BRIDGING THE GAP

AN EXPLORATION OF FACTORS SHAPING RECRUITMENT PARTICIPATION FOR SENIOR ROLES IN KOSOVO'S PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

BDO LLP | May 2024

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ACRONYMS

BEP	British Embassy in Pristina
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DMPO	Department for Management of Public Officials
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
IP	Implementing Partner
LPO	Law of Public Officials
MBR	Merit-based recruitment
NAC	National Admission Commission
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PAR	Public Administration Reform
PoE	Publicly owned enterprise

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 'Independent, Accountable, Meritocratic and Professional Recruitment in Kosovo' project is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), managed by the British Embassy in Pristina (BEP), and implemented by BDO LLP, with support from Talogy (the 'implementation team' or IP). It was observed throughout the course of the project that merit-based recruitment (MBR) processes for senior positions in public institutions often fail due to challenges in attracting enough eligible candidates. The IP therefore conducted a study to identify barriers and enablers to applying for senior positions within civil service and publicly owned enterprises (POEs). This research seeks to overcome a critical gap in knowledge and provides an evidence base for designing actions to improve candidate participation and contribute to broader efforts to strengthen MBR in Kosovo. It does this through a survey of 167 past applicants on IP-supported MBR processes (henceforth referred to as 'experienced applicants') and three interviews with potentially eligible individuals who never made the leap to apply (henceforth referred to as 'non-applicants'). Key findings are highlighted below.

- **Most experienced applicants viewed the recruitment processes supported by the project favourably in terms of the methodology. Key concerns cited by those that expressed reservations include**: (i) the selection criteria, written test, or the interview questions were overly broad and not tailored to the specific demands of the position (ii) the recruitment commission members lacked technical competence and sectoral know-how (iii) the selection criteria were overly rigid and excluded applicants with equivalent experience in the private sector and civil society and (iv) incidents of applicant document misplacement and mishandling.

- **Only half of the surveyed experienced applicants believed that the IP-supported MBR processes that they participated in were fair and transparent.** Results indicate that scepticism is more linked to the outcome of the process (who is appointed) rather than in the process itself. This is for a complex set of reasons often beyond project control. Men are slightly more inclined than women to be sceptical over the fairness and transparency of the process. Reasons for distrust included (i) recruitment commission has last word on the nominations of candidates; (ii) perception that appointed candidates were unfit and that qualified[1] candidates were passed over; (iii) lack of feedback shared to candidates and other measures for transparency and fairness.

- **The primary motivations driving experienced applicants to apply were the desire to serve one's country coupled with a belief that one is the right person for the job**. Secondary reasons include career advancement and the prestige associated with occupying a high-status position. Among experienced applicants, negligible differences were observed between men and women. However, one non-applicant interviewee speculated that women only apply when they are fully confident that their background and skills meet all the role requirements whereas men will pursue roles that support a career growth rather than based on their field of expertise.

- **Evidence suggested that the project was instrumental in generating trust in the process among potential applicants.** Among those who were aware of the project's involvement (n=111), 93% indicated that this knowledge encouraged them to apply. Due to disillusionment with the fairness and transparency of MBR processes outlined above, 33% percent of applicants would choose not to apply again even if the project was involved. For 26% of male respondents, their decision to apply in the future is conditional upon the involvement and monitoring of third parties. Interestingly, third party involvement makes no difference to women respondents, speculatively because women who have risen to such a senior level are persistent and accustomed to dealing with obstacles.

- **The chief concern preventing candidates from wanting to apply relates to the perception that recruitment processes are unfair, tainted by political influence and nepotism.** To some extent the issue of political influence extends to the period after a candidate is appointed and installed in the position. Many spoke of how political influence and politics can constrain senior leadership from enacting genuine change. These concerns were cited as "important" or "very important" by 87% of experienced applicants (92% of women and 86% of

[1] Qualified here means being perceived as having qualifying experience or qualifications, rather than only the latter. Actual eligibility based on the regulations often differs from what is perceived as qualifying experience/qualification.

men). Two of the three interviewed non-applicants also flagged this.

- Other key barriers deterring potentially eligible applicants highlighted by both men and women included the short tenure of the senior positions, uncompetitive salaries, burdensome recruitment process, and the difficulties in effectuating change once appointed, in what are perceived to be highly dysfunctional and politically constrained institutions.

- **Women considered public scrutiny/investigation and the high level of the responsibility to be more significant barriers than their male counterparts.** Some respondents speculate that women are more wary of their portrayal in the media and the effects that public exposure can have on family life. Further, women may be conditioned to doubt their ability to take on the demands of senior roles, especially when balancing domestic responsibilities.

- **When prompted on how to encourage potentially eligible applicants to apply, most experienced applicants recommended actions designed to reverse the perception that the process is unfair**. This included suggestions to digitise the application process to prevent opportunity for manipulation, to maintain international and/or third-party involvement in recruitments, a revision to how recruitment commissions are selected, and greater transparency with scores and the provision of feedback to applicants. Non-applicants added that this could be supplemented with more intentional messaging and awareness-raising to the public to cement the perception that the process is fair. Suggestions to increase salaries, simplify the application process, extend the mandate period, and continue the creation and maintenance of women's networks were also offered.

II. INTRODUCTION

The 'Independent, Accountable, Meritocratic and Professional Recruitment in Kosovo' is a project funded by FCDO and managed by the BEP. It is implemented by BDO LLP with support from Talogy ("the implementation team" or IP). The overall aim of the project is to promote the implementation of independent, accountable, meritocratic, and professional recruitment in Kosovo Institutions both through direct support running and observing MBR processes for senior leadership positions in civil service and PoEs, and through capacity building of public institutions and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) so as to generate demand for meritocracy.

Beyond public institutions' legitimacy and capability, success regarding the intended project's impact relies on eligible individuals having trust and applying to senior positions in public institutions. The need for this study was prompted by the IP's observation that the number of applications from eligible candidates to the IP-supported MBR processes remains consistently low. Within Phase 3 of the project (March 2021 to March 2024), 16 recruitments (26% of processes run) failed at shortlisting phase because less than two applicants met the minimum eligibility criteria. Further, 8 recruitments (13% of processes run) failed at the interview phase because not enough interviewees met the scoring threshold defined by the Law of Public Officials (LPO) to be recommended for appointments. This consumes time and resources for all parties involved, means few IP-supported MBR processes conclude in appointments, and could potentially dampen enthusiasm for MBR generally. At the same time, it could be an indication that the prospective candidates lack trust in the MBR process, a belief that the project is striving to reverse.

This study aimed to better understand the barriers and enablers to applying to senior positions within the civil service and PoEs in Kosovo. In the absence of literature that focuses on this topic, the study overcomes a critical gap in knowledge and provides an opportunity to design evidence-based actions to amplify factors that encourage participation and remove factors that discourage candidate participation. To the extent possible, the study seeks to have broader relevance and inform future efforts for the Government and the Assembly of Kosovo, civil society, international organisations and others seeking to promote and strengthen MBR over the long term.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

01 **EXPERIENCES WITH MBR PROCESSES**
What are experienced applicants' perception of IP project-supported MBR processes?

02 **BARRIERS TO APPLY**
What are the barriers to apply for senior positions within civil service and POEs in Kosovo?

03 **ENABLERS TO APPLY**
What are the factors that motivate well-qualified candidates to apply for senior-level positions?

04 **DIFFERENCES ACROSS GENDER**
How does the decision-making calculus around applying vary between men and women?

05 **ACTIONS TO PROMOTE**
What are the possible actions to encourage applications to senior civil service and PoE positions?

3.2 STUDY DESIGN

This study followed a mixed method approach, including surveys with experienced applicants and interviews with professionals well-suited for senior positions but who had never applied (non-applicants). Where relevant, secondary data from external reports and publicly available publications as well as findings from other data collection activities conducted under this project were used to contextualise and supplement the primary data.

3.2.1 Self-fill Questionnaire with Experienced Applicants

Experienced applicants were the first respondent group targeted by the study. They included individuals who had engaged in the IP-supported recruitment processes for senior level civil servant positions at the central level government in Kosovo, senior level positions in POEs and other senior recruitments. In particular, this group encompassed unsuccessful applicants, those who dropped out of the recruitment process, and those who were successfully selected or appointed. This group was included because they were easy to reach and could offer important insights from those who ultimately decided to participate.

The self-fill questionnaire method was selected for the following reasons: i) it offered the opportunity to capture the perspectives of a greater number of individuals compared to in-depth interviews and other methods; ii) it built on interview data collected in January and February 2023 with individuals appointed through IP-supported MBR recruitment processes; iii) overall, it afforded better value-for-money within the resourcing and budgetary constraints.

Support of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and the Department of Management of Public Officials (DMPO) was sought to access these individuals. Based on the criteria mentioned, the OPM shared the self-fill questionnaire survey link to around 800 experienced applicants of senior-level POE positions and the DMPO sent the self-fill questionnaire to all of the experienced applicants of senior-level civil servant positions. The response rate is presented in Table 1. Responses were collected between 4- 30 September 2023.

	# Invited	# Filled	Response Rate

Experienced applicants (POE roles)	800	150	19%
Experienced applicants (Civil Servant roles)	-	17	-
Total	-	167	-

Table 1: Response Rate for Self-Fill Questionnaire[2]

3.2.2 In-depth Interviews with Qualified Non-Applicants

Non-applicants were the second respondent group targeted by the study. They included individuals who had never applied to senior civil service, PoEs, and other senior-level positions recruited for despite being eligible and potentially suitably qualified. This group will be referred to as 'non-applicants'. There may be a different set of factors shaping their job-seeking behaviour compared to experienced applicants that is important to capture.

The sample was identified through an open call for volunteers published on the Facebook account of the British Embassy in Kosovo. Fifteen individuals responded to the open call (two women and 13 men). However, the majority did not have the experience and qualifications necessary to be eligible to a senior position and were thus eliminated from the pool. Ultimately four individuals were deemed to meet the criteria and were interviewed. During the interview, one of the male respondents revealed they had previously applied to two IP-supported MBR recruitment processes. As a result, findings from his interview are discussed alongside findings from the questionnaire, which targeted experienced applicants.

For this group a semi-structured interview guide was developed and interviews were held between 6-11 November 2023. Interviews provided an opportunity to gain a more nuanced picture of the complex dynamics around the decision to apply for senior level positions compared to a questionnaire. Considering that this was the first effort to capture this group's perspective and our understanding of the motivations, interviews are particularly well-suited. Moreover, given the small sample size, qualitative methods are more appropriate.

3.3 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Certain challenges and limitations need to be taken into consideration when interpreting the results of this study.

- The sample size is small (particularly for the non-applicant group) and not representative, so the findings must be interpreted as indicative. The group of applicants targeted with the self-fill questionnaire (experienced applicants) were identified through a non-probabilistic approach. It included only individuals who applied to IP-supported processes and who elected to participate, leading to a selection bias. Further, individuals who had not applied to senior positions at all (non-applicants) were a diffuse and potentially large group that was difficult to identify and reach. As a result, only three non-applicants were interviewed and they were identified based on a convenience sampling approach, as described in Section 3.2.2. This means that findings from both respondent groups are not representative and should not be generalised to the entire population of individuals who are a good fit for fulfilling senior positions in Kosovo.
- The use of the self-fill questionnaire for the purpose of our study included several limitations. Firstly, the self-fill questionnaire included a fixed set of response options and thus may not capture the range or complexity of opinions or experiences. To mitigate this, predefined categories were informed by observations of the implementation team and existing secondary data, and open text response options were included for elaboration. Further, because the questionnaire was self-administered and researchers were not enumerating the questions to the respondents, there was no opportunity to clarify or probe respondents to ensure a thorough understanding.
- The study relies on capturing the perceptions of the respondents. There is thus a potential gap between perceptions and reality in some cases, as

[2] Note that the number of experienced applicants who have previously applied to IP recruitments that received an invitation from DMPO to participate in the survey is unknown.

participants' views may not always accurately reflect objective truths or facts. Difficulty arises in independently verifying participants' perceptions due to the anonymous nature of the survey, as they are subjective interpretations rather than measurable or observable phenomena, potentially leading to skewed or biased findings. One of the research questions is concerned with understanding experienced applicants' past experience with IP-supported MBR processes. Accurate responses to this series of questions, presented in section 4.2, hinged on respondents' ability to recall which recruitment processes were monitored by the IP and which were not. Given that many respondents were involved in multiple senior-level recruitments, there is a risk of conflating their experiences with senior-level recruitments generally with MBR processes supported by the IP project.

- DMPO's cooperation in reaching out to experienced applicants to fill the self-fill questionnaire was delayed due to a change of personnel in the role of DMPO Director. As a result, the timeline of the research was extended.
- The study sought to capture the voices and unique experiences of both men and women and apply a gender lens to the interpretation of findings. However, women are relatively less represented in the applicant pool and by extension, represent 14% of the survey respondents. Gender disaggregated results were presented, but they must be interpreted with caution given that they only represent the viewpoints of 27 women.

IV. RESULTS

In the sections below, we first presented key demographic details of the questionnaire and interview respondents, followed by findings categorised by subtopics that correspond to the research questions presented in Figure 1. Findings from the different respondent types (experienced applicants and non-applicants) were presented side-by-side to present a coherent narrative. Where relevant, differences in perspectives between the two groups were highlighted.

