

SUMMARY REPORT

UN Global Open Day 2018

Women, Peace and Security

Focus on Women's Political Participation
in Kosovo



March 2018, Pristina





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BACKGROUND

On 5 March 2011, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and UN Women organized the eighth United Nations Global Open Day on Women, Peace and Security in Kosovo, which focused on women's political participation. Global Open Day was launched by the United Nations in 2010, with the aim of reviewing the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Today, Global Open Days are organized worldwide and provide an opportunity for women to highlight their experiences, challenges, contributions and efforts to promote peace and security.

Adopted in 2000, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 affirms that equal access and full participation of women in power structures is essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. In terms of women's political participation and representation in Kosovo institutions, there have been both gains and setbacks following the 2017 general and local elections in Kosovo. While the 30 per cent quotas under the electoral laws were met in both elections, the requirement of equal participation of men and women under the Law on Gender Equality has remained unfulfilled.

Women's representation in leadership positions at the central level has also been limited with the leadership of the main political parties remaining all-male. Within the new government, among the 21 ministers, only two are led by women. Positive developments were also observed including the fact that two of five Deputy Presidents of the Assembly of Kosovo are women and seven out of 14 parliamentary committees are chaired by women. At the local level, out of the 204 candidates competing for mayor only eight were women. There was a slight increase in the representation of women in Municipal Assemblies from 34.10% (339 women) in 2013 to 35.52% in 2017 (356 women).

A number of obstacles to women's effective participation remain, including the lack of substantial support from political parties and especially party leadership for women candidates and campaigns. The low participation of women in politics is also connected to the selection and nomination processes within political parties that influence their position as candidates and decision-makers. Deep-rooted patriarchal norms also require increased efforts to build greater political will for women's political participation.

This year's Global Open Day event aimed to raise awareness about on-going challenges and obstacles to women's political participation and formulate forward-looking recommendations to support potential policy and/or legislative change. The event brought together more than 150 women political leaders from the central and local level, government officials, representatives of the international community, civil society, academia, women's organisations and youth activists.

OPENING SESSION



During his opening address, **Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMIK, Zahir Tanin**, spoke of the insufficient empowerment of women in politics. He noted that while Kosovo has made positive progress in a number of areas, the experience of the recent elections has shown that women's effective participation in politics does not necessarily translate into effective participation in decision-making, especially in the absence of any women as deputy Prime Ministers or Mayors in Kosovo and the fact

that only two ministers out of 21, and five out of 72 deputy ministers, are women. He emphasized the centrality of women's political participation for the promotion of gender justice, and called for a greater political commitment in fighting the deep-rooted patriarchal norms and ensuring that the political climate is free of negative gender-based stereotyping and violence.

The **Vice President of the Assembly of Kosovo, Mr. Xhavit Haliti**, stated during his remarks that in contrary to the past, in the 2017 elections, almost all women candidates have been elected without the need of the quota, solely based on their human and professional merits. Mr. Haliti pointed out that Kosovo possesses a fairly comprehensive legal framework and mechanisms towards gender equality and political participation, and noted a number of laws adopted by the Assembly that ensure equal status and safeguards for women's rights. He underlined the importance of women's further empowerment based on their valuable role in society and the need for their increased engagement in Kosovo's development.





The Head of UN Women in Kosovo, Ms. Flora Macula spoke about the essential relationship between women’s political participation and a more just society. She underlined that peace and sustainable development is not possible without the equal participation and full involvement of women in all stages of development. Ms. Macula emphasized the necessity of democratizing political parties as a key factor for women’s inclusion in decision-making. She also highlighted the importance of increasing engagement with men

and boys, and called on women who are already in positions of power to create conditions to empower other women and girls.

The opening speeches laid the groundwork for three thematic sessions, which featured panel discussion followed by questions from participants. Each session provided an opportunity to highlight the experiences of women candidates, including the achievements that were made and the continuing obstacles that women continue to face in reaching greater parity in decision-making bodies at all levels in Kosovo.

SESSION 1

Capturing Women's Experiences from the 2017 General and Local Elections in Kosovo

This session provided an interactive conversation with women candidates from the 2017 general and local elections. Speakers highlighted and discussed achievements and challenges with regard to women's political participation in Kosovo.



