

SURVEY WITH WOMEN MPs

ASSEMBLY OF ALBANIA
2019-2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The participation of women in parliamentary life is an important standard for a representative, qualitative and functional democracy. Gender equality in parliamentary representation in Albania is marked by achievements as much as by shortcomings. Following the introduction of the quota system, there has been a gradual increase in the number of women running for a seat in the parliament, followed by an increased number of women MPs. This positive trend has been upheld in the processes of replacements and changes that have affected the current composition of the parliament. Several professional reports on the standards of representation in political parties, in the local political decision-making and in the main political institutions in the country, have highlighted the current achievements and problems, the convergences and divisions related to the gender balance in the political representation in the parliament.

The ISP has previously conducted professional studies on gender representation in politics, amongst which the most prominent ones -“Innovations and Issues of Gender Representation in Elections (2015) and Standards of Political Representation (2017), were supported by Un Women Albania.

In the period June-July 2019 the Institute of Political Studies (ISP) conducted a survey covering 90% of women MPs sitting in the current parliament and 10% of women MPs from the opposition parties who waived their parliamentary mandates in February 2019. This survey is part of the parliamentary monitoring project 2017-2020, implemented by ISP with the financial support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Tirana. All survey responses are anonymous. 35% were received via e-mail communication, 54% were directly completed by MPs / former MPs and 11% were completed through direct communication of ISP staff with MPs.

The survey was conducted by the ISP's monitoring staff in the parliament. Most of our staff had previous professional polling and surveying experiences conducted for ISP or other partners. Of particular support for the implementation of the survey were the members of the Alliance of Women MPs, the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, and the heads of parliamentary groups in the Assembly. The ISP extends its thanks to three experienced parliamentary politicians, who gave their preliminary assessment of the contents of the survey, its structure and other professional elements, as well as the staff of the Dutch Embassy for the excellent support and input provided for conceptualising and designing particular elements of this survey.

The purpose of this survey is to analyze the salient factors related to the political career of women MPs, their parliamentary activity, their communication with local constituencies, the quality of parliamentary representation, the implementation of quotas and their relations with women's organizations in political parties. The data presented in this research, after being presented to the Alliance of Women MPs, will be made available to all parliamentary political parties, political institutions in the country, human rights NGOs, election monitoring bodies, as well as international partners in Albania.

We strongly believe that the findings and recommendations provided in this document will contribute towards increasing women's political representation, improve the current political representation standards, and address present and potential problems in relation to tackling the need for adopting more effective measures for more equitable representation of women in politics.

MAIN FINDINGS

- ❖ **Over 30% of the women MPs sitting in the current parliament have no previous political leadership experience in the parliament, in the political parties or in local government.**
- ❖ **Over 60% of women MPs boast more than a decade of political experience. Over 80% of the women MPs have never shifted their allegiances towards their political parties. All of them link loyalty to their party with their trust in its political program.**
- ❖ **Women MPs are more inclined to run the legal path rather than to seek political protection through their party in dealing with accusations and legal contests. 93% of the women MPs believe in the justice system and 87% believe in their duty to provide for transparency and accountability towards the public and the electorate.**
- ❖ **Only 29% of women MPs seek primarily political support to deal with accusations and legal contests and 14% are willing to be part of the media debate on the above-mentioned conflictual situations.**
- ❖ **89% of women MPs believe they were able to win their seat in the parliament because of two main factors - support from the party leader and support from the party base. None of them ran out of her own initiative to get a seat in the parliament.**
- ❖ **Over 60% of women MPs have been assigned to a local constituency by the political party and only 16% have chosen it themselves. They see their entry into parliament as a result of two factors, the gender quota system and support from the party leader, - an indication of the nature of the current electoral and party system, in which the party rather than the individual plays a decisive role.**
- ❖ **Two-thirds of women MPs view a merit-based system as the long-term solution for their political career, rather than the decisions taken by the vertical line of command or the allocation of seats through the gender quota. Women MPs tend to have a negative opinion**



on their political rivals and on the system through which they are elected, despite the same system was applied to all political parties in the Assembly.

