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# THE GENDER DIMENSION OF CORRUPTION



Author: Arrita Reznici

Editors: Ehat Miftaraj dhe Betim Musliu

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KLI, Str. Ilaz Agushi

Pristina

E: [info@kli-ks.org](mailto:info@kli-ks.org)

[www.kli-ks.org](http://www.kli-ks.org)

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## 1. Executive summary

In recent years, studies and real-life examples have highlighted the potential of women leaders to lead with integrity. Numerous studies have also reached clear conclusions: with more women in power, there is less corruption. As such, the integration of a gender perspective is increasingly being discussed as a tool to combat corruption. But not only that, more broadly, it is essential to understand that gender equality plays a significant role in reducing corruption. The reasons are cited in various contexts, but generally, women tend to prioritize inclusiveness, justice, and the needs of marginalized communities, which can translate into the creation of more ethical policies and a reduction in opportunities for exploitation or corrupt practices.

Overall, societies with greater gender equality tend to have stronger institutions, better governance, and less tolerance for corrupt practices. In Kosovo, however, despite reforms over the years aimed at advancing legislation in various fields, these efforts remain incomplete without the full and meaningful inclusion of women, not just as participants but also as decision-makers. In our country, it seems that leadership positions are “occupied” by men, as men dominate all the key pillars of governance.

Since Kosovo’s declaration of independence, the Republic of Kosovo has had a total of five presidents, among whom, two have been women. In leading legislative positions, only once has there been a woman Speaker of the Assembly, and even then, for a period of just nine months. Meanwhile, in the Assembly Presidency, men have overwhelmingly dominated the past five legislative terms, with 19 vice-Speakers of the Assembly being men and only five being women. Representation of women in executive leadership positions in Kosovo, still shows underrepresentation. Since declaring independence in 2008, Kosovo has been continuously governed by male prime ministers, and there has never been a female prime minister. Moreover, in the last three governments, it is evident that women have never represented even half the number of men in the government (including ministers and deputy prime ministers). The judiciary stands no better. The Judicial Council, the Prosecutorial Council, the Supreme Court, the Office of the State Prosecutor, and the Kosovo Bar Association are all led by men. Furthermore, in the leadership of the country’s basic courts and prosecutors’ offices, men clearly dominate. Of the seven basic courts in Kosovo, only two are led by women. As for the basic prosecutors’ offices, the situation is much worse – none of the seven are led by women. Similarly, the presidents of the Court of Appeals, the Supreme Court, and the Commercial Court of Kosovo are all men. Additionally, the Special Prosecution Office of the Republic of Kosovo, the Appellate Prosecution Office, and the Office of the Chief State Prosecutor are all male-led. The only leadership position entrusted to a woman – though outside the regular judicial system, is the position of the President of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Kosovo.

The inclusion of women in leadership positions not only contributes to a diversity of perspectives in governance but is also a hallmark of a genuine democracy. This deep inequality must be addressed to create an inclusive system.

While the link between women and combating corruption presents some interesting dynamics, in cases where women are victims of corruption, they often experience its consequences

disproportionately. Corruption is harmful to gender equality and poses a barrier to women gaining full access to their civil, social, and economic rights. Women are more at risk of extortion in the provision of public services, and the corruption they experience can take the form of sexual abuse. This form of corruption is known as “sextortion,” which involves sexual exploitation as a form of corruption. It is therefore necessary to raise awareness among public officials and society at large about the unique ways in which corruption affects women, including forms like sexual exploitation. In our country, there still seems to be a lack of adequate awareness regarding the recognition and reporting of this form of corruption. Addressing this issue requires more than just anti-corruption measures, it requires a comprehensive commitment to empowering women, promoting gender equality, and creating inclusive systems.

When opportunities are equal for everyone, invisible barriers are removed, and a genuine culture of social equality is cultivated. As a result, societies with greater gender equality tend to have stronger institutions, better governance, and less tolerance for corrupt practices.

## 2. Gender aspects in the fight against corruption

### 2.1. Women's leadership and the reduction of corruption

The role of women in leadership is a critical factor in promoting governance based on values, ethical principles, and accountability. In recent years, studies and real-life examples have highlighted the potential of women leaders to lead with integrity. Research on gender and corruption seems to trace its roots to studies commissioned by the World Bank, which reported correlations between the percentage of women in leadership positions in various countries and the anti-corruption measures in those nations. The conclusion appeared clear: with more women in power, there was less corruption.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, studies have found that women in public office are more inclined to avoid improper behavior.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, other studies support the notion that women are often judged much more harshly by society than men for the same ethical violations, possibly because women in leadership positions are still underrepresented and are seen as exceptions rather than the norm. In short, if women leaders are expected to be less corruptible, there is more pressure on them to uphold this expectation compared to their male counterparts, who may perceive these expectations as implied acceptance of their corrupt behavior.<sup>3</sup> As a result of such findings, integrating a gender perspective is increasingly discussed as a tool for fighting corruption.

However, it is important to understand that gender equality plays a significant role in reducing corruption overall. Kosovo's legal framework has continuously undergone reforms in efforts to advance legislation in various fields. Nevertheless, these efforts remain incomplete without the full and meaningful inclusion of women, not just as participants but also as decision-makers. Societies with greater gender equality tend to have stronger institutions, better governance, and less tolerance for corrupt practices.

