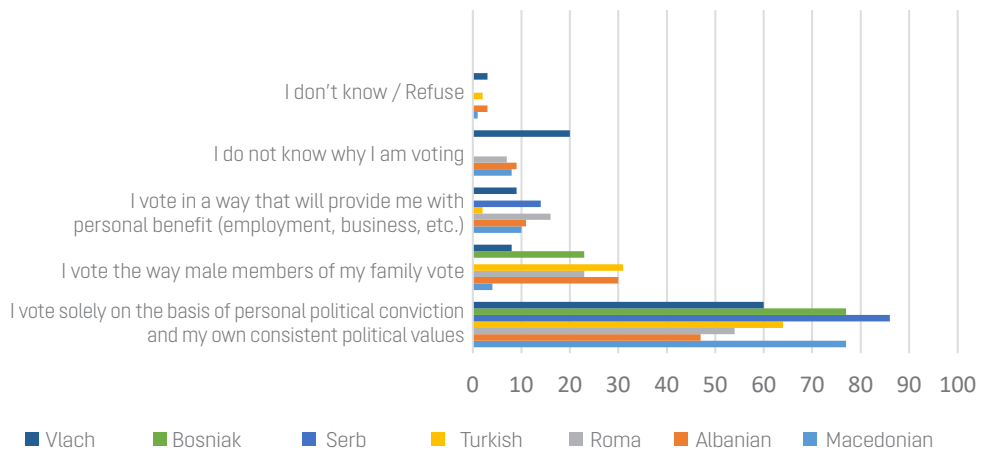
### The execution of the right to vote is clearly lowest among Roma women.

**Graph 6.** Have you voted in the previous elections? (%)



**Although majority of women vote according to their own political conviction, among some communities, significant percentage of women follow the decision of the male members in the family.**

**Graph 7.** When I vote on elections: (%)



When examining the engagement with political parties, around 10% of women from almost all communities are members of a political party. Bosniak and Macedonian communities are exceptions, since 25% and 17% of women from these communities respectively declared a membership in a political party (Graph 8).

Further investigation on their involvement within political party showed that only 12% of Albanian women and 5% of Macedonian women members of a political party have some specific engagement with the party, while women play with no particular role outside of their membership (Graph 9).

In discussing the manner and the circumstances under which our interlocutor entered politics, a certain pattern is visible in five cases out of six among the interviewed politicians. Namely, five of them were recognized by the party leader as someone that can contribute to a certain cause, with no previous active or significant engagement within the political party. One of the MPs testified: *“I didn't know that I would be on the list for the parliamentary elections, I found out on Sitel news... I didn't know at that time what a campaign was, and for that reason I subtly separated myself from that group. I wanted to make my own path of movement and see if it is for or not”*. Another MP, recruited into politics in a similar manner stated: *“I never intended to start a political career, it all happened suddenly when the party leader contacted me personally and asked me to join the executive board of the party”*. An ethnic Albanian MP, when recalling the circumstances under which she joined politics, jokingly said that men decided that she would become a politician: *“The head of the branch was out with my husband and said to*

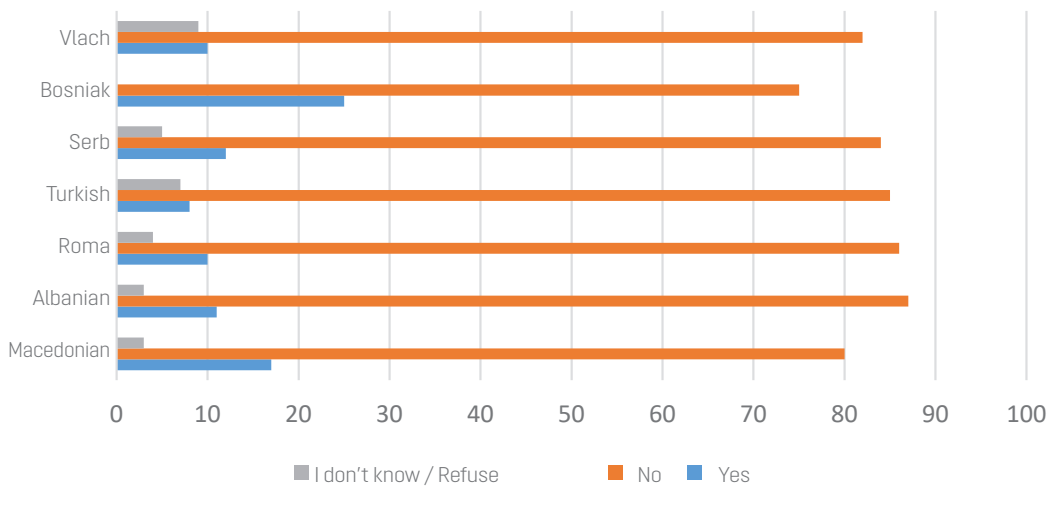
him 'Why don't you allow your wife to become a candidate?' My husband refused the claims that he is forbidding me to be a politician, and in that day, it was decided that I was going to be candidate. The head of the branch said that he thought I should be candidate and that he would send my name to the headquarters."

An ethnic Albanian government representative, whose enrolment in politics was similar to the previous cases, added that even when the party leadership approached her with the proposal arguing that with her skills she was an adequate candidate for the position, a discriminatory vocabulary towards women was still present: "I was offered the position because they thought I was a good fit for it, but there was slight discrimination there, as I was told this position is for women, as it requires a lot of talking, but not much doing."

However, the politicians emphasized the need for involvement in politics as a way for direct influence in the decision-making processes in the country. Part of the interlocutors further highlighted that this involvement should happen at young age. An MP stated: "The young generation, should not be afraid of the challenge to enter politics, because they are key, and they have to be the one decides your future".

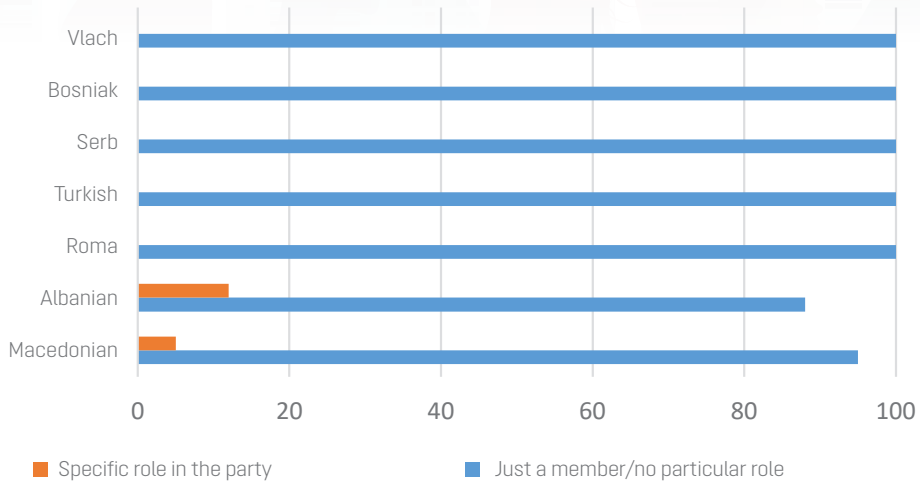
**Bosniak and Macedonian communities lead with the percentage of women members of a political party.**

**Graph 8.** Are you a member of a political party? (%)



## Women's engagement in political parties is generally reduced to simple membership.

Graph 9. What is your role in the political party? (%)



The women were asked about the direct political engagement within their close social surrounding as well. In this sense, around one quarter or more of women from all communities reported having a relative and/or friend as a member of a political party. Bosniak women lead in this regard, where 44% stated having such friends/family, followed 38% of Roma women, 33% of Macedonian, 29% of Albanian, 27% of Turkish, 26% of Vlach and 21% of Serb women (Graph 10).

Further investigation into the gender of the relatives/friends who are members of a political party suggest that around two thirds or more in the case of all communities are male. The highest percentage of female family/friends members of a political party is noted among Turkish women, where 42% of the reported members are women, Macedonian women with 41%, Roma 39% and Bosniak women 37%. This percentage among Albanian women is 34%, Turkish 30% and Vlach 30% (Graph 11).

Around 10% of women from almost all communities have some relatives or friends that hold some high political positions on a national or local level, or have had some high position in the past. Roma women are an exception in this regard, where none of the respondents reported having high-level politician within their close social circle (Graph 12).

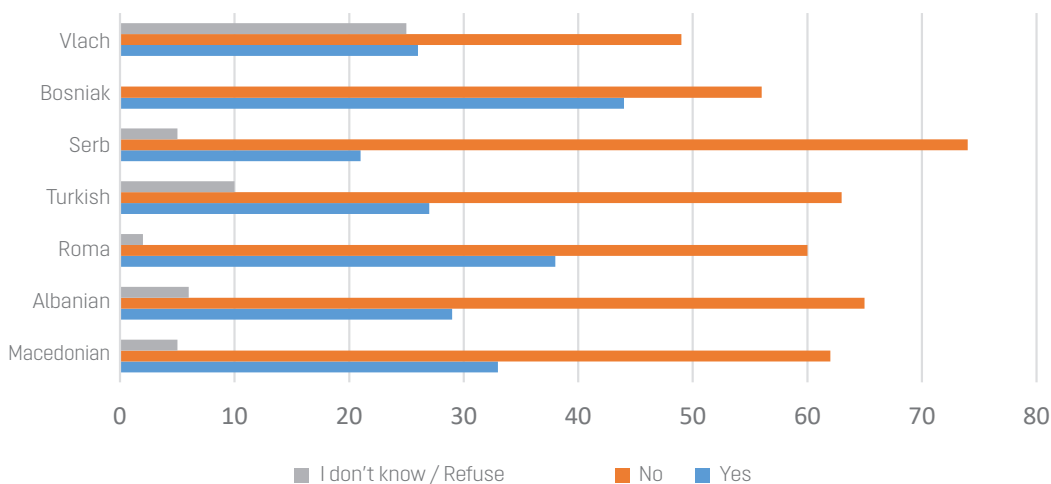
The women who answered positively to the question were further asked about the gender of their friend/relative that has, or has had high a political function. The analysis shows that men dominate with more than two thirds of the answers across communities. The highest percentage of women friends/relatives in a high-level position are present among Macedonian women – 37%, followed by Serb (30%), Albanian (27%), Turkish



(27%) and Bosniak (17%) women. All friends/family in a high-level political office among the Bosniak women are men, as previously stated (Graph 13).

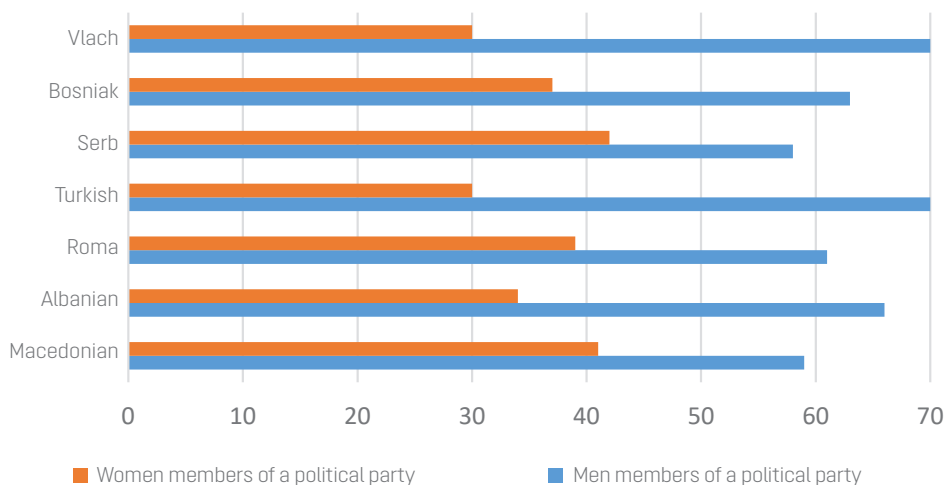
**Around one quarter or more from the women of all communities, declared relative and/or friend as member of certain political party**

**Graph 10.** Is anyone from your family/friends a member of a political party? (%)



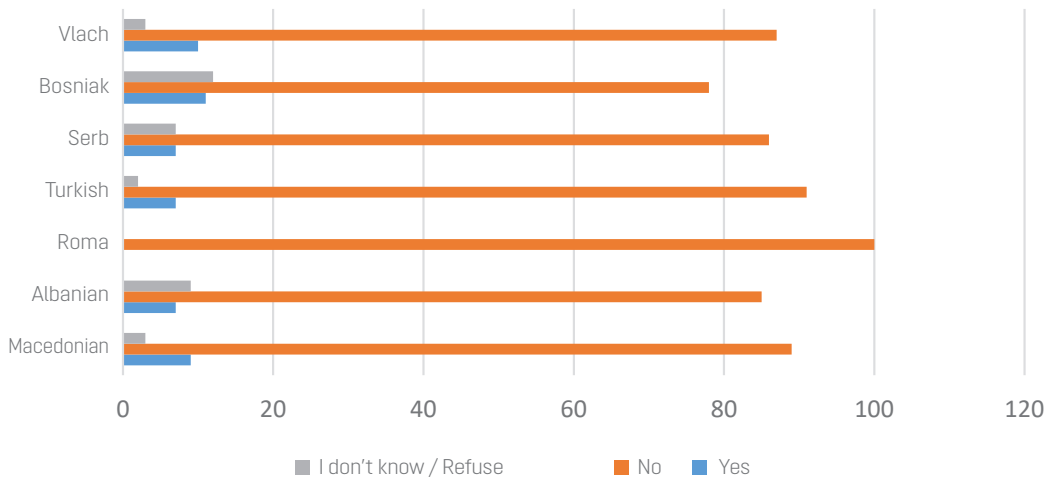
**The male friends/family that have membership in certain political party dominate among all communities.**

**Graph 11.** If the women have family/friends members of a political party, what is the gender of the members? (%)



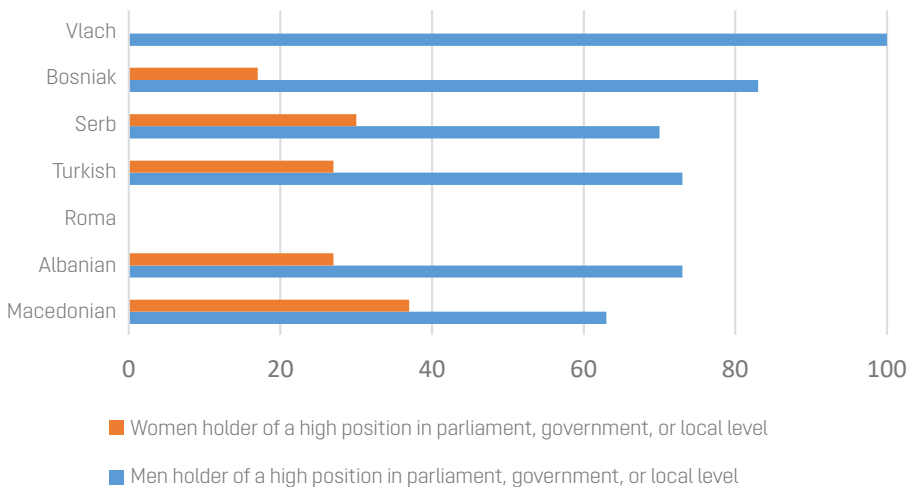
Roma women are most likely not to have anyone in their close surrounding that holds, or has held, a high official position.

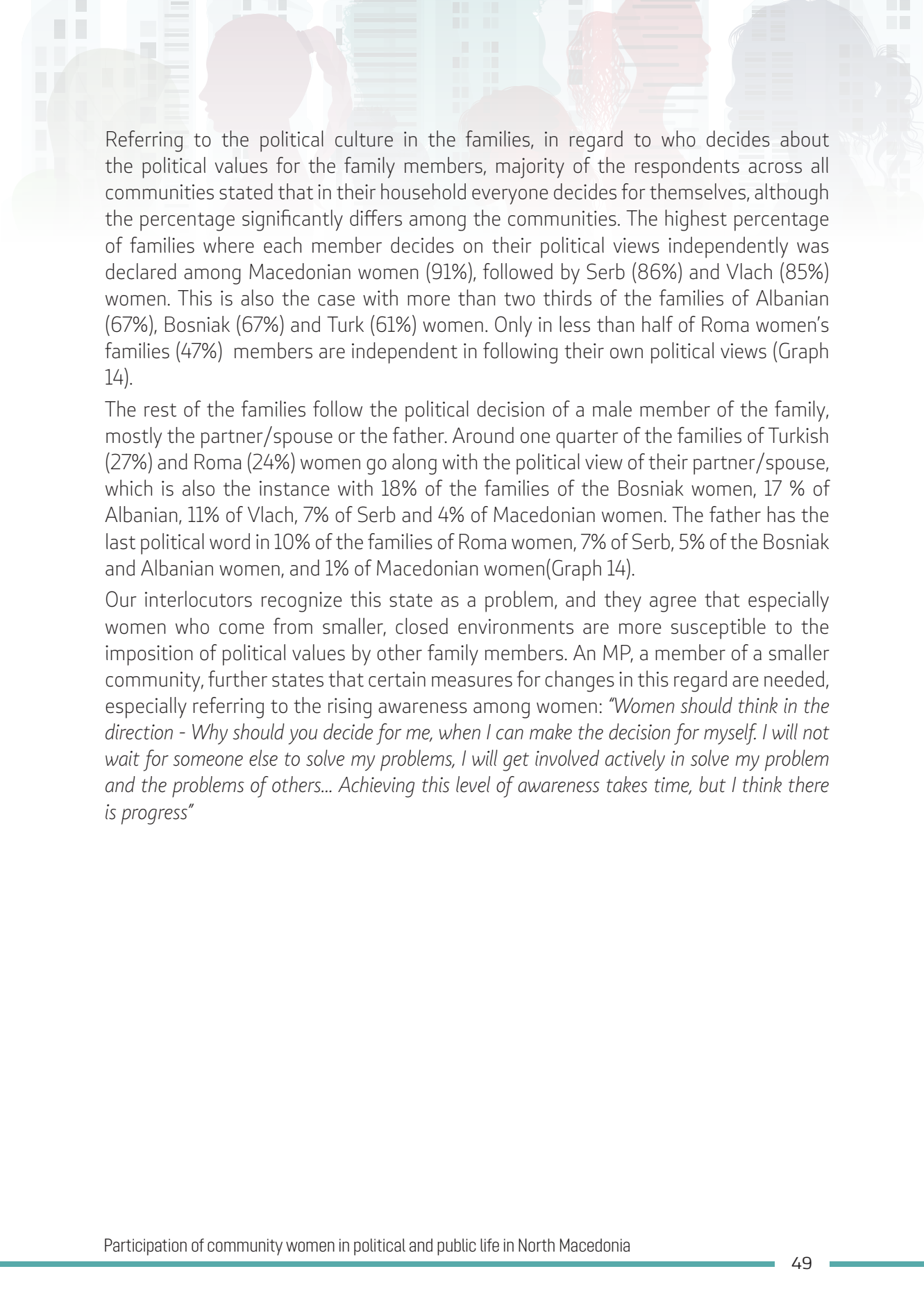
**Graph 12.** Has any of your family members or friends, now or in the past, held a high position in parliament, government, or local level? (%)



The male friends/family that have or had high-level political position, dominate among all communities.

**Graph 13.** If the women have family members/friends, holders of a high position in parliament, government, or local level, now or in the past, what is the gender of those individuals? (%)



The background of the page features a series of overlapping, semi-transparent silhouettes of people's heads and shoulders, representing a multicultural group. The silhouettes are in various shades of light blue, green, and purple. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern, with a focus on human diversity.

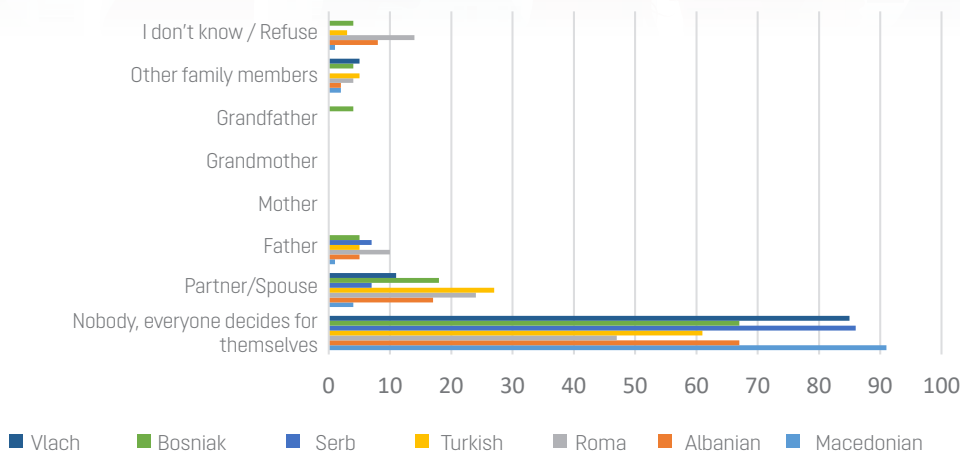
Referring to the political culture in the families, in regard to who decides about the political values for the family members, majority of the respondents across all communities stated that in their household everyone decides for themselves, although the percentage significantly differs among the communities. The highest percentage of families where each member decides on their political views independently was declared among Macedonian women (91%), followed by Serb (86%) and Vlach (85%) women. This is also the case with more than two thirds of the families of Albanian (67%), Bosniak (67%) and Turk (61%) women. Only in less than half of Roma women's families (47%) members are independent in following their own political views (Graph 14).

The rest of the families follow the political decision of a male member of the family, mostly the partner/spouse or the father. Around one quarter of the families of Turkish (27%) and Roma (24%) women go along with the political view of their partner/spouse, which is also the instance with 18% of the families of the Bosniak women, 17 % of Albanian, 11% of Vlach, 7% of Serb and 4% of Macedonian women. The father has the last political word in 10% of the families of Roma women, 7% of Serb, 5% of the Bosniak and Albanian women, and 1% of Macedonian women(Graph 14).

Our interlocutors recognize this state as a problem, and they agree that especially women who come from smaller, closed environments are more susceptible to the imposition of political values by other family members. An MP, a member of a smaller community, further states that certain measures for changes in this regard are needed, especially referring to the rising awareness among women: *"Women should think in the direction - Why should you decide for me, when I can make the decision for myself. I will not wait for someone else to solve my problems, I will get involved actively in solve my problem and the problems of others... Achieving this level of awareness takes time, but I think there is progress"*

**Macedonian, Serb and Vlach women most autonomous in terms of following their own political values, whereas Roma women are most dependent in comparison.**

**Graph 14.** Who dictates the political values in the family? (%)



The respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 - *I do not care at all* to 5 - *very important*, the personal importance of several values. About half or more than half of the women from all communities, marked with important (mark 4) or very important (mark 5), the need for their interests to be taken into account when a political decision is made. This percentage is highest with the Bosniak women (87%) and lower than 50% only for Roma women (44%). The percentage for Roma women stating that they *do not care at all* (mark 1) whether their interest is taken into account when political decisions are made is also overwhelming in comparison to other communities i.e. 42%. The second highest percentage in relation to this is among Vlach and Turk women (15% each, Graph 15).

