



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

# **Gender equality, social protection and rural development**

in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

*Insights from the region*





**Gender equality,  
social protection  
and rural development**  
in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

*Insights from the region*

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Budapest, 2016

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) concerning the legal or development status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The mention of specific companies or products of manufacturers, whether or not these have been patented, does not imply that these have been endorsed or recommended by FAO in preference to others of a similar nature that are not mentioned.

The views expressed in this information product are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of FAO.

ISBN 978-92-5-109192-0

© FAO, 2016

FAO encourages the use, reproduction and dissemination of material in this information product. Except where otherwise indicated, material may be copied, downloaded and printed for private study, research and teaching purposes, or for use in non-commercial products or services, provided that appropriate acknowledgement of FAO as the source and copyright holder is given and that FAO's endorsement of users' views, products or services is not implied in any way.

All requests for translation and adaptation rights, and for resale and other commercial use rights should be made via [www.fao.org/contact-us/licence-request](http://www.fao.org/contact-us/licence-request) or addressed to [copyright@fao.org](mailto:copyright@fao.org).

FAO information products are available on the FAO website ([www.fao.org/publications](http://www.fao.org/publications)) and can be purchased through [publications-sales@fao.org](mailto:publications-sales@fao.org).

*Cover pictures: © FAO / Abdul Baqi Mehraban; © FAO / Khatia Gogoladze; © FAO / Olga Grebennikova*

# CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Armenia - Astghik Mirzakhanyan Women and sustainable rural development	3
Azerbaijan - Rena Ibragimbekova Gender issues in agriculture in Azerbaijan	7
Belarus - Olga Pashkevich Gender aspects of employment and social protection in the context of development of rural areas in the Republic of Belarus	13
Georgia - Charita Jashi Challenges and perspectives of gender equality in the agricultural sector of Georgia	17
Kazakhstan - Meruert Makhmutova Rural development, social protection and gender equality in Kazakhstan	21
Kyrgyzstan - Gulnara Kurmanova Gender and rural issues in Kyrgyzstan	27
Moldova - Maria Vremis Basic gender characteristics and social protection of the rural population in Moldova	33
Russia - Natalia Zubarevich Development of rural areas in Russia: Social and gender issues	39
Tajikistan - Tatiana Bozrikova Key priorities to overcome the unequal access of rural women to resources in Tajikistan	43
Turkmenistan - Leila Toylyeva Gender approaches in Turkmenistan	47
Ukraine - Larisa Kobelyanskaya Gender issues, social protection and development of rural areas in Ukraine	53
Uzbekistan - Bakhodur Eshonov Transition or transformation? Social and gender aspects of rural development as an integral part of the reform strategy in Uzbekistan	59



# INTRODUCTION

This publication is a collection of articles written by economists, sociologists, and gender specialists and practitioners from twelve post-Soviet countries in Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia. It is unique in its effort to review and analyze the issues that are at the intersection of gender equality, social protection and rural development in the region. Overall, there is a lack of research, documented knowledge and public discourse on this subject and a multi-disciplinary approach is necessary for ensuring an in-depth and rigorous understanding of these intersecting issues in the context of the region. In supporting this publication, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia intends to draw attention to these issues as critical for the socio-economic development of the region, and raise greater awareness among all stakeholders and promote more research in this area.



One of the main reasons why this subject remains on the periphery of research and discourse is the widespread public opinion that issues relating to gender have already been addressed and are, therefore, not priorities for rural development and social protection. Indeed, in the post-Soviet countries, women, including those located in rural areas, continue to enjoy relatively high levels of literacy and education and high economic activity rates. Furthermore, all countries, in an effort to sustain the achievements of the previous regime, have recognized the formal supremacy of international legal norms and UN standards, including in the area of gender equality and women's rights. They have also been developing and implementing national policies towards achieving gender equality.

However, if we look beyond the average numbers, and disaggregate available statistics by sex and by location wherever possible, we can see that in critical areas (for example, formal employment; access to social services such as childcare facilities and pensions; and participation in local governance, among others), rural women often emerge as the most disadvantaged group. There are also key issues, for example, access to productive resources (such as land, credits, agricultural equipment and extension services) that are of crucial importance to rural livelihoods but are not commonly viewed from a gender perspective.

Across the region, women form a majority in the rural population, and a significant proportion of the labour force engaged in agriculture. However, the overarching trend in terms of rural women's employment is their engagement in informal, low-skilled and low-paid jobs. Women's access to assets and productive resources is also significantly lower than that of rural men's. Rural women's participation in public life has reduced dramatically over the last decades, and generous social welfare is no longer a social norm.

Women represent an important, yet largely neglected, resource for economic development, and their contribution to the economy is mostly invisible and unrecognized. There is a significant need to identify and highlight women's contributions, and learn more about the links between gender and rural development in the context of this region.

In order to generate a deeper understanding of these issues, an Experts Meeting was convened in Minsk, on 25-26 February 2016. This meeting was based on the guidance and recommendations received from FAO regional governing bodies, the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC), and the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) and its Executive Committee. Its aim was to strengthen national and regional capacities in Europe and Central Asia to address gender, social inclusion and rural development issues.<sup>1</sup> In line with these recommendations, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia has been working with experts and researchers from state agencies, academia and civil society based in the countries of the region. FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia has provided them with a neutral and independent platform for the exchange of knowledge and experience on gender, social protection and agriculture and rural development issues within the region. This work is underpinned by FAO Policy on Gender Equality which calls for *“increased attention to reducing the gender gap across all areas of its work”*.<sup>2</sup>

At the Minsk meeting, experts identified the need for more effective knowledge transfer and experience exchange between the countries of the region, stressing their potential to serve as a driving force for the formulation of evidence-based policies that are responsive to the needs of disadvantaged groups.

The experts who participated in the Minsk meeting have formed a regional network which brings together significant experience and expertise, alongside extensive knowledge of the issues relating to the region. The short articles in this collection offer summaries of the authors' presentations on gender equality and rural development perspectives in their respective countries. Although there is variation in the authors' views and opinions, this dialogue helps us to create an enhanced understanding of the main social and rural development issues within the region. The message coming from all experts is that without specific attention to the creation of decent jobs and social infrastructure in rural areas, and gender-sensitive and gender-responsive policies, further improvement of the status of rural women, their families and rural communities will be a distant dream. This publication highlights the need for more research on gender equality issues in the areas of FAO's mandate (including, for example, fishery and forestry), and the ways in which social protection can contribute to improving the livelihoods of rural communities in the region.

FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia hopes that the first meeting in Minsk will consolidate the regional expert community and enable it to become more actively involved in building the evidence base of knowledge on gender equality, social protection and rural development. A stronger evidence base can lead to more effective dialogue with governments, the private sector and civil society on the implications of gender-neutral policies; and improved policy research and advisory services to governments in formulating policies responsive to the needs of disadvantaged groups.

David Sedik, Senior Agricultural Policy Officer

Dono Abdurazakova, Gender and Social Protection Specialist

FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia

1 European Commission on Agriculture. 2014. *The Working party on women and the family in rural development (WPW): An alternative way forward. Regional Conference for Europe*. 38th Session. Bucharest, Romania, 01 and 02 April 2014. FAO. (available at [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Europe/documents/Events\\_2014/ECA2014/ECA\\_38\\_14\\_5\\_en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Europe/documents/Events_2014/ECA2014/ECA_38_14_5_en.pdf)).

2 FAO. 2013. *FAO Policy on Gender Equality: Attaining food security goals in agriculture and rural development*. Rome. (available at <http://www.fao.org/docrep/017/i3205e/i3205e.pdf>).





**Astghik Mirzakhanyan** has a PhD in Economics, and is a specialist with extensive professional experience of working with ministries, and inter-governmental and international organizations in the areas of Social Policy and Statistics, Poverty Assessment and Monitoring, Household Surveys and Socioeconomic Studies and Analysis. Astghik currently works as the Head of the Social Affairs Department of the Government of the Republic of Armenia, dealing with social protection and social security, human development and public social services issues.

## WOMEN AND SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

There are more women than men within the Armenian population and in 2015, women represented 52.2 percent of the total population.<sup>1</sup> However, Armenia ranked in the bottom five countries in the world in the Health and Survival subindex (2014)<sup>2</sup> because of its low female-to-male sex ratio at birth score (100/114). This has prompted intense debate among experts about the issue of selective abortion in the country.<sup>3</sup> The distribution of women by age is as follows: women below working age (0-15 years) account for 46.6 percent of this sub group of the population; working-age women (16-62 years) for 52.5 percent; and women above working age (63+ years) for 59.8 percent (2015).<sup>4</sup> Conclusion: **while women are an important resource in Armenia's economic development, they are also the main beneficiaries of the social protection system (in particular, the pension system).**

The Armenian population is predominantly urban: 73.5 percent of all residents live in urban areas and 36.5 percent in rural areas (2015). In urban areas, women account for 53.3 percent of the population. Both working-age urban women and urban women above working age outnumber men in these groups, accounting for 54.6 percent and 59.2 percent respectively. In rural areas, women account for 50.3 percent of the population. Furthermore, there are more working-age women and women above working age in rural areas than men: 50.2 percent and 60.2 percent respectively. Conclusion: **there are relatively fewer female workers and relatively more women of retirement age in rural areas when compared with urban areas.**

In recent years, one of the main changes in Armenian demography has been **the rapid decline of fertility in rural areas. Traditionally, rural fertility rates were high when compared with urban areas. In the period 2011 to 2015, rural fertility rates fell to below those of urban areas.**<sup>5</sup> Experts say that these trends are mainly related to unfavourable social conditions in rural areas, rather than a result of the economic situation. All indicators of material poverty are lower among rural households than urban households, especially when compared with households in small towns: for example, in 2014, 2 percent of the rural population was extremely poor, while in urban areas it was 2.4 percent and in small towns 2.9 percent. The same situation is observed in relation to the very poor (10.4 percent, 11.2 percent and 13.6 percent respectively); and poor (29.9 percent, 30.0 percent and 35.1 percent).<sup>6</sup> The lower levels of rural poverty are **a significant feature of the social situation in Armenia.** In most other countries across the world, the rural population is poorer than the population in urban areas.

1 National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia, 2015a.

2 World Economic Forum, 2014.

3 Guilmo, 2013.

4 National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia, 2015b.

5 The last time this situation was observed in Armenia was in the post-war period (1945-47). In 2011, fertility rates (number of births per 1 000 population) in rural and urban areas of Armenia were 14.2 and 14.4 respectively; in 2012 - 13.8 and 14.2; in 2013 - 13.6 and 14.0; and in 2014 - 13.8 and 14.6. Source: National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia, 2015b.

6 Trends in the poverty ratio for urban/rural areas have not changed since 1996. Source: National Statistical Service of RA and the World Bank, 2015.

One explanation for this phenomenon can be found in the land reform of 1992. After the declaration of independence, collective and state farms and small household plots were privatized.<sup>7</sup> In turn, this produced three other consequences. The first is **the structure of GDP in Armenia: agriculture (including forestry and fisheries) represents 18.5 percent of GDP (2014)**, which is higher than industry (16.2 percent) and construction (9.2 percent). Moreover, more than one-third of industrial products are produced by the food sector (36.4 percent), which is characterized by a high number of agricultural cooperatives, farms and small businesses located in rural areas.<sup>8</sup> The second factor is the **relatively high level of economic activity within the rural population**, which is almost 10 percentage points higher than that of the urban population, 69.2 percent and 59.6 percent respectively. The gap is the highest in the age groups 65-69 years - 35.4 percentage points; and 70-75 years - 43.5 percentage points. The third factor which has a positive effect on the level of rural poverty is tax relief provided to agricultural workers: **those employed in agriculture are fully exempt from income tax, and the sale of agricultural products is exempt from VAT**. This explains the high employment rate in agriculture: 34.8 percent of all employed persons in Armenia work in agriculture (which is the largest sector of employment after the services sector). Moreover, statistical data shows that **employment in agriculture is a more attractive option for women than men**: 40 percent of all employed women and 30 percent of all employed men in Armenia work in agriculture. At the same time, women make up 55.7 percent of all those employed in agriculture (2014).<sup>9</sup>

While the Armenian government recognizes the importance of the agricultural sector for the country in general, it places particular emphasis on the sector's role in the livelihoods of communities bordering with neighbouring countries. Consequently, as of 01 January 2015, the Law "On Tax Exemption for Activities Carried out in Rural Border Communities", adopted by the National Assembly in 2014, states that residents of 30 rural communities and one urban community, as well as entrepreneurs who have business in these communities, **are exempt from the turnover tax, income tax and from payment of state duties for licenses**. More than 50 000 mostly rural residents of these communities (or every 20th rural resident of the country) have become beneficiaries of this policy.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs developed a **special programme of social protection for vulnerable rural population groups**, which was launched in early 2014.<sup>10</sup> This programme targets residents in two types of rural areas: a) villages which have been affected by natural disasters (for example, hail, floods, mudslides, drought and loss of livestock due to epidemics); and b) mountain villages and border villages. The beneficiaries of the programme must be land users, and they can be both owners and tenants of land. The main condition for participation in the programme is registration in the local employment service as a job seeker. If other family members (aged 16-63 years) want to participate in the programme, they must also be registered as job seekers. If a family requires employees for rural work, it must sign a labour agreement with them, in accordance with the format developed by the Ministry. The duration of each mini-programme for families is set at 180 calendar days. The payment is: a) 4 000 AMD per day for the main land user and the same amount for each member of the family; b) 3 000 AMD per day for an employee; and c) 5 000 AMD per hour for an employee who is using farm machinery (for example, a tractor or combine harvester). All of the amounts listed include taxes and social payments. The cost of one mini-programme cannot exceed 350 000 AMD. According to information provided by the Ministry, 6 285 people participated in the programme in 2015 and 37.1 percent of these participants were women. The total programme budget amounted to almost 840 million AMD.

While the aforementioned programme is designed for vulnerable groups of the rural population, the programme discussed below is aimed at one of the most competitive groups in the Armenian female population – both urban and rural. The title of the programme is: **"Development of Female Entrepreneurship in Armenia"**. The first phase of the programme was delivered between 2013 and 2015. It is implemented by the Small and Medium Entrepreneurship Development National Center (SME DNC) of the Ministry of Economy. The programme is financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB); and the main partners are the German company PEM Consult and the Universal Credit Company of Armenia. The total amount of credit resources is 20 million dollars and beneficiaries must meet the following conditions:

<sup>7</sup> The process of land privatization in Armenia is described in detail in Lermann & Mirzakhanian, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia, 2015c.

<sup>9</sup> National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia, 2015d.

<sup>10</sup> The Decision of the RA Government, N534, 17 April 2014.

- The business must be “female”, which is defined by the following criteria:
  - 60 percent of senior management must be represented by women, or;
  - more than 50 percent of property must be owned by women, or;
  - more than 50 percent of staff must be represented by women.
- The business must be small or medium, which is defined by the following criteria:
  - a micro business with fewer than 10 employees and less than 100 million AMD annual turnover;
  - a small business with fewer than 50 employees and less than 500 million AMD annual turnover;
  - an average business with fewer than 250 employees and less than 1 500 million AMD annual turnover.<sup>11</sup>
- Loans are provided by selected commercial banks, in which the financial resources of ADB are allocated;
- The annual interest rate is 10 percent for starting businesses and up to 14 percent for existing businesses;
- The duration of the loan period is up to five years;
- The SME DNC provides loan guarantees, which are annually reserved in the state budget of the RA in a separate line item, “Provision of guarantees by the Small and Medium Entrepreneurship Development National Center (SME DNC) for obtaining commercial loans”;
- The amount of the state guarantee for a loan does not exceed 7 million AMD<sup>12</sup> for starting entrepreneurs and 15 million AMD for existing businesses.

The Ministry of Economy estimates that in 2015 there were 5 363 women beneficiaries of the aforementioned programme; 164 of these beneficiaries were female starting entrepreneurs in the 10 provinces (marzer) of Armenia. In total, 23 programmes were implemented in 2015, including four programmes in Yerevan, three of which were intended for Syrian refugees. Fifty-nine female entrepreneurs received preferential loans amounting to 260 million AMD from commercial banks under SME DNC guarantee letters. By 01 December 2015, commercial banks had issued almost 600 credits under state guarantees representing a total amount of 1.85 billion AMD.

In 2010, with the support of Oxfam International, **the programme for rural families was launched to support agricultural cooperatives with the preferential involvement of female labour.** This programme has been implemented in the two provinces of Tavush and Vayots Dzor (where the rural population is 57.7 percent and 64.9 percent respectively of the total provincial populations). In the period between 2010 and 2015, 25 cooperatives were established, including eight with 100 percent female participation (including directors). Overall, the total number of cooperative members reached 300 and 54 percent of these were female.

Although Armenia has a wealth of female resources, the country does not currently fully utilize this potential. Moreover, as women aged between 18 and 30 years become more economically active, birth rates fall sharply, especially in relation to third and subsequent children, which in turn **affects the demographic situation in the country.** One of the main problems faced by the country is the “loss” of the village as the main “provider of human resources”. A number of measures introduced by the government of Armenia have slightly improved the birth rate<sup>13</sup>, but the problem of population decline is still relevant.

A second serious challenge is the very low participation of women in local self-government. In Armenia, there are currently 866 rural governments with 6 006 communal employees, and 48.6 percent of these employees are women. **Despite the high numbers of women employed in local authorities, very few of them hold management positions or are represented in elected posts.** Today, only 17 women (2 percent) head rural communities, and only 515 women (9.9 percent) are elected to rural councils.<sup>14</sup> In terms of the political empowerment of women, Armenia occupies the 123<sup>rd</sup> position among 142 countries, which also has a negative impact on the country's position in the Global Gender Index (103).<sup>15</sup>

11 The Ministry of Economy estimates that in 2014, 98 percent of all registered enterprises fit that definition. “Female” SMEs amounted to 8 871 or 11-12 percent of all small businesses. The SME sector in Armenia employs 290 000 people and its contribution to GDP is estimated to be approximately 44 percent.

12 Before 2015, it was 5 million AMD and since 2016, it has been 7 million AMD.

13 In order to improve the birth rate, the following key measures were taken by the government. Firstly, in 2011, state childbirth certificates were introduced. These were provided to all pregnant women and gave them the right to give birth in any chosen medical institution, including private establishments, free of charge. Secondly, in 2012, children under seven years were included in the state programme of free inpatient treatment, regardless of their social status and type of disease. Thirdly, in 2014, the state parent capital programme was launched. If families received 50 000 AMD for the births of their first and second children, they will now receive 500 000 AMD (in cash) for the birth of the third child, in addition to an extra 500 000 AMD transferred to a bank account as parent capital. For the fourth and subsequent children, parent capital is 1 million AMD. As of January 2016, non-working mothers also receive maternity leave of 140 days (70 days of prenatal and 70 days of postnatal leave). The amount is based on the minimum wage, set annually by the RA National Assembly (this is currently 55 000 AMD).

14 GIZ, EU & UNDP, 2015.

15 World Economic Forum, 2014.

Furthermore, public opinion suggests that **the most urgent problem in Armenia today is the availability of medical services**, especially those using high-tech equipment and modern methods of treatment. As a solution to this problem, the government and other stakeholders have been discussing the introduction of **universal compulsory medical insurance**. This possibility raises many challenges, including: the introduction of a unified database in the health system; the development and electronic preservation of treatment protocols; the training of personnel; the provision of technical equipment in medical institutions, polyclinics and clinics; and personal data protection.