In general, women leaders tend to bring unique perspectives, greater sensitivity, and a collaborative approach to leadership, challenging traditional power structures that may enable corrupt practices. This means that women prioritize inclusiveness, justice, and the needs of marginalized communities, which can translate into the development of more ethical policies and a reduction in opportunities for exploitation or corrupt behavior. The presence of women in leadership positions is also associated with increased transparency and a stronger commitment to social justice. All of this underscores the decisive role women play in creating environments where corruption struggles to thrive.

This intersection between gender equality and anti-corruption efforts highlights the importance of empowering women leaders to contribute to ethical governance. Their participation is not merely symbolic but essential for reshaping political, economic, and social systems toward greater integrity and accountability.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "The Time is Now: Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption", 2020, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Corruption, Accountability, and Gender, Andrew C. Eggers, Nick Vivyan, and Markus Wagner, January 2018.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "The Time is Now: Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption", 2020, p. 29.

## 2.2. Women as victims of corruption

While the link between women and the fight against corruption presents some interesting dynamics, when it comes to situations where women are victims of corruption, it is clear that they experience the consequences disproportionately.

Women face discrimination in various forms – legal, political, economic, and socio-cultural prejudices. Therefore, it is unsurprising that women are particularly vulnerable to and affected by corruption. Corruption is detrimental to gender equality and poses a barrier for women in achieving full access to their civil, social, and economic rights. Two significant issues emerge in this context: first, women are at higher risk of extortion when accessing public services, and second, the corruption they experience can have an element of sexual abuse.<sup>4</sup>

These two issues intersect in what is known as the “gendered currency of corruption,” referring to situations where women are asked for sexual favors in exchange for access to services that are sometimes even free of charge.<sup>5</sup> This form of corruption, referred to as “sextortion,” involves sexual exploitation as a form of corruption. However, the impact of corruption on women is not uniform. Factors such as age, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status intersect to exacerbate the vulnerabilities of specific groups of women. For instance, rural women and those from marginalized communities often face even greater obstacles in accessing justice or reporting corruption due to systemic discrimination and geographic isolation.

In our country, there still seems to be a lack of adequate awareness about recognizing and reporting this form of corruption. Addressing this issue requires more than just anti-corruption measures, it calls for a comprehensive commitment to empowering women, promoting gender equality, and creating inclusive systems.

## 3. Gender division of leadership positions in Kosovo

In Kosovo, leadership positions appear to be predominantly “occupied” by men. Across all major pillars of governance, men hold the majority of key roles. The following section provides an overview of the past few years, offering a factual explanation and a general assessment of the current state of gender representation within the country’s main pillars: legislative, executive, and judiciary – along with the position of the President of the country.

### 3.1. The Presidency

The President of the Republic of Kosovo represents the unity of the people. As the legitimate representative of the country both domestically and internationally, the President serves as the guarantor of the democratic functioning of Kosovo’s institutions.<sup>6</sup> The President also acts as a

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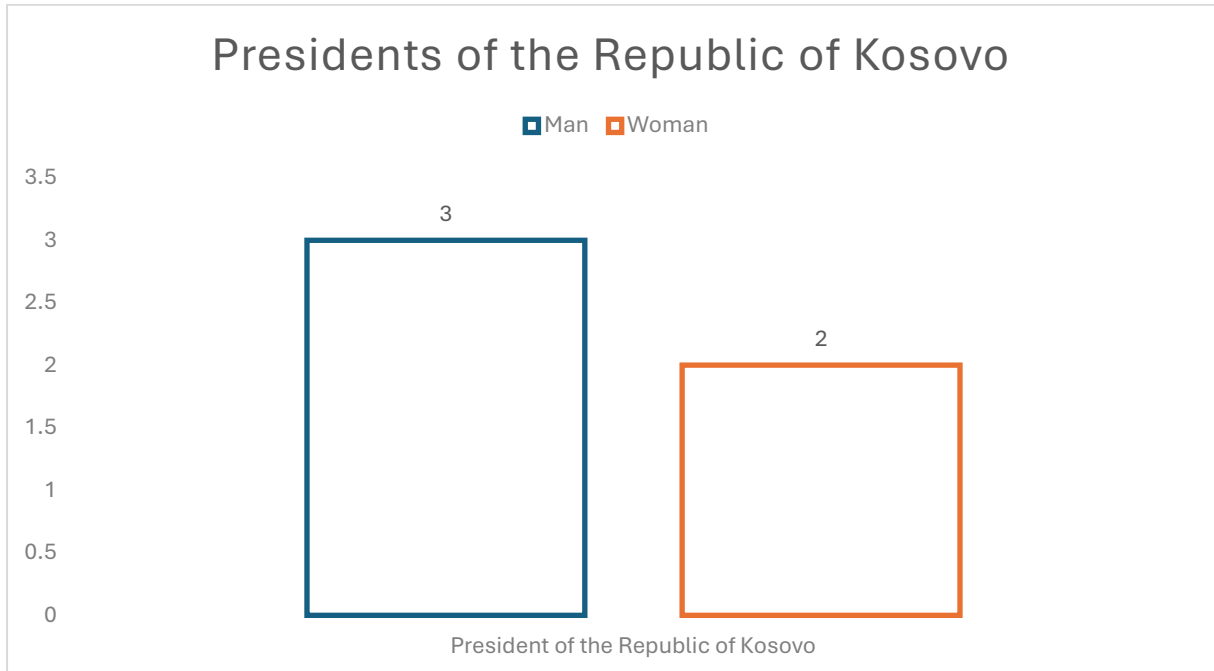
<sup>4</sup> Transparency International, “Recommendations for Women Against Corruption within OGP Action Plans”, 2020, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “The Time is Now: Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption”, 2020, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 4.3.

