



Funded by
the European Union



WOMEN, EMPLOYMENT & LEADERSHIP: A WB6 REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

2025



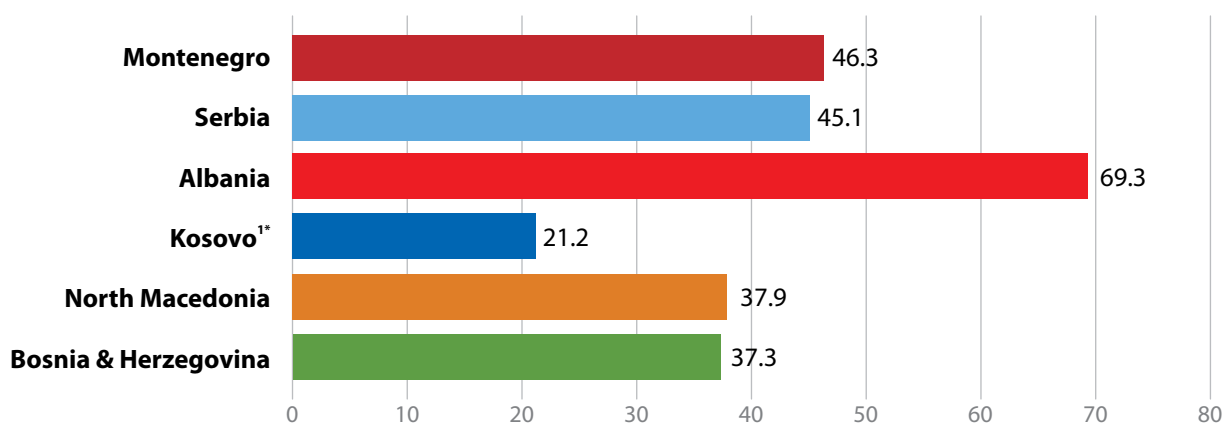
This publication is developed by UNDP in the framework of the Regional Joint Programme "EU 4 Gender Equality: Women's Economic Empowerment and Ending Violence against Women," funded by the European Union and implemented jointly by UN Women and UNDP.

A COMPARATIVE REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

In the Western Balkans - comprising Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo^{1*}, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina - **gender equality results reveal a common pattern of formal progress alongside ongoing structural inequalities**. While each economy differs in scale, governance structures, and economic development levels, the profiles show similar challenges in translating educational advances, legal frameworks, and political commitments into true economic and leadership equality for women. The region does not lack ambitious policies but continues to grapple with the gap between formal equality and real economic experiences.

Shared Structural Challenges Across the Region

One consistent issue across all six economies is women's weaker position in the labor market. Employment rates may vary, but **women everywhere face lower participation, higher inactivity, or more unstable jobs compared to men**. This situation is not mainly due to education - women in most Western Balkan economies now achieve or exceed men's educational levels - but is rooted in structural constraints. Unpaid care responsibilities, limited access to affordable childcare, rigid labor markets, and enduring gender norms persistently affect women's economic opportunities across the region.



Graph 1: Women's employment rate in percentages

Entrepreneurship also presents a shared challenge. **Women-owned businesses are a minority in every analyzed economy**. When women do start businesses, they often focus on micro and small enterprises in service-oriented or low-capital sectors. Women are more visible as managers than as owners, mainly due to systemic barriers regarding access to finance, property, collateral, and high-level business networks. These obstacles are structural rather than individual, leading to gendered patterns of economic power, regardless of income levels or regulatory frameworks.

Women are more visible as managers than as owners, mainly due to systemic barriers regarding access to finance, property, collateral, and high-level business networks.

¹ This analysis is produced by UNDP with the European Union, consistent with United Nations rules, practices, and procedures. References to Kosovo^{1*} in this document accordingly shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

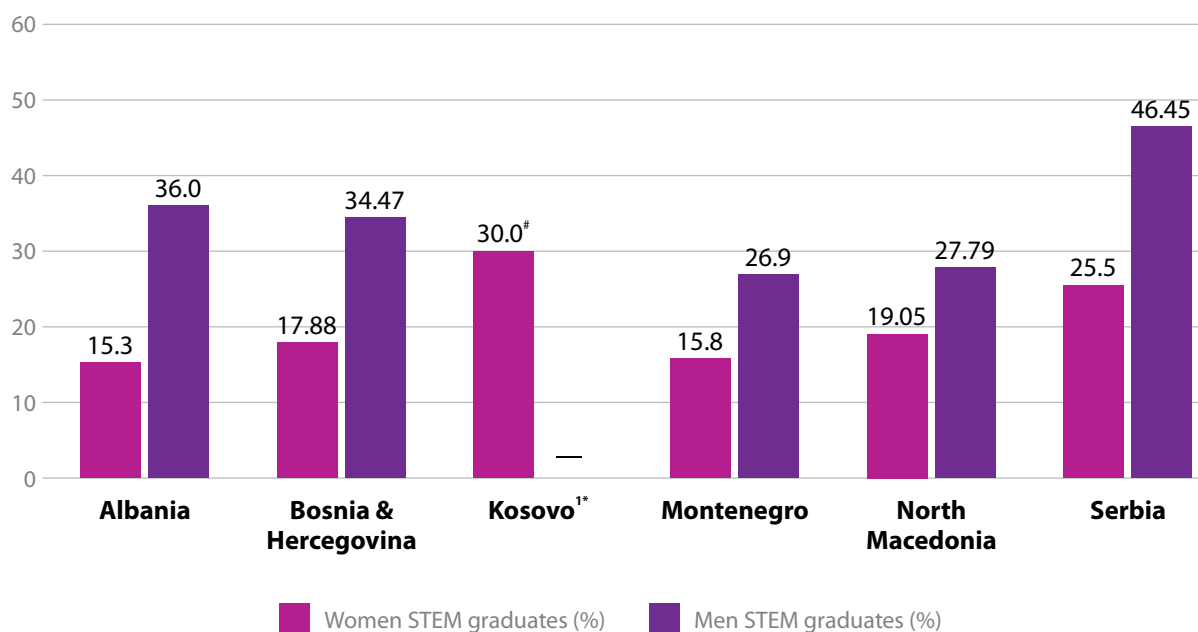
* For the European Union, this designation used is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1244/99 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo^{1*} declaration of independence.

Corporate leadership and governance reveal another common weakness. With some exceptions for public enterprises in Kosovo^{1*} and selected public-sector bodies elsewhere, **women are significantly underrepresented in boards and senior executive roles throughout the Western Balkans**. The private sector, in particular, shows slow and uneven progress, primarily due to a lack of binding requirements, weak incentives for diversity, and entrenched informal recruitment practices. In many economies, women’s presence in leadership positions often relies on formal rules - like quotas or appointment procedures - rather than genuine change within corporate cultures.

Where women do enter STEM education, they often perform as well as or better than men, yet face barriers in transitioning to employment, retention, and advancement.

Gender-based income inequalities persist across all economies, even where overall pay gap figures seem relatively small. In every situation, further analysis reveals that **occupational segregation, vertical segregation, and career interruptions from care responsibilities contribute to women’s lower lifetime earnings**.

In several economies, adjusted pay gap analyses show that controlling for education and experience does not erase inequality - and in some cases, it widens - indicating structural discrimination instead of differences in human capital. Income gaps, rather than just hourly pay gaps, provide a clearer picture of women’s overall economic disadvantage in the region.



