

# Kyrgyz Republic: special measures to ensure that gender quotas bring more women into local politics



UNITED NATIONS  
KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

2 June 2021

## Background:

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action<sup>1</sup> highlights that women's empowerment and autonomy are essential to achieving sustainable development in all areas of life, while improving their social, economic, and political status are necessary prerequisites for governments to achieve full accountability and inclusivity. The power relations that impede women from attaining fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public. Across the world, women are under-represented at most levels of government even though they constitute over half of the electorate. Socialization and negative stereotyping of women, including stereotyping through the media, reinforce the tendency for political decision-making to remain the domain of men. Often, discriminatory attitudes and practices within the family influence unequal power relations in the public sector.

Concern over the women's equal access to the basic right of political participation has not diminished since the adoption of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1952

Its provisions, therefore, are restated in article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>2</sup>, whereby women are guaranteed the rights to vote, to hold public office, and to exercise public functions. Under the Convention, State Parties are to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in their respective political and public lives.

On 18 December 1979  
CEDAW

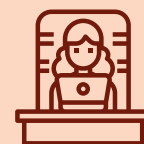
## WOMEN ARE GUARANTEED THE RIGHTS:



to vote



to hold public office



to exercise public functions

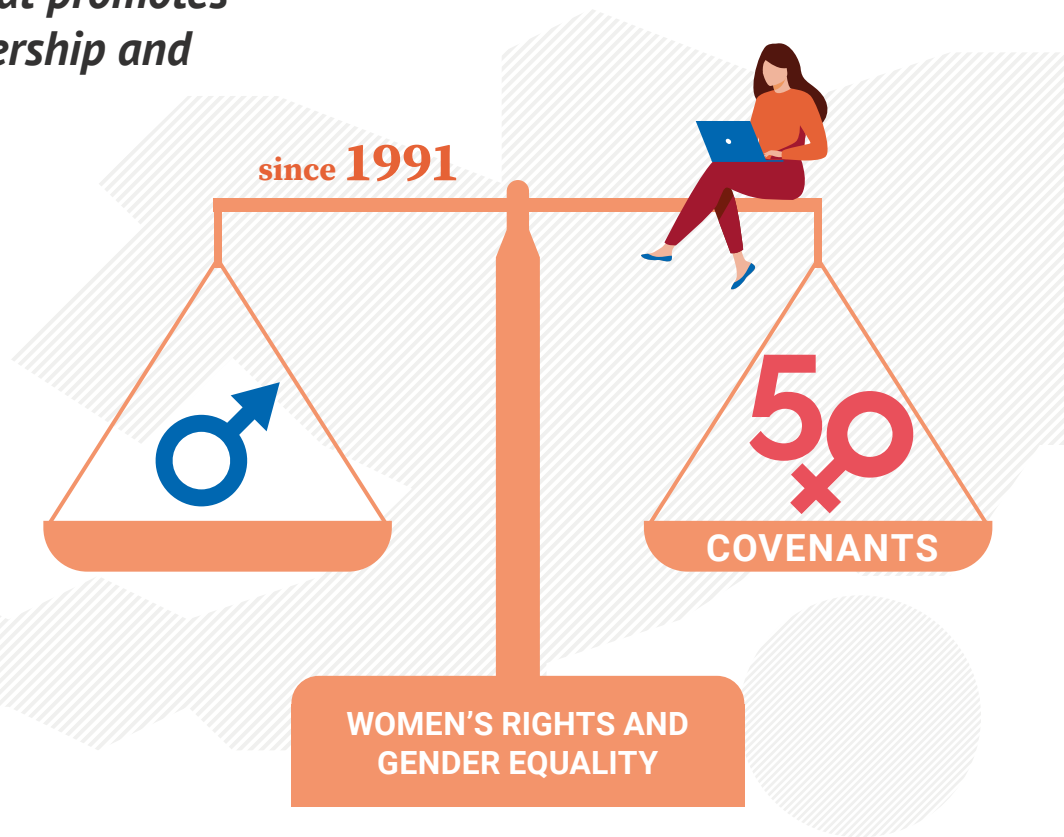
## Links:

<sup>1</sup> [https://beijing20.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa\\_e\\_final\\_web.pdf#page=125](https://beijing20.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa_e_final_web.pdf#page=125)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>

## National framework that promotes women's political leadership and participation

Within the early years of its independence, **Kyrgyzstan ratified more than 50 International Covenants**, some of which relate directly to women's rights and gender equality, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in and its Optional Protocol.



