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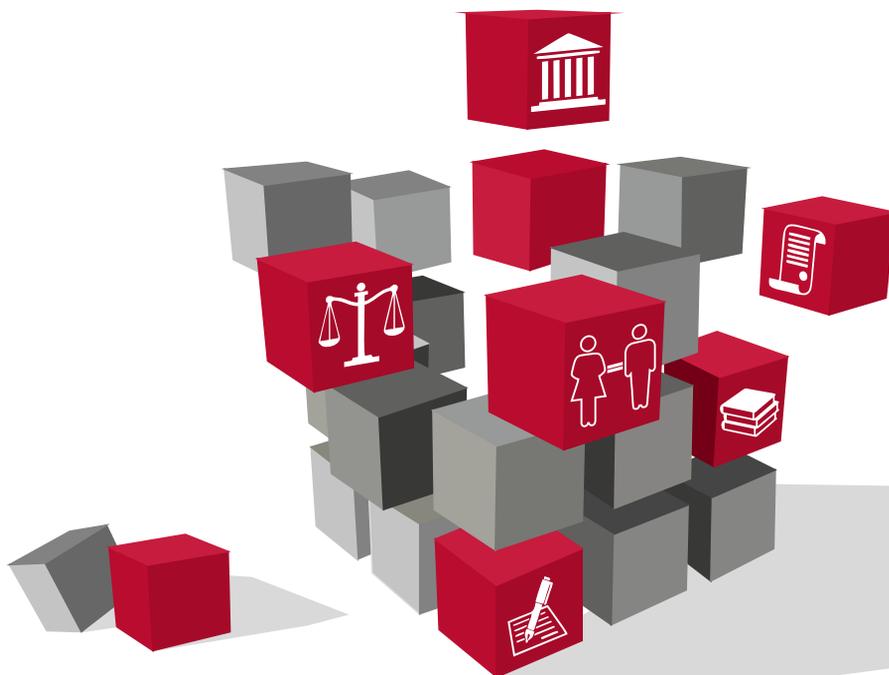
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NDI
NATIONAL
DEMOCRATIC
INSTITUTE

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

ANALYSIS





The analysis has been prepared within the framework of the project on
PROMOTING MORE GENDER-SENSITIVE LEGISLATION IN ARMENIA

The project “Promoting More Gender-Sensitive Legislation in Armenia” is implemented by OxYGen Foundation in cooperation with National Democratic Institute (NDI).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARF	Armenian Revolutionary Federation
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CCP	<i>Civil Contract Party</i>
CEC	Central Electoral Commission
CEDAW	UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CoE	Council of Europe
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EU	European Union
FSJP	<i>For Social Justice Party</i>
HDI	Human Development Index
LSG	Local Self-Government Body
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NA	National Assembly
NDI	National Democratic Institute
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSCE/ODIHR	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
PAP	<i>Prosperous Armenia Party</i>
RA	Republic of Armenia
RA MLSI	RA Ministry of Labor and Social Issues
RLP	<i>Rule of Law Party</i>
RPA	Republican Party of Armenia
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SSA	Statistical Service of Armenia
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN HDI	UN Human Development Index
WEF	World Economic Forum



INTRODUCTION

Rights enshrined in laws and envisioned by policies can affect men and women differently and unequally. Sidelining and ignoring special needs and capacities of women and men significantly reduces the effectiveness and impact of laws and policies and can deepen the inequality, thus bringing about negative consequences for both women and men and society in general.

The joint project of *OxYGen* Foundation and National Democratic Institute aims at promoting gender mainstreaming of and incorporation of gender-sensitive approaches into legislative work in Armenia through close cooperation with Members of Parliament in Armenia and a number of political parties, which are not represented in the Parliament. The project will provide political figures and experts with the opportunity to not only focus on consequences of gender inequality, but also reveal and correct the processes underlying and causing that inequality.

The project envisions numerous measures to overcome the noted problems, including promotion of women's political participation in Armenia through capacity building of women Members of Parliament, their staff, political parties, incorporation of gender equality principles into intraparty development, as well as through gender mainstreaming of legislation on political parties and electoral laws.

Hence, an analysis of the situation in Armenia with women's political participation has been selected as the first step in the implementation of the project, which will, in its turn, serve as a basis for discussion of the necessity of gender approaches with political parties.

This research has been implemented on the basis of national and international basic documents on women's rights and gender equality signed and ratified by the Republic of Armenia, including the *UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW, 1979), *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995) and *Agenda 2030: Sustainable Development Goals* (2015).

The research reflects on the achievements and still existing problems in the area of women's political participation in the Republic of Armenia recorded over the past five years, as well as contains recommendations targeting the improvement of the situation.





PART 1. THE ISSUE OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL BASIC DOCUMENTS

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the UN Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952), which precedes them, pay special attention to women's political participation and, specifically, their participation in governing bodies and decision-making processes.

For example, in reference to women's participation in governing processes, Beijing Declaration states that *“women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace.”*

The same document highlights the imperative of maintaining a balance between women and men in governing bodies as follows:

Women's representation (in consonance with their proportion in the population) in the system of governance and especially in elected bodies is an integral part of human rights and an important element of social justice.

- ▶ A balanced representation of women and men in the system of governance is a precondition for development and establishment of democracy and sustainable development of the country.
- ▶ Gender imbalance casts doubt on the legitimacy of governing bodies and especially of the Parliament as an institution of representative democracy.
- ▶ Women's participation in the governing and elected bodies provides the opportunity to formulate and to effectively defend the rights and objective interests of female representatives of the population.
- ▶ Ensuring the representation of “the critical mass”¹ of women in governing bodies leads to humanization of the political agenda, promotes the social dimension of adopted decisions and formation of a new and more democratic culture of decision-making.
- ▶ Women's participation in the system of governance is an important determinant and indicator of an effective use of human resources.
- ▶ Women's engagement increases the governance effectiveness, helps the introduction of the principles of accountability and transparency, and reduces corruption.²

¹ Beijing Platform for Action defines at least 30% representation of women in governing bodies as “the critical mass,” which impacts the decision-making procedures and content.

² A number of research works substantiate the direct link between high level of women's representation and low level of corruption.



It is noteworthy that Beijing Platform for Action notes among the factors impeding women's participation in the system of governance the traditional posture, discriminatory approaches and practices, which are often characteristic of the work of political parties and state structures, women's double workload, negative stereotypes in the public consciousness perceptions of women's activism, which are inter alia shaped by mass media...

In fact, it was the Beijing Platform for Action, which, for the first time, emphasized the special role of political parties in ensuring women's participation in governing bodies and decision-making processes and proposed specific recommendations to them.

Another basic document, the UN Convention³ on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which Armenia ratified in 1993, obligates the States Parties “to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country” and to ensure women's political rights, which include the following noted in Article 7:

- a) *To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;*
- b) *To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;*
- c) *To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country. (Article 7)*

The Convention also envisions special temporary measures to overcome gender imbalance (Article 4), the so-called “quota.”

The pivotal approaches of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women were first reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and later also in the Sustainable Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially, through the latter's Goal 5 *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*. The issue of women's representation at the decision-making level and leadership positions is further specified through the indicators outlined by Target 5.5 of Goal 5, which define women's representation in leadership positions of legislative, local self-government, and executive bodies.

It is noteworthy that the analysis of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the report on *Gender equality: Women's rights in review 25 years after Beijing*⁴ published by UN Women in January of 2020 was carried out in the context of the Sustainable Development Agenda.

³ The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women http://www.un.am/res/UN%20Treaties/III_8.pdf

⁴ Gender equality: Women's rights in review 25 years after Beijing <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/womens-rights-in-review>



PART 2. ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE AREA OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In international practice, the percentage of women's representation in parliament is considered one of the important indicators, which reflects the advancement of gender equality in the socio-political life. The degree of realization of women's right to elect and to be elected is indicative, on the one hand, of the status of women, their influence on the formation of political institutions and political decision-making processes and, on the other hand, of the stability of democratic processes.

From this perspective, the achievements recorded in the area of women's political participation in Armenia are connected with the introduction of the requirement to promote de facto equality stipulated in the Constitution and the increase in the percentage of women's representation in the legislature and local self-government system, which has been conditioned by continuous application of gender quotas.

2.1. Introduction of the requirement to promote de facto equality into the RA Constitution

The constitutional changes of 2015, which resulted in the adoption of the parliamentary governance system, were a new step in terms of the state's responsibility for realization of women's rights.

