




Slovak Self-Government'S Gender Policy

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Abstract: *Gender inequality is a complex phenomenon whose impacts and consequences affect every area of society. Although as a rule the disadvantages concern women, in some cases gender stereotypes have an adverse impact on men as well. The goal of gender equality is to create a respectful space for every woman and every man so that they can realize themselves in life according to their wishes and abilities and not be limited by gender stereotypes. Despite indisputable progress in equal opportunities for men and women in the Slovak Republic, inequalities persist in almost all areas of private and public life. The following contribution aims to present the differences and changes in the representation of women in elected positions of selected self-governing entities in the Slovak Republic.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Territorial self-government is a spatially defined functional unit that has the right to decide on its own affairs. An example of territorial self-government in Slovakia are municipalities, as basic territorial self-governing units. Their right to self-government is enshrined in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and defined in more detail in the Act on Municipalities. Self-governing units create their bodies through which self-government is carried out. The Constitution in chapter no. 4 also stipulates that the territorial self-government in the Slovak Republic consists of a municipality and a higher territorial unit. Territorial self-government is a part of public administration, usually in issues of local importance, which is carried out not by the state, but by the population of territorial units or certain bodies of territorial units.

In Slovakia, the territorial self-government has two levels (municipality/city and VUC) and is mainly enshrined in the fourth title of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (Article 64 - Article 71). According to this title:

- Territorial self-government consists of a municipality and a higher territorial unit.
- Municipalities and higher territorial units are independent, self-governing, and administrative units, legal entities with their own property and financial resources, obligations can be imposed on them only by law.

Territorial self-government is carried out at assemblies of the inhabitants of the village, by local referendums, by referendums on the territory of a higher territorial unit, by the authorities of the municipality, or by the authorities of a higher territorial unit. The authorities of the municipality are the mayor and the council, the authorities of the VÚC are the chairman of the VÚC

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and the council; the performance of state tasks can also be transferred to them under the conditions set by the constitution and laws.

Territorial self-government is divided as follows:

- local territorial self-government (in Slovakia, municipalities, and towns),
- regional territorial self-government (in Slovakia, higher territorial units).

A municipality is made up of one or more settlements. Its territory is made up of at least one cadastral territory. It brings together the citizens who reside permanently in its territory. Some municipalities in Slovakia have the status of a city. There are currently 2 891 municipalities in Slovakia, of which 138 are towns. Municipalities have municipal councils elected by the citizens and towns have town councils elected by the citizens. They are headed by a mayor.

The following contribution aims to present the differences and changes in the representation of women in elected positions of selected self-governing subjects in the Slovak Republic.

2. REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AT THE CENTRAL LEVEL

Politics has traditionally been reserved for men, meaning it has been very difficult for women to enter at the highest level. The progress in gender equality in politics has been uneven so far and significant differences exist among states and regions (Jakešević & Lusa, 2021, p. 33). Women's share of global lower or single-house parliamentary seats has increased by over 70% over the 21st century. Yet these increases have not been uniform across countries (Rosen, 2017, p. 82). In many of the most developed countries, including Slovakia is equality between women and men considered one of the basic rights, attributes of democracy, and display of social equity (Jánošková & Petrušová, 2019, p. 21). In a wider pan-European and global context, the degree of women's participation in power and decision-making is an indicator of civilizational maturity, a parameter of human development in the sense of women's ability to make individual decisions and participate in the benefits generated on a societal level as well (Holubová, 2010, p. 1). The participation of Slovak women in political decision-making after 1989 can be assessed as weak. This is evidenced by the insufficient fulfillment of the first assumption, which is the very presence of women in political bodies at the national, regional, and local levels. There is a significant gender gap (Bútorová, 2008, p. 280).

Before 1989, in the communist parliament of the Slovak Republic, women regularly made up 20 to 30% of all deputies. The reason was the existence of several quotas for filling parliamentary seats, among which there was also a quota for women, which required their 30 percent representation. Despite the relatively high number of women in legislative bodies, their participation in politics was only formal and their influence on decision-making was negligible. Right after the first free elections in 1990, the quota system was abolished as a discredited symbol of socialism, and the share of women in the parliament dropped from a third to 12%. The reason for such a result was, on the one hand, the low representation of women on the candidate lists of political parties, and, on the other hand, their disadvantaged position in the back seats, which gave them only a small chance of being elected. The Parliament of the Slovak Republic has 150 members - deputies.

