

## GENDER PARITY AND REPRESENTATION IN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION OF THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores the issue of gender parity, focusing on manifestations of gender asymmetry and imbalance within representative bodies at both the state and municipal levels, as well as within the civil service. The analysis highlights the dynamics of power distribution between men and women, revealing how these are shaped by persistent gender stereotypes. The article also offers recommendations for promoting and sustaining gender balance in public administration.

**Keywords:** *Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities, Gender Asymmetry, Gender Parity, Civil Service, Public Administration, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).*

### INTRODUCTION

Building a modern, successful democratic state requires the creation of opportunities for equal participation of all its citizens in the social, political, and economic life of the country, which cannot be realised without striving to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender equality is one of the driving forces in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015. As the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5), gender equality has a positive impact on most of the other SDGs, contributing to an inclusive model of sustainable economic development (Rebrey, 2021).

The Kyrgyz Republic has a sufficient legal framework in place to ensure gender equality. Over the years of independence, important laws proclaiming gender equality have been enacted, e.g., the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women". Furthermore, quotas for women's representation in the country's parliament and local representative bodies have been introduced, and the National Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic on Achieving Gender Equality until 2030 has been adopted<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the National Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2018-2040 notes as one of the benchmarks that "*Kyrgyzstan ensures full and equal participation of women in governance at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life*"<sup>3</sup>.

Therefore, today it is necessary to strive for parity representation of women in the sphere of governance. This implies equal representation of women and men in legislative and political bodies, in the management of production and labour collectives, and equal participation in decision-making at different levels. This is where the state faces gender asymmetry.

Gender asymmetry refers to the unequal representation of women and men across various spheres of life. In the context of public administration, politics, and decision-making, men

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<sup>2</sup> Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyz Republic of September 16, 2022, No. 513 "On the National Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic on Achieving Gender Equality until 2030" and "National Action Plan on Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2022-2024".

<sup>3</sup> Presidential Decree of October 31, 2018 UP No. 221 "On the National Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2018-2040".

continue to dominate in leadership and strategic roles. Conversely, women are often overrepresented in lower-level or executive (i.e., implementation-focused) positions. This vertical gender segregation contributes directly to the gender pay gap, as roles typically occupied by women tend to offer lower salaries and limited opportunities for advancement (Lavrusheva, 2017).

Women's political participation continues to be constrained by a range of structural and cultural barriers. Among the key factors are persistent gender stereotypes that frame political leadership as a male domain, the unequal distribution of domestic and caregiving responsibilities, and limited access to networks of political influence. These challenges make it significantly harder for women to enter politics or pursue long-term political careers on an equal footing with men.

In response to these challenges, various leadership training programs have been developed to support and empower women. These initiatives often focus on building communication skills, enhancing political literacy, and encouraging civic engagement. However, such programs are mostly situated within civil society and frequently operate at the margins of formal political structures. As a result, they may not sufficiently prepare women for navigating the realities of institutional politics or accessing actual decision-making power.

Moreover, there appears to be a weak correlation between participation in leadership training and women's subsequent success in securing elected or appointed political positions. This disconnect may be due to the fact that training alone cannot compensate for deeply embedded systemic barriers such as party gatekeeping, lack of financial resources, and entrenched gender norms within political institutions. Without broader structural reforms, leadership development efforts risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative (OECD, 2021).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology employed in this study is grounded in both quantitative and qualitative approaches to assessing gender balance within the civil (public) service. The analysis focuses on the gender composition of representative and executive bodies at both the state and municipal levels. The study involved a systematic examination of data provided by the Central Election Commission, with particular attention to the extent of compliance with established gender quotas. In addition, official statistical data were analysed to evaluate the representation of women and men across various segments of public administration. To assess progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) — achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls — a comparative analysis was conducted using data from 2015, the year the SDGs were adopted, and from the most recent available periods of 2023 and 2024. The study further includes a regionally disaggregated analysis of gender representation in political and administrative positions at different levels of governance.

## **MAIN BODY AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Participation of Women in Representative Bodies of the Kyrgyz Republic**

The legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic establishes a 30% quota for women's participation in the country's parliament and local councils. This should be perceived as the first step to reduce gender asymmetry in representative and legislative bodies of power. But as an analysis of the composition of the country's parliament of the current and previous convocations shows, this quota is not even close to being achieved.