mediator during times of political crisis, fostering dialogue between political parties and institutions. As a unifying figure, the President ensures that the country operates within the framework of its Constitution and laws.

Since Kosovo's declaration of independence, the Republic of Kosovo has had a total of five presidents. Over the years, two of them have been women.

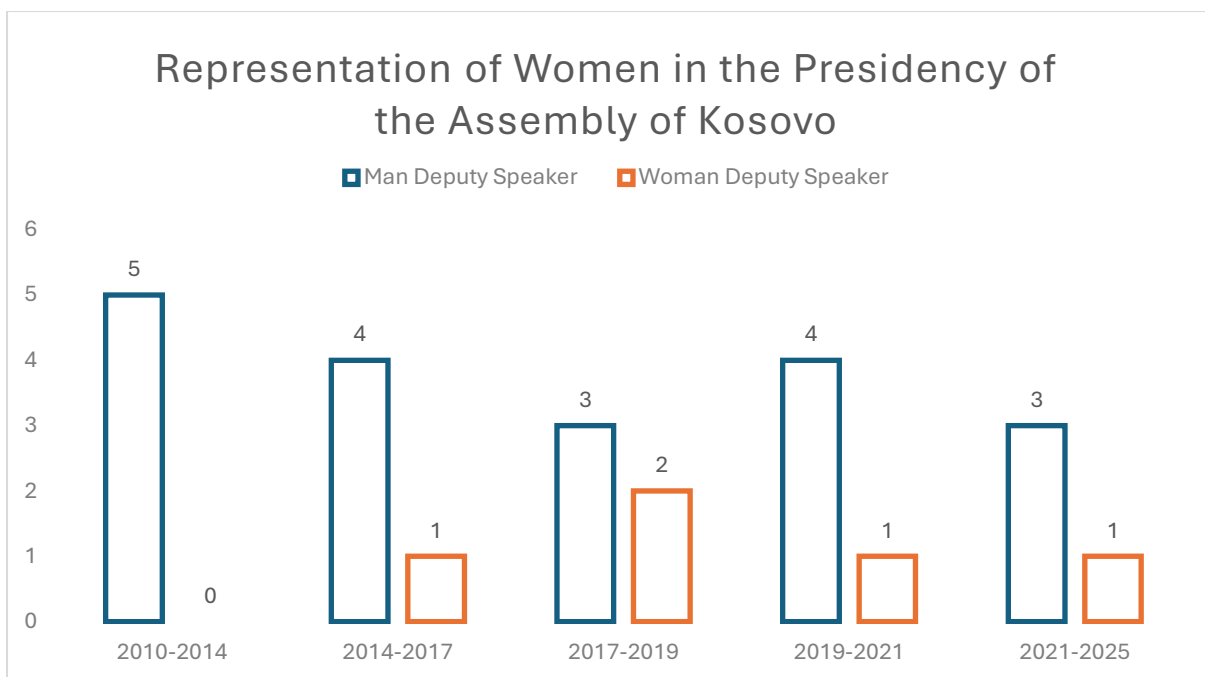


**Graphic 1. The number of female and male Presidents of the Republic of Kosovo over the years.**

### 3.2. The legislative branch

In the leadership positions of Kosovo's legislative branch, only once has a woman served as the head of the Assembly, and even then, only for a period of nine months. Within the Assembly's presidency, men have overwhelmingly dominated during the last five legislative terms. Each term has had 4 or 5 deputy speakers, totaling 19 men and only 5 women across all terms.





