COORDINATED AUDIT TO ASSESS TARGET 5.5 OF SDG 5 (GENDER EQUALITY)

WHAT DID THE TCU ANALYZE?

Target 5.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5 – Gender Equality) aims to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political life. Data from the 2024 Voluntary Country Paper, published by the Presidency of Brazil, and from the 2022 World Economic Forum Report indicated significant gender disparities in Brazil. The country ranked 133rd worldwide in women's political representation—last in Latin America—and 94th in the overall gender inequality index. In the National Congress, women made up less than 20% of members. In municipal legislature, they represented 26%. In municipal and state executive positions, women made up 12% and 7.4%, respectively.

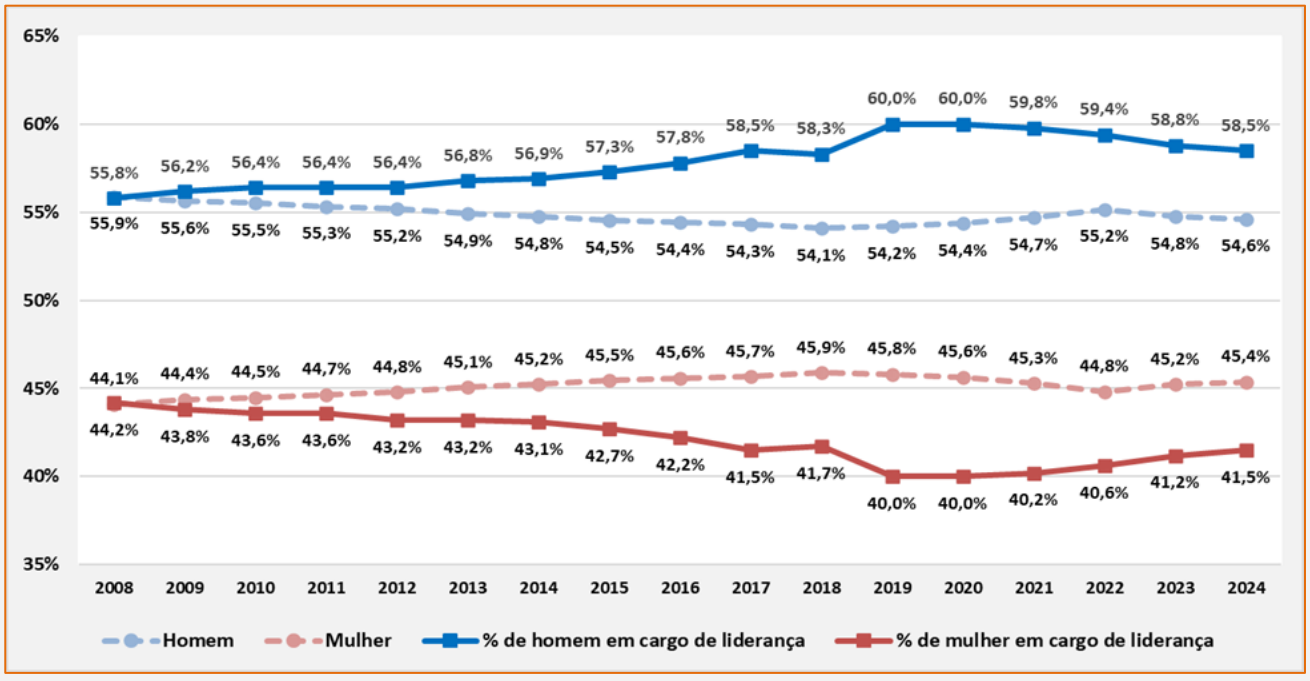
Given this context, the TCU's audit examined indicators and initiatives by the federal government related to the implementation of Target 5.5 of the SDGs, focusing on women's participation in public service positions at various management levels, especially leadership roles. The methodology included reviewing laws and regulations, requesting information from nine federal public bodies and entities, conducting a literature review, consulting the Federal Personnel Observatory, and extracting data from the Federal Government's Statistical Personnel Dashboard.