The drive to participate in civic activities and initiatives is to a certain level present among women from all ethnic backgrounds. In this regard, Bosniak (61%) and Albanian (51%) women are the most ambitious, marking as important (mark 4) or very important (mark 5) the need to be active in civil activities. These percentages for women from the other communities range from 20% for Vlach and 22% for Roma women, 28% for Serb, 36% for Turkish and 39% for Macedonian women. Roma and Vlach women indicate the highest degree of disinterest in taking part in civic initiatives, where more than half of the respondents in both communities answered this question with 1- *not important at all* (Roma women 54%, Vlach women 52%). The complete lack of interest in participating in civic initiatives (mark 1) is also notable among Turkish (39%) and Macedonian (26%) women, whereas among Albanian, Serb and Bosniak women, it ranges from 16 to 19% (Graph 16).

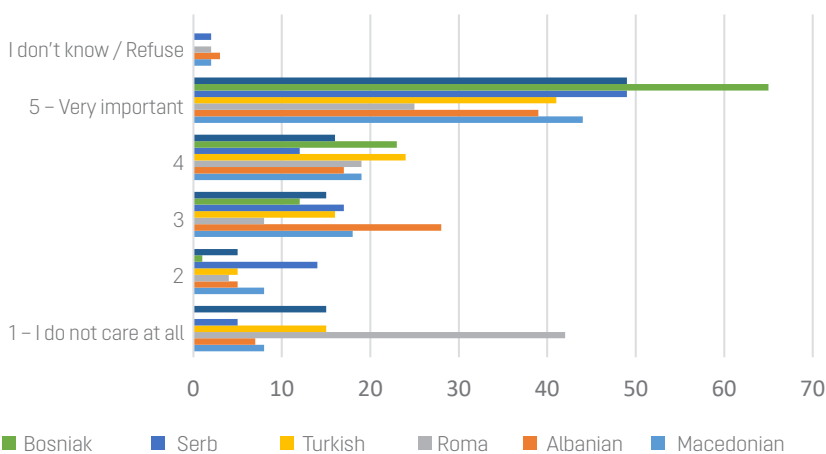
More than half of the women from the Bosniak (61%), Serb (52%) and Albanian (51%) community declare readiness for reaction if any political decision is against their interests (mark 4 or 5). This percentage for Macedonian and Turkish women is 45%, for Vlach 38% and for Roma women is 27%. Again, Roma women expressed the most negative attitude in relation to this matter as well, where more than two thirds (65%), answered that it is not important or not important at all (mark 1 or 2), for them to react if some decision is against their interest, out of which 46% answered with 1 – not important at all. This negative view is shadowed by Vlach (38%), Turkish (37%), Serb (36%) and Macedonian (31%) women, whereas it is to some extent lower with Albanian (20%) and Bosniak (10%) women (Graph 17).

An MP emphasized the importance of familiarizing women with their political rights, and the importance of why they should insist and fight to be heard: *“Women should know that time you go to buy bread, every time you buy bread is a political decision, every time you pay bills it’s a political decision, when you pay taxes, it’s tied to your political decisions, it’s your life, your future. When you take your child to the kindergarten, it is tied to the political system or the educational system in the country, that means I am affected in every possible way.”*

Another MP noted the importance of activism as a tool for political and social change, and the need for women to start practicing it regularly: *“I was civil activist for a long time and maybe that’s where my power comes from now in politics... Activism raises awareness and a critical mass which can bring the desired changes.”*

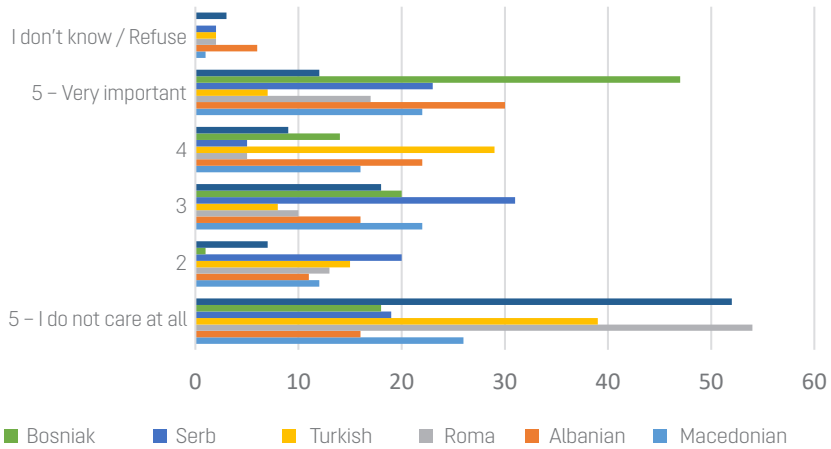
**About half or more than half of the women from all communities want their interests to be taken into account when a political decision is made.**

**Graph 15:** On a scale of 1 - I do not care at all to 5 - very important, how important are the following values in your life? - To have my interests taken into account when a political decision is made



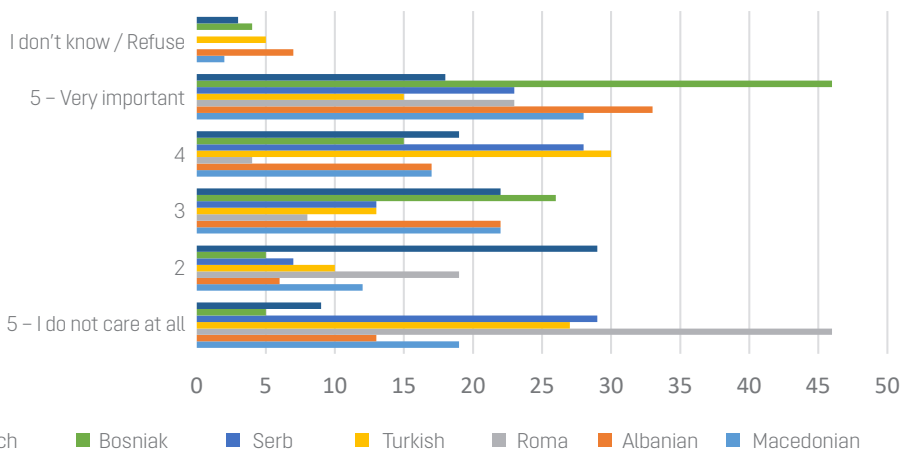
The drive to participate in civic activities and initiatives is, to a certain level, present among women from all ethnic backgrounds.


**Graph 16:** On a scale of 1 - I do not care at all to 5 - very important, how important are the following values in your life? - To participate in civic activities/initiatives



Bosniak, Serb and Albanian women expressed the highest readiness for reaction if any political decision is against their interests, opposite to Roma women where more than two thirds stated that this kind of reaction is of low importance to them.

**Graph 17:** On a scale of 1 - I do not care at all to 5 - very important, how important are the following values in your life? - To react publicly if any political decision is against my interests (%)





The respondents were asked a series of questions regarding the means and dedication to acquiring information on political issues. The political TV debates are less popular among Roma women, with a high of 86% stating that they don't follow such TV programs, followed by Serb (63%), Macedonian (58%), Turkish (46%), Albanian (45%), Bosniak (42%) and Vlach (35%) women. Most of the women that do follow political debates on TV do so on average 1 to 2 hours weekly, with Turkish women leading in this respect (43%), Macedonian 30%, Vlach 24%, Albanian 23%, Serb 19%, and Roma women 10% (Graph 18).

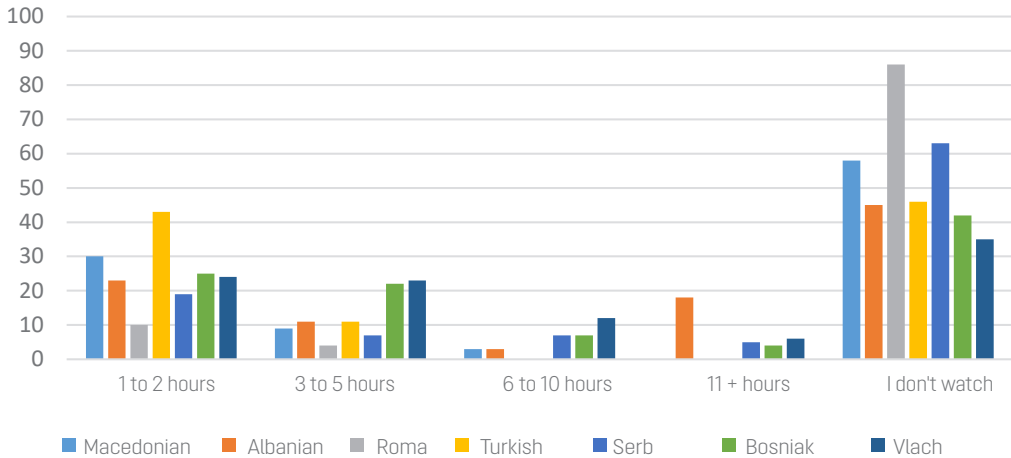
Women were also asked if the political topics are part of their everyday communication with friends and family. The majority of the women discuss political topics with friends and relatives up to 5 hours weekly, with Bosniak (70%) and Vlach (68%) women leading, followed by Turkish (61%), Macedonian and Serb women (54% each), Albanian (34%) and Roma (23%). The political issues are never a topic of everyday conversation among a high of 74% of Roma women, while this percentage is twice as low or more for the other communities (44% of Albanian, 43% of Macedonian, 40% of Serb, 35% of Turkish, 20% of Vlach and 16% of Bosniak women, Graph 19).

More than half of the women from almost all ethnic backgrounds spend at least one or more hours weekly following TV news programs. Most of the women watch the news up to 5 hours a week, i.e. Turkish 65%, Macedonian 64%, Bosniak 58%, Vlach 55%, Albanian 46%, Serb 43% and Roma 33%. The TV news have lowest rate among Roma women, 59% of whom stated that do not follow this informative program at all (Graph 20).

The majority of the women that search the internet for political information, do so in under 2 hours weekly (Turkish 53%, Macedonian 43%, Albanian 35%, Bosniak 34%, Vlach 31% and Roma women 10%). However, the percentage of women who do not browse the internet for political info is also significant, Roma women reaching high 82%. Serb and Vlach women follow in this regard with 52% and 50% respectively, Macedonian 44%, Bosniak 39%, Turk 36% and Albanian women 35% (Graph 21).

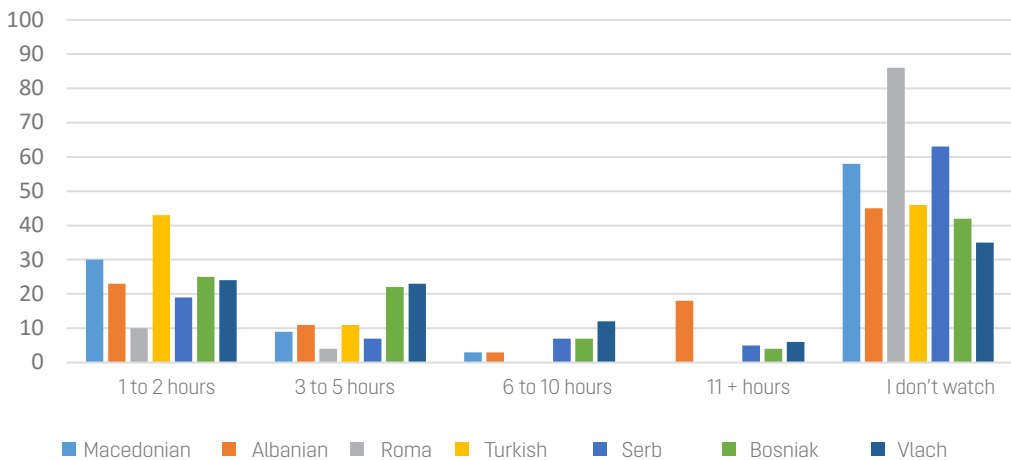
At least one third of the women across almost all communities follow political debates on TV up to 10 hours weekly, except for Roma women where only 14% have that custom.

**Graph 18:** How many hours do you spend on a typical week doing these activities? - Watching political debates on TV (%)



Majority of the women from almost all communities discuss political issues with friends and family, with exception for Roma women where 74% stated that these topics are not part of their everyday conversations.

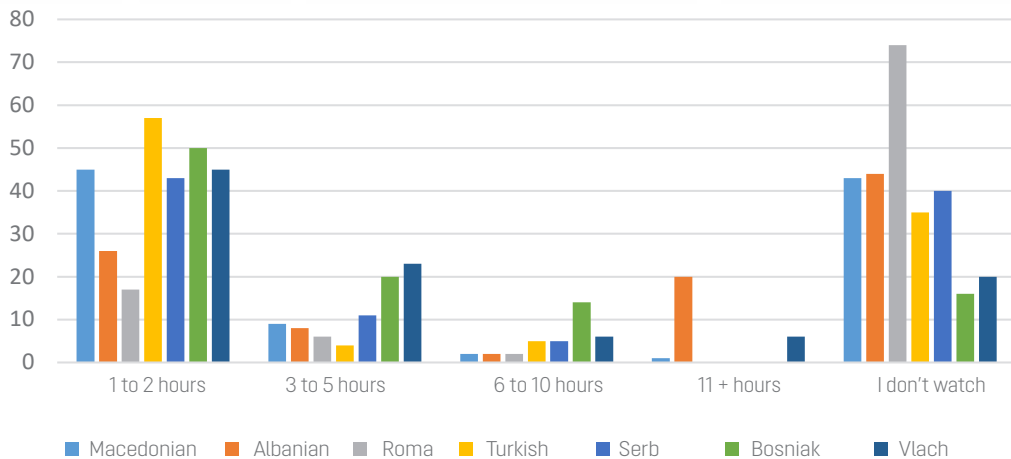
**Graph 19:** How many hours do you spend on a typical week doing these activities? - Discussing political topics with friends/family/colleagues (%)





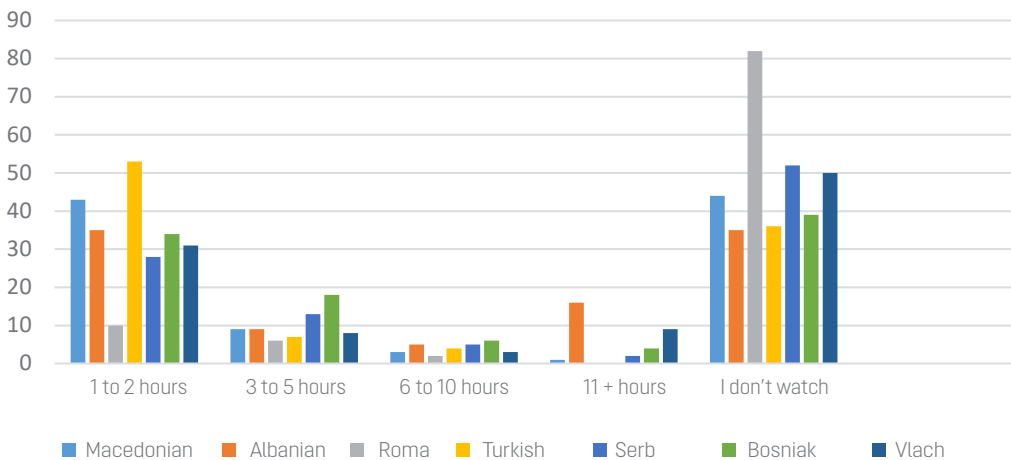
**Women across communities follow the TV news as a main source for obtaining information on political and social issues.**

**Graph 20:** How many hours do you spend on a typical week doing these activities? - Watching news on TV (%)



**Majority of the women spent up to 2 hours browsing for political information online.**

**Graph 21:** How many hours do you spend on a typical week doing these activities? - Browsing the internet for political information (%)



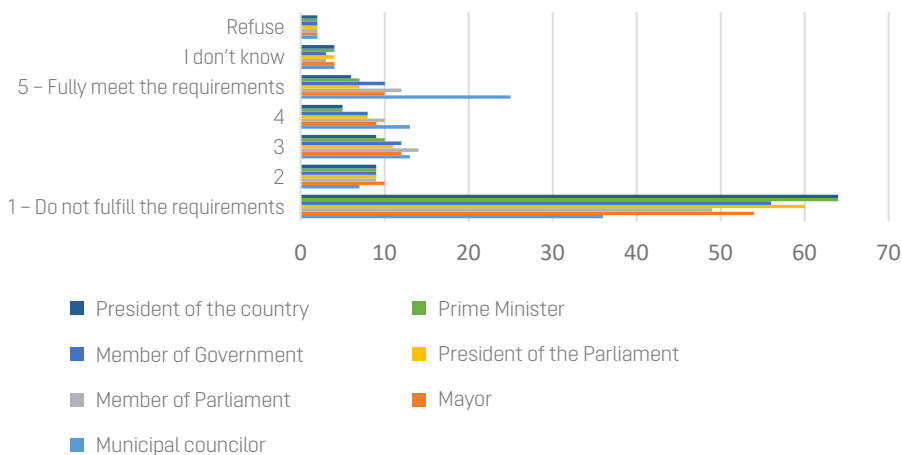
The research placed the self-confidence of women to the test in terms of whether they believe they possess the necessary knowledge and skills to hold political positions. The results indicate that the majority of women across communities, do not feel able

to hold a political position. This uncertainty grows with the higher political position proposed in the questionnaire.

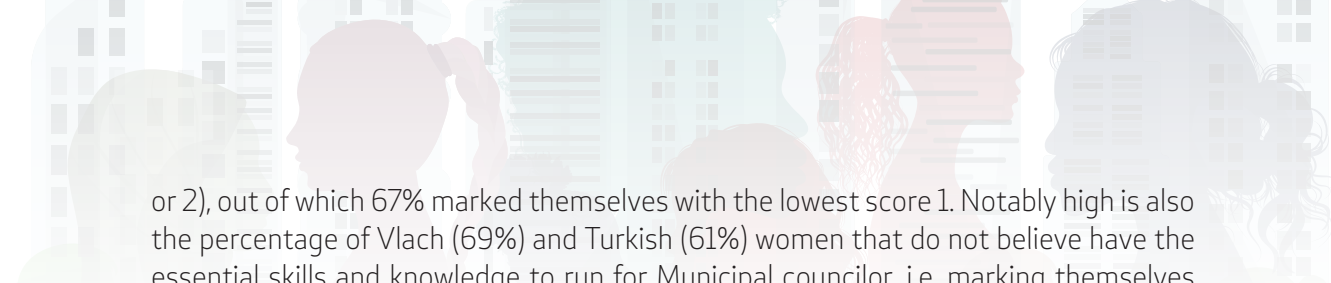
Thus, asked to mark their skills set from 1- *do not fulfill the requirements*, to 5 – *fully meet the requirements*, half and more than half of all women rated themselves with the lowest score – 1, when it comes to the position Member of Parliament (49%), Mayor (54%), Member of Government (56%), President of the Parliament (60%), Prime Minister (64%), President of the country (64%). The percentage of women that assessed themselves with the highest mark -5, is below 2% for each position. In comparison to this high-level political position, women feel most prepared for becoming Municipal councilor, 25% of which assets themselves with the highest mark – 5, and 36% with the lowest – 1 (Graph 22).

### Women in general lack confidence that with their skills and knowledge, they can hold high political offices.

**Graph 22:** Do you think that with your knowledge and capabilities you meet the requirements for becoming: (%) (do not fulfill the requirements - 1, while 5 fully meet the requirements)



These general findings still differ among the communities. In regards to the Municipal councilor as a political position, the women from the Serb (45%), Bosniak (45%), Macedonian (41%) and Albanian (36%) communities showed highest readiness, ranking themselves with 4 or 5 on the scale. The women from the Turkish (28%) and Vlach (23%) community follow lower self-assessment. Nevertheless, the most significant deviation is observed in the ratings of Roma women, where only 6% believe that partially of fully meet the requirements for becoming Municipal councilor (marks 4 or 5 on the scale), and high 79% believe that they fully or partially do not fulfill the requirements (marks 1




or 2), out of which 67% marked themselves with the lowest score 1. Notably high is also the percentage of Vlach (69%) and Turkish (61%) women that do not believe have the essential skills and knowledge to run for Municipal councilor, i.e. marking themselves with 1 or 2 on the scale. These percentages for the women from other communities vary from 34% with Bosniak, to 42% with Macedonian women. In line with these findings, the mean score (scale 1-5) from the responses of Roma women is lowest – 1.5, while Serb and Bosniak mean is highest – 3.1 (Graph 23, Graph 23a).

The analysis shows that as the political position grows, the already fragile self-assessment of the women's readiness to manage that position further drops. Thus, none of Roma women believe that they partially or fully fulfill the requirements for becoming a mayor, and consequently high 90% of them assessed themselves with the lowest score – 1. Vlach women follow, 77% of whom stated that do not possess the skill set for becoming a mayor (mark 1) and only 9% believe they fully or partially do (mark 5). Negative self-evaluation (mark 1 or 2) is noted also with 73% of the Turkish, 69% of Serb and 67% of Macedonian women, contrary to their peers 18% of the Turkish, 9% of Serb and 16% of Macedonian women that marked their knowledge and capabilities for becoming a Mayor with 4 or 5. Albanian and Bosniak women are with the highest confidence in this regards, where 26% each noted that they fully or partially (mark 4 or 5) meet the requirements, and 48% i.e. 46% respectively, feel the opposite (mark 1 or 2). The mean score (scale 1-5) on this question is highest with the Bosniak and Albanian women – 2.5, and lowest with Roma – 1.1 (Graph 24, Graph 24a).

This perception is mirrored in the next proposed political positions as well. Asked if they believe that their knowledge and capabilities are sufficient to become Member of Parliament (MP), Roma women remain the least confident. Namely, 88% of them feel that do not meet the requirements to become an MP (mark 1), and only 4% believe that they fully meet, or to some extent meet the requirements (mark 4 or 5). Compared to the other communities, Bosniak women are the most confident that with their knowledge and capabilities, they fulfill the requirements to become MP, where one third of them (33%) marked this question with the highest score (mark 4 or 5). Albanian women follow, where 25% of them to some extent believe in their skills set (mark 4 or 5), followed by Macedonian (22%), Serb (18%), Turkish (18%) and Vlach women (18%). The mean score (scale 1-5) on this question is highest with the Bosniak women – 2.7, and lowest with Roma – 1.3 (Graph 25, Graph 25a).

The confidence of the respondents further plummets when talking about the top executive governmental positions. Only one quarter of Bosniak (29%) and Albanian (25%) women consider themselves to some extent ready to become members of the government, whereas this percentage for the rest of the communities is 15% for Macedonian and Turkish women, 8% for Vlach, 7% Serb and low 2% for Roma women. In line with this results, the highest mean score (scale 1-5) is noted among Albanian 2.4 and Bosniak – 2.3, and lowest among Roma women – 1.2 (Graph 26, Graph 26a).



