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# **PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN ARMENIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

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**ANALYSIS**

# Imprint

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# 1. Executive Summary

The 2024 UN annual report entitled "Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals" (UN Women, 2024) highlights that the world is falling far short of its obligations towards protecting and supporting women and girls. Although there are some positive developments regarding poverty reduction, closing gender gaps in education, and legal reforms in the protection of women, so far, not a single indicator of Goal 5, gender equality, has been fully achieved. Of particular note is the fact that no country has all the relevant laws that prohibit discrimination, prevent gender-based violence, protect equal rights in marriage and divorce, guarantee equal pay, and ensure full access to sexual and reproductive health. According to the abovementioned report, gender equality in parliaments will not be achieved until 2063, yet there are only six years left as a deadline for the implementation of SDGs.

Moreover, among other findings, the report indicates that women worldwide spend 2.5 times more hours per day on unpaid care and housework than men do. In 2023, women occupied 26.9% of parliamentary seats, 35.5% of local self-government bodies, and 27.5% of management positions.

Women's equal participation in the social and political life of Armenia remains insufficient. Women's political participation remains relatively low in Armenia, although the number of parliamentary seats held by women has increased significantly, rising from 9.9% in 2017 to 35.5% in 2023. Some changes have been reported in terms of the gendered aspects of voting behavior. Compared to elections in 2018, women's participation increased by 3.8% in the 2021 elections, whereas men's participation decreased by 4.3%. Some differences have also been reported among employed and unemployed women in this regard. Employed women are more active in elections and make more active, conscious choices (NIRAS, 2024).

Social attitudes toward gender roles remain rigid. Despite some positive changes in social attitudes towards women's leadership, social stereotypes persist with regard to women's role in politics. The Gender Social Norms Index shows that 92% of Armenia's population holds at least one gender-related bias. More men share at least two biases (82%) than women (68%), and twice as many women have no biases (10%) than men (5%) (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). Prevalent biases concern economic participation and physical integrity, while the fewest biases are recorded with respect to education and gender.

To address this issue, the paper proposes a series of

actionable recommendations. These include introducing and enforcing stronger gender quotas in leadership roles across governance, public administration, and other decision-making bodies to ensure at least 30% representation of women. It advocates for wage transparency reforms and targeted programs to empower women through professional development and confidence-building initiatives. Additionally, the paper emphasizes the importance of combating stereotypes and gender biases through widespread educational campaigns and integrating gender-sensitive curricula in schools and universities. Improved childcare systems and flexible workplace policies are also suggested as critical measures to enable more women to balance professional and personal responsibilities. These efforts will foster an inclusive, equitable, and gender-balanced society in Armenia.

## 2. Situation of Women in Armenia

Armenia ranks 71st among 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2023, Political Empowerment sub-index, and 139<sup>th</sup> in the Health and Survival sub-index (World Economic Forum, 2023). In the World Bank's 2021 Women, Business, and Law Index (The World Bank, 2021), which assesses countries' performance in achieving SDGs and the impact of their legislation on women's equal opportunities, Armenia scores relatively well at 82.5 out of 100, which is close to the average for high-income countries (with a score of 85.9). However, the index reveals challenges in Armenia related to women's entry into the labor market, the existence of occupational segregation, and the gender wage gap. On a positive note, it also shows that Armenia is in a good state in terms of legislative efforts.

Despite a number of steps aimed at promoting women's participation in recent years, inequality between women and men in practice continues to have a negative impact at all levels of socio-economic development, ranging from the protection of individual freedoms to fair and inclusive decision-making.

It is important to note that the main obstacles to the promotion of the role of women are not the lack of legal regulations but largely the long-existing practices and stereotypes in society. A report titled "Breaking down gender bias" (United Nations Development Programme, 2023) indicates that the difference between the reality defined by legal regulations and public perceptions remains significant. According to the data published in the mentioned report, 49% of respondents believe that men are better political leaders than women, and 27% of respondents believe that it is important for democracy that women and men have equal rights. In their turn, 43% of the respondents believe that men are better executives than women in the field of business (United Nations Development Programme, 2023).

