



WORK AND FAMILY RELATIONS IN TURKMENISTAN



International
Labour
Organization

REVIEW OF THE SITUATION IN THE TURKMENISTAN LABOUR MARKET: GENDER ASPECTS

The gradual transition from the planned economy to market economy has been accompanied by changes in Turkmenistan's labour market. Thus, for a period between 1991 and 2002, the share of workers engaged in the public sector¹ dropped from 56% to 32%.² In the course of reforms, a large number of new enterprises were built in Turkmenistan, equipped with modern technologies, which, however, do not require a large number of employees, as they are rather capital intensive.

For the above period, practically all the small public enterprises were privatized, which boosted up the entrepreneurial development, especially in the trade and service sectors. In 2005, small enterprises accounted for a substantial share of 67% from the total number of registered enterprises. As a result, the private sector in Turkmenistan absorbed 20.7% of employed population. In 2005, there were 11,700 registered small enterprises and 55,500 active individual entrepreneurs in Turkmenistan.³

Turkmenistan is traditionally an agrarian country with 56% of its population living in rural areas.⁴ The majority of labour force in rural areas are engaged in farming associations and personal subsidiary plots (PSPs) whose income accounts for a substantial share of the household budget. Today, the development of PSPs is seen not only as a source of the farm produce, but as a self-consistent sector of employment as well.

Like in many countries with the transitional economy, the informal economy has expanded in this country. In 2000 the informal sector employed 14% of the population. Out



Photo: UNFPA

of the total number of those engaged in the informal sector, men account for 43% and women for 57%.⁵

According to the survey of employment and the labour market conducted by the State Statistical Committee jointly with the UNDP in 2001, the economically active population⁶ among women is 85% and among men 92%. Most of the women not engaged in the economy are in the reproductive age, running their households and raising children: their share of the employable population is 36.4%. Major part of the employed population are wage workers: 84% of men and 81% of women. Those who are not wage workers are represented by employers and self-employed workers. Women account for 30% of employers and 62% of self-employed. Women's entrepreneurial activities are, as a rule, confined to traditional female occupations, such as carpet weaving, sewing, teaching, child care, etc.⁷

¹ According to classificatory of Turkmenistan's economy sectors, the public sector is represented by government bodies, education and healthcare authorities, public financial institutions, as well as public production enterprises, being finances through the state budget, and quasi-corporations controlled by the state.

² Millennium Development Goals: Report of Turkmenistan, 2003.

³ "Gender Differences in Business", UNDP, 2007.

⁴ "Population Employment and Labour Market in Turkmenistan", UNDP, 2001.

⁵ "Population Employment and Labour Market in Turkmenistan", UNDP, 2001.

⁶ According to the terms' glossary of the survey "Population Employment and Labour Market in Turkmenistan", UNDP, 2001, the economically active population is defined as a totality of those employed in economy, priests, servicemen, and unemployed; the economically inactive population are students and retired persons in the employable age, as well as domestic workers.

⁷ "Population Employment and Labour Market in Turkmenistan", UNDP, 2001.



Photo: UNFPA

The share of women among education and healthcare workers varies between 64 and 70%. Female workforce is also widely represented in agriculture, social sphere, culture and arts. The share of female workforce in highly paid jobs (extractive and processing industries, construction, transport and communications) is as high as 15–25%.⁸

The reasons for a low representation of women in highly-paid sectors of the economy are, among other reasons, gender stereotypes of choosing professions by women,

while enrolling at vocational and higher educational institutions. Although the numbers of female and male pupils in primary and secondary schools are equal, and 85% of girls claim that they intend to continue their education, they account for mere 32% from the number

of students⁹ at higher educational institutions. While vocational schools have more female than male students, their choice follows the traditional gender pattern: girls generally prefer training programmes related to medicine, physical culture and pedagogics, whereas boys opt for communications and transport. Disproportions in the number of students at higher educational institutions negatively affect gender balance in the income level of the population and in the labour market. These gender differences are, however, not related to discrimination of women who have the same access to education as men.