Furthermore, none of Roma and Vlach women feel that their current knowledge and capabilities are sufficient to become Prime Minister. Within the rest of the communities, 19% of Albanian and Serb women are to some extent confident that they meet the requirements, as well as 16% of the Turkish, 15% of the Bosniak and 9% of Macedonian women. The mean score in general (scale 1-5), is highest among Albanian women – 2.1, and is lower than 2 within the rest of the communities, dropping to 1.1 within Roma and Vlach women (Graph 27, Graph 27a).

This situation is to some extent replicated with the position President of the country. Again, none of Roma and Vlach women perceives that their knowledge and skill set is enough for holding that political position. The largest percentage of respondents with confidence in this regard is noted among Serb women (21%), followed by Albanian (17%), Bosniak (15%) and Macedonian (9%). The mean score (scale 1-5), is highest among Albanian women – 2.1, and is again lower than 2 within the rest of the communities, dropping to 1.1 within Roma (Graph 28, Graph 28a).

The interviewed politicians are on the same line of thinking - that women are generally not confident in their abilities and knowledge, but also that the cultural environment in our country teaches them humility and does not encourage their ambition. An ethnic Albanian government representative testified that she encountered the same self-doubts on her career path: *“I have had many offers which I have not accepted, thinking that I am not competent. But the men lined after me haven’t had the skills and knowledge I have had for the position.”* An ethnic Albanian MP confirmed that she also had these insecurities in her knowledge and skills before entered the politics, and that now she regrets the low self-confidence she had in herself then: *“When I saw the electorate support, my biggest disappointment in myself was that prior to this I could not to see the potential I had in me, and other saw the potential l... I want to leave my trace in the party, but as an MP too. I am not as scared as I was in the beginning, I am much more confident now.”*

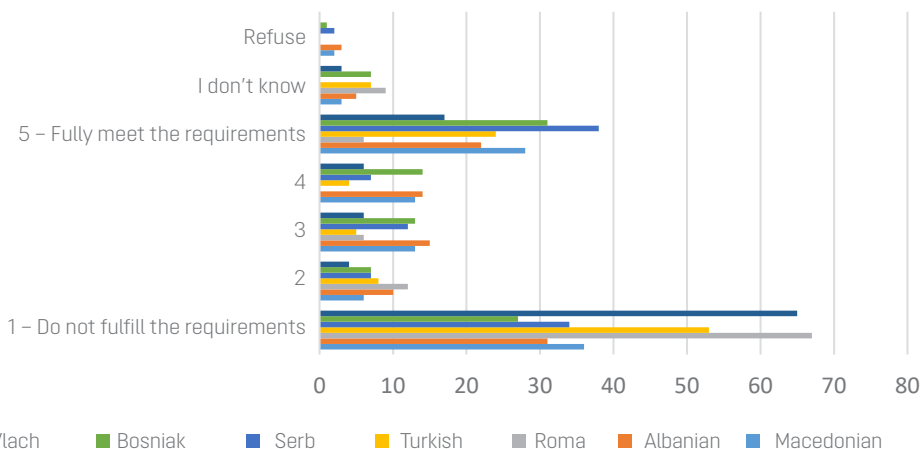
An MP offered an example depicting a situation in which many women generally find themselves in their professional development: *“We have this problem in all fields, not only in politics, but for instance, if I am your perfect female secretary, you are the male boss, I will remain a perfect secretary until my retirement. Now, if the secretary was male, after few hang-outs and beers, he will become a candidate for councilor or deputy in about 6 months or so... Hence the foreseen position for a quality woman is the secretary, not higher than that.”*

Notwithstanding the above, another MP emphasized the importance of role models on the political stage, where women can see themselves reflected and demystify politics as a possible path for their professional development: *“I think, we, the women who are in politics, will serve as examples for other women, especially Roma women and other women from non-majority communities, and we can help break down those barrier. Many of*

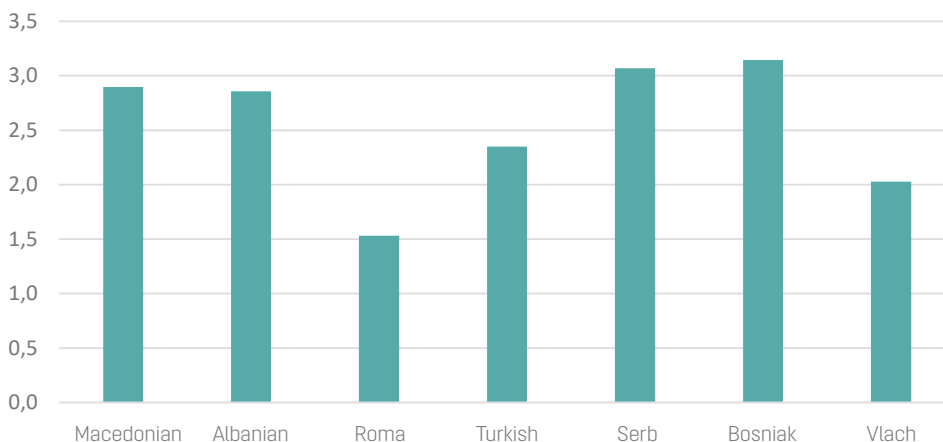
*these women are educated, they have potential, and, are already accomplished within their community, and by following our example, they will be encouraged to enter politics."*

**Regardless of the ethnic background, women are generally divided as to whether they possess the necessary knowledge and skills to become a Municipal councillor, with the exception of Roma women, as only 6% believe that meet the requirements for this political position.**

**Graph 23:** Do you think that with your knowledge and capabilities you meet the requirements for becoming Municipal councillor (%)

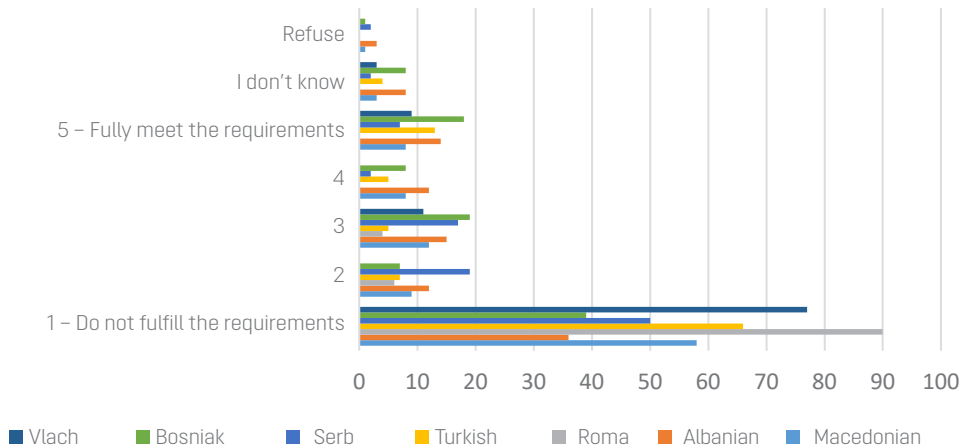


**Graph 23.a.:** Do you think that with your knowledge and capabilities you meet the requirements for becoming Municipal councillor (do not fulfill the requirements - 1, while 5 fully meet the requirements) – mean score

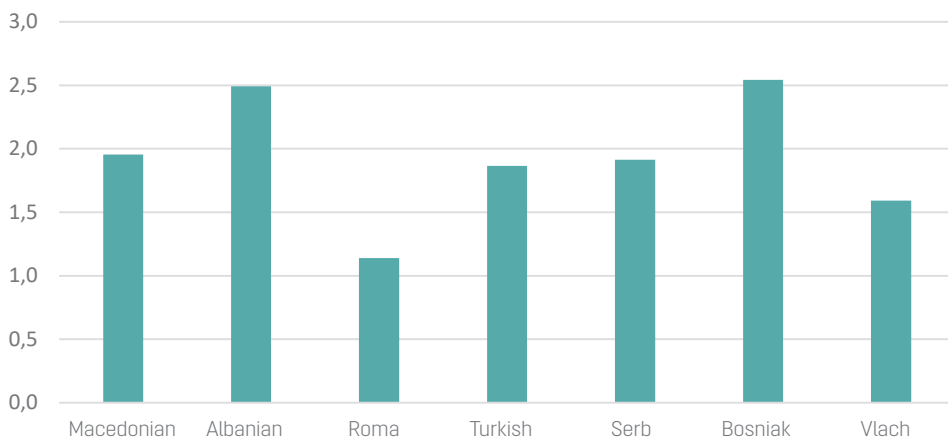


None of Roma women believes that they partially or fully fulfill the requirements to become a mayor. This percentage of women within the other communities does not exceed 26.

**Graph 24:** Do you think that with your knowledge and capabilities you meet the requirements for becoming Mayor (%)

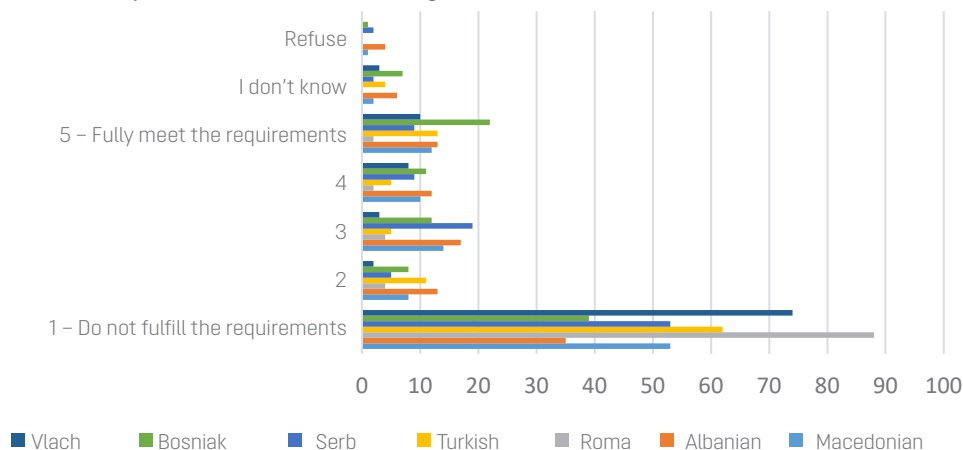


**Graph 24a:** Do you think that with your knowledge and capabilities you meet the requirements for becoming mayor (do not fulfill the requirements - 1, while 5 fully meet the requirements) – mean score

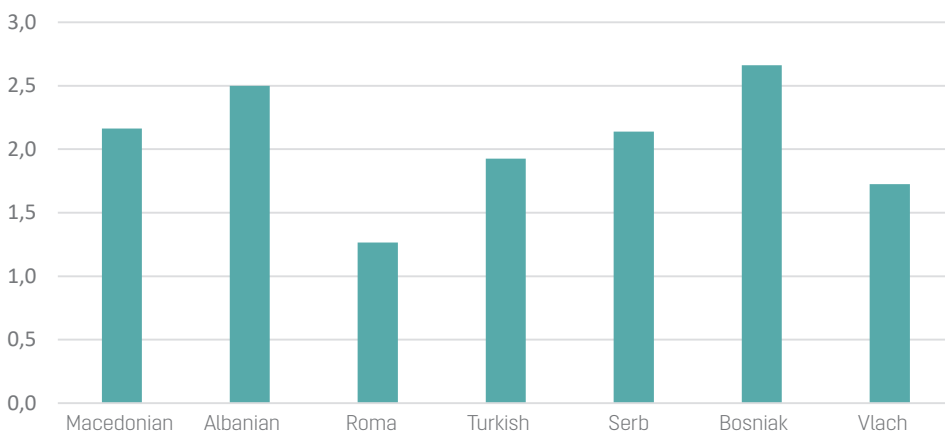


With one third answering positively, the Bosniak women are most confident that their skills and knowledge set meets the criteria for becoming MPs. On the other hand, only 4% of Roma women share the same confidence regarding their own knowledge and capabilities.

**Graph 25.** Do you think that with your knowledge and capabilities you meet the requirements for becoming Member of Parliament (%)

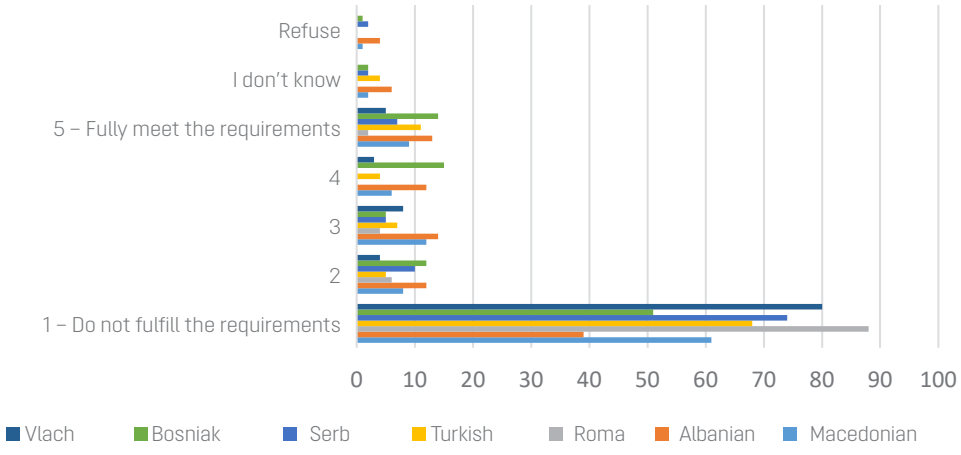


**Graph 25.a.:** Do you think that with your knowledge and capabilities you meet the requirements to become a Member of Parliament (do not fulfill the requirements - 1, while 5 fully meet the requirements) – mean score

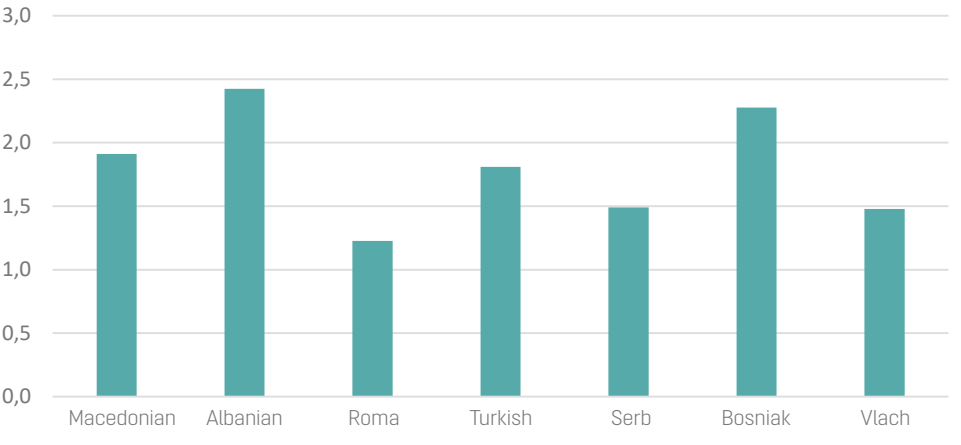


One quarter of the Bosniak and Albanian women consider themselves to some extent ready to become members of the government, whereas this percentage for the rest of the communities is below 15%, dropping to low 2% within Roma women.

**Graph 26.** Do you think that with your knowledge and capabilities you meet the requirements for becoming Member of Government (%)



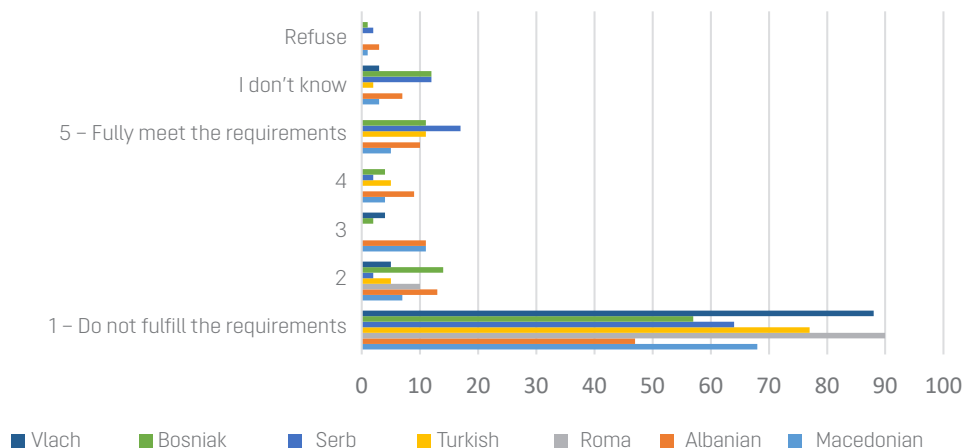
**Graph 26.a.:** Do you think that with your knowledge and capabilities you meet the requirements for becoming Member of Government (do not fulfill the requirements - 1, while 5 fully meet the requirements) – mean score





None of Roma and Vlach women feel that their current knowledge and capabilities are sufficient to become Prime Minister. Albanian and Serb women are most confident where 19% of both communities believe that they meet the requirements.

**Graph 27.** Do you think that with your knowledge and capabilities you meet the requirements for becoming Prime Minister (%)

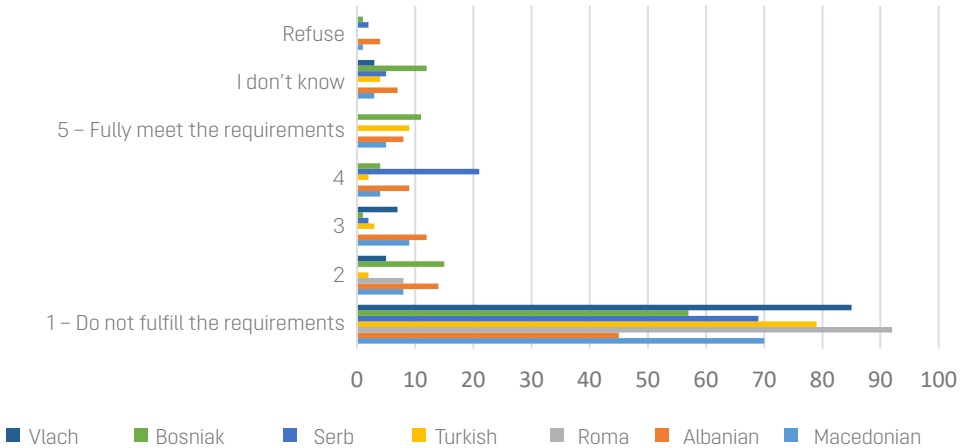


**Graph 27a:** Do you think that with your knowledge and capabilities you meet the requirements for becoming Prime Minister (do not fulfill the requirements - 1, while 5 fully meet the requirements) – mean score




None of Roma and Vlach women feels that they meet the requirements for becoming President of the country. Serb women with most positive responses for this political position – 21%.

**Graph 28.:** Do you think that with your knowledge and capabilities you meet the requirements for becoming President of the country (%)



**Graph 28a.:** Do you think that with your knowledge and capabilities you meet the requirements for becoming President of the country (do not fulfill the requirements - 1, while 5 fully meet the requirements) – mean score





## 2. Perception on the community women in politics – ethnic and cultural perceptions, perspectives and challenges

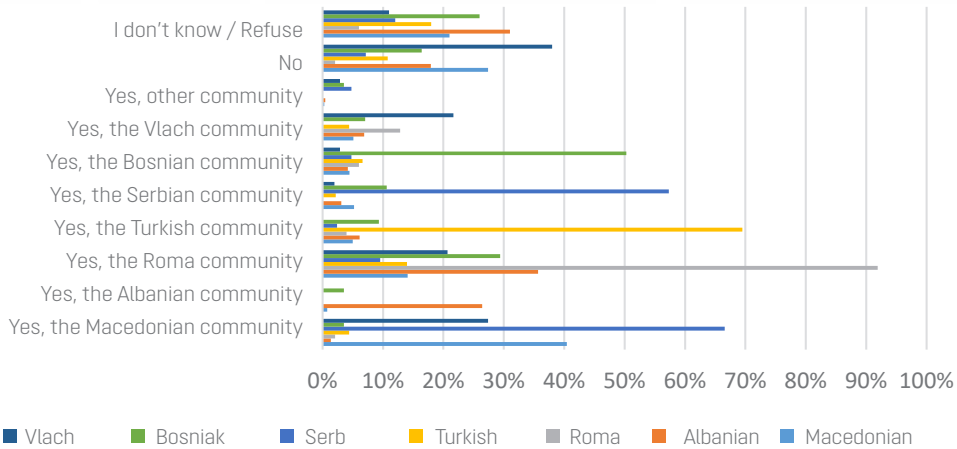
Women were asked to highlight the communities they consider to be more discriminating than others. In this regard, the majority of them, from almost every community, pointed the community they identify with. Exceptions are Serb (67%) and Vlach (27%) women, where most perceive that Macedonians are more discriminated. However, a significant percentage of all communities indicated that the Roma are more discriminated in this respect, i.e. 36% of Albanian women agree with this statement, as well as 29% Bosniak, 21% Vlach, 14% of Macedonian and Turkish women, and 10% of Serb women. A high 92% of Roma women also see their community as the most discriminated against in the country (Graph 29).

All of the interviewed politicians claimed that they faced, or are still facing some form of discrimination, both in their professional engagement in politics and in society in general. They further agree to a certain extent, that this is more related to their gender, but still in some cases combination of both their gender and ethnic background as well. In this regard, an ethnic Albanian politician said: *“When I started my medical education in Skopje, which was always my passion, after one year I had to leave because I faced ethnic discrimination, which I couldn’t stand anymore, so I decided to leave without informing my parents and became a journalist.”*

Regarding the discrimination against Roma community, a Roma MP stated that the stereotypical views towards this community are still present, but she further added that it is the duty of the politicians to take an active part in breaking down those barriers: *“I honestly did not feel any pressure or challenge, on the contrary, it was a motivation for me. Here I saw a positive challenge to highlight problems affecting Roma community from a wider perspective, and crucially, it was a motive for me to break down those stereotypes and prejudices and barriers that those who are not Roma have towards Roma.”*

**A significant percentage from all communities perceive the Roma community to be more discriminated against, compared to the other.**

**Graph 29.:** Do you think that some communities are more discriminated than others? (%)



Macedonian women are almost divided in terms of whether they are familiar with a woman from their community who holds a high political function (47% answered positively and 46% negatively). However, this ratio is significantly unbalanced among the other communities. A high 86% from Serb and 80% of Roma women stated that they are not familiar with any women from their community holding a high political position, as well as 75% of Bosniak, 70% of Turkish, 55% of Albanian and 52% of Vlach women (Graph 30).

The women who are familiar with a high-level women politician from their community, are further asked if they believe that she uses her influence to improve the lives of the people from her community. The answers vary among different communities, with 77% of Bosniak and 57% of Albanian women answering positively, followed by one third of Roma (33%) and Bosniak (32%) women, and a quarter of Macedonian (27%) and Serb (25%) women. Along these lines, half of Macedonian (50%) and Serb (49%) respondents answered negatively, while among other communities, the percentage of negative responses varies between 20% of Turkish and 33% of Roma women. A high 80% of the Turkish women were not certain how to answer this question (Graph 31).