Indeed, the gender gap between men and women in Armenia is expressed in many ways in practice. The predominance of men in decision-making almost in all levels of public life, such as the problem of unequal pay, harassment and/or gender-based discrimination, the influence of stereotypes on career choice and employment planning, societal pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, maternity (and other family statuses) conditioned challenges including in the context of competition in the labor market, etc.

Against this background, the deepening of gender-based

inequality affects the dynamics of both women and the country's overall development, as the involvement of all members of society and ensuring equal opportunities is a prerequisite for Armenia's sustainable development. Especially taking into account the fact that 47.2% of the population in Armenia are men, whereas 52.8% are women. The average age of the population is estimated to be 37.4 years old, with the average age of men at 35.2 years and the average age of women at 39.3 years (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, 2023a). It is also important to note that for the 2022-2023 academic year, 16,536 students were admitted to Armenian universities, of which 56% or 9,299 were women (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, 2023b). This means that more women in Armenian society have higher education than men.

Women's empowerment is fundamental to the country's economic development. Economic activities cannot be effective if half of the population is left out or has limited involvement in the key process of public life in Armenia. As mentioned above, women often face discrimination in the labor market, pay inequality and a lack of clear career growth opportunities. Effectively addressing and overcoming these problems is not only of the utmost importance in terms of the state's commitment to equal protection of human rights, but it can also have a significant impact on the activation of economic processes.

Empowering women is a key factor in reducing poverty, growing economies, and building healthy and safe communities. According to a report entitled "Facts and figures; Economic empowerment," women's economic empowerment includes women's ability to participate equally in existing markets, access to and control over productive resources, access to decent work, control and voice over their own time, life and body, increased agency and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels, both in domestic to international institutions." (UN Women. n.d.).

### 3. Assessment of women's participation in public administration

Although legislative provisions are important in ensuring women's rights, they are not sufficient when considering the measures to implement such legislative norms. In other words, it is necessary to have state practical strategies and clearly developed policies that will change the business culture, break stereotypes, and eliminate real obstacles to ensure women's participation. Because even the term participation is distorted, just physical participation is not enough; it is necessary to create a real opportunity for women to participate in decision-making. For example, when discussing the structure of the armed forces, the majority of employees are women, whereas in decision-making positions, the heads of all 15 departments of the Ministry of Defense of Armenia are men.

Similarly, in Armenia's National Assembly, while women account for 35.5% of parliamentary seats, the representation of women in leadership roles within the Assembly remains significantly lower (IPU Parline, n.d.). None of the Deputy Speakers are women, and only two out of the 12 Standing Committees are chaired by women. This highlights the persistent gap between formal representation and actual reality, underscoring the need for mechanisms that not only ensure numerical representation but also facilitate women's active involvement in leadership and decision-making processes.

Gaps in gender inequality in Armenia are most evident in the field of public administration and the private sector. The governors of all 10 regions of the Republic of Armenia are men, and the head of only one of the 18 banks operating in the Republic of Armenia is a woman. Neither the Speaker of the National Assembly nor any of his two deputies are women. In turn, only two of the 12 standing committees within the National Assembly (the Standing Committee on Fiscal and Budgetary Affairs and the Standing Committee on Labor and Social Affairs) are chaired by women - 16.6% (National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, 2024). As to the members of the government, both the Prime Minister and the two Deputy Prime Ministers are men; only two of the 12 ministers are women - 16.6%. As for the judiciary, 3 of the nine active

members of the Supreme Judicial Council are women (2 are judges, 1 is a legal scientist), - 33.3%. (Judicial Department of the Republic of Armenia, 2024a). The gender balance in the committees of the General Assembly of Judges was also studied. Thus, four out of eight members of the Committee on Ethics and Disciplinary Matters, i.e., 50%, are women (Judicial Department of the Republic of Armenia, 2024b). One out of seven members of the Educational Affairs Committee is a woman - 14.3%. Two out of five members of the committee for evaluating the performance of judges are women - 40%.