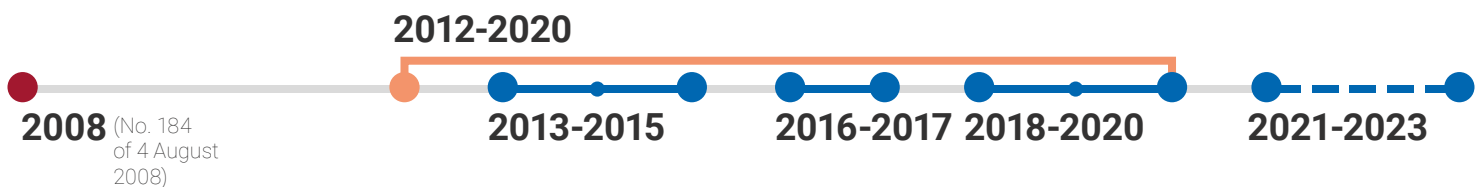
It is also committed to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Paris Declaration. In addition, the official prioritization of women's rights in the country is reflected in domestic laws and policies formally guaranteeing equal rights for both genders, as in the pivotal law.

Moreover, in 2012, the Kyrgyz Republic approved for the first time a strategy to address gender equality - the National Strategy for Gender Equality to 2020, outlining development priorities such as women in the economy, education for girls and women, access to justice, and political equality.

On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women (No. 184 of 4 August 2008)<sup>3</sup>

the National Strategy for Gender Equality

National Action Plans



Moreover, from 2013 to the present, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic has approved three National Action Plans for implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 to improve the role and status of women in peace and security (2013-2015; 2016-2017; 2018-2020). The fourth such plan covering 2021-2023 is currently being finalized.

Despite the Kyrgyz Republic's progressive legislation and numerous programs to promote women's equality in many areas, the nation has failed to achieve the goals outlined in these documents.

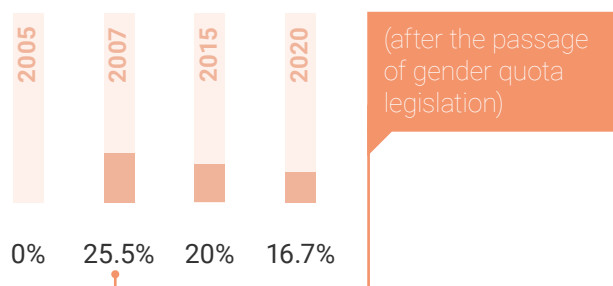
### Links:

<sup>3</sup> <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/202398>

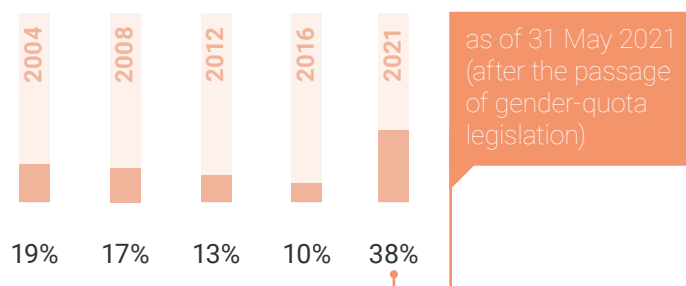
## Women representation in Parliament and Local Councils



WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT



WOMEN IN LOCAL COUNCILS



**Gender representation in the political sphere is guaranteed with a quota that women make up at least 30% of parties' lists of candidates to Parliament and that 30% of mandates on local councils be reserved for women deputies. The adoption of mandatory quotas in the amended Election Code in 2007, 2011 and 2019<sup>5</sup> helped improve women's representation in elected office at both the national and local levels – as the numbers in the above table show.**

According to the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, more than half of citizens believe that female involvement contributes positively to state policy. Nearly one in every second person is sure that life in their country would be better if there were more women decision-makers.



