



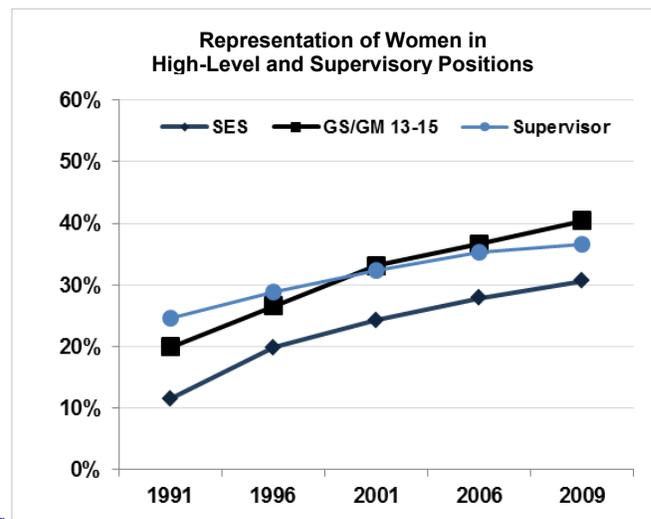
Women in the Federal Government: Ambitions and Achievements

The merit system principles at 5 U.S.C. §2301(b) call for a workforce that is “representative of all segments of society” and selection and advancement “determined solely on the basis of relative ability, knowledge, and skills.” Drawing on surveys and statistical analysis, this May 2011 report examines the Federal Government’s progress and challenges in the equitable treatment and advancement of women.

Has the Federal Government made progress?

Yes. Women have become better represented at higher grade levels and in supervisory and executive positions, reflecting increased employment of women in the professional and administrative occupations that afford the greatest opportunities for earnings and advancement. Accordingly, pay differences between women and men have been reduced, although not eliminated.

Also, women in the Federal Government have become more likely to believe that they are selected and evaluated on their merits. Compared to 1992, fewer women indicated that they had experienced discrimination on the basis of sex, and more women agreed with the statement that “Women and men are respected equally.” MSPB analyses of promotion rates found that women are about as likely as men to be selected for advancement when factors such as occupation, education, length of service, and supervisory experience are held equal, suggesting that the harmful effects of overt bias and subtle stereotyping have indeed diminished.



What might the future hold, and what remains to be done?

In the Federal workforce, women and men report high and comparable levels of career commitment, and the educational attainment of women in general continues to rise. Nevertheless, women remain less likely than men to be employed in high-paying occupations, and sex-based discrimination and stereotypes have not disappeared. Actions that Federal agencies can take to address this situation include—

- Provide continuing feedback and development to employees to help them understand and meet requirements for advancement.
- Improve the recruitment, selection, and training of supervisors.
- Make informed use of both internal and external sources of talent.
- Avoid reliance on stereotypes and assumptions in day-to-day HR management; focus on ability and results.
- Remain vigilant against sex-based discrimination and ensure that avenues of redress are accessible and trusted.
- Maximize flexibility in work arrangements and job requirements.