In terms of other bodies provided by the constitution, four out of seven members of the Central Electoral Commission (including the deputy chairperson of the Commission) are women, otherwise 57% (Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Armenia, 2024). Three out of six members of the Television and Radio Commission are women, otherwise 50% (Television and Radio Commission of the Republic of Armenia, 2024). All seven members of the Audit Chamber are men (Audit Chamber of the Republic of Armenia, 2024). The President of the Central Bank and his two deputies are men, and all five members of the board are also men (Central Bank of Armenia, 2024).

Moreover, two out of six members of the Competition Protection Commission are women - 33.3% (Competition Protection Commission, 2024). One out of five members of the Public Services Regulatory Commission is a woman - 20% (Public Services Regulatory Commission, 2024). Two out of four members of the Corruption Prevention Commission (currently, the position of the Commission chairperson is vacant) are women, otherwise 50% (Corruption Prevention Commission, 2024).

As for the local self-government, both the mayor of Yerevan and his four deputies are men; as for the composition of the Yerevan Council of Elders, 24 out of 65 members are women - 36.9%. However, none of the chairpersons of the four standing commissions, as well as the heads of 12 administrative districts, are women (Yerevan Municipality, 2024). The head of the Gyumri community, the second largest city of the republic, is a man, and 13 of the 37 members of the Council of Elders are women - 35.1% (Gyumri Municipality, 2024). In turn, the head of the Vanadzor community, the third largest city in Armenia, is a man, and 12 of the 33 members of the Council of Elders are women - 36.3% (Vanadzor Municipality, 2024). It is noteworthy that as of November 2022, a total of 1234 men and 424 women were represented in 71 communities of the Republic - 34.3% (Women's Information-Analytical Network NGO, 2022).

## 4. Obstacles to Active Participation of Women in Political and Public Life

This section shows the results of the in-depth interviews conducted with 30 alumni of the School of Liberal with an aim to find out what are the main obstacles of women who are willing to actively participate in the economic and political life of the country.

The research looked at such things as respondents' current employment status, career path, attempts to overcome challenges and difficulties in professional advancement, perceived gender bias and stereotypes in the workplace, existing support systems and their effectiveness, and personal strategies for career growth and success.

Based on the collection of individual stories of the interviewees, the reasons for all the conclusions indicated in many international reports related to the insufficient political and economic participation of women have become clearly visible. The survey was conducted among people interested in politics; however, only 20% of the respondents are members of different parties. It is noteworthy that a group of respondents mentioned the party system as a reason that detracts them from politics, and they prefer to be involved in social reforms or community processes. Thus, women do not want to participate in political processes, which may explain the high percentage of non-partisan members.

Regarding the career and professional growth opportunities among the women who participated in these surveys, it is necessary to note that a significant percentage of the respondents are those who have never worked in their profession, which indicates either the limitations of the labour market or the problem of not adapting to the professional field.

At least 30% of the participants faced the problem of gender-based limitations during their careers. Trying to reveal the fundamentals of the problematic situation, one of participants made the following comments: "Most of the staff in our municipality are women, though the decision-makers are men. However, the issue lies more in the lack of motivation on the women's side in this

case".

More than half of the respondents claimed that their choice of profession was largely dictated by family and society's gender stereotypes, such as the belief that women are more suited for nurturing roles like teaching or healthcare, while men are encouraged to pursue leadership or technical professions. Additionally, traditional expectations that women prioritize family responsibilities over career aspirations often steer them away from demanding fields like engineering, politics, or law enforcement. These stereotypes perpetuate the idea that women should avoid professions deemed "masculine," reinforcing occupational segregation and limiting women's professional opportunities. Referring to the limitations of choosing a profession, some women noted that a number of professions, for example, the military sector or the law enforcement system, are unacceptable for women not only for family reasons but also due to the influence of social perceptions.

The analysis of these issues shows that traditional perceptions of gender roles are still present at a number of levels, from family to intra-society. Although they tend to decrease, they affect both women's professional growth and the formation of personal space and relationships.

In summary, the impact of stereotypes on promoting the role of women has not only been captured by this research but is also found in international reports, in particular, in the 2022 and 2023 Human Rights Reports on Armenia published by the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. It is stated that although the laws in force in Armenia do not limit women's participation in political processes, and women have indeed participated, the patriarchal nature of society has prevented women from participating in the country's political and economic life on a large scale, as well as in decision-making positions in the public sector, and there has often been gender-based harassment and speculation against female parliamentarians and female officials (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2023).