**Article 11** of the Law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women states that in elections, women – on equal terms with men – should have fair and real opportunities to exercise their right to elect and be elected to government office and to local self-government bodies. With the intention of achieving parity democracy, the State managed to introduce special measures to support candidates of the underrepresented sex/gender. Further challenges associated with women's low representation in politics are driven by a range of institutional and individual factors<sup>6</sup>. There is a negative attitude in the society towards women politicians and social activists, explained in part by a tendency to standardize, or fix, social roles, where man is in the forefront and woman is placed in a subordinate position. Such a negative public perception of women as active members of society is but one facet of conservative views on the role and place of women in society and the respective behaviour patterns they are supposed to adhere to (with mistrust, discrimination, humiliation, and stereotypes regarding women's role and place in society all finding a growing base of adherents).

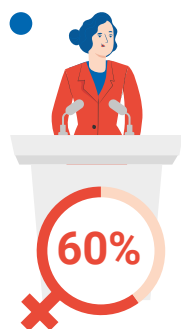
### Links:

<sup>4</sup> Kyrgyz Republic: Country Gender Assessment (adb.org)

<sup>5</sup> [https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/ZakonodatelstvoMyyzamdar/ZakonyMyyzamdar/O\\_vyborax\\_deputatov\\_mestnyx\\_keneshei/](https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/ZakonodatelstvoMyyzamdar/ZakonyMyyzamdar/O_vyborax_deputatov_mestnyx_keneshei/)

<sup>6</sup> [https://kyrgyzstan.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Kgz\\_Beijing%2B25\\_Review\\_Eng\\_FINAL\\_with%20layout\\_16082019.pdf](https://kyrgyzstan.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Kgz_Beijing%2B25_Review_Eng_FINAL_with%20layout_16082019.pdf)

## Key conclusions on women's participation in political life according to the UN Women's Gender in Society Perception Study<sup>7</sup> boil down to:



● People generally perceive women politicians as responsible, accountable, and dedicated professionals, and over 60 percent of the population would like to see more women in the Kyrgyz politics. However, people continue voting for men, because women are supposed to fulfil "other" important roles such as being housewives and mothers first before turning to public and social life;

- Women politicians are commonly perceived as "assistants" to or "implementers" of political ambitions of their male colleagues, not as "leaders";

- The three main barriers that women are still to overcome to become equal to their men colleagues in the public sector are:



50%  
24%

lack of family/  
public support



46%

lack of experience  
in politics



42%

lack of financial  
support

The promotion of women's political participation was a top priority for many women's organizations. In the past 10 years, it has been achieved most effectively through special measures such as legislative gender quotas, which have promoted women's political rights by ensuring their minimum representation in elected public positions.

## *Actions and measures the country has taken to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making*

UN support to enhance women's participation in public life and decision-making was led principally by UN Women and UNDP. The Kyrgyz Republic followed a strategic course of action that relies on special temporary measures to accelerate de facto equality between women and men.

**The Government issued two decrees approving the National Action Plans (NAP) on Gender Equality:**

*in 2014*

*in 2018*

**2015-2017**

**2018-2020**

Each of these documents aimed to improve the system of special measures that were first introduced into electoral legislation in 2007. The use of gender quotas in parliamentary elections was an undoubtedly effective measure, having increased the representation of women in the parliament from zero in 2005 to 25.5 percent in 2007. Though women's representation in parliament in 2015 turned

out to be 20 percent, instead of expected of at least 36 women deputies. Due to the lack of appropriate norms of regulatory mechanisms in the legislation, the quota dropped out.