From a gender perspective, the biggest success in history was the elections in 2010, when a woman stood at the head of the Slovak government for the first and only time so far. We must also not forget that in 2019 she became the fifth president of the Slovak Republic, Mgr. Zuzana

Čaputová. She is the first woman in the office of the President of the Slovak Republic and, at the age of 45 (at the time of the elections), she is also the youngest person to ever hold the office of the President of the Slovak Republic.

Table 1. Representation of women in the Parliament of the Slovak Republic

| Election period | Number of women | Women in % |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1994-1998 | 22 | 14.66 |
| 1998 -2002 | 16 | 10.66 |
| 2002 -2006 | 21 | 14.00 |
| 2006 -2010 | 26 | 17.33 |
| 2010 -2012 | 22 | 14.66 |
| 2012 - 2016 | 24 | 16.00 |
| 2016 -2022 | 28 | 18.66 |
| 2022 - 2026 | 32 | 21.33 |

Source: ŠÚ SR, n.d.; own processing

A proportional electoral system with an open list of candidates is typical for elections to the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic. This electoral method allows voters to exercise preferential voting, that is, to partially change the order of candidates and possibly also to decide on their advancement to parliament. In preferential voting, the rule is that the higher the candidates are placed, the higher the probability of their election. As can be seen from Table 1, the representation of women in the Parliament of the Slovak Republic has been in the range of 10-22% in the last thirty years. Currently, the Parliament of the Slovak Republic has the highest proportion of women, i.e. approximately one-fifth of the total number of deputies are women.

Table 2. Representation of women in the European Parliament 2004 - 2019

| Elections | Number of seats for Slovakia | Number of elected women deputies | Share of elected female MPs in % |
|-----------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2004 | 14 | 5 | 35.7 |
| 2009 | 13 | 5 | 38.5 |
| 2014 | 13 | 4 | 30.8 |
| 2019 | 13 | 3 | 23.1 |

Source: ŠÚ SR, n.d.; own processing

We can also positively evaluate the representation of Slovak women - MPs in the European Parliament in the first two election periods. The first elections to the European Parliament were held in 2004 when Slovakia joined the European Union. In the first three elections, the participation of women in the European Parliament was the highest among all levels of political power in Slovakia, although it has had a downward trend in recent years. However, the change occurred in the most recent elections, when the share of women did not even reach the level of representation of women in local self-government.

3. WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN REGIONAL AND LOCAL BODIES SELF-GOVERNMENT

Elections to higher territorial units have been held six times so far, the first time in 2001. The regional level of self-government was absent in Slovakia until then. Elections are held to elect the chairman of the higher territorial unit and deputies to the 8 higher territorial units. In the first four electoral periods, in none of the regions was a woman elected to the post of chairperson. Thus, without exception, the leadership of the counties has been in the hands of men. The

change took place only in the 2017-2022 term and was reconfirmed in the next term when a single woman was elected to the post of chairperson of a local government region. In both periods this was the case in Žilina Region.

Table 3. Representation of women MPs (%)
in the councils of self-governing regions of the Slovak Republic

| Election period | NR | KE | PO | BB | ZA | TN | TT | BA | SR |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| 2013-2017 | 14.81 | 19.30 | 8.06 | 14.29 | 5.26 | 28.89 | 12.50 | 22.72 | 15.19 |
| 2017-2022 | 12.96 | 8.77 | 12.90 | 10.20 | 10.53 | 23.40 | 7.50 | 26.00 | 13.94 |
| 2022-2026 | 19.64 | 17.54 | 12.31 | 10.20 | 12.28 | 20.45 | 12.50 | 28.30 | 16.62 |

Legend: NR - Nitra region, KE - Košice region, PO - Prešov region, BB – Banská Bystrica region, ZA – Žilina region, TN – Trenčín region, TT – Trnava region, BA – Bratislava region, SR - Slovak Republic

Source: websites of self-governing regions, own processing

The average share of women among elected members of local government at the level of the LDCs is below 17%. Thus, the participation of women in the governance of the LDCs can be considered insufficient. Table 3 shows the results of the elections to the regional councils of the Slovak Republic in the last three elections. We see here significant regional disproportions. In the current period, the Banská Bystrica Region (10.20%), the Žilina Region (12.28%) and the Prešov Region (12.31%) have the lowest representation of women. The region with the highest number of female MPs is currently the Bratislava Self-Governing Region, with just under one-third of the total (28.30%).