Another urgent problem for sustainable agricultural development is the **rural population's limited access to the state pension system**. Rural residents do not pay income tax on self-employment. Of all employed persons in rural areas, 83 percent are self-employed (defined by official statistics as people belonging to the informal sector because of a lack of information about their income). Across the country, the rural population accounts for 68 percent of all people engaged in informal employment. Moreover, the agricultural sector absorbs about 72 percent of all informal jobs, and women make up 55 percent of them. This means that **about 250 000 rural women employed in the informal sector (non-taxable) will encounter pension eligibility problems in retirement**.

Another significant challenge for rural development is the **migration of the male labour force for seasonal work**, mainly to Russia and other CIS countries. The Migration Service of Armenia estimates that there are between 100 000 and 120 000 labour migrants annually. Migration is a sensitive topic in the Armenian public sphere and a primary focus for researchers and politicians. Numerous household surveys and omnibus surveys of citizens suggest that the absence of men in many villages is disastrous for the villages' development, both socially (for example, incomplete families, fatherlessness and a sharp reduction in the numbers of socio-cultural events) and economically (for example, weak economic incentives and a lack of workers for the community).

Finally, another critical problem in Armenia is the prevalence of **small (even micro) villages which have little potential for survival**. Out of 866 rural communities in Armenia, 272 or 31 percent have a permanent population of less than 500 people. Intensive migration of the male population from these villages means that in some places, only 10 to 15 families remain, consisting mainly of women, children and the elderly. One strategic policy designed to resolve this problem is the **administrative and territorial consolidation of communities**. In 2015, for the first time, 23 rural and 2 urban communities in three provinces were merged into three new major administrative units. The establishment of another 12 enlarged communities is planned. Using a joint budget, the new units will have more abilities to address social issues such as the maintenance of schools and kindergartens, the renovation of rural roads and the promotion of local business.

## References

- GIZ, EU & UNDP.** 2015. *Participatory Democracy in Local Self-Government*. Yerevan, Armenia.
- Guilmoto, C. Z.** 2013. *Sex Imbalances at Birth in Armenia: Demographic Evidence and Analysis*. Yerevan, UNFPA. (available at [http://www.unfpa.am/sites/default/files/Sex Imbalance report Eng final-with%20cover-final.pdf](http://www.unfpa.am/sites/default/files/Sex%20Imbalance%20report%20Eng%20final-with%20cover-final.pdf)).
- Lermann, Z. & Mirzakhania, A.** 2001. *Private Agriculture in Armenia*.
- National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia.** 2015a. *Population. The Demographic Handbook of Armenia*. (available at [http://www.armstat.am/file/article/demog\\_2015\\_2.pdf](http://www.armstat.am/file/article/demog_2015_2.pdf)).
- National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia.** 2015b. *The Demographic Handbook of Armenia*. (available at [http://www.armstat.am/file/article/demog\\_2015\\_00.pdf](http://www.armstat.am/file/article/demog_2015_00.pdf)).
- National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia.** 2015c. *Statistical Yearbook of Armenia*. (available at <http://www.armstat.am/file/doc/99493648.pdf>).
- National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia.** 2015d. *Labour Market in the Republic of Armenia, 2010-2014*. Yerevan. (available at [http://www.armstat.am/file/article/trud\\_2015\\_6.pdf](http://www.armstat.am/file/article/trud_2015_6.pdf)).
- National Statistical Service of RA and the World Bank.** 2015. *Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia: Statistical Analytical Report*. Yerevan. (available at [http://www.armstat.am/file/article/1poverty-2015e\\_00.pdf](http://www.armstat.am/file/article/1poverty-2015e_00.pdf)).
- World Economic Forum.** 2014. *The Global Gender Gap Report*, October 2014. (available at [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR14/GGGR\\_CompleteReport\\_2014.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR14/GGGR_CompleteReport_2014.pdf)).





**Rena Ibragimbekova** is a Professor, Doctor of Philosophy and Head of the Department "Gender and Applied Psychology" in the faculty of Social Sciences and Psychology at Baku State University, where she has taught since 1977. She worked as deputy head of the Department of Science, Culture, Education and Social Problems of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan until 2011. Rena has extensive experience of cooperation with different UN agencies, including UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, WFP and the World Bank in various projects including: the preparation of the National Report on Human Development, the promotion of gender issues in the strategy of poverty reduction and studies on the situation of women and children of internally displaced persons, among others. She was a participant in the 4th World Conference on Women and in many other international forums on social development and gender equality. She is also the author of approximately 100 publications. Rena was the initiator and facilitator of a project on reviving the silk weaving industry, which provided jobs to dozens of rural women in different parts of Azerbaijan.

## GENDER ISSUES IN AGRICULTURE IN AZERBAIJAN

The Republic of Azerbaijan is an independent secular state in the South Caucasus. It is located on the border of Europe and Asia, at the crossroads of trade routes connecting the West and the East. The territory of Azerbaijan is 86 600 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>1</sup> In 2015, the population of Azerbaijan was 9 593 000 people, and women represented 50.2 percent of the total population. The rural population accounts for 46.8 percent of the total population (which has decreased by 30 percent over the last 100 years). Women represent 50.9 percent of the total rural population. There are 1 007 women per 1 000 men in rural areas. There are 1.8 times fewer men of retirement age (above 63 years) than women of the same age. The fertility rate in rural areas is higher than in urban areas (2.4 and 2.0 respectively). Maternal mortality is also higher in rural areas (15.8 and 13.4).<sup>2</sup>

The average salary of employees in agriculture is one of the lowest in the country, and amounts to 153.4 AZN in state institutions and 319.5 AZN in the private sector (the average wage in the whole economy is 649.7 AZN and 2 337.9 AZN in the oil industry).<sup>3</sup>

Agricultural statistics are included in some aggregated statistical data, and are supplemented with data obtained in specific surveys. In official statistics, the section entitled "Agriculture, forestry and fisheries"<sup>4</sup> contains four gender-specific indicators, and the section entitled "Welfare and social security"<sup>5</sup> contains 12 gender-specific indicators. A proportion of the sex-disaggregated data is made available by the State Statistical Committee, in a shared database in the section on "Gender".<sup>6</sup>

The last decade of the twentieth century has been crucial for Azerbaijan. It was marked by the achievement of independence and radical transformations in political, economic and social life. Since the early 1990s, the country has been engaged in a military conflict, has suffered material damage worth billions of dollars, and has lost 20 percent of its territory (mainly agricultural). The inhabitants of the occupied territories, who have become internally displaced, in addition to ethnic refugees from a neighbouring country (about 1 million people), rushed to different regions of the country, creating and encountering serious problems, primarily associated with access to food.

1 Information on the Azerbaijan Republic is available at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azerbaijan>.

2 State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan & UNFPA, 2015, Tables: 1.2, 1.4, 1.10 and 1.14.

3 Ibid. Table: 4.7.

4 Ibid. Tables: 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4.

5 Ibid. Tables: 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4.

6 State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

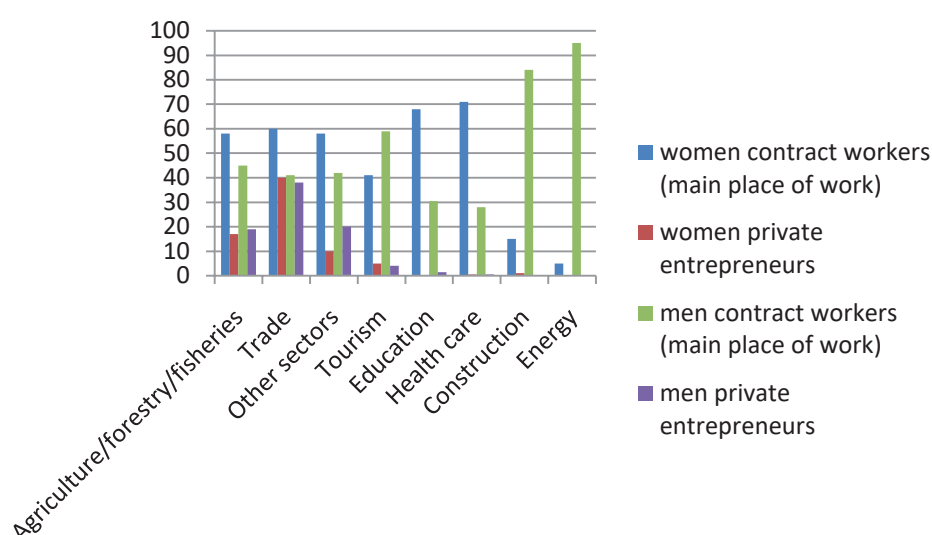
Nevertheless, in recent years, Azerbaijan has made a significant breakthrough in terms of its economic development, by increasing production capacity, mainly in the oil sector, and by formulating investment policies and activities to support the harmonization of its social structure. The global economic crisis, caused by falling oil prices, has intensified the country's search for ways of developing the non-oil sector. Government policy has been based on an understanding that the progress of the economy (in all areas which are not associated with the extraction and processing of oil and gas) is a **tool** for human development. First of all, it concerns agriculture, where the development of human potential is impossible without a thorough understanding of the gender composition of the society and the social status of women and men.

What is the situation in relation to a gender approach in agriculture in Azerbaijan today?

The government strategy is identified in the State programme on reliable food supply for the population in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2008-2015, with a main focus on food security through self-sufficiency. However, the saturation of the market with food products does not guarantee food security for the most vulnerable groups, including women. Significant growth in the economy in the period 2006 to 2010 stimulated the creation of more than 100 000 new jobs (equivalent to an employment growth rate of two percent), however, the overall employment rate in agriculture has not increased by much. Although the share of this sector in the economy fell, it continues to be high, and the number of working women and men within the sector amounts to approximately two-fifths of the total number of employed people in the country. More than 83 percent of those employed in agriculture are self-employed. Sex-disaggregated data for this indicator are not available.

Currently, official statistics disaggregate the data of economic activity of the population by place of primary employment and private entrepreneurship in various sectors, and also take into account indicators in relation to the economically inactive population. This enables the creation of a picture of the gender situation in various fields. While there is gender asymmetry in some sectors of the economy, for example, a large majority of men in construction and energy, and a large majority of women in education and health care, there is a relative gender balance within agriculture. There is also a relatively equal ratio of men and women engaged in private enterprise in agriculture (with a slight majority of men). However, it is interesting to note that while there is a minor gender difference in private entrepreneurship, there is a larger gender difference in relation to the main place of work. This is demonstrated in Chart 1.

**Chart 1: The distribution of men and women entrepreneurs in various sectors of the economy (%)**



A special rural households survey conducted in 2012 by the State Statistical Committee, shows the following gender distribution in production, harvesting and product sales.

**Table 2: Gender issues revealed by the rural household survey<sup>7</sup>**

Respondents	Total	%	
		Women	Men
Survey participants	100	47.6	52.4
Engaged in production	100	48.0	52.0
Engaged in harvesting	100	49.4	50.6
Engaged in sales	100	30.1	69.9
Involved from outside	100	36.7	63.3

Analysis of the data in Table 2 shows that although there is a relatively equal distribution of men and women involved in the production and harvesting of products, there are almost twice as many men engaged in the sale of agricultural products. This can be explained by the existence of gender stereotypes, where men are associated with the process of making money. This is also demonstrated in indicators related to obtaining credit (see Table 3). The data on the use of agricultural machinery and fertilizers in the same table indirectly point to the predominance of men in the group of people who use more machinery and fertilizers, which results in increased productivity and, of course, in higher revenues.

**Table 3: Special survey of rural households<sup>8</sup>**

Number of households	Total	%	
		Women	Men
Received credits	100	25.8	74.2
Used agricultural machinery	100	21.3	78.7
Used fertilizers	100	24.9	75.1

The same rural household survey revealed that the sector with the most gender asymmetry was fisheries. In this sector, only two indicators were considered: Lake and Pond fishery and the Fishing quota. In relation to the first indicator, the number of men within the sector is 8.3 times greater than the number of women (175 men versus 21 women), and in relation to the second indicator, the number of men is 240 times greater than the number of women. According to the available information<sup>9</sup>, worldwide fisheries and aquaculture are traditionally male sectors, even though women are involved in some of the processes within these sectors. Unfortunately, there are insufficiently detailed data on this issue. However, the predominance of men in this sector cannot solely be explained by the fact that fishing (this relates to marine fisheries in Azerbaijan) is heavy and dangerous work: it also explained by the high levels of income, in particular from the sale of valuable products such as sturgeon and caviar.

The current social protection system in Azerbaijan involves social insurance and social assistance. Social insurance benefits (for example, old-age, unemployment and illness) are financed by social insurance contributions made by members of the employed population. Monthly social transfers such as children's allowance, benefits of targeted social assistance and disability benefits are financed from the state budget. The main aim of the social assistance programmes is to support a minimum level of consumption in low-income groups. With reforms underway, there has been progress in the registration and implementation of social insurance payments.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan & UNFPA, 2015, Table: 6.2.

<sup>8</sup> State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan & UNFPA, 2015, Tables: 1.2, 1.4, 1.10 and 1.14.

<sup>9</sup> FAO, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> State Social Protection Fund of Azerbaijan, 2014.

However, there are no disaggregated data in relation to expenditure on social protection in urban/rural areas as a proportion of the total state budget (central, local) and its dynamics.<sup>11</sup> There is no difference between the rural and urban populations in relation to the old-age pension. According to the 2009 law on pensions, women with five or more children retire earlier, and each subsequent child reduces the age of retirement by one year. The law is also applicable in cases where a father raises children in the event of the death of a mother. However, there are no gender statistics on these indicators.

**Table 4: Gender distribution in the economically inactive population<sup>12</sup>**

Population	Women	Men	Gender ratio (%)	
			Women	Men
High school full-time students	28.2	42.8	42.4	57.6
Old-age pensioners	32.6	34.3	51.5	48.5
Disability pensioners	7.0	14.8	34.7	65.3
Rentiers deriving income from property	1.3	7	17.4	82.6
Housewives, childcare	30.8	1.1	96.9	3.1
Total (%)	100	100	52.8	47.2

The main gender issue in Azerbaijan is the limited access of women living in rural areas to productive and technical resources, and to the markets for sale of their agricultural products. This ultimately limits their incomes and creates economic dependence. Gender stereotypes form the basis of these problems. Gender issues in agriculture in Azerbaijan also include the poor gender responsiveness of legislation in various spheres of agriculture and the fragmentation of statistical databases.

Specific measures to improve the situation may include:

- *Conducting a large-scale, comprehensive study of the gender situation in rural areas, including gender analyses of national legislation in all fields of agriculture and in-depth interviews with rural women and men;*
- *Ensuring the further improvement of gender statistics in agriculture;*
- *Developing principles of cooperation and improving interaction between NGOs and state structures in relation to the assistance of rural women;*
- *Undertaking media campaigns to overcome gender stereotypes;*
- *Developing training programmes on private entrepreneurship and advanced training programmes for female small farmers.*

Since women of retirement age, who have at least secondary or incomplete secondary education, predominate in the structure of the economically inactive population, it is advised that targeted programmes are developed on how they can harness their professional and life potential.

An example of best practice for the engagement of rural women is the project on reviving old silk scarves. Following the collapse of the system of command economy in Azerbaijan, one of the most developed fields of sericulture declined. The research centre "Inkishaf" restored the technique of silk production using a very popular silk product, the women's traditional headscarf or "kelagayi". The project has ensured employment and increased income for more than 100 rural households, including all household members (both women and men). In the space of one year, this folk craft was restored using artisanal production techniques, ensuring the preservation of all technological requirements, and in compliance with the structural and aesthetic features of the product. On 26 November 2014, kelagayi was included in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity<sup>13</sup>, which affirmed the appropriateness of the project and created jobs for rural women in Ismayilli, Sheki, Gabala, Guba, Shamakhi and other regions of Azerbaijan.

<sup>11</sup> Data on budgeting in the municipalities is missing.

<sup>12</sup> State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan Republic.

<sup>13</sup> The traditional Azerbaijani art of making and wearing the women's silk headscarf "kelagayi" and its symbolism was included in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2014. Information is available at [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org).



## References

**State Social Protection Fund of Azerbaijan.** 2014. *Overview of state social protection fund of Azerbaijan.* (available at <http://www.sspf.gov.az/about.aspx>).

**State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan Republic.** (available at [www.azstat.gov.az](http://www.azstat.gov.az)).

**State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan & UNFPA.** 2015. *Women and men in Azerbaijan.* Baku.





**Olga Pashkevich** has a PhD in Economics and is an Associate Professor and Head of the Labour Resources Group in the Department of Labour and Social Relations, Institute of System Studies in AIC National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. Olga took part in expert meetings and sessions of the Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development (FAO) between 2008 and 2012 on the following topics: women's labour input in agriculture and role in subsistence farms in South-East Europe and Central Asia; impacts of migration on rural households' livelihoods and better management of agricultural resources; and gender statistics for assessing the socio-economic status of rural women and men in Europe and Central Asia. She has worked on international projects with UNESCO and Linnaeus University (Sweden), and has participated in the internship programme "Workforce Development" (Chicago, IL, USA). She has over 100 publications on labour market formation and development in rural areas and the research results have been implemented into the economic activities of agricultural organizations and agrarian educational institutions.

## GENDER ASPECTS OF EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL PROTECTION IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS IN THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

Economic, social and demographic contradictions in the processes of rural development and agricultural production represent some of the most important issues for the improvement of Belarus' socio-economic situation and strengthening the country's security. The response to these issues is shaped by their socio-political importance and national significance, particularly since Belarus is an active participant in international regional integration within the Eurasian Economic Community and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and a contributor to world food security.

The problems relating to rural development are articulated and addressed within the State Programme for Village Revival and Development (2005-2010)<sup>1</sup>, and the State Programme for Sustainable Rural Development (2011-2015)<sup>2</sup>. Recently, a draft State Programme for Development of Agrarian Business in the Republic of Belarus for 2016-2020 has been developed. The main goal of these programmes is to increase (i) the productivity and efficiency of agricultural production, (ii) the competitiveness of agricultural products and food in the global agrifood market and (iii) the saturation of the domestic market with domestic agricultural products in the volume and quality required for sufficient nutrition of the population.

The Republic of Belarus' gender policy is based on generally accepted international norms enshrined in UN Conventions and other international instruments. These aim to address all forms and manifestations of sex discrimination and to create conditions in which everyone has the right, regardless of sex, to full realization of personal potential.<sup>3</sup> To date, legal, organizational and administrative measures have been taken to ensure the full development of women in order to improve their social status and to respect the rights of women on an equal basis with men. Traditionally, emphasis was placed on the sectoral and occupational structures of women's employment, conditions of work and remuneration, opportunities for increased knowledge and career growth, and reducing unemployment.

Gender statistics in the Republic of Belarus include a broad range of indicators in relation to population, family, health care, education, employment, economy, social activities and other topics. The field of gender statistics is continuously being improved, thereby expanding the possibilities for comparative analysis of the situation of women and men; and several issues of the statistical handbook "Women and Men in the Republic of Belarus" have been published.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Agriculture and Food in the Republic of Belarus.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Agriculture and Food in the Republic of Belarus.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus (a).

<sup>4</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, 2013.

Women represent 53.5 percent of the total population of the Republic of Belarus. In rural areas, women account for 52.3 percent of the rural population. This can be explained by the longer duration of women's lives compared with men's (in urban areas the life expectancy ratio is 79.2 and 69.1 years; in rural areas it is 76.1 and 64.1 years).