Moderator: Ms. Flora Macula, Head of UN Women in Kosovo

Speakers:

- *Ms. Aida Dërguti*, Vice-President of the Assembly of Kosovo (Vetëvendosje)
- *Ms. Valdete Idri*zi, Candidate for mayor in South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica (PDK)
- *Ms. Mimoza Kusari-Lila*, Former mayor of Gjakovë/Đakovica municipality (Alternativa)
- *Ms. Emilija Redžepi*, President of New Democratic Party of Kosovo and former deputy Mayor of the Municipal Assembly in Prizren and former deputy Minister for Economic Development and Energy

Speaking about her journey in politics, **Ms. Aida Dërguti** described her achievements as a direct result of her work and close contact with the electorate throughout the years. She stated that she was able to triple her results at the 2017 general elections, not because she received more media coverage but because she was well-known and respected by the voters. Ms. Dërguti pointed out that political engagement of women needs to happen over a longer-term period through women's increased party activism, rather than women only entering politics when running as candidates.

For **Ms. Mimoza Kusari-Lila**, to succeed in politics, women are expected to work harder than their male counterparts and to constantly prove themselves. Speaking about her past experience as mayor, she said that she actively tried to create supporting mechanisms for empowering women and especially girls, including the introduction of gender-based budgeting in her municipality. **Ms. Emilija Redžepi** also spoke about the double-burden that women in politics experience everyday trying to balance both their professional and personal lives. She attributed her success in politics to the many years she spent as part of civil society, working closely with people and relating to their everyday challenges.

Ms. Valdete Idrizi on the other hand, spoke about how she grew stronger in the face of challenges she encountered while running for mayor of South Mitrovica and how she had to battle the general perception that a woman cannot be a mayor as she is not "tough" enough. She said she often felt frustrated when, at high-level meetings, people would talk only to the men around her but later realized that this was happening not because they did not want to see a woman in power, but because they were simply not accustomed to it. Understanding this, she said, motivated her to carry on with her work and continue advocating for women's political participation.

All panelists agreed that women who decide to embark on a political journey face higher expectations and double standards, starting from overcoming family pressures, patriarchal values and the daily challenge of proving to the electorate that they deserve to be there – and not due to the quota, but owing it to actual professionalism, vision and capacity. The panelists highlighted the need to strengthen inter-sectorial cooperation with associations of business women, civil society and decision-making structures at the central and the local level in order to create supporting mechanisms for empowering women and girls.

SESSION 2

Tackling Structural Barriers to Women's Political Participation

This session identified key factors that both enable and inhibit women's participation in politics. It explored subjects such as women candidates' access to resources and media, and the extent of support that women receive from political parties. Cultural resistance to women's participation, including the presence of gender discrimination and stereotyping within public discourse and the media were also examined.



Moderator: Ambassador Jan Braathu, Head of OSCE Mission in Kosovo

Speakers:

- *Ms. Luljeta Demolli*, Executive Director, Kosovar Gender Studies Centre (KGSC)
- *Ms. Ajete Kerceli*, Gender Specialist, Democracy for Development
- *Ms. Jeta Krasniqi*, Project Manager, Kosovo Democratic Institute

- *Ms. Jovana Radosavljević*, Executive Director, New Social Initiative

In his opening remarks, **Ambassador Jan Braathu** stated that analysis the 2017 local and central election results and the composition of the government show that many challenges remain for women in Kosovo to effectively participate in politics and decision-making. He noted the upcoming political party elections as an opportunity to encourage greater inclusion of women in the governing structures of political parties. Ambassador Braathu also stated that no society can thrive if a part of it is excluded and called on male politicians to support women, as by doing so they create opportunities for themselves. He also underlined the importance of engagement with young boys to promote an increased understanding of gender equality at an early age.