In particular, the new RA Constitution⁵ provides not only for prohibition of discrimination (Article 29) and equality of women's and men's rights (Article 30), but also for the requirement to de facto realize those rights, which, in essence, is an important step towards upholding the principle of equal rights and equal opportunities. Thus, Article 87 includes "the promotion of de facto equality between women and men" among the main goals of the state policy. It is important that those goals are to be pursued not only by state bodies, but also by local self-government bodies within the framework of their jurisdiction and possibilities. At the same time, Article 87 of the basic law obligates the Government to provide information to the National Assembly every year about the realization of the goals defined by Article 86, including about actions taken to promote de facto equality between women and men.

2.2. Continuous application of gender quotas in elections to the National Assembly

The past five years have seen positive trends with introduction of gender-sensitive norms and mechanisms in the RA Electoral Code. The majority of the provisions secured in the electoral legislation for the purpose of increasing women's representation at the decision-making level are the result of lobbying efforts by women's NGOs. They include:

⁵ <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docID=102510>





- ▶ In 2016, the RA Electoral Code stipulated the increase in the gender quota with the following “precise” wording: *“In the first part of the national electoral list of a political party, alliance of political parties and each of the political parties included in the alliance, the number of representatives of each sex, starting from the 1st place in the list, shall not exceed 70 per cent in each integer group of 3 (1-3, 1-6, 1-9 and subsequently up to the end of the list).”*⁶ The quota requirement applies to both national and territorial lists used in parliamentary elections, as well as to local self-government elections in Yerevan, Gyumri, and Vanadzor, which are conducted through the electoral system of proportional representation.⁷ At the same time, according to the transitional and final provisions and, in particular, Points 14, 15, and 16 of Article 144 of the Electoral Code, the above noted positive changes will go into effect only in 2021, and before that in all elections conducted in 2017 and 2018 the provision for 25/75 proportion applied.
- ▶ The Electoral Code envisages certain safeguards for maintenance of the quota in the elected body. According to these safeguards “if, as a result of giving up the mandate, the number of representatives of any sex in a given faction decreases, and, as a result, will be lower than 25 per cent, the mandate passes to the next candidate of this underrepresented sex.”⁸
- ▶ According to the changes to the RA Electoral Code adopted in 2020, in addition to Yerevan, Gyumri, and Vanadzor local council elections, the quota defining at least 30/70 proportion for candidates’ sexes in party lists will also be used in local self-government elections conducted on the basis of electoral system of proportional representation in communities with more than 4000 eligible voters.
- ▶ The RA Electoral Code secures a requirement on certain proportion of sexes in the composition of Central Electoral Commission and Territorial Electoral Commissions: *“The number of representatives of each sex in the composition of Central Electoral Commission shall not be less than two.”*⁹ *“The number of representatives of each sex in the composition of a Territorial Electoral Commission shall not be less than two.”*¹⁰

As a result of the increase in the quota, over the past five years the number of women in the RA National Assembly has doubled increasing from 10.7% to 23.5%, thanks to which Armenia has improved its position in the table of ratings of Inter-Parliamentary Union ranking now 84th among 193 countries. As compared to its 160th place recorded in 2015, this constitutes a significant though not yet satisfactory progress given the 50/50 proportion envisioned by the UN.

⁶ Points 4 and 10, Article 83, the RA Electoral Code <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=109081>

⁷ Article 130.2, the RA Electoral Code <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=109081>

⁸ Article 100.3, the RA Electoral Code <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=109081>

⁹ Article 42.2, the RA Electoral Code <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=109081>

¹⁰ Article 43.2, the RA Electoral Code <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=109081>



Another positive achievement is the fact that as a result of the 2018 snap parliamentary elections, a larger number of representatives of younger generations made their way into the Parliament (MP average age is 35 years old). This number also included women who had been the driving force of the velvet revolution and, hence, it was only logical that the electoral lists had been compiled with their involvement. Nineteen per cent of elected female MPs are under 30 years of age, and 58% within the 30-40 age group. For comparison, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union data, parliaments across the world include 2.2% of MPs under 30, and 28.1% aged 45 years old.

The increase in the number of women in the Parliament has also affected Armenia's position in terms of Gender Gap Index calculated by World Economic Forum in the four pivotal areas (economy, politics, education, and health care). If, in 2015, according to the data of the Global Gender Gap Report¹¹, Armenia ranked 105th among 145 countries, according to the 2020 report¹², it occupies 98th place among 153 countries. This progress is largely due to the improvement of the number of women in the Parliament. As a result, Armenia moved from 125th place to 114th during 2015-2020.

If we look at the dynamics of women's representation in the Parliament of Armenia over the past 25 years, we can see that it has increased almost four times, from 6% in 1995 to 23.5% in 2020. This growth is entirely due to the gender quota secured in the RA Electoral Code, which has increased from 5% to 25% over the same period.

The dynamics of women's representation in the RA National Assembly in 1995-2020

Year	Convocation	Introduced quota	Women's representation in the Parliament
1995	1 st convocation	-	6 %
1999	2 nd convocation	-	3.1 %
2003	3 rd convocation	5%	5.3 %
2007	4 th convocation	15%	9.2 %
2012	5 th convocation	20%	10.7 %
2017	6 th convocation	25%	18%
2019	7 th convocation	25%	24%

Comparing Armenia's indicators with the achievements of other countries, we can state that the current 23.5% of women in the National Assembly is approaching the average indicator of women's representation in parliaments across the world.

¹¹<http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/>

¹²http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf





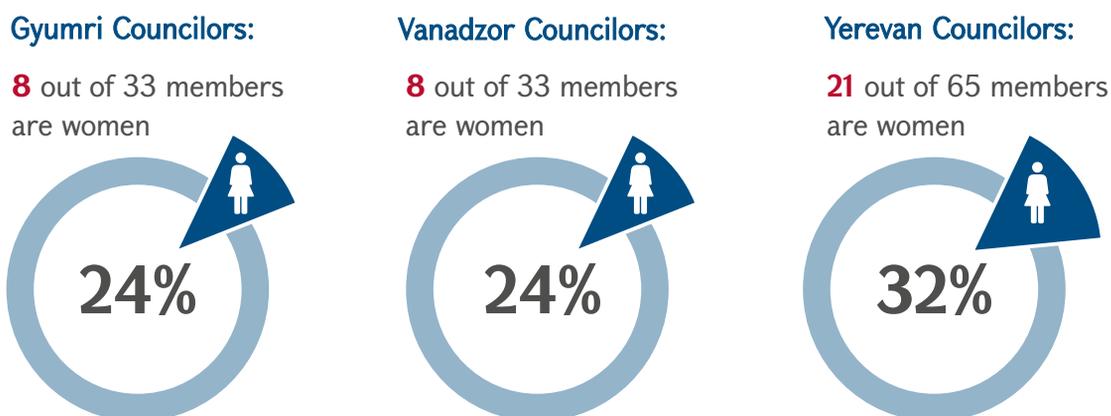
According to the data of Inter-Parliamentary Union, gender quotas continue to remain the most important factors of success, which ensure women's higher representation in parliaments.

2.3. The application of a gender quota in elections to local self-government bodies

The application of a gender quota in elections to local self-government bodies (LSG) based on the electoral system of proportional representation has led to a considerable increase in women's representation at municipal councils of Yerevan, Gyumri, and Vanadzor.

In particular, thanks to the application of the 25% quota, women's representation among Yerevan municipal councilors has increased up to 32%, and among Gyumri and Vanadzor councilors up to 24% at a time when the average indicator of women's representation in the LSG system/among LSG councilors stands at 10.7%.

Women in the composition of LSG councilors elected on the basis of proportional representation electoral system¹³



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In 2018, for the first time in the history of the Third Republic of Armenia, a female mayor was elected. Although according to evaluations by political scientists, Diana Gasparyan would not have achieved such success if she had not been nominated by the leading force of *Velvet Revolution*, this victory corresponded to the public's expectations, according to which, the political force that came to power thanks to active participation of women in the velvet revolution should encourage women's broader participation in the country's governance.



In September 2018, the elections to Yerevan City Council held on the basis of proportional representation were unprecedented in terms of women's ambitions since for the first time women headed the lists of three out of twelve political forces running for Yerevan mayor's position: RA MP, PAP representative Naira Zohrabyan, President of *Yerkir Tsirani* Party Zaruhi Postanjyan and architect Anahit Tarkhanyan from *Yerevan Public Alliance*. As it is known, not only Yerevan has never had a female mayor, but also before that, only two women had been nominated for that position (Heghine Bishryan in 2009 and Zaruhi Postanjyan in 2017).

