

# Men still hold most top jobs in public sector

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Women make up just a third of top civil servants and hold a little over a quarter of seats on public bodies, despite push for equality

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Only a third of high-level civil servants are women, and the ratio is even lower for the city's advisory and statutory bodies. Photo: Ricky Chung

Women may outnumber men in Hong Kong, but the upper echelon of the civil service remains a man's world, figures published by the Census and Statistics Department yesterday show.

Only a third of high-level civil servants are women, and the ratio is even lower for the city's advisory and statutory bodies; just 27 per cent of non-official members appointed to such bodies are women.

The gender disparity remains despite an ambitious report published by the Women's Commission in December 2011, which identified a lack of women in senior public-sector roles as a key issue the city needed to deal with.

"I've been trying to do more; putting forward more names of women candidates as positions come up. I do think we've been making some progress, but it's slow progress," said Sophia Kao Ching-chi, a former head of the Women's Commission, on her work for the government's Central Policy Unit think tank.

Kao led the team that issued the Hong Kong Women's Development Goals in 2011, which made adding more women to influential public-sector jobs a key priority.

While on paper the city's women enjoy equality, there was still sex discrimination and women were less likely to be involved in making important decisions that shaped the direction of the city, the team's report said.

The commission also urged the government to promote the importance of participation in public affairs to women, as a 2010 survey showed that more than 70 per cent of women would not accept appointment to a government body even if invited.

The latest figures show that there were just 429 women in directorate-level roles in the civil service at the end of last year, compared to 844 men. Some 1,414 women served on advisory and statutory bodies, against 3,766 men.

## Gender balance



The proportion of women in top civil service jobs had changed little since 2011, while there was an increase of just one per cent in the proportion of women on public-sector bodies.

Su-mei Thompson, CEO of the Women's Foundation, an NGO that seeks to advance opportunities for women, said there were a number of reasons women missed out on appointments to top jobs and boards. They include gender biases about the leadership aptitude of women, a lack of transparency and rigour in nominating committees that made appointments, and the reluctance of some women to accept appointments.

"Research shows that women are consistently overlooked for senior executive and non-executive positions," Thompson said.

The government has about 460 advisory and statutory bodies, overseeing everything from regulation of amusement machines to setting judicial salaries. The Women's Commission is itself an advisory body.

In 2001, just 19.3 per cent of board members were women. The representation of women has grown slowly since 2004, when the government first set a benchmark of 25 per cent. The benchmark was raised to 30 per cent in 2010 - a target that has not yet been met.

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