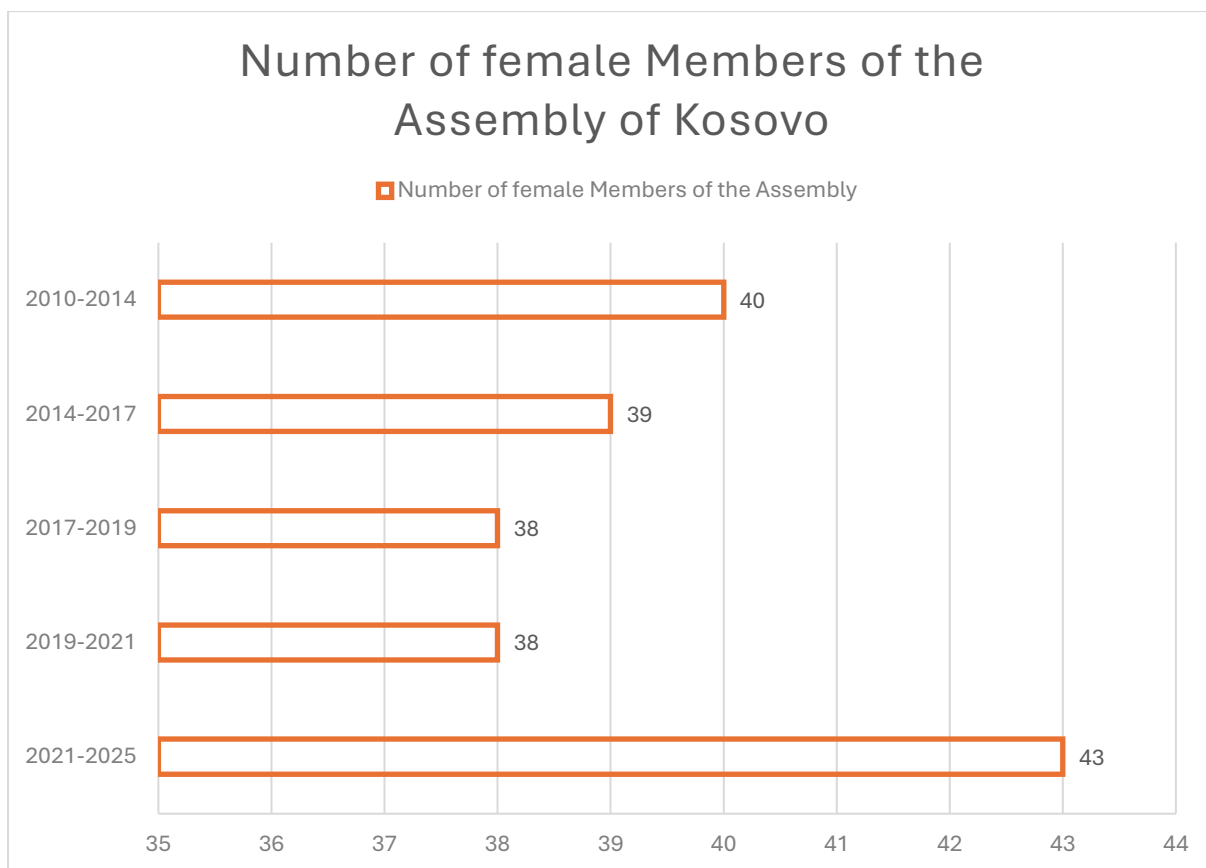
**Graphic 2. The number of female and male Deputy Speakers in the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo over the years.**

In Kosovo, a gender quota of 30% has been established to ensure the inclusion of women in electoral candidate lists. This requirement was reinforced by the 2010 amendment to the Law on Elections, which stipulates *if, after the allocation of seats to candidates on the list of a Political Entity, as set out in paragraph 5 of this Article, the candidates of the minority gender have not been allocated at least 30% of the total seats allocated to that Political Entity, the last elected candidate of the majority gender will be replaced by the next candidate of the minority gender on the reordered candidate list until the total number of seats allocated to the minority gender is at least 30%.*<sup>7</sup> Further clarification and strengthening of this principle came with the new law adopted in 2023, the Law on General Elections in the Republic of Kosovo (hereinafter: the Law on Elections), which stipulates *in each political entity's candidate list, at least thirty percent (30%) shall be male and at least thirty (30%) per cent shall be female, with one candidate from each gender included at least once in each group of three candidates, counting from the first candidate in the list.*<sup>8</sup>

This provision is considered an affirmative measure to increase the representation of women in the country's primary legislative body. For instance, in the most recent elections, women made up approximately 36% of the legislature. It is also worth noting that many women elected as deputies were chosen directly through citizen votes, without the need to invoke the gender quota.

<sup>7</sup> Law No. 03/L-256 on Amending and Supplementing Law No. 03/L-073 on General Elections in the Republic of Kosovo, Article 8, Paragraph 2.

<sup>8</sup> Law No. 08/L-228 on General Elections in the Republic of Kosovo, Article 28.



**Graphic 3. The number of female Members of the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo over the years.<sup>9</sup>**

Despite this progress, the representation of women in the Assembly of Kosovo still falls short of the requirements set by the Law on Gender Equality, which goes a step further by stipulating that public institutions, including the legislative branch, must ensure 50% representation of each gender.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.3. The Executive branch