According to the survey on the employment of population and the labour market (2001), the share of all job seekers amounted to 7.2% of the economically active population.¹⁰ The number of persons formally registered at the labour exchange makes out 2.5%¹¹ of the economically active population, with 25–35% women among them. The problem of job seeking is facing men to a larger extent, since by Turkmen tradition the man is the breadwinner in the family.

General discrepancies between demand and supply of the workforce make it difficult to employ the population. The male job seekers have greater chances of finding a job because their skills fit better to the vacancies offered by the labour exchange.

TURKMEN LEGISLATION ON THE PROTECTION OF WORKERS WITH FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

Turkmenistan has joined the basic international human rights treaties and has committed itself to preventing, banning and eradicating any attempts at discriminating women. In particular, in 1993, Turkmenistan ratified two ILO Conventions – Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No.100) and Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No.111) and in 1996. The country has ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination of Women.

A new wording of the Constitution was adopted on September 26, 2008, which has created new opportunities for the reform of the national legislation by introducing special measures, including those designed to maintain the “work-family” balance for Turkmenistan’s men and women. In 2007, Turkmenistan passed the Law on State Guarantees of Women’s Equality in 2007. Its Article 8 envisages that the spouses are equal in fami-

ly relations. The law establishes the principle of equality in household work which should not be a means of discriminating against women and may be done equally by women and men.



Photo: UNFPA

⁸ Turkmenistan Statistical Yearbook 2000-2009, p. 190.

⁹ “Gender Differences in Business”, UNDP, 2007.

¹⁰ «Population Employment and Labour Market in Turkmenistan», UNDP, 2001.

¹¹ Ibid.

The Labour Code spells out the features of the regulation of the work of women and other persons with family responsibilities:

- women may not be turned down for a job or have their wages cut if they are pregnant or have a child aged under 3 (Article 241 of the Labour Code);
- pregnant women may not be made work at night, overtime, on weekends, holidays and commemorative days, or sent on business trips (Article 242 of the Labour Code);
- pregnant women working in the field in agriculture have a six-hour working day with no reduction in wages (Article 244 of the Labour Code);
- based on medical statements, pregnant women have reduced production and service rates, or are transferred to easier jobs that rule out the adverse impact of occupational factors, while their average wage in the previous job is preserved. (Article 245 of the Labour Code);
- one of the parents (guardian, trustee) bringing up a disabled child under sixteen years of age is eligible to an extra day off every month with the preservation of the daily pay (Article 246 of the Labour Code).

The guarantees and privileges granted to women in connection with maternity also apply to fathers who bring up children without a mother, as well as to guardians (trustees) of minors (Article 249 of the Labour Code).



Photo: UNFPA

Maternity leave

Article 68 of the Social Security Code of Turkmenistan provides as follows:

- a maternity leave of at least 112 calendar days.
- while on maternity leave, the woman is entitled to a maternity allowance in the amount of her average monthly wage over the previous 12 months.

Childcare leave

Labour code also defines the entitlements of childcare leave.

- Upon the expiry of maternity leave, a woman is entitled to unpaid leave to take care of the child until the age of three. During the childcare leave, the working woman keeps her job. A childcare leave may also be taken by the person who is taking care of the child de facto, including the father, the child's guardian or other relative (Article 97 of the Labour Code).
- In Turkmenistan, the one-time childbirth allowance, as well as the childcare allowance are paid to all persons, irrespective of their employment status, who take care of a child until the age of three (Article 77 of the Social Security Code of Turkmenistan). The allowances are paid from the national budget of Turkmenistan. Under the law, they may be drawn by the mother or the father as they wish. In practice, only 0.3% of the recipients of the childcare allowance are men.

FAMILY STRUCTURE AND BALANCE BETWEEN WORK AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

The family in Turkmenistan continues to be one of the key values that have their roots in the centuries-old tradition and the mentality of Turkmen. Traditionally Turkmen families are close-knit. The families in Turkmenistan are extended, especially in rural areas: parents live in the same household with young families, which is important for providing mutual economic and social support.

