

# WOMEN MAYORS AND BUDGETARY SPENDING PRIORITIES

## PREFEITAS E AS PRIORIDADES DE GASTOS ORÇAMENTÁRIOS

Article received on: 7/21/2025

Article accepted on: 10/27/2025

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

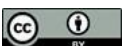
### Abstract

This study examines budget spending patterns in Slovak municipalities governed by women mayors and compares them with those led by men, aiming to determine whether women mayors allocate more resources to areas typically prioritized by women. International research often identifies education, health care, and social protection as key focus areas for female leaders, though previous findings on gender-based spending differences remain mixed. Using official data from the Statistical Office and the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, the study applies statistical tests to evaluate the significance of expenditure differences between male- and female-led municipalities. The results reveal no statistically significant differences across the budget categories investigated. A key limitation stems from the fact that municipal budgets require council approval, which may limit the direct influence of mayors on spending priorities. The findings suggest that mayoral gender is not a reliable predictor of budgetary preferences in Slovak municipalities. Instead, local spending decisions appear to be shaped by other determinants, such as the political power of councils, mandatory expenditures, and party policy alignment. This study contributes to the broader literature on gender and governance by providing evidence from Slovakia that diverges from several international findings.

**Keywords:** Women Mayors. Municipalities. Gender Equality. Budget Spending. Slovakia.

### Resumo

*Este estudo analisa os padrões de gastos orçamentários em municípios eslovacos governados por prefeitas e os compara com aqueles administrados por prefeitos homens, com o objetivo de verificar se as mulheres destinam mais recursos a áreas tradicionalmente priorizadas por elas. Pesquisas internacionais frequentemente identificam educação, saúde e proteção social como setores de maior foco para líderes femininas, embora resultados anteriores sobre diferenças de gastos entre gêneros sejam inconsistentes. Utilizando dados oficiais do Escritório de Estatística e do Ministério das Finanças da República Eslovaca, o estudo aplica testes estatísticos para avaliar a significância das diferenças de despesas entre municípios liderados por homens e por mulheres. Os resultados não revelam diferenças estatisticamente significativas entre as categorias orçamentárias analisadas. Uma limitação importante decorre do fato de que os orçamentos municipais precisam ser aprovados pelos conselhos locais, o que pode restringir a influência direta das prefeitas sobre as prioridades de gasto. Os achados indicam que o gênero do prefeito não é um preditor confiável das preferências orçamentárias nos municípios eslovacos. As decisões locais de gasto parecem ser moldadas por outros fatores, como o poder político dos conselhos, as despesas obrigatórias e a orientação partidária. Este estudo contribui para a literatura sobre gênero e governança, oferecendo evidências da Eslováquia que divergem de diversos resultados internacionais.*



*Palavras-chave:* Prefeitas. Municípios. Igualdade de gênero. Gastos orçamentários. Eslováquia.

## INTRODUCTION

Women continue to be underrepresented in almost all nations and at all tiers of governance globally. Nevertheless, the representation of women has grown in recent years. The representation of women at all levels of governance is also rising (Jalalzai, 2013; Sundström and Stockemer, 2015; Escobar-Lemmon and Funk, 2018). The European Union Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 (European Commission, 2020) aims to increase the number of women in local government leadership and their participation in municipal budgeting at the regional and local levels. In order to achieve the democratic values of equality and justice, women must be represented in these political institutions. Women are important, even if they don't act any differently from men. The presence of women can influence significant views and have symbolic consequences (Hinojosa *et al.*, 2017).

However, the recent increase in women's political participation has raised the question of whether a greater number of women in political institutions and substantial representation of women have an impact on politics (Dolan *et al.*, 2021; An *et al.*, 2022; Davidson-Schmich, 2023). The argument for increasing women's numerical representation only gets stronger if women behave differently from males (Aldrich and Lotito, 2020). This is because choosing women will have different results than electing men. Increasing the number of women in government has ramifications that reach beyond the national level (Paxton *et al.*, 2020). The quality of women's substantive representation is one of the significant outcomes that might be radically altered at the local level by expanding women's representation (Barnes and O'Brien, 2025). The allocation of government spending, tax collection, public service delivery, and management are all important responsibilities of local governments, particularly those in decentralized nations. Increasing the number of women elected to office may have the unintended consequence of changing the behavior of female elected officials and improving the substantive representation of women (Funk and Philips, 2019; Wahman *et al.*, 2021).