Analysis of the dynamics of employment in rural areas in various sectors of the economy shows that in 2014, the agricultural sector was the largest employer in rural areas (41.5 percent), followed by education (11.2 percent) and industry (13 percent). This suggests that agriculture continues to be the main sector of employment in rural areas. The main producers of agricultural products are agricultural enterprises (76.2 percent), agricultural holdings (1.7 percent) and household farms (22.1 percent).<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that agricultural employment is uniform and is primarily determined by the concentration of the rural population in large- and medium-sized agricultural enterprises. Men are better represented in agricultural employment than women (57.8 percent in 2014). Some gender stereotypes prevail in society, and there are various professions, positions and fields of work that are still perceived as male or female. This leads to gender inequalities in the distribution of male and female workers in agriculture.

Comparative analysis of the level of education of agricultural workers shows that the level of education is higher for women than it is for men. More than 30 percent of women working in agriculture have participated in higher and secondary vocational education (across the whole economy this figure is approximately 60 percent), compared with only 23.2 percent of men (42.2 percent in the economy as a whole).

There are 10 900 women in the Republic of Belarus who hold management positions in agricultural enterprises, or 45.6 percent of the total number of managers in agriculture, compared with 13 000 or 54.4 percent of men. Wages in agriculture, hunting and forestry are currently approximately 76.1 percent of the national average level and 72.2 percent of the wage level in industry; this is one of the lowest indicators in the whole economy. In 2013, the average salary for women in agriculture was 89.6 percent of the average wage for men in the same sector. Moreover, in recent years there has been a continuing trend towards gender differentiation in the labour wages of men and women.

According to the law<sup>6</sup>, the loss of a job is an insured event and an employee has the right to receive payments of state social insurance. However, unemployment benefits are very low and are implemented with strict conditions. This leads to a sharp decline in the living standards of the unemployed. In addition, the allowance does not meet the minimum needs of the unemployed, and in turn, this does not offer an incentive to seek support from the employment service.

In 2014, the number of unemployed people in rural areas represented 19.5 percent of all unemployed people in the country. Women accounted for 37.5 percent of all registered unemployed people. The average duration of unemployment among women is 3.3 months (among men it is 2.6 months). Although the level of registered male unemployment exceeds the level of women's, women need more time to find a job. There is a higher number of long-term unemployed women than there is men.

The analysis shows that the most disadvantaged groups in the labour market are: women with children; graduates without work experience; women approaching retirement age; disabled women; and women in professions (in the existing competitive conditions, men are preferred in professional roles). Moreover, after becoming unemployed, some women leave the labour market or find jobs with a lower social status.

One of the main priorities for state policy is the creation of conditions which facilitate the qualitative development of human potential and provide a healthy and decent life for all members of the population. The State Programme on Social Protection and Employment Assistance for 2016-2020 was developed to implement this priority.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> The law of the Republic of Belarus, dated 15 June 2006, N 125.

<sup>7</sup> The decree of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, dated 30 January 2016, N 73.

Within the country, coordinated and harmonized approaches to food security, access to food and education on nutrition have been developed and implemented. These are demonstrated by the "Concept of National Food Security of the Republic of Belarus"<sup>8</sup> and the "Concept of State Policy in the Field of Healthy Nutrition of Population of the Republic of Belarus until 2020".<sup>9</sup> These take into account territorial differentiation and seek to prevent adverse changes in the food market. It is important to note that in a market economy, disposable income is a key factor in determining whether or not households consume food in the volume and variety that meet the standards of food security.

In Belarus, the minimum subsistence level is the criterion by which a household is classified as low-income.<sup>10</sup> The subsistence minimum rate is based on the minimum set of material goods and services necessary to ensure human life and health, as well as mandatory payments and contributions. The analysis shows that between 2000 and 2014 there was a significant decrease in the shares of the low-income urban and rural populations. Within the total low-income population, approximately 43 percent were residents of rural areas. In addition, between 2000 and 2014, women formed the predominant group within the low-income population (approximately 55 percent).

In the Republic of Belarus, social security and social assistance measures include: *minimum social guarantees* (minimum wage, pensions, scholarships, grants); and *state targeted social assistance* provided to particular categories of citizens (families) to maintain their income at the minimum guaranteed level and to support them in solving their problems. Pensions include old-age pensions and pensions on a preferential basis. Alongside this, the state social standard in the field of social services has been introduced.<sup>11</sup> In addition, it should be noted that Decree No. 3 was adopted: "On the prevention of social parasitism".<sup>12</sup>

Thus, research on the gendered aspects of employment and social protection in the context of development in rural areas in the Republic of Belarus allows us to establish the following conclusions.

Rural areas in the Republic of Belarus have considerable resources. However, for several years, the number of rural settlements has been decreasing because of migration by the rural population, especially young people, to urban areas. In order to eliminate negative trends in rural development, programmes of support for rural areas are being implemented. Agriculture is the major employer of the rural population, and employment prospects in rural areas depend largely on the dynamics of, and level of economic efficiency in, agricultural production. In addition, the agricultural sector is seen as the field of moral and spiritual values and the centre of culture, and represents a unique type of lifestyle in the nation. Women play an important role in rural households: their activity is directly connected with the home, family, traditions, reproduction, bringing up children and ensuring the continuity of peasant generations.

Implementation of the gender policy in the Republic of Belarus is based on the legal, organizational and administrative standards of gender equality. The implementation of the principle of equality is ensured by providing women with equal opportunities for obtaining education and professional training, implementation of the right to work and remuneration for it, socio-political and cultural activities and special measures in the fields of labour protection and women's health care. There are numerous opportunities for the self-realization of women, and their participation in socio-economic activity can take a variety of forms. Important steps are being taken to improve the labour conditions of rural women, and to reduce the number of positions and professions with unhealthy working conditions. At the legislative level, there are no discriminatory practices in relation to women.

Timely measures of an economic and social nature have been developed in the Republic of Belarus in order to avert the negative consequences of the crisis: employment, social protection and food security strategies are in place to prevent social shocks, and to ensure a quick and effective response to existing and new problems in society.

8 The decree of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, dated 10 March 2004, N 252.

9 Republican Unitary Enterprise "The Scientific and Practical Center for Foodstuffs", 2015.

10 The Law of the Republic of Belarus dated 6 January 1999, N 239-Z.

11 Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus (b).

12 The Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus, No. 3, dated 2 April 2015.

## References

- The Decree of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus**, dated 10 March 2004, N 252, "On the concept of national food security of the Republic of Belarus". (available at <http://pravo.levonevsky.org/bazaby11/republic34/text337.htm>).
- The Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus**, No. 3, dated 2 April 2015, "On the prevention of social parasitism". (available at [http://president.gov.by/ru/official\\_documents\\_ru/view/dekret-3-ot-2-aprelja-2015-g-11135/](http://president.gov.by/ru/official_documents_ru/view/dekret-3-ot-2-aprelja-2015-g-11135/)).<sup>13</sup>
- The Law of the Republic of Belarus** dated 6 January 1999, N 239-Z, "On the subsistence minimum in the Republic of Belarus". (available at <http://www.levonevski.net/pravo/razdel2/num1/2d14.html>).
- Ministry of Agriculture and Food in the Republic of Belarus.** *The State Programme for Village Revival and Development for 2005-2010*. (available at <http://mshp.minsk.by/programms/fb78a49247bfa46c.html>).
- Ministry of Agriculture and Food in the Republic of Belarus.** *The State Programme for Village Revival and Development for 2011-2015*. (available at [http://mshp.minsk.by/prog/gosprog\\_ustrazvitsela2011\\_2015.pdf](http://mshp.minsk.by/prog/gosprog_ustrazvitsela2011_2015.pdf)).
- Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus.** a. *Gender politics*. Minsk, Belarus. (available at <http://www.mintrud.gov.by/ru/gendernaya-politika>).
- Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus.** b. *The Law of the Republic of Belarus*, 15 June 2006, N 125-Z, "On Employment of Population of the Republic of Belarus". (available at <http://www.mintrud.gov.by/ru/zacon>).
- Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus.** c. *The resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus* dated 30 January 2016, N 73, "On approval of the state program on social protection and employment assistance for 2016-2020". (available at <http://www.mintrud.gov.by/system/extensions/spaw/uploads/files/Gosudarstvennaja-programma-na-2016-2020-1.pdf>).
- Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus.** d. *State social support*. Minsk, Belarus. (available at <http://www.mintrud.gov.by/ru/gsp>).
- National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus.** 2013. *Women and Men in the Republic of Belarus. Statistical Yearbook*. Minsk, Belarus. (available at [http://www.belstat.gov.by/en/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/statistical-publications-data-books-bulletins/public\\_compilation/index\\_94/](http://www.belstat.gov.by/en/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/statistical-publications-data-books-bulletins/public_compilation/index_94/)).
- National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus.** 2015. *Agriculture in the Republic of Belarus. Statistical Yearbook*. Minsk, Belarus. (available at [http://www.belstat.gov.by/en/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/statistical-publications-data-books-bulletins/public\\_compilation/index\\_219/](http://www.belstat.gov.by/en/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/statistical-publications-data-books-bulletins/public_compilation/index_219/)).
- Republican Unitary Enterprise "The Scientific and Practical Center for Foodstuffs".** 2015. *The concept of the State policy in the field of healthy nutrition of the population of the Republic of Belarus up to 2020*. Minsk, Belarus. (available at <http://www.new.belproduct.com/assets/files/conception.pdf>).

<sup>13</sup> Date of access here and below – 16-22 February 2016.



**Charita Jashi** is a Professor in the Business and Economic Faculty at Tbilisi State University (TSU). She is the founder of the Gender Study Institute at TSU and Head of the Caucasus Development Group. She is currently engaged in the elaboration of national policy and strategic documents for gender mainstreaming in Georgia, under the frameworks of EDPRP and the SDGs. She also works as a programme manager and expert with UNDP, UNECE, OSCE/ODHIR, OSGF, World Bank, EBRD and Oxfam. Charita specialises in the macro and micro linkages of gender and economics, social marketing, poverty reduction, social protection and gender budgeting. She is the author of 85 scientific and policy papers, 3 manuals and 4 monographs.

## CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR OF GEORGIA

Georgia is a low middle income, traditional, agricultural country, which has undergone a series of successful political and economic reforms. New and forthcoming business regulations, due to be introduced because of Georgia's European Integration-related reform agenda, do not set any legislative limits on women's engagement in economic activities. However, women can find it difficult to develop their economic potential, find and maintain employment and run or start a business. The problem becomes more pronounced in rural areas. Research and surveys carried out with different rural women's groups have demonstrated unfavourable conditions for women in local labour markets. Women are also less likely than men to be landowners. Women typically own smaller plots of land compared with men and are more likely to be contributing family workers. Women tend to engage in agricultural production for family consumption, which negatively affects their earning capacity, whereas men tend to engage in the production of cash crops. Due to the double burden of work, insufficient social infrastructure and a lack of professional education, women's socio-economic status has currently significantly declined.<sup>1</sup>

Georgia has good climatic and natural conditions conducive to the development of agriculture. However, within the past decades, Georgian agriculture and food production has been lagging far behind other sectors of the economy. Georgia used to be an important supplier of agricultural products within the Soviet Union. Agricultural exports exceeded imports by 70 percent.<sup>2</sup> However, the share of agriculture in total GDP has significantly declined from 12.8 percent in 2006 to 9.3 percent in 2013, although it increased slightly in 2014. Agricultural production accounts for 45 percent of rural household income, and subsistence agriculture accounts for 73 percent of rural employment.<sup>3</sup>

According to the new Census of Georgia, the total population is 3 729 500 people. In rural areas there are 1 589 100 people, and 52 percent of the rural population are women.<sup>4</sup> Georgia's strong economic growth in the period 2004 to 2012 has not been accompanied by a significant reduction in rural poverty, partly because the growth was centred on financial services, information technology, mining and construction. The majority of people employed in these sectors are men. Women are mostly involved in less profitable sectors of the economy, for example, agriculture and social services industries.

<sup>1</sup> Khitarishvili, 2015; Jashi, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> EU & FAO, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2015a.



Since 2003, and in spite of the new transfers of land into private ownership, the condition of agriculture has not improved significantly and real production has diminished. Georgia is dependent on the importing of agricultural products, and as a result, the index of food self-sufficiency in the country remains very low (about 90 percent of the necessary wheat is imported).<sup>5</sup> Many factors have contributed to the reduction of agricultural productivity in the country including: the fragmentation of land; a lack of knowledge about management and marketing skills; the absence of modern machinery; poor connectivity to markets; low investment; and high interest rates from banks. The new government has prioritized the development of the agricultural sector.<sup>6</sup> 2013 was a favourable year for agricultural production: good natural conditions, alongside strengthened support from the state, resulted in agricultural output growth of 12.9 percent year on year. During the period 2007 to 2013, the average annual growth rate of agricultural output was 5.9 percent.<sup>7</sup>

There are approximately 640 302 households in rural Georgia. These are generally owned and managed by men. According to official statistics, men are the heads of 69 percent of farms and women represent 31 percent of farm owners. Households headed by men have higher incomes. The average salary of women in the agricultural sector is 27 percent lower than the average salary of men.<sup>8</sup> Women and men also tend to engage in different activities within agriculture, with most women engaged in lower paid work. Women are responsible for the majority of day-to-day agricultural activities including field work (for example, the bulk of the work collecting the harvest), milking cows, the processing of food, housekeeping and budget management / small sales.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, women are more isolated than men from ongoing economic reforms, because they are distanced from information flows, financial resources, adequate property and equality in the labour market.

Georgia's agricultural crisis has led to a decrease in village population size. The migration rate is higher in rural areas due to the difficulties of finding a job. It is worth noting that a large proportion of the rural employed population are self-employed farmers. This is the reason why unemployment is lower in rural than in urban areas (the difference reaches approximately 20 percent). The unemployment rate for women is 10.4 percent and 14 percent for men.<sup>10</sup> Farms led by women are four times smaller than those led by men, and accordingly, the income of the former is lower than that of the latter. In reality, women lead agribusinesses more effectively and this is supported by official data which shows that, on average, the income per employee in farms run by women is 1.5 GEL higher than in farms run by men.<sup>11</sup> The small farming sector in Georgia faces many challenges including: a poor economic base; low productivity; and a lack of access to the inputs, knowledge and capacities that farmers need to build profitable farming businesses. Additionally, rural women in Georgia are not actively involved in decision-making processes. In every region in Georgia, there is a lack of participation by women in the local community, despite women having a decisive role in the household and in subsistence farming. Women remain significantly under-represented in local assemblies, accounting for only 10 percent of seats in the local Councils of Georgian Regions.<sup>12</sup> Women also have very little involvement in areas of the value chain that are outside of the household.

Most of the population in rural areas is dependent on social protection. The social protection system is not sufficiently developed to support various social groups out of poverty by creating guaranteed and stable living conditions for them. The authorities have mainly implemented passive social policy, which is limited to maintaining the standard of living of the unemployed and poor. The state pension introduced by the government is disbursed when citizens reach retirement age (65 years of age for men; 60 years of age for women), have a disability or experience the loss of the breadwinner. From a gender perspective, it would be expedient to develop pension schemes which incorporate the time spent by women on raising children in the total number of years worked, and through reform of the social security system, ensure participation in private pension schemes. Unfortunately, this aspect has not been discussed at government level.

The amount received in a pension is significantly lower than the subsistence level. All types of pensions are regarded as benefits (allowance of the state budget), and there is minimal difference between the social pension (for example, disability and survivors) and old-age pension. In addition,

5 National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2015b.

6 The European Initiative - Liberal Academy Tbilisi, 2012.

7 Bluashvili & Sukhanskaya, 2015.

8 FAO, 2015.

9 CARE & GeoWel, 2013.

10 National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2015a.

11 EU & FAO, 2012.

12 National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2015a.



it does not take into account a person's pension contribution across her / his working life or the duration, quality and type of the activities. New amendments to the Labour Code of Georgia in 2013 have slightly improved employed women's situation in relation to taking maternity leave in pregnancy, childbirth or child adoption. Furthermore, the universal healthcare programme includes more beneficiaries and covers a wider proportion of the population. At present, about 3 100 000 people are involved in the Universal Healthcare Programme and 530 000 have private or corporate health insurance policies. The state health insurance packages for maternal and child health are very important for rural women. The rural population is highly dependent on subsistence agriculture and public transfers from the State Budget. Many experts hold the view that the costs of this type of social protection are a heavy burden for the budget.<sup>13</sup> Despite different attitudes within the population, the Universal Healthcare Programme represents a fairly effective form of aid, both in urban and rural areas.

Since 2012, the government has embarked on extensive reforms to encourage the growth of the agricultural industry and raise the living standards of the rural population. A Rural and Agricultural Fund has been established to provide the necessary support for infrastructure development and modernization in the agricultural sector. 600 000 families have received direct agricultural assistance. The majority of the population of Georgia is confident that the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the EU will bring about positive effects in the agriculture and food sectors. According to the Rural Development Strategy 2015-2020, the government aims to create an environment that will increase competitiveness in the food sector, promote the stable growth of high quality agricultural production and ensure food safety and security.<sup>14</sup> The state programme "Produced in Georgia" facilitates small entrepreneurship initiatives in rural areas. In addition, "Host in Georgia" constitutes a second sub-programme for promoting the development of tourism in Georgia. These programmes offer unique opportunities for representatives of small business to make their own businesses more successful and viable. It is reasonable to assume that women will take an active part in these programmes, particularly if local authorities strongly support rural women through long term loans and access to new technology.

The currently approved law "Development of Mountainous Regions" aims to encourage people to live and work in the country's mountainous regions. Incentives include: 20 percent higher pensions and social benefits; and an additional salary for veterinarians, agricultural professionals, teachers and doctors working in the mountains. This could potentially motivate more women and men to work in these regions.<sup>15</sup> One of the most important challenges for increasing women's role in the agricultural value chain is the facilitation of a shift from the supply of production inputs to the retail of products. Within this, the promotion of domestic production is necessary via active marketing campaigns and developing market information systems.<sup>16</sup> The state plans to implement capacity building programmes for women to support this goal.

In relation to food safety, the state plans to fully align food safety and phyto sanitary regulations to the EU *acquis*. It intends to implement capacity building programmes for existing laboratories, as well as the creation of new laboratories. Women have good experience for gaining employment in laboratories, but many will need to update their knowledge and learn more about modern technologies.

With support from the government and donor agencies, hundreds of women's cooperatives were established in rural areas. Some progress has been made in terms of the economic empowerment of women in rural areas, but this has had little impact at structural or societal levels. It is important to support rural women's involvement in the export process to increase their access to finance and markets. Women's economic empowerment is, therefore, fundamental to increasing social capital and economic development in the country. The recommendations for the main stakeholders include:

- *Ensuring that policies and programmes designed to revitalize the rural economy, including its agricultural production, processing and marketing functions, take into account the role of women and women's groups;*
- *Increasing women's role in the agricultural value chain, to provide them with the ability to control chain management;*

<sup>13</sup> Transparency International Georgia, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Strategy for Agricultural Development in Georgia 2015-2020.

<sup>15</sup> The Law of Georgia on the Development of High Mountainous Regions (2015).

<sup>16</sup> CARE & GeoWel, 2013.

- *Increasing agro-tourism in rural localities and promoting them as new and alternative workplaces for women, which will have a socio-economic and cultural impact;*
- *Developing social infrastructure, including the improvement of pre-school facilities to the latest standards, the provision of financial incentives for personnel and additional arrangements to significantly improve women's employment opportunities;*
- *Enhancing women's capacity in marketing, the commercialization of knowledge and access to new technologies;*
- *Supporting gender advocates to influence policies and strategies for the economic empowerment of women in rural areas;*
- *Encouraging social dialogue between local authorities, business and civil society to increase transparency and accountability in gender budgeting.*

## References

**Bluashvili, A. & Sukhanskaya, N.** 2015. *Country Report: Georgia*, March 2015. The Fund Georgian Center for Agribusiness Development. (available at [http://www.agricistrade.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Agricistrade\\_Georgia.pdf](http://www.agricistrade.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Agricistrade_Georgia.pdf)).