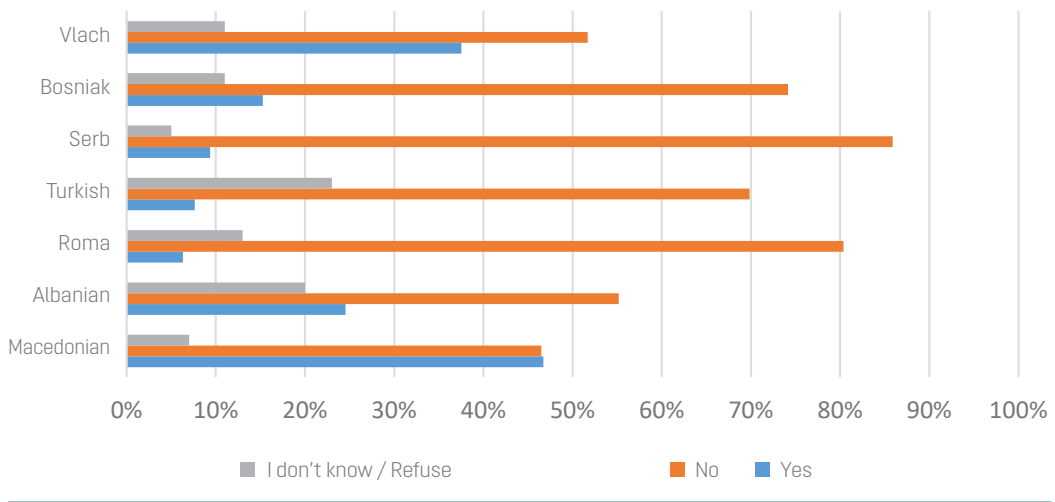
When asked about the level of engagement and influence our interlocutors invest in addressing issues specific for their community, some level of engagement is present in all cases, but it differs among different communities. However, the commitment of Roma politicians to the problems faced by their community is noticeably higher. Referring to this question, a Roma MP stated: *"I accepted this position, believing that, after working for so many years in the civil sector and knowing all the challenges faced by the*

community to which I belong, I said to myself - let's try this, I have been given this different chance to make collective solutions for Roma community as part of the parliamentary composition... You know, the non-majority communities do not have political power and that is our weakest point."

On the other hand, an MP member of another community, argued against political engagement on ethnic basis, pointing out that the differences in terms of the rights and position in society of women is much more pronounced at the level of urban-rural place of residence: "My community expects me to talk primarily about the problems they face, but I do not agree with such a way of acting. In my opinion, the biggest gap is between urban and rural women, regardless of their ethnic background. I do not believe that a Turkish woman, or a Bosniak woman living in a city, has a different status than a Macedonian woman living in a city." However, on ethnic basis, she also emphasized the level of commitment by Roma politicians and the pressure that they have from Roma community in this regard: In terms of ethnic background, a difference is visible between Roma women and the women from other communities. My colleague from Roma community significantly feels that pressure and constantly worries if she speaks enough and supports enough the TRoma community in her work.."

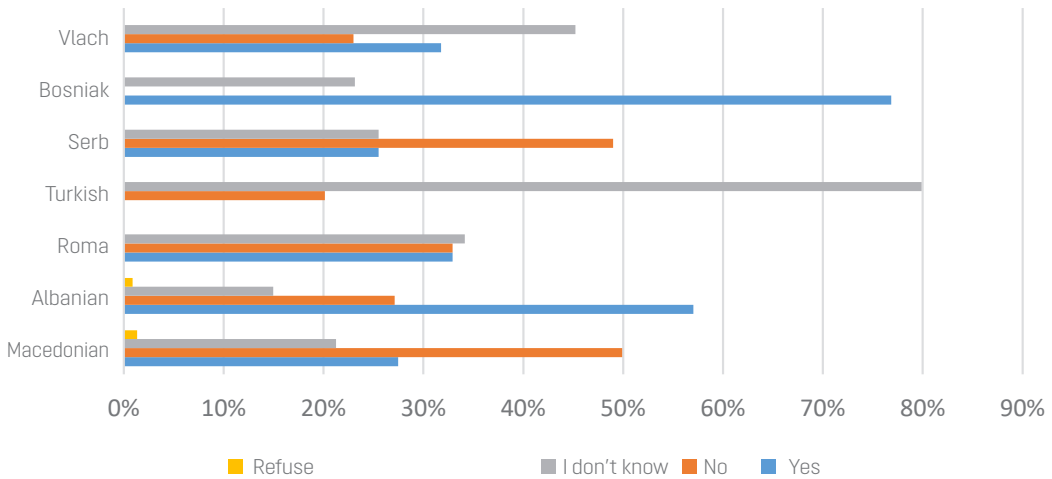
**More than half of the women from non-majority communities, are not familiar with any women from their community that hold a high political function in the country.**

**Graph 30.:** Are you familiar with any women from your community group that hold high political function in the country?(%)



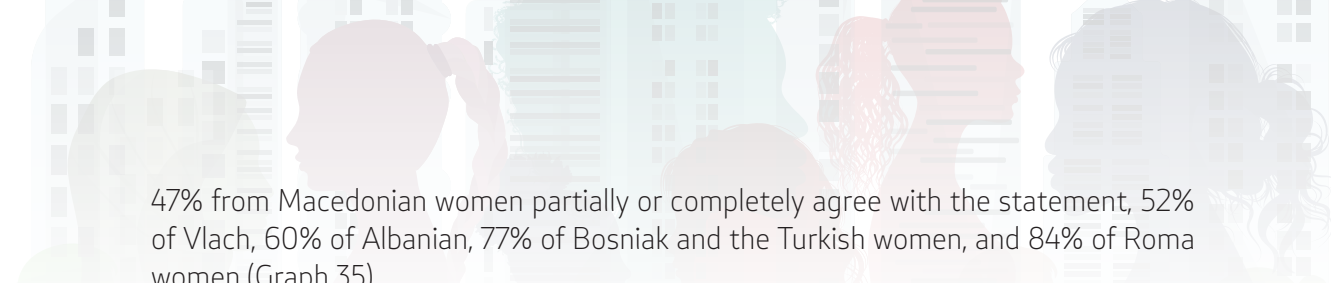
**Albanian and Bosniak women are most satisfied with what women politicians from their community have done for their community.**

**Graph 31:** Do you think she (women from your community group that hold high political function) uses her influence to improve the life of the people from your community? (%)



The respondents were presented a series of statements, and based on their perception and values, they were asked to evaluate each statement on a scale of 1 – *I don't agree* to 5 – *completely agree*. With the first three statements, the respondents evaluated the level and the need of women involvement in politics, where a pattern of general agreement is noted across all communities. Namely, the majority of the women, ranging from 49% of Vlach to 79% of Serb women, partially or completely agree that women are under-represented in political and public life in North Macedonia (Graph 32). The perception is also similar with the second statement “*The representation of women from non-majority communities in political and public life in North Macedonia is practically non-visible*” where the percentage of affirmative answers (partially or completely agree) among different communities varies between 46% (Macedonian respondents) and the 78% (Serb respondents, Graph 33). Women across communities almost unanimously agree with the statement that *it would be better for the country if there were more women involved in the political life of the country*. More than two thirds of the women from all communities partially or completely agree with this statement, with the percentages varying from 69% (Albanian women) to 84% (Vlach women, Graph 34).

A high level of agreement between communities is also noted regarding the statement “*Women should, above anything else, be good wives, mothers and take care of the home*”. However, compared to the agreement on the other statements, the range of difference in percentages among communities is the widest, i.e. starting with 41% from Serb and



47% from Macedonian women partially or completely agree with the statement, 52% of Vlach, 60% of Albanian, 77% of Bosniak and the Turkish women, and 84% of Roma women (Graph 35).

The interviewed politicians agree that women are underrepresented in politics, and they identified different causes behind that state. One of the MPs pointed out that one of the reasons is the lack of ambition and persistence of women for inclusion in this sphere in general: *“Men will never give away place to women in politics willingly, no matter how prevalent and popular that rhetoric is. It is up to us, we should be louder, more aggressive”*. She also emphasized the scarce access to resources that women in politics have: *“Women have less access to resources that can support their entry into politics. To run a successful political campaign, you need resources, and in the end it all comes down to how much the party will invest in your campaign.”*

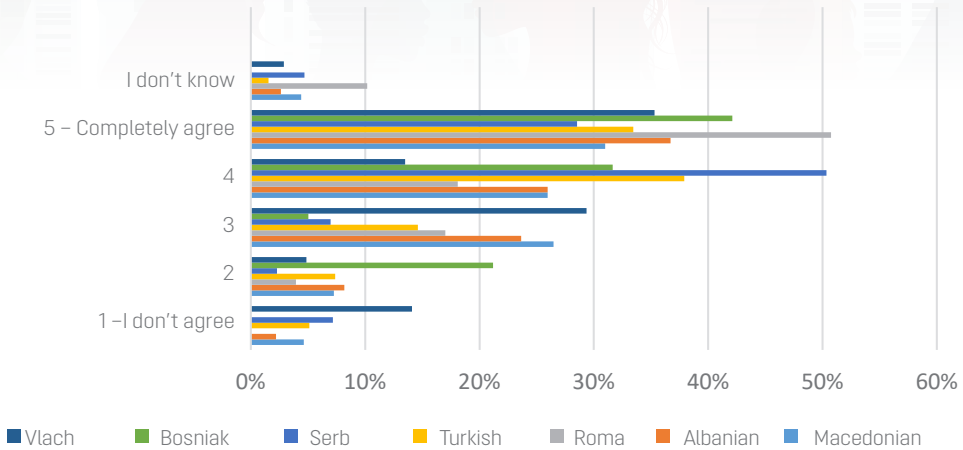
When referring to the political representation of women from smaller communities, an MP, a member of a smaller community, concluded that our politics and our society in general equate ethnic diversity with the representation of Macedonian and Albanian communities, hence excluding the other communities: *“Unfortunately, when talking about ethnic diversity, the focus is generally on the two most numerous communities. This is also visible in the work of the Club of women MPs. Diversity and ethnic representation are still very narrowly viewed, and that is actually a mirror of the society.”*

The perception of the society regarding the role and the expectation of women was also discussed with the politicians. All of them note that society expects women to carry the whole weight of caretaking for the home and family, and women traditionally conform to these expectations, thus discouraging them from active professional engagement and especially political engagement. Some of the interviewees testified that they experienced this expectation personally. In this regard, an ethnic Albanian MP stated: *“My biggest pain was that I will leave my kids behind with this new career path, which is something we talk about a lot with my other women colleagues. The men do not have the same considerations when embarking on this job... We as women restrict ourselves. However, I have a colleague that gave birth on the third of her mandate. I told her I think she is a heroine of this mandate, as she was running a whole campaign by being so pregnant. This goes to show that we can do everything we put our mind into.”*

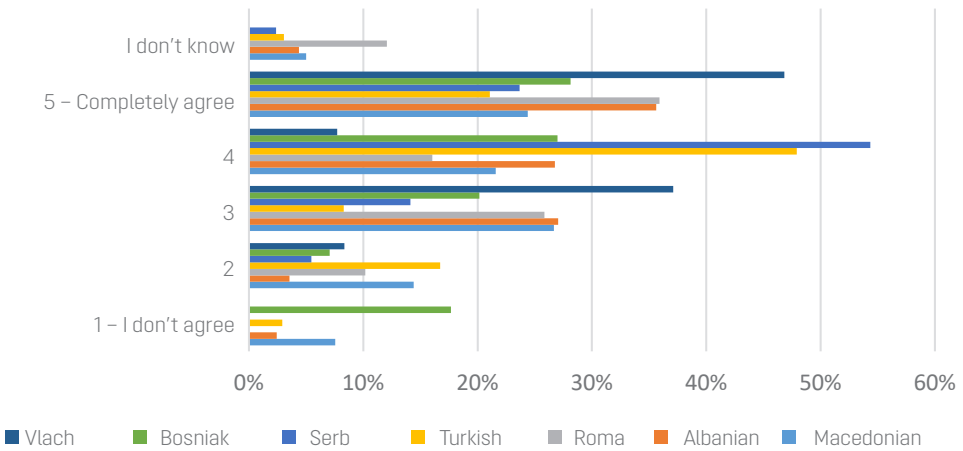
**Majority of women across communities believe that women, and especially those from non-majority communities, are under-represented in the political and public life in North Macedonia, and that it would be better if more women were involved in politics. On the other hand, they also expect the primary role in a woman's life to be the role of a mother and a wife.**

*On a scale of 1 - I don't agree at all to 5 - completely agree, to what extent do you agree with the following statements:*

**Graph 32.** Women are under-represented in political and public life in North Macedonia (%)

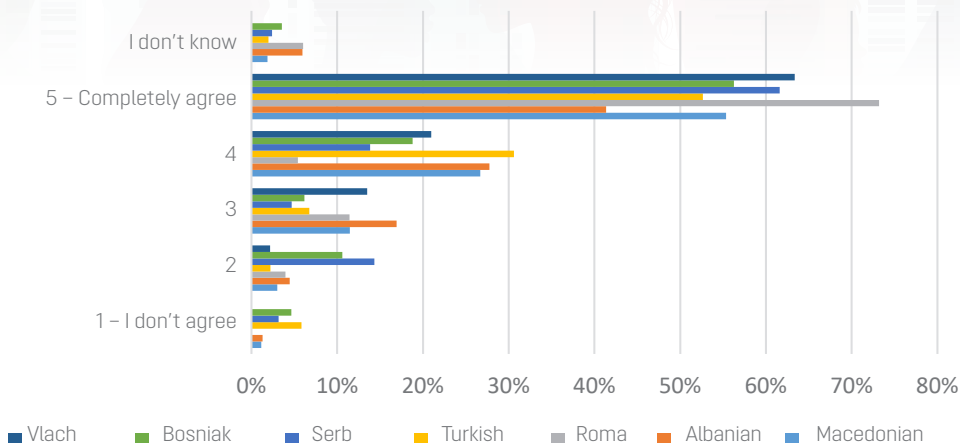


**Graph 33:** The representation of women from non-majority communities in political and public life in North Macedonia is practically non-visible (%)

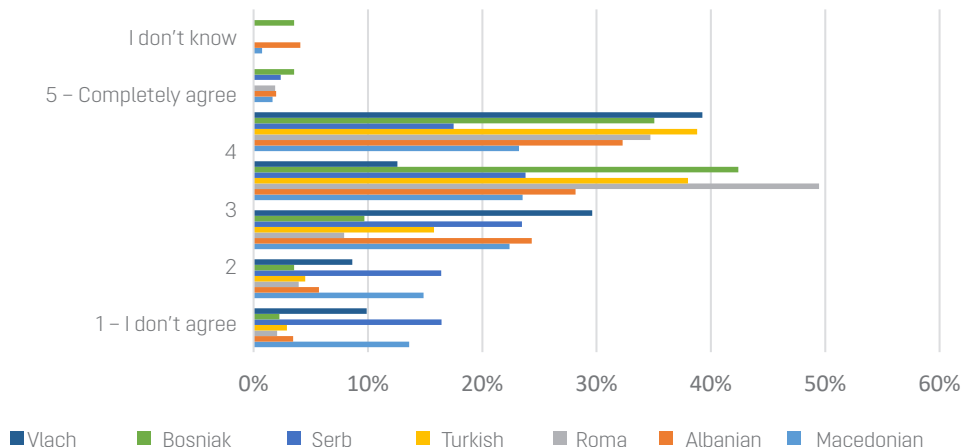




**Graph 34.:** It would be better for the country if there were more women involved in the political life of the country (%)



**Graph 35.:** Women should, first of all, be a good wife, mother and take care of the home (%)



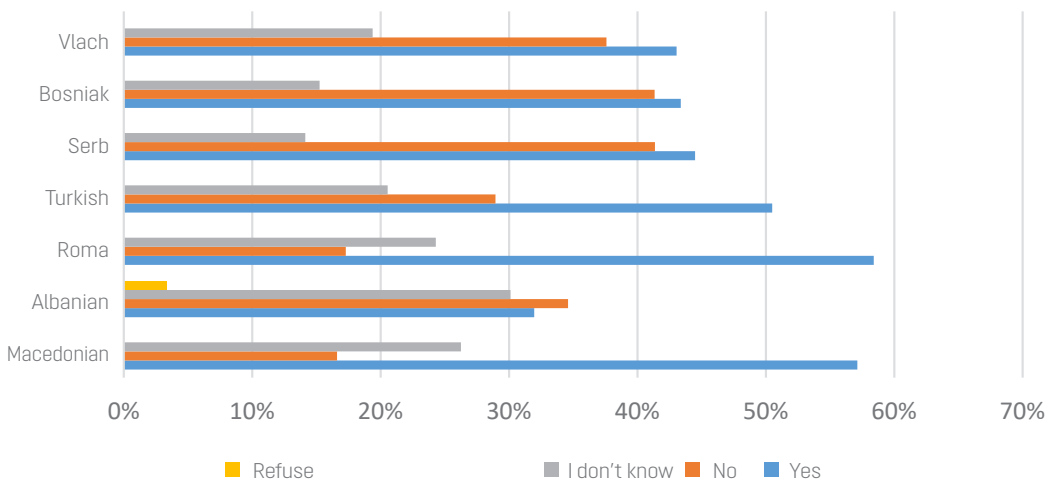
The possible language barriers to receiving relevant information on political issues was also examined in the survey. Significant percentage of women from the non-majority communities, stated their perception that different language groups are not getting sufficient information about public affairs, politics and elections. Namely, 41% of Serb and Bosniak women, and 38% of Vlach women feel that in this regard, followed by 35% of Albanian, 29% of the Turkish and 17% of Roma women (Graph 36).

When asked what they believe the source of this gap is, 28% of the respondents that recognized this problem pointed that *“the political actors are not interested enough to*

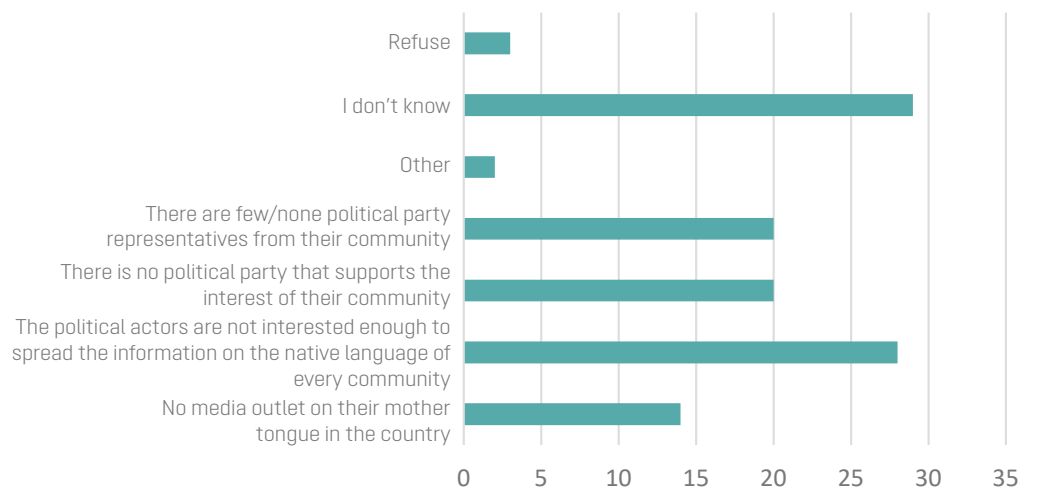
spread the information in the native language of every community”, and 20% each stated that the problem is that “there is no political party that supports the interest of their community” or that “there are few/none political party representatives from their community”. The lack of media outlets on their mother tongue in the country as a reason is noted by 14% of the respondents (Graph 37).

**Around one third or more of the women from the almost all non-majority communities, believe that different language groups are not getting sufficient information about political issues.**

**Graph 36:** Are different (language) groups getting sufficient information about public affairs, politics and elections? (%)



**Graph 37:** What are the gaps? (%)



A decorative header image featuring silhouettes of several people of different ethnicities and ages, set against a background of a city skyline with buildings. The silhouettes are in various colors, including shades of green, purple, red, and blue.

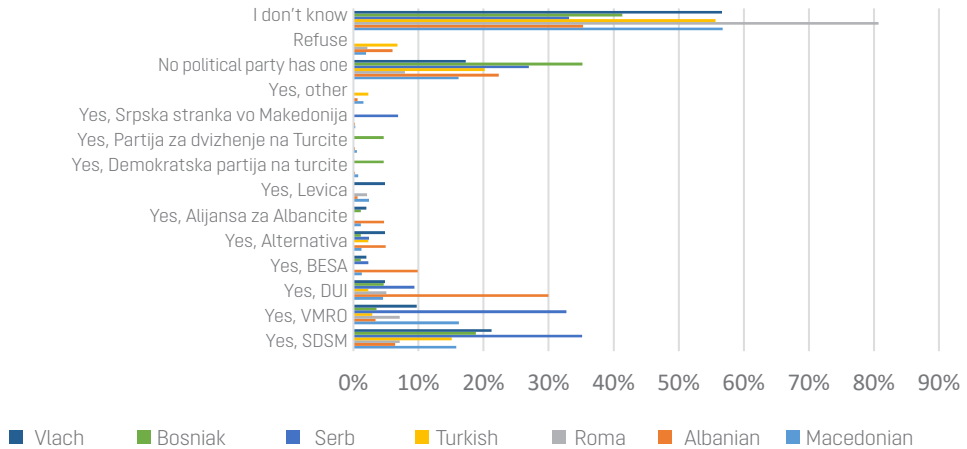
A great portion of women across communities are not familiar with whether there are political parties that practice policies to increase the political presence of women from non-majority communities. This percentage is highest among Roma women (81%), trailed by 57% of Macedonian and Vlach women, 56% of Turkish, 41% of Bosniak and 35% and 33% from Albanian and Serb women respectively. Notable percentage of women from all communities also believe that there is no political party that nurtures the idea of increasing the number of women from non-majority communities in politics, with the percentage varying from 8% of Roma women, 16% and 17% of Macedonian i.e. Vlach women, 22% of Albanian, 27% of Serb and 35% of the Bosniak women. Most of the respondents who indicated political parties from nearly all communities, pointed SDSM i.e. 35% of Serb, 21% of Vlach, 19% of the Bosniak, 16% of Macedonian and 7% i.e. 6% from Roma and Albanian women respectively (Graph 38).

The interviewed female politicians agree that political parties play essential role in increasing the number of women in politics. An MP highlighted this conclusion: *“Political parties play the key role in this regard. The party from whose ranks I am an MP, had the sense to recognize the quality in women from different branches, different professions and to rank man- women, man – women in the candidate list on the last parliamentary elections... This practice broke the gap between men and women and showed an example that other political parties should give opportunities and chances to women as well. In the area of local government, we still do not have enough representation of women.”* The MP further states that the issue of enhancing women from non-majority communities in politics can be more successfully addressed through civil democratic parties, rather than through political parties representing a specific community.