Graph 2: Gender Representation in STEM and Non-STEM Fields (Western Balkans)

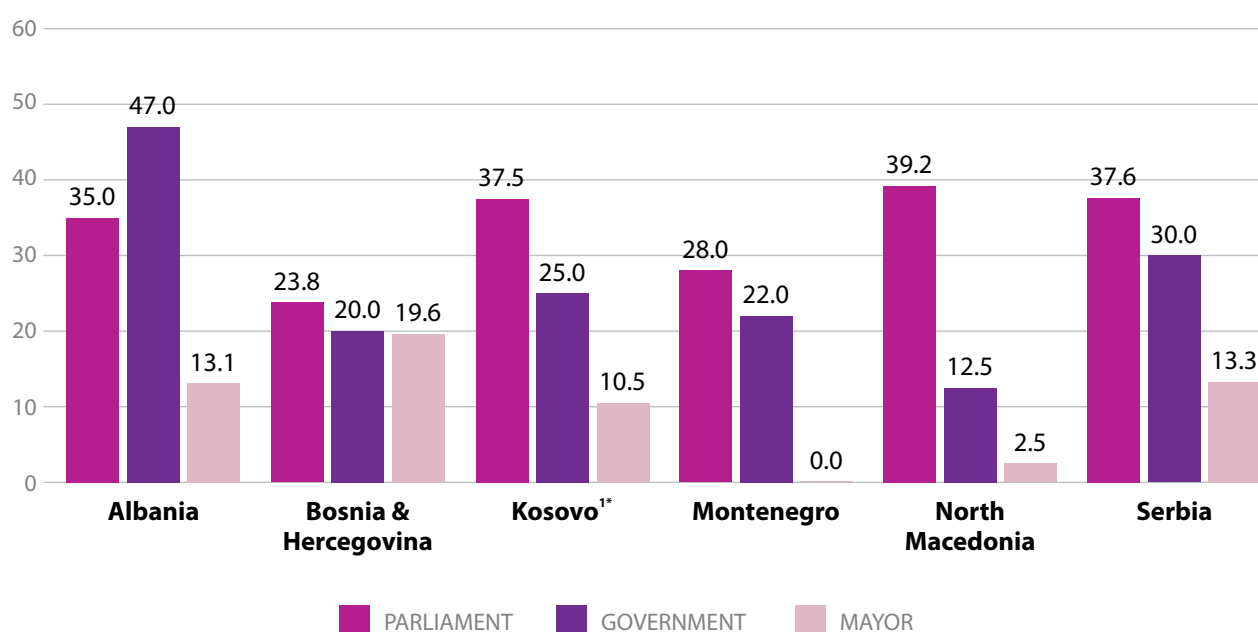
Global Gender Gap Report 2025, World Economic Forum (Data for Albania, BIH, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia); Statistics of Education in Kosovo¹ 2024/2025 (Data for Kosovo¹)

STEM education and employment serve as both a common challenge and an opportunity. **Women are underrepresented in STEM fields** of study and technical jobs across the Western Balkans, especially in engineering, ICT, and manufacturing. Where women do enter STEM education, they often perform as well as or better than men, yet face barriers in transitioning to employment, retention, and advancement. Horizontal segregation within STEM - where women are confined to certain subfields or non-technical roles - further limits their access to high-growth, high-paying sectors of the economy.

Areas of Relative Progress and Differentiation

While structural challenges are prevalent, individual economies also show areas of relative strength that can serve as regional examples. One such area is political representation at the parliamentary level. Several Western Balkan economies have achieved notable representation of women in legislatures, largely due to gender quotas. This shows that formal mechanisms can be effective when applied consistently. However, the region also shares a striking pattern of vertical segregation: women's representation drops sharply in executive roles, especially at the local level, highlighting the limits of quotas when not paired with broader cultural and institutional changes.

Public administration stands out as another area of progress in some economies. In situations where recruitment and promotion follow formalized, merit-based procedures, women achieve more balanced representation, even at decision-making levels. This contrasts with both private sector leadership and political executive roles emphasizes the significance of institutional design and accountability in determining gender outcomes.



Graph 3: Women on decision-making positions in percentages

Kosovo^{1*} relatively strong representation of women on boards of public enterprises shows how targeted governance rules can drive progress even in contexts with severe labor market inequalities. Likewise, North Macedonia's comparatively strong participation of women in certain technology-related sectors suggests the potential for education systems and labor demand alignment when some structural barriers are eased. While these examples do not negate broader inequalities, they illustrate that effective policy design can lead to progress within existing regional constraints.

Policy Frameworks and the Implementation Gap

All analyzed Western Balkan economies have adopted extensive legal and strategic frameworks for gender equality, often in line with EU and international standards. Gender equality strategies, employment strategies, and sector policies consistently mention women's economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, and participation in decision-making. However, implementation remains the central weakness across the region.



Common issues include limited institutional capacity, fragmented governance, insufficient gender-disaggregated data, and weak monitoring and accountability systems. In economies like Bosnia and Herzegovina, which have complex administrative systems, coordination issues further weaken policy impact. In other regions, frequent strategy revisions, limited budgets, or political pushback against gender equality initiatives undermine continuity and effectiveness. As a result, policy ambitions often exceed actual outcomes.

Regional Dynamics and Risks

The comparative analysis also points out shared regional risks. Economic shocks, demographic decline, and labor shortages coexist with the underutilization of women's skills and labor. Simultaneously, rising political polarization and backlash against gender equality, seen in public discourse and legislative debates in parts of the region, threaten already fragile gains. Without sustained political commitment, progress made through formal mechanisms like quotas or project-based interventions may be lost.

At the same time, the Western Balkans hold significant untapped potential. Women's high education levels, growing presence in professional and managerial roles, and increasing involvement in entrepreneurship and STEM fields provide a strong base for more inclusive growth. The challenge is not about capacity but about structural change.

The Regional State of Play

The Western Balkans are at a crucial point in advancing gender equality. Women have largely closed the education gap and gained significant visibility in formal political roles but remain systematically excluded from economic power, leadership, and high-growth sectors. The region's gender inequality is now more about structure than access. Key questions include who controls resources, who moves into decision-making positions, and whose work - both paid and unpaid - is valued. Progress in areas with strong formal rules shows that change is attainable, but inconsistent implementation, persistent gender norms, and fragile political commitment still limit transformation. Without a shift from mere symbolic inclusion to genuine structural reform - in areas like labor markets, care systems, entrepreneurship, and leadership paths - the Western Balkans risk solidifying a model of partial equality that fails to meet both social justice and economic sustainability needs.

Policy Implications at the Regional Level

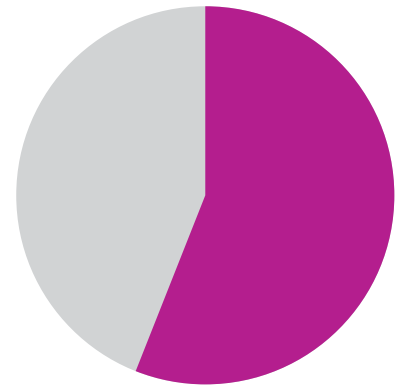
The comparative analysis suggests several policy implications best addressed through a coordinated regional approach.

- **First, labour market reforms must go beyond activation measures and directly tackle the structural roots of women's economic exclusion, particularly unpaid care work. Regional investment in childcare, eldercare, and family-friendly work arrangements - supported by EU accession instruments and regional cooperation frameworks - could significantly impact women's job opportunities and income.**
- **Second, women's entrepreneurship policies should shift from focusing on micro-scale participation to enhancing access to growth, finance, and markets. Aligning gender-responsive financial instruments, strengthening regional networks of women entrepreneurs, and addressing legal barriers related to property and collateral would help women-owned businesses move to higher-value segments of the economy.**
- **Third, the gaps in leadership and decision-making call for stronger and more consistent use of formal mechanisms. The success of quotas and appointment rules in political institutions and public enterprises shows that regulatory approaches are effective when applied consistently. Extending transparency requirements and diversity standards to the private sector - especially for larger companies and publicly supported enterprises - would accelerate progress.**
- **Fourth, closing gender gaps in STEM fields requires early, coordinated interventions across education and employment systems. Regional initiatives that connect girls' STEM education to internships, mentorships, and cross-border job opportunities can help address transition and retention gaps while meeting skills shortages.**



ALBANIA

Women's participation in Albania's **labour market** remains consistently lower than that of men, reflecting entrenched structural and socio-economic barriers. Despite recent progress in strengthening labour rights - through measures such as the increase of the minimum wage to 40,000 ALL per month and the ratification of ILO Convention No. 190 on eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work - significant gender gaps persist in labour market outcomes. Among the working-age population (15–64), women's participation rate stands at 69.3%, compared to 82.3% for men. Unemployment rates further highlight gender disparities, with women experiencing higher unemployment (10.0%) than men (8.9%) in 2024. These gaps are closely linked to women's concentration in lower-paid and less secure forms of employment, their overrepresentation as contributing family workers, and persistent unpaid care responsibilities, which continue to limit women's access to stable and quality employment opportunities.