The EU's Gender Equality Strategy planning period is now coming to an end.

Therefore, it is interesting to examine whether women's election to the position of mayor had an impact on local budgetary decisions also in our country. This study investigates whether the allocation of local government funds in locations that women might prefer is impacted by the election of women to the mayoral position. The expenditure data from 2,926 municipalities over almost two decades in Slovakia will be included in the research.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Women and men policymakers may choose to allocate government resources in very different ways as a result of gender disparities in policy goals and attitudes. There is an indication that the representation of women affects how government spending is allocated. According to cross-national research, the proportion of women in national legislatures is linked to higher social expenditure and family benefits (Bolzendahl, 2009; Bolzendahl, 2011; Enns- Jedenastik, 2017) or expenditure on social welfare and health (Chen, 2013; Lukáčová and Maličká, 2023). Women's representation plays an important role in shaping subnational government spending. There are indications that more women serving in state legislatures across the US leads to higher health care spending (Rehavi, 2007; Courtemanche and Green 2017).

Women mayors in USA are more likely to support social welfare (Holman, 2015) and give federal subsidies to childcare centers and social assistance for children (Smith, 2014). State legislatures in India with increased women representation invest more in health care and early education (Halim *et al.* 2016). Similarly, Braendle and Colombier (2016) reported higher health care spending in Switzerland as women's representation on local government boards increased. Some authors observed that male and female politicians may not always behave in accordance with their gender-specific preferences, even if there are gender disparities in policy (Ferreira and Gyourko, 2011). Rigon and Tanzi (2012) used a sample of Italian towns and exogenous variation imposed by a federal regulation that enforced gender quotas to evaluate the effects of female involvement in local councils. They discovered no impact on the expenditure composition. Thomas (1991) found that increased female representation in state legislatures is associated with a higher likelihood of enacting legislation on issues affecting women, families, and children. According to poll data from Swedish municipalities, women prefer spending on education and childcare over elder care (Svaleryd, 2009). Elected female mayors in India

invest in infrastructure based on gender-specific preferences, taking advantage of female quota laws that arbitrarily mandate that certain Indian communities limit the mayorship to women (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004). However, multiple studies (Funk and Philips, 2019; Ferreira and Gyourko, 2011; Schild, 2013) indicated a significant impact of women's representation on government expenditures.

Coessens (2024) indicates that women's representation is an important factor in shaping government spending priorities, which results in an increase in the allocations to policies and programs that support women's interests. The correlation between government expenditure and women's representation, however, can depend on additional variables.

Policies that govern people's everyday lives and attend to their wants and requirements are included in local politics. Municipalities are the most fundamental administrative divisions in Slovakia and mayors are chosen for four-year periods to lead them. When it comes to how men and women use urban space, their needs are different. The dominant male structure and gender trends are the root cause of the issue with women's participation in municipal politics and local governments (Karkıŝ, 2023).

The position of women in the European Union is somewhat better, but still under the goals set in Zamfir (2024). Based on the latest statistics published in Coessens (2024), it can be stated that with the 17.4% share of mayors, women remain underrepresented in local and regional governments. The situation in Slovakia is better, and women's share reaches 26.5%. The leading countries include Iceland (39.1%), Estonia (37.2%) and Sweden (36.2%), while the countries with the lowest percentages are mainly those in Eastern and Central Europe (like Greece 6.7%, Austria 10.5%, Poland 12.0%).

Policy priorities are reflected in local government spending. If the representation of women has a substantial impact on the distribution of spending, then women also influence the importance that governments attach to particular policy concerns. Furthermore, because governments do not have limitless resources to allocate, changing the way spending is allocated frequently necessitates making trade-offs.