## 5. International Perspectives

To respond to the identified problems in a targeted manner, a study of international advanced, exemplary, and relevant experience was carried out. In particular, the regulations of 11 developed and developing countries (United States of America, Estonia, Georgia, Canada, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Moldova, Netherlands, Finland, and Sweden) were studied mainly focusing on: a) Mechanisms for protecting the rights of working women, b) promoting the role of women in decision-making processes, and c) equal pay for women and men. The choice of the countries was based on their innovative and specific (both positive and negative) approaches. In particular, the research included the following milestone aspects:

### 5.1 Mechanisms for protecting the rights of working women

According to the standards of the International Labor Organization (ILO), maternity leave is one of the universal and key labor rights of women. That leave should last at least 14 weeks, although the ILO suggests extending it up to 18 weeks (World Health Organization, n.d.).

This fundamental right is properly protected in all the examples considered, where unequal treatment on the basis of maternity or pregnancy in employment relations is qualified as discrimination, implying appropriate legal remedies. It is noteworthy that the Gender Equality Act of the Republic of Estonia 2004, for example, the employer's creation of unfavorable working conditions for pregnant women (Article 6) is also considered discrimination. In addition, Estonia's labor law obliges (Employment Contracts Act of the Republic of Estonia 2008) employers to set flexible working conditions for mothers, such as reduced working hours or remote work.

In the field of regulation of parental leave, a norm was set by the 2022 amendment of the relevant legislation in Finland, which provides that each parent is provided with 160 days of parental allowance, and parents may decide to combine this allowance and the leave and grant its use to one of the parents (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, n.d.).

The Kingdom of the Netherlands has one of the best examples of legislation in the context of the effectiveness of mechanisms for the protection of the rights of working women. The Law on Equality between Women and Men 1994 stipulates that during the first nine months of a child's birth, a working mother has the

right to take a break from work to take care of or breastfeed the child. This allows the working mother to take off work for ¼ of the total working time. A special room that can be locked from the inside must be available at the workplace.

In Canada, pregnancy discrimination is equated with sex discrimination. Under Canadian law, employers have a positive obligation to accommodate the needs of pregnant women in the workplace (Canadian Human Rights Commission National Office, n.d.).

### 5.2 Promoting the role of women in decision-making processes

According to the World Economic Forum, women's participation remains uneven and low in almost all sectors. Women make up 42% of the global workforce and 31.7% in leadership positions Worldwide (World Economic Forum, 2024). Senior leadership positions remain out of reach for women, according to a published report.

Among the most common tools for promoting the role of women in the decision-making process is the reliance on regulatory mechanisms, such as the establishment of quotas for women. The obligation of the gender quota in the United States of Mexico is fixed at the level of the constitution (2013). In this country, with the latest changes (made in 2014), a requirement of at least 40% representation of women was established, as a result of which, according to the data of 2023, the representation of women in the legislative body of this country reaches 50%, and in the Government 42.1% (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, n.d.).

At the same time, despite these excellent indicators, there has never been an electoral quota for a separate gender in Sweden, which indicates that availability of quotas system is not vital. As of 2023, Sweden ranks first among the European Union member states in terms of women's participation in political decisions. In 2022, 46.1% of the seats in the Swedish parliamentary elections were won by women, and 11 of the 23 ministerial positions were held by women.

### 5.3 Equal pay for women and men

The issue of equal pay for women is considered in the context of women's economic equality. One of the reasons for unequal pay is that women tend to spend more time at home caring for and doing housework and are overrepresented in low-paying jobs.

On May 10, 2023, the EU approved Directive 2023/970 of the European Parliament and of the of May 10, 2023 to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and



women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms (2023), according to which employers operating in the Union's member states are obliged to provide data on pay (Citation). This key document can be of landmark importance in the process of similar reforms implemented in Armenia.