Parties were able to avoid the full impact of the gender quota by pushing women candidates off the lists post-CEC-registration and again post-election. In August 2019, the parliament amended the constitutional Law



*"On elections of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament) of the Kyrgyz Republic"*

according to which the place of the retired candidate is taken by another next candidate, taking into account gender, this means that instead of the retired candidate, a female gender can only be occupied by a candidate of the same gender.

It is worth noting the role of international human rights instruments and frameworks like CEDAW with its Concluding observations, Beijing Platform of Action, Universal Periodic Review that have systematically highlighted and recommended the country to take measures to increase the participation of women in political and public life at all levels, including by adopting temporary special measures due to the fact of low participation of women in political and public life, in particular in decision-making positions and rural self-governing local bodies (where women's representation was as low as 4,7% as recently as 2019).



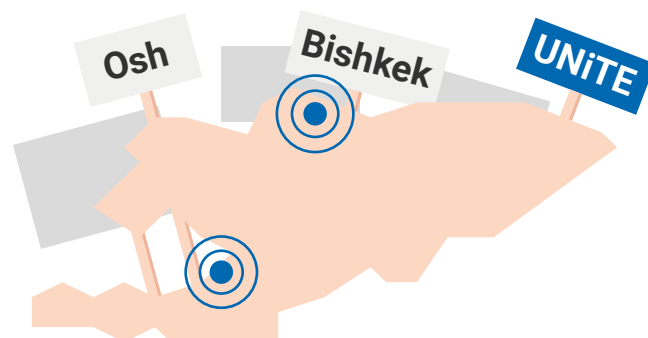
In promoting women's participation in local representative institutions, the key achievement was adoption of the amendment (No.117) to the Law on Elections to Local Councils ("Keneshes") as of 8 August 2019, reserving 30% of mandates in local councils for women deputies. The introduced quotas are temporary special measures that provide a mandatory reservation of seats for women candidates irrespective of their share of votes. These measures were a needed and timely intervention, addressing the regression of women's political representation in local councils since 2005, which had reached a low point of 10.8% in 2018<sup>8</sup>.



These changes resulted from the collaborative efforts of civil society, women MPs, UN agencies, and other development partners, all of whom jointly advocated at the national and local levels for meaningful women's political participation. Additional factors included these organizations' efforts to include women in local development and gender-responsive local planning and budgeting as part of implementation of the successive National Strategies on Gender Equality, the SDGs nationalization process, and the National Programme on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Terrorism 2017-2022.

organized by UNiTE network of civil society organizations and civil activists under the leadership of feminists in major cities such as Bishkek and Osh, where one of the key messages was on women's political rights.

Peaceful marches devoted celebrating International Women's Day - 8 March were systematically



Moreover, over the last five years, UN GTG supported the collaborative efforts of civil society, women MPs, state officials and other development partners to adopt amendments to the electoral code to introduce the



the **30%** gender quota at the local council level including through a nationwide advocacy and communication campaign.

As a result, in **August 2019**, Parliament adopted these amendments in their third reading

Following adoption of these amendments, the UN continued to work for their successful implementation, to raise awareness of them, to ensure that national and local institutions alike were prepared to fulfill their new requirements, and to address more broadly the gender beliefs and stereotypes that can stymie women's participation in public life and hinder their ability to speak up even after attaining public office.

For example, the UN developed a communication campaign covering all provinces of the Kyrgyz Republic with messages that reflected the diversity of women's leadership, going beyond political participation and covering a wide range of areas where women make valuable contributions such as: health, education, the caring economy, women's coping efforts to address family/household economic hardships, and their roles in supporting communities and local governments to resolve urgent local challenges.