4.1 RESPONDENTS' PROFILE

4.1.1 Experienced Applicants (Self-fill Questionnaire Respondents)

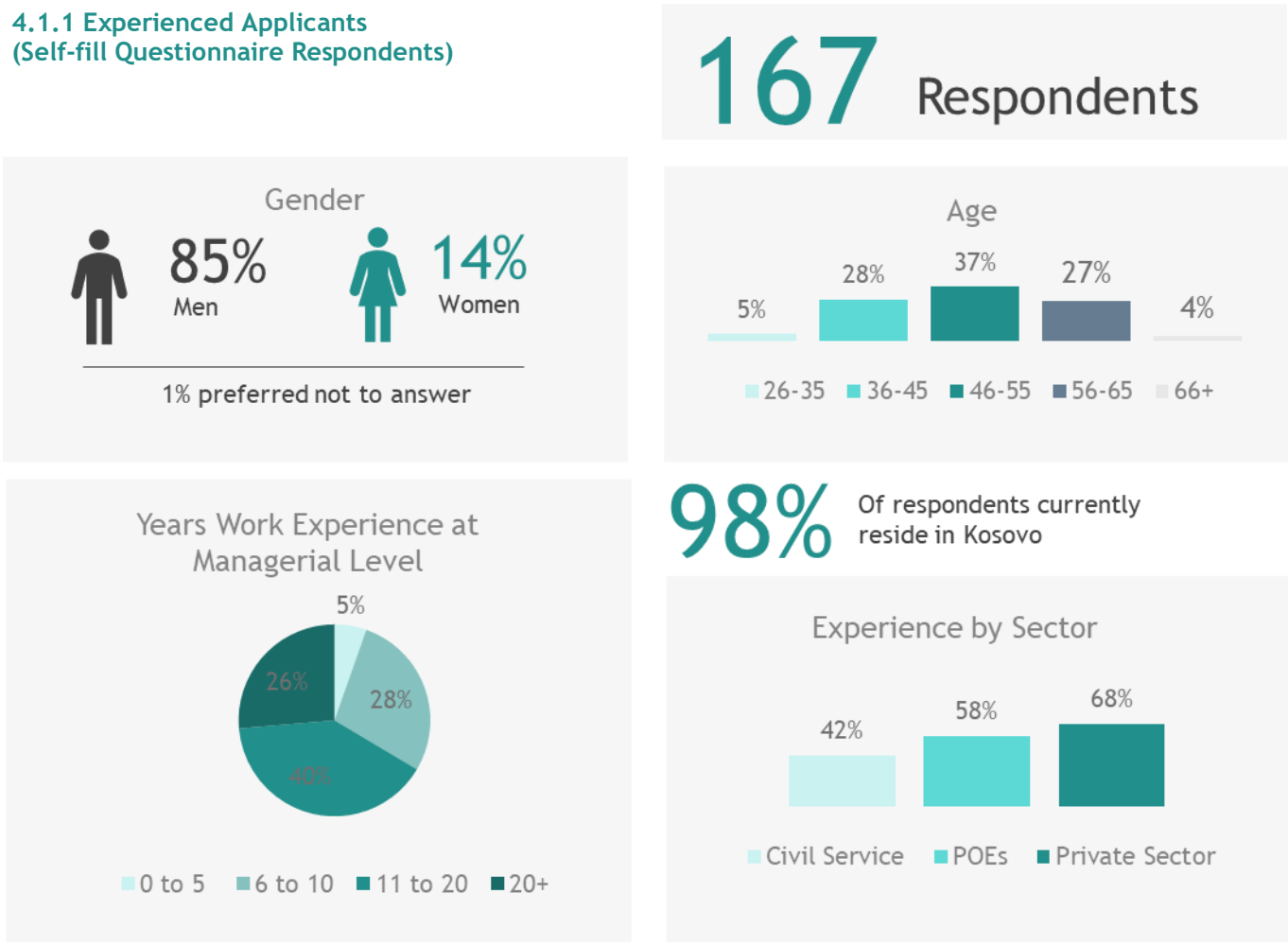


Figure 1: Profile of Questionnaire Respondents (Experienced applicants to IP-supported MBR processes)

4.1.2 Non-Applicants (Interview Participants)

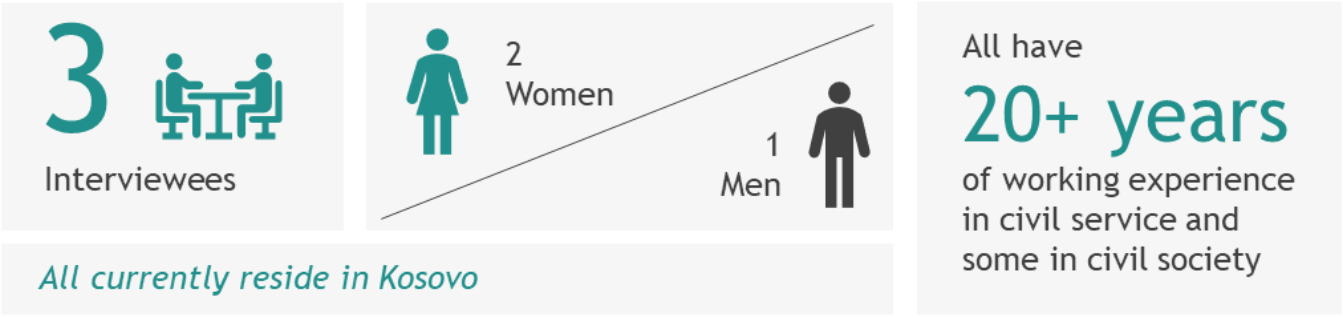


Figure 2: Profile of Interview Respondents[3]

4.2 PAST EXPERIENCES WITH MBR PROCESSES

This section seeks to understand the respondents' past experiences with MBR processes and how this has shaped their future willingness to participate in MBR. This is useful background for interpreting later findings related to barriers and enablers to apply. Moreover, it serves as an opportunity to collect direct feedback from experienced applicants to IP-supported processes, which to date, has not been done as part of the project's monitoring and evaluation activities. Note that, for obvious reasons, this section only captured the perspectives of the experienced applicant category of study participants. The responses given are perceptions and not verified facts. Where possible, contextual information and the reflections of the IP are also included to contextualise the results. It is also important to emphasise that many of the variables within the process are beyond the IP's control.

4.2.1 Outcomes of Applications

Figure 3 below indicates the modality of interaction of the 167 survey respondents with MBR processes in the past. Both men and women respondents had a mix of experiences participating in MBR processes supported by the IP and senior position processes ***not*** supported by the IP over the last five years. Figure 4 shows results of the IP-supported processes that the respondents have applied to up to three times. Overall, there was a diminishing rate of individuals being selected for each successive process. This could be because preferred candidates are selected and appointed in earlier rounds and cease job seeking. On the other hand, the percentage who reach the interview stage gradually increased, suggesting that the quality of applications improved as individuals became better-versed in the process.

Overall, across these three first processes, 19% of respondents never made it to an interview, 44% were interviewed at least once but never selected, and 37% were among the selected candidates in at least one instance.

[3] Ultimately four individuals were deemed to meet the criteria and were interviewed. However, it was revealed during the interview that one of the male respondents had previously applied to two MBR recruitment processes led by the project. As a result, findings from his interview are discussed alongside findings from the questionnaire, which was targeted towards past applicants.

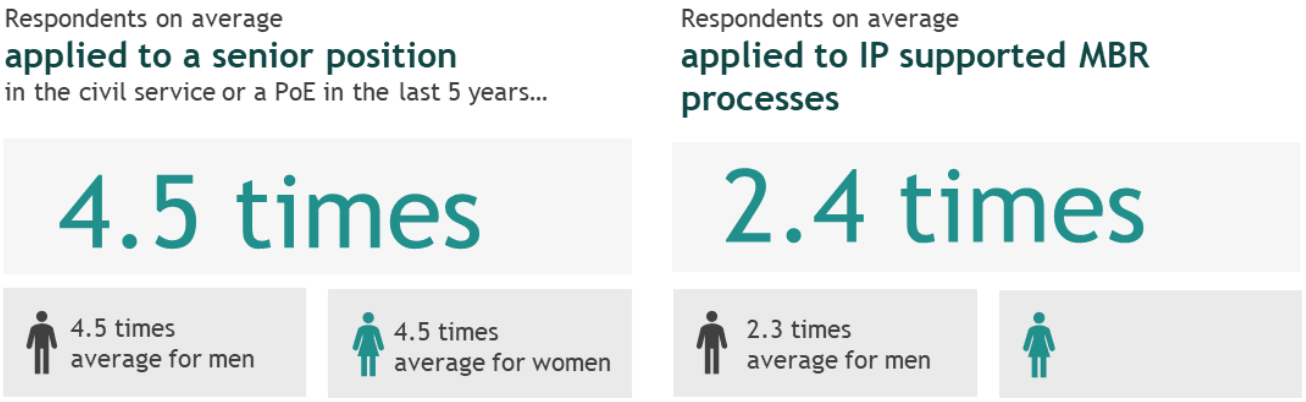


Figure 3: Respondents' Past Experience Applying to both IP-supported MBR processes and Senior Position Recruitment Processes not run by the Project (n= 167)

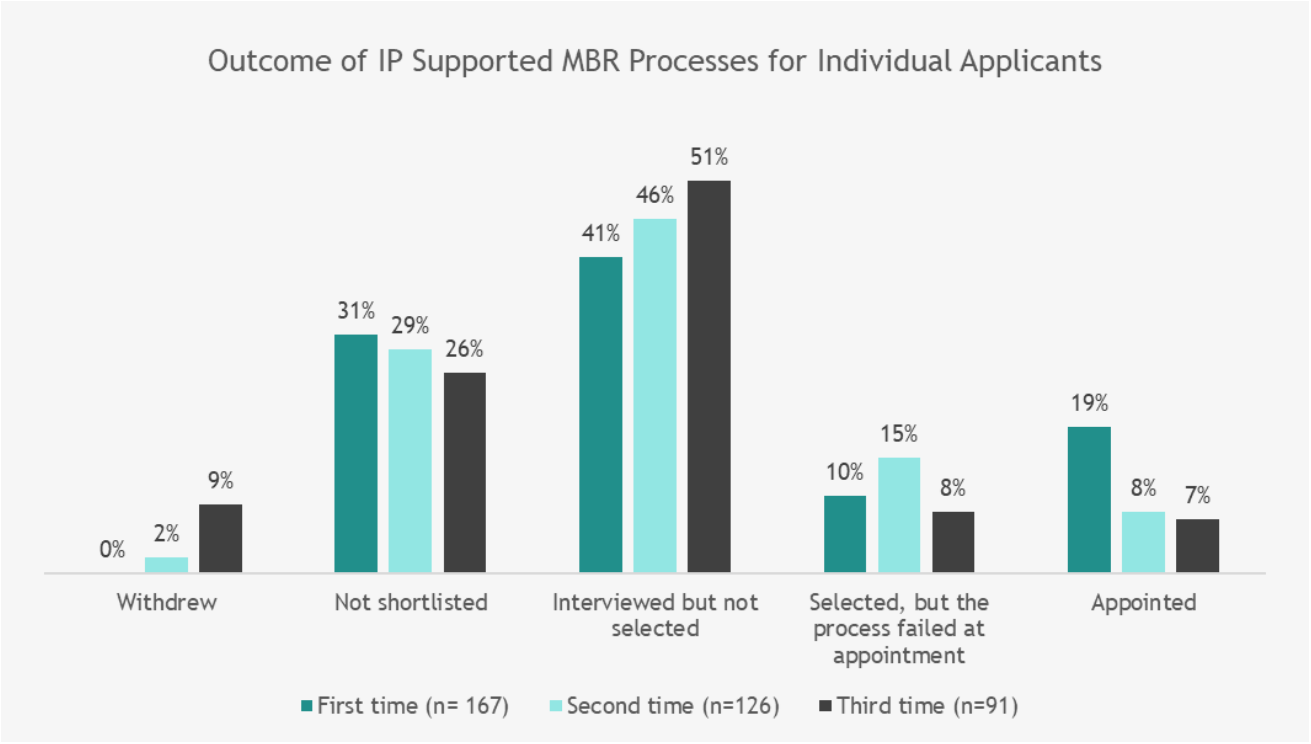


Figure 4: Outcomes for Individual Applicants in IP-supported MBR Processes (n=167)

4.2.2 Perception of IP-supported MBR Processes

Survey respondents were prompted to rate the extent to which they agree with the statements contained in Figure 5, on a scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree. Key results emerging from those responses and the accompanying open-ended responses are organised below.

FEEDBACK ON PROCESS MOSTLY POSITIVE

Most respondents had a positive experience with IP-supported MBR processes in terms of how it was organised and the methodology. The majority agreed or strongly agreed that the process testing, interview questions, and the selection criteria were appropriate, as highlighted in Figure 5. One respondent commented that "The recruitment process until the interview went in order according to me" while another commented that it was "well done and very professional" and "let it continue on the model of the BDO and British Embassy project."