As a result, raising spending in one area almost invariably necessitates cutting spending in another. Another way that government funding is distributed through representation, which is a regular and necessary government function. Local government spending has an impact on policy results as well. Expenditures are expected to have a significant influence across policy domains, even while certain kinds of representation

may just be symbolic or dependent on the resources available for appropriate implementation and enforcement.

Furthermore, as government budgets frequently undergo gradual changes, little adjustments to allocations might eventually have significant impacts (Funk and Philips, 2019). This effect is likely to last over time if female policymakers modify spending in a single year. Therefore, the distribution of spending can offer a significant way for different social groups, including women, to be represented over the long run. This raises the question of whether women distribute their spending differently than men do when they hold positions of authority. Previous studies on government expenditure and gender representation have produced conflicting results, with the majority of them concluding that the link depends on the circumstances.

Women representatives may want to represent women in a gendered institution, but they may be limited by the gendered norms and regulations of the political office (Funk and Philips, 2019). The gendered character of executive positions may encourage female executives to behave "like men". Women must strive to dispel stereotypes and overcome issues related to their gender's credibility (Funk, 2015), while men are presumed to have the traits typically associated with a chief executive, such as assertiveness and competence (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

Since men and women mayors genuinely might have equal spending preferences, there might not be any noticeable disparities in the allocation of expenditures. According to the equity view of women's representation, if women are genuinely equal participants in politics, they will be able to drive change in a variety of policy areas rather than being restricted to just one. Since they have attained equality, the few women who are elected mayors may be able to work on a wide range of issues in a manner similar to that of males. Women mayors prioritize spending on both women's and non-women's policy concerns because they may respect women's issues, but also want to serve all voters. As a consequence, there might be no appreciable variations in how men and women mayors allocate their budgets (Funk and Philips, 2019).

### **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Our research compared the budget expenditures of female mayors in local budgets with the same expenditures of male mayors in selected areas. The areas were defined

according to the UN COFOG (Classification of the Functions of Government) classification. Based on the results of other studies (Rigon & Tanzi, 2012; Schild, 2013; Funk & Philips, 2019), the following areas were identified as potentially preferred by women: Education, Health care and Social protection.

The research covers 2,926 municipalities in Slovakia, thus covering a complete sample of Slovak municipalities that are governed by a mayor and assisted by a municipal council. The same number of municipalities is listed in the register of the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, which has collected the budget data of all the Slovak municipalities since the fiscal decentralization in 2005. The period of our data covers the years from 2005 to 2022. Data for the research is collected from DataCube database provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and DataCentrum database provided by Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic. For the research data set, we used different categories of data: demographic (district, area in km<sup>2</sup>, population, age profile, gender profile), socio-economic (productive population, unemployment share, female share), political (mayor party orientation, independence, gender of the mayor, re-election), and fiscal (current expenditures, taxes). To be able to analyze expenditures for individual budget chapters, it was necessary to calculate, summarize or aggregate some of the variables or subtotals for individual categories that were the subject of our research in UN COFOG classification categories Health, Education and Social protection.

Data were processed as the average percentage expenditures in the budget for these aggregated categories for men and women mayors by year through using Microsoft Power BI, its programming language DAX and statistically analyzed using basic ratios and Independent Sample Test in IBM SPSS software. Independent Sample T Test was a suitable test as normality of data distribution was proved using Shapiro-Wilk test and homogeneity of variances in both groups was checked using Levene's test. Furthermore, the observations are independent as men and women are naturally independent groups.

### **3.1 Objectives of the study**

The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze budget expenditures in Slovak municipalities over the available time period and compare them among the groups of men and women mayors responsible for these expenditures.

The aim is to reveal whether women mayors spend significantly more on

Education, Healthcare and Social Protection areas of expenditures than men mayors.

