



WORK AND FAMILY RELATIONS IN ARMENIA



International
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WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY IN ARMENIA

While Armenia in many respects remains a patriarchal society, the majority of women are involved in economic activity outside the home. Between 2003 and 2008, the number of economically active women grew from 55% to 65%. This stands in contrast to men's employment which fell very slightly over the same period (from 81% to 80%).¹ In terms of sector, 42% of women and 65% of men are classified as being 'employed' in what can be loosely termed the formal sector.² However a larger proportion of women (23%) than men (15%) work in the informal sector, where employment goes unregulated. Of the informal work, agriculture remains dominant, employing 45% of the workforce. Half of those working informally in agriculture are women.⁴ A large gender disparity exists in relation to wages, with women earning approximately 60% of the value of men's wages.⁴ Traditionally male occupations such as building, road construction, repair of cars and home appliances remain better paid than those undertaken by women in both in the private and public sector.

The notion that the man's duty is to work and support the family and the woman's duty is to keep house and raise children remains a dominant part of culture within Armenian society at all levels. According to a traditional Armenian saying "The man is the outer wall of the home and the woman is its ceiling." As in many parts of the world, women are and feel under pressure to conform to these norms, both from within their own families and from society at large and this is linked to ongoing discrimination in the labour market.

Since achieving independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, emigration has been a central characteristic of Armenian life. Figures vary, but it is estimated that somewhere



between 700,000 and one million people have emigrated since 1991. Recent labour migration trends explain that mismatch of labour demand and supply in the domestic labour market is one of the reasons of massive labour migrant outflow. Many young Armenians with higher education (particularly in economics, humanities and law) leave the country to seek employment opportunities abroad. Some study explains that about 20% of Armenian households have labour migrants, with 96% leaving to Russia.⁵

A clear majority of labour migrants have been, and continue to be men⁶, resulting in increasing numbers of female headed households. According to statistics of 2007, 27% of Armenian households were headed by women⁷. There are concerns as to whether female-headed households are vulnerable to falling into extreme poverty given that some women are left alone to shoulder the burdens

¹ National Statistical Service of Armenia, 2008

² Ibid.

³ IFAD – Armenia Gender Profile, 2007

⁴ UNDATA (data.un.org), 2010

⁵ Study of Migrants Returning to Armenia in 2002-2008 carried out by Progressive Social Technologies Centre (Study of Migrants Returning to Armenia in 2002-2008 carried out by Progressive Social Technologies Centre

⁶ The sex ratio for those under 15 year olds in the country is 1.15 male/female. For those aged 15 – 64 it is 0.88, reflecting the large scale emigration of men (Source CIA The World Fact Book, 2010)

⁷ IFAD – Armenia Gender Profile, 2007



Photo: ILO

of household and childcare responsibilities.⁸ On the other hand, Armenian women migrating with their families are expected to be the good mothers taking care of family members rather than engaging at work in other countries because of underlying traditional notion of the division of labour between men and women. It is also reported that male migration has led to the growth in “parallel families”, where migrant male workers establish another family in their new location.⁹

Women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions. Two of 18 government ministers are women, and three of 51 Deputy Ministers are women. Women hold 12 out of 131 seats (9.2 %) in the parliament, despite the fact that in the last election in 2007 political parties introduced a 15 % minimum quota to increase the number of women elected via party lists. Only 2% of village mayors are women and there are no female city mayors.¹⁰ However, women far outnumber men among middle-level public servants, particularly in the education sector, where 83% are women.¹¹

After several years of double-digit economic growth, Armenia is now facing a severe economic recession with GDP declining at least 15% in 2009. Sharp declines in the construction sector and migrant workers' remittances, particularly from Russia, have been identified as the main reasons for the downturn. While there are as yet no figures examining the gendered nature of the downturn it is likely, given the structure of formal employment, that the massive drop off in construction has resulted redundancies for men rather than women workers. Nonetheless, this will impact on women, as household incomes are reduced.

ARMENIAN LEGISLATION ON THE PROTECTION OF WORKERS WITH FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES



Photo: ILO

Article 15 of the Armenian Constitution states that “Citizens, regardless of national origin, race, sex, language, creed, political or other persuasion, social origin, wealth or other status, are entitled to all the rights and freedoms, and subject to the duties determined by the Constitution and the laws”. Moreover, article 32 of the Constitution states that “the family is the natural and fundamental cell of society. Family, motherhood, and childhood are placed under the care and protection of society and the state. Women and men enjoy equal rights when entering into marriage, during marriage, and in the course of divorce.” In 2005 adopted a new Labour Code which outlines the rights of women and men workers (see below).