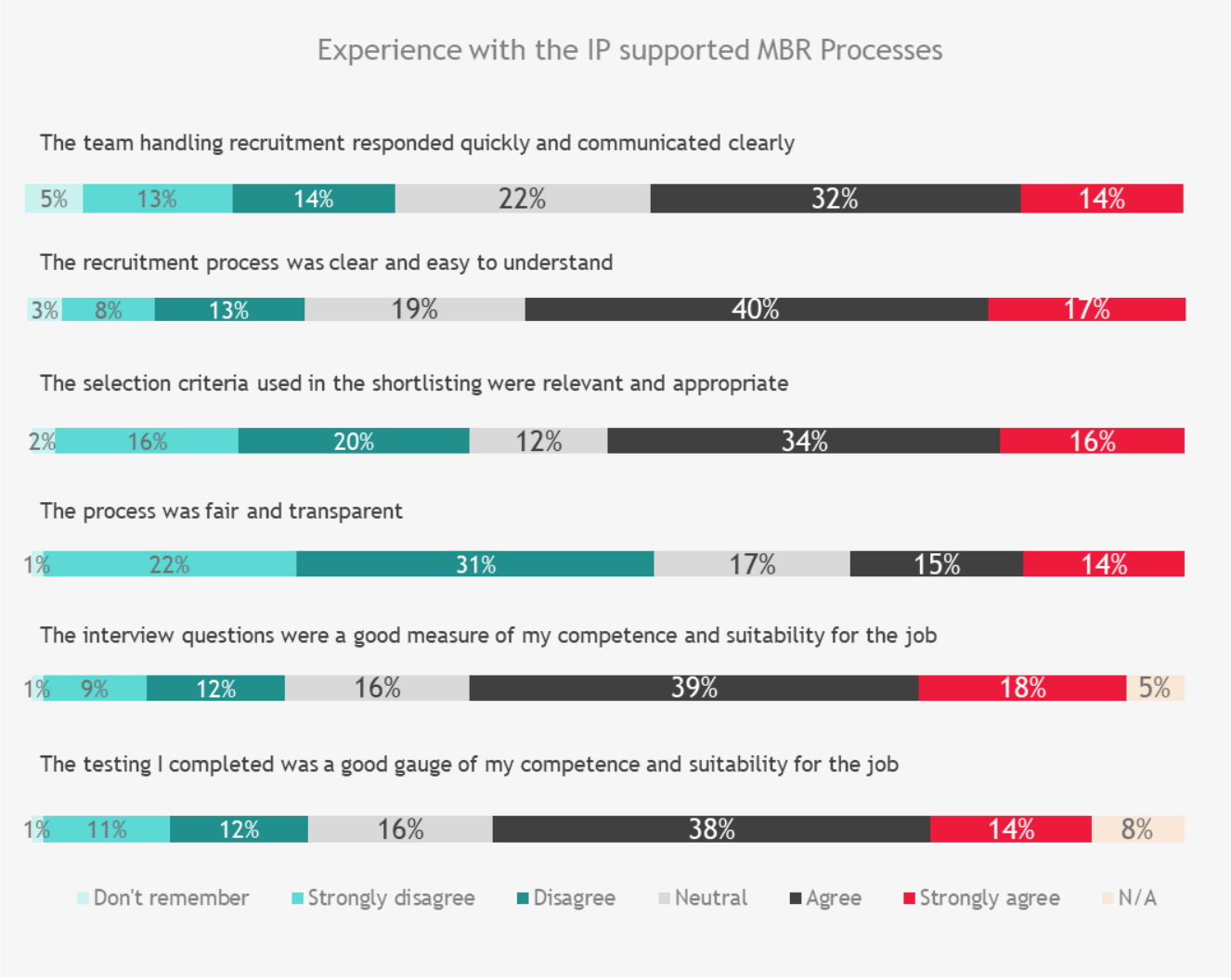


*Figure 5: Experience with **IP project** led MBR Processes according to Experienced applicants (n = 167)*

POINTS TO IMPROVE

The perceived deficits in the process are presented below in descending order of the frequency that they were mentioned. Note that these deficits were provided in response to an open-ended prompt to share general reflections on IP-supported processes. The number of times each issue was raised is included to give a sense of prevalence but should not be used to make statistic generalisations on the percentage of respondents who hold a particular viewpoint.

- ***Measurements not tailored to specific position***

Ten respondents suggested that either the selection criteria, written test, or the interview questions were overly broad and not sufficiently targeted to the specific position. "The panel does not have any questions or information about that department or organisation in industrial or professional terms, there are only general questions" noted one respondent. Others echoed this sentiment, with one who shared that interview questions need to be "more focused on concrete issues related to the organisation's mission and vision" and another who noted that "the [selection] criteria must be compatible with the activity of the organisation." The selection criteria and testing process is largely set by laws and regulations and thus outside the control of the IP project. The selection criteria are generic across senior management roles unless specific additional criteria are added at the start of recruitment. In general, senior recruitment criteria also focusses on broader skills such as management and leadership skills rather than specific technical expertise related to the sector of the organisation, thus pointing to a potential disconnect with applicants' expectations.

- ***Recruitment Commission Lacks Technical Competence***

Closely linked to the above point, a further nine respondents questioned the credentials and competence of the selection commission. For civil service recruitments, the National Admissions Commission (NAC) was operating with five individuals appointed under the LPO who are responsible for managing the recruitment process with the support from the IP project. For PoE recruitments, commissions are ad hoc and appointed by the OPM. Further, independent PoE institutions may have further and separate requirements in appointing their commissions. As such, the commission composition is outside of the IP project control. The view of the commission's perceived incompetence is summed up by the one respondent who shared that "the evaluation commission should be appointed professionals from the respective fields related to the position under recruitment!" While the IP team does concede that having some commission members with industry experience is important, it also increases the likelihood that they personally know the candidates and by extension, undermining the fairness of the process. Further those with technical specialisms relating to the company's area of operation sometimes find it difficult to provide evidence relating to the wider abilities required to run an organisation.

- ***Selection Criteria not Inclusive***

Seven respondents suggested that there are many different avenues one can take to attain the requisite skills and experience for senior management roles. However, they suggested the criteria were too prescriptive and narrow, and by extension excluded qualified candidates. One opined that "managerial work experience should be taken into account... and not only the experience of being a director." Another took issue that recruitments are allegedly "not taking into account the experience gained in private enterprises… even though we are talking about positions in public manufacturing enterprises" and that they did not recognise "certificates acquired by internationally recognised international organisations such as International Federation of Certified Accountants and Auditors." Further, another respondent considered the criteria to be reproducing patterns of exclusion for the politically non-aligned as presented in the quote below.

> *"I applied for a position as a board member in a public enterprise and I was not invited to the interview because I have no managerial experience, while my experience is over 10 years as CFO of the largest company in the country. - Experienced Applicant"*

> *"Often they say only people previously in high management positions have the right to apply. I wanted to remove this sentence because, after the war, we all know how people in high positions are … So those not in the line of the party in power are excluded (even though they are very good and experienced experts)! - Experienced Applicant"*

There are some instances where candidates are deselected not because they lack experience but because they have not evidenced that experience with documentation. It is possible that some respondents are confusing the two. Nonetheless, as mentioned previously, the selection criteria are largely set by laws and regulations and thus outside the control of the IP project. The IP has routinely highlighted the limitations of the criteria from an MBR perspective during the process to amend the LPO. According to the analysis of the IP team, rigid selection criteria and rigid interpretation of them has evolved partly due to a lack of trust in the system, and a reticence to allow for any professional judgement on the part of commissions (for fear that this is abused).

- ***Document Mishandling***

There were six separate specific incidents raised related to the handling of application documents. In one case, a respondent shared that "the reason for elimination was the lack of a document that I submitted to the file. The document has purposely "disappeared" from the commission." Four other individuals describe situations where a document mix-up resulted in what they regarded as an unfair elimination. The final, as highlighted in the quote below, felt that his reasonable justification for not being able to obtain a document was unjustly disregarded. The process of document verification varies depends on the recruitment type. For civil service recruitments soft copies are collected while for PoE recruitments hard copies are required. Thus, those that voiced complaints of document mishandling were likely involved in PoE recruitment processes. At the time of writing, efforts to entirely digitise the application processes using the HRMIS were underway. This should positively impact the potentiality or actuality of document mishandling and mistrust around this part of the recruitment process.

> *Firstly, there was no criterion for the nostrification of the diploma in the advertisement and secondly it was not my fault [that the nostrification was not obtained], but it was the other institution's negligence , which failed to perform its duties. My complaint was not considered and there was no response. - Experienced Applicant*

- ***Other***

Other perceived weaknesses in the process were expressed by only a small number of respondents (around two to three respondents) and so are given brief mention. Note that these opinions sometimes conflict on if the process is sufficiently rigorous. These "other" perceived deficits include a single interview was not enough to ascertain the suitability of the candidate, that evidence of past employment and references needed to be more rigorously verified for authenticity, and that the process was overly onerous and long. This last point, captured in the quote below, was stressed by a male interviewee who had applied for two IP-supported recruitment processes.

> *I don't think we need to go through this very comprehensive process [for recruitment]. It is a luxury to go through this very detailed one. Maybe in the future, but for the given circumstances, it feels excessive. We need to walk before we can run. - Experienced Applicant*

OPINIONS SPLIT ON THE FAIRNESS OF PROJECT-SUPPORTED PROCESSES

According to the results of the survey questions presented in Figure 5, only half of the surveyed individuals believed that the IP-supported MBR processes were at least somewhat fair and transparent. As highlighted in Figure 6, men were slightly more inclined than women to be sceptical over the fairness and transparency of the process. For many, the involvement of the IP engendered trust in the process. For instance, one respondent noted that "the process is now much more credible" and another noted that "there is progress following the involvement of the BDO implementation team." This is discussed more in Section 4.4.

> *A sentence from a member of the commission confirms my hypothesis that the interview was a formality. "Don't bother, professor, this work is done" he said immediately after the second question... Since then, I never applied again! - Experienced Applicant*

> *The last time I applied, I submitted the documents in hard copy, and I did not enter the shortlist because the check list document shows a documents in the file was "missing" even though it was attached by me. - Experienced Applicant*

> *The recent recruitment process [supported by the IP project] is transparent compared to earlier processes when the political influence was great and decisive! - Experienced Applicant*

Those who disagreed allege that candidates are selected according to their political affiliations and connections. As one respondent said, "the selection is made only by proximity to the interest groups" while another added that "prior to the publication of the public competition, it is decided who will be selected." This finding is explored further in Section 4.4.

Why a lack of trust in the process has persisted despite project involvement is less clear. As one respondent stated, "You [project] are not electing professional people to the relevant positions, but you are continuing with the old routine." Many respondents did not provide specific evidence or reasoning. It may be that this scepticism in MBR's ability to thrive in Kosovo is so deeply entrenched that it difficult to reverse, even if the project provides conditions for meritocracy within specific processes. However, from the open-ended responses, several key narratives emerged over the source of the distrust comes from. It becomes clear that the scepticism is more linked to the outcome of the process (who is appointed) rather than in the process itself.

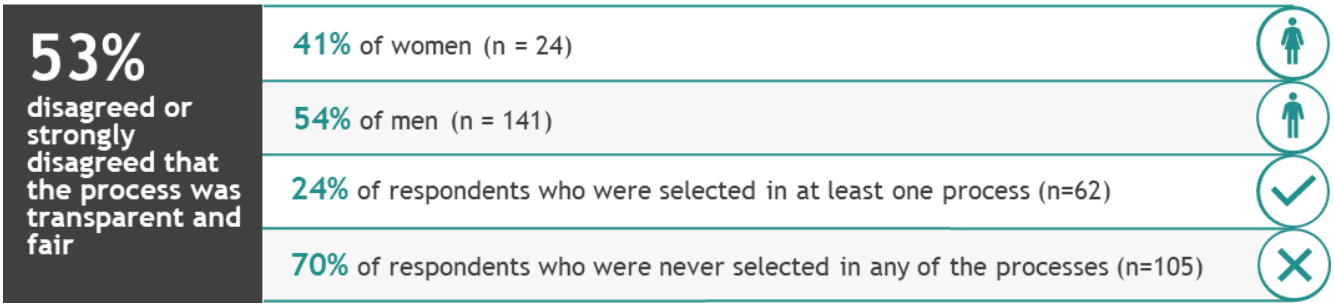


Figure 6: Perception of Fairness and Transparency of IP project supported MBR process by Gender and Recruitment Outcome Status according to Experienced Applicants

REASONS FOR SKEPTICISM

- ***Recruitment Commission has Last Word on Nomination***

It is worth noting that the recruitment commissions (NAC and ad hoc commissions assembled for PoE recruitments) are not bound to the recommendations of the project monitors, who deliver a full parallel assessment of all candidates during the recruitment process. The commission is the legal decision-making entity and as such, is solely responsible for the decision. Within Phase 3 of the project (March 2021 to March 2024), 24 recruitment processes resulted in the appointment of 44 individuals to various positions by the respective commissions. Eighty-eight percent of these appointed candidates were deemed appointable by the project, meaning that they met a minimum score of at least 70%. Further, in 48% of cases the highest scoring candidates according to the project monitors were not the highest scoring candidate according to the commission.

At least 12 respondents in their open-ended responses pointed to the fact that that those who are selected are sometimes not the top candidates according to the rankings produced by the implementation team. As one candidate put it, "In most cases the implementation team's evaluations are not taken into account" while another added that "in many cases applicants were selected who were ranked very low by the Implementation team, while this committee has rated them highly."

At least six respondents explicitly questioned the neutrality of the commissions handling the recruitment. "So far as per my observations, the commission has been political," commented one respondent while another highlighted that "Politically exposed persons should not be part of the recruitment and selection of candidates for high positions." Previously, it was stipulated by law that NAC members are not politically involved. The majority were acting in the civil service, however. This has changed in the amendment to the LPO, which removes the requirement for commission members not be politically involved. It goes without saying that NAC members vigorously protest this characterisation that they are not independent. In interviews conducted by the IP project in March 2024, one commission member shared that "I am proud of choosing people based on merit" and "no political person has ever encouraged me to select one candidate over the other."