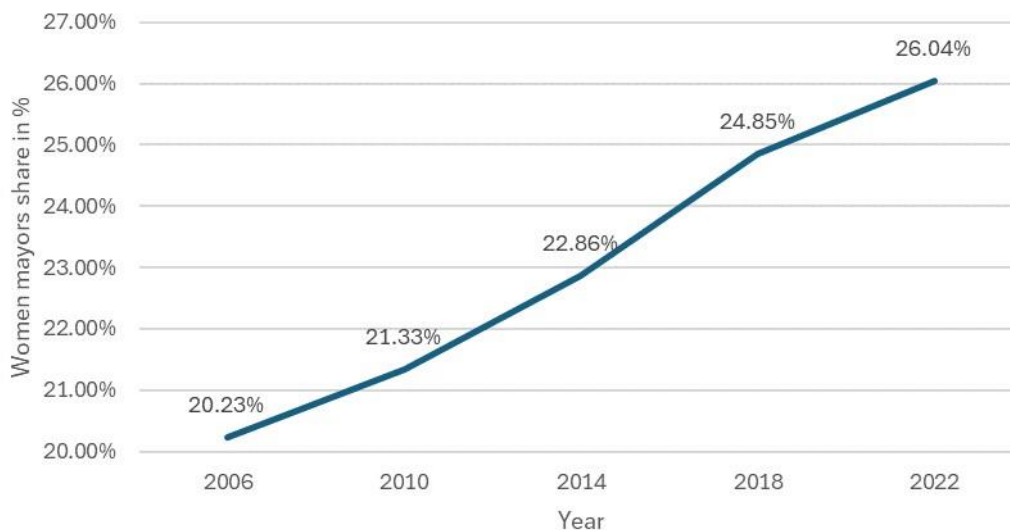
## 4 RESULTS

Data on budget expenditures in all available municipalities in Slovakia were connected with the information on mayors' gender (considering male or female) in every year of the relevant period (2005 – 2022). First, the share of women mayors was analyzed. Figure 1 plots the development over time of the share of women mayors.

Data from the Statistical Office of Slovak Republic (2025) shows that the share of women in positions of mayors is continuously growing. Changes occur in election years in Slovakia (2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, 2022 in our sample period). The representation in Slovakia was growing over these years, which raises gender equality, but it is still not adequate to the proportion of women in the total population. This might be caused by the fact that women are often socialized from a young age to question their place in politics and leadership, leading to a lower self-perception of political competence compared to men with similar qualifications. They are less likely to be encouraged to run for elections (Benedictis-Kessner, 2024).

**Figure 1**

*Percentage of women mayors in Slovakia within the years 2005-2022*



Source: Data processed from DataCube database provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2025)

Another cause might be the party bias of male-dominated political parties at the local level, which act as gatekeepers in the candidate selection process in favor of men. Furthermore, voters may hold gender stereotypes that view women as less competent in traditional "masculine" areas of local government (like infrastructure or finance) and may hold them to a higher standard than male candidates (Nikos-Rose, 2020).

The more detailed analysis of the data highlights the specific nature of the Slovak Republic as a country with an exceptionally high number of small municipalities. Data from 2005–2022 show that the representation of female mayors is highest in the smallest municipalities, reaching the level of 18.77% – 24.05%, and has been growing steadily over the long term, to the level of 34.45% (Table 1). However, as the size of the municipality increases, the proportion of women in mayoral positions decreases. In medium-sized municipalities (1,501–5,000 inhabitants), their representation ranges from 14% to 18%, while in larger towns and cities, it falls below 13%, and in the largest cities with over 50,000 inhabitants, there are practically no female mayors. This trend suggests that women are more strongly represented in smaller communities, where municipal management is based more on personal ties, trust, and resident participation. We therefore assume that women prefer to fund areas that directly improve quality of life, such as social services, education, and municipal infrastructure.