The composition of the Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament) by gender in percentage terms has not changed significantly over the past 9 years. In both quantitative and relative proportions, the share of women in the Parliament of the country in 2024 has decreased. There are only 18 women out of 90 deputies and the percentage of women in parliament has actually decreased being 20% of the total, whereas in 2015 it was 22% (Table 1).

**Table 1. Composition of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic (2015, 2024)**

	Women	Men	Total
2015	26	94	120
	22%	78%	
2024	18	72	90
	20%	80%	

Source: Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic website.

While 33% of the deputies on party lists are women, only one of the 36 deputies from single-mandate districts is a woman (3%).<sup>4</sup> Thus, if even the statutory quota for parliamentary representation is not met and the population's preferences among single-mandate constituencies are unambiguously given to male candidates, there are significant informal barriers to women's leadership in the country. It is likely that due to existing stereotypes, society prefers to support the participation of men rather than women in politics, believing that women are not ready and capable of "holding public office, thinking strategically and objectively, solving issues of state security and other serious problems" (Musabaeva, 2015). That is, one of the reasons for gender asymmetry in public administration is perceptions about leadership aspects. The most generalised stereotype states that the leader should be a man. He is attributed such leadership qualities as assertiveness, organisational skills, while women are considered to be "not suitable" for managerial positions, especially at the highest level.

However, women's representation in the country's main legislative body is critical. It was women parliamentarians who played a major role in passing the law on domestic violence, increased penalties for bride kidnapping and, for the first time in Kyrgyzstan's history, led to the discussion of previously taboo topics in the country - sexual and other forms of harassment in the country.

At the local level, the established quota of 30% is generally fulfilled, with city councils falling slightly short (Table 2).

**Table 2. Composition of local councils by gender (2024).**

	Women	Men	Total
City councils	289	704	993
	29.1%	70.9%	
Ayil keneshs (village councils)	2248	3143	5,391
	41.7%	58.3%	
Republic-wide	2,537	3,847	6,384
	39.7%	60.3%	

Source: Central Commission on Elections and Referendums of the Kyrgyz Republic. *Qualitative composition of deputies of local councils*, 2024. <https://shailoo.gov.kg/media/azamat/2025/01/20/uwirdt.xlsx> [Accessed 3 Feb 2025]

<sup>4</sup> This single female deputy was elected in the Pervomaisky district of Bishkek. No gender quotas apply for single-mandate districts.

The lowest percentage of women's representation is in Bishkek and Osh. Although women's representation in local councils is increasing, they still face obstacles to fully fulfill their public duties. For example, insufficient communication skills, including leadership, argumentation, and public speaking skills, as well as lack of knowledge of legislation and its implementation, limited professional competence, insecurity, and restrictive social norms, especially in rural areas (Abdyldaeva, 2023). These factors combined further hinder the progress of women's participation in local legislative and executive bodies.

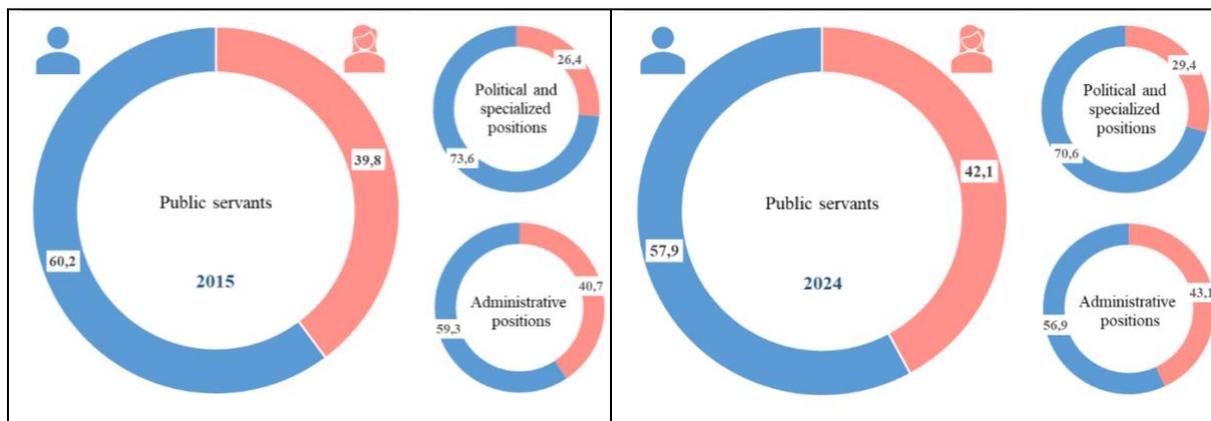
An important factor that significantly influences women's political activity is their environment – husband, parents, children, relatives, acquaintances (OSCE, 2022). This study also showed that the most frequent forms of psychological violence experienced by the interviewed women were intimidation, humiliation, verbal abuse, threats, blackmail and public discrediting. Almost a third of the women interviewed (30%) experienced economic violence due to the fact that women did not have equal access to economic resources as men. And campaigning and propaganda (meetings with voters, printing and campaign videos) are known to require significant investments that a significant number of women cannot afford. The research results also show that 97% of female respondents (!) are aware of sexual harassment of female politicians in the form of unwanted flirtations or demands of a sexual nature, letters and messages of a sexual nature. Based on this, it can be concluded that this phenomenon is extremely widespread.