From Table 3 we can see that in the long term only two self-governing regions, namely Bratislava and Trenčín, are above the 20% threshold for the representation of women in the MPs of the Regional Self-Government Bodies. In the former, the participation of women is gradually increasing, but in the latter, we have observed a decreasing tendency.

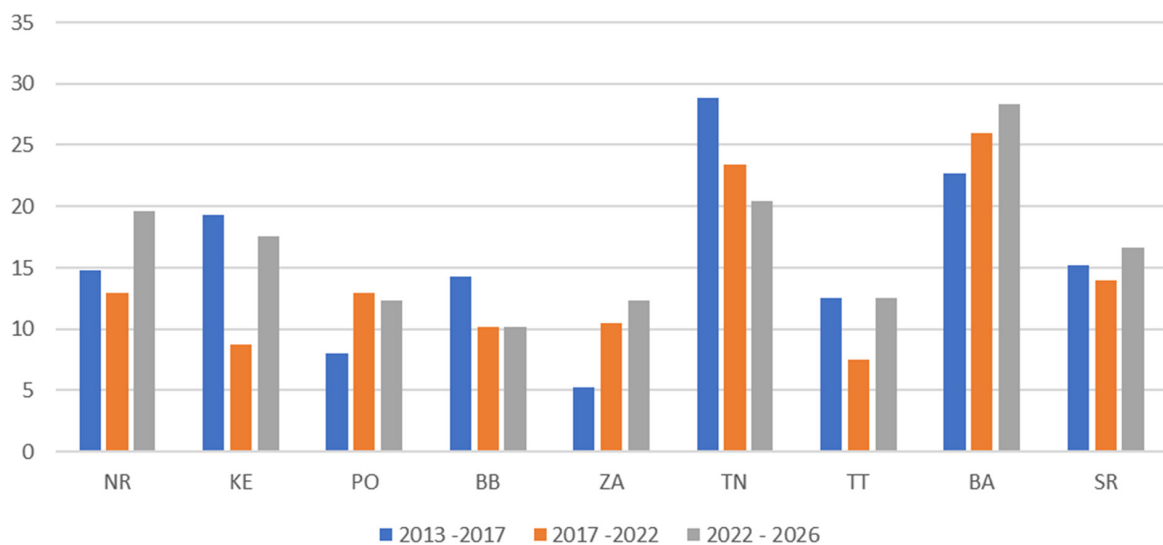


Figure 1. Representation of women MPs (%) in the councils of self-governing regions of the Slovak Republic

Source: own processing

In local elections, people elect councillors and mayors of municipalities, boroughs, and towns. The election of mayors uses a single-round relative majority system, i.e. the candidate with the

highest number of votes wins. Local politics should be the closest of all political areas to the citizens. This is where people should be able to participate most easily. Despite this, however, the representation of women at this political level is relatively low. So-called municipal politics is also seen as a career bridge for women politicians to the national political level.

Table 4. Results of elections for mayors of municipalities, towns, and city districts in 2014, 2018, 2022

| Election period | NR | KE | PO | BB | ZA | TN | TT | BA | SR |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| 2014-2018 | 22.16 | 20.39 | 21.36 | 27.34 | 21.47 | 22.82 | 22.09 | 12.36 | 20.20 |
| 2018-2022 | 21.75 | 22.99 | 25.97 | 27.38 | 21.34 | 22.83 | 23.11 | 13.63 | 23.81 |
| 2022-2026 | 21.88 | 25.60 | 25.57 | 27.34 | 23.79 | 28.00 | 27.49 | 19.32 | 25.46 |

Legend: NR - Nitra region, KE - Košice region, PO - Prešov region, BB – Banská Bystrica region, ZA – Žilina region, TN – Trenčín region, TT – Trnava region, BA – Bratislava region, SR - Slovak Republic

Source: ŠÚ SR, n.d.; own processing

The number of women mayors of municipalities, towns, and urban districts after the first elections in the era of the independent Slovak Republic in 1994 was on average 15.2%. In the last elections in 2022, 25.46% of women were elected to these positions.