Similarly, **Ms. Luljeta Demolli** pointed out that the patriarchal mentality still persists in Kosovo and that the signal being sent to women and girls is “stay away from the decision-making”. This, she said, discourages young girls from pursuing a career in politics. She underlined the need for media and political parties to play a greater role in influencing change. **Ms. Ajete Kerqeli** stated that despite a fairly comprehensive legal framework, the patriarchal mentality still remains one of the main barriers to women’s political participation in Kosovo. She spoke about a “prevailing culture of male dominance” that does not always allow political parties to be open and encouraging to women candidates.

Ms. Jeta Krasniqi described how the problem lies with the lack of political will to empower women’s participation in all political party structures. According to her, political party leaders do not perceive women as “assets” but rather as simple “quotas” and without the political will to change this mentality, she argues, the reality will not change.

Ms. Jovana Radosavljević stated that women who enter politics are stereotyped and scrutinized regardless of the community they are part of. The general belief, she said, is that women are “too soft” to handle politics and that their place should be in the “kitchen or the laundry room”. According to her, another obstacle for women is the fact that they tend not to trust and support other women. Referring to the K-Serb community, she said that women political candidates often lack the infrastructure to carry out effective political campaigns.

Similarly, **Ms. Pranvera Lipovica** stressed the need for political parties to go beyond the mere fulfillment of the 30 per cent quota and invest more in empowering women within party structures. She also pointed to the patriarchal mentality and the media’s tendency to scrutinize women politicians far more than men, as factors contributing to women’s low participation in politics.

Panelists agreed that the main structural barriers to women’s political participation are: 1) the existence of deep-rooted patriarchal values and gender stereotypes about women’s role and position in society; 2) a lack of political will within political parties to promote women candidates,

especially within leadership roles; 3) women's lack of access to resources and media during their campaigns; and 4) the presence of gender discrimination and stereotyping within the media.

SESSION 3

Review of the Gender Quotas: Still Serving their Purpose or Reforms Needed?

This session focused on quotas for gender representation in Kosovo's election rules. It touched upon the discrepancies between the Law on Elections which requires at least 30% of candidates in each political party's candidate list to be women, and the Law on Gender Equality, which obliges political parties to take measures to achieve equal representation of women and men. Panelists also addressed the merits and effectiveness of the quota system and shared recommendations for future reforms.



Moderator: Mr. Christopher Coleman, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG)

Speakers:

- *Ms. Edi Gusia*, Chief Executive Agency for Gender Equality

- *Ms. Duda Balje*, Chairperson of the Assembly of Kosovo Committee on Human Rights, Gender Equality, Missing Persons and Petitions
- *Ms. Valdete Daka*, Head of the Central Election Commission
- *Mr. Hilmi Jashari*, Ombudsman, Ombudsperson Institution

DSRSG Christopher Coleman opened the session by pointing out that gender quotas have directly contributed to women's participation in Kosovo, and argued that without them it is unlikely that women would have been able to achieve 30% representation. Nevertheless, he pointed out that challenges with quotas remain which are well documented internationally. DSRSG Coleman also noted that too often, parties recruit women simply to fulfill the legal quota requirement rather than based on the fact that equal participation of women and men in decision-making is a necessary condition for the better functioning of a democratic society.

Ms. Edi Gusia stated that despite the existence of a strong legislative framework in Kosovo, further measures are needed to ensure equal participation of women in politics and decision-making. According to her, the focus should be on implementing a 50 per cent quota in the Assembly and revising all laws to align with the Gender Equality Law. **Ms. Duda Balja** spoke about how she was first elected thanks to the quota and is currently serving her third mandate as a result of her own engagement with the community. She argued in favour of a 50 per cent quota, stressing that the political scene in general and the Assembly in particular would benefit from having more women.

Ms. Valdete Daka stated that the introduction of quotas has allowed women to occupy positions in the Assembly that otherwise would have been unthinkable. She stressed the need for an amendment to the Law on Elections in order to make it mandatory that all candidates' lists include 50 per cent women. She also underscored the need for a change of mentality, arguing that there needs to be more interaction with men and boys on such issues. **Mr. Hilmi Jashari** pressed on the need to ensure implementation of the Gender Equality Law. He noted that, although institutions are responsible for the implementation of the 50 per cent quota, currently they are not held accountable for failing to do so.