**The UN supported the Central Election Commission to develop its communication and public outreach strategy – specifically targeting women –**

*that was implemented jointly with civil society partners and included online talks on international experiences in increasing women's participation in elections;*

*the development of the special online-platform "One Vote", which included informational materials promoting women's leadership;*

*TV shows devoted to women in politics;*

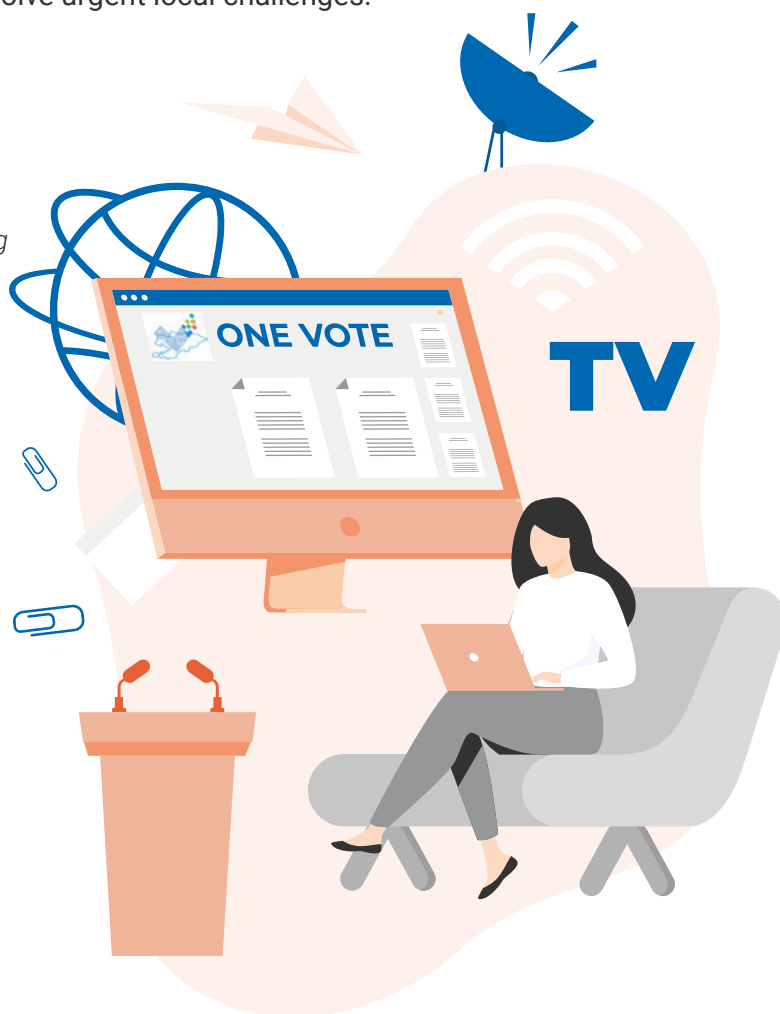
*a hotline for female candidates;*

*public service announcements that were broadcast on national and regional TV channels;*

*informational consensus-building meetings with representatives of local self-government authorities, female candidates, local community leaders;*

*the training of female candidates;*

*and the planting of the "Alley in Support of the Gender Quota" with the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Special Representative of the Secretary General in Central Asia, CEC members, and representatives of international community.*



**9 ONLINE TALKS**  
**have been conducted to study the international experience in increasing women's participation in politics, including participants from:**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  Afghanistan |  Latvia          |
|  Armenia     |  Moldova         |
|  Bulgaria    |  Ukraine         |
|  Germany     |  the OSCE region |
|  the EU      |  Kyrgyzstan      |

*The events were attended by CEC members, MPs, deputies from local councils, potential female candidates, and gender activists from all regions in Kyrgyzstan, and were streamed on social media, allowing Kyrgyzstani citizens to familiarize themselves with the successes and failures of other countries in promoting women's participation in elections, building their confidence that many countries other had overcome the challenges successfully and that Kyrgyzstan will find its way as well. Cumulatively, online talks were seen by more than 10 000 viewers.*



**The “One Vote”** platform, which was specifically devoted to the women’s participation in elections, collected visual informational materials that promote women’s participation in elections, including interviews with famous Kyrgyz citizens discussing the importance of women’s political representation, and online theatrical performance symbolically showing the

transfer of power from famous Kyrgyz women in the past to the young women who collectively represent the new generation of female leaders. In addition, a social media challenge on Tik Tok and Instagram was conducted to develop positive perception of women in politics, to dispel gender stereotypes, and to highlight the importance of women’s participation.