2.4. Women's participation in the area of governance as a priority of the RA gender strategy

In 2019, albeit with delay¹⁴, the Government adopted *the 2019-2023 Strategy and Action Plan for Implementation of Gender Policies in the Republic of Armenia*¹⁵, which defines five priorities of state gender policies:

- ▶ Perfecting the national machinery for women's advancement, equal participation of women and men in the area of governance and decision-making,
- ▶ Overcoming gender discrimination in the socio-economic area, expanding women's economic opportunities,
- ▶ Women's and men's full and effective participation and expansion of equal opportunities in the area of education and science,
- ▶ Expanding equal opportunities for women and men in the area of health care,
- ▶ Preventing gender discrimination.

It is noteworthy that the strategy views the issue of women's participation in the area of governance and decision-making in unison with the perfection of the national machinery, which is a justified approach taking into consideration that the Beijing Platform for Action views the existence of an effective national machinery in the state governance system as a guarantee for development, implementation and oversight of policies contributing to the improvement of the status of women.

Of special attention is worthy the fact that the strategy envisions expanding the field of the gender quota application embracing not only the legislative body, but also the state governance system. We should note that according to the data of the sociological survey on *Men and Gender Equality in Armenia*¹⁶ carried out

¹⁴ The previous *2011-2015 Strategic Program on Gender Policies of the Republic of Armenia* ended in 2015.

¹⁵ <http://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=151906>

¹⁶ The sociological survey on *Men and Gender Equality in Armenia*, UNFPA, 2016
https://armenia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MEN-AND-GENDER-EQUALITY_ARM_July_2017_finalized_0.pdf



back in 2016, 63.3% of respondents were in favor of introducing quotas in the RA Government and LSGs and 65.9% in business, in positions important in terms of decision-making. Hence, the expectations of the strategy correspond to the public mood.

Part of the objectives envisaged under the strategy's priority on *Preventing Gender Discrimination* is also concerned with women's political participation. In particular, these are as follows:

- (1) *Enrooting gender non-discriminatory approaches in the country's economic, social and political spheres, evaluating the situation of women and men, and revealing differences existing between their statuses;*
- (2) *Overcoming gender stereotypes and awareness raising of the importance of women's and men's balanced participation in solution of the country's political problems and sustainable economic development;*
- 4) *Maintaining gender-disaggregated, systematized and unified statistics, including on groups receiving state services...*

It should be noted that contrary to the trends of an anti-gender movement that started in Armenia in 2013 and attempts to distort the meaning of the term "gender," the new strategy makes use of gender terminology, which is an important step towards gender equality and correct interpretation of other terms associated with it.

2.5. Summarization and promulgation of sex - disaggregated data by the Central Electoral Commission (CEC)

An important achievement is the publication of the booklet on *Statistical Data: Women's and Men's Participation in 2018 Electoral Processes*¹⁷ by Armenia's CEC in 2019, which summarizes sex-disaggregated data on all participants in the electoral processes, including constituents, voting participants, MP candidates, members of electoral commissions of all levels, observers, and accredited journalists. It is the first and a very valuable attempt through which the public has been presented with not only sex-disaggregated statistics on all participants in elections, but also has been able to see the so far neglected role of CEC in promoting women's political participation and organizing all-inclusive electoral processes¹⁸.

¹⁷ <https://res.elections.am/images/doc/Statistics2018.pdf>

¹⁸ The publication has been made possible through the initiative and assistance of the project on *Support to the Electoral Process in Armenia* (SEPA) implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Inclusive Electoral Processes: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Participation <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/7/inclusive-electoral-processes>



A guarantee for ensuring the continuity of this positive experience is the fact that Point 10 of the fifth priority, i.e. Preventing Gender Discrimination, of *the 2019-2023 Action Plan on Implementation of Gender Policies in the Republic of Armenia*¹⁹ envisions:

“Collection and summarization of statistical information on gender situation in the RA social, economic, public, and political areas /as well as on female to male ratio of persons who have participated in elections/ according to the annual plan for statistical works,” with a co-executor being the RA Central Electoral Commission (by consent).

2.6. Women’s Agenda for political parties running in parliamentary elections

The document on *Women’s Agenda for Development*²⁰ was first developed²¹ and presented to political forces during the 2017 regular parliamentary elections and later, in the lead-up to the 2018 snap parliamentary elections, it was amended with the aim of inviting the attention of parties and party alliances running in the elections to issues concerned with women’s and men’s equality.

The issues raised in the *Agenda* were based on the RA Constitution, laws and programs adopted within the scope of the Conceptual Framework for the RA Gender Policies, international obligations of the Republic of Armenia, the RA statistical data, and on recent studies and sociological surveys carried out in the republic. The agenda was compiled in accordance with different areas based on the structural approaches and key areas outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action. The process was guided by the conviction that under the conditions of parliamentary system of governance it is the political parties represented in the RA National Assembly that will be responsible for improvement of the legislative field and for the policies implemented by the executive power.

During the pre-election debates organized around *Women’s Agenda*²², it was suggested that the political parties purporting to be represented in the legislative body clarify their attitude towards issues ensuring women’s and men’s equal participation in the country’s development processes with the expectation that in the event of their election they will not only raise these questions from the Parliament’s tribune, but will also propose solutions to them. *Women’s Agenda* also served as a basis for the RA National Assembly-Civil Society Cooperation Platform.

¹⁹ <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=134904>

²⁰ In Armenian: <http://womennet.am/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Womens-Agenda-2018-arm-min.pdf> and in English <https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Womens-Agenda-ENG.pdf>

²¹ *Women’s Agenda for Development* has been developed within the framework of the project *EQUAL: Promoting Women’s Political Participation at the National Level* implemented by OxYGen Foudation in cooperation with experts of ProMedia-Gender NGO and WomenNet.am web site with the financial support of the Government of Sweden.

²² <http://womennet.am/women-agenda-debate-1/>





2.7. NA-CSO Cooperation Platform for women's and men's equal rights and opportunities

On March 8, 2019, an NA-CSO Memorandum of Understanding²³ was signed on formation of an open platform of bilateral cooperation between civil society organizations and the RA National Assembly of the seventh convocation²⁴ for ensuring women's and men's equal rights and equal opportunities.

The goal of the Cooperation Platform is to join the efforts of the RA legislative power and representatives of civil society in ensuring de facto equality of women's and men's rights and opportunities. The document *Women's Agenda for Development* presented to political forces in the pre-election period served as a basis for cooperation.

Parties to the Memorandum of Understanding agreed and expressed willingness:

- ▶ *To ensure, within the framework of their competence, civil society participation in legislative initiatives aimed at legal empowerment of women in the political, economic, and social spheres, as well as at the promotion of women's and men's equal rights and equal opportunities;*
- ▶ *To carry out, with defined periodicity, joint public events to promote equal participation of women and men in the country's development processes;*
- ▶ *To consult on issues highlighted in the document Women's Agenda for Development²⁵ and other issues of common interest, as well as to discuss the process of implementation of jointly carried out activities and plan for future joint activities.*

The wrap-up of the Platform's activities over a one-year period demonstrated that during that period discussions were held on six topics, five proposals put forth by the Platform were transformed into legislative initiatives and adopted, and nine more proposals for legislative initiatives are underway. The Platform's activities are continuing with the framework of the program on *Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia*.²⁶

²³ <https://havasari.infohub.am/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/%D5%93%D5%B8%D5%AD%D5%A8%D5%B4%D5%A2%D5%BC%D5%B6%D5%B4%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B7%D5%A1%D5%A3%D5%AB%D6%80.pdf>

²⁴ The memorandum was signed by Lena Nazaryan, the RA NA Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the RA National Assembly and Margarita Hakobyan, Executive Director of OxYGen Foundation as an initiating organization, and heads of more than twenty organizations dealing with women's issues.

²⁵ <http://womennet.am/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Womens-Agenda-2018-arm-min.pdf>

²⁶ The goal of the program is to strengthen Armenia's legislature so that it can perform its key functions of development of laws, oversight and representativeness. The goal is also to support the Parliament so that the public administration system utilizes new tools and mechanisms promoting improvement of work quality, transparency and inclusiveness, as well as development of gender-sensitive policies. The program is jointly implemented by the United Nations Development Programme, the RA National Assembly, the OxYGen Foundation, and the International Center for Human Development with support from the United Kingdom's Good Governance Fund and the Government of Sweden.



2.8. Formation of the Council on Women's Affairs

In November of 2019, by the decision of the RA Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, the Council on Women's Affairs was created. It is chaired by the RA Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan.