Table 4 shows the results of the elections for mayors of municipalities, towns, and urban districts in 2014, 2018 and 2022 from the perspective of individual regions of the Slovak Republic. In the long term, the lowest representation of women in these positions is in the Bratislava region, although we observe a gradual increase (12.36% - 2014, present 19.32%).

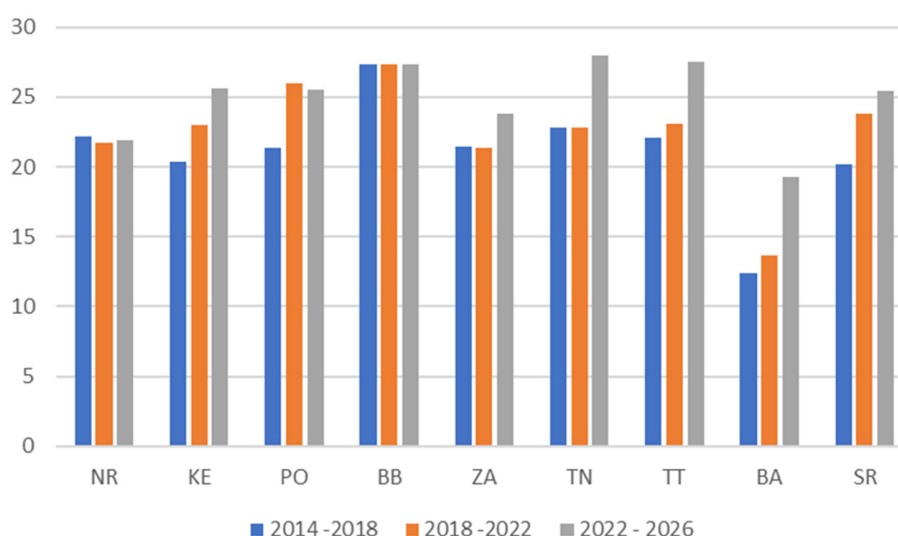


Figure 2. Representation of women as mayors of municipalities, towns, and districts in %.

Source: own processing

After the last elections, the highest representation of women at that level of local self-government is in the Trenčín Region, at 28%. Interestingly, in all regions (except Nitra) the share of women in mayoral positions is increasing. The Nitra region shows a gradual, albeit slight, but persistent decline.

At the local level, it is typical for women to be mayors of small villages, with their numbers decreasing as the size of the village increases. One of the reasons why there are more women in

local politics than at higher levels may be that the job of mayor does not require a change of residence and is more easily compatible with caring for a family. Since daily contact with the family is maintained at the local level, the conflict of family versus public activity is weaker than it is when working in national positions.

4. CONCLUSION

Barriers to women's entry into political office can be seen in many factors in the socio-cultural setting of society, as well as in the practices of political parties and political culture. Some barriers are obvious, others more hidden and sophisticated, relating to the mechanisms and practices of the political culture created by the long-standing social dominance of men in this area.

Family responsibilities repeatedly emerge as the most intense and universal barrier to women's entry into politics. Women's entry requires the consent and support of spouses and family members. Meanwhile, the burden of paid and unpaid work on women increases disproportionately, especially at weekends. Politics is another activity for them, with family members taking on only part of the responsibilities. At the local level this is manageable, but by going to national functions the conflict between family and public activity becomes even more acute.

The equalisation of women's status in politics and the labour market is gradually occurring as women's educational attainment increases. Nowadays, women are more educated than at any time in the past. But despite this, their numbers in managerial positions, and especially in top positions, are still insufficient. Social attitudes, which are still dominated by the view that men are better suited to senior management roles, are a significant contributory factor to this situation. Research and various analyses of women's attitudes suggest that women themselves also contribute to these attitudes. Women do not seek to make themselves visible. Women who seek to advance in employment and also in social status must become more 'visible'. This is primarily a matter of acquiring and being thoroughly aware of information about their career paths, but also of socio-economic information and a new attitude towards their careers. A woman cannot wait for someone to organize her career, she must have her plan, goals and active control over her career, the ability to effectively communicate to others the results of her work, goals, ideas and understanding of her own development and growth potential during her working career.

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