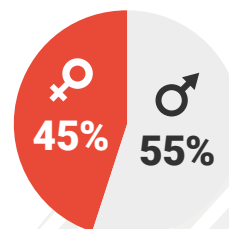


The Central Election Commission launched a special hotline for female candidates, served by operators from among people with disabilities who were specifically trained to address issues related to women’s participation in elections.

The hotline operators consulted female candidates on procedural matters for effective campaigning and, during parliamentary elections in **October 2020** and local elections in **April 2021**

more than  
**9 000**

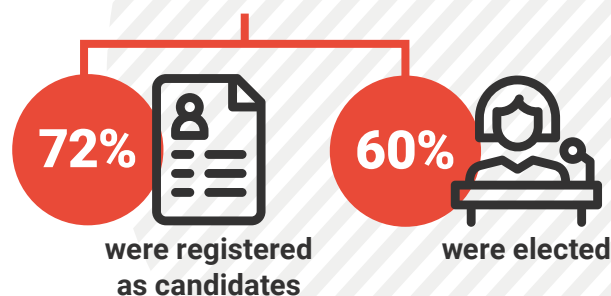
Kyrgyz voters approached the hotline, from which more than 45 % were women



In addition, the Central Election Commission jointly with civil society trained upwards of 300 female candidates on how 30% gender quota works and on application procedure, from whom 72 % were registered as candidates and 60 % were elected.

Such support played an important role in the women’s ability to run effectively, as previously they were lacking in key procedural knowledge and would either miss legally established deadlines or submit incorrect documents.

**300** female candidates



The Central Election Commission jointly with the State Registration Service of the Kyrgyz Republic arranged 11 buses, bringing representatives of the State Registration Service and the Central Election Commission to remote areas to inform voters about upcoming local elections and distribute more than 52 000 informational leaflets: “On reservation of 30% seats for women in the local councils”, “Information about the basics of local elections (rules and procedures)”, “About the function and status of local councils”, and “Check yourself in the voters list”.

In addition, more than 10 000 copies of informational brochures were produced and disseminated by the Central Election Commission and civil society partners with the support of the UN. This provided more in-depth information regarding the new instruments for increasing women’s participation in elections and the impact that these mechanisms will have on the political and social-economic development of the country, with the goal of contributing to a positive change in citizens’ attitudes toward women’s leadership.

The Central Election Commission and civil society partners organized **20** informational consensus-building meetings for more than



# 1130

representatives of local self-government bodies, female candidates, and local community leaders, aiming to explain the

meaning of the reform reserving 30 % of mandates in the local councils for women and the importance of women's participation in elections.

These discussions were oriented toward preventing resistance to the reforms and their implementation at the local level and included discussions by successful local female deputies who shared their success stories on running for office and further achievements as local deputies, thereby encouraging women to participate

## in the April 11, 2021 local elections as candidates.

### The TV show "Ezhe Sindiler" on Azattyk Media and Alla-Too TV channel

*focused on the importance of women's participation in elections as candidates and shared their motives as to why they chose to be local deputies. The shows also discussed the issue of the 30% quota for women in local councils. Representatives of civil society, the Central Election Commission, and female local deputies shared their opinions on the importance of women's participation in elections and representation at all levels. Such TV shows aimed to convince some audience members on the necessity of supporting female candidates during local elections in April 2021.*



The March 2021 ceremony of planting trees in the alley of "Equal rights and opportunities" was organized by the Central Election Commission with the support of the UN, the goal being to ensure continued political support for the 30 % gender quota for women in local councils, a reform that had first been adopted under the previous government.



the President of the Kyrgyz Republic Sadyr Japarov

During the ceremony, the President of the Kyrgyz Republic Sadyr Japarov reaffirmed that gender equality is a priority for Kyrgyzstan and that the reform in women's representation is an achievement of which the nation is proud. His speech was echoed by **the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Central Asia, Chairperson of the Central Election Commission and almost 57 representatives of the international community** who attended the event, which was recorded and then broadcast on national and regional TV channels.