Graph 4: Women's labour force participation

Data on **women's entrepreneurship** in Albania remain limited, as available statistics combine women owners and managers. Nonetheless, existing figures point to modest participation levels and clear structural patterns. Women owners or managers are most prevalent in **micro and small enterprises** with 1 – 4 employees, where they account for 32.6%, indicating that women's entrepreneurship is largely concentrated in small-scale and often lower-capital businesses. Sectoral distribution reveals further disparities: **women-led businesses are more common in services (33.6%) than in production-related sectors (18.0%)**, suggesting restricted access to capital-intensive industries and growth-oriented markets.

Women's **representation in corporate governance and senior leadership** in Albania remains notably low. In this economy's top 50 revenue-generating companies, **women hold only 17% of supervisory board seats and 22% of CEO or senior administrator positions**. Female participation as non-executive directors is also minimal, and only a minority of board chairs are women. These figures point to persistent barriers in corporate leadership pipelines, including gender stereotypes, limited access to influential networks, and weak accountability mechanisms for gender balance in the private sector. As a result, women's representation in corporate boardrooms in Albania remains well below the 40 per cent gender parity threshold mandated by EU policy.

Graph 5:
Women hold just 22%
of top executive roles
in the economy's 50
highest-earning
companies



Albania records a relatively low reported **gender pay gap of 4.9%**, with men earning, on average, slightly more than women. While this figure suggests narrower wage differentials compared to regional peers, the absence of detailed income gap data limits a deeper understanding of inequality across sectors, occupations, and income levels. Given women’s concentration in lower-paid sectors and forms of employment, the modest pay gap may mask broader structural inequalities related to job segregation, limited career advancement, and unequal access to higher-paying positions.

Gender disparities in STEM education are pronounced. Only 15.3% of female graduates completed studies in STEM fields, compared to 36.0% of male graduates. This gap signals early educational and social norms that continue to steer women away from technical and scientific disciplines.



Graph 7: STEM disciplines - Albania
Global Gender Gap Report 2025, World Economic Forum



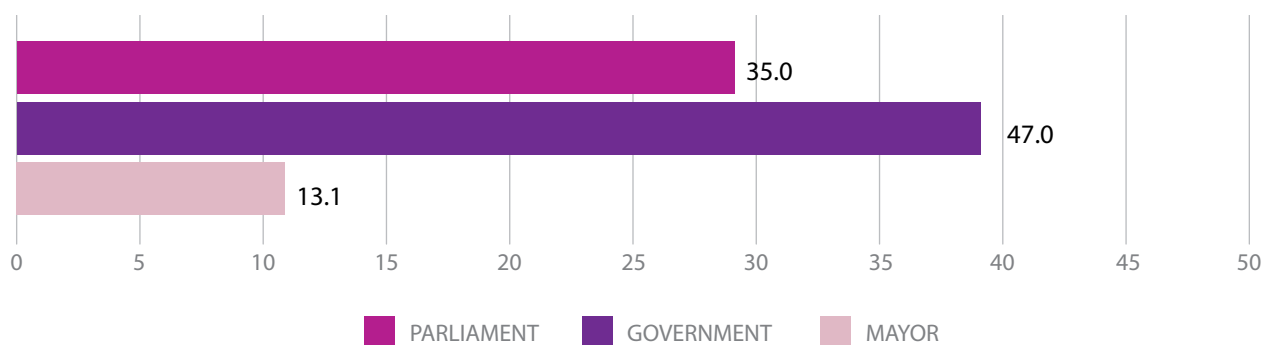
Graph 6: Gender pay gap - Albania

Data on women’s participation in ICT and STEM employment are not currently available, pointing to a significant evidence gap that constrains policy design and monitoring. Nonetheless, existing education trends suggest that women’s underrepresentation in STEM likely carries over into the labour market, limiting access to high-growth and well-paid sectors. Although strategies on digital transformation and scientific research promote innovation and recognize the importance of increasing women’s participation, they lack explicit gender-mainstreaming measures and concrete actions to address gender disparities in digital skills, STEM inclusion, and leadership. In the field of arts and humanities, the situation is somewhat better and indicates a higher number of women who have graduated, 8.78% compared to 4.52% of men.

Albania has made **notable progress in women’s political representation** at the state level. Women comprise 35% of Members of Parliament and hold 47% of ministerial and 53.5% of deputy minister positions, reflecting the impact of electoral quotas and political commitment. However, this progress is not reflected at the local level. Women hold only 13.1% of mayoral positions, despite representing approximately 44% of municipal council members. This vertical segregation underscores the persistence of structural and cultural barriers that limit women’s access to executive leadership roles.

Albania has **established a comprehensive legal and strategic framework aligned with EU** standards and international commitments, including the Gender Equality Law, the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2030 and sectoral strategies on employment, education, digitalisation, and innovation.

The Law on Gender Equality adopted in 2025 introduces targeted measures to address gender discrimination across labour, health and social protection, ICT and media, and agriculture and rural development, while formally recognising unpaid care work. It promotes equal participation of women and men in public



Graph 8: Women's political representation at the state level - Albania

administration and the private sector, without compromising the merit principle. The previous Law on Gender Equality provided a solid normative basis but faced implementation challenges, particularly related to accountability and gender mainstreaming. Effective monitoring of the new law will be essential to mitigate implementation risks. In parallel, Albania is preparing a new Law on Prevention and Protection against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, aligned with EU Directive (EU) 24/1385, which expands legal protection to all forms of violence against women.

Several initiatives demonstrate Albania's commitment to advancing women's economic empowerment. Reforms of Active Labour Market Programmes have introduced targeted measures for women, including survivors of violence and trafficking. Networks such as Women Founders Network Albania support women entrepreneurs through mentoring and community-building, while financial inclusion initiatives focus on rural women and agricultural value chains. International partners, particularly UNDP, play a central role in strengthening institutional responses, supporting survivors of violence, including through technical assistance to local governments in the development and implementation of sexual harassment policies, while promoting safer and more inclusive working environments, contributing to longer-term economic and social empowerment.

Albania has made visible progress in advancing women's political representation and establishing a comprehensive legal and strategic framework aligned with EU and international standards. However, significant gaps persist between formal commitments and women's actual economic outcomes.

Albania has made visible progress in advancing women's political representation and establishing a comprehensive legal and strategic framework aligned with EU and international standards. However, significant gaps persist between formal commitments and women's actual economic outcomes. Women continue to face lower labour market participation, higher unemployment, limited access to entrepreneurship in growth-oriented sectors, and pronounced underrepresentation in corporate leadership and STEM fields. While reported gender pay gaps are relatively low, they likely mask deeper structural inequalities related to occupational segregation and constrained career advancement. Strong gains at the national political level contrast sharply with women's limited presence in local executive leadership, highlighting persistent vertical segregation. Sustained progress will depend on strengthening implementation and accountability, closing data gaps - particularly in STEM and income distribution - and scaling targeted interventions that address structural barriers, unpaid care responsibilities, and access to capital, technology, and leadership opportunities for all women, especially those from marginalized groups.



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to face a substantial **gender gap in employment**. In the second quarter of 2025, men accounted for 62.7% of total employment, **while women represented only 37.3%**, resulting in an employment gap of 25.4 percentage points. This gap reflects structural challenges rather than short-term labour market fluctuations. Women's lower participation is closely linked to unpaid care responsibilities, limited availability of childcare services, occupational segregation, and persistent gender norms that frame paid work as secondary to women's family roles. As a result, women remain disproportionately excluded from stable, formal employment despite comparable levels of education.

Women's **entrepreneurship** in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains limited and concentrated in low-growth sectors. Approximately 25% of businesses are owned by women, even though women make up nearly 39% of the active labour force.

Women entrepreneurs are predominantly small business owners operating in trade and services, with limited access to capital, assets, and growth-oriented markets. Leadership disparities are particularly pronounced: **77% of companies have no women on management boards, and only 23% have a woman serving as managing director**. These figures point to entrenched barriers in access to finance, networks, and decision-making power.