Thus, to ensure the meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes, establishing quotas – while important – should only be the first step. Sustainable and effective involvement of women in politics requires additional efforts to create safe and supportive environments free from harassment, discrimination, and other barriers. The issue is not simply about increasing the number of women in politics, but about enabling their full and empowered participation.

### **Gender Balance in Civil Service**

While there are legally established gender quotas for participation in representative bodies of power, there are no such norms for public and municipal employees. In 2024, there is insignificant progress in increasing the share of women public servants in the Kyrgyz Republic (+0.3%). At this rate, it appears that Kyrgyzstan will need approximately another 70 years to achieve a reasonable gender balance in the public service. The growth rate of the share of women in administrative positions is slightly higher. But the representation of women in political and special positions shows very far from gender equality, although the trend is positive - 29.4% (+3% compared to 2015) (Figure 1).

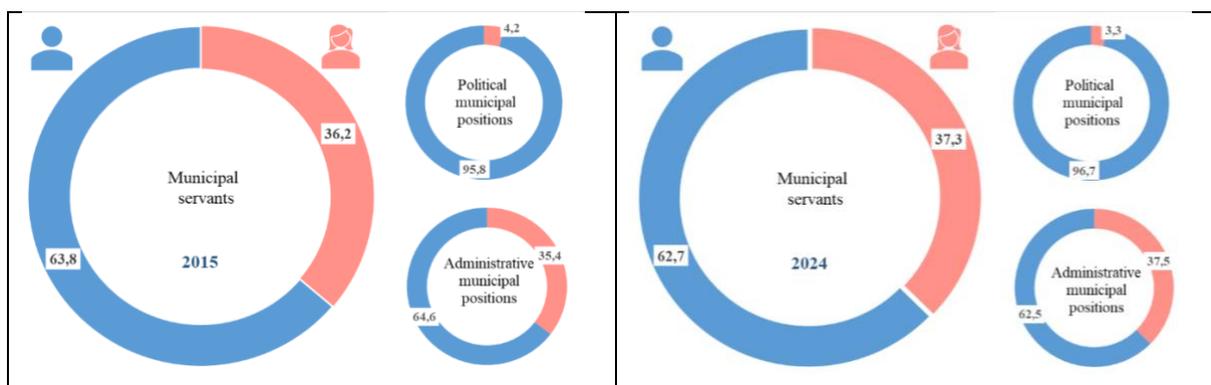
**Figure 1. Public servants by gender (2015, 2024) (%)**



Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic

The dynamics of women's representation among employees of local self-government bodies, including municipal employees, shows a slight increase (Figure 2). Overall, the percentage of women in municipal service has increased by 1.1% since 2015, in which case Kyrgyzstan will need 57 years to achieve gender balance in the municipal service. The share of women in administrative municipal positions is slowly but growing (+2.1% compared to 2015). But the figures on the share of women in political municipal positions (heads of local councils or villages (aiyl okmotu)) are simply catastrophic – only 3.3% of women, with a decrease of 0.9%.

**Figure 2. Municipal servants by gender (2015, 2024) (%)**



Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic

The ability to make decisions at the state and municipal levels by territory is a very important factor. For instance, there is not a single woman among 40 heads of districts and 7 regional plenipotentiary representatives of the President (governors). Moreover, of the 21 members of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic, only one is represented by the female gender (Minister of Education and Science). It turns out that 95% of the members of the Cabinet of Ministers of the country are men<sup>5</sup>.