As in the vast majority of the observed countries, as well as in Armenia, the legislation addressing the issue of equal pay generally meets the international standards of non-discrimination and ensuring gender equality.

## 6. Legal Framework Promoting Women's Participation in Decision-Making Process in Armenia

The constitution and regulations in the protection of women's rights in its current positive expression were fixed by the 2015 amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia (2015), directly stipulating that women and men have equal rights (Article 30). Thus, the current constitution and laws contain specific provisions and guidelines for state and local self-government bodies, including legislation and enforcement, to ensure the prohibition of discrimination against women at the legislative level, as well as to take steps in that direction in practice.

At the same time, Armenia has joined a number of international legal instruments which provide legal guarantees for the protection of women's rights. In the context of the United Nations, one can single out the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948)<sup>1</sup>, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (in the context of participation in decision-making, Articles 7 and 8 deserve special attention), and the 1953 Convention on Political Rights of Women (Articles II and III), Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (1954).

In the context of the Council of Europe, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Article 14) (Council of Europe, 1950) is characteristic, and this list can be continued in the context of various legal instruments. As a result of the above, a national legislative mechanism was also adopted in the domestic legal system: the law "On ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men", Chapter 3 defines the guarantees of gender equality in state administration, guarantees of equal electoral rights, guarantees of gender equality in public in service (Council of Europe, 1950).

Observing the tools used to ensure women's involvement in the legislative body of Armenia through quotas, it is important to consider Article 89 of the Constitution of Armenia. This article defines the composition of the National Assembly and the election procedure but does not directly require allocating seats specifically for women, unlike the provisions for representatives of national minorities. (Constitution of the Republic of Armenia 2015).

However, the constitution encourages women's participation. Article 83, Part 4 of the Constitutional Law Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia 2016 stipulates that in the first part of the electoral list of any party or alliance, starting from the first candidate, the number of representatives of each gender should not exceed 70% in any group of three (e.g., 1-3, 1-6, 1-9, and so on). This effectively ensures at least 30% representation for women in the electoral lists of parties or alliances participating in elections.

Furthermore, Article 100, Part 3 of the same code (Constitutional Law Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia 2016) addresses cases where an MP renounces their mandate or their powers end prematurely. In such instances, the mandate is given to the next candidate on the electoral list. If this results in the underrepresented gender falling below 25%, the next candidate of the underrepresented gender must be selected, if available.

In other words, the provision also ensures that women participate in the National Assembly by at least 25%. However, it is important to note here that the Regulations of the National Assembly (Law of the Republic of Armenia on Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly 2016) defines the powers of the bodies of the National Assembly, including the deputy presidents and committees. According to Article 6, Part 1 of the National Assembly Regulations, and the President of the National Assembly has three deputies, and Article 106, Part 2 of the Constitution stipulates that the positions of the chairpersons of the Standing Committees are distributed among the factions in proportion to the number of MPs included in the faction. Both articles do not provide a special regulation for the involvement of women. As a result, we can notice that while enabling women to be

involved in the National Assembly, at the same time, there are not enough legislative guarantees that will also facilitate the involvement of women in the leadership positions of the National Assembly. As a result, the current reality is that none of the Deputy Speakers of the National Assembly are women, and only 2 of the 12 committee chairpersons are women.

Part 3 of Article 76 of the Judicial Code of the Republic of Armenia 2018 stipulates that for the purpose of gender representation of judges in the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), the number of representatives of the same gender should be limited to a maximum of three members as much as it is possible, except for the cases provided for in parts 12 and 13 of this article. Accordingly, if there are no specified exceptions, the participation of women in the case of 2 out of 5 judicial members of the SJC (40%) is legally guaranteed.

According to part 1 of Article 195 of the Constitution of Armenia 2015, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) is composed of seven members. The constitution does not envisage any requirement regarding the gender distribution of CEC members, but the Electoral Code, developing the mentioned article, already stipulates in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of Article 42 that the number of representatives of each gender in the Central Election Commission should not be less than two. Thus, the participation of women must be guaranteed to be at least 28.5% (Constitution of the Republic of Armenia 2015).