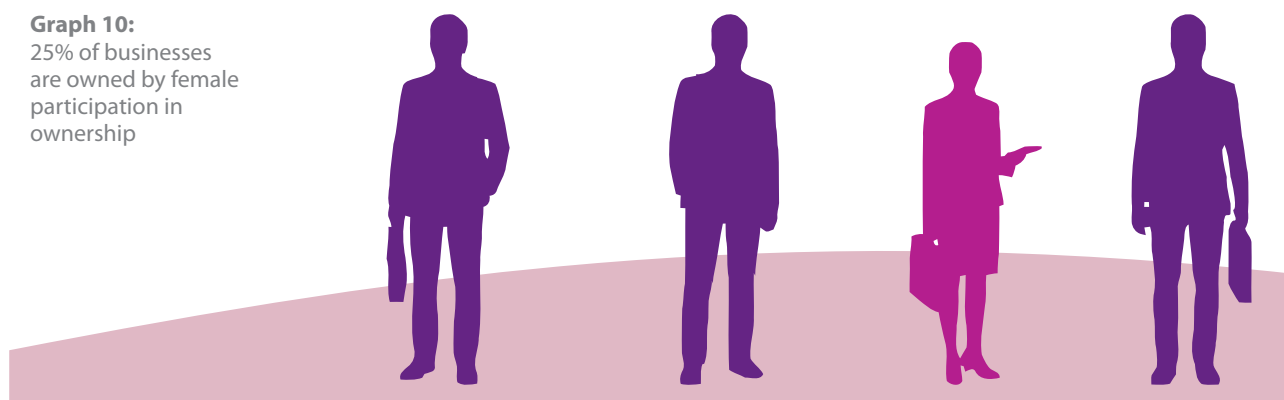
Women's **representation in corporate governance** structures remains extremely low, particularly in the private sector. With **more than three-quarters of companies lacking any female representation on management boards**, Bosnia and Herzegovina lags behind regional peers in advancing gender-balanced corporate leadership. The absence of binding measures, transparency requirements, or incentives for gender diversity contributes to slow progress. This governance gap limits women's influence over strategic business decisions and reinforces gender hierarchies within the private sector.

Gender-based **income inequality** is pronounced and persistent. According to UNDP data, **women's gross national income per capita is only 53.7%** of men's, highlighting a stark income disparity over the life course. Estimates of the gender pay gap vary by source but consistently point to significant inequality: 9.8% (WPS/UN BiH, 2022), approximately 10% in institutional earnings analyses, and up to 14.8% based on average wage data. These gaps reflect occupational segregation, vertical segregation, and women's



Graph 9: Women's labour force participation

Graph 10:
25% of businesses
are owned by female
participation in
ownership



concentration in lower-paid positions, as well as weaker access to bonuses and higher salary brackets.

Women remain **underrepresented in STEM fields** in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Women account for approximately 17.88% of STEM attainment, compared to 34.47% among men. While around **27% of women are employed in the IT sector**, this figure masks strong horizontal segregation, with women more likely to occupy non-technical or lower-paid roles. Limited exposure to STEM pathways, gender stereotypes, and weak linkages between education and employment continue to constrain women's participation in high-growth, innovation-driven sectors. In Arts and humanities women are represented in a higher percentage (8.35%) than men (6.08%) in relation to the total number of graduated students.



Graph 12: STEM disciplines - Bosnia & Herzegovina
Global Gender Gap Report 2025, World Economic Forum

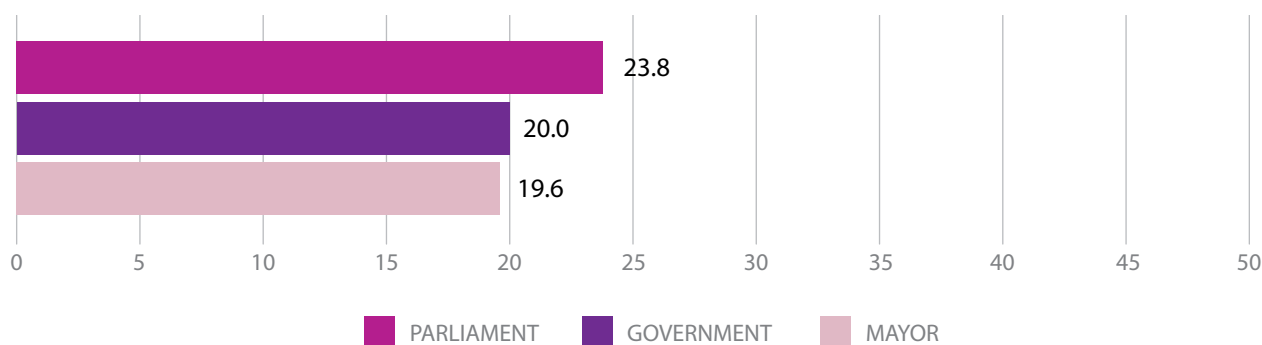
Women are **relatively well represented in public administration**, particularly at decision-making levels. In 2023, **women made up 41.4% of public administration employees and 53.5% of decision-making positions**, marking steady progress since 2016. This contrasts with women's underrepresentation in political and private-sector leadership suggests that formal recruitment procedures and merit-based systems can contribute to more balanced outcomes when effectively implemented.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a **well-established legal and institutional framework for gender equality**, including the Law on Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, medium term strategy Gender Action Plan (2023-2027) and Agency for Gender Equality and as well as centers at the entity levels, followed up by gender commissions at the municipal level. However, the economy's complex governance structure complicates policy coordination, implementation, and monitoring. Fragmented competencies and uneven political commitment limit the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming across employment, economic development, and education policies. In 2025, the Gender Equality Accelerator Framework was launched, co-developed by UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF in cooperation with the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Framework supports the implementation of the Bosnia and Herzegovina



Graph 11: Gender pay gap - Bosnia & Herzegovina

Women's **representation in political decision-making** shows uneven progress across governance levels. At the federal level, women hold 23.8% of seats in the House of Representatives and only 13.3% in the House of Peoples. Women account for 20% of ministers, although recent milestones include the first woman Chairperson of the Council of Ministers and the first woman serving as member of the Presidency. At the entity and cantonal levels, women's representation ranges between 26% and 31.5%, while at the local level, it drops sharply to 19.6% in deliberative bodies and only 5% of women mayors. These patterns reveal persistent vertical segregation and limited access to executive power, despite formal gender quotas.



Graph 13: Women's political representation at the state level - Bosnia & Herzegovina

Gender Action Plan and aligns with the UN Cooperation Framework's gender equality commitments. Supported by joint funding from the European Union, Sweden, and Denmark, it promotes a coordinated, system-wide approach to advancing gender equality. The Framework focuses on three strategic pillars: prevention and response to gender-based violence; women's economic empowerment, with emphasis on the care economy; and gender-responsive governance, providing a structured mechanism to translate policy commitments into implementation results.

Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrates persistent and deeply rooted gender inequalities across employment, income, entrepreneurship, corporate governance, and political decision-making. Women's significantly lower employment rates, pronounced income gaps, and marginal presence in private-sector leadership and STEM reflect structural barriers related to unpaid care work, occupational and vertical segregation, and limited access to economic power and decision-making. While women's representation in public administration and recent breakthroughs at the highest state level signal the potential impact of formal rules and merit-based systems, these gains remain uneven and fragile across governance levels and sectors. Advancing women's economic empowerment in Bosnia and Herzegovina will require holistic and multisectoral approaches to tackling complex gender equality issues, stronger policy coordination within its complex institutional structure, effective enforcement of equal pay, work-life balance and anti-discrimination measures reinforced by workplace standards, structural investment in care system and work on transforming social norms, LNOB and intersectional work, targeted support for women entrepreneurs and women in STEM and green jobs, and sustained investment in leadership pathways that translate formal equality into substantive and lasting change.

Advancing women's economic empowerment in Bosnia and Herzegovina will require stronger policy coordination within its complex institutional structure, effective enforcement of equal pay and anti-discrimination measures, targeted support for women entrepreneurs and women in STEM, and sustained investment in leadership pathways that translate formal equality into substantive and lasting change.



Kosovo^{1*} exhibits the most pronounced **gender gaps in labour market participation** in the Western Balkans. In 2024, **women's employment rate stood at just 21.2%**, compared to 55.9% for men - a gap of 35.7 percentage points. Women's economic exclusion is further reflected in extremely high inactivity rates: **nearly three-quarters of women (74.1%) are outside the labour force**, compared to 39.4% of men. While overall unemployment remains relatively moderate at 10.8%, these figures highlight that the core challenge is not unemployment but women's limited access to paid work altogether. Structural barriers such as lack of childcare, persistent unpaid care responsibilities, informal employment, and restrictive gender norms continue to constrain women's participation in the labour market.