> *The proposals of the IP project implementation team must be made mandatory because otherwise this process makes no sense.*
> *- Experienced Applicant*

> *"The national commission must take the implementation team's assessment as a basis during the selection, since in many cases applicants were selected who were ranked very low by the IP project, while the national commission has rated them highly…" - Experienced Applicant*

According to the IP, the potential reasons for discrepancy in scoring vary. For instance, it could be due to the IP having higher expectations or a lack of knowledge of the local context or regulations. Additionally, in some cases a minimum of, for example, two appointable candidates are required by the Commission to meet legal requirements. This creates an additional incentive to inflate scores to ensure the recruitment process is viable and need not be repeated. However, there have also been certain situations in which the scoring patterns of certain commission members did not appear to reflect the quality of evidence provided by the candidate, and this did raise some questions around whether outside factors were influencing the commission member's evaluations.

- *Appointed Candidates Unfit and Qualified Candidates Passed Over*

At least ten respondents in the open-ended response suggested that their lack of trust in the process is evidenced by who was appointed in the position and who did not. One respondent reflected that "I do not agree with the appointment of the Director, that man does not deserve that position as director there, but the political clan appointed that man there." Another noted "almost in all the recruitments made, the selected persons have been in one form or another related to politics" while a third said that "they hired people with poor preparation and experience and removed the best." One experienced applicant expressed dismay over the selection of the Board, which allegedly "does not contain any appointees with background in the field of engineering." This sentiment is further illustrated by the quotes below. However, running an organisation or advising on business operations does not always require deep technical expertise. As such, the lack of engineering skills in Board members selected cannot be interpreted as conclusive evidence of unfair recruitment practices. Here too candidate expectations may be mis-aligned with the nature of senior role recruitment, which seeks to identify individuals who have the strategic and managerial skills over operational know-how in the specific sector the role stems from.

> *I have a 4-year college degree, a master's degree, 14 years of managerial experience, a certified accountant, skills, honesty, very much in compliance with the law. But I go to 12 interviews in vain, even though when the selected candidates appeared, they were unqualified, inexperienced and party militants. - Experienced Applicant*

An interesting counterpoint to these observations is one shared by a NAC member in an interview conducted by the IP project in March 2024. He explains that "Kosovo is very small country, and we know each other… you cannot find a very good candidate in Kosovo without certain connections to government, parliament, police, justice department, or political parties." He goes on to explain a situation where the commission was unaware of a selected candidate's distant familial connections to someone with power until the media pointed it out. "We just interview the candidates, and not the relatives," he continued.

It should also be caveated that these respondents are not entirely neutral and may have personal grievances over not being selected or moving forward in the process. Unsurprisingly, only 24% of those who were selected as the preferred candidate in one or more IP-supported MBR processes found that the process was unfair compared to 70% of those that were never selected (Figure 6). Note that the difference between men and women was small, with men on average being slightly more dubious of the fairness of the process.

- *Lack of Feedback and other Measures for Transparency & Fairness*

Transparency of the process was a top concern among experienced applicants. A core complaint was around communication with candidates and the provision of feedback, which was expressed by at least nine respondents. "I have never received an answer as to why I was not selected either in the shortlist or after the interview," explained one respondent. Another who felt similarly stated that "there must be justification regarding the positive/negative notification." One respondent added that more communication around the reason for not being selected would allow candidates to make more informed decisions on whether to apply to future opportunities. Similarly, one interviewee shared that "for me it was very surprising that I never heard officially that the process was cancelled. I was shortlisted, and it was cancelled in a hidden way, and I was never contacted."

> *Even if you entered the top three candidates, you don't have an explanation why person one [is selected] and not you. - Experienced Applicant*

> *It must be transparent and include the notification of candidates for each step of the process. Usually, the notifications are made when you are rejected at the end of all the procedures or after they are accepted and start the work. - Experienced Applicant*

This issue around providing feedback is something that has been recognised by the IP project. To manage expectations and ensure that candidates have an equal opportunity before, during and after the recruitment, it was determined that there is a need for the recruitment panel to clarify its policy around feedback with candidates at the first point of engagement. Indeed providing feedback on processes at a senior level is common practice elsewhere. However, providing feedback is time consuming and carries potential risks (can provoke problematic and confrontational discussions, candidates seeking information about the performance of other candidates which cannot be disclosed etc.). As such, if introduced by the commissions, the conditions and process would need to be carefully considered and approached.

There is an existing appeals process in place. However, it was mentioned by very few past participants of IP-supported MBR processes. One person mentioned that "I did not follow the appeals procedures because it seemed to me a waste of time and useless," but he did not elaborate on why he held this view. Another shared that he was hesitant to make an appeal for fear that it could affect his relationship with the relevant Ministry and affect future engagements.

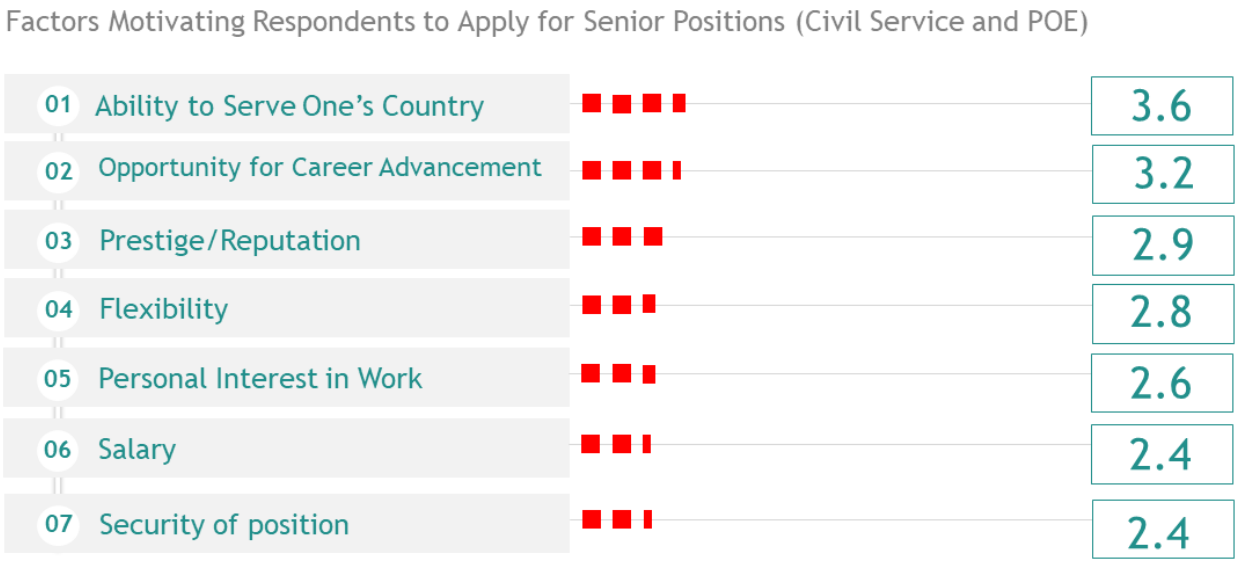
A small number also suggested that the process itself was subject to manipulation. Four speculated that the process is "rigged" and candidates are "pre-prepared." One individual noted that "I am convinced that candidates who are supported by political parties or the government are favoured by giving them the interview questions in advance and for this reason the implementation team may not suspect they are being misled during the recruitment of ""X"" candidate." Another shared this assumption and stated that "even if you are monitored by the Implementation team, candidates who have been accepted get the questions before the test, that's why they always come out as winners." It is worth noting that no concrete evidence was presented to substantiate these accusations.

4.3 FACTORS THAT MOTIVATE PROFESSIONALS TO APPLY

4.3.1 General Factors

Figure 7 below shows the results on the factors that motivate professionals to apply to senior positions in the civil service and in PoEs in Kosovo, according to experienced applicants. Each response was assigned a score from 1 (not important) to 4 (very important). An average score was then produced across the 167 respondents for each factor, with a higher score signifying it is more influential in terms of motivating candidates to apply. For a full breakdown of results refer to Figures 14-15 contained in Annex 1.

Generally, the most important factors for experienced applicants are the opportunity these positions provided to serve one's country, advance one's careers, and the prestige associated with occupying such a high-status position. The same considerations motivated both men and women. How these results compare to findings from the annual public opinion barometer from the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) on the reasons behind peoples' decisions to be part of public sector is presented in Figures 18 in Annex 1.



Average score across 167 respondents where 1 = not important 2 = a little important 3= important 4= very important

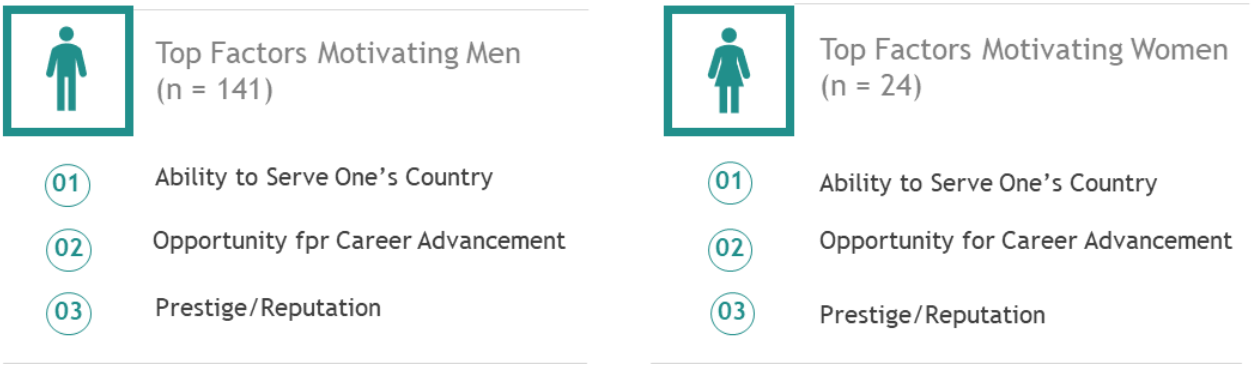


Figure 7: Factors Motivating Men and Women to Apply to Senior Positions in the Civil Service and in PoEs according to Experienced Applicants

Respondents were asked to elaborate on their responses. In accordance with the replies presented in Figure 7, the overwhelming majority spoke of a desire to improve the performance of public institutions in service of their country and a belief that their background and skills position them well to do so.

> *Because many mistakes have been made in the management of these enterprises, I thought that I would help the country if I take one of these positions based on my experience, preparation and dedication.*
> *- Experienced Applicant*

> *Seeing the poor state of the management in the institution where I applied, I am concerned that continued mismanagement will affect the future of my children and my country. This has been the main motive who has pushed me to pursue a position. - Experienced Applicant*

Non-applicants referenced similar factors to experienced applicants. Both women non-applicants emphasised that their ability to help their country is predicated on them having the requisite experience. One respondent noted that when qualified professionals hold a senior position, they "already understand the processes, enhancing the efficiency for both the official and the institutions. This results in increased accountability and the potential for delivering more quantifiable outcomes." Both interviewees stressed that the professionalism, expertise and experience they had developed until today provided them with the self-confidence to apply for senior positions in similar fields. As such, if an opportunity was presented that aligned with their area of expertise they would be incentivised to apply (in labour law and human rights respectively). One female respondent suggested that this might not be the case with men, who may be inclined to apply for positions they are not suited for, as demonstrated in the quote below.

> *Women decide to apply to senior positions when they know that it is under their field of expertise and they can do it, they can contribute substantially to that position and the country. Men decide based on the ranking of the position, for them the field is not necessary, they only want to advance to more senior positions in their careers. I have examples where a director of a department working on human rights, applied to a senior position which was linked to the transport department - Female Non-Applicant*

One female non-applicant also cited "the advantages of holding a senior position in civil service or a PoE are vast when it comes to personal growth and development. Climbing up the developmental and career ladder means constant interaction with numerous individuals within your division."

4.3.2 Role of the Project in Encouraging Individuals to Apply

PROJECT HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL IN INITIALLY ATTRACTING CANDIDATES TO APPLY

According to Figure 8 below, 68% of experienced applicants were aware the process they applied to was monitored by the Project before applying. Of those that were aware (n=111), 93% indicated that the project's role in the recruitment encouraged them to apply. This underscores how influential the project was and the trust it generated in the process among potential applicants. Non-applicants shared this view. The male interviewee reflected that "I have experience with internationals and think that they are fair. I think that they rightfully score and give merit to those who apply. I want the British Embassy to continue to be involved. I think if I knew they

were involved it would affect by decision to apply in a positive way."