Panellists agreed that there is a need to: 1) undertake electoral reform, review all laws, and make the necessary amendments in order to meet the standards set by the Law on Gender Equality; 2) increase accountability of authorities for the non-implementation of the Law on Gender Equality; 3) ensure internal democratization of political parties by appointing women to leadership positions and providing them with greater support during their campaigns, 4) encourage political parties to work upstream and engage young women and men early on in life so that they can develop their political experience and exposure over a longer period and better prepare themselves to enter politics; and 5) maintain the use of gender quotas in Kosovo but ensure in parallel that broader

social and cultural issues are addressed in order to remove structural barriers to women's political participation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In his concluding remarks, SRSG Tanin identified three requirements that remain crucial in promoting women's effective political participation in Kosovo: 1) fighting deep-rooted patriarchal norms and ensuring that the political climate is free of negative gender-based stereotyping and violence; 2) ensuring substantial support from political parties and especially party leadership for women candidates; and 3) increasing support for elected women and amplifying their voices, in order to heighten their impact on decision-making processes.

The event **reaffirmed** the belief that the democratization of political parties is key to enhancing women's political participation and **emphasized** the need for greater political will to ensure that the political climate is free of gender discrimination and bias. Discussions **highlighted** both successes and challenges related to women's participation following the 2017 general and local elections in Kosovo, unanimously **stressing** that more needs to be done to strengthen women's effective representation in politics and decision-making, particularly in senior positions and leadership roles within political parties and the government. Participants **agreed** that while a strong legislative framework exists to support women's political participation, increased measures are needed to align the gender quotas set out under the election-related laws with the Law on Gender Equality.

All agreed that there is need for change and that engagement with men and young boys in challenging patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes about women's participation is a critical requirement for achieving such change.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Legislative and Policy:

- ➡ The Assembly of Kosovo should: a) harmonize all legislation in light of the gender equality standards set by the Law on Gender Equality, including setting 50 per cent quotas in the Laws on General and Local Elections, and b) hold the authorities accountable for not implementing the Law on Gender Equality through enforcement sanctions and penalties;
- ➡ The Government should assess, and where necessary reform, the electoral system to ensure women's greater participation;

- ➔ Governmental institutions and agencies should set specific targets and implement measures to increase the number of women in leadership and decision making positions;
- ➔ Women in decision-making should be proactive in promoting the gender equality agenda and ensure that gender mainstreaming is part of all institutional strategies and working plans;
- ➔ While it is important to continue to analyze and report on gender related statistics, it is crucial to understand the complexity of the challenges that affect these numbers, and to take concrete action to address them. Quotas should not be seen as a mere obligation, but rather as a way to enable more democratic decision-making.

Social norms and behaviors:

- ➔ Starting from the family, there is a need to address the patriarchal mentality and counter the societal perceptions about women's participation in politics and decision-making;
- ➔ Society should recognize and accept that sharing work and family responsibilities between women and men is critical to women's involvement in politics;
- ➔ Educational institutions should develop a civic curriculum that advocates and promotes gender equality to boys and girls from an early stage, so as to ensure that future generations are more receptive to women's equal participation;
- ➔ Media should offer equal and unbiased coverage to women candidates before and after elections as well as undertake increased efforts to ensure gender-sensitive reporting;
- ➔ Media should include gender-related issues in election debate discussions and do more to reflect gender equality within their reporting on elections;
- ➔ Civil society organizations, through projects, should provide training programmes that increase women's ability to participate in and influence policy-making processes.

Political will and leadership:

- ➔ Political parties should review party structures and internal processes with the aim of identifying and subsequently addressing any element that obstructs women's participation;
- ➔ Political parties should ensure that gender issues and priorities are incorporated in their political agendas;
- ➔ The leaders of political parties should ensure sustained engagement and support for women candidates, including equal resources and access to media. Gender equality should not just be discussed within closed women groups but should be a priority agenda item for political party meetings and procedures;
- ➔ Political parties should develop initiatives to ensure women's full participation in all party policy-making structures and electoral nominating processes;
- ➔ Political parties need to do more to tackle the patriarchal mentality, enhance their internal democracy and be more inclusive and less discriminatory.