**CARE & GeoWel.** 2013. *Gender analysis under "Local actors join for inclusive economic development and governance in the South Caucasus" (joint) project.* (available at [www.geowel.org/files/care\\_gender\\_final\\_2013.docx](http://www.geowel.org/files/care_gender_final_2013.docx)).

**The European Initiative - Liberal Academy Tbilisi (EI-LAT) & G-PAC Think Tank Program (USAID).** 2012. *The Economic Transformation of Georgia in its 20 Years of Independence.* Summary of the discussion paper. (available at <http://www.ei-lat.ge/images/doc/the%20economic%20transformation%20of%20georgia%20-%2020%20years%20of%20independence%20eng.pdf>).

**EU & FAO.** 2012. *Assessment of the Agriculture and Rural Development Sector in Eastern Partnership Countries: Georgia.* (available at [http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/georgia\\_assesment\\_final\\_en.pdf](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/georgia_assesment_final_en.pdf)).

**FAO.** 2015. *Report of In-Depth Country Assessment: Georgia.* Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics. (available at [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/rap/files/Project/Global\\_Strategy\\_Country\\_Pages/Georgia/IdCA\\_Report\\_Georgia.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/rap/files/Project/Global_Strategy_Country_Pages/Georgia/IdCA_Report_Georgia.pdf)).

**Jashi, C.** 2004. *Development of women's entrepreneurship: The case of Georgia.* In *Access to Financing and ICT for Women Entrepreneurs in the UNECE Region: Challenges and Good Practices.* Geneva-New York. (available at [http://www.tanzaniagateway.org/docs/access\\_to\\_financing\\_ict.pdf](http://www.tanzaniagateway.org/docs/access_to_financing_ict.pdf)).

**Khitashvili, T.** 2015. *Gender and Employment in South Caucasus and Western CIS.* Background Paper, UNDP. (available at <http://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/dam/rbec/docs/UNDP%20Gender%20and%20Employment%20in%20South%20Caucasus%20and%20Western%20CIS%202015.pdf>).

**The Law of Georgia** on the Development of High Mountainous Regions. 2015. (available at [www.agora.mfa.gr/agma/images/docs/rad96C44mountain\\_law.pdf](http://www.agora.mfa.gr/agma/images/docs/rad96C44mountain_law.pdf)).

**Ministry of Agriculture.** 2015. *Strategy for Agricultural Development in Georgia 2015-2020.* (available at [www.moa.gov.ge/Download/Files/9](http://www.moa.gov.ge/Download/Files/9)).

**National Statistics Office of Georgia.** 2015a. *Women and Men in Georgia.* Statistical Publication. Tbilisi. (available at [http://www.geostat.ge/cms/site\\_images/files/english/health/Women%20and%20Men\\_2015.pdf](http://www.geostat.ge/cms/site_images/files/english/health/Women%20and%20Men_2015.pdf)).

**National Statistics Office of Georgia.** 2015b. *Factcheck, March 2015.*

**The World Bank Group.** 2015. *Georgia Partnership Program Snapshot.* (available at <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Georgia-Snapshot.pdf>).

**Transparency International Georgia.** 2015. *Public opinion on the universal health care programme* (available at <http://www.transparency.ge/en/node/5616>).



**Meruert Makhmutova** has a PhD in Economics and is a director and co-founder of the Public Policy Research Center (PPRC) in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Since 2002, the PPRC has implemented numerous projects in economic analysis for ADB, UNESCAP, UNDP, World Bank, OECD, the European Commission Delegation to Kazakhstan and the Government of Kazakhstan. The 2015 Global Go to Think Tank Index Report ranked PPRC 27<sup>th</sup> among the top think tanks in the region. Between 2008 and 2012, Meruert was a member of the Council of Economic Advisers under the Government of Kazakhstan.<sup>1</sup> Since 2011, she has been a member of the Expert Council under the Security Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

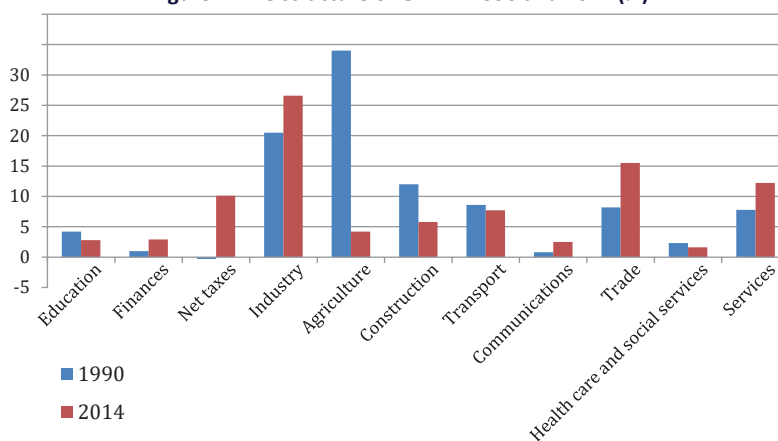
## RURAL DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND GENDER EQUALITY IN KAZAKHSTAN

Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world in terms of territory. In 2015, the total area of sown agricultural crops was 21 022.9 hectares, two-thirds of which were located in the Akmola, Kostanai and North Kazakhstan regions.

On 01 January 2016, the population was 17.67 million people, and the rural population represented 43 percent of the total population. In 2014, 3.771 million women lived in rural areas, out of a total population of 9 million women. On 01 January 2015, the structure of the rural female population was as follows: women below working age (under 15 years) represented 29.7 percent of the rural female population; women of working age (16-57 years) represented 56.7 percent; and women above working age represented 13.5 percent.<sup>2</sup>

During the years of independence, there have been significant changes in the structure of GDP (see Figure 1). In the 1990s, price liberalization, deregulation and privatization had a significant impact on agriculture and led to the deterioration of villages. The liquidation of collective and state farms was not accompanied by the creation of new businesses in their place. The privatization of state property in rural areas, without taking into account specific rural conditions, was the main cause of the reduction in agricultural production, crops, livestock and poultry. The privatization of agricultural lands after the adoption of the new Land Code in 2004, reinforced the 1990s trend of allocating land to a narrow circle of people. This has contributed to a radical restructuring of the economy. In 1990, the contribution of agriculture to GDP was 34 percent<sup>3</sup>; by 2014, this had fallen to 4.2 percent.

Figure 1. The structure of GDP in 1990 and 2014 (%)



Source: Calculated by the author and based on data from the Committee on Statistics.

<sup>1</sup> Information available at [http://www.akorda.kz/ru/executive\\_office/presidential\\_councils/soviet-bezopasnosti](http://www.akorda.kz/ru/executive_office/presidential_councils/soviet-bezopasnosti).

<sup>2</sup> Committee on Statistics, 2015a, p.14.

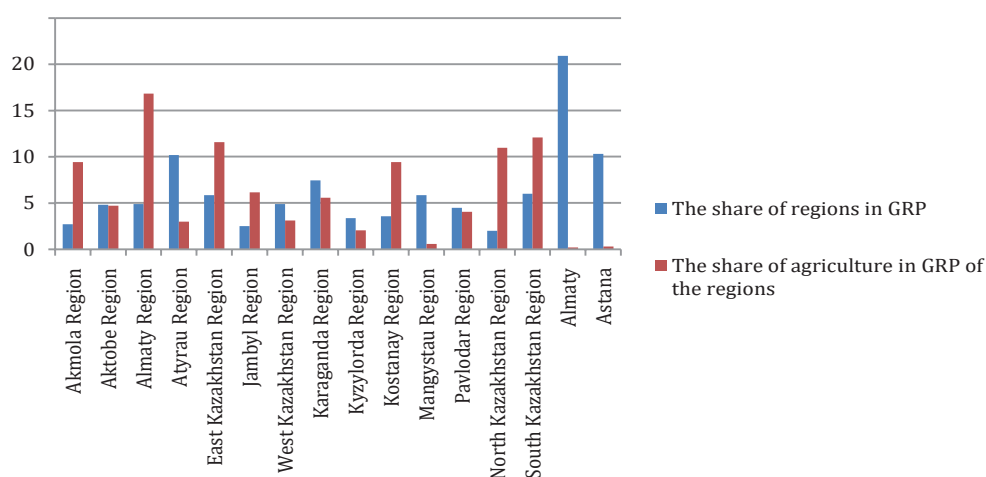
<sup>3</sup> Calculated by the author and based on data from the Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan (available at [http://stat.gov.kz/faces/wcnav\\_externalId/homeNationalAccountIntegrated?\\_afLoop=31231887629477175#%40%3F\\_afLoop%3D31231887629477175%26\\_adf.ctrl-state%3D4fp67vol7\\_127](http://stat.gov.kz/faces/wcnav_externalId/homeNationalAccountIntegrated?_afLoop=31231887629477175#%40%3F_afLoop%3D31231887629477175%26_adf.ctrl-state%3D4fp67vol7_127)).

High rates of economic growth in Kazakhstan in the 2000s were caused by high oil and mineral resource prices in global markets. The export of hydrocarbons amounted to almost 70 percent of the country's exports, which represented more than half of consolidated budget revenues and almost a quarter of GDP.<sup>4</sup> However, dependence on oil makes the economy vulnerable to fluctuations in oil prices on the international market, and results in volatile economic growth.

In 2005, the World Bank placed Kazakhstan within the group of middle-income countries. Per capita GDP increased from 1 200 USD in 2000 to 13 612 USD in 2013, although this decreased to 10 435 USD in 2015 as a result of devaluation. Inequality in income distribution, measured by the GINI Index, declined from 0.36 in 2001 to 0.28 in 2014.

Because of its large territory, Kazakhstan is characterized by the uneven development of its regions. This is related to the structure of local economies and the contribution of particular sectors to Gross Regional Product (GRP, Figure 2). The largest contributor to the GRP of the regions is Almaty with a share of more than 20 percent. When combined, Atyrau region and Astana contribute little more than 20 percent. The regions that specialize in agriculture contribute less than five percent to GRP, and similarly have lower budget revenues.

**Figure 2. The share of regions in GRP and the share of agriculture in GRP of the region in 2014**



Source: Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The areas with the highest levels of poverty are: South Kazakhstan Region (6.1 percent), North Kazakhstan Region (4.2 percent) and Kyzylorda Region (3.2 percent). The latter is an oil-producing region. The majority of people with low incomes live in rural areas and in small towns. Since 2005, when Kazakhstan was recognized as a middle-income country, poverty has not been prioritized in public policy, and no specific programmes have been adopted for poverty alleviation. In 2015, about three percent of the population had incomes below the subsistence minimum (compared with 46.7 percent in 2001). The main causes of poverty are the large size of households (families with children), the low educational level of the head of the household and limited employment opportunities for household members.

Imbalances in the levels of regional economic development have led to increased internal migration and the resettlement of the economically active population, from disadvantaged regions to regions with better economic profiles. Each region has disparities in income and development opportunities between urban and rural areas. Moreover, secondary school graduates have very little chance of finding a job in their home village. A lack of work and poor social infrastructure in rural areas contribute to the exodus to cities, especially by young people.<sup>5</sup>

Although the 2009 census shows a small statistical increase in the rural population size (three percent in twenty years), this does not reflect the real population decline that is taking place due to intensive migration from villages to towns. On the one hand, this can be explained by the fact that urban settlements have been re-categorized as rural settlements in official statistics. On the other hand, the

<sup>4</sup> UHY SAPA Consulting, 2014.  
<sup>5</sup> Makhmutova, 2013.

difficulty of registration in the cities contributes to the preservation of rural population numbers.<sup>6</sup> The analysis of statistical data shows that the rural population will age due to the out-migration of youth.

The Republic of Kazakhstan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), as well as a number of International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions relating to the equal treatment of, and equal opportunities for, working women and men and workers with family responsibilities, and the Maternity Protection Convention. In 2005, the government approved the "Strategy for gender equality in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2006-2016", aimed at creating conditions for the implementation of equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men and their equal participation in all spheres of society.

The Gender Inequality Index (GII), calculated using UNDP methodology, has decreased from 0.459 in 2008 to 0.373 in 2014<sup>7</sup>, due to a reduction in maternal mortality and an increase in the birth rate.

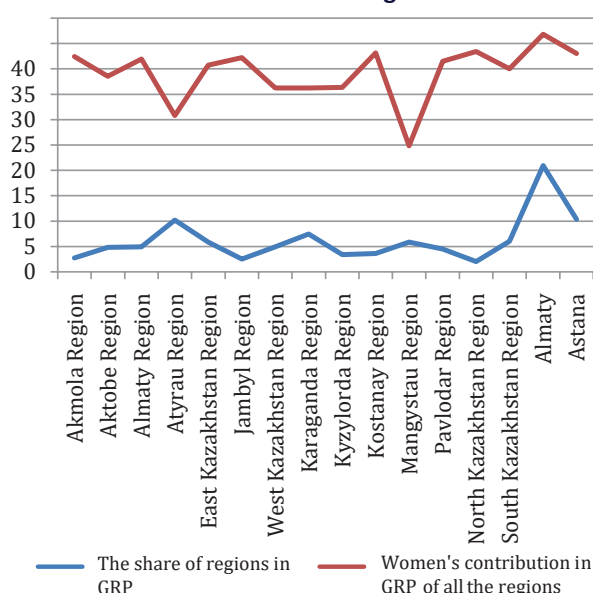
Economic stabilization and annual growth throughout the 2000s has led to a growth of demand in the labour market and to improved employment levels. In 2014, there were 9 million economically active people, of whom 4.4 million were women.<sup>8</sup> The level of economic activity is approximately 71 percent, but this rate is lower for women (65.4 percent).<sup>9</sup> However, the picture becomes less optimistic if one takes into account the numbers of self-employed people.<sup>10</sup> In 2014, there were 2.4 million self-employed people (27 percent of all employed people), including 1.3 million men and 1.1 million women. There is a lower level of rural unemployment because the majority of rural residents, or 1.6 million people, are considered to be self-employed. Fifty five percent of self-employed women live in Almaty, Zhambyl and the East and South Kazakhstan, where the share of the rural population is larger in comparison with other regions.

The rate of unemployment was not recorded until 1994. The unemployment rate increased from zero in the period 1991 to 1993 to 13.5 percent by 1999. It then decreased to 5.1 percent in 2015. However, women are less in demand than men in the labour market. According to data from 2015, women represented 55 percent of unemployed persons. The unemployment rate was five percent in 2014, but female unemployment was higher at 5.8 percent; in the age group 30-34 years, the unemployment rate reached 8.4 percent; in the age group 25-29 years it was 6.6 percent; and in the age group 55-59 years it was 6.5 percent.

Women's wages are almost a third less than those of men (67 percent), because women work in traditionally female sectors such as health care, education and the service sector (70.1 percent). In industry, 17.9 percent of all employed people are women, and in agriculture 12.0 percent are women. In 2014 in the oil-producing regions of Atyrau and Mangystau, women's wages were only 48.6 and 43.8 percent (respectively) of men's wages, because it is mostly men that are employed in the oil sector in jobs associated with heavy physical work. Consequently, women in Atyrau and Mangystau make the lowest contribution to GRP out of the regions (see Figure 3).

There are many government programmes that support village development, including, the "Strategy of Territorial Development of Kazakhstan till 2015" and the "State Programme of Development of Rural Territories of Republic Kazakhstan for 2004-2010". However, according to the Accounts Committee, the implementation of these programmes is characterized by low efficiency.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 3. The share of regions in GRP and women's contribution to the GRP of regions in 2014**



Source: Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Data from the Committee on Statistics.

<sup>8</sup> Committee on Statistics, 2015b.

<sup>9</sup> Committee on Statistics, 2015a.

<sup>10</sup> Self-employment is an activity in which the size of remuneration depends on income received from the production and sales of goods and services (where personal consumption is classified as part of the income).

<sup>11</sup> Extract from Resolution No. 19-P dated 29 April 2011, "On the results of monitoring the effectiveness of implementation of the State Programme of Rural Territories Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2004-2010"; the Bulletin of the Accounts Committee for Control over Execution of the Republican Budget. No. 28. 2011.



Given the shortage of specialists, several programmes have been implemented to help young people return to the villages after graduation from high school. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture developed the project "With diploma – to the village". Between 2012 and 2014, the national budget provided 21.6 billion KZT for this project, with the aim of attracting more than 16 000 young specialists.<sup>12</sup> An Action Plan of Nationwide Initiative, "Auylyzhastary", offered support for rural young people between 2009 and 2011.<sup>13</sup> Since 2010, the "Rural Mortgage" programme has provided loans at an interest rate of 0.01 percent to 4 747 young people to enable them to buy houses, and the total value of the loans has exceeded 6 billion KZT.<sup>14</sup>

Among 12 993 agricultural producers registered in the country, 12.2 percent are headed by women. Out of 7 991 acting agricultural producers, 11.9 percent are headed by women. Out of 185 533 acting farms, 18.6 percent are headed by women.<sup>15</sup>

There are 1.6 million people employed in agricultural production: 736 300 are women and 35 percent of this group are located in Almaty and in the South Kazakhstan region.<sup>16</sup>

Targeted social assistance (TSA) is paid to individuals and families with an average monthly income per family member that is below the poverty line. The provision of TSA in rural areas takes into account availability of private plots and ownership of real estate, livestock and poultry as potential revenue, which therefore limits rural dwellers' access to social protection.<sup>17</sup> In 2014, the average amount of TSA was 1 970.7 KZT per month (a minimum of 1 109 KZT in Pavlodar region and a maximum of 3 008 KZT in Almaty) and there were 56 108 recipients.

In 2014, there were 1.9 million pensioners. The average pension was 36 068 KZT (201 USD), with a minimum pension of 20 782 KZT, plus a basic state pension of 9 983 KZT, which is received by all pensioners.<sup>18</sup> The total number of women pensioners is 2.5 times higher than the total number of men pensioners, but there are significantly less women among the recipients of average size pensions: 1 366 female pensioners receive an average pension of 33 648 KZT, and 552 000 male pensioners receive 42 057 KZT.<sup>19</sup>

The increase in the retirement age for women, due to be implemented from 01 January 2018, has not been supported by the appropriate calculations. In the villages there is virtually no work for women or men, and a pension is sometimes the only monetary source of income for the household. Women work in low-paid sectors – education and health care – and an additional five years of work will not increase their pension savings.<sup>20</sup> Women approaching retirement age have to fight to hold onto their jobs until they reach 63 years of age, which simultaneously prevents young people from entering the labour market. In addition, women over 45 years are not the preferred candidates for jobs. As noted earlier, female unemployment is on the rise in the age group over 45. Recognizing the failure of its actions, the government adopted a Comprehensive Plan to promote the employment of people aged 50 years and older (50 + initiative).<sup>21</sup> However, a lack of specific indicators to monitor the implementation of this plan raises the possibility that the initiative is little more than a good intention.

In 2015, the economy of Kazakhstan faced two major problems: falling oil prices (the main export commodity in the international market), and a decreased trading turnover due to the country's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union.