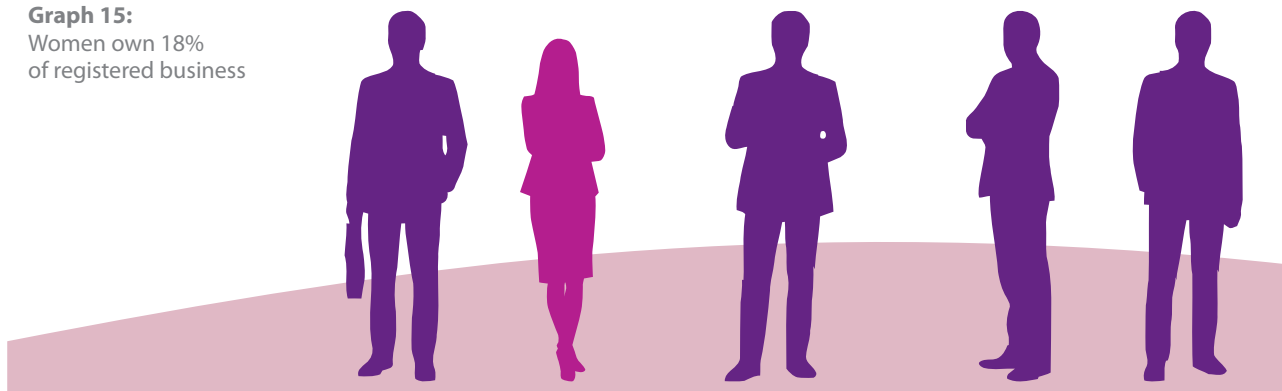
Graph 14: Women's labour force participation

Women's **participation in entrepreneurship** in Kosovo^{1*} remains limited but shows gradual progress. In 2023, women owned approximately 18% of registered businesses, indicating that fewer than one in five entrepreneurs are women. Women are somewhat better represented in management roles, accounting for 28.3% of senior and middle management positions. This discrepancy suggests that while women are increasingly present in professional and managerial employment, significant barriers persist in accessing capital, assets, and networks required for business ownership. Limited collateral, restricted access to finance, and concentration in low-growth sectors continue to shape women's entrepreneurial opportunities.

Women's **representation on boards of publicly owned enterprises** in Kosovo^{1*} is comparatively strong. In 2024, women held an average of 40% of board positions in central public enterprises, approaching gender parity. While data for the private sector are not available, public enterprises serve as an important proxy, demonstrating the positive impact of formal appointment rules and institutional commitments. However, the absence of private-sector data underscores persistent gaps in transparency and monitoring of women's participation in corporate governance.

Gender-based income disparities remain a significant concern. The gender pay gap was estimated at 12.7% in 2020, with men earning more than women, while more recent data indicate an average net income gap of 16% in 2024. These gaps reflect occupational segregation, women's concentration in lower-paid sectors, and limited advancement into higher-paying roles. Strengthening enforcement of equal pay legislation and promoting gender-responsive wage-setting mechanisms remain key priorities.

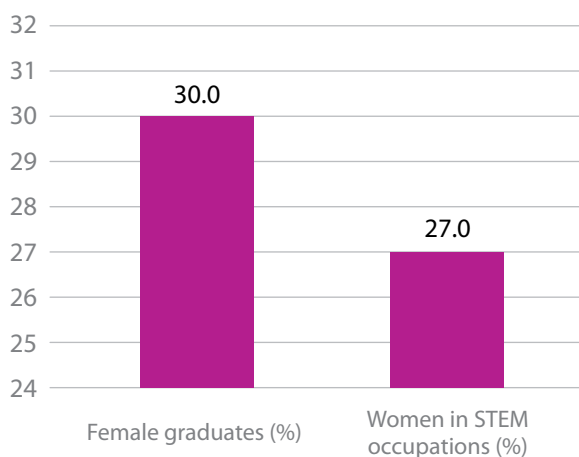
Graph 15:
Women own 18%
of registered business



Women’s **participation in STEM** in Kosovo^{1*} shows moderate but insufficient representation. During the 2023/24 academic year, women accounted around 30% of STEM students and graduates. This share declines further in the labour market, where women represent only 27% of those employed in STEM-related occupations.

The transition from education to employment highlights challenges in transition, retention, and career progression, particularly in technical and manufacturing sectors that men traditionally dominate.

Kosovo^{1*} has made notable progress in women’s political representation. Following the 2025 elections, women hold 37.5% of parliamentary seats, reflecting the impact of gender quotas. Women’s representation in government stands at 25%, indicating more limited access to executive roles. At the local level, women account for 37% of municipal council members but only 10.5% of mayors, pointing to persistent vertical segregation and barriers to executive leadership at local levels.



Graph 17: STEM disciplines - Kosovo^{1*}
Statistics of Education in Kosovo^{1*} 2024/2025



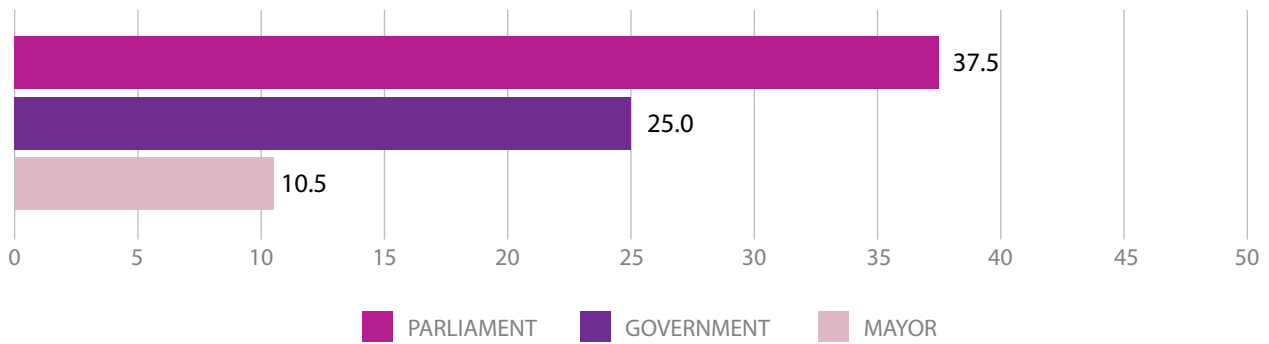
Graph 16: Gender pay gap - Kosovo^{1*}

Gender equality in Kosovo^{1*} is guided by the Programme for Gender Equality (2020–2024) and reinforced through gender mainstreaming within the National Development Strategy 2030. These frameworks provide a strategic foundation for advancing women’s economic empowerment. However, implementation challenges persist, including limited institutional capacity, fragmented data systems, and insufficient integration of gender-disaggregated statistics across labour, education, and enterprise policies.

Active Labour Market Programmes implemented with UNDP support have demonstrated tangible results. Between 2021 and 2025, over 2,800 beneficiaries - 55% of whom were women - entered employment or started businesses through self-employment grants, wage subsidies, and internships.

Complementary initiatives targeting rural women, access to finance, and green and digital skills present significant opportunities for scaling impact. Strengthening coordination between institutions, municipalities, and international partners will be critical to sustaining and expanding these gains.

Kosovo^{1*} continues to face profound structural gender inequalities in economic participation, with women’s labour market engagement remaining among the lowest in the region despite progress in political representation and public-sector governance. Extremely high inactivity rates, limited entrepreneurship ownership, and persistent income gaps underscore the deep-rooted impact of unpaid care responsibilities,



Graph 18: Women's political representation at the state level - Kosovo^{1*}

restricted access to finance, and sectoral segregation. While women's representation on public enterprise boards and in parliament demonstrates the effectiveness of formal measures and quotas, these gains have yet to translate into broad-based economic empowerment, particularly in the private sector and at the local executive level. Advancing gender equality in Kosovo^{1*} will require sustained investment in childcare and care infrastructure, stronger enforcement of equal pay and labour protections, expanded access to finance and growth-oriented sectors such as STEM and the green economy, and improved availability of gender-disaggregated data to support evidence-based policymaking and long-term inclusive growth.

Advancing gender equality in Kosovo^{1*} will require sustained investment in childcare and care infrastructure, stronger enforcement of equal pay and labour protections, expanded access to finance and growth-oriented sectors such as STEM and the green economy, and improved availability of gender-disaggregated data to support evidence-based policymaking and long-term inclusive growth.