There are no women among the 32 mayors of cities in Kyrgyzstan, in 13 villages (aiyl okmotu) out of 453 heads were women (as of 2021). In total, there are 16 women and 471 men in political municipal positions in the Kyrgyz Republic (as of 01.01.2024). There are no women in political municipal positions in Naryn oblast and in Bishkek and Osh cities (Table 3).

<sup>5</sup>Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic. Composition of the Cabinet of Ministers. <https://www.gov.kg/ru/gov/s/103> [Accessed 3 Feb 2025]

**Table 3. Political positions holders by gender (2015, 2024) (%)**

	Public servants				Municipal servants			
	2015		2024		2015		2024	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Batken oblast (region)	25	75	19 ↓	81	2	98	2	98
Jalal-Abad oblast	21	79	33	67	3	97	2	98
Issyk-Kul oblast	19	81	19	81	2	98	3	97
Naryn oblast	22	78	19 ↓	81	5	95	0 ↓	100
Osh oblast	15	85	24	76	5	95	1 ↓	99
Talas oblast	36	64	25 ↓	75	3	97	13	87
Chui oblast	12	88	22	78	6	94	4 ↓	96
Bishkek city	28	72	31	69	0	100	0	100
Osh city	20	80	35	65	25	75	0 ↓	100

Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic

Traditionally, the share of women prevails in departments of social orientation (table 4): Ministry of Health (75%), Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration (74%), Ministry of Education and Science (64%), Ministry of Culture, Information, Sports and Youth Policy (59%). In addition, women prevail in departments associated with maths and statistics: National Statistical Committee (73%), Ministry of Digital Development (70%), Ministry of Economy and Commerce (55%), Ministry of Finance (57%). However, of all the above-mentioned ministries and departments, only the Minister of Education is a woman, while the rest, although the share of women among the employees of these ministries is high, are headed by men.

**Table 4. Public servants employed in public authorities by gender (2015, 2024) (%)<sup>6</sup>**

	2015		2024		
	F	M	F	M	
<b>Top 5 ministries and agencies by maximum employment rate for women</b>					
Ministry of Social Development	73	27	President's Archive	91	9
National Statistical Committee	73	27	Ministry of Health	75	25
President's Archive	70	30	Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Migration	74	26
Ministry of Health	70	30	National Statistical Committee	73	27
Ministry of Culture, Information and Tourism	65	35	Ministry of Digital Development	70	30
<b>Top 5 ministries and agencies by minimum employment rate for women</b>					
State Service for Drug Control	6	94	State Service for Combating Economic Crimes	0	100

<sup>6</sup> Defence, public order and security departments are excluded.

Attorney General's Office	18	82	State Customs Service	17	83
State Customs Service	18	82	Attorney General's Office	21	79
Court of Accounts	25	75	Court of Accounts	24	76
Office of the President	25	75	Office of the President	28	72

Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis indicates that a significant challenge to achieving gender equity in public administration in the Kyrgyz Republic lies in the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions, particularly at the municipal level. Ensuring that leadership within state institutions and representative bodies reflects the gender composition of the population is essential for promoting institutional fairness, legitimacy, and responsiveness.

Achieving gender equality in politics and public administration requires more than women and men having an equal share of parliamentary seats and ministerial positions, which the Kyrgyz Republic has not yet achieved. It requires women and men to have equal access to such positions and subsequently to participate in decision-making on an equal basis. Achieving this entails creating an inclusive working environment, facilitating equal access to leadership roles (e.g., chairpersons of parliaments at all levels and parliamentary committees, mayors of cities, heads of villages (*aiyl okmotu*) and removing socio-economic barriers to political participation, for example through gender-sensitive and targeted public policies. There is a clear need to disseminate gender knowledge among the population of the country, a campaign on positive perception of women in politics and public administration, introduction of a gender quota for political positions, promotion of women in public administration, developing their leadership skills and professional competencies, as well as training of women's managerial personnel.

Therefore, it is crucial for Kyrgyzstan today to adopt a comprehensive gender-sensitive approach in the implementation of personnel policies within the state and municipal civil service. Addressing gender asymmetry in public administration and actively promoting gender equality constitute essential prerequisites for the country's sustainable development.

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