Although the law guarantees equal property inheritance rights for men and women, by tradition the parents bequeath their property to younger sons who stay to live with them. One also has to bear in mind that in families

with many children not all children may be able to acquire a higher or secondary professional education, especially abroad. In such situations, parents give preference to boys as future "breadwinners" of the family.

Employment in the formal sector of the economy in Turkmenistan ensures equal pay for women and men. In view of the fact, however, that women are predominantly employed in medium-wage jobs, their incomes are 14.5% lower than those of men.¹² From the results of a study carried out by the Union of Turkmenistan Economists and the UNDP in 2007, the average monthly

¹² Millennium Goals: Report of Turkmenistan, 2003.

incomes of women entrepreneurs in 2005 were 1.5 times lower than the average monthly incomes of male entrepreneurs. Women's incomes from other (non-entrepreneurial activities) were 1.4 times lower than men's.¹³

In governing bodies women occupy about 30% of medium-level positions (2002)¹⁴ and their share tends to decrease. Because of the tough criteria for selecting workers, fewer women are employed by joint ventures and foreign companies which have high salaries. There is a general tendency that Turkmen women prefer a part-time

employment to be able to pay more attention to family and child care. Besides, for the majority of women the main criterion in choosing a job is a flexible schedule and proximity to home.

From the results of the "Gender Differences in Business", most entrepreneurs have noted that their work prevents them from paying due attention to their family (54.3%).¹⁵ The majority of female entrepreneurs said that they found it hard to conduct their business single-handed and they had no support in the family.

CHILDREN'S PRESCHOOL INSTITUTIONS

The number of children's preschool institutions in Turkmenistan has practically not changed since the country became independent. There was a slight decrease in the number of such institutions in rural areas. A survey in 2007¹⁶ revealed that the largest coverage of children by preschool institutions is in the capital (58%) and the Balkansky Region (50%) where the share of the urban population is high.

Because of the positive demographic situation in the country, the number of children is growing year in and year out, which leads to a shortage of preschool childcare facilities, especially in rural areas where one kindergarten has, on the average, 64 children of the age ranging from two to seven.¹⁷

The main problems of preschool children's institutions are as follows: (1) their shortage; (2) need for capital repair of the existing preschool children's institutions, (3) shortage of furniture, tableware, toys and other things. Further on, in the opinion of mothers having children in the age between 0-6, problems of preschool institutions were (4) lack of air conditioning systems and (5) poor diet.¹⁸

In preparing a child for school, attending preparatory classes at preschool children's institutions is essential. Almost 95% of mothers who raise children under the age of seven, are in favor of introducing the compulsory preschool training of children (96.5% of positive responses in the cities and about 94% in rural areas).¹⁹



Photo: UNFPA

Based on the results of this survey, a National Programme was adopted in 2007.²⁰ Under the National Programme, it is planned to additionally build 428 preschool children's institutions for up to 61,500 children. The number of preschool children's institutions has been gradually growing since 2007. In 2009, there were 821 institutions (with 150,600 children.)

Furthermore, under the Labour Code (Article 248), enterprises that employ many women must organize crèches and kindergartens, rooms for breastfeeding of babies as well as rooms for women's personal hygiene. However, it is impossible to monitor compliance with these standards in practice because of the lack of statistical data.

¹³ "Gender Differences in Business", UNDP, 2007.

¹⁴ Millennium Goals: Report of Turkmenistan, 2003.

¹⁵ "Gender Differences in Business", UNDP, 2007.

¹⁶ Survey of the social and living standards and priorities in Turkmen villages, communities and cities conducted by the State Statistical Committee and the UNDP in 2007.

¹⁷ Turkmenistan Statistical Yearbook 2000–2009, p. 144.

¹⁸ Report on "Sociological research on the level and priorities of social conditions of residents villages, settlements, and towns in Turkmenistan", drafted by Goskomstat and UNDP, 2007.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ National programme of reforming social conditions of the population's life in villages, settlements, towns, districts, and district centres until 2020, p. 12