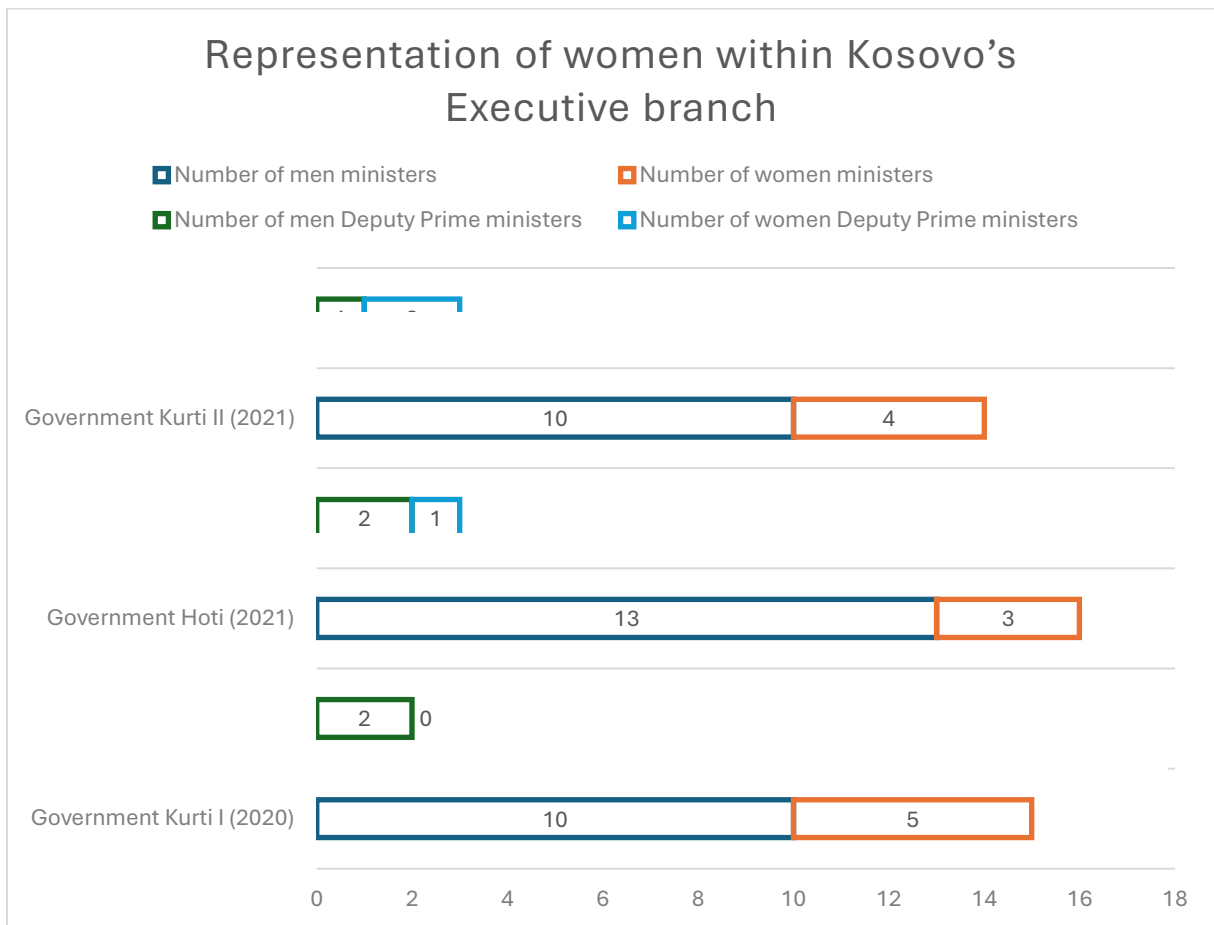
Despite a slight increase over the years, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles within Kosovo’s executive branch. Despite the existence of legal frameworks, such as the Law on Gender Equality, and various policies promoting greater participation of women, significant challenges persist. These include systemic barriers and persistent gender stereotypes, which hinder women from achieving equal representation in high-ranking positions within the executive. The current level of representation continues to fall short of the standards set by existing laws.

Since the declaration of independence in 2008, Kosovo has consistently been governed by male prime ministers, and there has never been a female prime minister.

<sup>9</sup> Data obtained from the Central Election Commission (CEC).

<sup>10</sup> Law No. 05/L-020 on Gender Equality, Article 6, Paragraph 8.

The graphical representation below illustrates the participation of women in government, both as ministers and deputy prime ministers, over the last three governments. A clear pattern emerges: at no point during these years have women constituted even half the number of men in government positions.



**Graphic 4. The number of female and male Ministers and Deputy Prime Ministers in the Government of the Republic of Kosovo over the years.**

The inclusion of women in leadership positions not only contributes to the diversity of perspectives in governance but is also an indicator of a genuine democracy. In this context, analyzing the current situation, identifying the challenges faced by women in Kosovo’s executive branch, and addressing these challenges to improve and increase women’s participation in such positions is an essential step forward.

### 3.4. The judiciary

The Judicial Council, the Prosecutorial Council, the Supreme Court, the Office of the Chief State Prosecutor, and the Kosovo Bar Association are all led by men. The only leadership position entrusted to a woman—albeit outside the regular judicial system—is the role of the President of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Kosovo.