**Table 1**

*Representation of female mayors in individual election periods in municipalities of different sizes (in percentage)*

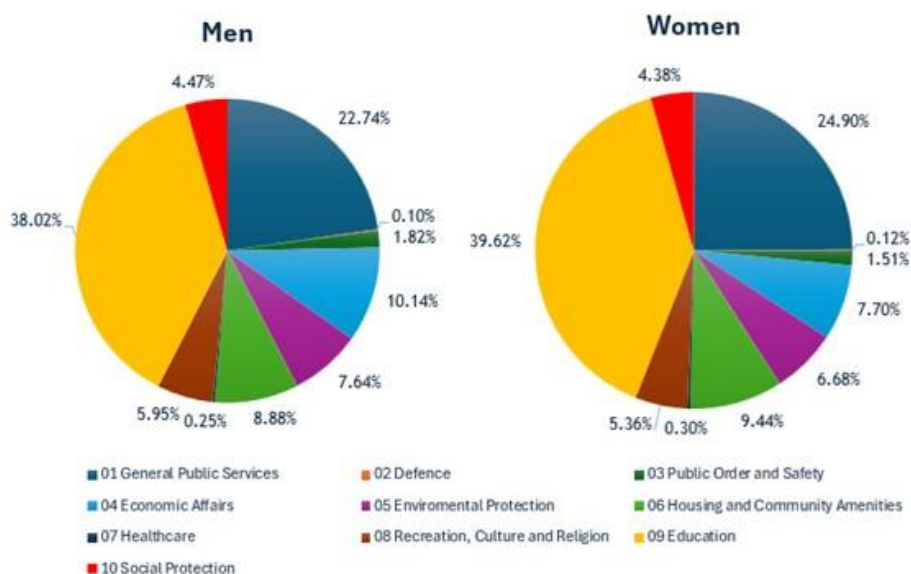
Municipality size (citizens)	Number of municipalities	Women mayors share in %					
		2005	2006	2010	2014	2018	2022
Very small (0-500)	1135	24.05	25.90	27.93	29.25	31.45	34.45
Small (501 - 1500)	1135	18.77	19.38	19.12	21.15	22.47	23.26
Middle-sized (1501 - 5000)	500	14.00	12.00	14.00	15.60	18.60	18.20
Large Village (5001 - 15000)	86	6.98	15.12	12.79	12.79	11.63	10.47
City (15001 - 50000)	58	5.17	8.62	15.52	12.07	18.97	12.07
Large City (above 50000)	12	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.33	8.33	0.00

Source: Data processed from DataCube database provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2025); \*2005 was not an election year mentioned to highlight the situation before the first elections analyzed.

Data from the analyzed dataset was aggregated, and the ratio of expenditures across all areas within the UN COFOG (Classification of the Functions of Government) classification was calculated using Microsoft Power BI software.

**Figure 2**

*Percentage share of individual expenditure chapters according to COFOG by gender of mayor (on the left: men, on the right: women)*



Source: Data processed from DataCube database provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2025)

The data presented in Figure 2 show the spending percentages of men and women within all individual COFOG chapters from investigated period in Slovakia, indicating similar distribution in both groups. Further, only areas of Education, Healthcare and Social Protection were considered as they were identified in the theoretical framework as of women mayors' high priority areas. Table 2 presents the numerical data.

**Table 2**

*Percentage share of individual expenditure chapters according to COFOG by the gender of the mayor*

COFOG chapter	Men	Women
07 Healthcare	0.25 %	0.30 %
09 Education	38.02 %	39.62 %
10 Social Protection	4.47 %	4.38 %