Involved in the Council are the RA Minister for Labor and Social Issues and a number of deputy ministers, the RA MPs, officials from other departments and representatives of non-governmental organizations. To organize the current activities of the Council, a working group was established and its composition on an individual basis was endorsed.²⁷

The Council was created with the purpose of coordinating work related to women's issues and forming a national machinery for ensuring women's and men's equal rights and equal opportunities. In fact, it is expected that the Council will serve as a national machinery for ensuring gender equality in Armenia, although, according to expert assessments, it does not correspond to the requirements of a full-fledged and effective national machinery proposed in the Beijing Platform for Action.²⁸

2.9. Programs implemented with the support of international structures

Over the past twenty years, women's organizations have implemented numerous projects in Armenia, which have been aimed at expansion of women's political participation and included work with parties.

The following are the most noteworthy:

- ▶ Analyses carried out by different organizations on women's participation in all parliamentary elections held from 2000 to 2018. These analyses were conducted with support of the OSCE Yerevan Office and a number of other international organizations;
- ▶ Since 2000, *High-Level Political Courses* program of Women's Leadership School established by the Association of Women with University Education for activists of political parties and non-governmental organizations;
- ▶ Publication of the newspaper *Women and Politics* by the ProMedia-Gender NGO since 2007 with support of different international organizations and the WomenNet.am informational and analytical web site created in 2011;
- ▶ The manual *From Women Political Figures to Women Political Figures* prepared within the framework of the British Council's program on *Wo/Men in Politics* in 2010 and Women's Leadership Forum created within the framework of the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) programs during the same period;

²⁷ [https://www.e-gov.am/u_files/file/decrees/varch/2019/11/19-1740\(1\).pdf](https://www.e-gov.am/u_files/file/decrees/varch/2019/11/19-1740(1).pdf)

²⁸ Beijing Platform for Action defines the *National Machinery (NM)* as "the central policy-coordinating unit inside government," which should be at the highest possible level of government and headed by a Cabinet Minister. The NM high status should be ensured through adequate resources, competence and governing capacity. The NM mandate is to support the efforts of all state structures in integrating gender equality approach in all policy areas. *Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration*. Fourth World Conference on Women. N.Y.: UN DPI, 1996, para. 201-203, 296



- ▶ Programs on women's participation in local self-government bodies implemented by UNDP and other organizations since 2011;
- ▶ The initiative on *Women Support and Exchange Programs between Local and International Structures* implemented in 2015 through the assistance of the OSCE Warsaw Office and the Eastern Partnership Estonia Office. Within the framework of the initiative, gender plans were developed for a number of parties in Armenia;
- ▶ The research on *Snap Parliamentary Elections – 2018: Peculiarities of Women's Electoral Behavior* carried out in 2018 within the framework of the *OxYGen* Foundation's project *Elections for All* supported by the European Union and a number of other research works concerned with women's political participation.

The projects and programs in progress in 2020 include:

- ▶ The project **Women in Politics**, whose main goal is to expand women and youth's participation in politics especially through promotion of their engagement in community development processes. One of the main directions of the project also includes cooperation with political parties at the local level. The project is implemented through cooperation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures, and *OxYGen* Foundation, with the financial support of the United Kingdom's *Good Governance* Fund.
- ▶ **KATARINE Women's Political Leadership Program**, which is inspired by the personality of Katarine Zalyan Manukyan, who, in 1919, was one of the first Armenian female MPs. This continuous program, which offers training and orientation over a period of twelve months, helps women develop a successful political career and leadership skills. It is expected that within the framework of the program 60 women will acquire political leadership skills. The program is implemented by National Democratic Institute (NDI).
- ▶ **Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia**. The goal of the program is to strengthen Armenia's legislature so that it can perform its key functions of development of laws, oversight and representativeness, as well as carry out gender mainstreaming of the processes ongoing in the Parliament. The program is jointly implemented by the United Nations Development Programme, the RA National Assembly, the *OxYGen* Foundation, and the International Center for Human Development with support from the United Kingdom's *Good Governance* Fund and the Government of Sweden.





- ▶ **Women and Youth for Innovative Local Development** project is part of four-year strategic partnership framework between UNDP, GIZ and CoE within “Improvement of the local self-governance system in Armenia” programme. The project is funded by SDC and implemented in partnership with RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure. The goal of the project is to strengthen the accountability, effectiveness, efficiency and inclusiveness of the local self-government system in Armenia in a regionally and socially balanced manner. The main directions of the project include: 1) inclusive municipal sectoral services designed, implemented and monitored improving the quality of lives of community residents; 2) active youth in the communities empowered as enablers of local democracy and women support groups through empathy-building leadership models; and 3) leadership potential and skills of women in enlarged municipalities are advanced vis-a-vis community development processes and ongoing reforms
- ▶ **The Gender Equality in Public Administration of Armenia (GEPAA)** project is implemented at the level of the national/ central government in direct collaboration with the Deputy Prime Minister Office. The project has been initiated in 2019 and is aimed at supporting the gender dimension of the public administration system in Armenia. The project, in particular, evolves around revamping the recruitment procedures and practices in selected public bodies to promote women's role in higher levels of public administration; enhancing the training, staff development and coaching functions with focus on promoting young women cadre; capacity development of public sector staff with focus on gender component; modernization of civil service and introduction of in-house gender-sensitive practices; review of the legislation regulating civil and public service through the gender prism. Special attention is paid to the elaboration and introduction of evidence-based recommendations and solutions in line with the *Draft Public Administration Reform Strategy* and *SIGMA Baseline Measurement Report: The Principles of Public Administration* to support the on-going public administration reform process.



PART 3. PROBLEMS IN THE AREA OF WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

3.1 General situation

In Armenia, women have a powerful potential from a professional and educational perspective. They make up a majority among persons with higher education.²⁹ However, their presence at the political decision-making, local self-government, territorial and public administration top levels, as well as at the party leadership bodies is far from being satisfactory. Not only it does not match the 40/60³⁰ proportion (now 50/50) securing the critical mass as pointed out by the UN in 2003, as well as the principles stipulated in national documents, but also the number of men in leadership positions of the legislative, executive, judicial powers and local self-government political and public units exceeds that of women by 2.8 times³¹ at a time when women make up 57% of specialists with higher qualifications, and men 43%.³² Thus, women’s potential is not fully utilized in the area of decision-making and the country’s governance.

In legislative power³³
▶ Female MPs make up 23.5% in the composition of the RA National Assembly.
In executive power³⁴
▶ Only one of twelve Ministers in the RA Government is female (8, 3%),
▶ Only 13 of 45 Deputy Ministers of twelve Ministries are women (28.8%),
▶ Only five of 42 Ambassadors and 6 Consuls General representing Armenia in different countries are women (10.4%).
In judicial power³⁵
▶ 27.7% of judges are women
▶ Two out of nine judges of the Constitutional Court are women (22.2%) ³⁶
In the territorial administration system³⁷
▶ Governors of all ten mares of Armenia are male; there are only two female Deputy Governors.
In the LSG system³⁸
▶ Only nine out of 502 communities of Armenia are headed by women (1.8%),
▶ There is only one female mayor in Armenia (Vagharshapat),
▶ 371 out of 3784 municipal councilors are women (9.8%),
▶ The municipal council composition of 282 out of 502 communities of Armenia does not include women,
▶ Women make up 32% of the City Council of Yerevan, the capital of the republic,
▶ Women make up 24% in the City Councils of two large cities in the marzes, Gyumri and Vanadzor,
▶ Only one out of 52 consolidated communities is headed by a woman (Amasia),
▶ 22 of 420 administrative heads of localities in the consolidated communities are women (5.2 %/).

²⁹ Women and Men in Armenia, 2019 https://www.armstat.am/file/article/gender_2019.pdf

³⁰ UN CEDAW Recommendation R(2003)

³¹ Ibidem

³² Ibidem

³³ www.parliament.am

³⁴ www.gov.am

³⁵ Women and Men in Armenia , 2019 https://www.armstat.am/file/article/gender_2019.pdf

³⁶ By the way, now changes are under way in this body and the number of female judges is not clear.

³⁷ <https://www.gov.am/am/structure/276/>

³⁸ As of May 2020, according to the data of the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures.



In the period from 1991 to 2018, the number of female Ministers in the composition of 16 Governments of Armenia has never exceeded three women. Overall, during this same period, men have held the position of Minister 235 times, and women only eight times.

Women have never held positions of the RA President, the RA Prime Minister, and Deputy Prime Ministers.

In terms of women in government, Armenia has been lagging behind the world average indicator for years.

Even in the government formed as a result of the Velvet Revolution in Armenia, only two female Ministers were included in the Cabinet comprised of 18 Ministers, and after the snap parliamentary elections in 2018, only one woman became a member of the Cabinet comprised of twelve ministries, Minister of Labor and Social Issues Zaruhi Batoyan.