However, an ethnic Albanian government representative also stressed that the women in political parties should be more active, sharper and more agile in creating space for themselves and for other women within their political parties, to act and progress: *“Personally, if I had had more support in the past, I would have tried to influence party structures more, especially the women’s forums, to make them strong enough that the party men would think twice before dismissing the opinions of women.”*


The majority of women from all communities do not recognize a political party that invests in increasing the representation of women from non-majority communities in politics.

**Graph 38.** Do you know of political parties that have policies or quotas in place to increase membership/representation of women from non-majority communities? (%)



Women from all communities are generally divided on whether the women from non-majority communities who are involved in national politics have the power to influence. Thus, the highest percentage of positive responses is noted among Serb (40%) and Bosniak (38%) women, shadowed by Albanian (34%), Macedonian (33%), Roma (31%), Turkish (28%) and Vlach (26%) women. conversely, half of Vlach women (53%) are most skeptical when it comes to the power of women from non-majority communities to influence politics. Next are Macedonian and Serb women, where 42% do not believe that women politicians from non-majority communities are influential in their public roles, so are 38% and 37% of Turkish and the Bosniak women respectively, 33% Roma and 30% of Albanian women (Graph 39).

Women are also divided in their responses when asked if the women from the non-majority communities that are in public roles are working on topics that are important for the status of the women. Hence, half of the Bosniak women (54%), believe that women politicians who are members of a non-majority community support women's issues in their work, while as this percentage with the rest of the communities is lower - 41% of Albanian women, 36% Macedonian, 31% with Roma and Serb women, 26% of Vlach women and 23% of the Turkish. Consequently, 45% of Serb, and 42% of Roma and Vlach women (Graph 40)do not believe that women from non-majority communities are addressing women's issues in their political roles.

The background of the page features a series of overlapping, semi-transparent silhouettes of people's heads and shoulders, representing a diverse group of individuals. The silhouettes are in various shades of light blue, green, and purple, set against a background of faint, light-colored grid lines.

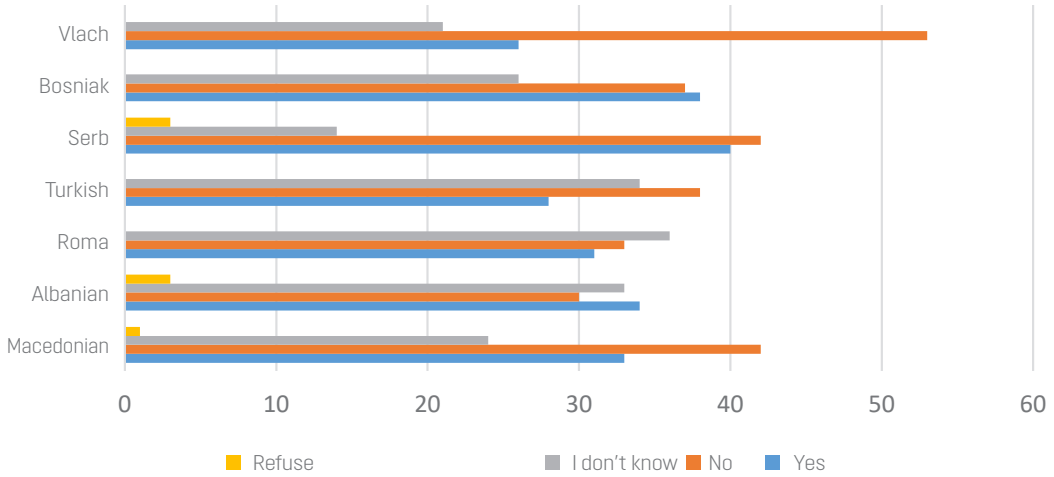
The interviewed politicians agreed that the power to influence politics, not just for women from non-majority communities but women in general, is lower compared to men. Furthermore, all of them argued that this is significantly conditioned by different lifestyle and traditional gender roles practiced by men and women in our society, that are in direct relation to the decision-making practices. In this context, an MP, a member of a smaller community, stated: *"Politics is decided over lunch and dinner in the after working hours at the restaurants. It is a fact that in this space, women are considerably less present. There are numerous examples where, after the meeting continues in the after working hour, but the women politicians cannot join since they have obligations at home around family."*

An ethnic Albanian politician further states that not only the social environment, but the male colleagues are often found to be obstacles to women when executing their political power: *"Maybe I would want to be more politically active in my party, but when male colleagues see that you have any ambitions to advance, they will put challenges in your way, because they have a big aversion to competent women."* In this regard, an ethnic Albanian MP added: *"There are women in institutions, but not in decision making positions. Where there is work to be done, women are there, where there is commodity and power, there are men."* However, some interlocutors emphasized that women from the non-majority communities are in a more disadvantaged position when it comes to political influence, and they attribute it to several factors. An ethnic Albanian MP stated: *"Women themselves, especially in smaller communities, do not have sufficient interest or support from their environment, insufficient education, etc."*

However, when it comes to the need to focus the political power on the specific issues women from their community face, there are certain discrepancies in the perception of the interviewees. An MP stated that she primarily sees difference between urban and rural women, and when referring to the ethnic background, Roma women are more discriminated against compared to the women from other communities: *"When I talk about women, I talk about all women. I rarely speak specifically about the women representatives of my community, and I often get negative remark from my community because of this... In terms of ethnicity, a difference is visible between Roma woman and the women from other communities."*

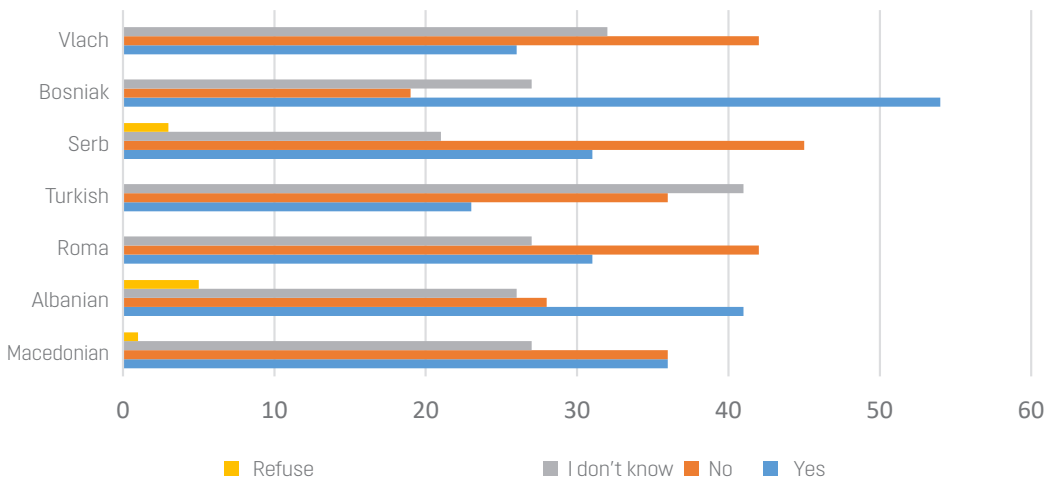
**Women across communities are divided in the opinion whether the women from non-majority communities in politics have power to influence.**

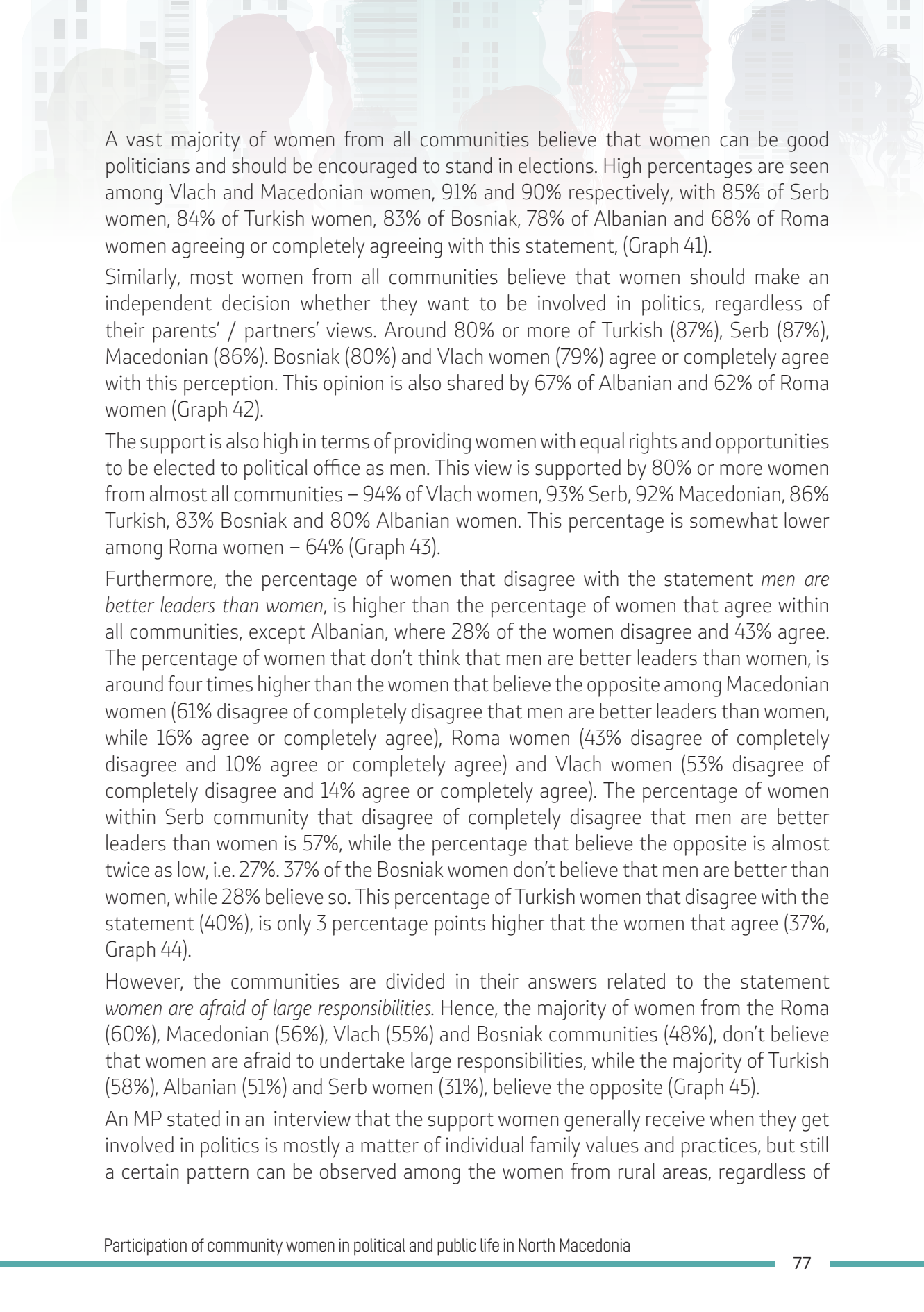
**Graph 39.** Do you feel that those women, members of a non-majority communities, who are in public roles (in national politics) have power to influence?(%)



**Women across communities are generally divided in their believe whether women politicians for the non-majority communities, support women’s issue with their work.**

**Graph 40.:** Do you think that those women, members of a non-majority communities, that are in public roles (in national politics) are working on issues that are important for women? (%)





A vast majority of women from all communities believe that women can be good politicians and should be encouraged to stand in elections. High percentages are seen among Vlach and Macedonian women, 91% and 90% respectively, with 85% of Serb women, 84% of Turkish women, 83% of Bosniak, 78% of Albanian and 68% of Roma women agreeing or completely agreeing with this statement, (Graph 41).

Similarly, most women from all communities believe that women should make an independent decision whether they want to be involved in politics, regardless of their parents' / partners' views. Around 80% or more of Turkish (87%), Serb (87%), Macedonian (86%), Bosniak (80%) and Vlach women (79%) agree or completely agree with this perception. This opinion is also shared by 67% of Albanian and 62% of Roma women (Graph 42).

The support is also high in terms of providing women with equal rights and opportunities to be elected to political office as men. This view is supported by 80% or more women from almost all communities – 94% of Vlach women, 93% Serb, 92% Macedonian, 86% Turkish, 83% Bosniak and 80% Albanian women. This percentage is somewhat lower among Roma women – 64% (Graph 43).

Furthermore, the percentage of women that disagree with the statement *men are better leaders than women*, is higher than the percentage of women that agree within all communities, except Albanian, where 28% of the women disagree and 43% agree. The percentage of women that don't think that men are better leaders than women, is around four times higher than the women that believe the opposite among Macedonian women (61% disagree of completely disagree that men are better leaders than women, while 16% agree or completely agree), Roma women (43% disagree of completely disagree and 10% agree or completely agree) and Vlach women (53% disagree of completely disagree and 14% agree or completely agree). The percentage of women within Serb community that disagree of completely disagree that men are better leaders than women is 57%, while the percentage that believe the opposite is almost twice as low, i.e. 27%. 37% of the Bosniak women don't believe that men are better than women, while 28% believe so. This percentage of Turkish women that disagree with the statement (40%), is only 3 percentage points higher than the women that agree (37%, Graph 44).

However, the communities are divided in their answers related to the statement *women are afraid of large responsibilities*. Hence, the majority of women from the Roma (60%), Macedonian (56%), Vlach (55%) and Bosniak communities (48%), don't believe that women are afraid to undertake large responsibilities, while the majority of Turkish (58%), Albanian (51%) and Serb women (31%), believe the opposite (Graph 45).

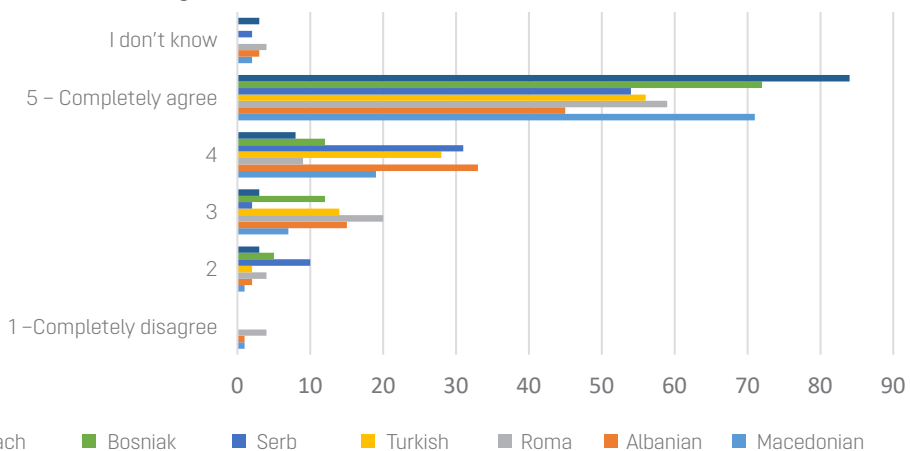
An MP stated in an interview that the support women generally receive when they get involved in politics is mostly a matter of individual family values and practices, but still a certain pattern can be observed among the women from rural areas, regardless of

the ethnic background: *"I think it is very individual, but there is a certain stereotype that non-majority communities are thought to be less supportive in this regard. In my experience they [the women from non-majority communities] are always supported, they are respected because they step forward, so I don't agree with the stereotype.... Now we see that stereotypes of a rural environment versus an urban environment can have differences here, because the smaller the environment is a more closed one, because the traditional roots are preserved. However, there can be a difference in the support between the rural and urban environment, having in mind that the rural environment is more closed, the traditional roots are kept. We have rural areas with a dominant Macedonian population, but no drinking water, water for washing, for the newborn. Women living in those conditions are not thinking about how to get to Skopje and get involved in politics... let's talk about how much these women will be supported by the family to enter the politics, will not be supported at all."*

In line with these considerations, an ethnic Albanian government representative, emphasized that despite the support that women can receive in their career path by their family, society can be a serious obstacle: *"I was lucky to have the support of my family and was never treated differently from my brother, but the moment I stepped out of the house I knew I had to fight for my place..."*

**Women from all ethnic backgrounds are confident that women can be good politicians and should be encouraged to stand in elections**

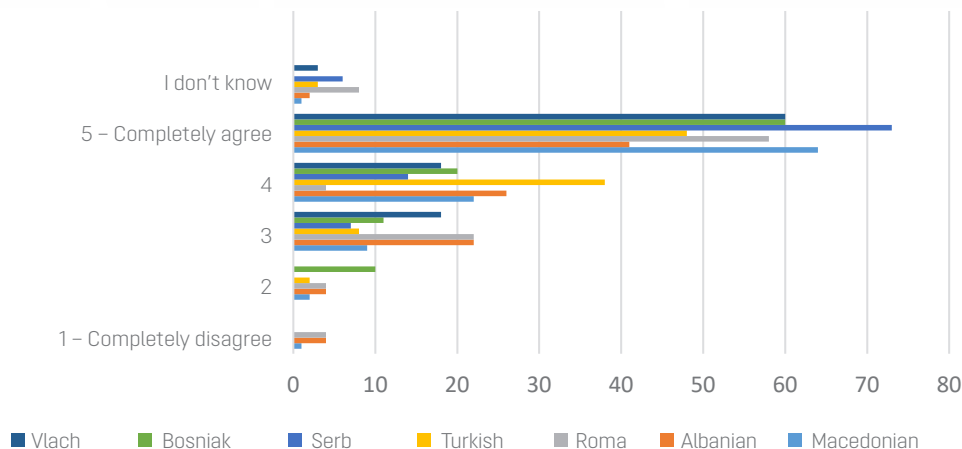
**Graph 41.:** On a scale of 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree, please rate the following sentence: Women can be good politicians and should be encouraged to stand in elections (%)





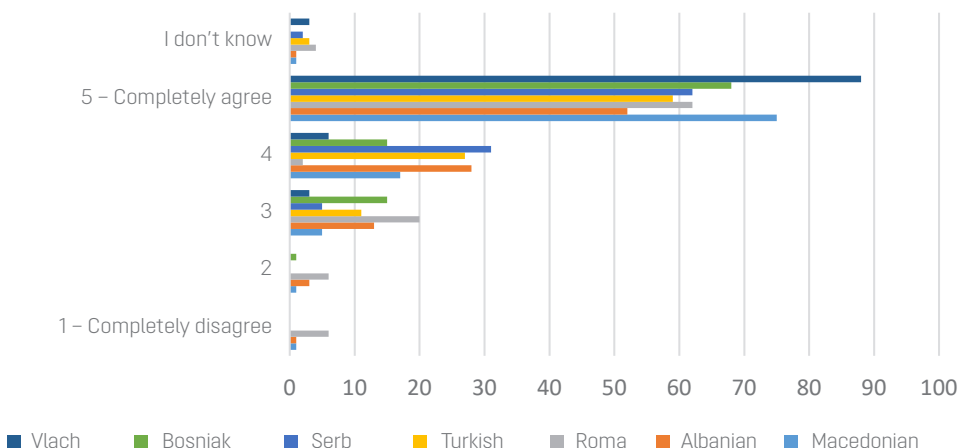
**The decision to get involved in politics should be the sole responsibility of women.**

**Graph 42:** On a scale of 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree, please rate the following sentence: Women should get involved in politics, regardless of their parents' / partners' views (%)



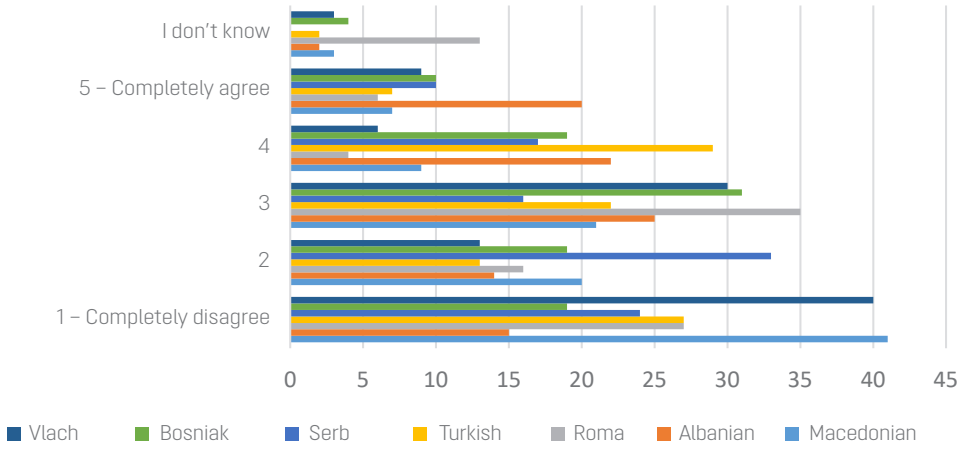
**Women should enjoy equal rights and opportunities of being elected to political office as men.**

**Graph 43:** On a scale of 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree, please rate the following sentence: Women should have the same chances of being elected to political office as men (%)



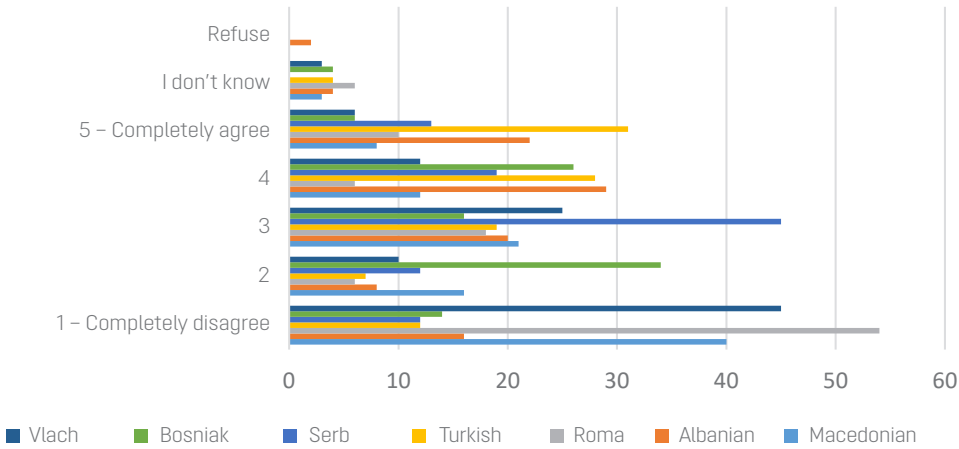
**Majority of the women from all communities, except Albanian, don't believe that men are better leaders than women.**

**Graph 44.:** On a scale of 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree, please rate the following sentence: Men are better leaders than women (%)




**The communities are divided in their perception whether or not women are afraid to undertake large responsibilities.**

**Graph 45.:** On a scale of 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree, please rate the following sentence: Women are afraid of large responsibilities (%)



The majority the women from all communities would vote for a candidate that supports the improvement of the position of women in the society. Turkish (81%), Serb (78%) and Vlach (78%) women are the biggest supporters of such candidates, followed by



Roma (74%), Bosniak (74%) and Macedonian (71%) women. As to the women from the Albanian community, although the majority of them would also vote for a candidate with a gender sensitive programme, this percentage is somewhat lower in comparison to the rest of the communities, 54% (Graph 46).