These broadcasts played an important role in convincing some male candidates who did not succeed in the elections to accept the outcome, rather than blame their defeat on those women who earned their local council mandates in part thanks to the 30 % quota.




## A National Forum was conducted by the UN under the project, “Kyrgyzstan Election Support Program”, entitled, ‘Women’s Leadership: Breakthrough to a New Era’

10 March 2021

This forum created the special wave of public interest due to the composition of speakers at the Forum, who represented a diverse groups of women with disabilities, violence survivors, women from poor communities, and ethnic minorities.


These women talked about their everyday battles in different fields, such as women medical workers being in the forefront of saving people’s lives from Covid, women activists organizing humanitarian assistance to those most in need during the Covid-19 lockdown, women artists and teachers contributing to societal solidarity and stability through their arts and educational work, and women political leaders promoting the rights of vulnerable groups by voicing their needs in decision-making fora. The quotations from the National Forum were further cited in social media, enabling it to foster positive public perceptions of women’s roles and better positioning them in the process of local elections.

### As a result of the campaign:


- 


196  
56%


were registered as candidates


Close to 350 women participated in local dialogues (from across all 7 provinces), of whom 196 women registered as candidates to run for local elections. Many of these women stated that they had never thought of registering as candidates, and that until participating in the dialogues they had believed that only prominent people (mainly men) could do it. Discussions on the true meaning of leadership during these dialogues empowered them to make the decision to participate in local elections.
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64%

126 out of 196 registered women won mandates in the elections and became members of their local councils.
- 

Women from vulnerable groups were recognized for their leadership, positively influencing the perceptions of local rural communities and creating a level of trust, leading to greater support for these women to run in elections.
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Close to 355 women united in a Telegram group called “Women Leaders”. It served as a platform for posting questions and getting advisory and consultancy support from Central and Territorial Election Commission members (8 central and local), led by the CEC Advisor.
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Women members of the Telegram group helped each other by providing moral support in cases of pressure from their communities and families and celebrated their successes and small gains in working with the electorate.
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Interest across diverse groups of individuals in both rural and urban areas was generated through use of innovative communication approaches, such as generating discussions on social norms on Facebook and WhatsApp groups and blitz-queries on questions related to women’s participation in elections. These fora attracted social media users’ attention to the issue of women’s local leadership<sup>9</sup>.

### Links:

<sup>9</sup> [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=3696143043838200&id=10000327623861](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=3696143043838200&id=10000327623861)



## 62 communication products

were developed and widely disseminated through different channels, having an overall coverage through:

-  Oblast level TV channels  
•  **1,880,000** (subscribers)

Batken TV

•  **300,000**

Issyk-Kul TV

•  **200,000**

Jalal-Abad TV



•  **1,000,000**

Regional TV: Talas TV

•  **230,000**

Naryn TV

•  **150,000**

-  Azzatyk site  
•  **4,000,000**

EITR



•  **3,000,000**



Azattyk YouTube


•  **1,390,000**

-  Newspaper Kutbilim  
•  **10,000**





-  Radio Salam  
•  **700,000**


-  KTRK  
•  **3,000,000**





-  Birinchi Radio  
•  **3,000,000**

-  Radio Maral  
broadcasts 24 hours/7 days  
Radio BBC

-  Social media  
'Ayalzat koomu'  
•  **8,000**  

-  '3 jashtan kyin kech'  
•  **40,000**  

-  'Migrant Women'  
•  **600**  

-  WhatsApp and Telegram groups  
(all together)  
•  **3,837**    
members representing communities of Batken, Osh, Chui, Naryn, Issyk-kul provinces, different groups – of rural women, teachers, migrants, social workers.