Gender proportion is relatively better for the positions of Deputy Ministers. As of July 2020, 13 out of 44 Deputy Ministers of the twelve ministries in the composition of the RA Government are women (28.8%) holding the noted position only in eight ministries:

- ▶ Two out of four Deputy Ministers of Labor and Social Issues are women,
- ▶ Two out of four Deputies of the Minister of Health Care are women,
- ▶ Two out of four Deputy Ministers of Justice are women,
- ▶ Two out of five Deputies of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport are women,
- ▶ One out of three Deputies of the Minister of Environment is female,
- ▶ Two out of six Deputies of the Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures are women,
- ▶ Only one out of five Deputies of the Minister of Economics is female,
- ▶ One out of three Deputies of the Minister of High-Tech Industry is female.

The remaining four ministries do not have female Deputy Ministers at all. In particular, in the power bloc, both in the Ministry of Emergency Situations (three deputies) and in the Ministry of Defense (two deputies) Deputy Ministers are exclusively men. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Finance do not have female deputies either.

Although by the RA Law on Public Service³⁹, the positions of both Ministers and Deputy Ministers are considered political, the law states that *“Person holding the political position of deputy minister and municipal*

Women in ministerial positions in Armenia and in the world

851 out of 4003 persons holding a ministerial position in the world are women, which makes up 21.3%.

In 16 countries, women’s share of ministerial portfolios is 40-50%.

In 14 countries, women make up 50% and more in the composition of the governments.

Only one of the twelve Ministers in the composition of Armenia’s Government is female, which makes up 8.3%.

³⁹Public positions are elected or appointed positions, which are held as a result of political processes, discretionary decisions, as well as of other procedures envisioned by law. Persons holding these positions make decisions individually or through collegiate deliberations within the scope of their powers and bear responsibility for decisions adopted by them unless otherwise provided by law. The RA Law on Public Service, Article 4 <http://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=150577>



*political position of deputy community head acts by force of the powers delegated respectively by the minister and head of the community and is not endowed with competence to adopt political decisions under own responsibility.”*⁴⁰ In this sense, only the position of Minister of Labor and Social Issues held by Zaruhi Batoyan ranks as one of political decision-making.

In general, within the scope of public positions (state and municipal) provided by the RA Law on Public Service⁴¹, only limited number of public officials⁴² are endowed with the competence of political decision-making.

A major role in expanding women’s representation at the decision-making level is played by public perceptions of women’s leadership, which are largely stereotypical and can be a serious impediment to women’s advancement.

In 2019, in Armenia, a research work on *Public Perceptions of and Policy Gaps regarding Women’s Leadership and Participation in Decision-Making in the context of Local Self-Government Reforms*⁴³ was carried out. The responses to the question *In which positions would the society like to see women more?* included the following:

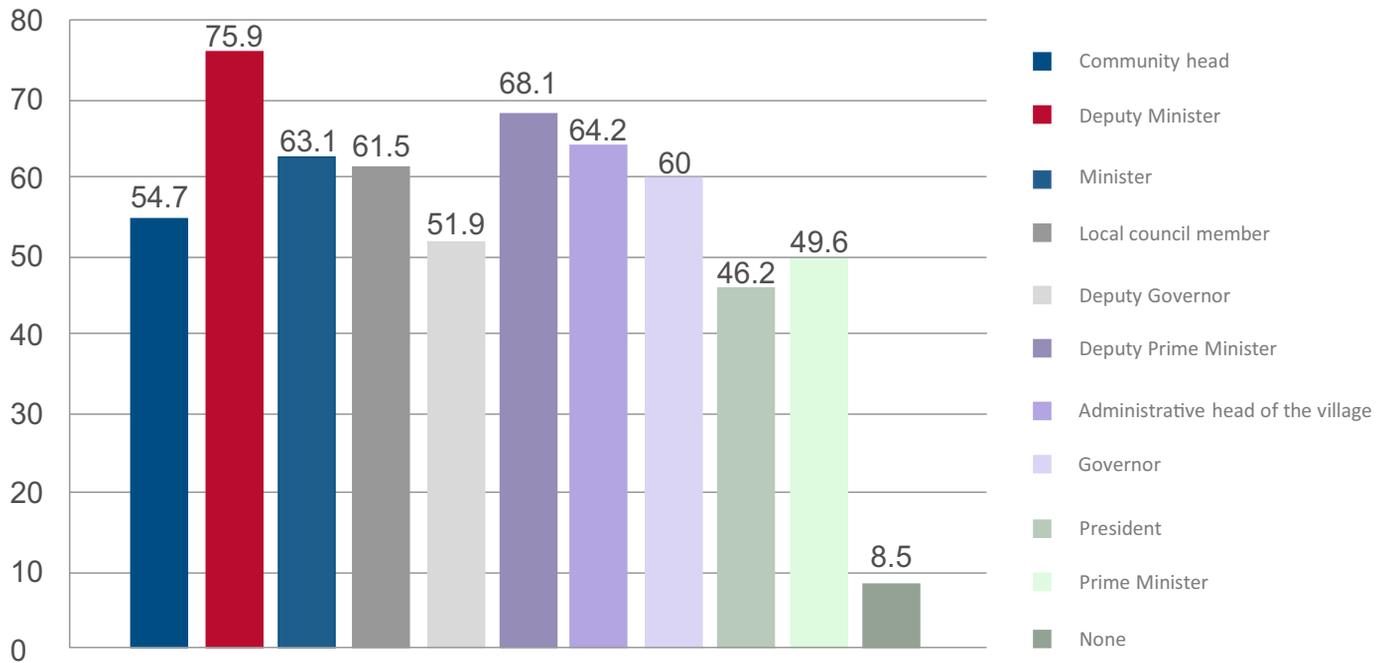
- ▶ The greatest number of respondents see women in **the position of a municipal councilor – 75.9%**
- ▶ The fewest number of respondents see women in **the position of Prime Minister – 46.2%**
- ▶ The higher the position, the fewer respondents see women in that position.
- ▶ Women are seen more in the positions of deputies than those of the first persons/top officials.
- ▶ Fewer respondents see women in the positions of community head (63.1%) or administrative head of a village (54.7%) than in those of Deputy Ministers (68.1%) or Ministers (64.2%).

⁴⁰ Article 5.5, the RA Law on Public Service <http://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=150577>

⁴¹ The public position is subdivided into groups: state and municipal. The state positions are subdivided into types: political, administrative, autonomous and discretionary. The municipal positions are subdivided into types: political, administrative, and discretionary. Article 4, the RA Law on Public Service <http://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=150577>

⁴² The state political positions are those of the President of the Republic, Members of Parliament, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers, Secretary of the National Security Council, Ministers and their Deputies. Article 5.2, the RA Law on Public Service <http://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=150577>

⁴³ The research was carried out in 2019 within the framework of the project *Women in Politics*, which is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme in cooperation with the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures and OxYGen Foundation, with the support of the United Kingdom’s *Good Governance Fund*.



According to the results of the same research, public expectations of expansion of women’s participation in LSGs are quite high and public perceives women as becoming managers of positive change.

It is also noteworthy that over the past decade the number of those with negative attitude towards women’s engagement in politics has considerably decreased. In particular, according to the findings of the survey on *Media Consumption and Information Preferences in Armenia - 2019*,⁴⁴ only 12.7% of respondents believe that politics is not a women’s business at a time when ten years ago the number of those with this opinion stood at 46.2%.⁴⁵ However, even within the context of such a positive change in the public opinion, experts, based on in-depth interviews and studies of women’s electoral behavior⁴⁶, have responded that the opinion that “the stereotypes have already been broken” is too early and the existence of stereotypical approaches continues to remain one of the main obstacles to women’s political advancement.

3.2. The role of parties in promoting women’s political participation

In terms of women in political positions, an important role is played by political parties and periodically held elections at different levels of political governance. However, in this respect, there are certain obstacles and problems requiring solutions.

With the constitutional changes of 2015, Armenia shifted to the parliamentary governance system, which unequivocally has led to the increase in the role of the Parliament and political parties in the country’s governance system.

⁴⁴ The research has been conducted by *Region* Research Center within the framework of the project *Elections for All* with the financial support of the European Union.

⁴⁵ Study of Reasons for Underrepresentation of Women at the Decision-Making Level, the RA National Institute of Labor and Social Research, Yerevan, 2008.

⁴⁶ Elections for All: Participatory Assessment of Inclusiveness of the Electoral Process in Armenia, June 2019, with the financial support of the European Union.





Over the past two years, gender monitoring of parliamentary and LSG elections based on the proportional representation electoral system in the Republic of Armenia allow to make judgements about the party standpoints and role in expanding women’s political participation. The party positions are largely determined by the existence of quotas and the effectiveness of their application.