Reducing dependence on oil presents a good opportunity for the development of agriculture. The most effective way of preventing another economic downturn is to diversify the economy in order to support small and medium-sized businesses. However, the development of entrepreneurship is currently

12 Makhmutova, 2013.

13 Approved by the Decree of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, No. 76-P dated 25 May 2009.

14 Over 4 700 young specialists in the Republic of Kazakhstan have received loans at a 0.01 percent interest rate. Interview with MedetTokpai, Director of Credit Department of JSC Fund for Agricultural Sector Financial Support. (available at <http://www.kursiv.kz/novosti/v-kazakhstane/1195222196-svyshe-4-tys-700-molodyx-specialistov-v-rk-poluchili-kredit-pod-001.html>).

15 According to the Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

16 Information on gender equality in the economy is available at [http://stat.gov.kz/faces/wcnav\\_externalId/homeGenderInd3?\\_afz-Loop=31245622945285490#%40%3F\\_afzLoop%3D31245622945285490%26\\_adf.ctrl-state%3Dqh7smp6ss\\_67](http://stat.gov.kz/faces/wcnav_externalId/homeGenderInd3?_afz-Loop=31245622945285490#%40%3F_afzLoop%3D31245622945285490%26_adf.ctrl-state%3Dqh7smp6ss_67).

17 The poverty line is set quarterly in KZT, in the regions and cities of Astana and Almaty.

18 The weighted average exchange rate in 2014 was 179.19 KZT per 1 US dollar (available at [www.nationalbank.kz](http://www.nationalbank.kz)).

19 Information on gender equality in the economy is available at [http://stat.gov.kz/faces/wcnav\\_externalId/homeGenderInd3?\\_afz-Loop=31245622945285490#%40%3F\\_afzLoop%3D31245622945285490%26\\_adf.ctrl-state%3Dqh7smp6ss\\_67](http://stat.gov.kz/faces/wcnav_externalId/homeGenderInd3?_afz-Loop=31245622945285490#%40%3F_afzLoop%3D31245622945285490%26_adf.ctrl-state%3Dqh7smp6ss_67).

20 In 1998, Kazakhstan introduced an accumulative pension system.

21 The decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, dated 14 May 2013, No. 478.

limited by a lack of starting and working capital. Therefore, supporting women's entrepreneurship in small and medium-sized businesses in rural areas will contribute to the sustainability of regional economies.

Currently, food security is not guaranteed and approximately 60 percent of food is imported. One of the main problems in rural areas is the marketing of agricultural products. The government and local authorities need to create advantageous conditions for the development of business in relation to the purchase and processing of agricultural products.

The fertility rate is higher in rural areas than it is in urban areas. The average age of rural women is 31.7 years, and the average age of rural men is 29.5 years.<sup>22</sup> However, over time the ageing of the rural population will become a problem, particularly because many young people leave the villages when they reach 15 years of age and complete 9th grade of secondary school. Although the idea of young specialists returning to the village after graduating from higher education institutes is an appealing one, without further development of village infrastructure, villages will be unable to retain their workforces over a long period of time. The development of infrastructure requires the provision of: access to water, uninterrupted power supply, gas, roads, Internet, sports facilities and leisure activities. Without these, villages will not be able to maintain their young populations. Moreover, elderly village residents require vital access to social services and health care. Even if it is possible to establish modern infrastructure in rural areas through the state budget, ongoing maintenance is then required. Therefore, the radical improvement of rural women's and men's lives is improbable without the creation of jobs, the development of agricultural production and processing industries in the villages, and the development of appropriate infrastructure.

## References

**The Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, dated 14 May 2013, No. 478.** (available at <http://egov.kz/cms/en/law/list/P1300000478>).

**The Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan Committee on Statistics.** 2015a. *Women and Men in Kazakhstan in 2010 - 2014*.

**The Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan Committee on Statistics.** 2015b. *Economic activity of the population of Kazakhstan in 2010-2014*. Statistical Compendium.

**The Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan Committee on Statistics.** *Gendernoye razvitiye v ekonomike. [Gender equality in the economy.]* (available at [http://stat.gov.kz/faces/wcnav\\_externalId/homeGenderInd3?\\_afLoop=31245622945285490#%40%3FafLoop%3D31245622945285490%26\\_adf.ctrl-state%3Dgh7smp6ss\\_67](http://stat.gov.kz/faces/wcnav_externalId/homeGenderInd3?_afLoop=31245622945285490#%40%3FafLoop%3D31245622945285490%26_adf.ctrl-state%3Dgh7smp6ss_67)).

**Makhmutova, M.** 2013. *Internal migration of youth in Kazakhstan*. Almaty.

**Tokpai, M.** Director of Credit Department of JSC Fund for Agricultural Sector Financial Support. Interview dated 14 March 2012. (available at <http://www.kursiv.kz/novosti/v-kazakhstane/1195222196-svyshe-4-tys-700-molodyx-specialistov-v-rk-poluchili-kredity-pod-001.html>).

**UHY SAPA Consulting.** 2014. *Ninth National Report "On implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2013"*.

<sup>22</sup> Committee on Statistics, 2015a.







**Gulnara Kurmanova** has a PhD in Biological Sciences and is a researcher with over thirty years of experience. She specializes in the qualitative research of different social groups. Since 1996, Gulnara has been an active participant in the gender movement, and is a founder of a non-governmental organization for the development of the most vulnerable groups of women. She is an international expert who has undertaken more than twenty field studies in the countries of Central Asia, Russia and Lithuania for UNDP, UNAIDS and USAID. She is also an ex-member of the Programme Coordination Board of UNAIDS and the GFATM<sup>1</sup> Board. Gulnara has authored several books devoted to the development of civil society, and the guide for teachers, "Healthy Lifestyle", which has been translated into the Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Uzbek languages. Since 2013, she has been actively engaged in the development of rural areas.<sup>2</sup>

## GENDER AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES IN KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan is a country in the heart of Central Asia; more than 90 percent of the country is mountainous terrain. There are 0.25 ha of arable land per person, of which 0.18 ha require irrigation.<sup>3</sup> The total area of arable land, including irrigated land, is decreasing, despite measures taken by the government. Pasture land accounts for about 10 million hectares and pastures are managed by local pasture committees.<sup>4</sup>

The permanent population of the Kyrgyz Republic in 2016 was six million people. Two-thirds (66 percent) of the permanent population lives in rural areas. Thirty-three percent of the total population are children and adolescents. Women are better represented in the older age population, because their life expectancy is higher than men's.<sup>5</sup>

In 2015, GDP per capita in Kyrgyzstan was 2 400 United States dollars (USD).<sup>6</sup> The average salary is about 200 USD per month. In 2015, the minimum subsistence level amounted to 5 212.95 KGS (approximately 70 USD).<sup>7</sup> In 2014, 37 percent of the population lived below the poverty line; approximately 70 percent of this group resided in rural areas.<sup>8</sup>

Kyrgyzstan has a Gender Inequality Index (GII) value of 0.353. This means that the country has experienced a loss of potential human development equivalent to 35 percent, owing to disparities between female and male achievements, empowerment and economic status. However, Kyrgyzstan has more positive outcomes in particular dimensions (notably women's political participation and education levels), compared with the average for the European and Central Asian regions combined.

Advanced gender legislation in the Kyrgyz Republic is based on the constitutional provision of equality of rights and opportunities for women and men and non-discrimination on the grounds of sex. It involves the rule of international law in national legislation and the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, "On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women" (2008).<sup>9</sup> At the legislative level, women have the same rights as men in relation to land ownership and ownership of other agricultural resources.

<sup>1</sup> The Global Fund to accelerate the end of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

<sup>2</sup> Acknowledgements: The author expresses her gratitude to Mrs Alma Usbekova, Communication officer, Central Asian Hub of Mountain Partnership, for her assistance in the identification of information sources and support in communication with experts.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Agriculture of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2012, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Kerven et al., 2011, p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2015a, pp. 6–7.

<sup>6</sup> Data available at Wikipedia, no date.

<sup>7</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2016.

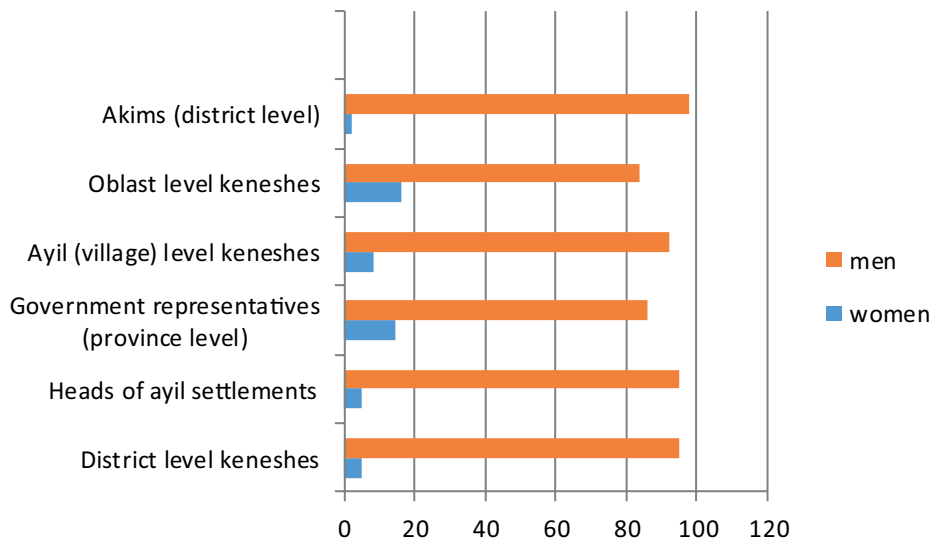
<sup>8</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2015c, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, "On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women", of 04 August 2008, No. 184, Bishkek.

*De facto*, however, the distribution of power by gender is quite asymmetrical. For example, women are less well represented as members of local Councils (see Figure 1). In general, it can also be argued that the traditional role of women is more pronounced in rural areas than it is in the city.

Women in rural communities also have little involvement in the development and implementation of programmes that affect them, and are not always able to openly voice their needs in order to work cohesively and strategically. Greater levels of support are needed in these areas.

**Figure 1. Proportion of women in local government offices (2011, 2012)<sup>10</sup>**



Women and men in Kyrgyzstan have equal rights to work. The proportion of women within the economically active population is high, but the gap between male and female participation is significant (56 percent of women compared with 79.5 percent of men).<sup>11</sup> In 2014, the share of men employed in agriculture was larger than the share of women (55.5 percent and 45.5 percent respectively)<sup>12</sup>, but the share of employed women has been increasing.<sup>13</sup> External labour migration makes a substantial contribution to the country's economy, yet simultaneously, it can result in a number of adverse social consequences. However, there is no robust quantitative data, disaggregated by sex, for rural areas.

At the same time, rural women often lack the opportunity to engage in productive paid work because their reproductive and domestic responsibilities restrict access to the necessary education and limit their time. On average, women spend 4.2 hours per day on household chores, which accounts for 17.4 percent of their time, compared with 5.7 percent of men's time.<sup>14</sup>

Access to kindergartens frees up time for mothers and reduces the amount of time that they spend on unpaid work. Despite the successes achieved in recent years in Kyrgyzstan in the promotion of pre-school education, only 29 percent of children have access to kindergartens<sup>15</sup>; in rural areas the coverage is disproportionately smaller and is less than five percent (based on data available for 2010).<sup>16</sup> These factors mean that rural women are extremely dependent on their husbands who are employed in paid labour.

The privatization of land has provided the rural population with an opportunity to generate income. This is essential to poverty reduction. However, the share of women owning land, vehicles and agricultural machinery, is substantially lower than the share of men. Men and women have different levels of access to economic resources; and women have fewer opportunities to do business and

<sup>10</sup> Figure 1 has been created by the author using data from FAO, 2016, pp. 54–55.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.10.

<sup>12</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2015a, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014, p.12.

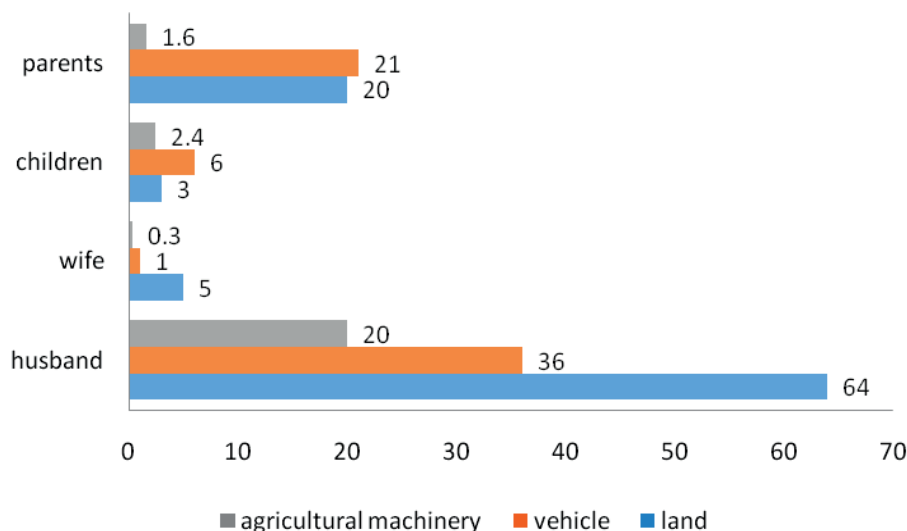
<sup>14</sup> FAO, 2016, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> Benhard, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Tursunov, 2012.

to manage their family's budget. According to research conducted at the local level, 64 percent of men and only five percent of women in Kyrgyzstan own land (see Figure 2).<sup>17</sup> In relation to other important agricultural inputs, vehicles are owned by 36 percent of men and one percent of women; and agricultural machinery is owned by 20 percent of men and 1.6 percent of women.<sup>18</sup> In 2015, women headed less than one-fifth (19.4 percent) of all peasant farms in the country.<sup>19</sup>

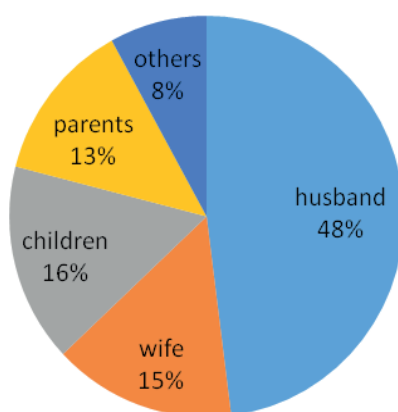
**Figure 2. Agricultural inputs and land ownership in rural households (%)<sup>20</sup>**



In agriculture, unlike other sectors of Kyrgyzstan's economy, women's wages are almost equal to those of men, and in some years even exceeded them. For example, in 2014, the average monthly nominal wage of women was 6 193 KGS (approximately 90 USD), while the average wage of men was 6 074 KGS.<sup>21</sup> This may be due to overall low wage levels, but further analysis of the reasons for this phenomenon is needed.

Because of unequal employment in paid activities, husbands make a larger contribution to the family budget than wives (see Figure 3).<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, men more frequently make the decisions on distribution of income (see Figure 4).<sup>23</sup>

**Figure 3. Contribution to the family budget by family members in rural households (%)<sup>24</sup>**



<sup>17</sup> These data reflect the results of local studies, and may not be representative of the whole country.

<sup>18</sup> GEF & UNDP, 2011, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> 74 531 peasant farms were headed by women, and 309 787 by men (National Statistical Committee, 2015d, p. 66).

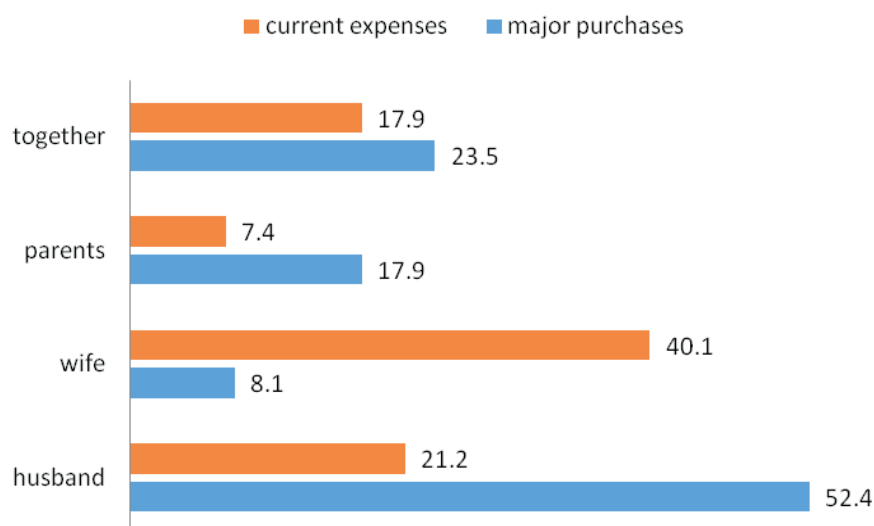
<sup>20</sup> GEF & UNDP, 2011, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> FAO, 2016, p. 59.

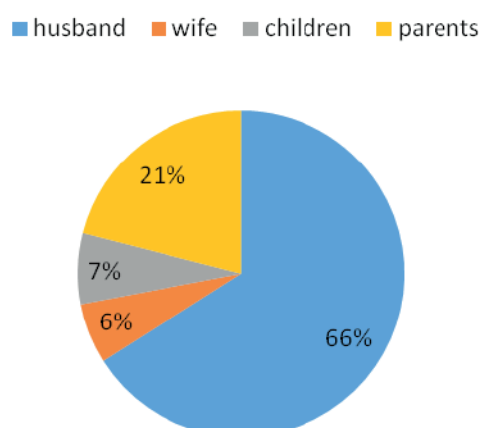
<sup>22</sup> GEF & UNDP, 2011, p.18.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.19.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

**Figure 4. Decisions on the distribution of income in rural households (%)<sup>25</sup>**

In the Kyrgyz Republic, the right to housing is a constitutional right, equally applicable to women and men, and in a post-Soviet context, it is traditionally perceived as a basic social good. In practice, in rural areas, 66 percent of family houses are owned by men and only six percent by wives (see Figure 5).<sup>26</sup> This places women in a particularly vulnerable position.

**Figure 5. Rural housing ownership (%)<sup>27</sup>**

The main social resources in Kyrgyzstan are heating, electricity, water, sanitary infrastructure and information. Access to these resources is considered so important that it formed one of the main topics in a CEDAW Alternative report (2014).<sup>28</sup> Women are affected more acutely by the lack of access to water than men, due to their physiological characteristics, and because of the need to carry out household chores, for example, cooking, cleaning, laundry and bathing children. The majority of rural households in Kyrgyzstan (81.8 percent) have access to improved drinking water sources.<sup>29</sup> In general, however, access to these resources remains limited, which leads to an additional increase in the time that women spend on unpaid domestic labour, and in the transmission of diseases, primarily intestinal. Inadequate access to information is primarily associated with the inaccessibility of the Internet in rural areas. The impact of this on the status of women requires further study.

Although Kyrgyzstan is a poor country and can only provide its citizens with minimal social support, the structure of the social protection system has been preserved from the Soviet era and is still functional. An independent study shows that 45.3 percent of respondents in rural areas are covered by social protection, primarily in the form of pensions and children's benefits.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.15.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Council of NGOs, 2014, pp. 39–41.

<sup>29</sup> FAO, 2016, p.22.

<sup>30</sup> GEF & UNDP, 2011, p.33.