MONTENEGRO

Women remain structurally disadvantaged in Montenegro's **labour market** despite their significant participation in the working-age population. In the second quarter of 2025, women accounted for **46.3% of the labour force** but represented **59% of those outside the labour force**, indicating persistent barriers to participation. Employment figures further reflect this imbalance: women made up **46.7% of those employed and 42.8% of those unemployed**. These patterns point to structural constraints, including care responsibilities, occupational segregation, limited access to quality employment, and ongoing challenges that continue to shape women's labour market outcomes.

Women's entrepreneurship in Montenegro remains limited in scale. In 2024, women owned only 26.3% of registered business entities, meaning that just one in four business owners was female.

Women are also underrepresented in management, holding **32.3% of managerial positions**, a decline from 2022 levels (38.8%). This downward trend suggests that women's advancement into leadership roles is not only slow but vulnerable to regression, particularly in periods of economic uncertainty or restructuring.

Women's representation at the highest levels of **corporate governance remains modest**. In 2024, women **held 23% of board positions** in the ten largest private companies. In the public sector, women occupied **30% of board memberships in public companies**, indicating slightly better performance compared to the private sector but still falling short of gender balance. These figures reflect ongoing challenges related to informal networks, gender stereotypes, and limited pipelines to top decision-making positions.

Montenegro continues to face a **pronounced gender pay gap** (GPG). In 2021, women earned on average 21.6% less than men, meaning they received €0.78 for every euro men earned. The gap is particularly pronounced among high earners, where **men in the top 10% of the wage distribution earn 25% more than women**. Importantly, these disparities persist despite women's higher average educational attainment, indicating that the pay gap cannot be explained by human capital differences alone and pointing instead to structural and discriminatory factors in the labour market.

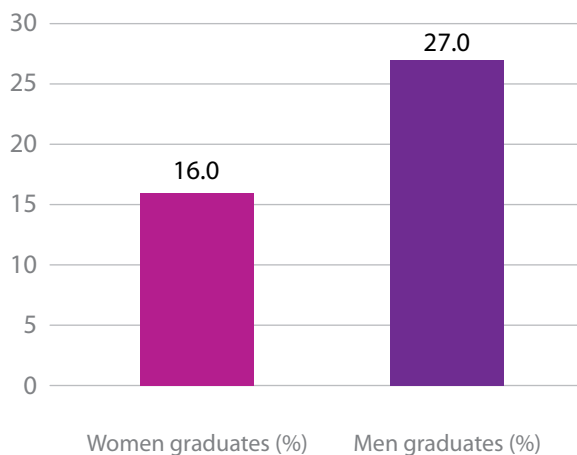


Graph 19: Women's labour force participation

Graph 20:
Women make up 1 in
4 business owners



Women in Montenegro outperform men in overall participation in higher **education**, including at postgraduate and doctoral levels. However, this advantage does not translate into STEM fields. In 2024/25, only 15.8% of female graduates were concentrated in STEM disciplines, compared to 26.9% of male graduates. Conversely, women dominate in several non-STEM disciplines. In the Arts and Humanities, 11.82% of graduates were female, compared to 5.81% male; in Health and Welfare, women accounted for 4.33% of graduates, versus 2.74% of men; and in Education, women represented 5.09%, compared to 2.32% of men. These educational patterns are mirrored in the labour market, where women remain significantly underrepresented in high-paying STEM occupations, reflecting both horizontal segregation and barriers to entry and retention.



Graph 22: STEM disciplines - Montenegro
Global Gender Gap Report 2025, World Economic Forum



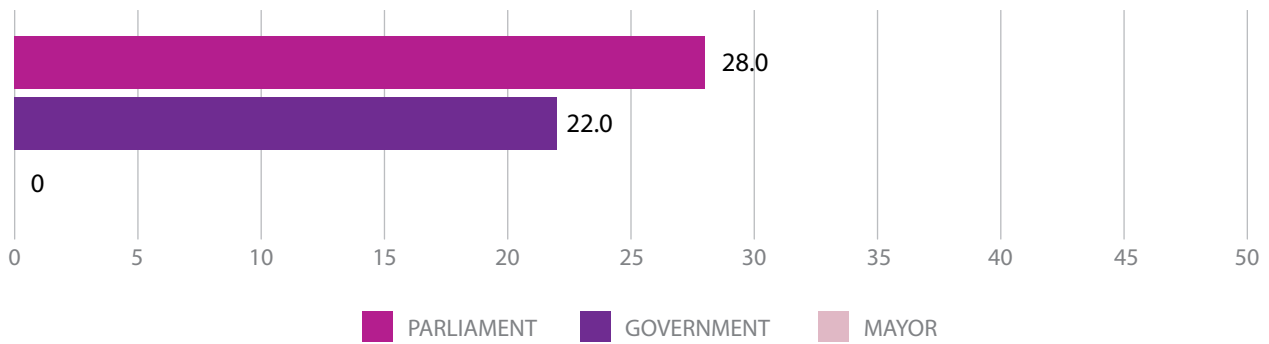
Graph 21: Gender pay gap - Montenegro

Women’s participation in **political decision-making** has improved but remains below parity. In 2025, women held 28.4% of parliamentary seats and 21.9% of ministerial positions. At the local level, women represented one-third of municipal council members but held no mayoral positions. This uneven representation highlights persistent vertical segregation, and the challenges women face in accessing executive power.

Montenegro has established a comprehensive **policy framework** supporting women’s economic empowerment, including the Strategy for the Development of Women’s Entrepreneurship (2025–2028), the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2025–2029), and sectoral strategies on employment, education, and public administration reform.

These frameworks signal strong formal commitment, but their effectiveness depends on adequate financing, institutional coordination, and systematic monitoring.

Several initiatives demonstrate progress toward women’s economic empowerment. Programmes such as EmpowHER Montenegro, the WE Finance Code, Women on Boards Montenegro, and targeted financial instruments supported by international partners have expanded access to finance, skills, and networks for women entrepreneurs. Local-level measures, including public calls for women’s entrepreneurship support, further contribute to creating enabling environments. A total of €45,000 has been allocated for the first Public Call for Women’s Entrepreneurship Support in Podgorica in 2025. The maximum amount that can be granted per business plan is up to 50% of the total funds available under this call. Funds will be distributed to business plans that contribute to the strategic goals of the Capital City, particularly those that promote economic growth, sustainable development, manufacturing, tourism, cultural heritage, sports, and environmental protection. Scaling and sustaining these initiatives remain a key opportunity for advancing gender equality in Montenegro’s economy.



Graph 23: Women's political representation at the state level - Montenegro

Montenegro shows a mixed picture regarding women's economic participation, with progress in education and policies not fully reflected in employment, entrepreneurship, or leadership outcomes. Women are still underrepresented in business ownership, managerial roles, high-paying STEM careers, and political positions, while experiencing a significant gender pay gap that remains largely unexplained. However, initiatives related to finance access, entrepreneurship, and corporate governance indicate a growing institutional awareness and momentum for change. Achieving gender equity will require better implementation of current strategies, targeted actions to dismantle structural and cultural barriers, and ongoing investment in women's leadership and economic empowerment across all sectors and decision levels.

Achieving gender equity will require better implementation of current strategies, targeted actions to dismantle structural and cultural barriers, and ongoing investment in women's leadership and economic empowerment across all sectors and decision levels.



NORTH MACEDONIA

North Macedonia continues to experience a significant **gender gap in labour market** participation. In 2023, the **gender gap in the employment rate stood at 18 percentage points**, reflecting women's systematically lower access to paid employment compared to men. While educational attainment among women has improved substantially over time, this progress has not translated into equal labour market outcomes. Structural factors - including persistent unpaid care responsibilities, occupational segregation, and limited availability of flexible and family-friendly work arrangements - remain key barriers to women's sustained labour market participation and career advancement.

Women's **participation in entrepreneurship** in North Macedonia remains relatively limited. In 2023, only 20.6% of firms reported female participation in ownership, indicating that roughly one in five businesses includes women among owners.

Women are somewhat better represented in management roles, **accounting for 32.4% of senior and middle management** positions. This gap between ownership and management suggests that while women increasingly access professional and managerial employment, they face continued obstacles in acquiring capital, collateral, and networks necessary for business ownership and control.