Furthermore, women unanimously stated that women will represent women's needs better. Above 70% of women from all communities agree or completely agree with this statement, i.e. 87% of Bosniak and Vlach women, 83% of Serb, 82% of Roma and Macedonian, 74% of Turkish and 72% of Albanian women (Graph 47).

The same level of positive response is received when asked more specifically, if they believe that women politician will represent better the needs of women from their community better. Namely, a high 88% of the women from the Turkish community agree or completely agree with this statement, shadowed by 84% of Vlach women, 83% of the Bosniak women, 81% of Macedonian, 80% of Roma, 77% of Albanian and 76% of Serb women (Graph 48).

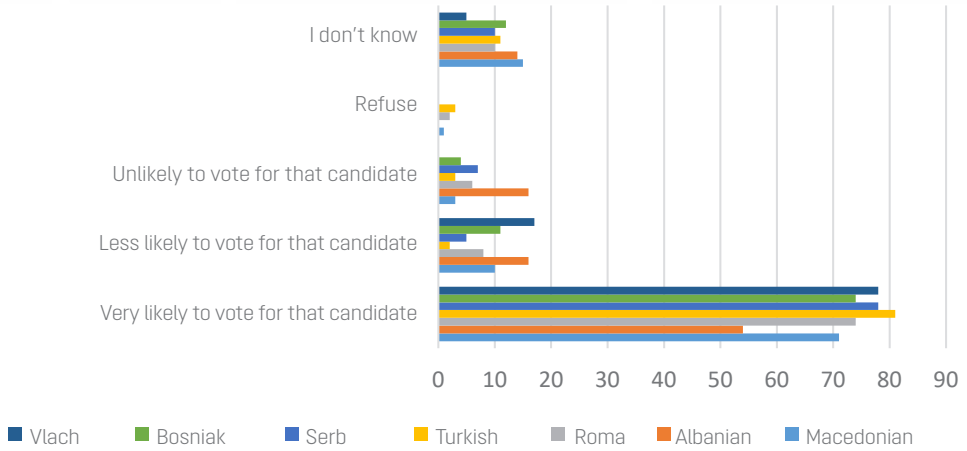
The majority of women also claim that political life in the country will be less corrupt and less violent if women are more involved in it. Namely, 70% of Albanian and Bosniak women agree or completely agree that women will make political life less corrupt, as do 61% of Macedonian, 57% of Turkish, 53% of Vlach, 52% of Serb and 37% of Roma women (Graph 49). A similar response was received when asked about the extent to which they agree with the statement that women will make political life less violent, with 77% of the Bosniak and 75% of Albanian women agreeing or completely agreeing, as well as 69% of Serb and Macedonian, 65 of Turkish, 55% of Vlach and 37% of Roma women (Graph 50).

Women also perceive women politicians as more dedicated to social welfare situation in the country. More than 60% of women from all communities believe that women politicians will strengthen social welfare policies. In line with this, a high 77% of Bosniak women agree or completely agree with this statement, followed by 73% of Albanian, 70% of Macedonian, 64% of Vlach, 63% of Roma and Turkish women and 61% of Serb women (Graph 51).

In line with this result, one of the interviewed MPs explained that the criteria for women's engagement in politics are different from the criteria for men, which is an additional obstacle in for women pursuing political careers. She stated: *"You will be evaluated, as a woman, for everything... You will be criticized for everything that a man would not be criticized for. Men are criticized only when in a case of financial misconduct, women on the other hand – for everything. We have a politician in the Balkans, Edi Rama, whose trademark is colorful socks and short pants and this is seen with sympathy, that he is unique, that he is different, that cannot be replicated and that it is his charisma. Imagine if I did that...want to count the minutes until my New Year's Christmas patterned socks start being talked about?"*

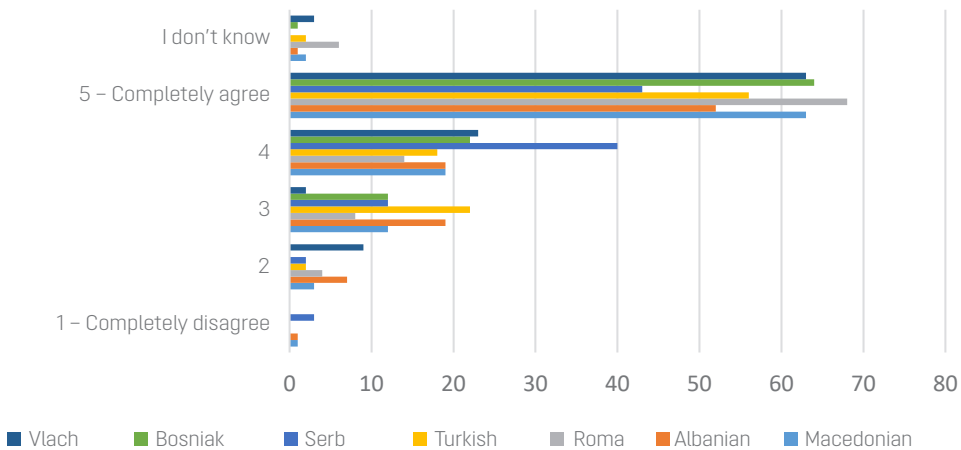
The majority of women across communities would vote for candidates who include support for improving the position of women in the society in their programmes.

**Graph 46.:** Would you vote for a candidate that in her/his programme includes activities for improvement of the position of women in the society? (%)



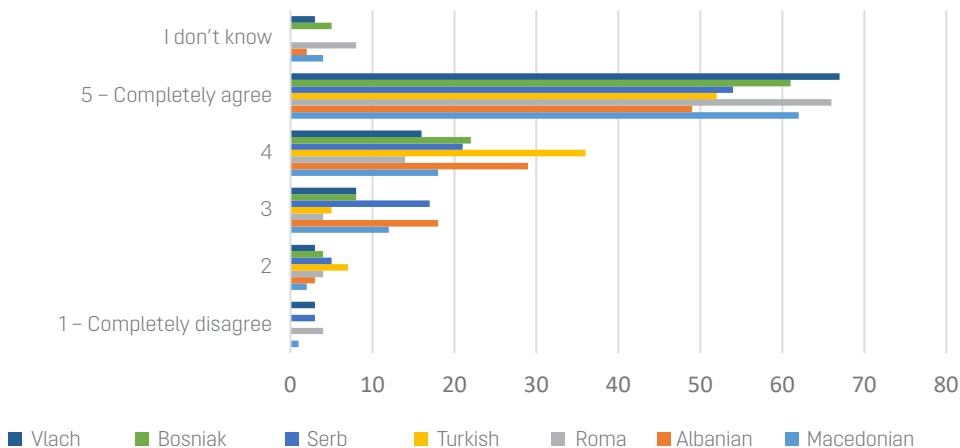
Women unanimously agree that their needs will be better represented by female politicians.

**Graph 47.:** On a scale of 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree, please rate the following sentence: Women will represent women’s needs better (%)



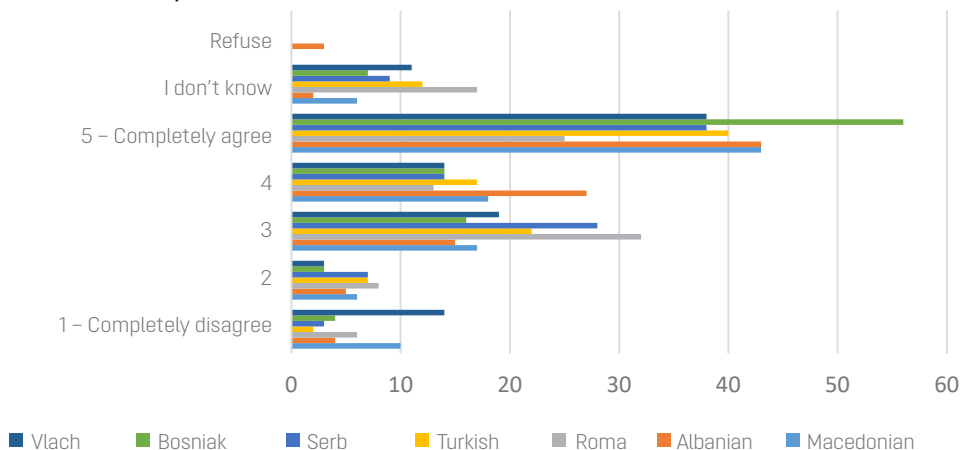
**Women believe that women politicians will better represent the needs of the women from their communities.**

**Graph 48.:** On a scale of 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree, please rate the following sentence: Women will better represent the needs of the women from their community better



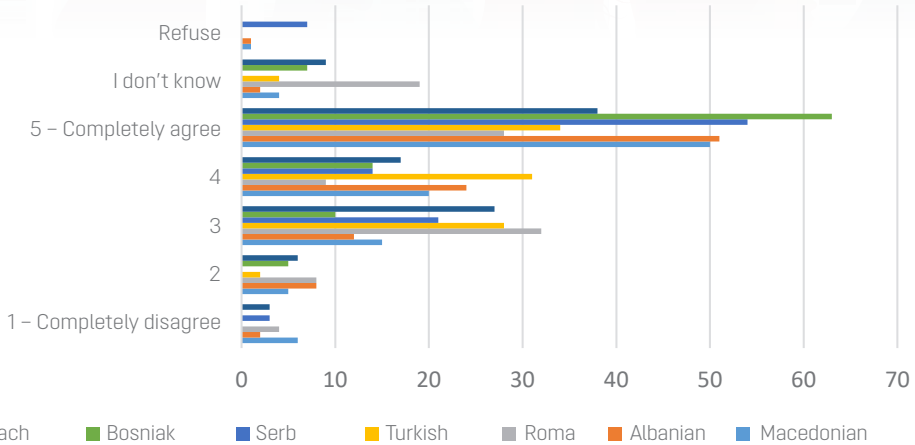
**Women believe that women politicians will make political life to be less corrupt.**

**Graph 49.:** On a scale of 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree, please rate the following sentence: Women will make political life to be less corrupt (%)



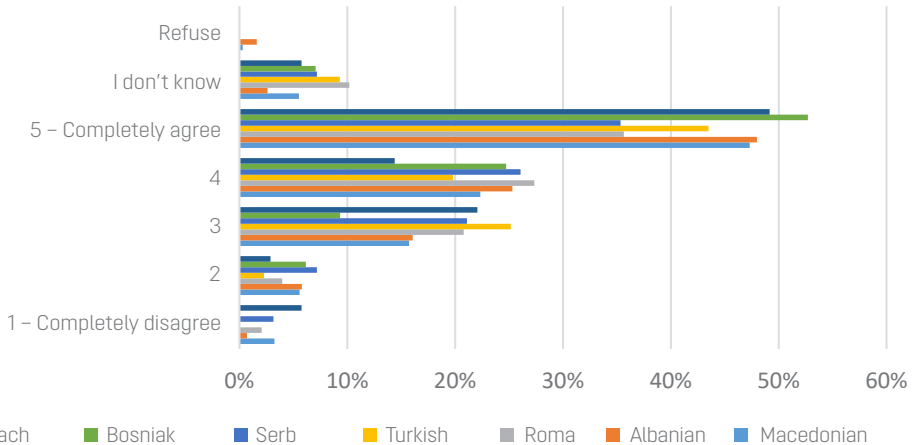
**Women believe that women politicians will make political life to be less violent.**

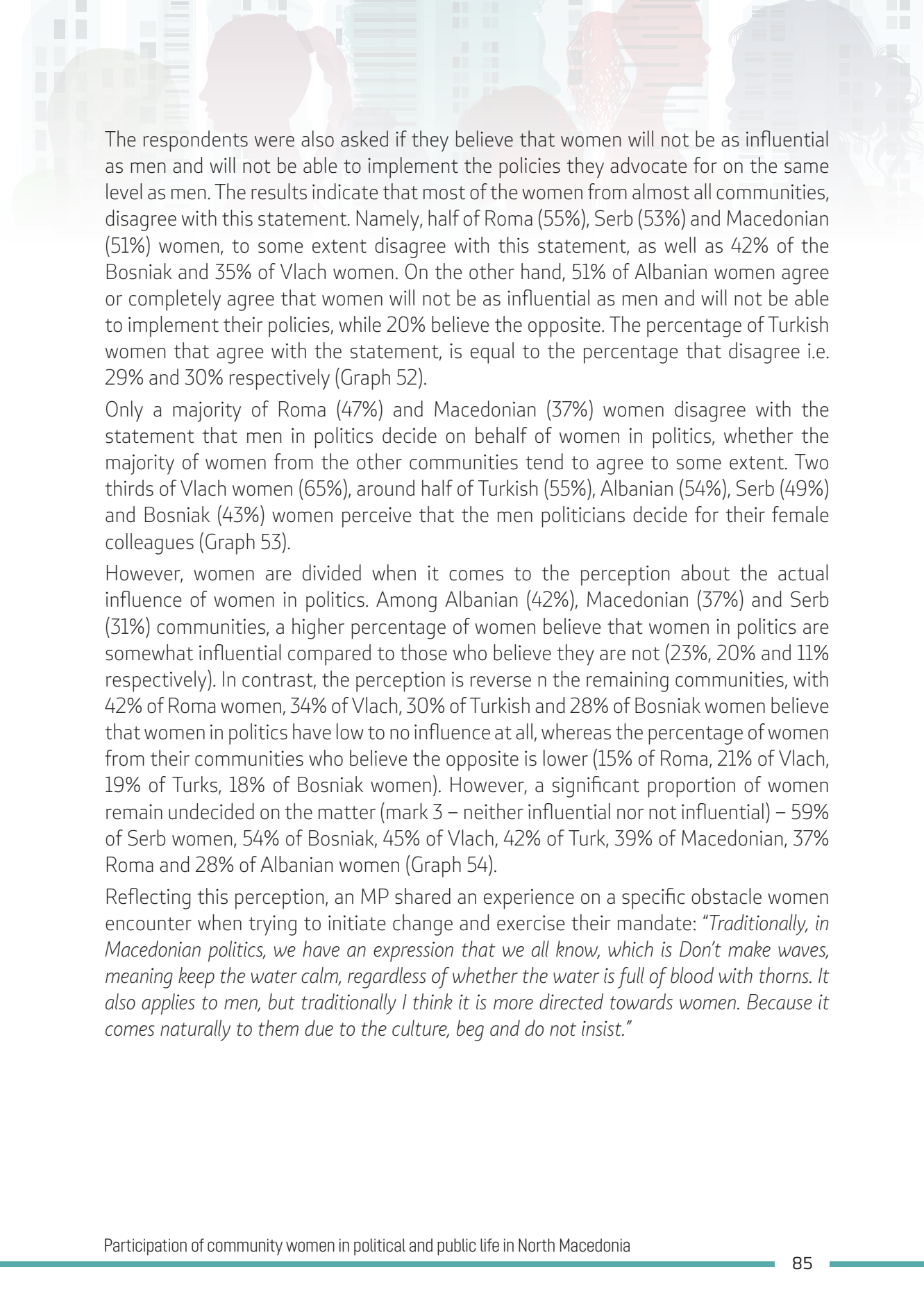
**Graph 50.** On a scale of 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree, please rate the following sentence: Women will make political life less violent (%)



**Women politicians will strengthen social welfare in the country.**

**Graph 51.** On a scale of 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree, please rate the following sentence: Women will strengthen social welfare policies (%)





The respondents were also asked if they believe that women will not be as influential as men and will not be able to implement the policies they advocate for on the same level as men. The results indicate that most of the women from almost all communities, disagree with this statement. Namely, half of Roma (55%), Serb (53%) and Macedonian (51%) women, to some extent disagree with this statement, as well as 42% of the Bosniak and 35% of Vlach women. On the other hand, 51% of Albanian women agree or completely agree that women will not be as influential as men and will not be able to implement their policies, while 20% believe the opposite. The percentage of Turkish women that agree with the statement, is equal to the percentage that disagree i.e. 29% and 30% respectively (Graph 52).

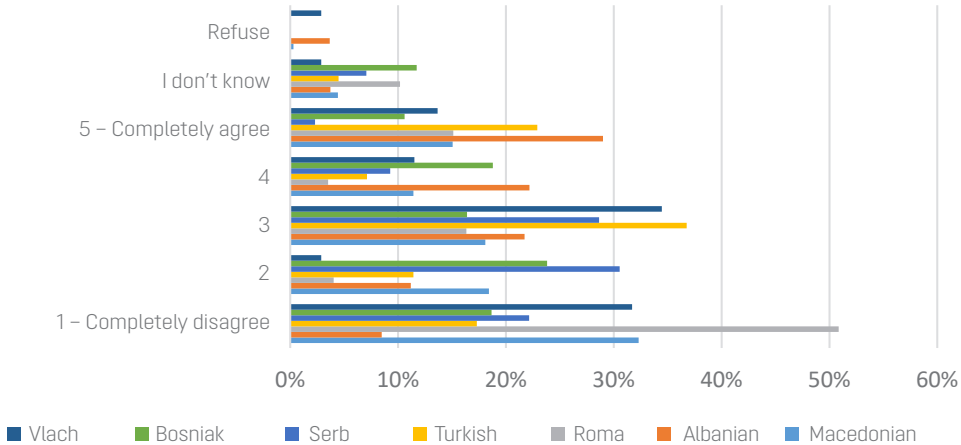
Only a majority of Roma (47%) and Macedonian (37%) women disagree with the statement that men in politics decide on behalf of women in politics, whether the majority of women from the other communities tend to agree to some extent. Two thirds of Vlach women (65%), around half of Turkish (55%), Albanian (54%), Serb (49%) and Bosniak (43%) women perceive that the men politicians decide for their female colleagues (Graph 53).

However, women are divided when it comes to the perception about the actual influence of women in politics. Among Albanian (42%), Macedonian (37%) and Serb (31%) communities, a higher percentage of women believe that women in politics are somewhat influential compared to those who believe they are not (23%, 20% and 11% respectively). In contrast, the perception is reverse in the remaining communities, with 42% of Roma women, 34% of Vlach, 30% of Turkish and 28% of Bosniak women believe that women in politics have low to no influence at all, whereas the percentage of women from their communities who believe the opposite is lower (15% of Roma, 21% of Vlach, 19% of Turks, 18% of Bosniak women). However, a significant proportion of women remain undecided on the matter (mark 3 – neither influential nor not influential) – 59% of Serb women, 54% of Bosniak, 45% of Vlach, 42% of Turk, 39% of Macedonian, 37% Roma and 28% of Albanian women (Graph 54).

Reflecting this perception, an MP shared an experience on a specific obstacle women encounter when trying to initiate change and exercise their mandate: *“Traditionally, in Macedonian politics, we have an expression that we all know, which is Don’t make waves, meaning keep the water calm, regardless of whether the water is full of blood with thorns. It also applies to men, but traditionally I think it is more directed towards women. Because it comes naturally to them due to the culture, beg and do not insist.”*

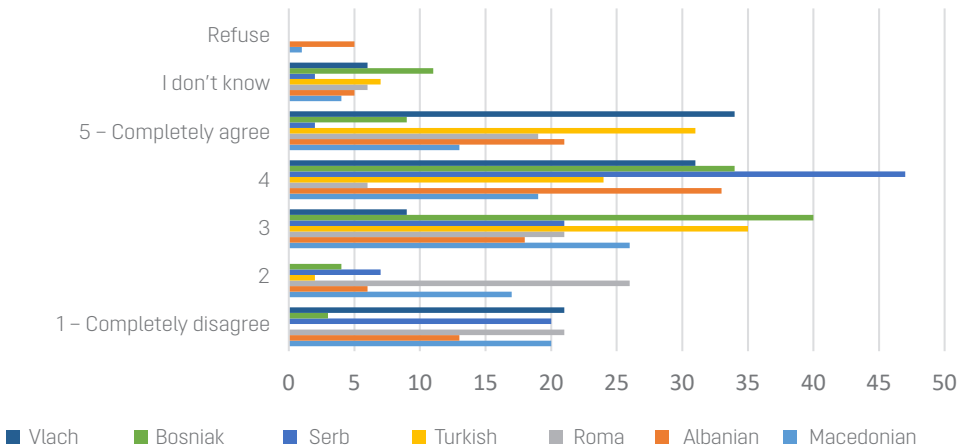
The majority of women don't believe that women politicians cannot be as influential as men in implementing their policies. Albanian women are an exception, with the majority believing the opposite. Turkish women are divided on this issue.

**Graph 52.** On a scale of 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree, please rate the following sentence: Women will not be as influential as men and will not be able to implement their policies (%)



The majority of women from almost all communities believe that men in politics decide on behalf of the women in politics. The majority of Roma and Macedonian women believe the opposite.

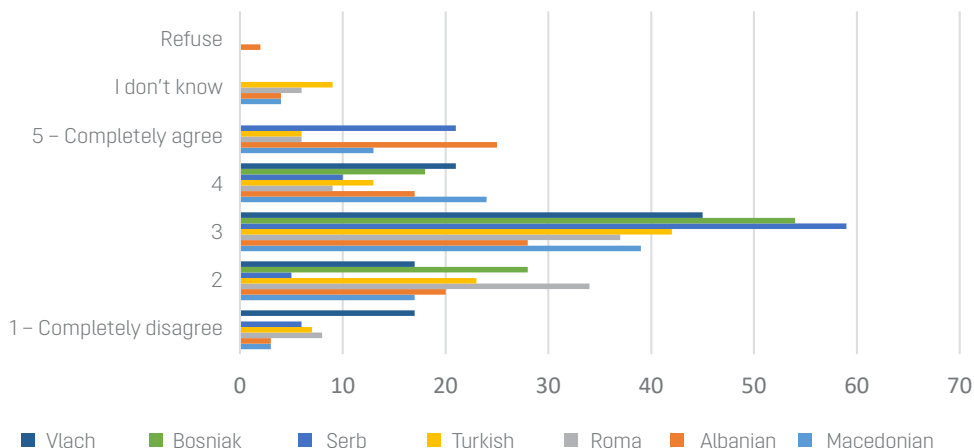
**Graph 53.** On a scale of 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree, please rate the following sentence: Men in politics decide on behalf of women in politics (%)





The majority of women are indecisive about how influential women in politics are. The percentage of women from different communities that do have specific opinion on this matter shows division.

**Graph 54.** On a scale of 1 – no influence to 5 – very influential, please rate the following sentence: How influential do you think women in politics are? (%)



More than half of the women from almost all communities support the mandatory quotas for representation of women in the candidate list of the political parties. Hence, 77% of Turk women are in favour of quotas, as are 66% of Roma and Bosniak women, 64% of Serb, 61% of Macedonian and 59% of Albanian women. Women from the Vlach community are an exception, with half of them (50%) against and 41% pro quotas. Moreover, 29% of Serb women are also against quotas, as are 19% of Bosniak and Macedonian, 14% of Albanian, 8% of Turkish and 4% of Roma women. However, a significant percentage of the respondents stated that they are not familiar with the quotas, namely 30% of Roma, 22% of Albanian, 20% of Macedonian, 15% from the Turkish and Bosniak, 9% from Vlach and 7% from Serb women (Graph 55).