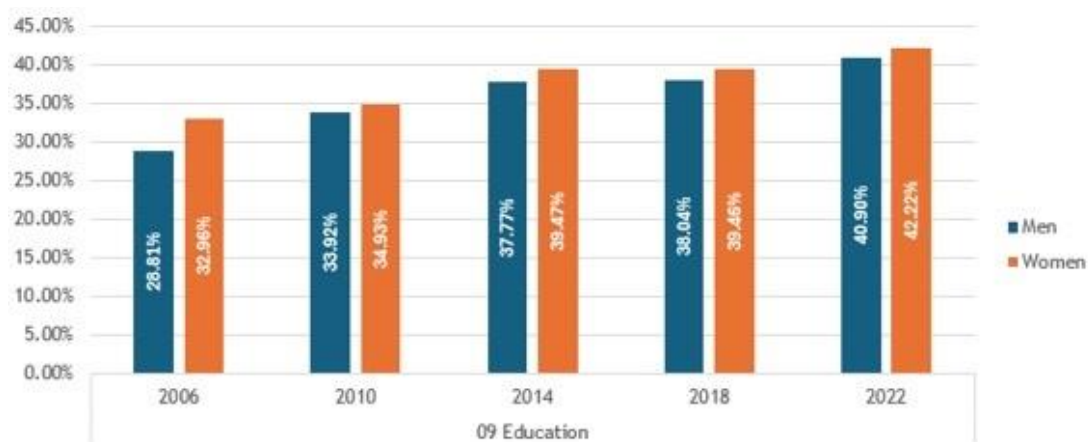
Source: Data processed from DataCube database provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2025)

A gender-based analysis of mayors' financial practices from 2006 to 2022 showed some differences. The largest share of public spending has long been directed towards education, which accounts for approximately 39.62% of expenditure in municipalities led

by women and 38.2% in municipalities led by men. This result indicates that education is a priority budget area regardless of the mayor's gender. Figure 3 reveals a slight increase in the relative share of expenditures of female mayors (approximately 1.04 times the expenditures of male mayors), with the trend of increasing percentual expenditures in this area over the years for both genders.

**Figure 3**

*Comparison of mayors' budget expenditures on the COFOG category 09 – Education, based on gender (in percentage)*

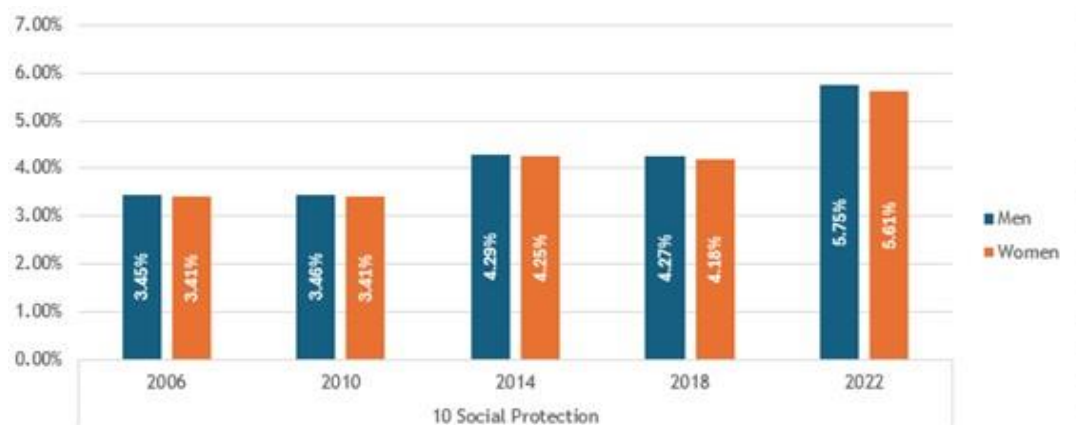


Source: Data processed from DataCube database provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2025)

The second investigated category was the 10th COFOG category, the Social Protection, where expenditures were very balanced (the expenditures of male mayors represent approximately 1.03 times the expenditures of female mayors) and did not show any stable increase during the period monitored (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*Comparison of mayors' budget expenditures on the COFOG category 10 - Social Protection, based on gender (in percentage)*