**Graphic 5. Gender division of leadership positions in the Constitutional Court and the justice system.**

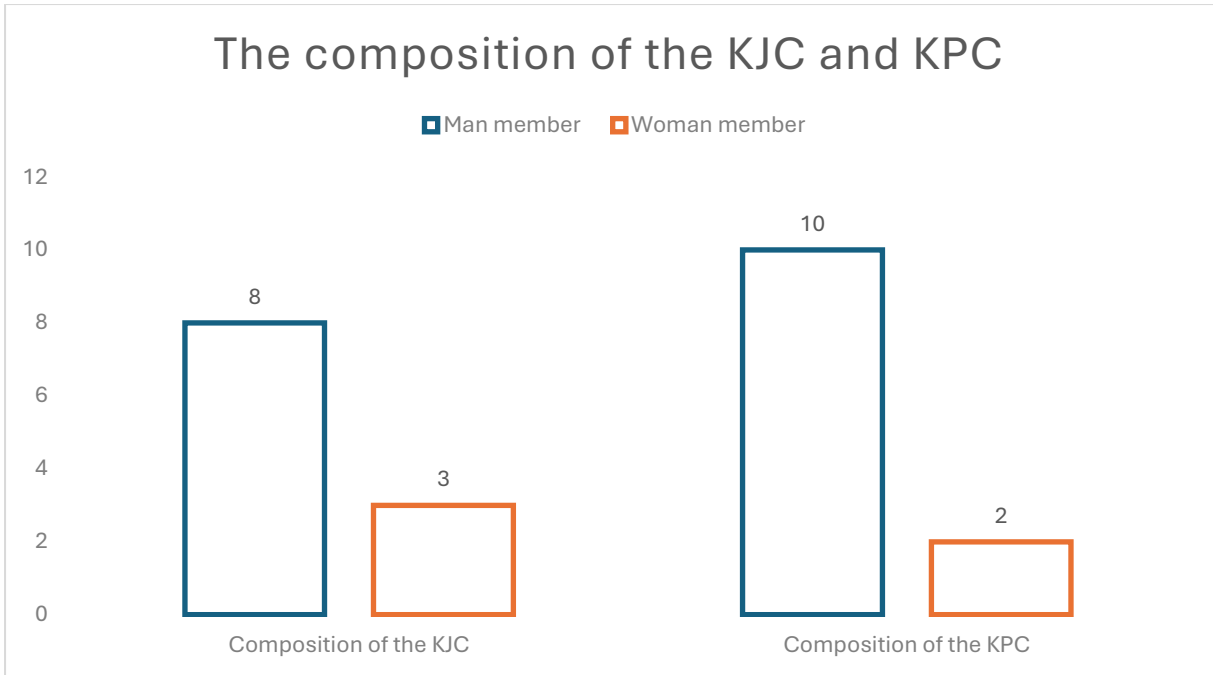
The fact that only the Constitutional Court is led by a woman, while the entire regular judicial system is led by men, effectively excludes women from actively participating in leadership, policymaking, and effective decision-making to improve the judiciary, prosecution, and legal profession. This highlights a pronounced lack of willingness to entrust women with leadership positions. Advancing women’s rights should not remain confined to the creation of legal frameworks or specific policies but must extend to their practical implementation and to changing the mindset that leadership roles are “reserved” for men.

The Kosovo Judicial Council (KJC) and the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council (KPC) are independent institutions that serve as fundamental pillars of the justice system. They play an irreplaceable role in ensuring the rule of law and protecting the rights of citizens in Kosovo. The organization and composition of these two institutions are defined by the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo.<sup>1112</sup> Similarly, as in the leadership positions of these two institutions, both of which are headed by men, their composition is also dominated by men. The KJC, out of 11 members, consists of 8 men and only 3 women. On the other hand, the KPC has 10 men and just 2 women as members of the council.

<sup>11</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 108.

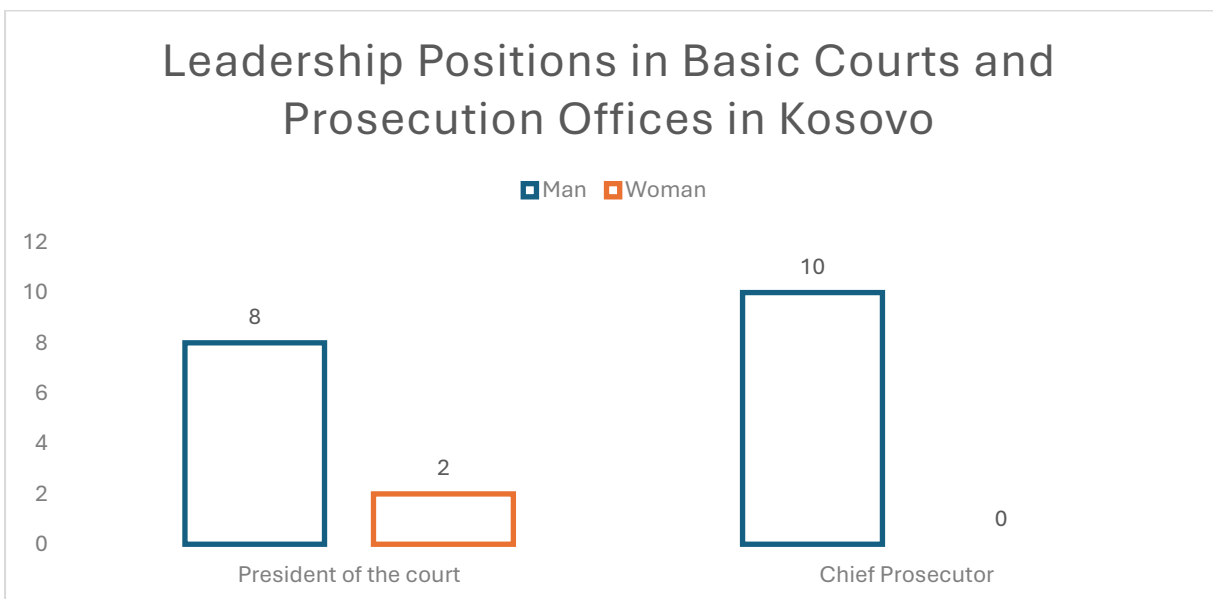
<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 110.