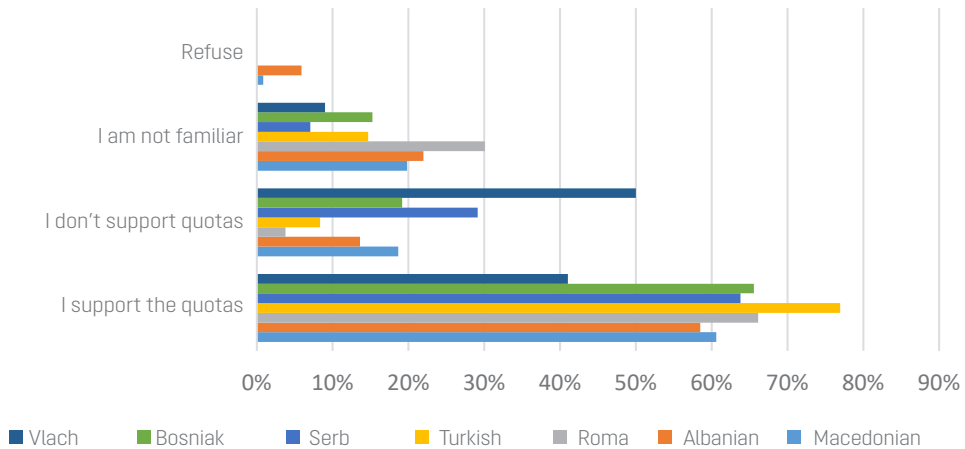
Women that do not support the quotas were further asked to explain their stand, and almost half of them (47%), said that gender should not be a criterion for someone to be on the candidate list. Furthermore, 18% believe that there is no need for quotas since women already have equal political rights as men, 14% stated that it is the right of the political party to organize their own candidate list and 6% said that the women politicians are under control of their male collages anyways. Only 3% believe that it is normal for women to be less represented in politics than men (Graph 56).

The opinions of the interviewed politicians differ in terms of their perception of the usefulness and utilization of quotas, and whether there might be an alternative way to retain and increase the number of women in politics. An MP said: *“If there are extra women at the table, add chairs, why use quotas? In a group of men in leadership, if two*

women are allowed to sit, a question is immediately asked – How did they get there? and the song “Whose are you?” plays in the background...The quota bothers me, not that it doesn’t bother me, but it also scares me that at the moment the quotas are removed, there won’t be any women on the political stage. Hence, the question is whether women won’t reach out for political position then or simply won’t be allowed, or a combination of both.” On the other hand, her colleague in the Parliament emphasized her support for the quota, and advocates for its increase: “Let’s work on increasing the quota from 40 to 50 percent, for more women in in the executive branch as well.”

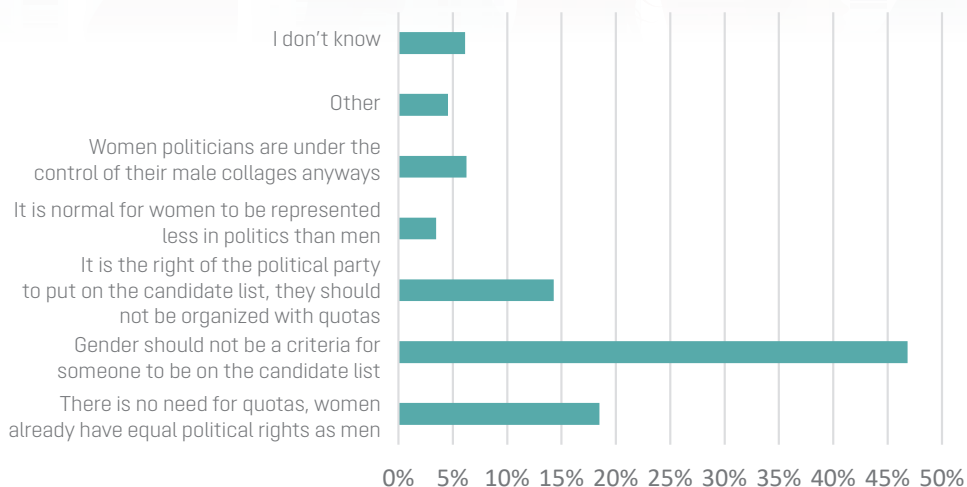
**The Majority of women from almost all communities support the quotas for representation of women in the candidate list of the political parties.**

**Graph 55.** Do you support the mandatory quotas for representation of women in the candidate list of the political parties? (%)



**Half of the women who are against quotas stated that gender should not be criteria for someone to be on the candidate list.**

**Graph 56.** If you don't support quotas, why so? (%)



Women were asked whether they were familiar with the work of the women councilors within their municipal Council, and a high 84% of Roma, 78% of Vlach and 77% of Turkish women, as well as 70% of Turk, 69% of Macedonian, 58% of Albanian and 53% of the Bosniak women answer negatively. Only around one third of Bosniak (36%), Albanian (27%) and Macedonian women (27%), stated that they were familiar, and as for the other communities, this percentage varied between 11% of Roma women and 18% of Serb women (Graph 57).

A high percentage of women are also not familiar with the women MPs in the Parliament. This is the case with two thirds or more of women from every community, starting with 60% of women from the Albanian community, 67% from the Bosniak community, 69% from the Macedonian community, 74% of women from the Serb community of, 75% of women from the Vlach community and 91% of women from the Roma community. Less than one third of Macedonian women (27%) said that they were familiar with women MPs, as well as 21% of women from the Albanian community, 19% of women from the Serb and Vlach communities, 18% of women from the Bosniak community, 11% from the Turkish and 9% of women from the Roma community (Graph 58).

The respondents were asked to name a political leader in the country whose leadership style they view positively. Although the vast majority of the women from all communities stated that there is none or that they don't know, still among the women that answered from almost all communities, the names of male political leaders prevailed. Male leaders were named by one third of Serb (35%) and Roma (32%) women, whereas female political leader were named by 9% and 2% of both communities respectively.

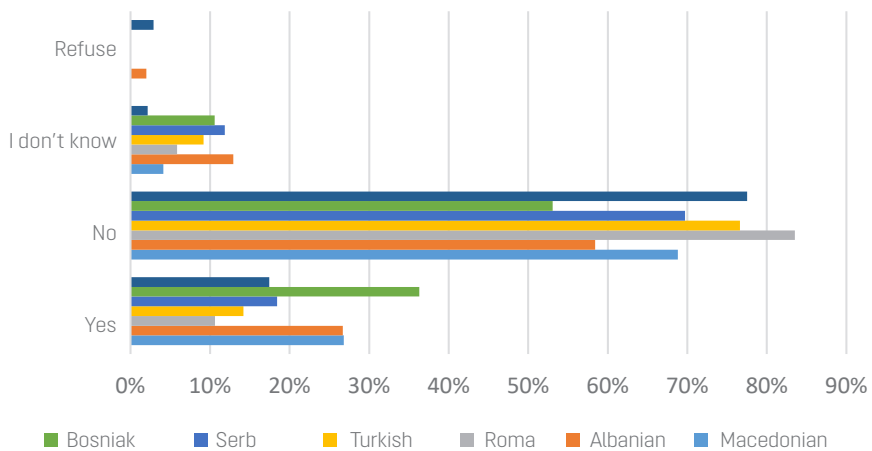
The case is also similar within Vlach and Macedonian communities, where 30% of Vlach women stated a male name and 13% a female name, and 20% of Macedonian women stated a male name and 12% a female name. The difference is less notable in the Albanian community, where 11% named a male politician and 6% a female one, and the percentages are leveled within the Turkish (7% - male, 6% - female) and the Bosniak community (15% - male, 16% - female, Graph 59).

Research further indicates that woman politicians, members of non-majority communities, are rarely, if ever, heard by the public. Namely, among five out of seven communities, more than 83% of women stated that they had not listened to or read a speech by a woman from a non-majority community in politics. This is the case with 92% of Turk women, 88% of Macedonian, 87% of Roma, 86% of Serb and 83% of Vlach women. Although significant, this percentage is still lower among the Bosniak (75%) and Albanian women (62%, Graph 60).

An MP member of a smaller community acknowledged that women politicians are less visible in the public, and she identified this issue as a direct consequence of the scarce resources that women have at their disposal for promotional purposes: *“In reality, women are less present than men in the media, less promoted, and one of the reasons behind all this is allocation of the resources.”*

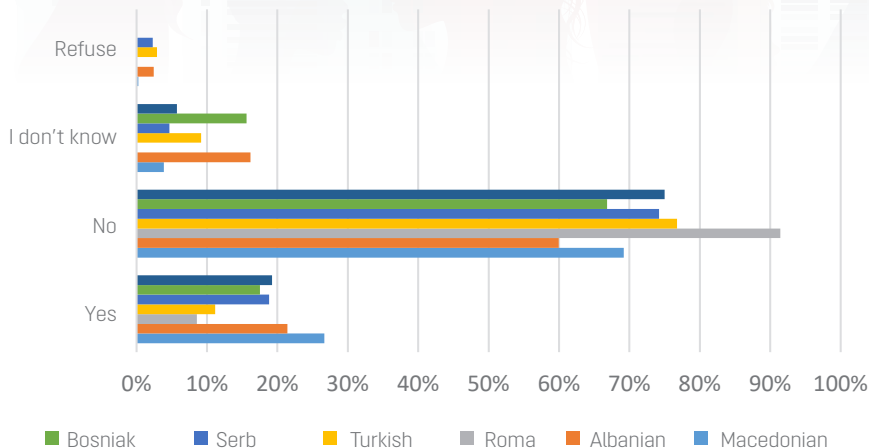
**Women across different communities are largely unfamiliar with the work of the women councilors in their municipal Councils.**

**Graph 57.** Are you familiar with the work of the women councilors in the Council of your municipality?



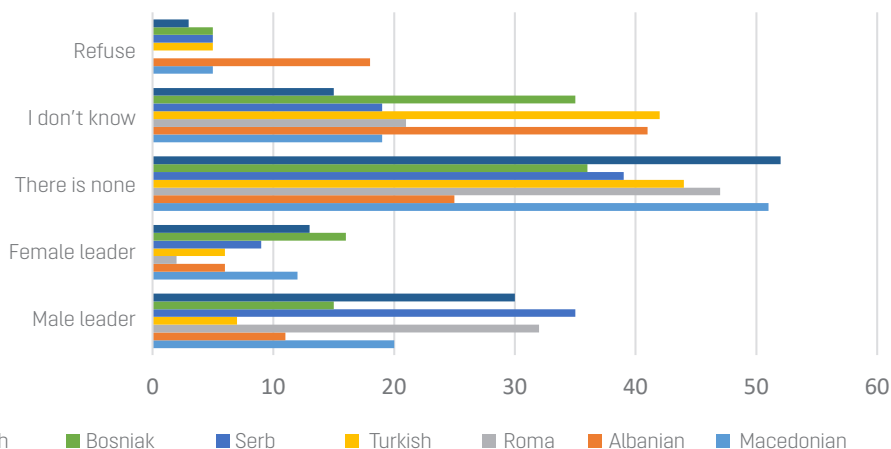
**Women from all communities are generally unfamiliar with the women MPs.**

**Graph 58.** Are you familiar with women MPs? (%)



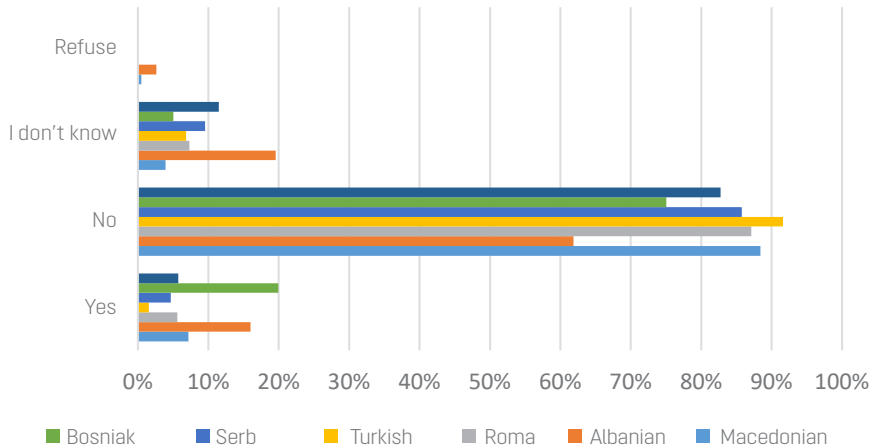
**Women of mostly all communities initially recognize male leader as positive example for leadership style.**

**Graph 59.** Name a political leader in North Macedonia whose leadership style you view positively (% multiple-choice)



**Women are not exposed to politicians' speeches coming from women member of a non-majority community.**

**Graph 60.** In the past 7 days, have you listened to (or read) a speech by a woman from non-majority community in politics? (On TV, in person, on the internet, newspaper... %)



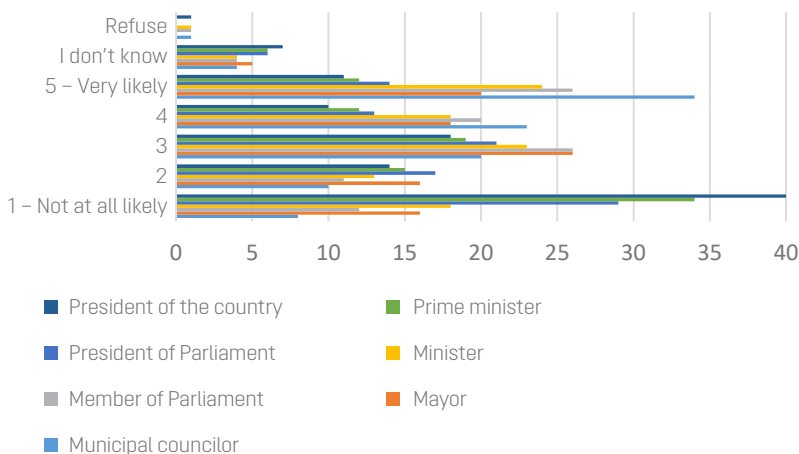
Women are also skeptical regarding the probability that women from non-majority communities would have high political positions in the near future. Asked on a scale of 1 – *not likely at all*, to 5 – *very likely*, to mark the likelihood of women from non-majority communities to hold certain high political position, more than half of the women (54%) believe that it is not likely that a woman from a non-majority community will become the President of the country, 40% of which feel very strong that that will not happen at all. On the other hand, 21% think the opposite i.e. that it is likely or very likely that this position will be held by a woman from a non-majority community. These results are to some extent similar when it comes to the political positions Prime minister and President of the Parliament, where 49% of the women don't believe that a woman from a non-majority community will become Prime minister (34% of which stated that this case is not likely to happen at all) and 46% have the same opinion for the position President of the Parliament (29% of which answered with 1 – not likely at all). As oppose to this state, 24% of the women believe that it is possible for a woman from non-majority community to become Prime minister and 27% believe the same for President of the Parliament (Graph 61).

Percentages are more optimistic in the case of the political positions Minister, Member of Parliament (MP), Mayor and Municipal councilor. Almost half of the respondents (46%) stated that that it is possible or very possible for a woman from a non-majority community to hold an MP position, 42% believe the same for the political position Minister in the Government of the country and 38% for the position Mayor. The

percentage of women that disagree is 23% for the MP position, 31% for the Minister's position and 32% for Mayor. Women are most confident when it comes to a political position Member of the municipal council, where almost two thirds (57%) answered that it is likely or very likely for a woman from a non-majority community to be elected as municipal Councilor while only 18% believe the opposite (Graph 61).

**As the political position gains more political power, women are less and less confident that a woman from a non-majority community will be ever elected as its holder.**

**Graph 61.** What is the probability that women from non-majority communities would have one of the following leadership positions: (%)



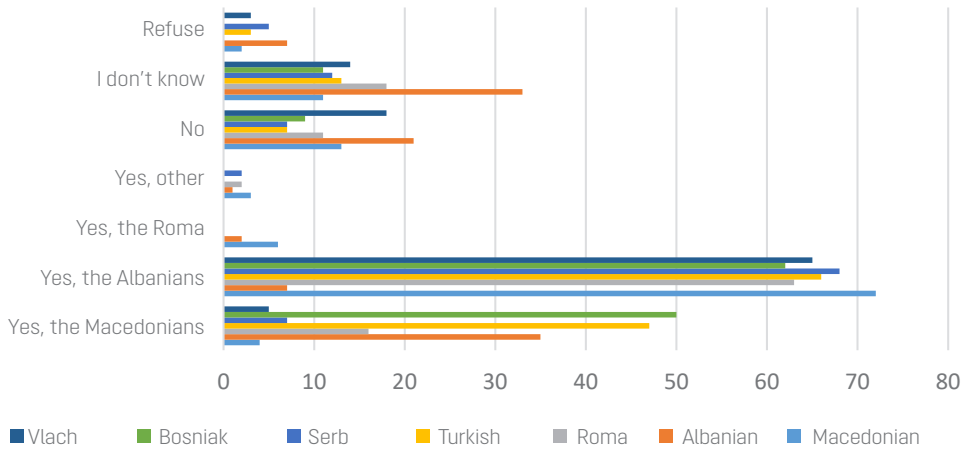
More than two third of women from all communities, except Albanian, believe that Albanian community is overrepresented in the political and public life in the country. This perception is shared by 72% of Macedonian women, 68% of Serb, 66% of Turkish, 65% of Vlach, 63% of Roma women, and by 7% of Albanian women. The Macedonian community follows in this regard, identified by 50% of Bosniak women, 47% of Turkish women, 35% of Albanian, 16% of Roma, 7% of Serb, 5% of Vlach and 4% of Macedonian women (Graph 62).

The interviewed women politician agreed that the political representation of every community and every group at a risk of social exclusion is key for the democratic development of the country. A MP in this regard stated: *“If I wasn't part of this parliamentary composition, the problems of my community might still be dragged indefinitely. It is positive to always have a representative from a specific community, who knows the problems and can offers a systemic solution. It is a more effective approach and it carries more weight. Hence, I, as a woman representative of that community, am affected by the*

problems and I know them, I have worked on that problem, and with me being here I can more easily convince my colleagues to dissuade the issue.”

**Women across different communities, except Albanian, perceive the Albanian community as overrepresented in the political and the public life in the country. The Macedonian community follows in this regard.**

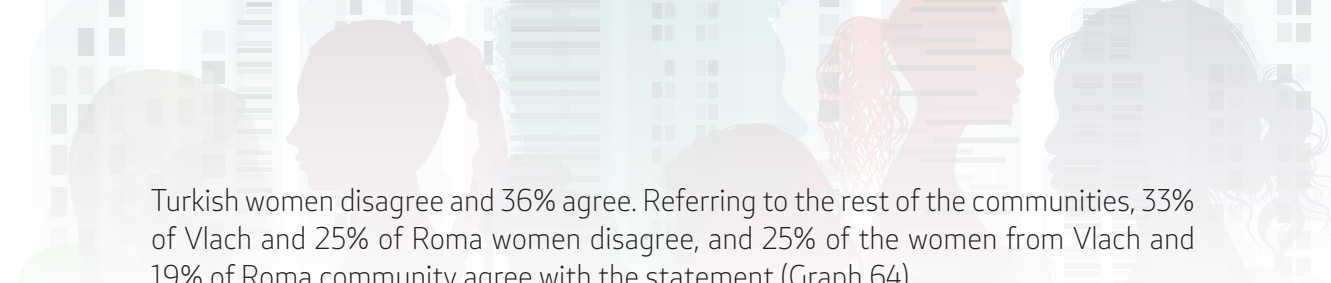
**Graph 62.:** Do you believe that certain communities are overrepresented in the political and public life in the country? (%)



Women were also asked, on a scale of 1 – *not as all* to 5 – *absolutely yes*, to grade three stereotypical statements of the position of women in the political life based on their personal judgment and conviction. Hence, asked whether woman should be passive and quiet in the political life of the country/community, more than half of the women from all communities disagree. However, numbers vary between different communities, where the highest level of explicit disagreement (mark 1), is noted among Macedonian (mark 1 - 62%; mark 1 or mark 2 - 80%), Roma (mark 1 - 61%, mark 1 or mark 2 – 67%), and Vlach (mark 1 - 60%, mark 1 or mark 2 – 70%) women. In general, the percentage of women that disagree of strongly disagree (mark 1 or mark 2) with the statement is between 52% among Albanian women, 60% among the Bosniak, 64% Turkish, 67% Roma, 70% Vlach and 80% among Macedonian women (Graph 63).

On the other hand, in comparison, the percentage of women across different communities that don't think that women should follow men in the political life of the country/community is notably lower. Namely, more than half of the women from the Serb community (69%), the Macedonian (64%) and Bosniak (55%) communities don't agree that women should follow men in the political life, and 7% Serb, 15% Macedonian and 25% Bosniak women agree. Albanian and the Turkish women, are equally divided in this regard i.e. 36% of Albanian women disagree whereas 35% agree, and 35% of the





Turkish women disagree and 36% agree. Referring to the rest of the communities, 33% of Vlach and 25% of Roma women disagree, and 25% of the women from Vlach and 19% of Roma community agree with the statement (Graph 64).

Women are also divided in their perception of whether or not women are taught that administration and political leadership is not their job. From here, the percentage of women that disagree with the statement is higher than the percentage of the women that think the opposite among Roma (66% disagree vs 11% agree), Macedonian (58% disagree vs 19% agree), Albanian (39% disagree vs 30% agree) and Turk (34% disagree vs 29% agree). The case is different with other communities, where the percentage of women agreeing that women are taught that administration and political leadership is not their job is higher than the women that disagree. Namely 46% of Serb women agree and 38% disagree, 39% of Vlach women agree and 34% disagree, and 28% of the Bosniak women agree and 22% disagree (Graph 65).