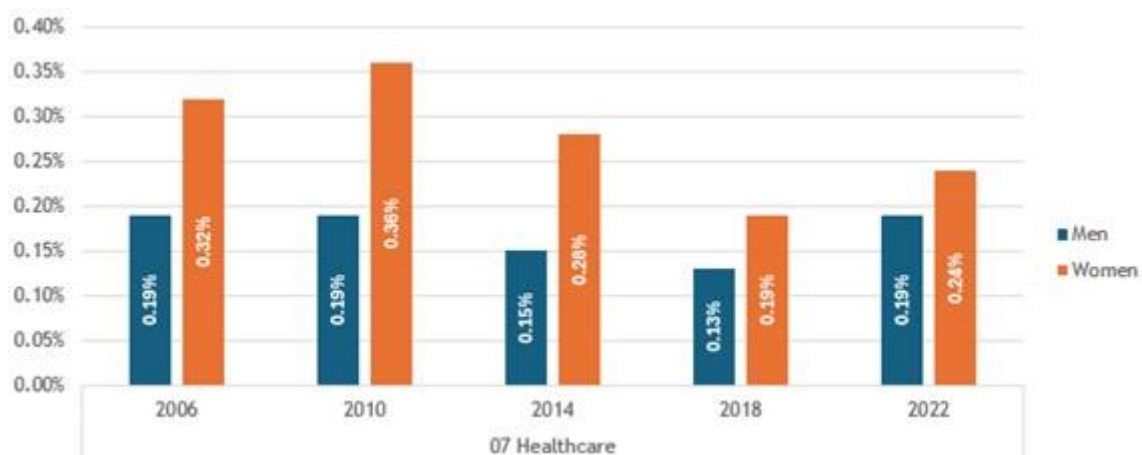


Source: Data processed from DataCube database provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2025)

The most distinctive difference was discovered during a data comparison in the category, to which the total expenditure values did not represent a significant element in the mayor's expenditure policy (only an average of 0.22% over the entire monitored period). However, the differences in expenditure based on the gender of the mayors showed the highest variation (Figure 5), with women investing higher amounts in health care throughout the period (an average of 0.28% compared to 0.17% for men).

**Figure 5**

*Comparison of mayors' budget expenditures on the COFOG category 07 – Healthcare, based on gender (in percentage)*



Source: Data processed from DataCube database provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2025)

Since the above-mentioned descriptive analysis revealed minor differences in the spending policies of men and women in the position of mayor, we were interested in the statistical significance of these differences. Therefore, the data was subjected to statistical testing. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to check the normality of the distribution of gathered data for all budget priority groups, and similarly, Levene's test was used to check homogeneity of variances. The results of these tests are shown in the following table.

**Table 3**

*Tests of normality and homogeneity of variances.*

Area of spending	Shapiro-Wilk		Levene's test	
	Statistic	Significance	Statistic	Significance
<b>Education</b>	0.949	0.095	1.220	0.277
<b>Healthcare</b>	0.902	0.063	0.040	0.842
<b>Social protection</b>	0.897	0.058	0.087	0.769

The Independent Sample T Test was a suitable test as normality of data distribution and homogeneity of variances were proved. Furthermore, the observations are independent as men and women are naturally independent groups. The following table shows the results of an independent sample test on the difference between women and men mayors' local budget expenditure priorities.

**Table 4**

*Results of an Independent Sample T Test on the difference between women and men mayors' local budget expenditures.*

Area of spending	F	Significance	T	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean dif.
<b>Education</b>	1.220	0.277	-1.754	0.088	-2.148
<b>Healthcare</b>	0.040	0.842	-1.203	0.237	0.064
<b>Social protection</b>	0.087	0.769	0.230	0.820	0.050

Sig. (2-tailed) = two-tailed significance; Mean dif.= Mean difference, level of significance  $\alpha=0.05$

Results of the conducted independent Sample T Test show that differences between women and men mayors' local budget expenditures are not statistically significant in any of the areas of spending identified as preferred by women mayors (i.e. Education, Healthcare, Social protection). In all these areas, significance was detected

above the level of significance ( $\alpha=0.05$ ), thus indicating no significant differences in the investigated data.