Part 1 of Article 197 of the Armenian Constitution (2015) stipulates that Television and Radio Commission consists of seven members. And according to the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the same article, the members of the Television and Radio Commission are elected by the National Assembly by the recommendation of the competent standing committee of the National Assembly, with at least three-fifths of the votes of the total number of MPs, for a period of six years. Further, according to Article 35, Part 1 of the Law on "Audiovisual Media" (2020), the number of representatives of each gender in the regulatory state body<sup>1</sup> should not be less than three. Otherwise, 42.8% involvement is guaranteed here.

According to Article 181 of the Armenian Constitution, the local self-government bodies are the Local Council of Elders and the Head of the community, whose election procedure is defined by the Electoral Code. In turn, Article 130 of the Electoral Code (2016) defines the regulations regarding the nomination of candidates for the Council of Elders of the community held by the proportional election system. According to the fourth paragraph of part 2 of this article, starting from number 1 of the

electoral list of the party (alliance of parties) and each of the parties included in the alliance, in any whole number of threes (1-3, 1-6, 1-9 and so on) until the end of the list) the number of representatives of each gender should not exceed 70%.

According to the second paragraph of Part 6 of Article 141 of the Electoral Code, which summarizes the results of the elections of the Council of Elders held by the proportional electoral system, specific rules ensure gender balance. If more than 70% of a party's mandates are assigned to representatives of the same gender, the excess mandates (above 70%) are allocated to candidates of the underrepresented gender from the party's electoral list, if any. This provision guarantees that at least 30% of the mandates are held by the underrepresented gender.

Additionally, Part 8 of the same article stipulates what happens if a member of the Council of Elders renounces their mandate or if their powers are terminated prematurely. In such cases, the mandate is assigned to the next candidate on the party's electoral list. If this change results in the underrepresented gender falling below 25%, the mandate is given to the next candidate of the underrepresented gender on the list, if available. As in the case of the National Assembly, there is also a mandatory requirement for the parties or alliances to ensure at least 30%<sup>2</sup> Participation of women in the electoral list when participating in the elections for the Council of Elders. However, in contrast to the National Assembly, there is a requirement that after the elections, the participation of women among the members of the Council of Elders should not be less than 30%, and it is only in cases of relinquishing the mandate or early termination of powers that this threshold is allowed to be lowered to 25%. The mentioned guarantees the involvement of women in the Councils of Elders, but again, there is no legal instrument to guarantee the involvement of women in leadership positions.

It should be emphasized that in cases where legislatively active structures have been planned and quotas for the distribution of different genders have been set, we can notice the tendency that the involvement of women is often even more than the set quotas. Accordingly, it can be stated that the introduction of quotas ensured a certain positive shift in the level of women's participation. Thus, in the National Assembly of the seventh convocation, at the time of its formation, the gender distribution quota among MPs was 20%, 31 of the 132 MPs were women, in other words, about 23.5% (National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, 2018), whereas in the sixth convocation of the National

<sup>1</sup> The same Television and Radio Commission, according to Article 31, Part 1 of the Law "On Audiovisual Media."

<sup>2</sup> 25% was planned for the National Assembly.

Assembly, 20 of the 105 MPs were women, other around 19% (National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, 2017). It is noteworthy that in the context of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, such active steps are encouraged, including the establishment of quotas, which will contribute to quickly and effectively filling the gap that exists between the level of involvement of women and men in the context of decision-making.

## 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Considering the issue of women's involvement in the decision-making process in light of the above discussion, two main conclusions can be made. First, both in the majority of countries and in Armenia, it can be observed that the problem of unbalanced involvement of women in the decision-making process is not a legal one but is mainly in social perceptions, traditional ideas, and stereotypes because the legislation stipulates minimum guarantees to exclude manifestations of discrimination against women. The images of legislation and reality do not always coincide, including in the case of guaranteeing women's rights. Such inconsistencies are not rare or new. However, legal frameworks for combating such realities also exist. In particular, one can rely on the empowering and binding functions of the legal regulation, in the context of which privileged rights will be defined for women and, in parallel, the involvement of women in relevant fields will be mandatory. Second, the relevant legislation of the Republic of Armenia is mostly neutral from the point of view of gender sensitivity. In other words, it is based on the fundamental logic that women and men are equal. However, in most cases, there are no active legal provision that take into account the abovementioned social perceptions and traditional biases, within many states and local self-governing bodies. It is clear that the involvement of women is either rather low or not present at all. Such gender-neutral and non-discriminatory legal structures, at times when gender stereotypes and unconscious gender bias exist in the society, do not take into account the gender component, which contributes to the maintenance of gender inequalities between women and men (Council of Europe, 2022).