> *The support from the IP project is a motivation to apply for me but also for many people with whom I have talked considering that they believe in the objectivity of the assessment regardless of political or ethnic affiliation! - Experienced Applicant*

> *The participation of IP project implementation team monitoring the process makes the competition fairer and more transparent! - Experienced Applicant*

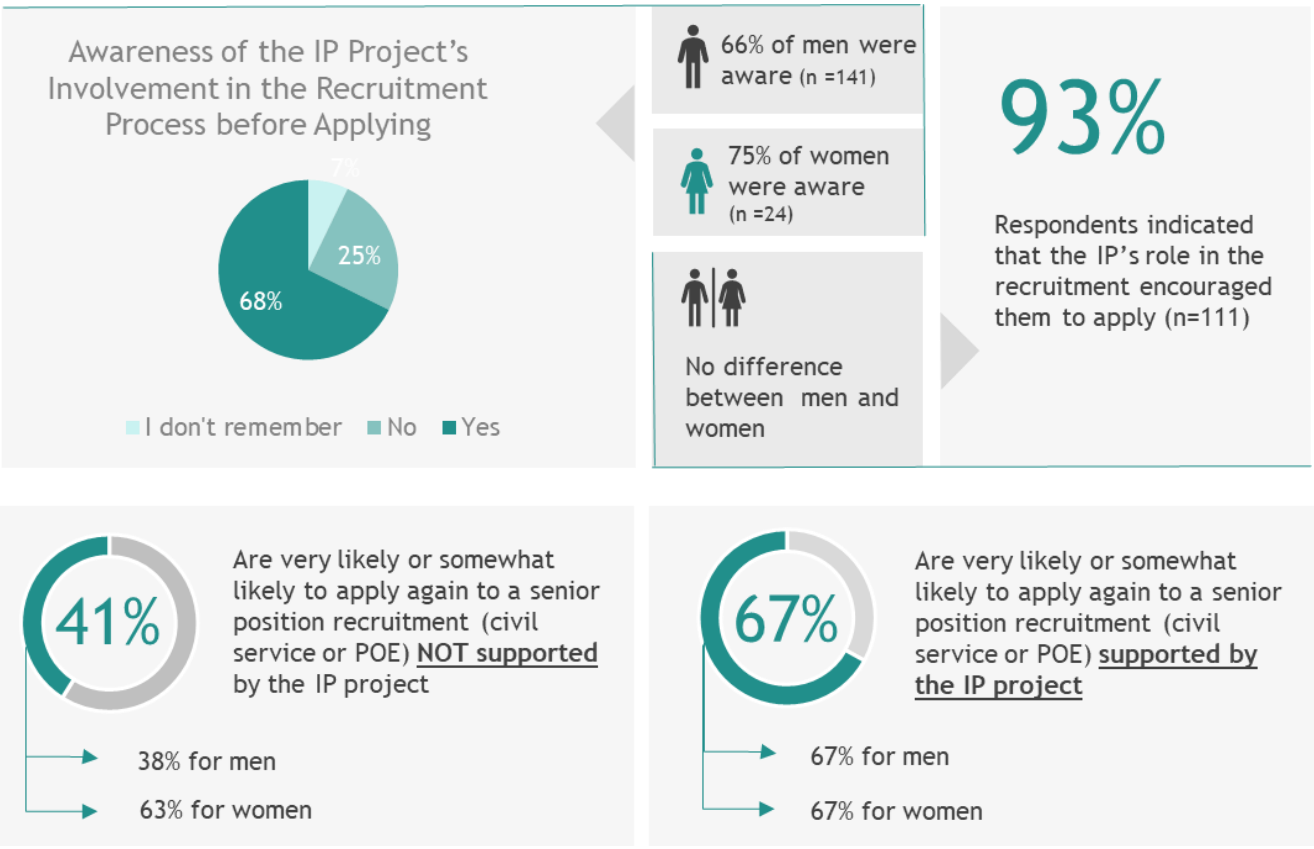


Figure 8: Project Involvement's Influence in Motivating Past and Future Applications according to Experienced Applicants

FOR SOME MEN, DECISION TO APPLY IN FUTURE CONDITIONAL ON PROJECT INVOLVEMENT

As illustrated in Figure 8, 67% of experienced applicants said that they will re-apply if the process is monitored by the IP while only 41% said that they will re-apply if the process is not monitored by the IP. As one respondent put it "I have no motivation to apply if there is no monitoring by the IP" while another added "I do not believe in the hiring team without the presence of foreign embassies." All cited lack of trust in the fairness of the process when asked to elaborate.

> *In the future, I will only participate in competitions for high positions which are supported by the IP because I do not trust national commissions in which people without proper experience in public enterprises and without professional competences participate. - Experienced Applicant*

> *If we do not have the help of IP, the Civil Service as well as Public Enterprises in Kosovo will be caught by daily politics. - Experienced Applicant*

Interestingly, this discrepancy did not apply for women. Women seemed equally inclined to continue to apply regardless of whether the IP was involved or not in monitoring (Figure 8). The reasons for this were unclear. Speculatively, this could be because women who have risen to such a senior level are persistent and accustomed to dealing with obstacles. As one woman shared, "the support from recruitment projects is a plus to gain a meritorious position, but until I have the opportunity to work and contribute at this level, I will never give up."

Another added "I have never given up and I will not give up. I will continue to compete in those places where I think I can contribute. My experience, even with the disappointments I have had during my career, has made me stronger and more motivated to continue."

SOME KEEN TO CONTINUE TO APPLY AND OTHERS DISALLUSIONED

It is worth noting that there is still a non-negligible number of experienced applicants (33%) who would choose not to apply again under any circumstances. This is linked to a disillusionment with the fairness and transparency of IP-supported MBR processes as described above in Section 4.2.2.

> *It was a year of hope when these recruitments were being monitored by the IP project implementation team, but with all due respect, it is not enough. - Experienced Applicant*

> *There is disappointment everywhere regarding the recruitment process …In the beginning it was believed that the recruitments would be based exclusively on merit, but this has not happened in reality. - Experienced Applicant*

Others were more optimistic and committed to continue to apply. Eight respondents suggested that the project may have precipitated lasting change which gives them more confidence in future processes. "Taking into account that now the IP has been involved for a long time, I would like to say that the local staff are aware, and the process will go better than before, so I am confident that things have changed positively!" Another added that "On the basis of the trainings that have been held with this official IP project, it is estimated that this practice of employment based on merit will be followed."

4.4 BARRIERS THAT DISCOURAGE PROFESSIONALS FROM APPLYING

> *I think that the processes and we as a society are getting better from year to year, but much is left to be desired. - Experienced Applicants*

Figure 9 below shows the results on the factors discouraging eligible candidates to apply to senior positions in the civil service and in PoEs in Kosovo according to experienced applicants. Each response was assigned a score from 1 (not important) to 4 (very important). An average score was then produced across the 167 respondents for each factor, with a higher score signifying it is more influential in terms of demotivating candidates to apply. For a full breakdown of results by gender refer to Tables 16-17 in Annex 1. The most cited barriers are discussed below.

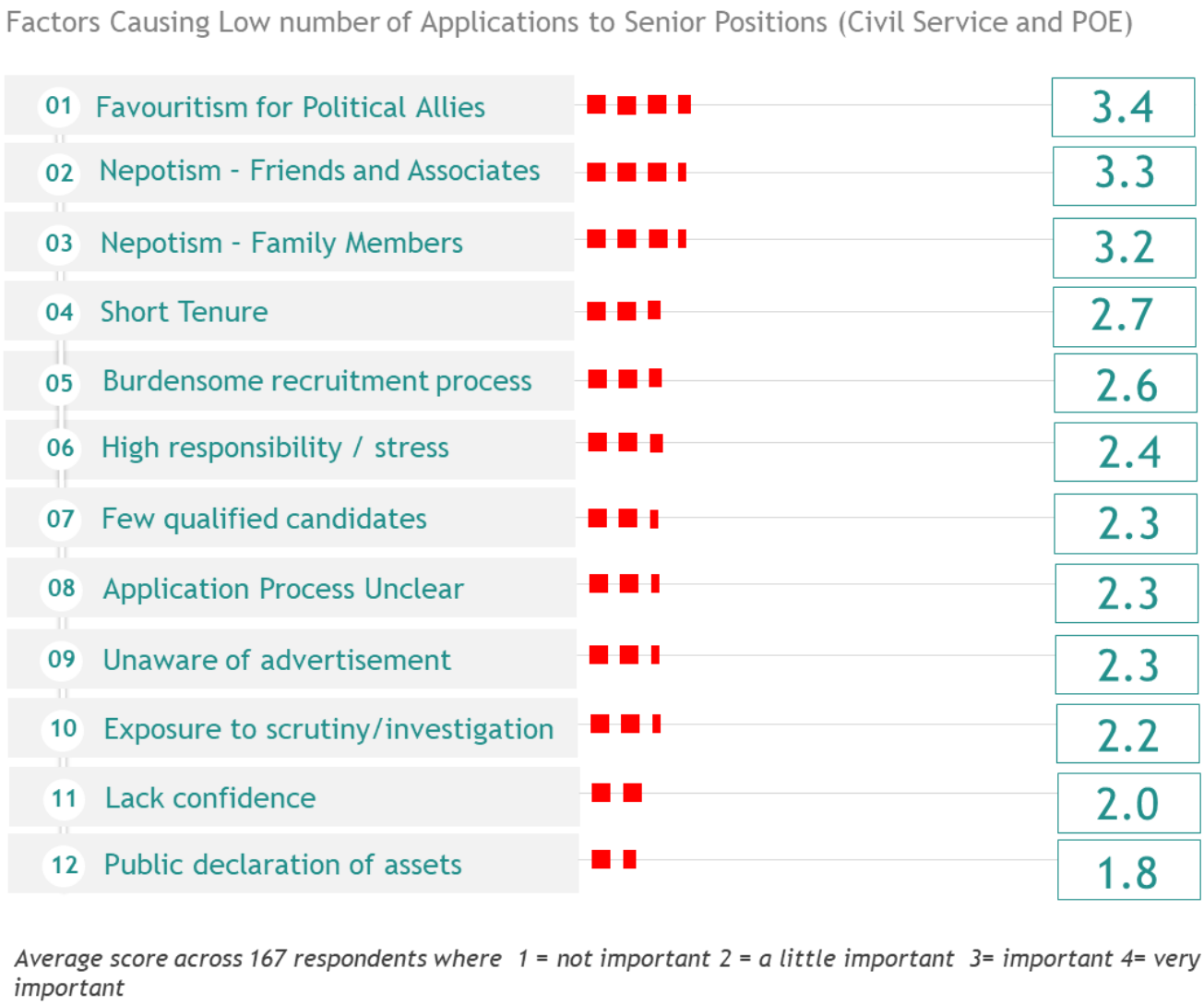


Figure 9: Factors Causing Low Number of Applications to Senior Positions According to Experienced applicants (n=167

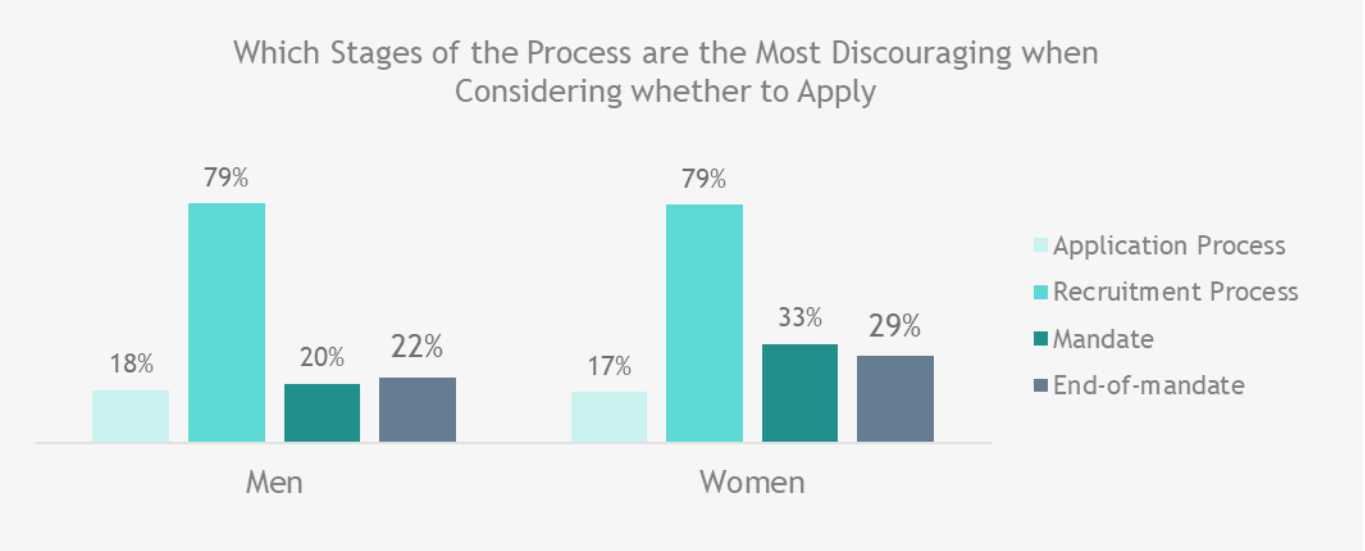


Figure 10: Stages of the Process that are Most Discouraging for Candidates Considering to Apply According to Experienced applicants (n = 167)

NEPOTISM AND POLITICAL INTERFERENCE

The chief concern which prevented experienced applicants from wanting to apply related to the perception that recruitment processes or the commission decisions on appointments are unfair, tainted by political influence and nepotism. This rings true with the results presented previously, which indicated a high level of distrust on the meritocracy, even in some cases when the IP was involved.

This was evident from the open-ended responses of experienced applicants. As one respondent noted, "if you are a politician and have power, you are accepted, if you are in a business relationship with a politician, you are accepted, if you are related by blood to someone from the commission, you are accepted." One person even relayed a personal anecdote of interest groups offering positions in exchange for loyalty, as highlighted in the quote below.