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Similar results, that there is no significant difference in the level and composition of local public spending depending on the gender of the mayor, were detected in multiple other countries worldwide. In Italian municipalities, Casarico *et al.* (2022) similarly did not detect significant differences between local expenditures and revenue levels related to the mayor's gender. Ferreira and Gyourko (2014) found that female mayors in US cities have no impact on municipal spending, employment and crime rates. A similar result was obtained in Gago and Carozzi (2020) for Spain, where the gender of the mayor showed no correlation with policy decisions, although party affiliation did. Bagues and Campa (2021) discovered that the gender of Spanish municipal representatives has no impact on the amount of money spent on areas that are most important to women. Likewise, Schild (2013) found that electing a female mayor does not have a measurable effect on the size of the government budget, tax setting, or on the allocation of expenditures in data from Bavarian municipalities.

On the other hand, Brollo and Troiano (2016) demonstrated that in Brazil, cities led by women mayors have better health indicators, receive more federal payments, and are less likely to be corrupt in public contracts in mixed gender election races. Funk and Philips (2019) detected in Brazil that women spend more on topics that affect women (social assistance, healthcare, and education), and less on areas that affect males, such as urban development and transportation. Furthermore, a higher proportion of female councillors results in higher spending on social assistance, healthcare, education, and traditionally feminine problems compared to other policy topics, indicating that women's legislative participation has a major impact on how funds are allocated. However, in Slovakia, mayors, in general, possess limited authority in budget allocation and are primarily answerable to the council.

Baskaran and Hessami (2018) demonstrate that a greater proportion of female

council members in Bavarian municipalities positively influences the availability of childcare, while Baskaran *et al.* (2024) reveal that Indian regions that elect women experience higher growth rates than their counterparts.

Thus, the results on the influence of women mayors on budget expenditures are contradictory in an international context. Our findings may be limited by the proportion of female mayors in Slovakia. Similarly, budgets are also influenced by the approval of councils, where the proportion of women was not considered. Furthermore, local budgets are often influenced by budgetary constraints, fixed expenditures and mandates having minimal room for discretionary spending. In such constrained environments, a mayor's personal policy preference may be impossible to realize.

Moreover, the political affiliation of mayors may also have an impact on budget expenditures. The political context, even at the local level, may foster significant policy unanimity or consistency. All mayors, irrespective of gender, may encounter comparable demands from constituents and other financing entities, resulting in comparable expenditure patterns.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This investigation contributes to the expanding literature on the effects of women's representation by investigating whether the presence of women in local elected offices affects the distribution of government spending in a manner that benefits women's interests.

Despite women possessing equal legal rights to men, their involvement and representation in political life in Slovakia remains insufficient in practice. Together with the executive committee, the mayor is in charge of the fiscal policy and has the authority to take the initiative in deciding about expenditures and revenues. The mayor and executive committee must be given permission by the local council to implement the suggested fiscal policy.

Even though the mayor has a significant influence on local public finance choices, the ability and space to reach an agreement also determines the ultimate policy result. A woman mayor may only be able to enact the desired policy if she receives sufficient support, which may depend on the gender structure of the entire political body, especially the municipal council, which must approve the mayor's proposals, if men and women

have different policy priorities.

The representation of women, despite the fact that it is continuously increasing between individual elections in the Slovak Republic, it is still relatively low and therefore even if women influence the distribution of budgets into individual categories, their influence is not sufficient to be statistically significant. Moreover, the approval of municipal budgets in Slovakia is always influenced by the composition of the council. Similarly, the political affiliation of mayors (as well as council members) to individual political parties can influence municipal budget expenditures. These effects may provide scope for further research in this area.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The paper is published with the support of the Scientific Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of Slovak Academy of Sciences within the project VEGA 1/0646/23.

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### Authors' Contribution

Both authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

### How to cite this article (APA):

Vejačka, M., & Pařová, D. WOMEN MAYORS AND BUDGETARY SPENDING PRIORITIES. *Veredas Do Direito*, e223575. <https://doi.org/10.18623/rvd.v22.n4.3575>