In 2004 the Armenian Government issued a decree launching the ‘National Programme of Improving the Po-

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Brigitta Wistrand and Armine Mkhitarian ‘Women’s Empowerment and Cooperation in Armenia with a focus on the Synuk Region’ OSCE, Yerevan, 2007

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² National Programme of Improving the Position of Women in the Republic of Armenia and Enhancing their Role in Society for 2004-2010

sition of Women in the Republic of Armenia and Enhancing Their Role in Society for 2004-2010' (hereinafter referred to as 'The Programme'). The programme seeks to improve the economic status of women and reduce unemployment by expanding their employment opportunities, including through promoting women's entrepreneurship activities. It, in its own words, "seeks to create conditions whereby women can earn an income and continue to undertake domestic work."¹² The programme also seeks to combat violence against women and to reduce women's vulnerability to being trafficked.

Armenia was the first former Soviet Republic to ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in 1993. In 2006 it ratified the Optional Protocol which "provides a Communications Procedure which allows either individuals or groups of individuals to submit individual complaints to the Committee (on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women)"¹³

if all domestic remedies have been exhausted. Individual Armenian citizens are therefore able to hold their government to account for breaching the terms of CEDAW, which has specific measures for women's work, namely "to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure their effective right to work".¹⁴

Armenia joined the International Labour Organization in 1992 and has ratified a total of 29 of its 188 Labour Conventions. Four conventions directly relate to issues of gender equality and balancing work and family life. Of these Armenia has ratified the Equal Remunerations Convention (C100) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (C111). However the country has not ratified the Maternity Protection Convention (C103) of 1952, the more expansive Maternity Protection Convention (C183) of 2000, or the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (C156).

SELECTED ARTICLES FROM THE ARMENIAN LABOUR CODE

Leave for the reason of pregnancy and childbirth

Working women are entitled to fully paid maternity leave as follows:

- 140 days (70 days for pregnancy and 70 days for childbirth);
- 155 days (70 days for pregnancy and 85 days for childbirth) in the event of complicated childbirth;
- 180 days (70 days for pregnancy and 110 days for childbirth) in the event two or more babies being born.
- A worker who has adopted a newborn or has been appointed his/her guardian, is entitled to leave of absence from the time of being appointed guardian through the first 70 days of the newborn's life (Labour Code of the RA, Article 172).
- A nursing mother, in addition to regular breaks for rest and meals, is entitled to at least half an hour nursing break every three hours. During additional breaks for breast-feeding the worker is entitled to the average hourly wage (Labour Code of the RA, Article 258).



Photo: ILO

Employment of Pregnant Women and Women with Young Children

- The mother (or adoptive mother), father (or adoptive father), grandmother, grandfather or other relative, including the person appointed as guardian of the child, may be granted unpaid leave to take care of the child until the age of three. The leave can be taken in one block or in parts (Labour Code of the RA, Article 173).
- If a woman who is pregnant or has a child under 12 months old in her care needs to pass a medical examination during working hours, the employer is obliged to relieve her of her work while paying the average wage computed on the basis of the average hourly pay.

¹³ Protocol to CEDAW, article 2

¹⁴ CEDAW, article 11(2)

CHILDCARE FACILITIES

While the number of pre-school institutions in the Armenia dropped from 699 to 628 between 2002 and 2008, the number of children attending pre-school has increased by approximately ten percent. However, the number of children attending pre-school education is relatively low by international standards, particularly in rural areas where it stands at 14%. The figures available suggest that pre-school institutions are operating nationally at 75% of their capacity, with those in urban areas operating at 60% capacity. The Armenian government is aware of a link between under-attendance at childcare facilities and women's access to the labour market as outlined in The Programme.¹⁵ However, while recognition of this fact is a positive, there does not appear to be any specific, targeted attempts by



Photo: ILO

government to rectify the problem in any meaningful way – neither as part of the above-mentioned programme or otherwise.

CONCLUSIONS

Armenia has a number of progressive laws in respect to workers with family responsibilities. However, for the most part they seem to assume that mothers, and not fathers have primary responsibility for the family. For example the Constitution places motherhood, and not fatherhood, under the care and protection of society. Moreover 'The Programme' explicitly seeks to enable women to more easily enter the workforce, while continuing with their domestic responsibilities. It does not mention that men workers also have domestic responsibilities.

As it is the final year of The Programme in 2010, it ought to be evaluated and a new six-year programme set in motion. The next such programme ought to have more specific targets and look at employment from a more holistic, gendered perspective, rather than simply focusing exclusively on women. Men's role in combining work and family life is imperative as otherwise the government risks reinforcing women's double burden of paid work outside the home and unpaid work within it.



Photo: ILO

¹⁵ Government of the Republic of Armenia - The National Programme for Improving the Position of Women in the Republic of Armenia and Enhancing Their Role in Society in 2004-2010 pg. 4