In cases where legislatively active structures have been provided and quotas for the distribution of different genders have been set, the tendency can be noticed that often the involvement of women is even more than the set quotas. It can be stated that the introduction of quotas has ensured a certain positive shift in the level of women's participation (Armenian Association of Lawyers, 2019, p. 88). It is noteworthy that in the context of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, such active steps are encouraged, including the establishment of quotas, which help to quickly and effectively fill the gap that exists between the level of participation of women and men in the context of decision-making (United Nations Secretariat, point 53, 1993).

Regarding the strategic planning of the policy of the

Republic of Armenia, such problems are also pointed out. In particular, within the framework of Pillar four of the Public Administration Reforms Strategy (Government of Armenia, 2022) were approved by the Government's Decision No. 691-L of May 13, 2022. It was recorded that the human potential at different levels of the state service is not fully realized, especially in the representation of women and from the point of view of involvement. In particular, the representation of women in professional jobs is high, and the weight of men is incomparably high in the group of managerial positions. It was also noted that, despite non-discriminatory regulations, and formally equal opportunities for promotion, the probability of career growth among men is higher.

Meanwhile according to the results of priority 1 of the "2019-2023 strategy for the implementation of gender policy in the Armenia" (Government of Armenia, 2019) approved by the government's decision No. 1334-L of September 19, 2019, the introduction of quotas to ensure gender equality in the state administration system and the expanded participation of women at the decision-making level of legislative, executive and other authorities are defined. With that being said, taking active steps, in particular, setting quotas, can and should be the enabling and compelling legal structure that will contribute to the actual increase of women's involvement. In other words, women will have the right to be actively involved in the decision-making process within state and local self-government bodies. This right should not remain declarative, as is often the case, leading to its non-enforcement in practice.

It must be made mandatory both *de jure* (by law) and *de facto* (in practice), to ensure and guarantee women's meaningful involvement in these decision-making processes. Thus, it is necessary to:

- **Enhance gender quotas and representation in governance:**
- Revise the Electoral Code of Armenia, National Assembly regulations, and relevant laws to ensure a minimum of 30% gender representation in the National Assembly, government, judiciary, autonomous bodies, and local self-government. Introduce quotas for leadership roles, such as deputy presidents, committee chairs, ministers, and local administrators, to guarantee balanced decision-making power.
- **Strengthen institutional and structural support for gender equality:**
- Incorporate provisions in laws like the Judicial Code and the Electoral Code to enforce gender-balanced committees and councils, such as the Supreme Judicial Council, Ethics and Disciplinary Committees, and Central Electoral Commission. Extend these quotas to oversight bodies, including the Audit Chamber and Central Bank, ensuring representation of at least 30% of the underrepresented gender in all state and autonomous institutions.
- **Ensure wage transparency and economic equality:**
- Incorporate the EU's 2023 recommendation on wage transparency to address gender pay gaps. Mandate employers to provide data on wage structures and implement mechanisms for pay

equity. This will create fair opportunities for women in the workforce and promote economic empowerment.

- **Promote women's empowerment and professional growth:**
- Develop and implement comprehensive women's empowerment programs focused on skill-building, career advancement, and strengthening self-confidence. Include motivational and teaching materials in school and university curricula to challenge stereotypes, foster leadership skills, and encourage active participation in public life.
  - **Expand childcare and raise awareness to combat gender stereotypes:**
  - Increase the availability of pre-school educational institutions and align their working regimes with societal needs to support women's work-life balance. Simultaneously, launch nationwide campaigns to dismantle stereotypes, highlight the importance of gender equality, and emphasize the vital role of women in governance, the economy, and society.

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