Maternity payments have a clear focus on the alleviation of gender differences. The average size of benefits in relation to maternity leave for working women is 7 660 KGS (about 100 USD) for women engaged in entrepreneurial activities; for members of peasant farms and women having the official status of unemployed it is 3 500 KGS (about 50 USD).<sup>31</sup>

Women in Kyrgyzstan retire at 55 years of age, which is five years earlier than men. The proportion of pensioners in the total population of Kyrgyzstan for the last five years is around 11 percent. The share of women receiving a pension is 65 percent, and the share of men is 35 percent. However, the average size of calculated pension is higher for men than for women (4 553 and 4 222 KGS, respectively).<sup>32</sup> The gender dimension of pension provision in rural areas remains unclear, but most probably reflects the situation in the country as a whole.

### Nutrition and food security

The country has fulfilled and even exceeded its obligations to reduce poverty in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, and, although the number of undernourished is declining at a slower pace<sup>33</sup>, an overall improvement is evident. At the same time, a number of indicators on poor nutrition and the prevalence of diseases and conditions associated with poor nutrition, reveal clear gender differences. For example, women are more likely to be overweight (34.6 percent of women and 30.2 percent of men) and obese (11.1 percent of women and 8 percent of men).<sup>34</sup> Rural women are also more likely to be overweight than urban women (38 and 32 percent, respectively).<sup>35</sup>

Some field observations demonstrate the prevalent rural practice of sending goods produced within the household (particularly milk) to market. This means that the necessary products are often absent at the family table.<sup>36</sup> In the available data, the economy at household level and cultural patterns of nutrition are only superficially described and not sufficiently explored. Moreover, a paucity of statistics incorporating the respective indicators along the axes of "gender" and "city-village", means that an overall picture of the nutritional status of women in rural areas is unavailable. FAO can play a critical role in addressing this information gap.

In conclusion, the following recommendations can be provided:

- *Kyrgyzstan needs more robust data reflecting the comparative advantages and gaps in promoting good living conditions and the development of women and men. Governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, with the support of international organizations, could engage more systematically in the development of a national system of gender indicators for rural areas, harmonized with existing national and international systems, such as the Sustainable Development Goals. These need to be adopted and utilized by the National Statistical Committee.*
- *Rural women and men in Kyrgyzstan should not merely be the subjects of research and interventions: they should participate in all decision-making processes that affect them. Communities, local authorities, civil society and the government could significantly increase the participation of women and men in determining their own future at all levels, from family and local self-government to the highest levels of governance.*
- *Studies on nutrition and food security in rural areas do not yet provide a clear picture of the situation, and therefore do not help us to understand what actions are needed and which stakeholders are required to improve it. FAO could take the lead in supporting this research and in encouraging local researchers to contribute to an improved understanding of the needs of women and men in rural areas.*
- *Recent trends in, for example, external migration, the changes in external and domestic markets and the new structure of the field of information – and their impact on women and men in Kyrgyzstan – are observable, but poorly understood. The research community, with the support of international organizations, could carefully study these trends, in order to assess their impact on gender differences in rural areas. Knowledge about basic facts, estimates and forecasts in relation to gender differences in rural areas in Kyrgyzstan is restricted to a small network of experts from government and non-governmental organizations. It would benefit the whole society if the mass media (in particular, the mass media available in rural areas) expands its coverage of gender issues, using real-life examples and language that is comprehensible to members of the rural population.*

31 Programme of development of social protection of population in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2015–2017, p.15.

32 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2015d, p. 83.

33 FAO, 2016, p.22.

34 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2015d, p. 80; see also, National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & MEASURE DHS, 2013, pp. 206–207.

35 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health & MEASURE DHS, 2013, pp. 206–207.

36 World Food Program, 2012, p. 6.

## References

- Benhard, A.** *Kyrgyzstan lacks 1.5 thousand kindergartens*. 18 May 2016. Bishkek – IA“24kg” (available at [http://24.kg/obschestvo/32149\\_v\\_kyrgyzstane\\_ne\\_hvataet\\_15\\_tyisyachi\\_detskih\\_sadov](http://24.kg/obschestvo/32149_v_kyrgyzstane_ne_hvataet_15_tyisyachi_detskih_sadov)).
- Council of NGOs.** 2014. *Alternative report to the fourth periodic report of the Kyrgyz Republic to the CEDAW Committee*. Bishkek. (available at [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/KGZ/INT\\_CEDAW\\_NGO\\_KGZ\\_19064\\_E.pdf](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/KGZ/INT_CEDAW_NGO_KGZ_19064_E.pdf)).
- FAO.** 2016. *National gender profile of agriculture and rural households*. Country Gender Assessment Series. Budapest.
- Global Environment Facility (GEF) & UNDP.** 2011. *Study of potential social and gender impacts of small and micro HPP on local communities of the Kyrgyz Republic*. Bishkek.
- Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women”** of 4 August 2008, No. 184, Bishkek. (available at <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/.../womenrights/kyrgyzstan.equalrig>).
- Kerven, C., Steimann, B., Ashley, L., Dear, C. & Rahim, I.** 2011. *Pastoralism and farming in Central Asia's mountains: A research review*. Background paper No. 1, September 2011. Bishkek, UCA, Mountain Societies Research Institute. (available at [http://www.ucentralasia.org/Content/Downloads/pastoralism\\_and\\_farming\\_in\\_central\\_asia\\_mountains.pdf](http://www.ucentralasia.org/Content/Downloads/pastoralism_and_farming_in_central_asia_mountains.pdf)).
- Ministry of Agriculture of the Kyrgyz Republic.** 2012. *The Strategy of Agricultural Development of the Kyrgyz Republic until 2020*.
- Ministry of Labour and Social Development of the Kyrgyz Republic.** 2015. *Programme of development of social protection of population in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2015–2017*. Approved by Decree of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on 27 February 2015, No. 85. (available at <https://mlsp.gov.kg/sites/default/files/1.docx>).
- National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Health, & MEASURE DHS.** 2013. *Kyrgyz Republic Demographic and Health Survey 2012*. Bishkek and Calverton, Maryland, NSC, MOH & ICF International. (available at <http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR283/FR283.pdf>).
- National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic.** 2014. *On the situation of rural women in the Kyrgyz Republic*. (available at <http://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/66bd4835-30f0-4dcc-b321-694e9b12e336.pdf>). [accessed 10 March 2016].
- National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic.** 2015a. *Social trends in the Kyrgyz Republic 2010–2014*, Vol. 11. Bishkek. (available at <http://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/66bd4835-30f0-4dcc-b321-694e9b12e336.pdf>).
- National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic.** 2015b. *Demographic Yearbook of the Kyrgyz Republic 2010–2014*. (available at <http://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/99205c1e-cb4d-499e-b03c-fe7648456fa1.pdf>).
- National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic.** 2015c. *The poverty level in the Kyrgyz Republic in 2014*. (available at <http://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/8f14d08e-7469-4ebe-bbf1-bc7c059f6f8a.pdf>).
- National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic.** 2015d. *Women and men in the Kyrgyz Republic, 2010–2014*. (available at <http://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/534f0c98-fb76-4922-b8c1-6b8b8f44ba7.pdf>).
- National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic.** 2016. *The subsistence minimum for main socio-demographic groups of population for 2015*. Express information as of 14 January 2016. (available at <http://www.stat.kg/media/files/0f7c8629-fb12-44b4-b78f-ae9f9205c0ec.pdf>). [accessed 14 March 2016].
- Tursunov, H.** *Kyrgyzstan: The vanishing kindergartens*. 05 November 2012. *Transitions online (TOL)*. (available at <http://www.tol.org/client/article/23466-kyrgyzstan-preschools-children-russian.html>).
- Wikipedia.** no date. *The Economy of the Kyrgyz Republic*. (available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy\\_of\\_Kyrgyzstan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Kyrgyzstan)). [accessed 09 March 2015].
- World Food Program.** 2012. *Food Security Assessment: Kyrgyz Republic*. (available at [https://www.wfp.org/sites/default/files/WFP%20Kyrgyzstan%20EFSA%20September%202012%20\(FINAL\).pdf](https://www.wfp.org/sites/default/files/WFP%20Kyrgyzstan%20EFSA%20September%202012%20(FINAL).pdf)).





**Maria Vremis** is an analyst and expert on social statistics at the Centre of Sociological Research and Marketing CBS-AXA S.R.L. She specializes in research in the social sphere including: the analysis of quality of life, social exclusion, migration, gender equality and the rural population. Maria is the author of a number of analytical works, including the National Human Development Report; Extended Migration Profile; Assessment of the Impact of Social Policy on Poverty; and Analysis of the Effectiveness of State Benefits and Social Assistance for Targeted Groups. Since 2000, Maria has worked with various UN agencies and has been involved in projects for UNDP, UNICEF, IOM, ILO and the World Bank.

## BASIC GENDER CHARACTERISTICS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION OF THE RURAL POPULATION IN MOLDOVA

In 2015, the population of the Republic of Moldova was 3 555 000 people; 51.9 percent of the population were women and 48.1 percent were men. The share of the rural population accounted for 57.6 percent of the total population. Women represented 51.1 percent of the rural population, and rural men 48.9 percent.<sup>1</sup>

Men are better represented in the age group 0–15 years and in the working-age population (52 percent of men, compared with 48 percent of women).<sup>2</sup> In the groups above working-age, there are twice as many women as there are men (69.0 percent). Similar trends are observable in rural areas where the proportions of women and men are 68.6 percent and 31.4 percent respectively.

Women in Moldova live 7.9 years longer than men, and the average life expectancy at birth is 75.4 years for women and 67.5 for men. This gap can be explained by the high level of premature mortality among men, especially of working-age men. The mortality rate depends on place of residence and this underpins some of the differences found in the average life expectancies of the rural and urban populations. On average, the urban population lives longer than the rural population; for women the gap is 3.5 years and for men it is 4.5 years.<sup>3</sup>

The birth rate in Moldova is 10.9, and the mortality rate is 11.1; these figures differ significantly depending on place of residence. In urban areas, these rates are equal to 9.3 and 8.7, and in rural areas, they are equal to 12.0 and 12.9. Therefore, there is a negative natural increase in rural areas, in spite of a higher birth rate.<sup>4</sup>

A progressive ageing process is taking place within the country. In the early 1990s, the ageing index exceeded the critical value of 13.0 percent, and in recent years it reached a very large value (for example, 16.2 percent in 2014). In rural areas, the ageing index is 16.4 percent and among women it is 19.4 percent.<sup>5</sup>

11.4 percent of the population in Moldova live below the official poverty line and the rural poverty rate is much higher than the urban rate (16.4 percent in rural areas and 5.0 percent in urban areas). The poverty rate among residents of small cities is 8.4 percent, and in large cities (Chisinau and Balti) it is 2.2 percent. However, the level of poverty in Moldova is steadily decreasing; in particular, migrant remittances from abroad, which account for about one-third of total income per rural household member, have had a major impact on poverty reduction.<sup>6</sup>

1 National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (a).

2 Working age for women is defined as 16 to 56 years and for men, 16 to 61 years.

3 National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (b).

4 National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (c).

5 National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (d).

6 According to the official methodology for measuring poverty in Moldova, a person is considered poor if the sum of monthly consumption expenditure is below the absolute poverty threshold. In 2014, this amounted to 1 257.0 MDL (89.5 USD) at the average exchange rate of the National Bank of Moldova.

It is worth noting that there is a high level of migration in the country. According to the Labour Force Survey, in 2014, approximately 340 000 people worked abroad; of these, 64 percent were men and 36 percent were women.<sup>7</sup> Rural migrants represent 72 percent of the total number of migrants. Migrant workers are often young: 56.6 percent are in the age group below 34 years, and in villages this percentage is even higher at 60.4 percent. Migration is also shaped by level of education: 11 percent of migrants have higher education, and among women, this percentage is higher (14.5 percent).

There is also internal rural to urban migration in Moldova. While the total population has been declining in recent years, the urban population has been steadily growing, especially in the capital. The population of Chisinau represents approximately one-fifth of the total population and 45 percent of the urban population. Internal migration to Chisinau offers more opportunities than in other settlements, as well as a relatively higher quality of life.

It is well established that after graduating from high school, a significant proportion of the young people who go to school in the city do not return to rural areas. In the last five years, there has been a higher concentration of young people in cities, especially in the age group 25–29 years.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, over the past five years the rural population has decreased by 32 376 people, and the urban population has grown by 26 315 people, which demonstrates a stable trend of demographic redistribution between rural and urban areas. More than 90 percent of internal migrants are persons of working age (20–49 years), of whom 58 percent are women and 42 percent are men. About two-thirds of people who changed their place of residence in 2014 were residents from rural areas.<sup>9</sup>

The average nominal wage in 2014 was 4 172 MDL (267 USD<sup>10</sup>) and in agriculture it was 2 774 MDL (178 USD). The wages of women amounted to 88 percent of men's wages. The average old-age pension was 1 114.7 MDL (71 USD). The old-age pension in Moldova amounted to 83 percent of the subsistence minimum and in agriculture to 70.6 percent.<sup>11</sup>

In 2015, retirees represented 690 300 or 19.4 percent of the total population, of whom 669 900 were registered with social protection institutions. The share of old-age pensioners in the total number of pensioners was 75.7 percent; in the non-agricultural sector this was 46 percent and in the agricultural sector, 29.7 percent. 29.5 percent of the total number of pensioners were older men and 70.5 percent were older women.

The social insurance system in Moldova operates in accordance with the following laws: Law 489-XIV of 08 July 1999, "On Public System of Social Insurance"; Law No. 156-XIV of 14 October 1998, "On State Social Insurance Pensions"; the Law, "On the Annual State Social Insurance Budget"; and additional legislative and normative acts on social protection.

In accordance with the law, the state system includes the following types of pensions: old-age pension, disability pension and the survivor pension.

Pensions for agricultural workers are provided in accordance with the terms set out by the general system of social security, and there are no distinct social insurance schemes for this category of the population. In accordance with the Law on pensions, the categories of agricultural workers include: (i) owners and / or tenants of agricultural land; (ii) members of agricultural or other forms of association in agriculture; (iii) persons carrying out agricultural activity within a household, or within an agricultural association.

The amount of the allocated pension is based on duration of employment, the size of insured income (wage), the size of contributions to state social insurance and other factors that are established in the legislation.

7 National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (e).

8 National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, 2014.

9 Information available at <http://www.mmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/rsa2014ru.pdf>, p.20.

10 The exchange rate set by the National Bank on 31 December 2014: 100 USD = 1 561.52 MDL.

11 Information available at <http://www.mmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/rsa2014ru.pdf>, p. 40, pp. 57–58.



The legal framework includes provisions to protect low-income retirees, mostly farmers and the self-employed. In accordance with the Law, "On State Social Insurance Pensions", if the retirement pension amount (calculated in accordance with the law) is less than the minimum old-age pension, then the minimum pension is allocated.

In 2003, the law<sup>12</sup> established a procedure for the indexation of pensions, calculated as the average between the annual growth rate of consumer prices and the annual growth of average wages in the country for the previous year. The indexation rate is set annually by the government, and the indexation of pensions is only carried out for all types of pensions paid from the State Social Insurance Budget. The minimum pension is indexed annually.

The social insurance system generally covers all residents of the Republic of Moldova. For farmers, there are specific provisions in the legislation in relation to social security contributions and benefits.

The size of social security contributions is differentiated by category of payer: employers, employees and self-employed. In 2015, the rates of contribution to compulsory state social insurance were established by the Law, "On State Social Insurance Budget"<sup>13</sup>, and are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: State social insurance contribution rates**

Category of payer	2014	2015
The employer – payer for persons employed in agriculture		
Employer	16%+	16%+
State	6%+	6%+
Employee	6%	6%
The employer – payer for persons employed on an individual employment contract		
Employer	23% +	23% +
Employee	6%	6%
Owners of land without employees (annual voluntary insurance)	1 428 MLD	1 584 MLD
Self-employed persons (individual entrepreneurs)	5 748 MLD	6 372 MLD
Individuals who do not belong to any category (voluntary insurance)	5 748 MLD	6 372 MLD

Source: The Law, "On State Social Insurance Budget", 2010–2015.

In accordance with the law, the social insurance contributions of an employer engaged exclusively in agricultural activities, for persons employed under an individual labour agreement or other agreements relating to the performance of works or rendering of services, are calculated at 22 percent of payroll and other earnings. Out of the calculated amount, 16 percent is paid by the company, and the remaining six percent is subsidized by the state budget.

The social insurance contributions of an employer engaged in non-agricultural activity are calculated at 23 percent of payroll. Furthermore, it should be noted that agricultural employers who pay a rate of 16 percent for social insurance contributions, benefit from a six percent grant from the state. These advantages also apply to corporate agricultural enterprises, which employ only 12 percent of persons working in agriculture. It is important to recognize that tax incentives do not always stimulate growth in a sector and may in fact slow down the structural transformation of the economy, exerting a negative influence on entrepreneurs' decisions to work in other sectors of the economy.

Since 2009, individual land owners and tenants who work on an individual basis have not been included in the list of the mandatory insured. They have the option to make voluntary insurance payments by signing an individual state contract with the National Social Insurance Office and by paying 1 584 MDL per year (101 USD<sup>14</sup>), and not less than one-twelfth of this amount monthly. This type of insurance contribution is four times lower than the amount paid by others.

<sup>12</sup> Art. 13 (1) of the Law No. 156-XIV dated 14 October 1998, "On State Social Insurance Pensions".

<sup>13</sup> Law No. 73 of 12 April 2015.

<sup>14</sup> The exchange rate set by the National Bank on 31 December 2014: 100 USD = 1 561.52 MDL.

Another legal provision aimed at owners or tenants of agricultural lands, is the opportunity for retrospective social insurance. This involves annual social insurance contribution payments of 1 584 MDL, which provide the person with the right to a certain amount of social security (a minimum retirement pension and a burial allowance).<sup>15</sup>

Although they receive more favourable conditions within the social security system, farmers, especially women, receive the lowest pension compared with other population groups. From 01 April 2015, the minimum old-age pension for agricultural workers is 767.22 MDL (49 USD); for other recipients of the old-age pension it is 861.80 MDL (55 USD).<sup>16</sup> In 2014, the value of the average old-age pension for women in the agricultural sector was approximately 60 USD, which represented 94 percent of the average male pension in this sector, and 83 percent of the average female pension in the non-agricultural sector. The share of women in the total number of pensioners in the agricultural sector (by age) was 67.7 percent, and the share of men was 32.3 percent.

The legal framework also contains discriminatory elements that have a direct impact on the amount of state social insurance pension for farmers, which directly depends on the length of contribution. The legal provisions concerning the possibility of retroactive insurance are differentiated for owners and tenants of agricultural lands and other persons. The owners and tenants of agricultural land can be insured retroactively from 2009 and others from 1999.

Although these pensions are low, the low rate of social insurance contributions for employers, and for individuals working on their own land, leads to the significant redistribution of funds for pension payments in favour of pensioners in the agricultural sector, who account for approximately 40 percent of the total number of old-age pensioners. Additionally, the percentage of contributions by agricultural employers in the total amount of deposits transferred to the state social insurance budget, is around four percent, while the share of financing provided for the payment of pensions for these categories of workers represents over 30 percent of the total resources for the payment of pensions.<sup>17</sup>

Factors that cause this imbalance include a significant reduction in the number of taxpayers<sup>18</sup> and the introduction of the principle of voluntary insurance for farmers in 2009, at a time when approximately 30 percent of the working population was employed in agriculture, and only 12 percent of workers in agriculture were employed in enterprises<sup>19</sup>, while others worked in their own households engaged in the production of agricultural goods for exclusive self-consumption, or were owners / tenants of agricultural landworking independently. Consequently, the wage replacement rate in agriculture in 2014 amounted to 34 percent<sup>20</sup>, compared with an average wage replacement rate of 27 percent<sup>21</sup> for the whole economy. This distribution of pension system funds may result in various side effects, such as distrust in the pension system and evasion of social insurance contribution payments. This will significantly affect the sustainability of the social security system.