Thanks to consistent efforts of civil society organizations, the gender quota introduced for the first time in the 90s (3%) gradually reached the level of 25/75% secured in 2016. In the same year of 2016, parties did not display a proactive stance regarding the introduction of the quota defining 30/70 proportion of sexes in party candidate lists into the RA Electoral Code (Points 4 and 10, Article 83). More than 60 local advocated the adoption of the quota and international organizations, who confronted the resistance of a number of parties represented in the RA National Assembly.

As a result, taking into consideration the international obligations of the Republic of Armenia, a consensual option was adopted, i.e. a quota defining 30/70 proportion was secured in the RA Electoral Code, however, on the condition that it will go into effect only in 2021. Before 2021, effective are the transitional and final provisions stipulated by Points 14, 15, and 16 of the Code’s Article 144. According to the latter, *“the number of representatives of each sex in any integer groups of four (1-4, 1-8, 1-12, and so on) in party electoral lists shall not exceed 75%.”*

This “transitional” quota was the initiative of political parties, who argued in favor of gradual and not drastic increase in the quota taking into account lack of prepared female cadres in parties. Non-governmental organizations do not share this opinion noting that there is a problem of prepared, experienced cadres both among women and men.

Nevertheless, the suggestions made by civil society several times during 2016-2020 on annulling the provisions under Points 14, 15, and 16 of Article 144 and enacting the 30% quota, which is in consonance with Armenia’s international obligations, have not been adopted for various reasons.⁴⁷ The suggestions were based on the fact that in all elections conducted through the electoral system of proportional representation during this very period the political parties had shown goodwill and secured on average no less than 30% representation of female candidates in their pre-election lists. Below is provided the average representation of female candidates in party lists.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Before the 2018 snap parliamentary elections, the package of amendments to the RA Electoral Code, which proposed the enactment of the 30% quota, was rejected by a vote in the National Assembly, failing to garner the required three-fifths of the vote.

⁴⁸ The source: WomenNet.am informational and analytical portal
<http://womennet.am/%d5%ab%d5%b6%d6%86%d5%b8%d5%a3%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%86%d5%ab%d5%af%d5%a1/>

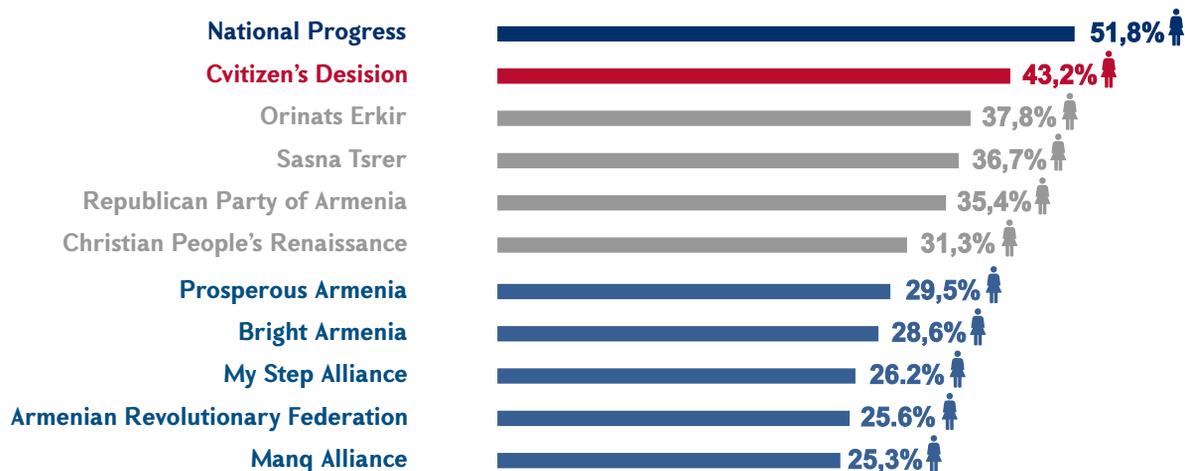


Election year	<u>LSG proportional representation elections</u>	Average number of women
2016թ.	Gyumri	30.5%
2016թ.	Vanadzor	29%
2017թ.	Yerevan	32%
2018թ.	Yerevan	36.2%

Election year	<u>Parliamentary elections</u>	National lists	Territorial lists
2017թ.	National Assembly	29.5%	30.5%
2018թ.	National Assembly	32%	33%

Hence, the decision of the political forces represented in the Parliament to postpone the application of 30/70 proportion until 2021 was not justified since the parties were actually prepared to engage a larger number of women in their lists than provided by the effective legislative regulation of the 25/75 proportion. It is obvious that in the event of the application of the 30% quota, it could have been expected to have a greater progress with representation of women in the parliament because of the 2018 elections. Below is provided information on female candidates in the 2018 national lists of political forces.⁴⁹

Women Candidates in National Lists of Political Forces



Looking at the representation of female candidates in the electoral lists of eleven political forces running in the snap parliamentary elections from the perspective of improvement of the gender quota, one can argue that the concerns of parties about lack of women's potential are extremely exaggerated. An analysis of the lists and expert observations⁵⁰ demonstrate that actual problems are connected with the lack of female leaders

⁴⁹ The infographics comes from WomenNet.am informational and analytical portal <http://womennet.am/%d5%ab%d5%b6%d6%86%d5%b8%d5%a3%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%86%d5%ab%d5%af%d5%a1/>

⁵⁰ <http://womennet.am/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/WP-dec2018-arm.pdf>



in parties, their underrepresentation among party leadership and, as a result, with featuring female candidates in leading positions of the electoral lists. This is demonstrated by the information on women's representation in the national lists provided below

REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE CANDIDATES IN NATIONAL LISTS



In fact:

- ▶ Although half of the political parties had a number of female candidates higher than 30%, the list of only one of the political forces running in the snap parliamentary elections, that of *National Progress* Party, was headed by a woman, Lusine Haroyan.
- ▶ Female candidates are in the second place of the lists of only three parties: RPA, *Bright Armenia*, and Christian-Democratic Party.
- ▶ Only one party, *National Progress*, included two women in the first group of five, and each of the remaining political forces had only one female in the first group of five.
- ▶ Only one political force featured four women in the first group of ten (*National Progress*) and only four political forces had three women in the first group of ten (*My Step Alliance*, *Bright Armenia*, RLP, and *We Alliance*), the rest just upheld the requirement of the law, featuring two women in the first group of ten.

The origin of this problem should be sought within the context of the status of women inside the parties and their representation in the leadership positions, gender-sensitive personnel policy and intraparty democracy. Important are also party positions on gender equality issue, which are revealed not only by electoral lists, but also by a gender analysis of pre-election programs. As a result, experts have discovered that⁵²:

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Research report on *the Snap Parliamentary Elections – 2018: Peculiarities of Women's Electoral Behavior*, EU/OxYGen Foundation, Yerevan 2019



- ▶ An in-depth understanding of the gender policy conceptual framework was missing in the pre-election programs of the majority of the parties;
- ▶ The greater part of the pre-election programs made references not to ensuring gender equality, but to “women’s issues,” and that was done with a paternalistic approach;
- ▶ Certain level of gender sensitivity was recorded in the programs of *Bright Armenia Party*, *My Step Party Alliance*, and *Citizen’s Decision Socio-Democratic Party*, albeit with some manifestations of a paternalistic approach.

As in the preceding elections, during the 2018 snap parliamentary elections, topics related to women’s or gender equality were almost non-manifest during election campaigns, including those run by female candidates, with the exception of cases when candidates responded to questions of journalists on this topic.

Judging from the programs presented to the public by the parties and the position of women in electoral lists, one can conclude that political parties do not realize the importance of the principle of gender equality neither in terms of intraparty development, nor in terms of public interests, which, in its turn, brings about numerous problems, including low level of women’s political participation.

Another obstacle to women’s participation in parliamentary elections is the existence of territorial or open lists envisaged by the Electoral Code in effect. In contrast to national (closed) lists, even the quota-triggered presence of women in territorial (open) lists is not yet a guarantee for being elected. In this respect, concerns were expressed not only by representatives of civil society, but also by experts of OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission. The OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission report published in 2016 noted that in the event of use of territorial lists, the RA Electoral Code does not, in essence, guarantee that the proportion of sexes of candidates in party lists will be maintained in the de facto elected National Assembly. Assessing the experience of introducing “open” or free lists in different countries in its analytical report (2009) on *the Impact of Electoral Systems on Women’s Representation in Politics*,⁵³ the Venice Commission had noted that this could lead to election of fewer number of women, which was the case both in 2017 and 2018 elections with the only difference that as a result of the 2017 elections only two women made their way into the Parliament through territorial lists, and the 2018 elections resulted in the election of twelve women to the Parliament through territorial lists, including nine out of 23 women elected from *My Step Alliance*, two out of five MPs from *Prosperous Armenia Party*, and one out of the four women from *Bright Armenia Party (BAP)*.