Women's **presence in corporate governance structures** shows moderate but uneven progress. In 2023, **women held 29.5% of board positions** in listed companies and accounted for **31.7% of high-level managerial roles**, including boards of directors and executive management. While these figures indicate movement toward greater gender balance, women remain underrepresented in the most influential corporate decision-making roles, particularly in sectors traditionally dominated by men.

Gender-based pay and income inequalities in North Macedonia remain pronounced and structurally embedded. Estimates indicate that women earn on average **12–16% less than men**, with income data showing an earnings gap of approximately 13.5% in 2022. Research based on Labour Force Survey microdata reveals that the gender pay gap varies significantly across age cohorts, reaching its peak among women aged 45–49. Notably, when adjusted for education, experience, and occupation, the pay gap widens rather than narrows—reaching up to 18–20%. This pattern suggests that women with comparable or higher qualifications continue to earn less than men, pointing to systemic discrimination, vertical segregation, and motherhood-related penalties in the labour market.



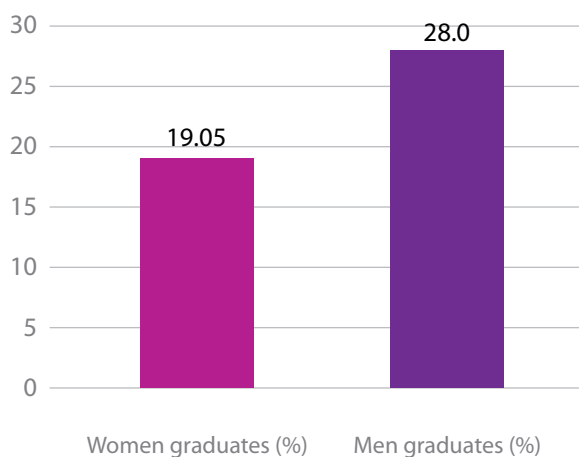
Graph 24: Women's labour force participation

Graph 25:
20.6% of firms reported
female participation
in ownership



Women in North Macedonia outperform men in overall tertiary **education participation**, accounting for approximately 60% of all tertiary students. However, only 19.05% of women graduate in **STEM** fields, compared to 27.79% of men. In the labor market, **women represent an average of 43% of employees in tech-related roles**, with substantial sectoral variation: women are strongly represented in biotechnology, moderately present in ICT, and significantly underrepresented in light manufacturing. These patterns highlight both progress and persistent horizontal segregation within STEM-related employment.

Women’s **political representation** in North Macedonia is relatively strong at the parliamentary level. Following the 2024 elections, women hold 39.2% of seats in Parliament, largely due to legislated gender quotas.



Graph 27: STEM disciplines - North Macedonia
Global Gender Gap Report 2025, World Economic Forum

While gender equality goals are formally embedded across strategies, challenges remain in implementation, enforcement, and accountability, particularly at the local level. A range of initiatives demonstrate potential for advancing women’s economic empowerment. Programmes such as EBRD’s Women in Business have expanded access to finance and advisory services for women-led enterprises. Active Labour Market Measures, including self-employment schemes supported by UNDP, have enabled unemployed women to start businesses. Initiatives promoting women entrepreneurs in the green and circular economy and targeted credit lines for women-led MSMEs further contribute to inclusive growth. Scaling successful interventions and strengthening coordination among public institutions, financial actors, and development partners remain critical priorities.

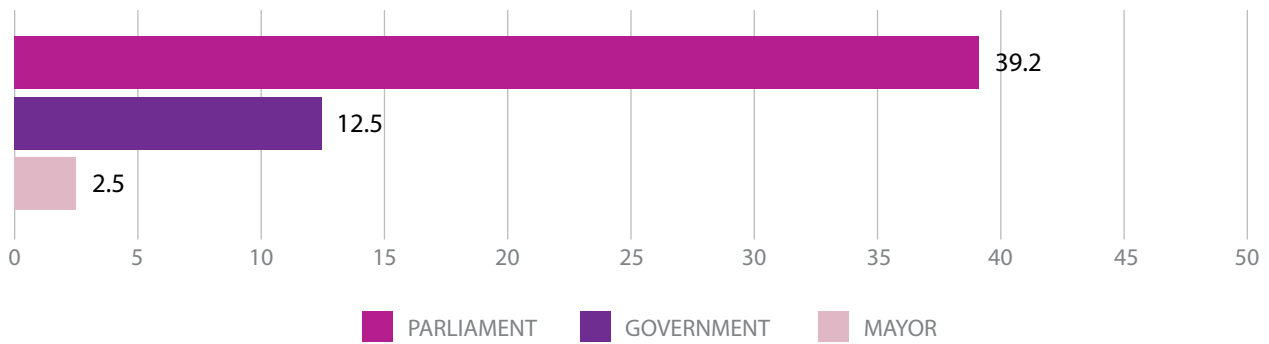
North Macedonia has made notable progress in women’s educational attainment and parliamentary representation, yet these advances have not translated into equal economic and executive power. Persistent gender gaps in employment, entrepreneurship, ownership, pay, and leadership reflect deep-rooted structural



Graph 26: Gender pay gap - North Macedonia

However, this representation drops sharply in executive positions. Women hold only 12.5% of ministerial posts and occupy just 4 out of 81 mayoral positions (local elections in 2025). While women make up over one third of municipal council members, the stark underrepresentation in executive leadership points to persistent vertical segregation and limited access to real decision-making power.

North Macedonia has adopted several strategic frameworks aimed at advancing gender equality and women’s economic participation, including the Strategy on Gender Equality 2022–2027 and the National Employment Strategy 2021–2027. The Strategy for the Development of Women’s Entrepreneurship (2019–2023) provided a foundation for supporting women-led businesses, but the absence of an updated framework creates a policy gap.



Graph 28: Women's political representation at the state level - North Macedonia

inequalities, including occupational and vertical segregation, unpaid care responsibilities, and discrimination that intensifies over the life course and with motherhood. Women's relatively strong presence in STEM education and certain technology sectors demonstrates significant untapped potential, but limited access to senior roles and high-growth industries continues to constrain outcomes. While a solid strategic framework and several effective programmes support women's economic empowerment, gaps in implementation, policy continuity, and accountability remain. Achieving substantive gender equality will require renewed strategic commitment to women's entrepreneurship, stronger enforcement of equal pay and anti-discrimination measures, investment in care infrastructure, and sustained efforts to open leadership pathways for women across both public and private sectors.

Achieving substantive gender equality will require renewed strategic commitment to women's entrepreneurship, stronger enforcement of equal pay and anti-discrimination measures, investment in care infrastructure, and sustained efforts to open leadership pathways for women across both public and private sectors.



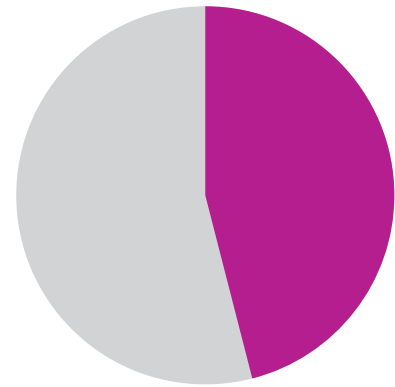
SERBIA

Women in Serbia continue to face a substantial **employment gap** compared to men. In 2024, the **employment rate of women stood at 45.1%**, significantly lower than the 58.2% recorded for men, reflecting persistent structural inequalities in access to paid work. While unemployment rates declined for both women and men compared to 2023, the gendered nature of labour market participation remains evident. Notably, all individuals who reported working part-time due to childcare or caring for disabled adults in 2024 were women, underscoring the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work and its direct impact on women's labour market attachment, working hours, and career progression.

Women **represent approximately one-third (34%) of entrepreneurs in Serbia**, indicating moderate but still limited participation in **business ownership**. Their presence in business leadership is even lower: only 25–27% of founders, owners, legal representatives, or directors are women. Sectoral segregation further constrains women's entrepreneurial opportunities. Women-owned businesses are concentrated in trade, hospitality, education, healthcare, and other service-oriented activities, while they remain underrepresented in high-growth and capital-intensive sectors such as industry, construction, transport, agriculture, and ICT. This pattern reinforces income disparities and limits women's access to more profitable and innovative segments of the economy.