WHAT DID THE TCU FIND?

The audit revealed isolated efforts and insufficient progress toward institutionalizing practices that promote women's participation in senior leadership positions within the federal government, where gender imbalance persists in favor of men. This disparity underscores the presence of invisible yet tangible barriers that hinder women's advancement to leadership and decision-making positions despite their qualifications and competencies—the so-called "glass ceiling."

The share of women civil servants in the federal workforce rose slightly from 44.1% in December 2008 to 45.4% in August 2024. However, women's share of leadership positions declined over the same period, from 44.2% to 41.5%. Women accounted, on average, for 41.6% of lower- and mid-level leadership positions, 40.5% of senior leadership positions, and only 25.8% of special positions (the highest level, such as cabinet ministers). The data show that women's representation decreases as the rank of the position increases.

Proportion of women and men in leadership positions in federal government bodies and entities, 2008–2024.



Source: Infographic – Percentage of Women and Men in Leadership Positions in the Federal Government (2008–2023); and Federal Government Statistical Personnel Dashboard, 2024. Created by the authors.

Although the average rate of women's participation in leadership positions across federal public bodies meets the 30% minimum recommended in paragraph 182 of the Beijing Declaration, it remains 4 percentage points below the desired parity threshold. In the Courts of Accounts, 88% of full members

(counselors and ministers) were men, and 56% of the institutions had no women as full members at all.

Underrepresentation is even more pronounced for Black women, who face additional barriers compared to white women and are significantly less present in senior leadership roles.

Consistent with the literature, women's leadership roles are concentrated in areas that reinforce gender stereotypes, such as social and caregiving sectors. Ministries and departments linked to the economy, finance, security, infrastructure, and diplomacy remain male-dominated in leadership positions.

The main factors hindering women's career progression include:

a) excessive scrutiny and heightened expectations from colleagues;

b) difficulties reconciling professional duties with motherhood and domestic responsibilities;

c) sexist workplace environments;

d) persistence of male appointments, reinforcing the myth that men possess inherently stronger leadership traits.

The audit found that most federal public bodies still lack mature policies, regulations, structures, and practices to foster women's advancement and broader participation in leadership roles. Many institutions had no adequate training programs or formal structures to promote gender equality. Initiatives aimed at ensuring gender balance in governance and leadership appointments were, for the most part, incipient and fragmented, lacking the continuity or depth required for meaningful structural change.

The absence of robust policies and more effective actions continues to hinder women's access to higher leadership levels and perpetuates gender inequality in strategic and management positions.

WHAT DID THE TCU DECIDE?

The Court decided to inform the bodies and entities that contributed to the audit of its findings and conclusions, so that they may use the results to support public policies and help achieve gender equality within the Federal Executive Power.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

The expected outcomes include strengthening policies on equity, diversity, and inclusion, and fostering sustained commitment to reducing the historical inequalities that affect women, particularly Black women. The goal is to ensure that women serving in the federal government have equal opportunities to participate in and lead decision-making spaces, especially in senior and strategic positions, in pursuit of SDG 5 Target 5.5. The most significant disparities occur precisely in positions of power.

Without meaningful female representation in decision-making spaces, discussions and solutions become poorer and less reflective of society as a whole. The data collected reflect a perspective that does not fully address the needs of society as a whole. To build a truly inclusive public service, it is essential to implement structural training policies, promote equal opportunities, and encourage women's active participation in all spheres of decision-making. The absence of such measures perpetuates inequalities and limits the potential for innovation and fairness in public policy.

TCU DECISIONS

Court Decision: 635/2025-TCU-Full Court
Rapporteur: Minister Aroldo Cedraz
Case file: Case No. 017.461/2024-3
Responsible Department: Audit Department for Education, Culture, Sports and Human Rights (AudEducação)