**Graphic 6. Gender distribution of Members of the KJC and the KPC.**

Moreover, men overwhelmingly dominate leadership roles in both basic courts and basic prosecution offices in the country. Out of seven basic courts in Kosovo, only two are headed by women, while the remaining five are led by men. The situation is significantly worse within the prosecution offices, where one of the seven basic prosecution offices in Kosovo are headed by women. Similarly, the leadership of higher judicial and prosecutorial institutions is entirely male-dominated. The Court of Appeals, the Supreme Court, and the Commercial Court of Kosovo are all led by men. Additionally, the Special Prosecution Office of the Republic of Kosovo (SPRK), the Appellate Prosecution Office, and the Office of the Chief State Prosecutor are also exclusively led by men.



**Graphic 7. Gender Distribution of Court Presidents and Chief Prosecutors.**

Advocacy is considered an independent profession and is defined as a constitutional category.<sup>13</sup> The Kosovo Bar Association (KBA) represents the key institution for protecting and promoting the rights of lawyers, improving professional standards, and ensuring access to justice. In the history of this institution, since 1974 to 2024, only one woman has served as the President of the KBA.<sup>14</sup> This situation further demonstrates another key justice institution dominated by men.

This deep inequality in the justice system must be addressed to establish an inclusive justice system. It is essential to challenge gender stereotypes and change the prevailing mindset, contributing to the creation of a society where opportunities are equal for everyone, invisible barriers are eliminated, and a genuine culture of social equality is fostered. As a result, the justice system is perceived as more trustworthy, encouraging the belief that it is fair and impartial. Such a justice system inevitably increases the demand for addressing citizens' rights, particularly for marginalized groups. This growing demand for access to justice helps bridge the gap between legal provisions and lived experiences, further advancing the legal framework and societal aspects. Ultimately, this contributes to combating and minimizing corruption.

## 4. A Gendered approach to combating corruption

Gender equality plays a crucial role in reducing corruption. Societies with greater gender equality tend to have stronger institutions, better governance, and less tolerance for corrupt practices. Some perspectives suggest that functional, liberal institutions not only enable greater participation of women in decision-making but also contribute to lower levels of corruption simultaneously.<sup>15</sup>

However, what generally prevails across various studies, global analyses, and specific practices are common points highlighting how women leaders contribute to the fight against corruption. Consequently, this chapter is dedicated to some of the key leadership characteristics of women, such as: promoting transparency, ethical governance, and accountability.

### 4.1. Promoting transparency

The presence of women in leadership positions is often associated with increased transparency and a stronger commitment to social justice. Women leaders play a crucial role in combating corruption and fostering transparency within society. Their inclusion in leadership roles enhances the level of integrity and accountability in both public and private institutions. Numerous studies indicate that women prioritize inclusivity, fairness, and the needs of marginalized communities, which can translate into the development of more ethical policies and a reduction in opportunities for exploitation or corrupt practices.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Article 111.

<sup>14</sup> See link: <https://oak-ks.org/kryetari>.

<sup>15</sup> Hung-En Sung, "Fairer Sex or Fairer System? Revisiting the Gender and Corruption Nexus", December 2003, p. 710.

In the context of Kosovo, where corruption remains a significant challenge, the role of women as leaders is essential in building a more just and equitable society. Encouraging the participation of women in politics, public administration, and the private sector, especially by entrusting them with leadership positions, not only strengthens democracy but also creates an environment where corruption struggles to thrive.

Through inclusivity, recognized as a hallmark of women's leadership, transparency is directly enhanced. This approach to leadership, involving comprehensive consultations, promotes more sustainable and fair practices. Consequently, it minimizes the likelihood of corrupt dealings and scandals.

## 4.2. Ethical Governance

Women tend to uphold higher standards of ethical behavior, concerning specifically regarding the common good. In business, women are also less likely to engage in bribery, demonstrating a stronger commitment to integrity and ethical practices.<sup>16</sup> This intersection between gender equality and anti-corruption efforts highlights the importance of empowering women leaders to contribute to ethical governance.

Moreover, corrupt networks are often dominated by men and tend to exclude women from participation. Therefore, it can be assumed that increasing the number of women in decision-making roles could disrupt these existing networks and, as a result, reduce corruption levels. Since women have largely been excluded from power and consequently from corrupt networks, they are more likely to oppose corrupt behavior when they encounter it.<sup>17</sup>

Consequently, it can be concluded that women's leadership helps transform institutional culture by setting higher standards for ethics and accountability.