In its final election observation report on the snap parliamentary elections held in Armenia on December 9, 2018⁵⁴, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has specifically commented on the obstacles to women’s participation in the elections.

⁵³ Report on the Impact of Electoral Systems on Women’s Representation in Politics. European commission for democracy through law (Venice Commission), Point 80, June 2009

[http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2009\)029-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2009)029-e)

⁵⁴ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/armenia/413567>



The international observers specifically pointed out that in conversations with them almost all parties had noted that they had had difficulties with recruiting experienced female candidates to maintain the 25% quota. The observers concluded that *“while gender quota assumes more efforts be undertaken by political parties to encourage and facilitate women political participation, regrettably many contestants only formally included women in the candidate lists.”*⁵⁵

The recommendations to improve the situation made by the report authors include the following:

- “Awareness should be raised by and among all electoral stakeholders about the importance of equal participation of women and men in public and political life, with a particular emphasis on the role of women within political parties.
- Consideration should be given to enhancing special measures to promote women candidates. This could include placing candidates from the under-represented gender in every second position on national candidate lists.”

It is noteworthy that members of the election observation mission have also emphasized the role of political parties recalling the third paragraph of the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 7/09, which calls on the participating States to *“encourage all political actors to promote equal participation of women and men in political parties, with a view to achieving better gender-balanced representation in elected public offices at all levels of decision-making.”*

The report particularly notes sex-conditioned disparaging rhetoric and disrespectful attitude towards women candidates, especially in the online domain, which, being a manifestation of hate speech and sexism has become one of the topical problems of today’s political agenda.

Taking into consideration the experience of the elections and conclusions of international and local observers, amendments to the RA Electoral Code and Law on Political Parties are on the political agenda today. Conceptual approaches inter alia include increasing the gender quota, giving up territorial lists and gender mainstreaming of intraparty processes.

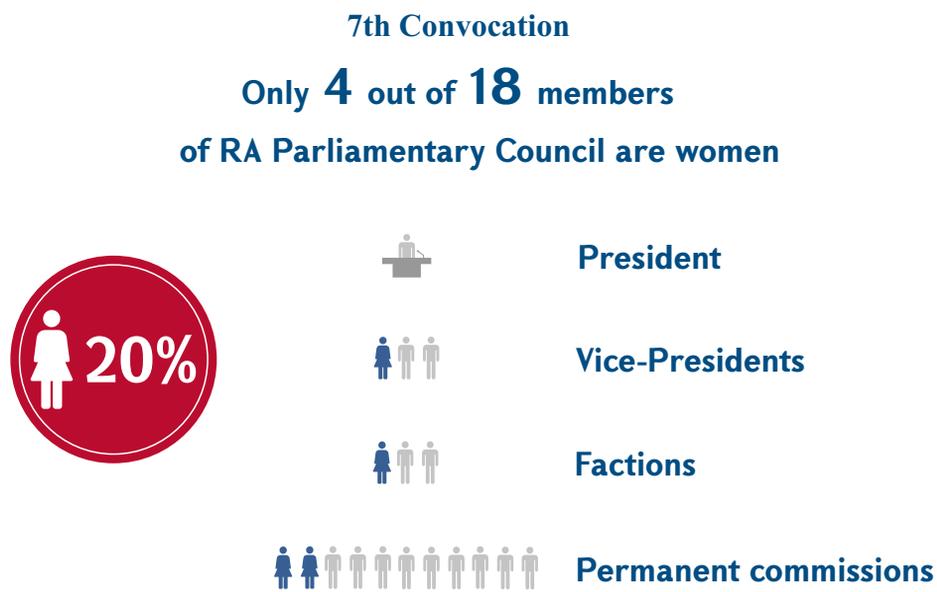
3.3. Women in the National Assembly leadership positions

As a result of the application of the 25% quota envisioned by the Electoral Code, 31 out of 132 MPs elected to the National Assembly (7th convocation) formed in 2018 are women (23.5%), including 22 of 88 MPs (25%) of *My Step* faction, five of 23 (22%) MPs of the PAP faction and four of 18 MPs (22%) of the BAP (*Bright Armenia Party*) faction.



The noted political forces had included respectively 26%, 29.8%, and 26.4% women candidates in their electoral lists, which proves that the quota worked to the extent possible in these elections (for example, in case of *My Step* faction). However, even in these circumstances the problem of women’s under-representation in the National Assembly is not solved, especially taking into consideration the fact that the increase in the number women MPs in the National Assembly of 7th convocation has not led to an increase of women’s representation among the Parliament’s leadership. See below⁵⁶

WOMEN IN THE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS OF THE RA PARLIAMENT



Thus, women hold only four of 18 positions in the National Assembly Council. One of the three Deputy Speakers is female: Lena Nazaryan (*My Step*), one of the three parliamentary factions is headed by a woman: Lilit Makunts, head of the *My Step* faction, and only two of the eleven standing committees are headed by women: the NA Standing Committee on Financial-Credit and Budgetary Affairs is headed by Mane Tandilyan (*Bright Armenia* faction) and the NA Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs is headed by Naira Zohrabyan (*Prosperous Armenia* faction).

It is noteworthy that the dramatic increase in women’s representation in Yerevan City Council, where 21 or 32% of its 65 members are women, did not in any way affect the composition of the leadership of the City Council, which is entirely comprised of men as before.

⁵⁶ The source of the infographics: WomenNet.am informational and analytical portal
<http://womennet.am/%d5%ab%d5%b6%d6%86%d5%b8%d5%a3%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%86%d5%ab%d5%af%d5%a1/>



The number of female speakers in the world

According to the data of Inter-Parliamentary Union,⁵⁷

- ▶ In 2020, the speakers of 57 of 278 parliaments in 192 countries are women, which makes up 20.5%.
- ▶ In 1995, 25 years ago, when Beijing Conference was held, the number of female speakers was two times lower.
- ▶ In its history, the Parliament of Armenia has never had a female speaker and only once a female candidacy has been nominated.⁵⁸

3.4. Women’s representation in LSG

Looking at the dynamics of women’s representation in the LSG system over the past 15 years, one can state that positive changes, albeit insignificant, have taken place and they have primarily been related only to LSG municipal councilors. The number of community heads has fluctuated around 2% reaching 2.5% in 2008 and decreasing to 1.6% in 2019. It is apparent that unless serious steps are taken to ensure women’s participation in this area, securing at least 10% of women in the positions of community heads will remain just a dream.

The dynamics of women’s representation in LSGs⁵⁹

	2005	2008	2012	2016	2019	2020
Municipal councilors	6.2%	6.1%	9.6%	11.7%	9.3%	9.8%
Community heads	2.1%	2.5%	2%	2.1%	1.6%	1.8%

Today, women head nine out of Armenia’s 502 communities and there are no female community heads in four out of the ten marzes in the republic: Aragatsotn, Tavush, Vayots Dzor , and Syunik. Women head exclusively rural communities, only one out of the 46 republic’s urban communities (Etchmiadzin) is headed by a woman, which is the first case when a female head has been elected in an urban community.

Today, there are 52 consolidated communities in Armenia and only one of them, the community of Amasia in Shirak marz, is headed by a woman. Although 22 of the administrative heads of 420 localities

⁵⁷ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/women-in-politics-map-2020>

⁵⁸ In 2011, the *Heritage* faction nominated the candidacy of MP Larisa Alaverdyan for the position of the RA NA Chair.

⁵⁹ Source: the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures.



within the consolidated communities are women (5.2%), according to law, the scope of competences for this position is much more limited than in case of community heads. In addition, administrative heads are appointed, and community heads are elected.

According to the data of the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures, 371 out of 3784 municipal councilors in Armenia are women (9.8%), and of major concern is the fact that there are no women among municipal councilors of 282 communities out of Armenia's 502.

Compared with the data of the preceding year, the number of female municipal councilors has slightly increased: in 2019, it made up 9.3%. For comparison, we should note that, in 2016, women's representation in municipal councils was 11.7%, i.e. there has been certain regress since 2016, which is attributed to the community consolidation process. Tougher competition in elections in consolidated communities accompanied by other obstacles decreases women's chances and opportunities for election. According to expert assessments, the consolidation of communities has created a new "glass ceiling" for women. For example, in 2016, gender monitoring⁶⁰ of consolidated elections in 17 clusters uniting 125 communities demonstrated that women had been very passive starting with the nomination phase, and women's representation among elected municipal councilors is two-three times lower than before consolidation. The only exception is the community of Togh in Syunik marz, which is today the only consolidated community where the number of women in the municipal council has increased after consolidation.