> *The recruitment process for high positions is controlled by interest groups who decide on the candidates. This happened to me personally after placing my name on the short list, one of the interest groups asked me to have coffee…they asked me to fulfil their demands in exchange for being selected for the high position. I refused and did not get the job. - Experienced Applicant*

This was also consistent with the results presented in Figure 10, which found that most experienced applicants found the recruitment process to be the most discouraging stage in the process (more so than the actual mandate period). Two of three non-applicants also expressed this view during their interviews. One female non-applicant shared that "there's a lack of confidence among men and women regarding the government's assurance of merit-based hiring. Both genders seem unconvinced about the fairness of the hiring process."

However, to some extent the issue of political influence extends to the period after a candidate is appointed and installed in the position. Many experienced applicants spoke of how political influence and politics can constrain senior leadership from enacting genuine change. Specifically, respondents cited the "mixing of politics in business strategies," "requests for favours by the parties in power," "an atmosphere of threats and obstacles" and "continuous monitoring by political persons." This is further captured by the quotes below.

> *The current situation of holding high positions is unfavorable because you cannot make decisions or manage the sector you cover independently and you are completely influenced by politics… - Experienced Applicant*

> *Every action that is carried out even now needs the prior approval of the political party that appointed the person to the position. - Experienced Applicant*

SHORT TENURE

After nepotism and political interference, experienced applicants appeared to be most deterred to apply to senior-level civil service positions based on the short

tenure of positions. In Kosovo, Law no 06/L-114 on Public Officials introduced the 4-year mandate for senior managerial positions with a possibility of re-election only once, while mandated positions were already the case in PoE senior managerial positions.[4] For this reason, senior-level civil servant and PoE positions are often associated with job instability. It may be that the person only holds the position for a few years, or even months. Further, recent changes to LPO have introduced fixed mandates for lower levels of the civil service, which will likely restrict the pipeline of future leaders who are motivated to rise through the ranks.

Experienced applicants appeared to be keenly aware of this. As one respondent explained "with the change of governments, high officials are also changed" while another complained of "dismissal of high officials at any time and without reason" and "the ridiculousness of the 3-year contracts." This in effect is another way in which the politicisation of these positions undermines their attractiveness.

> *People who have been appointed earlier and are in high leadership positions [within civil service and POEs], even if they are qualified professionals, are pressured to resign and be replaced by other people. - Experienced Applicant*

Thus, according to many applicants, the opportunity cost of seeking senior positions is too high. One would have to abandon their present job with little assurances over the stability of their future one. According to senior-level women interviewed in September 2023 as part of the project monitoring activities, to women already lacking confidence in their ability to lead, taking such a risk for only a few years of stability is unappealing. Furthermore, some felt that the short tenure limited their ability to implement real change within the institution, as pointed out in the quote below.

> *The only thing that is hindering me is the duration of the mandate…the mandate is ending and those experts are leaving without any reason and we are starting from the beginning with new people… I think that the professionals for whom so much has been invested should be kept. - Experienced Applicant*

This consideration was not explicitly mentioned by non-applicants.

UNCOMPETITIVE SALARIES

Forty-one percent of experienced applicants considered salary to be a real downside to holding a senior role, as highlighted in Figure 11 below. Salaries for senior level public sector positions are fixed by the Law No. 08/L-196 on Salaries in the Public Sector.

In the open-ended responses, experienced applicants elaborated that they considered that "the compensation level is weak in relation to the responsibility." One respondent advised that "the compensation should be increased because the positions in high positions also involve greater responsibility. The monetary compensation of the boards of PoEs should be competitive with the boards of banks and insurance companies." Some further complained that in some cases compensation levels are fixed and fail to adjust for inflation or the size of the institution they are overseeing. All three non-applicants expressed similar concerns.

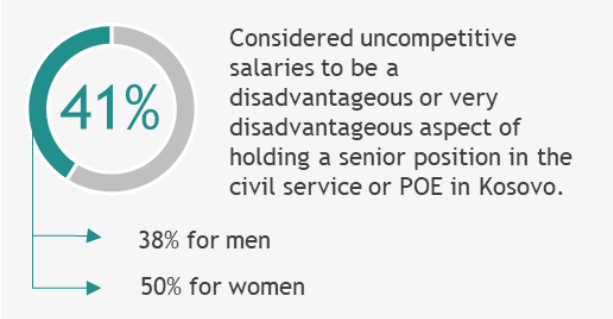


Figure 11: Perception that Uncompetitive Salaries are a Key Disadvantage of Holding Senior Civil Service and PoE Positions according to Experienced Applicants (n = 167)

DIFFICULTIES IN GETTING THINGS DONE

The difficulties in getting things done when holding senior roles was another factor that discouraged professionals from applying. This is interlinked with the notion of political interference described previously but also goes beyond it. This came out strongly in the open-ended response portion but was not explicitly captured in the fixed responses.

One of the most cited concerns was that these institutions are staffed by unprofessional, unmotivated, unqualified, or untrained staff. One respondent summed it up when he said that the key challenge is "the team you will work with, that is, your co-workers." The potential reasons for this are varied. Several respondents attributed it to a lack of professional development and training opportunities within these institutions. Another respondent surmised that "the salary is low therefore they do not do the work

[4] Law no. 06 L/114 On Public Officials, Article 41, paragraph 4

with dedication" while another attributed it to the guaranteed job security that public sector employees enjoy. "If maintaining your job is not linked to performance, you have less of an incentive to work hard," she reasoned. Finally, a few speculated that hiring lower-level staff is also not based on merit and so less competent staff are put in place.

This assessment is consistent with an interview conducted by the project in March 2023 as part of the project's routine monitoring activities. The interviewee, a CEO of PoE appointed through an IP-supported MBR process, explained that "From my point of view, the key problem is the team… without a team, you can be the best manager in the world ... but manager works with other peoples' hands, not his own. You can make decisions, but you can't implement on your own." He explained that he was dropped in as a relative outsider to PoE and asked to lead with the support of staff who have been there a long time, are stuck in their ways, and may view him as an "intruder" or "disruptor."

Some respondents also spoke to a "toxic work environment" characterised by "corruption that hinders the success of an enterprise" as well as how chronic mismanagement has left institutions with "lack of functional organisational structure" and with high loss of revenues. "The challenges in front of you are big." In summary, the cumulative effects of these myriad forms of perceived disfunction within the institutions are thought to frustrate senior leadership's ability to effectively lead. This is particularly true considering the short time that many senior leaders will hold on to their appointment. The expectation that you will be ineffective is enough to deter at least some potential candidates from seeking out such roles.

This consideration was not explicitly mentioned by non-applicants.

MINOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Figure 12 highlights the top five factors that demotivated men and women from applying according to experienced applicants. More detailed data on this can be found in Tables 16-17 in Annex 1. The top five concerns were shared between men and women. The three factors where there was the biggest difference between men and women is captured in Table 2. This includes public declaration of assets,[5] exposure of scrutiny/investigation, and the high level of responsibility of the position. A discussion of these factors is presented below alongside of reflections of the non-applicant interviewees.

- **Public exposure more of a deterrent for women**: In terms of why women would consider the first two items an impediment to attracting eligible candidates at a higher rate than their male counterparts, one could speculate that women feel more susceptible to backlash or criticism in the public eye due to underlying prejudices or are more reticent to expose their family. This is consistent with a comment by one of the female interviewees from the non-applicant group, who opined that "women don't want to be in the headlines of newspapers" and that "the news is sometimes very bombastic - it affects people's family relationships, etc." An interview conducted by the IP in March 2024 with a NAC member underscored this public exposure and also legal backlash appointees many face. "My colleague in a high management position said you cannot finish one mandate without having 2-3 indictements in court. You cannot control everything, but you have responsibility for everything" while another presenting servicing senior-level leader in civil service shared "our families are under pressure of the public opinion and the media… my daughter cannot celebrate her birthday the way she wants or she will be published in the headlines of the media – look at the daughter of the director drinking alcohol or something like that."
- **Lack of confidence among women**: On the other hand, it is not surprising that the responsibility of the role may have discouraged women more so than men based on the responses of experienced applicants. It is also consistent with the views shared by the two female non-applicants. One of the female respondents shared that "there's a perception that individuals, especially women, might not feel empowered or confident enough to apply for these positions due to the stressful nature of the job and the impression that being a woman might hinder their prospects." The second women interviewee went on to explain that sometimes the gender discrimination is more of an internalised problem where despite being in equal positions, women might not feel comfortable to raise their voice. This aligns with findings from interviews conducted by the project in September 2023 as part of routine monitoring activities. These interviews involved two women on the organising committee for the "Network to Empower Women in Decision Making Positions in the Public Sector" who hold high-level positions in civil service. Both highlighted

[5] Law No. 08/L-108 on Declaration, Origin and Control of Assets and Gifts, Article 4, Article 8

a lack of self-confidence among women to apply and handle the demands of the job. One noted that "women do not have the courage to take the position, to take the responsibility. This issue was also a concern for me. You have the responsibly of managing staff and other things" while the other shared that "It is a high burden of responsibility, and women question if they can cope with it."

- **Traditional Gender Roles and Women's Responsibilities at Home:** One of the female non-applicant interviewees explained that "it's also about working conditions and the need for workplace flexibility. The existing legislation and system lack flexibility concerning the domestic responsibilities of young women or mothers. Unfavourable working conditions reduce the appeal for women to apply for senior positions." The second woman agreed and added that "Unfortunately, traditional values still depict men as primary breadwinners and assign women to domestic roles. This perception impacts women's inclinations or opportunities to pursue senior positions."
- **Selection Criteria Exclude Women:** One responded indicated that the managerial experience requirement outlined above may disproportionately exclude women from applying. She explained that in Kosovo, women in civil service belong to lower-level managerial (heads of divisions or senior officers) positions thus leading to impossibility to apply to senior positions, while men who already are part of mid-level managerial positions take the decision to apply immediately. This speaks to the systemic disadvantage experienced by women. Fewer women promoted into senior roles means there are fewer women with the required managerial experience to apply for senior roles. This structural issue may limit the proportion of women able to evidence the eligibility requirements. However, the new LPO entering into force may pave the way for women candidates to apply to such positions even though they did not belong to mid-level managerial positions before. The specific reasons for why this might be the case were not shared.

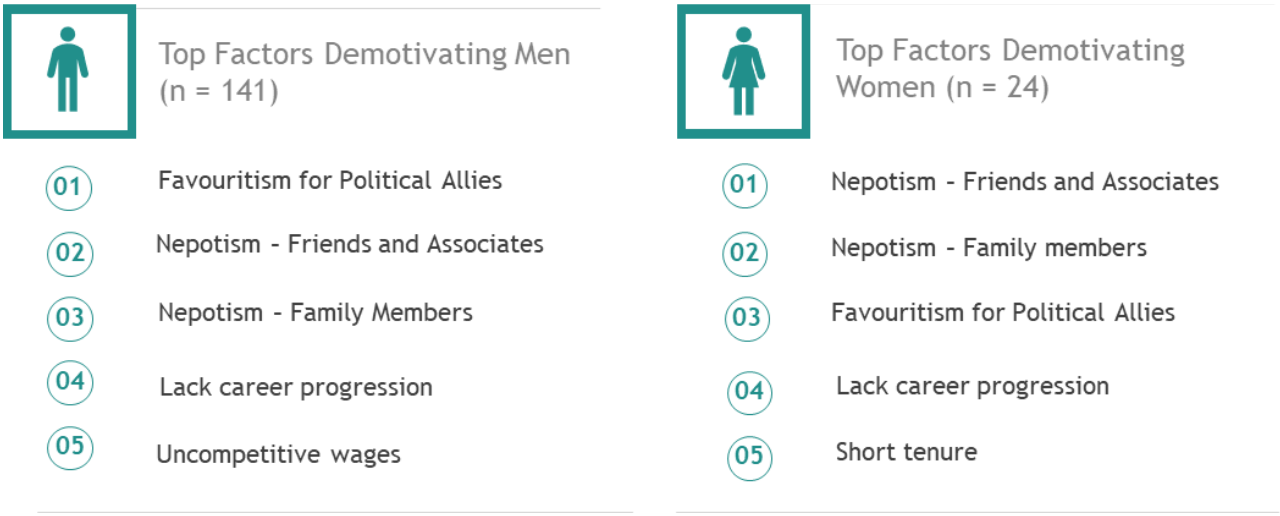


Figure 12: Top Factors Demotivating Men and Women according to Experienced Applicants (n=167)

	% who consider the barrier important or very important		
	Men	Women	Difference
Request for public declaration of assets	19%	46%	27%
Exposure to scrutiny/investigation	34%	46%	12%
High level of responsibility of the position	43%	54%	11%

Table 2: Top 3 Barriers with Differences Observed between Men and Women Respondents (n= 167)

4.5 ACTIONS TO PROMOTE APPLICATIONS

Experienced applicants were prompted to give their suggestions for actions that could be taken to attract eligible candidates to seek out senior-level roles in civil services and POEs. The findings of the fixed responses are presented in Figure 13 disaggregated by gender. In addition to these responses, additional suggestions were captured in the open-ended response section that were not included in the fixed options. It should be noted that not all suggestions are easily implementable. Many would require political will and direct intervention from the government itself.