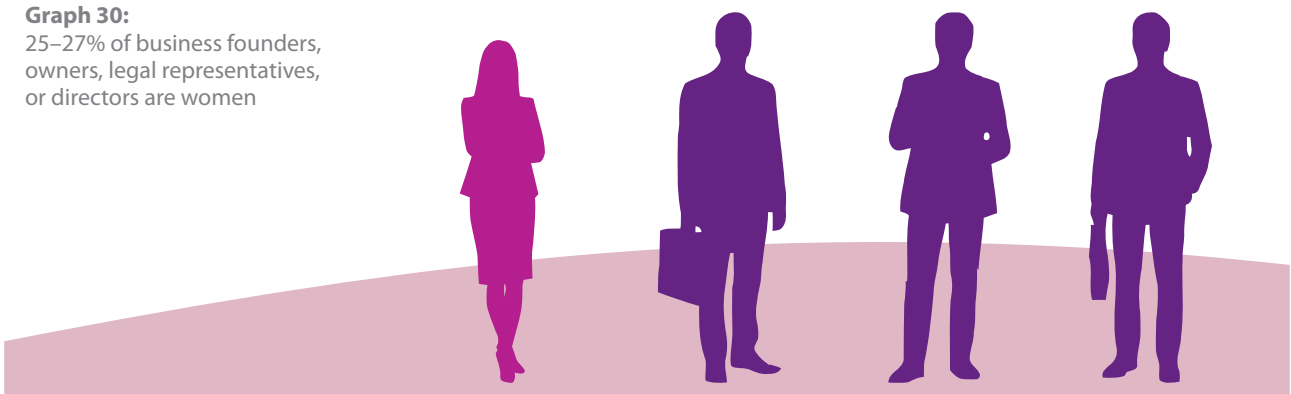
Women's representation in **corporate decision-making** bodies in Serbia shows uneven progress. In 2023, women accounted for **24% of directors of registered companies** and members of managerial boards, while their presence was somewhat higher in **supervisory boards (30%)** and **executive boards (33.6%)**. Although these figures suggest incremental improvements, women remain a minority in strategic decision-making roles, particularly in positions with the greatest influence over corporate direction and financial outcomes.

Serbia's overall **gender pay gap** appears relatively modest at 8.8%, yet this aggregate figure masks deeper inequalities. When earnings are disaggregated by education level or occupation, wage differences between women and men increase significantly, most often to the disadvantage of women. Women are also slightly more likely than men to fall into the low-wage category. These patterns suggest that occupational segregation, unequal career advancement, and concentration of women in lower-paid positions continue to shape income disparities, even when formal pay equality provisions exist.



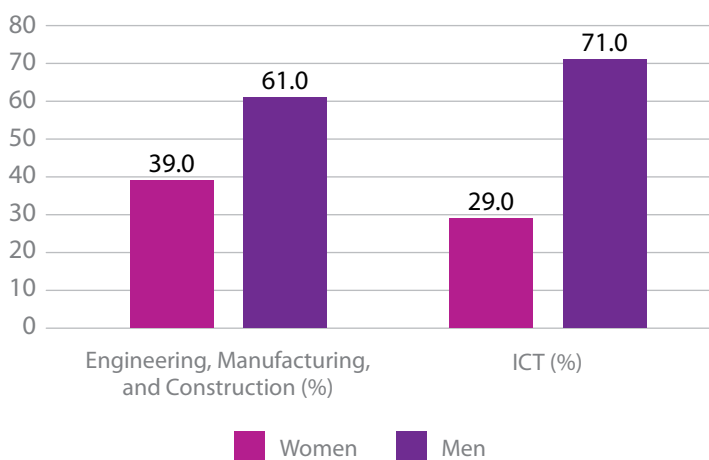
Graph 29: Women's labour force participation

Graph 30:
25–27% of business founders,
owners, legal representatives,
or directors are women



Women constitute the majority of graduates in Serbia, but their representation drops sharply in **STEM fields**. In STEM women account for 25.5% of all graduates while men account for 46.45%. While academic performance between women and men is comparable, this educational imbalance translates into pronounced labour market disparities. Women represent only 23.3% of ICT specialists and less than 10% of top earners in the sector. Most women in ICT occupy junior positions, with very limited progression into senior or leadership roles, and the gender pay gap in ICT (9.1%) is higher than in many other occupations. In the field of Arts and humanities similar like in whole region women outperforms men (11.3% compared to 7.87%)

Serbia has achieved a **relatively strong representation of women at the parliamentary level**, with women holding 37.6% of seats in 2025, supported by legislated gender quotas. Women also occupy 30% of ministerial positions. However, this progress is not mirrored at the local level, where women account for only 13.3% of mayors or municipal presidents, despite making up over one-third of local assembly members. This vertical segregation highlights persistent barriers to executive power and leadership at local levels.



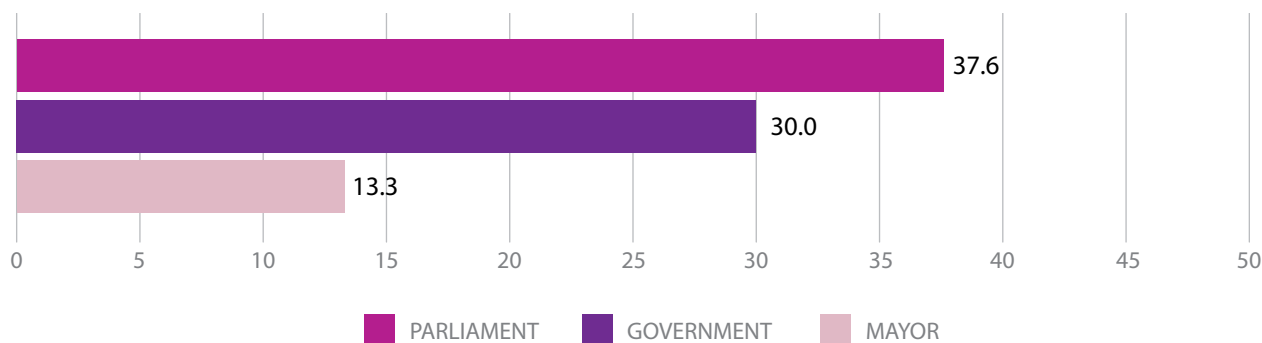
Graph 32: Women in STEM - Serbia
Global Gender Gap Report 2025, World Economic Forum



Graph 31: Gender pay gap - Serbia

Serbia has developed a **comprehensive legal and strategic framework** aligned with international and EU standards, including the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2021–2030) and robust anti-discrimination and labour legislation. However, implementation gaps remain significant. Institutional capacity constraints, uneven local-level coordination, and recent political backlash against gender equality - most notably the temporary suspension of the Law on Gender Equality - have weakened policy effectiveness. These challenges are particularly acute for rural women, Roma women, women with disabilities, and survivors of violence, who face intersecting forms of discrimination.

A range of targeted initiatives demonstrates Serbia’s potential to advance women’s economic empowerment. Programmes supporting female entrepreneurship, digital skills, green and circular economy initiatives, rural women’s employment, and survivors of violence have delivered tangible benefits through grants, mentorship, and capacity building. International and local partnerships, particularly involving UNDP and line ministries, have played a critical role in piloting innovative approaches and reaching vulnerable groups. Ensuring sustainability, scaling successful models, and strengthening institutional ownership remain key priorities.



Graph 33: Women's political representation at the state level - Serbia

Serbia presents a complex picture of formal progress alongside persistent structural gender inequalities. Despite women's high educational attainment, relatively strong parliamentary representation, and an extensive legal and strategic framework aligned with EU and international standards, women continue to face significant disadvantages in employment, entrepreneurship, income, STEM careers, and executive decision-making - particularly at the local level. Deeply entrenched gender norms, unequal care responsibilities, sectoral segregation, and implementation gaps undermine the translation of formal commitments into lived economic equality. Recent political and societal backlash against gender equality policies further highlights the fragility of achieved gains.

Deeply entrenched gender norms, unequal care responsibilities, sectoral segregation, and implementation gaps undermine the translation of formal commitments into lived economic equality.

Sustained progress will depend on strengthening institutional capacity, safeguarding gender equality legislation, expanding targeted support for women in high-growth sectors and leadership roles, and ensuring that economic empowerment initiatives systematically reach the most marginalized women.