To prevent a decrease in women's representation in LSGs, changes have been introduced in the Electoral Code and a number of other laws, according to which "*elections of municipal councilors in communities with more than 4000 electors, as well as in communities comprised of multiple localities are to be held based on the electoral system of proportional representation.*"

⁶⁰ http://womennet.am/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/WP_november_2016_arm.pdf





Transition to the electoral system of proportional representation means that the gender quota secured in the Electoral Code will apply, i.e. *“Starting from the 1st place of the electoral list of a political party (alliance of political parties) and each of the political parties included in the alliance, the number of representatives of each sex shall not exceed 70 per cent in each integer group of three (1-3, 1-6, 1-9 and subsequently up to the end of the list).”* It is expected that thanks to these changes, not only the number of women in LSGs will not decrease, but also it will drastically increase. This expectation is confirmed by LSG elections in Yerevan, Gyumri, and Vanadzor held earlier based on the electoral system of proportional representation.

In the elections to the Yerevan City Council held in September of 2018, 356 candidates out of the total number of 982 were women, and 18 council members or 27.6% from among actually elected 65 were women. As a result of the December 9, 2018 snap parliamentary elections, many members of the Yerevan City Council, including women, became MPs, and their vacancies in the Council were filled by other candidates included in the lists of political forces, which led to the increase in women’s representation in the Yerevan City Council with its current number of women members being 21 and making up 32% of the total number of 65 members.⁶¹

Alliance/party	Women members, %
<i>Luys Alliance</i>	67%
<i>My Step Alliance</i>	28%
<i>Prosperous Armenia Party</i>	40%

Nevertheless, in spite of the broad participation of women in the elections to the Yerevan City Council,

- ▶ Yerevan mayor and his four deputies **are men**,
- ▶ All three advisors to the mayor **are men**,
- ▶ Mayor’s assistant, press secretary, chief of staff, chief city architect **are also men**,
- ▶ All twelve administrative districts of the capital are headed **by men**,
- ▶ **Only one** out of 19 deputies of heads of administrative districts **is a woman**,
- ▶ Women surface only in the positions of department heads with **only three** out of 22 department heads in the mayor’s office **being women**.

Given the context of active discussions on holding LSG elections on the basis of the electoral system of proportional representation, it is necessary to note that, as a rule, political parties have shown low levels of participation in elections of community heads and councilors. In 2019, representatives of only a few parties – CCP, FSJP, PAP, ARF, RPA, and Communist Party, participated in the LSG elections and almost all of them were self-nominated, which means that at least formally the parties did not support these candidates as members of their parties.



⁶¹The source of information is WomenNet.am informational and analytical portal.



In particular, according to the CEC data, 156 candidates out of 175 nominated for the position of community head were non-partisan. One hundred seventy-three of them were self-nominated. The parties provided support only to two candidates. As for the elections to municipal councils held in the same year, 290 out of 295 candidates were self-nominated and 276 were non-partisan.

Such a posture of the parties in LSG elections is conditioned also by low level of trust of the public in them. For example, the findings of a sociological survey⁶² conducted by Caucasus Barometer in Armenia in 2019 demonstrate that the indicator of the public trust in parties does not exceed 20 per cent.

Trust in political parties ⁶³	
Fully distrust	24%
Rather distrust	21%
Neither trust nor distrust	30%
Rather trust	17%
Fully trust	3%
No response	6%

The above noted findings demonstrate that not only parties are not ready yet to show active participation in LSG elections, but the public too does not have any expectations from parties. Therefore, in order to succeed, parties have to carry out serious work in communities, including in terms of engaging women.

Based on the observations of experts⁶⁴, over the years, the scope of cause and effect factors determining women’s low representation in the LSG system has almost remained the same and includes the following:

- ▶ Tough competition for access to power and resources, which is easier surmounted by men than women;
- ▶ Women have limited access to resources necessary for nomination, including financial means and social connections;
- ▶ Impeding mindset or stereotypes, which limit manifestations of women’s activism in community life;
- ▶ Women’s double and even triple workload, especially in rural communities;
- ▶ Imperfection of electoral processes;
- ▶ Absence of institutional mechanisms for women’s advancement;
- ▶ Absence of political experience among women and their low self-esteem;
- ▶ Party neglect of and disregard for the necessity of women’s participation;
- ▶ Problems with not proper level of development of the local self-government system.

⁶² <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2019am/TRUPPS/>

⁶³ Ibidem

⁶⁴ According to the findings of the research on *Public Perceptions of and Policy Gaps regarding Women's Leadership and Participation in Decision-Making in the context of Local Self-Government Reforms*. The research was carried out in 2019 within the framework of the project *Women in Politics*, which is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme in cooperation with the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures and *OxYGen* Foundation, with the support of the United Kingdom's *Good Governance* Fund.





PART 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking notice of the creation of the necessary legislative prerequisites for expanding women's political participation in Armenia and certain progress with the increase of women's representation in the RA National Assembly and the City Councils of the republic's three major cities – Yerevan, Gyurmi, and Vanadzor - thanks to the application of the quotas secured in the RA Electoral Code, it is necessary to emphasize that this increase cannot be considered satisfactory, especially taking into account that five years ago UN Women came up with a vision of 50/50 proportion for equal participation of women and men in decision-making, which is part of both Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and obligations of UN Member States with respect to the Sustainable Development Agenda;

Bearing in mind that the reasons impeding women's political participation and determining their low level of competitiveness in electoral processes continue to include problems related to lack of resources, time, social connections, managerial and leadership skills, political experience, opportunities for reconciling the family and work responsibilities, as well as those related to women's low self-esteem, gender stereotypes existing in public perceptions, which hinder women's progress, and manifestations of sex-based hate speech and sexism;

Realizing that targeted legislative changes should include gender analysis and mainstreaming of laws, which should be brought to the attention of both parties represented in the Parliament and non-represented ones;

Mindful of the fact that the transition to the parliamentary system of governance based on the 2015 constitutional changes in Armenia has increased the role and responsibility of political parties in the development processes of the country, including in ensuring women's advancement in politics, and at present the political agenda includes the requirement to incorporate gender-sensitive principles into the founding documents and internal regulations of political parties, as well as to increase women's representation in governing bodies;

The following actions are recommended for implementation:

- ▶ To ensure the public's awareness of international documents and processes aimed at enhancing women's political participation, including Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Sustainable Development Goals, as well as to ensure the implementation of concluding observations (2016) of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Armenia about undertaking measures to promote women's full and equal participation in elected and appointed bodies,





- ▶ To provide for effective realization of *the 2019-2023 Strategy and Action Plan on Implementation of the RA Gender Policy*, including proportional representation of men and women in representative bodies in line with international standards,
- ▶ To incorporate provisions on expansion of women's political participation in the draft changes to the RA Electoral Code,
- ▶ To incorporate provisions facilitating intraparty democracy development, enhancement of the role of women in parties, and women's political growth and progress in the draft changes to the RA Constitutional Law on *Political Parties*,
- ▶ To introduce amendments to the RA Constitutional Law on *Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly* to envision disciplinary sanctions for calls of violence, hate speech and sexist expressions and to provide for the same norms in the rules of ethics and conduct of MPs, which are defined in the RA Law on *the Guarantees for the Activities of the Deputies of the National Assembly*,
- ▶ To ensure active participation of Members of Parliament within the framework of inter-parliamentary cooperation and in those initiatives by parliamentary assemblies which target to promote gender equality and rule out discrimination in parliamentary work,
- ▶ To ensure the awareness of Armenia's political forces about the documents on expansion of women's political participation adopted by UN, PACE, OSCE, and other international structures,
- ▶ To expand the cooperation of women members of political parties and representatives of civil society on issues concerned with gender equality,
- ▶ To introduce additions to the RA Law on *Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* with a view to reinforcing gender equality mechanisms,
- ▶ To carry out monitoring of women's representation within the system of governance and in political decision-making and active and effective oversight of the implementation of the obligations undertaken by Armenia in this respect,
- ▶ To work with political parties to ensure gender mainstreaming of intraparty building and other processes,
- ▶ To raise the awareness of the public about work and success stories of women involved in political parties, NA, and LSGs,
- ▶ To establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for ensuring gender equality in electoral processes, including collection and publication of sex-disaggregated data.



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