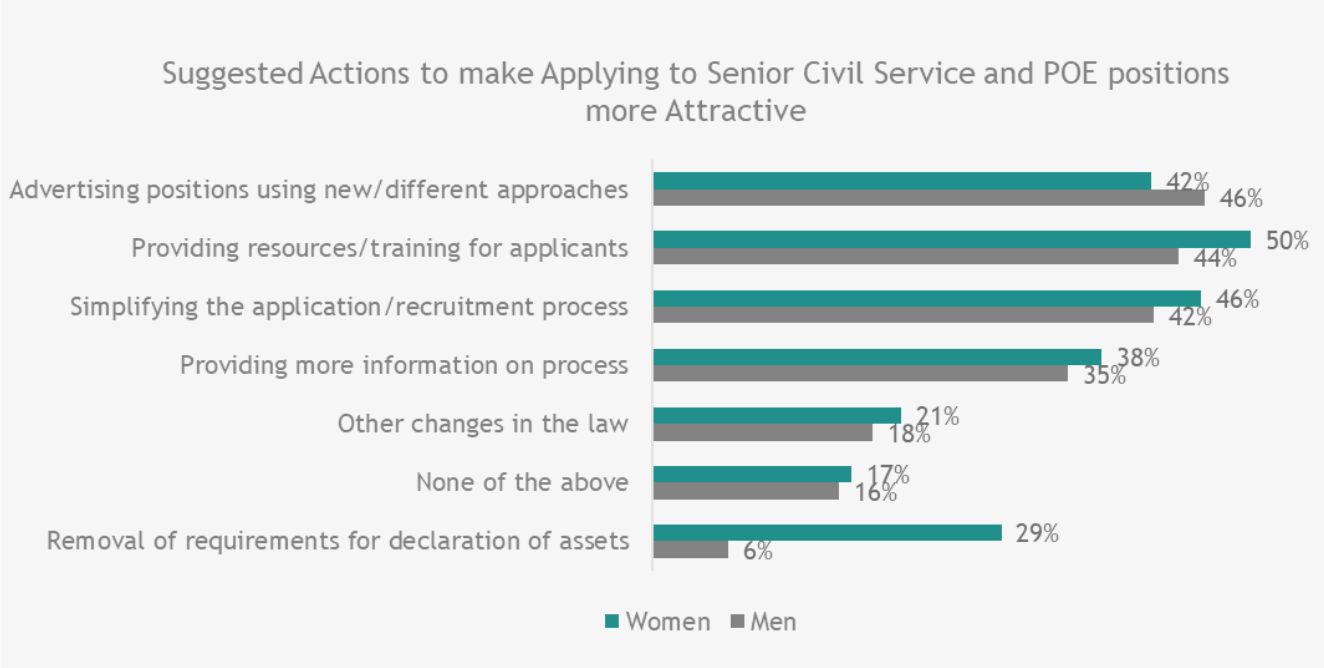


Figure 13: Suggested Actions to make Applying for Senior Civil Service and POE Positions more Attractive According to Experienced applicants (n = 167)

MEASURES TO CREATE TRUST IN THE FAIRNESS OF THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

According to the results presented in previous sections, the prevailing wisdom is that eligible candidates do not apply because there is a deep distrust in the fairness of the recruitment process. As such, many of the recommended actions revolved around remedying this root problem. Some of the specific suggestions are elaborated below.

DIGITIZE APPLICATION PROCESS AND OTHER MEASURES TO PREVENT MANIPULATION

To minimise the opportunity for human error and the perception of deliberate document mishandling (described in Section 4.2.2, at least seven separate experienced applicants made the recommendation to digitise the application process. Reportedly, efforts are underway to digitise the application process entirely for civil service recruitments through use of the HRMIS, which is already in existence but not used at a systematic level.

One respondent explained that "the fact that public enterprises require that the application be made in hard copy shows the great tendency of distorting the application and the attached documents." Another explained that a digital application process would provide an "an internal control to ensure that the documents with which the candidate has applied are not removed from the file." Further, the suggestion was made to including "a letter for all the documents he/she has provided in the application file."

A few experienced applicants also suggested measures to better anonymise the process. "I think that an opportunity for candidates to be only with codes and not with personal data will reduce the possibility that the commission will be influenced from the outside." "Compilation of the test by the committee supervised by the cameras, 30 minutes before the test, in order not to

leak questions to their favourite candidates," suggested another.

INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

It is apparent from the results in Figure 8 presented in Section 4.3.2 that the involvement of the IP via the British Embassy project gave legitimacy to the process. By extension, at least nine respondents explicitly suggested that such involvement should continue. "In order to increase the number of applications, it should first be announced that representatives of the IP team will be present during the recruitment," explained one respondent.

However, many went a step farther and proposed that the IP's involvement (or other international bodies and projects) take on a more active role in manging recruitments and deciding who is selected. As noted in Section 4.3, the IP monitors do not have a direct say in who is nominated. One respondent suggested that the "process of recruiting high positions should be managed by an independent foreign international organisation such as the British Embassy." At least four additional respondents suggested that the Commission be composed of international, impartial representatives and local representatives. However, while this may provide short-term independence and objectivity, it does pull away from the EU accession aims of have Kosovo institutions able to self-govern in a fair and meritocratic manner.

Non-applicants shared this view. One interviewee suggested that external monitoring be provided not only for senior positions but also for mid-level recruitment processes in civil service and in POEs. Another female non-applicant suggested that civil society could take the place of the IP if it is no longer able to continue. There is a precedent for involving civil society to add transparency and accountability to senior recruitment processes in other countries. And indeed, the IP has trained CSOs to monitor the recruitment processes. However, competing priorities or lack of funding have provided limited incentives currently for CSOs to systematically do so.

CHANGE HOW COMMISSIONS ARE SELECTED

Without giving specific suggestions, several suggested a need to design a mechanism for selecting neutral and independent commission members to combat concerns around commission neutrality and competence described in Section 4.3. This in turn may give prospective candidates more assurances that the commission will be fair, and their application considered without prejudice. Recent changes to the LPO will decentralise the recruitment process for senior civil service positions. Instead of having the NAC, which manages recruitments for all senior-level positions, each individual ministry will be responsible for assembling their own recruitment commission and running the recruitment processes. This could present an opportunity to move further towards or away from this suggestion depending on who is appointing and how that it done.

> *The recruitment commissions should include representatives of all political subjects from the Assembly of Kosovo or be entirely external and apolitical. - Experienced Applicant*

TRANSPARENCY WITH SCORES & FEEDBACK

As discussed in Section 4.3, many seem to believe that by instituting measures for transparency, additional candidates may be attracted to apply. Recommendations from experienced applicants ranged from requiring "publication of the score from each panellist for the selected candidate," "candidates to see the results of their tests and the comparison with the selected ones," or at a minimum, feedback and "explanation of non-selection." While this adds transparency, disclosing commission or candidates scores could discourage candidates and commission members from participating for fear of public embarrassment, scrutiny, or backlash.

AWARENESS RAISING

Like experienced applicants, one of the non-applicants focused on the need to create trust in the process and "establish a clear perception that the selection process is entirely based on merit." However, her proposed solution focused more on messaging rather than steps to weed out nepotism and political interference. She suggested that "the state to actively convey and emphasise this message: that these processes are indeed merit-based," to initiate "an awareness campaign highlighting the decline in the number of female applicants" and to "apply pressure on the government to publicise and promote the collaborative efforts between the BEP and BDO." Related to this point, the second female interviewees suggested better cooperation with media, where MBR processes are portrayed as positive developments rather than being part of news which state there is nepotism in a certain recruitment process.

OTHER

At least four different experienced applicants proposed that once appointed, the performance of candidates needs to be more closely monitored. For example, one

expressed a need for "measuring results and achievements on an ongoing basis" while another recommended a "6-month or annual performance appraisal." The intention behind this is to hold appointees accountable and demonstrate to potential applicants that decisions around selection and continuation are rooted in merit and performance. Others suggested that criteria and interview questions need to better be adapted to the position. This links closely to the complaints noted in Section 4.3.

MEASURES TO MAKE THE ROLES MORE ATTRACTIVE AND ACCESSIBLE

There was a second category of recommendations that were less focused increasing trust in the process.

- **INCREASING SALARIES**: Those that named uncompetitive salaries as a deterrent to apply suggested that salaries be reviewed. This was mentioned explicitly by seven experienced applicants.
- **SIMPLIFYING THE APPLICATION PROCESS**: According to Figure 13, many experienced applicants agreed that various suggestions such as advertising positions using new/different approaches, providing resources for training applicants, and simplifying the recruitment process could be beneficial in attracting candidates. However, in the open-ended responses enthusiasm for such measures came through less strongly. There were however at least five experienced applicants who highlighted a need to simplify the application process, primarily by reducing the number of documents needed.
- **EXTEND MANDATE PERIOD**: As described in Section 4.3, many felt that the short mandate period did not give enough time to have an impact and persuade eligible applicants to disrupt their current career trajectory. By extension, at least three experienced applicants in the open-ended portion highlighted a need to extend the mandate period and/or amend laws that allow for appointees to be dismissed without cause.
- NETWORKS FOR WOMEN: One female non-applicant also highlighted the importance of "encouraging women to come together through different networks and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to vocalise and address these statistics [of low representation of women]." She continued that this is "a catalyst for driving change, both in terms of societal attitudes and potentially influencing legislative alterations" as well as "to motivate women to actively participate."

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V. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides a range of insights that can be leveraged towards promoting MBR in Kosovo by government, media, institutional organisations, and civil society. High-level recommendations that can be realistically implemented in the current political environmental are captured briefly below.

- Maintenance of candidate guidance to support understanding about processes should be held by a named national institution.
- Further development of women's support networks that can help with mentoring, allyship and development to speed up eligibility and confidence of women to apply for senior roles.
- The process to identify recruitment commissions needs to be made clearer and more transparent. Laws should consider requiring at least one commission member to have expertise in the relevant sector.
- Commissions need to be trained and supported in the process of providing feedback to candidates, so that it ultimately becomes standard practice in all processes.
- Commission members need to be trained in principles and practices of MBR before being allowed to join a commission.
- Monitoring is undertaken by a CSO (who have received training in MBR principles and practices) in every senior appointment process.
- Those making the final selection decision are required to provide a clear rationale in instances where the highest performing candidate is not appointed.
- There is a need to consider whether the restrictions in the laws/regs go far enough to ensure that those appointed to civil service and PoE's are truly independent without infringing rights about political freedoms.
- When updating laws, findings from this study and other research should be considered to gain a clearer understanding of what actions promote rather than restrict MBR.

VI. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: ADDITIONAL FIGURES

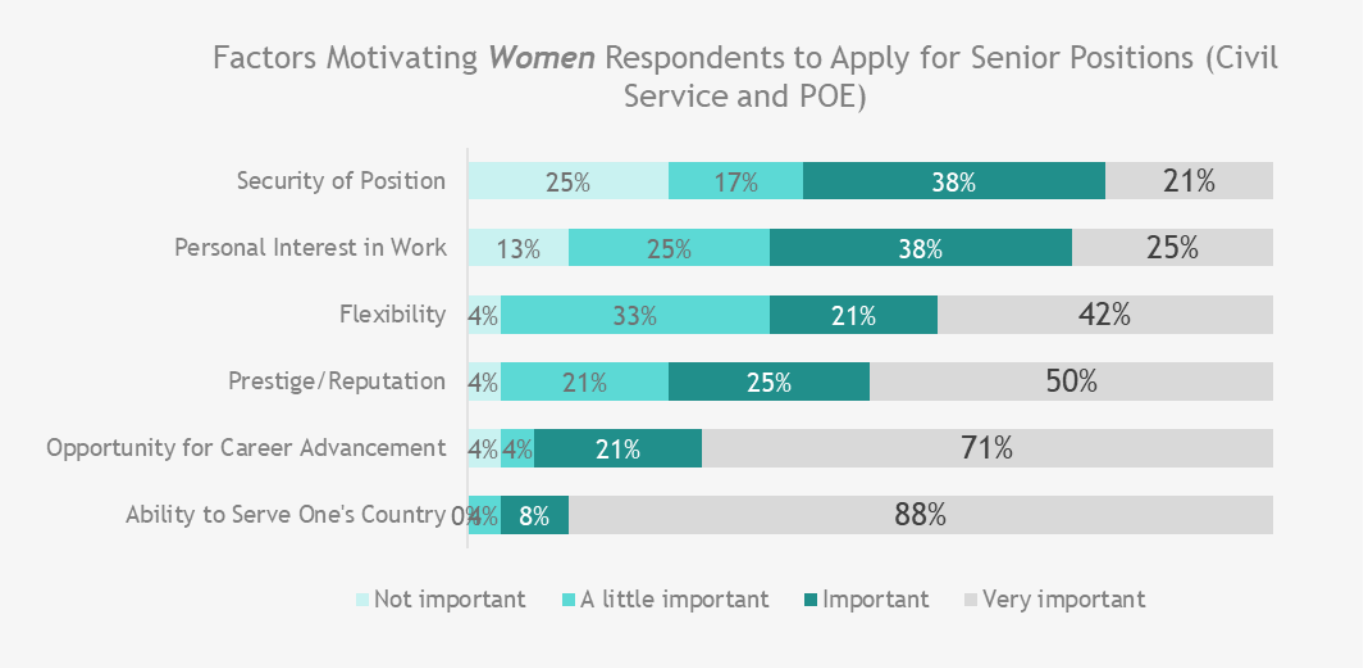

Figure 14: Factors Motivating Women to Apply to Senior Positions in the Civil Service and in POEs