Regarding how the society, and different communities in general, see the role of the women in politics, all interlocutors agree that the basis are often set in the earliest stages of the childhood. An MP, member of a smaller community, stated that these differences are established at the very moment of the child's birth, long before biological peculiarities can even be considered as a factor: *"You will receive different rhetoric when people congratulate you for the birth of a son vs a daughter. You have a SON! Aww, do you have a daughter? The voice tone is completely different. When the boy falls, we tell him not to cry, you're a boy, you're a man. When a girl falls, aww, daddy and mommy's princess fell, are you hurt? Boys are expected to be naughty, even when they don't have testosterone yet as a biological factor. But if a girl behaves like that, we sent her at the children's clinic to get a diagnosis, what kind of woman she will grow up to be."* Her colleague from the parliament, further specifies that the situation is more alarming in rural and socially isolated communities: *"In rural and isolated communities, the support is greater for the male children than for female children... when I say that children deserve equal support I mean education, we had a problem in my community, male children are enrolled in school, female children are not. When the law regarding mandatory primary and secondary education was changed, the numbers began to even out, but families must also offer equal support for their children."*

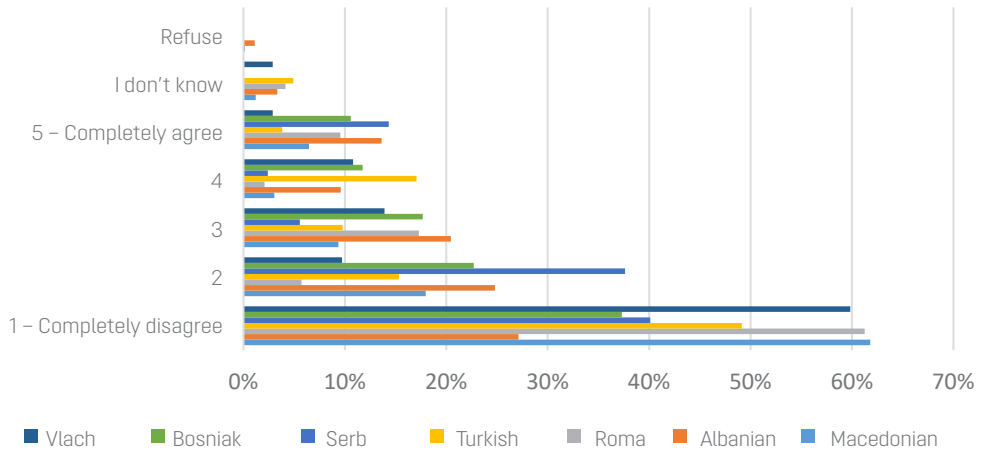
Recalling her personal experience, an ethnic Albanian MP declared that was under the wrong perception during the development of her career, that women cannot have a successful career and simultaneously fulfill their role as a mother and wife, an impression which, according to her, is distracting but unfortunately still present: *"While I was a student, I thought the sky was the limit. The moment I got married, things changed. The expectations of society were for me to be the best wife, mother, bride... I am not sad that I spend time with the education of my kids, but I did lose many years into thinking that my personal goals don't go hand in hand with family life... We raise our girls to make them ready for married life."*

In line with this dialog, an ethnic Albanian government representative further stressed the role of the education system in setting different career path for girls, pushing them

towards nurturing and care-giving profession: “Teachers, even women teachers, would advise girls to become teachers, as it is the best profession that would allow us as women to take care of the family and kids.”

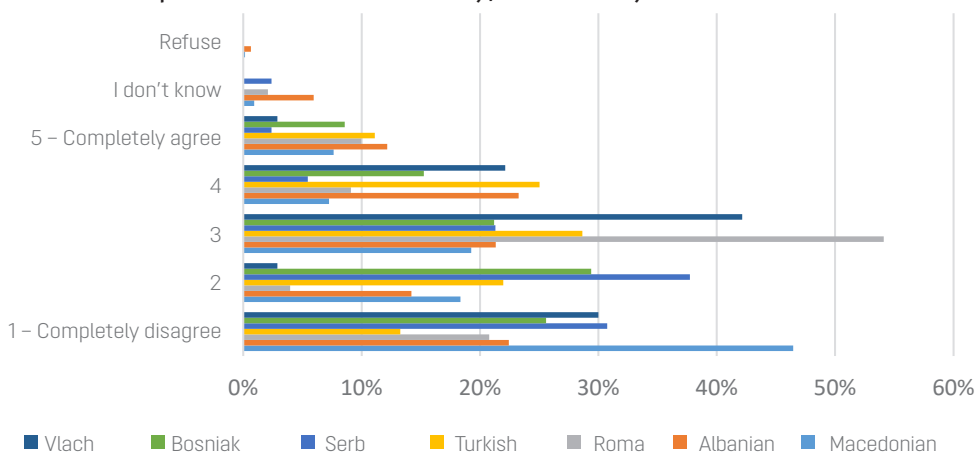
**Majority of the women from all communities disagree that women should be passive and quiet in the political life of the country/community.**

**Graph 63.** On a scale of 1 – not as all to 5 – absolutely yes, to what extend do you agree with the following statement: The woman should be passive and quiet in the political life of the country/community (%)



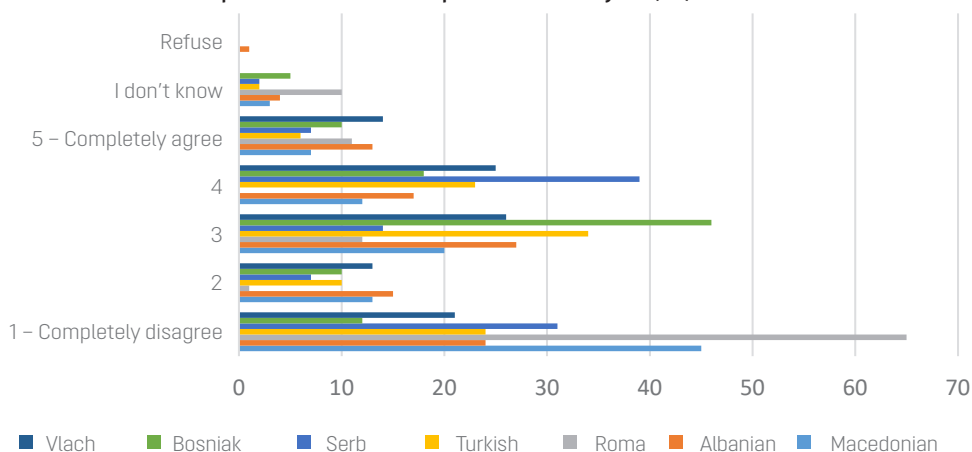
**Women are generally divided among communities as to what extent they agree that women should follow men in the political life of the country/community.**

**Graph 64.** On a scale of 1 – not as all to 5 – absolutely yes, to what extend do you agree with the following statement: The woman should follow the man in the political life of the country/community



**Women are also generally divided among communities as to the extent of their agreement that women are taught that administration and political leadership is not their job.**

**Graph 65.** On a scale of 1 – not as all to 5 – absolutely yes, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: Women are taught that administration and political leadership is not their job (%)



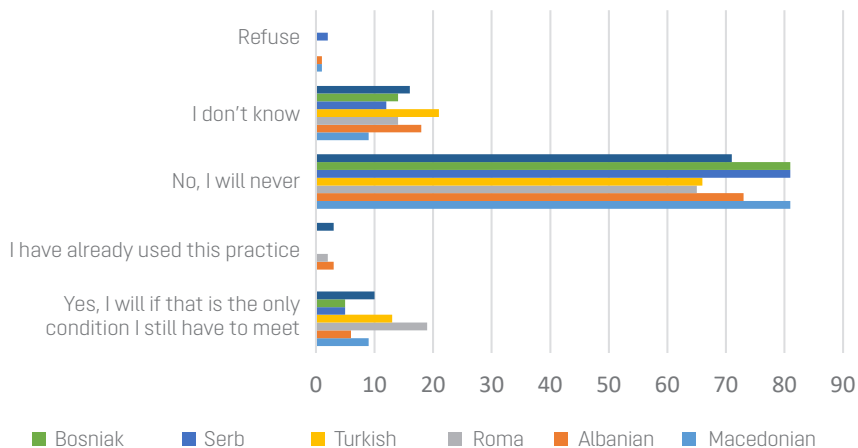
More than two thirds of women indicated that they will never declare themselves as a member of another community, if meeting the quota for a certain community is the only condition needed for employment in some public institution. Namely, this is the case with 81% of Macedonian, Serb and Bosniak women, 73% of Albanian, 71% of Vlach, 66% of the Turkish and 65% of Roma women (Graph 66).

Certain percentage of women further declared that they know somebody from their community that has used this practice. This percentage is highest among the Bosniak women (39%), and lowest among Vlach (13%) and Albanian (7%) women. For the rest of the communities, it is around 20% (24% of the Turkish women, 21% Serb, 20% Roma and 17% of Macedonian women, Graph 67).

On the other hand, women across different community believe that this practice is often use within their community. Namely, more than two thirds of Roma (68%) and Macedonian (64%) women stated that people for their community occasionally or often declare a different ethnic background for the purpose of getting employment. The same response was also obtained from more than half of the women for the Bosniak (51%) and Vlach (56%) community and from 42% of Turkish and Serb women. In comparison with the other communities, this perception is less common among Albanian women, where 32% believe that Albanians occasionally or often declare a different ethnic background for employment purposes (Graph 68).

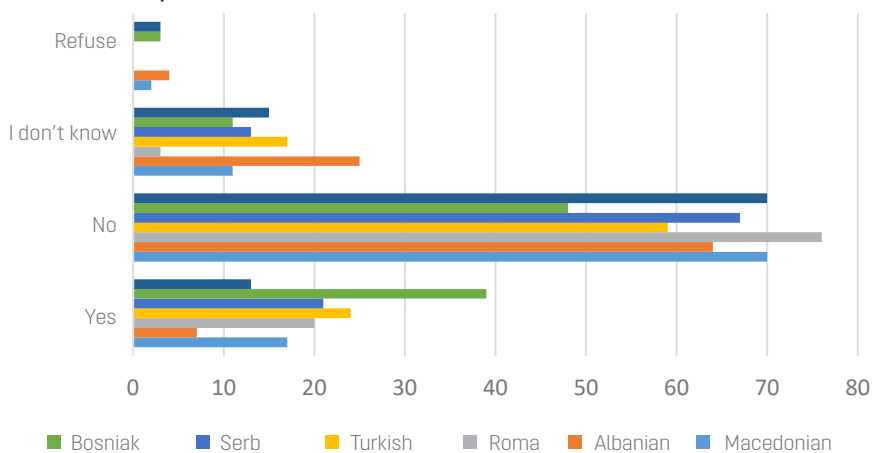
**More than two thirds of women will never declare themselves as a member of another community in order to get employed.**

**Graph 66.** Will you ever declare as a member of another community, if meeting the quota for a certain ethnic background is the only condition standing in your way to get employment in some public institution (%)



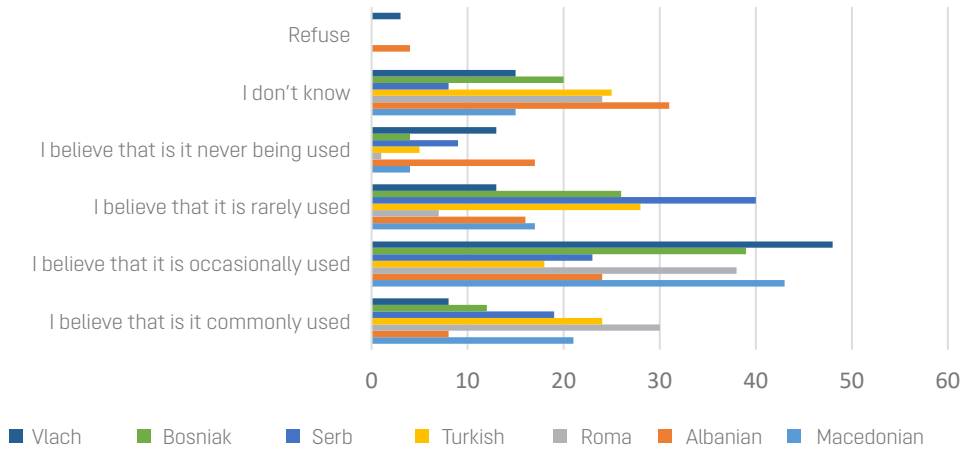
**Certain number of women from all communities knows somebody from their community that has declared different ethnic background in order to get employment in the public administration.**

**Graph 67.** Do you know someone from your community that has declared him/herself as member of another ethnic community in order to gain employment in the public administration? (%)



The common perception of women is that to some extent, the practice of declaring a different community for getting employment is present among every community

**Graph 68.** Do you believe that using this practice, declaring a different community for getting employment in our community is often used within your community? (%)





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## VI. Conclusions

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The objective of this study has been to provide an overview of the political participation of women from non-majority communities in North Macedonia, highlighting their standing and perceptions. **Generally, there is a lack of institutional data on the political participation of women from non-majority communities. Governmental institutions and ministries rarely have disaggregated data relevant to assessing the position of women from non-majority communities, which hardens the process of policymaking.**

The increased involvement of women in North Macedonia's politics is attributed to the ongoing enhancements in electoral regulations and the persistent advocacy efforts of women politicians and activists. The establishment of the Women Parliamentarians' Club in 2003 and the formation of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the Assembly in 2006 reflect institutional steps to address gender-related legislation. The introduction of a gender quota in 2002 mandated that 30% of candidates on electoral lists, both nationally and locally, be from the under-represented gender. Subsequent amendments in 2006 specified that every third candidate on lists must belong to the under-represented gender, significantly boosting women's participation in the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia. The 2014 Electoral Code introduced additional mechanism to protect female representation in the political life of the country, envisioning that if a woman resigns from her MP post, the next woman on the candidates list may replace her. In 2015, amendments to the Election Code increased the gender quota to 40%. **Despite these improvements, challenges persist in ensuring access to decision-making structures for specific groups of women, such as Roma women, rural women, and women with disabilities.**

**Women from non-majority communities experience double discrimination on the grounds of their ethnic background and on the grounds of their gender.** Thus, compared to women from the majority community, they hold one of the feeblest positions in society. They often face exclusion from public life and rarely have the power to influence policies. **This unfavorable position is noted globally and, to a certain level, is mirrored in both wealthy countries and underdeveloped regions.**

**North Macedonia has an extensive normative and institutional framework referring to promoting gender equality in the country, which is generally speaking solidly set and harmonized with international directives and conventions relating to this issue.** Its significant development began after 2000, catalyzed by: (i) the



increased number of women in politics – women MPs after the introduced quotas for the underrepresented gender on the candidate lists in 2002, and women councilors in the local self-government after the introduced quotas in 2004; (ii) obtaining the status of a candidate country for membership in the European Union In 2005, which led to the harmonization of Macedonian legislation with the EU (gender-sensitive) legislation; and (iii) the adoption of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in 2006, which was the basis for further construction of the gender-sensitive institutional and normative set-up of the state. **However, the implementation of this normative framework is weak, both in terms of its practice and in terms of punishment for its violation. International institutions and domestic civil society organizations have pointed out the issue of implementation as crucial to advancing gender equality in the country.**

**While the legal framework for equal opportunities for political participation is satisfactory, it does not always translate directly into practical implementation.** Political participation of women from non-majority communities, apart, to some extent of Albanian women, is at a considerably low level. The situation is similar at the executive and local level, as women, in general, are underrepresented, while women from non-majority communities are practically non-existent. **Primary research data also show a low level of participation of women in political and civic life. However, there is a favorable position in terms of future engagements of women in politics.**

Despite significant progress in integrating gender issues into legislation and measures and programmes promoting equal opportunities for women and men, their implementation is still hampered by low awareness of issues related to gender equality, gender bias, gender stereotypes, and restrictive thinking, attitudes, values, beliefs and perceptions, making the process of changing attitudes, behaviors and gender stereotypes in favor of gender equality a long-term but essential effort.

**Primary data also confirms that gender roles are still prevalent in society in general; however, women from non-majority communities fare worse as these attitudes are more frequent.** In general, political participation of women among communities in North Macedonia is equivalent to voting in elections. Consequently, 72% or more of the women from all communities lack direct involvement and personal ambitions to get involved in politics. The prevailing answer as a main reason for their decision not to enter politics is lack of interest among all communities. The women involved in politics, or with ambition to get involved, do it (will do it) as they have a need to influence and improve the situation in society and a need to influence and improve the situation in their communities.

The exercise of the right to vote in the last elections is clearly lowest among Roma women with two thirds of women stating that they voted, in comparison to the other communities where the turnout was between 73% and 95%. When voting, personal



political convictions and consistent political values are the sole basis for the majority of the women across communities. The engagement with political parties is around 10% for the women from all communities, with exception of the Bosniak and Macedonian (25% i.e. 17%). However, women's engagement in political parties is generally reduced to just membership.


Around half or more of the women from all communities want their interests to be considered when a political decision is made. Furthermore, the drive to participate in civic activities and initiatives is present among women from all communities. The percentage of women that declared low to no interest when it comes to readiness for reaction if any political decision is against their interests, is highest among Roma women (65%).

Women lack confidence that their skills and knowledge set meet the requirements to hold high political positions. The highest confidence is noted for the most local position proposed, Municipal councilor, where women from all communities are divided as to whether they possess the necessary knowledge and skills. Roma women are exception where only 6% believe that they meet the requirements for this political position. This uncertainty grows with the higher political position proposed in the survey.

A significant percentage from all communities perceive Roma community as more discriminated compared to others. All of the interviewed politician claimed that they faced, or a still facing some form of discrimination mostly related to their gender, but in some cases combination of both their gender and ethnic background. The majority of the women agree that women are under-represented in political and public life. This perception is again reflected in the representation of women from non-majority communities in political life. Women across communities agree that it would be better for the society if there were more women involved in the political life of the country. High level of agreement between communities is also noted concerning the discussion if women should, first of all, be a good wives, mothers and take care of their homes. The politicians agree that women are underrepresented in politics, identifying lack of ambition and persistence for inclusion in this sphere and the scarce access to resources that women in politics have, as one of the main reasons.

Women across communities are divided as to whether women from non-majority communities in politics have power to exert influence, thus, the highest percentage of positive responses is noted among Serb (40%) and lowest among Vlach (26%) women. The interviewed politicians agreed that the power to influence politics, not just of the women from the non-majority communities but women in general, is lower compared to men. They further argue that this is significantly influenced by different lifestyle and traditional gender roles practiced by men and women in our society, that are in direct relation to the decision-making practices.



The background of the page features a series of overlapping, semi-transparent silhouettes of women's heads in profile, facing right. The silhouettes are rendered in various colors including shades of green, purple, red, and blue. Behind the silhouettes, a faint, stylized cityscape with grid patterns is visible, suggesting an urban or community setting.

Women across communities share the belief that women politicians will make political life less corrupt, less violent and will strengthen social welfare in the country. Asked to name a political leader whose leadership style they view positively, a vast majority of the women from all communities stated a person, a name of a male political leader. Furthermore, woman politicians members of non-majority communities, are rarely, if ever, heard by the public. An MP acknowledged that women politicians are less visible in the public, and linked this issue to the scarce resources that women have at their disposal for promotional purposes. Women are also skeptical regarding the probability that women from non-majority communities would have high political positions in the near future. Hence, more than half of the women (54%) believe that it is not likely that women from non-majority communities will become President of the country.

More than two thirds of respondent women indicated that will never declare themselves as a member of another community, if meeting the quota for a certain ethnic background is the only condition needed for employment in some public institution. On the other hand, women across different ethnicities believe that this practice is often used within their community.



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## VII. Recommendations

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**There is an urgent need to increase the representation of women from different communities in politics through political parties.** Political parties should be encouraged to actively recruit and support women candidates from different ethnic backgrounds for elected positions and implement gender quotas within their party to ensure a more equal representation especially in the Government and the Municipalities. Furthermore, political parties should create targeted outreach programs to actively engage women from non-majority communities in political activities, including providing resources and support for their participation in political processes and decision-making.


**Political parties should provide equal support and resources for both men and women in politics.** Women in politics should have equal access to initiatives, training, mentorship, financial support, networking opportunities and campaign resources as their male colleague within their political party.

**Investment in education and increased awareness concerning women in politics and political rights in general.** There is a need for educational campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of women's participation in politics, and provide information about the political process, voting rights, and how to get involved in local and central government. A specific focus needs to be on non-majority communities, in particular women and girls.

**Creation and fostering enabling environment for women's active involvement in politics.** Political organizations need to create a culture that values and promotes women's engagement in politics, actively combats sexism and discrimination in the political sphere, and promotes a more inclusive and diverse political environment.

**There is an urgent need for enhancement of the implementation level of the degree of implementation of policies that prevent violence, harassment, discrimination and hate speech on gender and ethnic background, with an accent on the cases against women in politics.** It is necessary for the competent institutions to react more intensively to such cases and to discourage potential triggers.

**It is crucial for women in politics, and especially women from non-majority communities, to have equal share of representation in all decision-making bodies, by implementing policies that promote diversity and inclusion.** It is necessary for women to have a voice and influence in decision-making bodies, including local and central government.



**It is important to address cultural and social obstacles for women's active engagement in politics.** It is necessary to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, and ethnic stereotypes and promote the importance of women's participation in politics, and especially among women from non-majority communities. With a more supportive environment for women, their engagement in politics will increase.


**Introduction of mentorship and leadership development for women and politics or with ambitions for involvement in politics.** Establish this kind of development programs, specifically tailored to women from non-majority communities, will provide them with the skills, support, and networks necessary to pursue political careers and become leaders within their communities

**Improvement of the gender quotas to ensure a minimum representation of women in political institutions.** This legislative measure needs to be further improved in order to reflect the needs for equal representation of women, and especially women from non-majority communities in both legislative and executive branches in the country, on national and local level.

**There is an urgent need for government institutions and responsible ministries to collect and publish relevant data on the political and social participation of women from non-majority communities and general data regarding gender equality.** This would contribute to better policymaking and better approaches to improving the levels and conditions of political and social participation of these women.

**There is an urgent need for systematic approach of ex ante gender sensitive scrutiny of the laws.** The Government conducts a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) for draft legislation nonetheless, there is no gender impact assessment (GIA) within the RIA and the Parliament does not have a methodology for conducting GIAs on the laws proposed by MPs. Not all of the laws in their preparatory phase are consulted with gender-equality experts. Although public hearings are often organized in the Parliament for certain draft laws, this practice covers an insignificantly small segment of the passed laws. RIA and GIA will allow the decision-makers to consider women's different backgrounds and develop policies and legislation informed by specific circumstances faced by different community women. The Commission for Protection against Discrimination should consider the intersection between gender and ethnic background, among other identities, when addressing women's complaints on discrimination.

**There is an urgent need for post-legislative scrutiny (PLS) and tracking of implementation of legislation on gender equality and community rights.** Conducting PLS would shed light on how legislation on gender equality and community rights have worked in practice since the adoption by the Assembly and would help improve government policies, legislation and public services. It is crucial that the Assembly

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actively engages its oversight mechanism to track the implementation progress of the gender sensitive norms (oversight hearings, MPs questions, inquiries etc.). Additionally, there is a need for establishing practice of collecting information on law enforcement concerning gender issues and the impact of their implementation. Address barriers to entry: Identify and address the specific barriers that prevent women from engaging in politics, such as gender discrimination, lack of access to childcare, and limited financial resources, and implement policies to remove these barriers.

**Adoption of the new Gender Equality Law** that aims towards full gender equality in all spheres of public and private life by strengthening the position and status of women in society and enabling equal opportunities for the realization of all rights through the promotion of gender equality. The Law uses inter-sectional and gender-transformative approaches that are crucial in dealing with the stereotypes and prejudices and advocates for new national gender machinery.

**There is a need for a more significant investment of resources towards the implementation of the normative and institutional framework for gender equality in the country.** Greater efforts are needed in the implementation of the normative framework and the activation of the institutions in charge of its implementation. Conducting regular ex-post analysis in this area can significantly contribute to the practice and improvement of the framework.

**Increased investment in childcare facilities and facilities for elderly and frail persons and the engagement of additional professional staff in these institutions is needed** to allow women an optimal choice between the decision to dismiss their professional development due to care for family members. The availability of such infrastructure and its quality are the biggest obstacles to the decision and the possibility for women to effectively devote themselves to their professional careers, including political careers.