## 4.3. Public perception and accountability

Accountability of leaders toward citizens ensures that concrete actions align with the principles of justice and transparency. These are powerful tools that directly enhance the role of women leaders in society, particularly when utilized in the fight against corruption. Women in leadership positions are often perceived as more ethical and transparent, creating higher expectations for them. This perception not only increases public trust but also establishes higher standards that act as deterrents against corrupt practices.

As a result, women leaders, aware of these expectations, are motivated to demonstrate accountability. In doing so, they not only directly combat corruption but also reshape societal expectations of leadership, fostering long-term systemic change. This means that the representation of women in leadership positions is not merely symbolic but essential for reforming political, economic, and social systems toward greater integrity and accountability.

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<sup>16</sup> See link: <https://www.transparency.org/en/press/gender-and-corruption-are-women-less-corrupt>.

<sup>17</sup> Westminster Foundation for Democracy, "Anti-Corruption and Gender: The Role of Women's Political Participation", January 2022, p. 12.

## 5. Empowering women in combating corruption

A recent study confirms that the mechanisms through which women reduce corruption levels also vary depending on the type of corruption being addressed. The study shows that the inclusion of women has reduced both “petty corruption” and “grand corruption,” but for very different reasons. The authors argue, for instance, that women tend to focus on sectors that are traditionally significant to them and reduce petty corruption within these areas. On the other hand, grand corruption is tackled by dismantling male-dominated networks, thereby disrupting the continuity of corrupt practices.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, greater inclusion of women in decision-making processes challenges traditional norms and contributes to broader societal recognition of women’s capabilities in leadership positions, including their role in combating corruption.

### 5.1. Identifying and recognizing all forms of corruption

A cornerstone for combating a widespread phenomenon is identifying key issues and understanding the basic concepts related to that phenomenon. In this regard, it is essential to recognize all forms of corruption, including sexual exploitation (or “sextortion”).

In our country, there still appears to be a lack of adequate awareness about recognizing and reporting this form of corruption. Addressing this issue requires more than just anti-corruption measures; it necessitates a comprehensive commitment to empowering women, promoting gender equality, and creating inclusive systems that reduce stigma and encourage victims to report such cases.

A first step in this direction is raising societal awareness about this phenomenon and similar practices, followed by integrating a gender perspective into overall anti-corruption strategies and policies. This approach paves the way for addressing the needs of women and combating the abuse they face when they are victims of corruption.

### 5.2. The importance of affirmative measures

Affirmative measures play a critical role in promoting gender equality and ensuring the inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making positions. These measures are particularly important in societies where systemic barriers, cultural norms, and institutional practices have historically limited women’s participation in governance and public life.

Quotas have been an effective measure for increasing women’s representation, and if the argument holds that a higher number of women in leadership positions reduces corruption, they can be expected to serve—at least indirectly—as a tool to curb corruption.<sup>19</sup> By guaranteeing a minimum level of participation, these measures ensure that women have access to opportunities to influence policies and decisions, including those aimed at combating

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 20.



corruption. Anyway, it is important to emphasize that the Law on Gender Equality provides for greater representation of women than provided by the quotas, thus stipulating equal gender representation in all legislative, executive and judiciary bodies and other public institutions is achieved when ensured a minimum representation of fifty percent (50%) for each gender, including their governing and decision-making bodies.<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, affirmative measures pave the way for long-term systemic change. They ensure that women's voices are heard in the creation of laws, policies, and strategies, including those targeting corruption. This enables institutions to reflect gender diversity, thus ensuring that institutions become more balanced and capable of addressing the needs of all citizens.

### 5.3. Combating gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are generalized views or prejudices about the attributes, characteristics, or roles that women and men have or are expected to have.<sup>21</sup> Such prejudices limit individual potential but also perpetuate structural inequalities. Addressing and combating these stereotypes can be a powerful strategy for tackling corruption.

In general, gender stereotypes are often accompanied by a culture of silence and tolerance toward unethical practices. This results in many cases where women and marginalized groups are discouraged from reporting corruption due to fear of retaliation or negative public perception. Thus, combating stereotypes and promoting gender equality can create a safer environment for everyone, where corruption is less likely to go unreported.

From a global perspective, Nordic countries actively fight gender stereotypes and consistently record the lowest levels of corruption in the world, further strengthening the connection between gender equality and transparency.

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<sup>20</sup> Law No. 05/L-020 on Gender Equality, Article 6.8.

<sup>21</sup> OHCHR, "Gender Stereotyping and Women's Rights to Gender Equality". For more, see link: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/gender-stereotyping>.

## 6. Recommendations

1. Legislative and law enforcement institutions must fully and continuously commit to empowering women, promoting gender equality, and creating inclusive systems, in order to leverage women's leadership as a tool to combat corruption.
2. Efforts should be made to increase awareness among public officials and society about the unique ways corruption affects women, including specific forms such as sexual exploitation (sextortion).
3. Institutional discussions should begin to address legal and administrative measures to tackle gender-specific forms of corruption, including demands for sexual favors as a prerequisite for accessing services.
4. The Office of the Prime Minister and the Government of Kosovo must ensure that the National Anti-Corruption Strategy includes planned activities from a gender perspective.