Minimum pension policy is aimed at protecting poor, older women and men to ensure a minimum standard of living. At the same time, it weakens the link between contributions and size of pension and, consequently, devalues the contributions. In addition, the annual indexation of minimum pensions undermines the financial sustainability of the pension system. The absence of an incentive mechanism for contributions to the social insurance fund is one of the main reasons for the declining number of investors in agriculture.

In this context, the introduction of a payment incentive might be the solution for maintaining the stability of the system. It is important to strengthen the link between social contributions and benefits at the individual level, in accordance with the principle of "equal contributions – equal pension". At the same time, in order to solve the pension problems of the agricultural sector, examples from other

15 The social insurance contract (available at <http://www.cnas.md/libview.php?l=ru&idc=185&id=670>).

16 Government Decision No. 61 dated 06 March 2015 on the indexation of social insurance and some state social benefits (available at <http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?action=view&view=doc&id=357300&lang=2>).

17 Contributions of the agricultural sector to the state social insurance budget: 2013 – 3.7 percent; 2012 – 3.6 percent; 2011 – 3.7 percent. The share of funding of pensions in this sector: 2012 – 33.4 percent; 2011 – 34.8 percent (Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, Annual social reports for 2011, 2012 and 2013, available at [www.mmpsrf.gov.md](http://www.mmpsrf.gov.md)).

18 From 200 000 in 2008 to 2 000 000 in 2012.

19 In 2013, only 39 500 were employed in agricultural enterprises, out of a total of 337 900 people employed in agriculture as a whole.

20 The ratio between average retirement pension and average salary. According to the European Code of Social Security (Art. 65), the recommended level for this indicator is 40 percent.

21 Information available at <http://www.mmpsrf.gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/rsa2014ru.pdf>.

countries should be considered where agricultural workers are included in a separate system. This would stimulate an increase in the wage replacement rate in the economy and ensure financial security in old age for both women and men farmers.

## References

- Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family.** 2011, 2012, 2013. *Annual social report*. (available at <http://www.mmppsf.gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/rsa2014ru.pdf>).
- National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova.** 2014. *Youth in the Republic of Moldova, 2013*. 12 August 2014. (available at <http://www.statistica.md/newsview.php?l=ro&id=4480&idc=168>).
- National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova.** 2015a. *Indices of demographic dependence, 2000–2014*. (available at <http://statbank.statistica.md/pxweb/Database/EN/02%20POP/POP02/POP02.asp>).
- National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova.** 2015b. *Labour Force in the Republic of Moldova: Employment and Unemployment*. Chisinau. (available at [http://www.statistica.md/public/files/publicatii\\_electronice/ocupare\\_somaj/Forta\\_Munca\\_2015.pdf](http://www.statistica.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/ocupare_somaj/Forta_Munca_2015.pdf)).
- National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova.** (a). *Resident population by sex and areas, as of January 1, 1970–2015*. (available at <http://statbank.statistica.md/>).
- National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova.** (b). *Life expectancy at birth by years, sex and areas, 1958–2014*. (available at <http://statbank.statistica.md/>).
- National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova.** (c). *Vital statistics rate by years, indicators and areas, 1940–2014*. (available at <http://statbank.statistica.md/>).
- National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova.** (d). *Ageing factor of population, 1980–2014*. (available at <http://statbank.statistica.md/>).
- National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova.** (e). *Population aged 15 years and over, working or looking for work abroad by level of education, age groups, sex, area and quarters, 2000–2014*. (available at <http://statbank.statistica.md/>).





**Natalia Zubarevich** is a Professor in the Department of Geography at Moscow State University named after Lomonosov. She was a UNDP expert in Russia from 1997 to 2012. She specializes in research on regional and urban / rural development in Russia and other countries of the CIS. She is the author of 240 publications, including 4 monographs.

## DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS IN RUSSIA: SOCIAL AND GENDER ISSUES

The rural population represents 26 percent of the total population of Russia and varies by region, from 71 percent to 5 percent.<sup>1</sup> The largest proportion of the rural population is found in the republics of Southern Siberia and the Northern Caucasus, due to the later onset of urbanization in these areas. The highest density of rural inhabitants is in the south of Russia: 27 percent of the country's rural population lives in the Southern Federal District and in the North Caucasian Federal District. The regions with more developed agriculture are mainly located in the southern part of the country, which has favourable agro-climatic conditions. The high density of the rural population in the south is combined with a larger size of villages that reach five to ten thousand inhabitants. The low density of the rural population in most other regions of the country is the result of a long process of depopulation and rural to urban migration. The process of depopulation in small and medium-sized villages in many regions of Russia has been going on for a long time, and the density of rural populations in large villages in the south and in suburban areas has been increasing.

The rural population in Russia has been declining since the 1960s, due to two trends: rural to urban migration and the natural loss of the rural population in most regions. The greatest natural decrease (excess of deaths over births) was observed in the 1990s. In the 2010s, the demographic situation began to improve due to a growth in the birth rate. In addition, maternal mortality in rural areas decreased more than three times (from 52 to 16 per 100 000 births in the period 2000-2013), and the life expectancy of rural women increased by 3.4 years (from 71.7 to 75.1 years). The main gender problem is the large gap (more than 11 years) in the life expectancies of rural women and rural men, due to the high mortality of able-bodied men (related to unhealthy lifestyles and alcoholism).

The rural population has also become older, especially in the central and north-western parts of Russia, because of low birth rates and continuous migration to cities. It is mainly elderly women that remain in the villages, and in some regions, the proportion of women above working age can range from 39 to 42 percent of all rural women. The youngest men and women live in rural areas in the southern republics, where there are high birth rates. There are fewer working-age women in rural areas than working-age men (868 women per 1 000 men). This is the result of more active migration from villages by young women. Other patterns are observed in the republics of the North Caucasus and Tuva (950 and 1 180 respectively), where traditional gender roles prevail, the economic activity of women is limited to household duties and men are leaving the villages.

The level of education in the rural population aged 15 years and older is lower than the educational level of the urban population: for example, 13.4 percent of rural women (mostly elderly women) have lower primary education. The level of education of employed rural women is higher than that of men: 22.5 percent of rural women have attended higher education compared with 14.6 percent

<sup>1</sup> The sources of all statistical data in this report are the statistical handbooks "Women and men in Russia" and "Regions of Russia", Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat).

of rural men; and 30.5 percent of rural women have participated in secondary vocational education compared with 18.4 percent of rural men. However, 32 percent of rural women do not have any professional education, and they are the least competitive in the labour market.

For the last ten years, the rate of employment in agriculture and forestry has declined (from 11 to 9 percent of all people employed in the economy). The largest proportion of people employed in agriculture is based in the agricultural south (in the Southern and North Caucasus Federal districts and in the southern regions of Central, Volga and Siberian Federal districts), and in the underdeveloped republics, where there are sizeable rural populations. In Russia, agriculture and forestry are predominantly male sectors, in which women account for only 38 percent. The gender gap is caused by structural transformations in the agricultural sector. After the transition to a market economy, crop production developed more successfully (cereal and sunflower production). These branches are characterized by a high level of mechanization and predominantly male employment. Other parts of the agricultural economy, for example, labour intensive dairy farming, where there is a predominance of female labour, have not yet recovered from the crisis. This has resulted in the reduction of female employment in the agricultural sector. In addition, since the middle of the 2000s, the number of social institutions in rural areas where mainly women are employed has decreased. This has led to a reduction in the number of jobs for women in the social services sector and in agriculture.

Like other countries, Russia has a higher level of unemployment among the rural population compared with the urban population. This is a consequence of a lack of jobs in rural labour markets. The level of unemployment among rural women is lower than among rural men, but gender differences are minor (7.9 percent for women and 8.7 percent for men in 2013). The main reasons for this include that: (i) women are more likely to accept a job with lower status and a lower wage; (ii) women more often receive the status of economically inactive when they lose work; and (iii) women are retiring earlier than men (at the ages of 55 and 60 years respectively). Furthermore, in most regions, the unemployment rate for women is lower than it is for men.

Agriculture and forestry are the lowest paid sectors of the economy. In 2014, the average wage in these sectors accounted for 55 percent of the average wage in the economy as a whole. Gender differences in wage levels are minor. Women's wages amount to 84 percent of men's wages. In the social sphere, where wages are also below average, there are almost no gender differences.

It is not possible to analyse the gender pay gap at regional level; the gap can only be assessed in relation to the whole economy. As a rule, the poorer and less developed a region is, the less significant the gender pay gap. However, a substantial gender pay gap is observable in the regions which specialize in extractive industries, especially in oil and gas production.

There is a greater risk of poverty in the rural population because of lower wage levels and higher unemployment. In 2014, the wages of 20 percent of those employed in agriculture and forestry were below the subsistence minimum for the able-bodied population; across the whole of the Russian economy, only 11 percent of employees earned such low wages. According to the Household Budget Surveys, 40 to 41 percent of all households classified as poor are located in rural areas.

The poverty risk index, calculated by the Federal State Statistics Service, shows that in Russia, families with children are at maximum risk of poverty, and the above working age population faces the minimum risk. In rural areas, the birth rate is higher and therefore the risk of poverty among families with children is also higher. A children's allowance is paid to families with incomes below the subsistence minimum. In most regions, this accounts for between 10 and 20 percent of the subsistence minimum of the child. In the above working age rural population, where there is a higher number of women, the problem of poverty is not monetary but social in nature. In accordance with Russian legislation, pensioners in receipt of a pension below the subsistence minimum are allocated additional payments from the state budget. However, the main problem faced by rural pensioners is the low availability of services, especially health care services, which leads to the social deprivation of elderly women, who predominate in rural areas in some regions of Russia. In addition, the elderly population spends a considerable amount of money on medicines, but these costs are not adequately represented in the subsistence minimum for a pensioner.



Regional differences in poverty levels can only be assessed for the entire population and they depend on many factors including: the level of economic development in the region; the age structure of the population; the proportion of rural inhabitants; and the regional poverty line (subsistence minimum). The underdeveloped republics, which have a large share of the rural population and the largest numbers of children, have the highest poverty rates (ranging from 15 to 34 percent). Furthermore, many regions of Siberia and the Far East, where there are higher costs of living, also have high poverty rates (ranging from 15 to 17 percent). In other regions, the differences in poverty rates are minor.

This analysis demonstrates that typical gender problems are not necessarily prevalent in rural Russia: the level of remuneration of women employed in agriculture is slightly lower than that of men; the unemployment rate of women is lower; the life expectancy of rural women is 11 years longer than that of men; and the level of education of employed rural women is higher. In addition, women in Russia are well represented among the heads of administrations of rural settlements, especially in the peripheral areas where there are acute problems with development.

Russia has a large territory and multinational population, therefore gender problems in rural areas are geographically differentiated. We can distinguish between several types of regions in Russia:

- **The central part of Russia, the North-West and part of the Volga region** are characterized by (i) the ageing structure of the rural population and (ii) the social exclusion of rural inhabitants, predominantly elderly women, due to underdeveloped transport infrastructure and limited access to social services (health care and social protection). Urgent problems include the degradation of human capital, marginalization and alcoholism among men.
- **Agrarian regions of the South** (with a large proportion of the Russian population) are characterized by (i) a reduction in the number of women's jobs in agriculture, (ii) mass migration of young people to cities and (iii) labour migration of rural men and women, including migration outside their region.
- **Underdeveloped regions** (North Caucasus, South Siberia) are characterized by (i) a lack of jobs in rural areas, (ii) the younger age structure of the population, and (iii) the growing working age population. These factors lead to the mass migration of young people (mostly men) to urban areas; the predominance of self-employment in rural areas; and the generation of incomes through private commodity economies, where it is mostly women who are engaged. In rural areas in these republics, patriarchal gender roles prevail and the social and labour mobility of women is low.
- **North, Siberia and the Far East** are characterized by a reduction of human resources due to migration and marginalization. The agricultural sector is less developed and there are large amounts of shadow economic activity in the regions which have the poorest climatic conditions for agriculture (for example, gathering mushrooms, berries and nuts and fishing for sale). Labour mobility is limited due to the large distances between settlements. Moreover, the availability of social services is low because of the reduction in the number of social institutions in rural areas and the remoteness of the cities. Gender issues are less prominent than social ones (for example, the degradation of human capital).

One can conclude that the socio-economic problems found in Russian rural areas are much more significant than the gender ones. Explicit gender discrimination is mainly found in the underdeveloped republics. In other regions, the inequality of rural women and men is much less evident, because the rural development challenges in Russia are caused by factors that affect all of the population, without gender differences.

Gender mainstreaming in rural areas is not a priority for the Russian authorities, because social problems are considered to be more important. In the period of economic growth, the main way to address them was to redistribute the energy sector revenues to increase levels of social transfers and benefits to support the population. Less attention has been given to other important issues, such as improving institutional conditions for business, creating new jobs, stimulating economic activity and facilitating the mobility of women.

Redistributive government policy has contributed to the alleviation of social problems in rural areas. In Russia, different forms of support have been used, and women have benefited from these measures. Some of the most important measures include:

- *Increases in pensions and additional payments from the state budget to the level of subsistence minimum for a pensioner, targeted at those who have low pensions (women, especially those in rural areas, form a large share of the pension age population).*
- *Parent capital, which can be used to improve the living conditions of a family and to pay for the education of a child, and an increase in other maternity benefits (these measures contribute to reducing poverty among families with children and are particularly important for rural areas, where fertility rates are higher).*
- *Higher wages for employees in the public sector (for example, those employed in education, health care, culture and social protection, where women are better represented than men, especially in rural areas).*
- *Housing subsidies for rural teachers and doctors and other benefits, which have had a positive impact on gender inequality.*

This broad spectrum of social support measures was only possible when the state received high oil revenues. The fall of oil prices in 2014 led to reduced income from oil and gas production, and therefore to reduced opportunities to provide social support to the population, including women.

The institutional reforms aimed at the development of the rural economy are necessary, in particular the creation of new jobs, including jobs for women. More effective policy in the sphere of social services is also needed to ensure their availability within the rural population. Some important measures have not yet been sufficiently implemented. These include:

- *Encouraging the territorial mobility of the rural population and its concentration in suburban areas, where there is a more diversified labour market and a wider choice of jobs, in order to reduce the risk of unemployment.*
- *Reducing institutional barriers to the development of agricultural holdings and private farms, which would contribute to the growth of employment and incomes in the rural population.*
- *Creating conditions for rural industrialization (for example, the processing of agricultural and forest production), especially in the agrarian regions of the south and in the suburbs of major cities where there is a higher density of working-age rural inhabitants.*
- *Developing mobile social services, primarily in health care and social protection, and in particular in peripheral areas with low population densities and a predominance of small villages or sparse rural settlements. These measures will enhance the accessibility of social services for the rural population.*

In addition to the institutional measures which are necessary for the development of the rural economy, the problem of targeted social support for families with children (the most vulnerable group of the population in rural areas) needs to be resolved. Children's allowances paid to families with incomes below the subsistence minimum are very small, and it is necessary to increase them. This measure will contribute to the reduction of poverty in rural areas.

## References

**Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat).** 2015a. *Regiony Rossii: sotsialno-ekonomicheskiye pokazateli. Statistichesky sbornik [Regions of Russia: socio-economic indicators. Statistical Handbook]*. Moscow. (available at [http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat\\_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc\\_1138623506156](http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc_1138623506156)).

**Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat).** 2015b. *Zhenshiny i muzhchiny Rossii. Statistichesky sbornik [Women and men in Russia. Statistical Handbook]*. Moscow. (available at [http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat\\_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc\\_1138887978906](http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc_1138887978906)).



**Tatiana Bozrikova** has a PhD in Philosophy. She is an expert on gender and development, a sociologist and deputy Director of the non-governmental research centre "New Panorama". Tatiana was a former advisor to the President of the Republic of Tajikistan on Social Development and Public Relations (for seven years until 2004) and is a founder and former president (until 2014) of the Coalition of NGOs "From Legal Equality - To Actual Equality". She is the author of more than sixty publications, analytical reports and research studies on gender issues. She is also one of the main developers of the national long- and medium-term strategies and state programmes on gender and development in Tajikistan. Tatiana is the head of expert groups on gender mainstreaming in land and agrarian legislation, as well as on the preparation of alternative reports on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. She is also a member of the Advisory Council on Civil Society of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

## KEY PRIORITIES TO OVERCOME THE UNEQUAL ACCESS OF RURAL WOMEN TO RESOURCES IN TAJIKISTAN

In 2015, the permanent population of the Republic of Tajikistan was 8 352 000 people. The proportion of men was 50.6 percent (4 224 000 people) of the total population, and the proportion of women was 49.4 percent (4 127 000 people). Up to 73.5 percent of the total population lives in rural areas.<sup>1</sup> The average age of the population is 25.7 years.<sup>2</sup> According to the available statistical data, the proportion of the population below working age accounts for 34.6 percent of the total population; the working age population for 60.5 percent; and those above working age for 4.9 percent. The age structure of the rural population is similar to this.<sup>3</sup> The agricultural sector is the main employer in the country: 65.5 percent of the population is engaged in agricultural employment.<sup>4</sup> The share of people employed in agriculture, hunting and forestry represents 90.6 percent of the population employed in the real sector.<sup>5</sup>

In 2012, life expectancy at birth for members of the Tajik population was 72.8 years of age. This indicator was higher in the rural population at 73.6 years of age. On average, rural women live three years longer (75.2 years) than rural men (72.1 years).<sup>6</sup>

In 2014, the total level of poverty in Tajikistan fell to 32 percent; and the level of extreme poverty fell to 16.8 percent. The level of poverty is higher in rural areas than it is in urban areas. Eighty-one percent of the poor live in rural areas and approximately four out of five poor people live in rural households. In urban households, the poverty rate is 23.5 percent, whereas in rural areas it is 36.1 percent. The incidence of extreme poverty within the rural population is 1.8 times higher than in the urban population (19.7 percent and 10.7 percent respectively).<sup>7</sup>

In 2014, GDP per capita was 5 498.2 TJS (1 114 USD). In the first nine months of 2015, the share of agriculture in GDP reached 21.4 percent, compared with industry representing a 12.5 percent share and services representing a 53.2 percent share.<sup>8</sup> At least 600 000 people are annually involved in the process of external labour migration, and remittances account for more than 40 percent of the country's GDP.

1 Agency on Statistics, 2015a, p. 9, p. 32.

2 Agency on Statistics, 2014a, pp. 24-25.

3 Agency on Statistics, 2015a, p. 9, p. 32, p. 35.

4 Agency on Statistics, 2014a.

5 Agency on Statistics, 2015b, p. 41.

6 Agency on Statistics, 2014a, p. 108.

7 Agency on Statistics, 2015c, pp. 23-34.

8 Agency on Statistics, 2014b, p. 65.

In November 2015, the average monthly nominal wage amounted to 920.97 TJS (138.4 USD).<sup>9</sup> In the real sector of economy, those employed in agriculture, hunting and forestry received the lowest wages of 302.31 TJS (45.4 USD).<sup>10</sup> This means that the average salary of agricultural workers is 3.3 times lower than the average salary of workers in the real sector. Owing to current occupational segregation, women's wages are generally lower than men's in all sectors of the economy. In 2009, women's average nominal salary in agriculture and forestry represented 86.8 percent of the average men's salary, and in 2013, this share was only 57.5 percent.

