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KAZAKHSTAN

COUNTRY REPORT - USERS

Paper submitted by Kazakhstan¹

Introduction

1. Three UN structural indicators are selected to assess gender equality and improving the status of women. They are:

- The ratio of girls and boys accepted to secondary educational institutions;
- The share of women in paid labour force in non-agricultural sectors of economy;
- The share of women in national legislative bodies.

1.1. The ratio of girls and boys accepted to secondary educational institutions.

At present in the Republic of Kazakhstan there are 14,9 million people. The total percentage of women is 51,8 %. However in childhood and adolescent age there are more girls than boys are. The number of women is higher than the number of men starting from the age of 30 years old.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan all citizens are given equal rights in all spheres of human life, including access to education. Secondary education is mandatory for all children. Education is located under the control of the state that provides mandatory educational standards. Girls study together with boys in schools.

¹ Ms. N. Kulmanova, National Commission on Family and Women's Affairs under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Economic difficulties of the republic have affected the education. In the beginning of the 1997-1998 academic year almost 27 thousand children did not attend schools. Due to enormous work conducted with the children themselves, as well as their parents it was possible to return almost all children back to school. In the end of the 1998-1999 academic year only 172 persons did not attend school.

Conclusion: In accordance with this indicator the gender equality in Kazakhstan is ensured.

1.2. The share of women in paid labour force in non-agricultural sectors of economy.

The total share of women in the labour force is 46 %, of men - 54 %. In 1998 the largest number of women was employed in healthcare and social services – 82 % of the total labour force. Women constitute the majority in such sectors of industry as textile, sewing, catering and electronic.

Women in Kazakhstan are more educated than men are. Among specialists with higher and secondary education women constitute 62 %. Yet, among unemployed women constitute around 60 %. As many experts notice correctly, during a transitional period women have lost more than men have, especially in terms of labour activities.

In fact unemployment has a woman's face. The demand for women's labour remains limited. Women face inequality when hired to work, they are first to be laid off when personnel is being reduced, inequality in opportunities is also noticed in professional training and re-training. This is related to the fact that women are more occupied with family issues and child upbringing, they are entitled to pregnancy leave and so forth.

Women demonstrate a stronger interest to small business. Since our women are quite educated, many of them are in the position to start their own business. The main problem is receiving credits.

Since 1998 in Kazakhstan a state microcrediting programme is implemented for people with least income level. Due to limited financial resources it was possible to release slightly less than over 16 thousand microcredits amounting to the total sum of 510 million tenge (approximately 3,5 million US Dollars).

Two thirds of all credit beneficiaries have been women. Women in comparison to men show higher rates of returns of credits. We have noticed that under our conditions microcrediting is the practical means to combat poverty.

For women producers, the National Commission on Family and Women's Affairs under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan initiated a special credit line in one of the secondary banks JSC - «Temirbank». "Soft" credits for the amount totalling to over three million US dollars have been distributed. However our banks also face the issue of limited credit resources and this circumscribes development of women's entrepreneurship significantly.

Conclusion: Despite the fact that women are more educated than men are, there is existing gender equality in education, for Kazakhstan women's employment issue remains one of the priority gender indicators that should be included in state programmes of employment promotion.

1.3. The share of women in national legislative bodies.

Despite the fact that women are provided equal rights to men in all areas of human activities in Kazakhstan, a woman's voice is not strong enough in the public decision-making process. This relates to the fact that equality 'de jure' is not always automatically results in equality 'de facto'. We have few women politicians, ministers, and heads of large institutions and organisations. In the Parliament out of 116 members only 13 are women (11%). Women are not well represented at the decision-making levels in state bodies of executive power. If among specialists the total share of women is 57 %, among top management and their deputies there are only 8% of women. There are no women among top management of oblasts (provinces), very few of them among their deputies.

Conclusion: In Kazakhstan there a lot needs to be done to achieve gender balance in the country.

2. Gender changes in the population ageing.

Social and economic transformations in the republic affected the population structure. In the republic the ageing process is evident. The total share of persons over 65 years old in the total population size is only 7 %. One of the reasons for population ageing is active population emigration, primarily in the able-bodied age. At the same time the life expectancy decreased by 3, 7 years over the last ten years, including 4,4 years for men and 2,9 years for women. On average, women live up to 70,4 years, whereas men up to 59 years. A large gap is between the life expectancy of men and women (11,4 years) – due to unhealthy lifestyles of men (tobacco smoking, drinking), as well as work under more difficult labour conditions and so forth. As the experience of previous years indicates, as the economic situation in the country improves, the gender situation in the country also will improve.