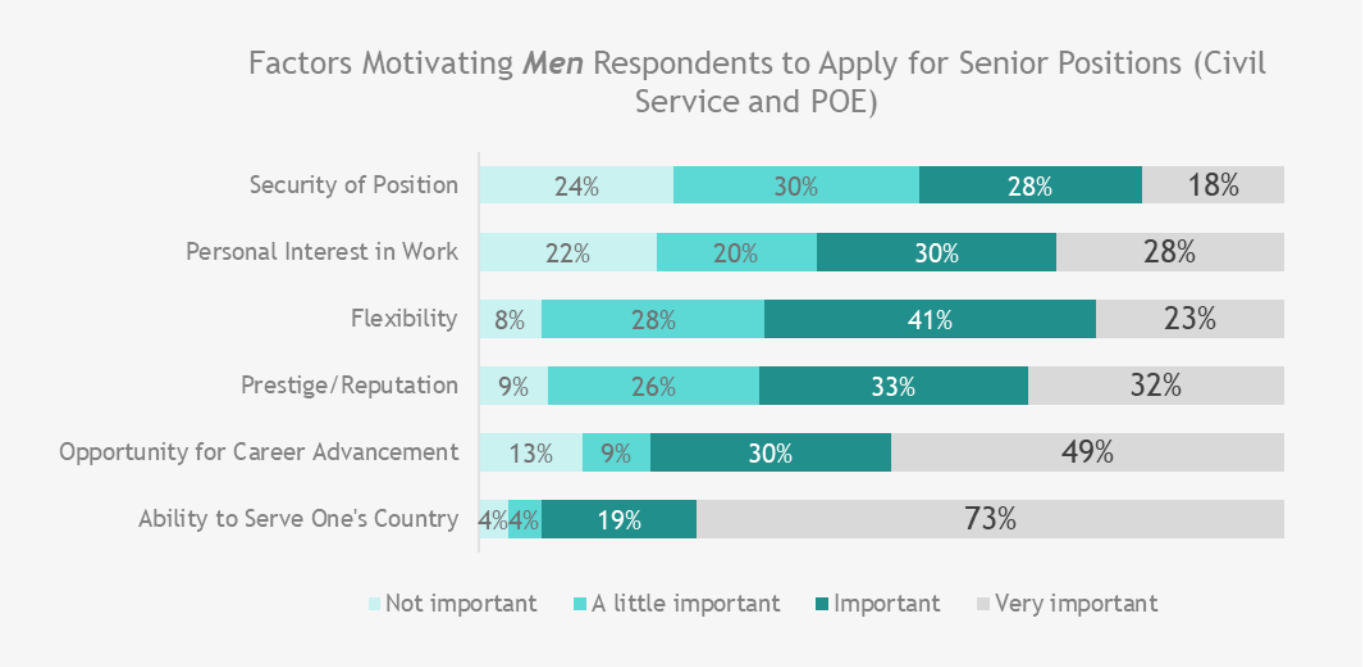

Figure 15: Factors Motivating Men to Apply to Senior Positions in the Civil Service and in PoEs

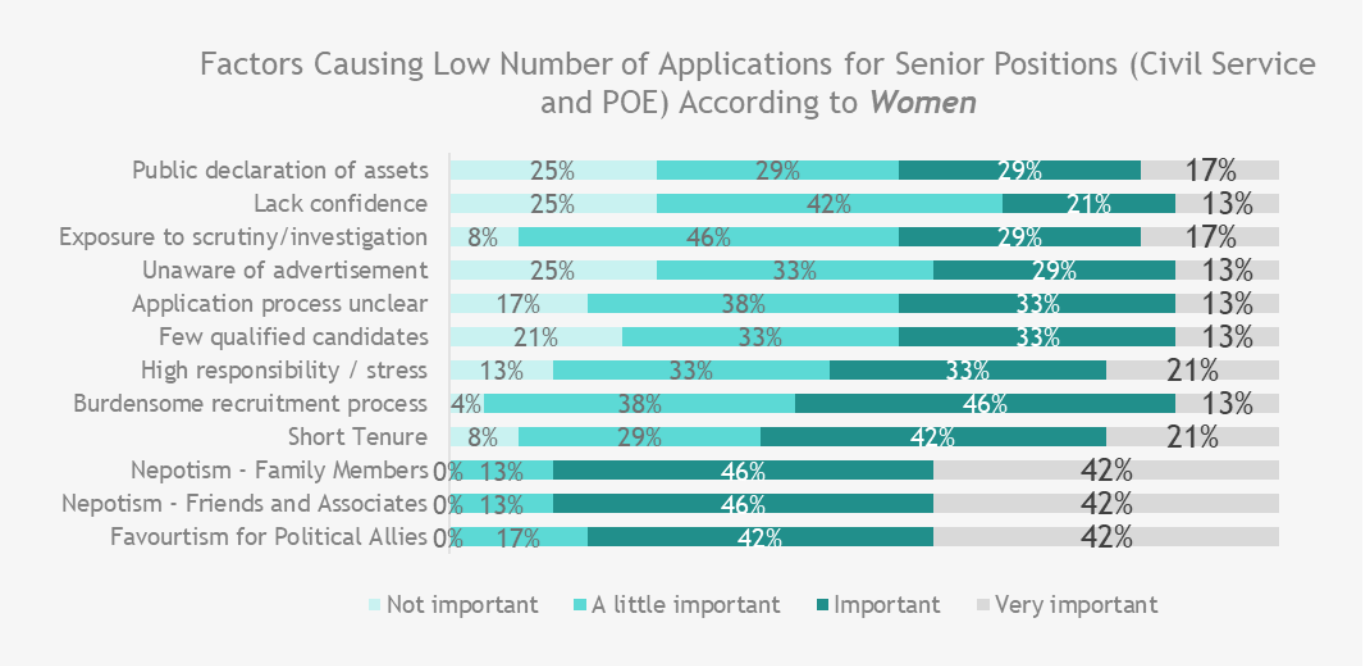

Figure 16: Factors Causing Low Number of Applications for Senior Positions (Civil Service and PoE) According to Women Experienced applicants.

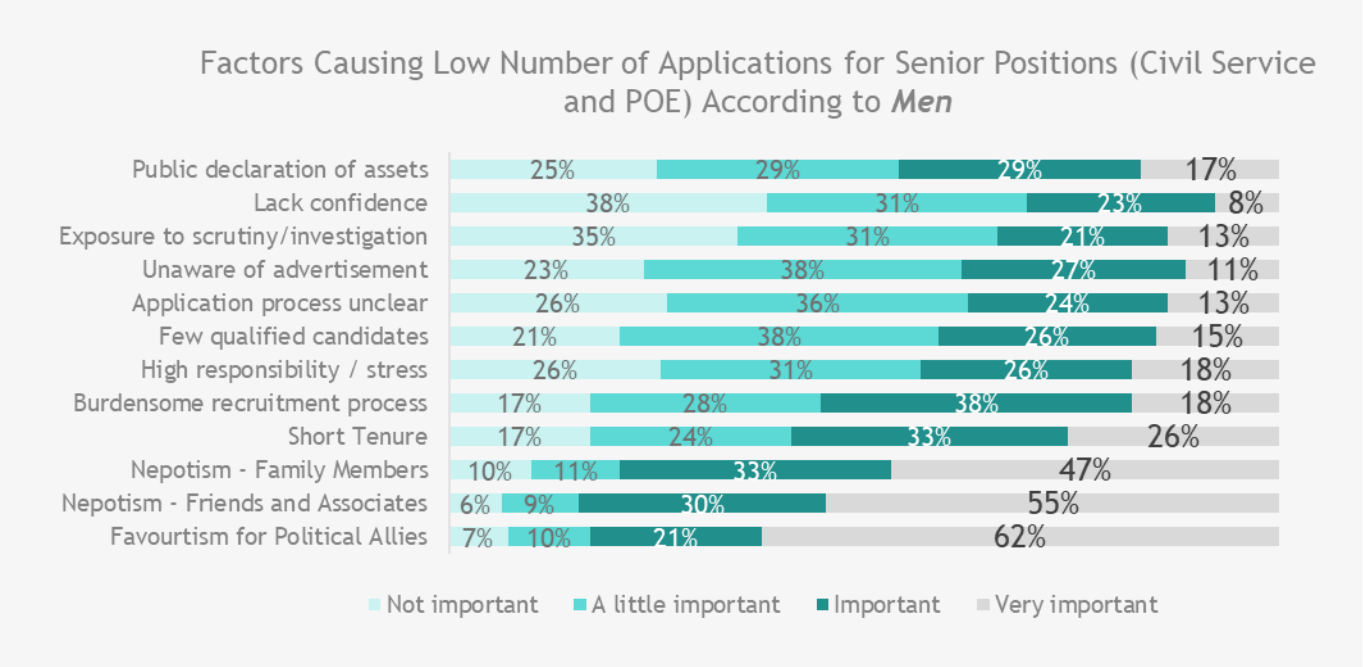

Figure 17: Factors Causing Low Number of Applications for Senior Positions (Civil Service and PoE) According to Men Experienced applicants.

Results of Figure 7 on factors motivating professionals to apply to senior positions in the public sector according to experienced applicants were compared to the annual public opinion barometer from the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), a regionally owned framework for cooperation, which assessed the reasons behind peoples' decisions to be part of public sector. Findings differ somewhat. In 2023, respondents ranked better pension after retirement, better working conditions, sense of public duty, opportunities for professional training and development, job is safer, better social care and access to health services, better salary, and better advancement opportunities as all having relatively equal weight in people's preference to work in the public sector.[6]

However, it is important to note that the stability of offered by lower-level public sector positions does not extend to the senior level, who often are subject to short-term tenures. This topic is discussed more in Section 4.4. Moreover, the desire to better society and serve one's country appears to be more pronounced among those seeking senior level roles, presumably because leadership positions offer more potential to enact change.

[6] RCC Balkan Barometer Public Opinion, 2021,2022, 2023

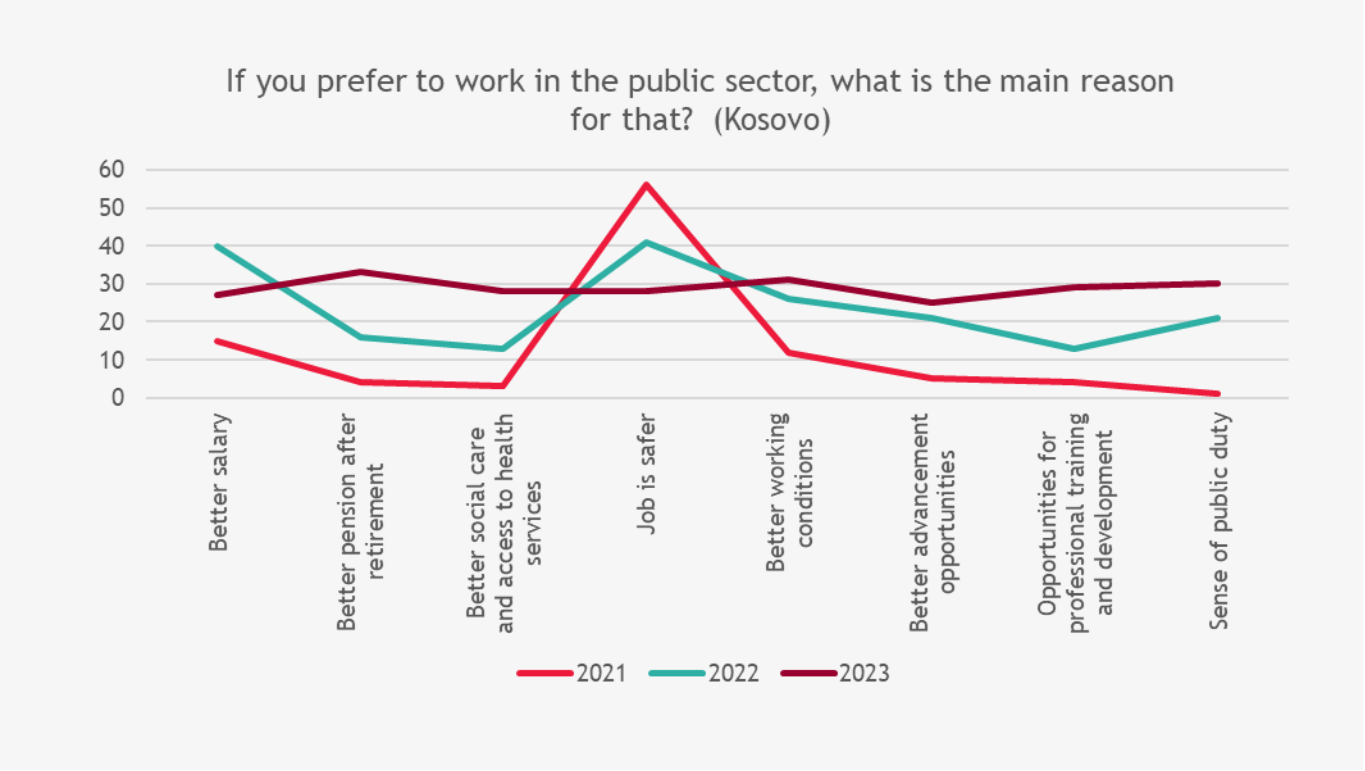

Figure 18: Regional Cooperation Council, Balkan Barometer Public Opinion Database, 2021-2023)