- ❖ 75% of women MPs are not willing to give up politics, although 100% of women MPs think that they better things to do in their professional, non-political life. Nonetheless, 93% have decided to run for re-election and 83% want to continue their involvement in their political parties.
- ❖ Women MPs devote an average of 2-6 hours a day to party politics, which amounts to over 13 hours a week, while parliamentary activity averages 3-4 hours a day.
- ❖ Three-fifths of women MPs have initiated lawmaking proposals or proposed various legislative amendments during their parliamentary activity. The two main obstacles to propose more legal initiatives are the lack of support staff and lack of personal expertise.
- ❖ Two-thirds of women MPs consider that political engagement is a major or partial barrier to personal and family commitments.
- ❖ With regard to the process of consulting laws voted in the Assembly, women MPs state that they usually receive the information they need through their participation in parliamentary committees and through communications from the Assembly. Only half of women MPs are able to consult the laws in the parliamentary agenda in advance with their voters and even fewer are able to consult these with external experts.
- ❖ Over 47% of women MPs feel powerless to change things in the country, one in five women MPs admitted they voted in favour of laws they personally were critical of, and about 13% admitted to have stated in public things they did not believe in.
- ❖ The majority (53%) feel victimized by the media and by the fake news, 19% did not feel disrespected by their colleagues, one in five women MPs felt subjected to abuse because of their appearance or because of their political position.
- ❖ 36% of women MPs feel completely or partially discriminated against in their parliamentary activity because of their gender and one in four women feels ignored because of the highly confrontational political climate prevailing in the country.
- ❖ Women MPs noted that there is a need for the promotion of the gender equality principles, for a better knowledge of the Constitution and laws, and for public advocacy in favour of the opinions and ideas they promote.
- ❖ Although the establishment of a parliamentary sub-committee on gender equality in the Assembly is a positive achievement per se, half of women MPs have critical attitudes towards the outcomes and effectiveness of its work. Two thirds of women MPs consider that the lack of budget for the committee's activities is a major barrier for its functionality; more than half criticize the Assembly and the parliamentary groups for insufficient support provided to the sub-committee.



- ❖ One third of women MPs usually are not consulted by their party structures nor do they benefit from their party's assistance with regard to discharging their parliamentary responsibilities as MPs; nonetheless, over 80% think that women MPs have sufficient potential to promote an increased women representation and gender equality through legal initiatives.
- ❖ The top three concerns in local constituencies for both female and male voters are high unemployment, difficulties with youth employment, and gaps in the education system.
- ❖ The two main factors that make it difficult to work with local constituencies are the high level of poverty and the control of local government by a rival political party.
- ❖ More than half of women MPs feel discriminated against in terms of political narratives and lack of funds whilst participating in electoral campaigns. There are twice as many women MPs trying to overcome obstacles through greater patience and commitment than those who stand down in front of obstacles / difficult situations in order to avoid conflict.
- ❖ Women MPs think that the best method of communicating with the electorate is through direct contact and by telephone. Using social media to communicate with the electorate is popular with only half of women MPs.
- ❖ All women MPs stated that they did not have sufficient funding for parliamentary activities, 87% stated that they did not have sponsorships from political party supporters, and 63% stated that they did not have advisors to assist them in their activity.
- ❖ 94% of women MPs think that women politicians are less incriminated than men and that they have brought about positive change for the country, 65% are critical of the assessment that they were successful because of quotas rather than merit, and 59% think that the political environment is prejudiced against women career politicians.
- ❖ 100% of women MPs asked for more lobbying to increase women representation, to strengthen women's organizations and to promote positive role models. 88% think that mandatory gender quota in the parliament should be applied and 81% think that "strong men" and "businessmen" should be prevented from entering politics.
- ❖ About 80% of women MPs are active or partially active members of women's forums / organizations in their political parties, and part of the Alliance of Women MPs (AGD). Most believe that the AGD does not promote women politicians enough.
- ❖ The three major challenges for the AGD are the implementation of cross-party activities, the initiation of legal initiatives aiming at gender equality, and the provision of active support for women in politics. Women MPs require a dedicated budget and a more active role for the AGD is needed to make it more influential in the parliament and more effective in its mission.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- **The Assembly must fulfill its responsibilities towards providing continuous capacity building and training to MPs and create a regular training agenda that is in line with real needs and essential legislative functions.**
- **The Assembly should support the Alliance of Women MPs (AGD) with a dedicated budget line and a more consistent professional and legislative assistance.**
- **AGD needs to be supported and strengthened to overcome political divisions, as well as to build effective mechanisms to promote positive models and careers of women in parliament and in the country's political life.**
- **Parliamentary political parties need to strengthen their women's organizations, allocate separate budgets for them, and promote competition within them on the basis of meritocracy and recognition of their public contributions.**
- **Parliamentary groups should adopt Internal Regulations and implement ethical norms enabling for the elimination of all forms of discrimination on the grounds of gender and create the preconditions for an equitable gender representation in all their governing and representative structures.**
- **Electoral reform should respond to the need to shift from the existing quota in the candidates' lists to the representative quota in parliament. The quota system should be conducive to a enabling environment leading to new entries of women in politics, through increased competition and quality of representation that harmonizes professional skills, merits and political support.**
- **Civil society and the media, international organizations, donors and political parties should prioritize the need to increase gender representation in political decision-making at all levels.**
- **The Assembly, the parliamentary groups and the political parties should conduct frequent surveys to better understand their internal problems and issues of representation, to understand the situation and provide a basis for future solutions and remedies.**
- **The Assembly, the groups and the political parties should broaden the scope of the provision external professional expertise for the legislative process, and provide ongoing legal assistance to women MPs and other MPs.**
- **The Assembly, the parliamentary groups and political parties should take additional measures to support the legal education of candidates for MPs, avoid problematic entries (strong men / candidates with criminal records / problematic businesspeople) and create a supportive climate for individuals with a positive professional and political records.**
- **Women MPs should be more co-operative in promoting gender equality policy aimed at increasing womens' political representation, whilst demanding higher standards of parliamentary activity for themselves and their colleagues.**