Tajikistan holds the 129th position in the Human Development Index (0.624), out of 188 countries. In 2014, the value of the Gender Inequality Index was 0.357 and Tajikistan was ranked 69th out of 155 countries in the world.

The low level of education among rural women constitutes a pressing issue in Tajikistan. According to 2010 census data, only 8.7 percent of rural women entered professional education (higher, incomplete higher or secondary vocational education), compared with 39.1 percent of urban women. In addition, there are 2.5 times fewer employed rural women with professional education than rural men, while among urban women and men there is almost no difference.<sup>11</sup>

The main priorities for overcoming inequality between rural women and men are: gender equality in the allocation of resources and opportunities; gender equality in decision-making in the public and private sectors; and freedom from violence against women and girls.

In recent years, the government of Tajikistan has used a number of legislative, institutional, organizational and financial mechanisms to enhance rural women's access to tangible and intangible resources:

- Access to land.** Within the "State Programme on the Main Directions of State Policy to Ensure Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2001-2010", the State Land Committee of RT conducted regular monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the section "access of rural women to land" using gender indicators. In order to track the dynamics of the processes of land reform and to assess women's access to land and other resources, gender indicators were incorporated into statistical reports on agriculture, and the publication "Gender Indicators in the Production Activities of Dekhan Farming" is published annually.

*The results of the activity of NGOs in lobbying for gender mainstreaming in the Land Code of RT are also noteworthy. For the first time, land legislation contains provisions concerning: the equal access of men and women to land; the equality of participants in land relations; granting the right to receive small plots close to the house for categories such as heads of single-parent families and single adults who are unmarried and do not live with relatives; and regulations on the application of rules concerning the joint property of spouses and their equal rights to expropriate and use the land.*

- Access to financial resources.** Since 2006, Presidential grants aimed at improving the competitiveness of women entrepreneurs and access to financial resources have been introduced to support women entrepreneurs, including the heads of agricultural holdings and rural women. Between 2016 and 2020, there are plans for a further 80 Presidential grants per annum for these purposes. The total amount of the grants is 2 000 000 TJS (340 000 USD).

*In recent years, a practice focusing on the social mobilization of local communities, with the involvement of women, has become increasingly common. Self-help groups are organized to promote the empowerment of rural women by obtaining financial resources through loans from the solidarity funds, and through the creation of credit unions on the basis of self-help groups.*

- Access to professional education.** In 1997, the Presidential quota system was introduced to reduce the unequal access of rural girls and boys to higher education.<sup>12</sup> According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2 408 students were assisted by the quota in the 2015/2016 academic year: 1 178 were female students and 1 230 were male students.

<sup>9</sup> Agency on Statistics, 2016, p. 149, p. 236.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 221.

<sup>11</sup> Agency on Statistics, 2012, p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> A quota system is used to encourage school graduates from remote rural areas to enrol in higher education (HE). Applicants are admitted to an HE institution on the basis of interviews, rather than on the results of entrance examinations. Initially, the quota system was established for girls, but was later extended to boys.

Despite a significant number of state policies and programmes on gender mainstreaming, gender inequality persists, and has even increased in some areas, particularly in relation to access to various resources. On average, women have a smaller plot of land, and experience unequal access to (i) agricultural decision-making processes, (ii) the distribution of financial benefits from the harvest and (iii) obtaining loans. In 2014, there were almost seven times fewer female managers of agricultural enterprises compared with male managers, and women represented a 13 percent share in the management of agricultural enterprises.

In Tajikistan, there is an explicit gender imbalance in the staffing of the agricultural departments, land management and other specialized structures. Women should not only have equal access to land and other resources, but real control over them. This would enable women to have a real impact on decision-making in relation to acute problems.

Rural women are also mainly engaged in unpaid work, including household duties and work in, for example, family businesses and agricultural holdings. Overcoming the obstacles to gender equality in employment and the mobility of rural women in the labour market requires women's increased access to education, their acquisition of professional skills and knowledge, and the development of infrastructure in the sphere of pre-school education and in the fields of, for example, household services and transport communications.

Furthermore, the issue of social protection is significant for the rural population. The existing mechanisms for ensuring the pension rights of rural workers, most of whom are women, are not sufficiently developed. In 2013, the value of a woman's pension represented 80.4 percent of the average pension of a man.<sup>13</sup>

One of the main barriers to overcoming gender inequality is the impact of prevailing gender stereotypes, associated with the division of roles between men and women. Changing social and cultural norms in rural communities is a difficult challenge, and one which requires time, and targeted and coordinated action by the state and civil society.

Government policies and actions need to aim towards achieving equal outcomes for both women and men, rather than focusing solely on the equal treatment of women and men, and rural and urban women. Overlooking the different capabilities of women and men in general, and those of rural and urban women in particular, in the enjoyment of granted rights enshrined in certain laws, policies, programmes or measures, results in the indirect discrimination of women in general, and rural women in particular.

In order to broaden the information base for effective gender analysis on the status of rural households and women, and given the substantial differences not only between the sexes but also between urban and rural women, publications with the results of the statistical surveys and census data must incorporate a full range of indicators, including those disaggregated by sex, but also by sex and by geographical location (rural and urban).

Moreover, it would be beneficial for the Agency on Statistics under the President of Tajikistan, in partnership with the gender experts' community, to undertake a gender analysis of the results of the agricultural census (implemented in 2013), and use the data to adjust gender indicators for the effective monitoring and evaluation of the agrarian reform.

The development of new programmes and action plans needs to take into account significant differences between (i) women and men, and (ii) agricultural holdings and households headed by women, in terms of socio-demographic characteristics and the characteristics of households and holdings by, for example, type, size, composition and potential. Special attention to the most vulnerable groups of rural women is required, including: women with young children; women with children or with family members with disabilities; "abandoned wives" of labour migrants; and women with low levels of education. Within these groups, women living in remote villages are at particular risk.

<sup>13</sup> Agency on Statistics, 2010, p. 84; see also 2014b, p. 122.



In the context of a changing legislative base, in the parts relating to the alienation of land use rights and formation of land markets, it is very important to make satisfactory changes to the regulatory framework. In this regard, it would be useful to conduct a broad information campaign with the wide involvement of women, in order to explain the new provisions of the Land Code of Tajikistan, including the provisions made for applications for the registration of joint property in marriage, to ensure both individuals have the right to expropriate and use the land.

It is also recommended that the Presidential quota for rural girls and young women is increased, particularly in specialties such as law, economics and finance, agriculture and management, in order to overcome occupational segregation by sex. This should also include the greater involvement of women in the adults' training groups in education centres, and specific training for these groups focusing on the professions which are in demand in the labour market (rather than based on the principle of "male" and "female" professions).

Finally, in order to increase women's access to financial resources, credit products for the most vulnerable groups of rural women need to be more actively introduced, with interest rates ranging from 12 to 18 percent and without the need for collateral.

## References

**Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.** 2010. *Zhenshiny i muzhchiny Respubliki Tajikistan [Women and Men of the Republic of Tajikistan]*. Dushanbe.

**Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.** 2012. *Perepishnaseleniya i zhilishnogofonda Respubliki Tajikistan 2010 goda. Obrazovatelnyurovennaseleniya RT [Census of population and housing of the Republic of Tajikistan 2010. Educational level of the population]*. Vol. IV. (available at: [http://www.stat.tj/img/526b8592e834fcaaccec26a22965ea2b\\_1355500088.pdf](http://www.stat.tj/img/526b8592e834fcaaccec26a22965ea2b_1355500088.pdf)).

**Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.** 2014a. *Demographicheskiy Yezhegodnik Respubliki Tajikistan [Demographic Yearbook of the Republic of Tajikistan]*. (available at: [http://stat.tj/ru/img/7b6f49435ed5ae6ec685562d6e28583a\\_1426678896.pdf](http://stat.tj/ru/img/7b6f49435ed5ae6ec685562d6e28583a_1426678896.pdf)).

**Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.** 2014b. *Women and Men in the Republic of Tajikistan*. (available at: [http://stat.tj/ru/img/d976061967cd7672af7e083fead26bda\\_1420539196.pdf](http://stat.tj/ru/img/d976061967cd7672af7e083fead26bda_1420539196.pdf)).

**Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.** 2015a. *Chislennostnaseleniya RT na 1 yanvaria 2015 goda [Population of the Republic of Tajikistan on January 1, 2015]*. (available at: [http://stat.tj/ru/img/65a709121baf8a64bf15d33f398aafde\\_1435736807.pdf](http://stat.tj/ru/img/65a709121baf8a64bf15d33f398aafde_1435736807.pdf)).

**Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.** 2015b. *Tajikistan v tsifrah [Tajikistan in figures]*. (available at: [http://www.stat.tj/ru/img/695c206e2b1ce86f333f33fdc268a469\\_1439617140.pdf](http://www.stat.tj/ru/img/695c206e2b1ce86f333f33fdc268a469_1439617140.pdf)).

**Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.** 2015c. *Оценка бедности в Таджикистане: методологи ческая записка. [Poverty easurement in Tajikistan: A Methodological Note]*. (available at: [http://www.stat.tj/ru/img/07f755a0540d47f1ba5c1ab373be64ff\\_1436004752.pdf](http://www.stat.tj/ru/img/07f755a0540d47f1ba5c1ab373be64ff_1436004752.pdf)).

**Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.** 2015d. *Informatsionniy bulletin po prodovolstvennoy bezopasnosti i bednosti [Informational bulletin on Food Security and Poverty]*. № 2, 2015 (available at: [http://www.stat.tj/ru/img/9ebc521cb615be2812a13bca74a6a46c\\_1444195767.pdf](http://www.stat.tj/ru/img/9ebc521cb615be2812a13bca74a6a46c_1444195767.pdf)).

**Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.** 2016. *Socialno-ekonomicheskoye polojeniye Respubliki Tajikistan (yanvar-dekabr 2015). [Socio-economic Situation in Tajikistan, January-December 2015]*. (available at: [http://www.stat.tj/ru/img/3c8b737e693be8769270f0f588a0a0e5\\_1455852583.pdf](http://www.stat.tj/ru/img/3c8b737e693be8769270f0f588a0a0e5_1455852583.pdf)).





**Leila Toylyeva** is an independent expert with extensive experience in governmental and non-governmental organizations. As a professional economist, Leila was head of the Department of Household Surveys at the the Ashgabat city branch of Turkmenmilliyhisabat (National Statistical Service) of Turkmenistan for several years. Her activity within non-governmental organizations has for many years been aimed at supporting local communities, especially in rural areas, in small business development, environmental issues and the economic empowerment of women. In these areas, Leila has implemented projects in cooperation with ICRC, IOM, the OSCE Centre and the Regional office of UNODC.

## GENDER APPROACHES IN TURKMENISTAN

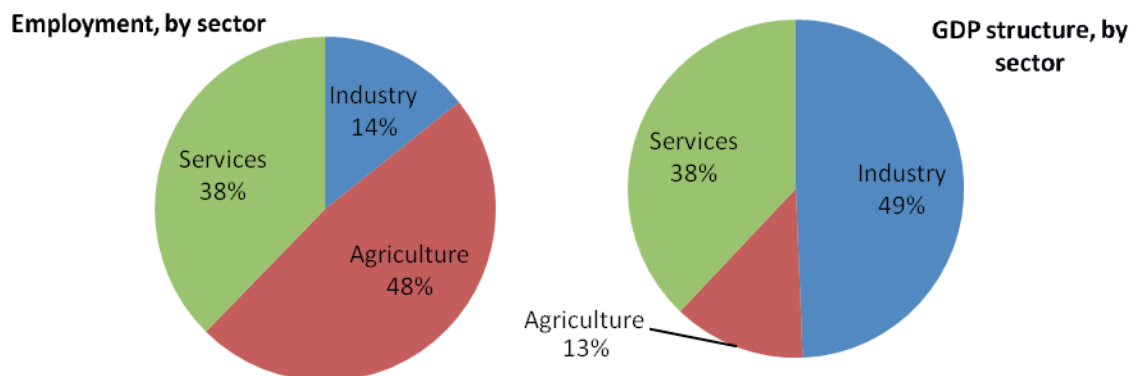
Turkmenistan is one of the five countries in Central Asia, and is the second largest country in the region (491 210 km<sup>2</sup>).<sup>1</sup> It is divided into five provinces (welayatlar), and the capital Ashgabat also has the status of a province (welayat). The provinces are subdivided into 65 districts (etraplar) and 20 cities. Eighty percent of the country is covered by land classified as desert.

The total population of Turkmenistan (as of 10 February, 2016) was 5 419 037 people. The male population represents 49.2 percent (2 667 307 people) of the total population and the female population represents 50.8 percent (2 751 730 people).<sup>2</sup>

Turkmenistan became a sovereign state in 1991, along with the other former Soviet republics. In the ensuing years of independence, Turkmenistan's economy was transformed into one of the fastest growing economies in the world, maintaining an average economic growth rate of 11 percent annually since 2007 (in accordance with the official data).<sup>3</sup> Steady economic growth, sustained over a long period of time, has contributed to an increase in income levels: by the end of 2012, the level of GDP per capita was higher than 6 000 US dollars, which corresponds to the level found in upper-middle income countries.<sup>4</sup>

A large part of state revenue comes from natural gas exports. The second largest source of foreign exchange earnings is the agricultural sector, which accounts for 13–14 percent of GDP. Irrigated farming (production of cotton, wheat, melons, fruits and vegetables) and livestock breeding (sheep, horse, poultry and camel breeding) provide employment to almost half of the population (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Employment and GDP structure, by sector**



Source: Central Intelligence Agency, 2016.

<sup>1</sup> National Statistical Committee of Turkmenistan, no date.

<sup>2</sup> Estimates of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN Population Division (available at <http://countrymeters.info/ru/Turkmenistan>).

<sup>3</sup> The World Bank, no date.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

At the UN General Assembly in 1995, Turkmenistan acquired the status of a neutral state. The country agreed to the international rights and obligations associated with neutral status and refused to participate in military blocs. As a result, Turkmenistan received international guarantees of security. At present, Turkmenistan's "protective" function of neutrality is less significant than its international peacekeeping function.

Turkmenistan has set new goals, which are articulated in the National Socio-Economic Development Programme of Turkmenistan for 2011–2030. The main purposes of this programme are to significantly increase the standard of living for the population and ensure that Turkmenistan becomes one of the economically developed countries with a high ranking in the Human Development Index.

Domestic government policy is aimed at the balanced development of the regions of Turkmenistan, and takes into account the regional characteristics and individual potential of each province (welayat). The overarching aim of this policy is to improve the welfare and the quality of life of the population. An important goal of the national programmes is the formulation of common standards of social and living conditions for people living in both large cities and small towns and villages.

The agro-industrial complex of Turkmenistan focuses on further growth of agricultural production through the introduction of advanced water-saving technology, 100 percent domestic processing of agricultural products, and the substitution of imported food products with domestic products in order to achieve food independence. In 2014, over 1 200 000 tonnes of high quality wheat and over 1 100 000 tonnes of cotton were produced. Livestock and poultry production has also increased across all of the regions.

The National Socio-Economic Development Programme for 2011–2030 and the National Rural Development Programme are both aimed at comprehensive economic growth, alongside the preservation of economic independence. More than 25 000 hectares of land have been allocated for the building of model towns and villages in every province across the country. The rural investment projects focus on: building houses and roads; the construction of plants; the development of modern infrastructure; building new schools (equipped with multimedia technologies), kindergartens, cultural centres, health centres and commercial and communication facilities; and the creation of new jobs. Citizens of Turkmenistan receive extensive support in obtaining preferential loans for building houses in new villages.

In the first ten months of 2014, 6.2 billion TMT were invested in the, "National Programme of the President of Turkmenistan on the transformation of social and everyday services for the population of villages, settlements, etrap towns and etrap centers during the period till 2020". This exceeds the 2013 level of investment by 21.7 percent. In 2014, more than 400 facilities were operationalized, at a total cost of over nine billion United States dollars. The total cost of numerous ongoing construction projects in Turkmenistan is approximately 48 billion USD.

Having successfully integrated into the global political, economic and legal spheres, Turkmenistan performs a substantial amount of targeted work in the field of human rights, deepening international cooperation on a wide range of areas, the most important of which is gender equality.

In accordance with the Constitution of Turkmenistan and international legal norms and standards, the principle of equality between women and men and non-discrimination on the basis of sex is recognized as one of the main priorities for state policy.<sup>5</sup>

Turkmenistan strictly follows the international obligations arising from the United Nations' human rights treaties. In 1996, the country joined the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and in 2009 it ratified the Optional Protocol. Turkmenistan also joined the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (in 1995). The national programmes of socio-economic development of Turkmenistan are based on the UN Millennium Declaration, in which gender equality is highlighted as one of the main objectives, in particular in relation to the health care of women and children, education, the promotion of equality between women and men and the empowerment of women.

<sup>5</sup> Turkmenistan: The Golden age, 2015a.

In 2015, a new Law, "On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men", was adopted, and a National Action Plan for Gender Equality in Turkmenistan for 2015–2020 was formulated.

The indicator for gender equality in politics and the economy is the index of empowerment of women. This index reflects the degree of participation by women in decision-making processes. There are no formal quotas for the election of women in Turkmenistan. Women take an active role in the full election process and their involvement is reflected in the following data. There are 33 women delegates in the Mejlis (parliament) of Turkmenistan (elections of 15 December 2013), or 26.4 percent of the total number of deputies<sup>6</sup>, which is higher than the world average (22.8 percent). The Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson of the Mejlis and the Chair of one of the eight parliamentary Committees are women.<sup>7</sup> Among elected representatives of local governments, women account for 16.67 percent at the regional level; 20.21 percent at the municipal and district levels; and 18.68 percent at the rural level.<sup>8</sup>

In 2013, women represented more than 44 percent of people employed in the economy.<sup>9</sup> Women are represented in government at various levels, and in foreign policy. For example, the Permanent Representative of Turkmenistan in the UN and the Ambassador of Turkmenistan in China are both women.<sup>10</sup>

In 2014, more than 40 percent of employees in large and medium-sized enterprises in Turkmenistan were women. 38.7 percent of the total number of employed women work in education, 14.8 percent in health care and social services and 10.7 percent in the manufacturing industry.<sup>11</sup> Business and entrepreneurship have become a new focus for women's activities.

Turkmenistan has established an extensive system of social protection for every citizen and every family, especially large families. For example, all citizens, regardless of their level of material well-being, enjoy free (within a certain limit) gas, electricity and drinking water, and families receive children's allowances.

On 17 July 1998, the Mejlis of Turkmenistan adopted the Law, "On State Benefits", which stipulates the following types of social benefits: maternity allowance; allowance for children; (temporary) disability allowance; and allowance upon the loss of the breadwinner. A separate system of guarantees is established for mothers. Maternity allowance is assigned to women, amounting to 100 percent of salary during a maternity leave period of 112 calendar days, regardless of the length of employment and place of work, and including seasonal and temporary employment.<sup>12</sup>

Low-income families receive an allowance for children under the age of three.<sup>13</sup>

Women at the age of 57 years and men aged 62 years are entitled to a pension. Those who do not receive pensions, receive social benefits.<sup>14</sup> Under the law, "On Pensions" (1998), pension provision incorporates a period of study in higher, secondary special and vocational institutions, and a non-working period of caring for a young child until three years of age (a total of no more than six years) as work experience. Women who have given birth to and raised three children up to the age of eight are entitled to retire one year earlier than the age prescribed by the Law; women with four children, two years earlier; and women with five or more children or a disabled child, three years earlier.<sup>15</sup>

Targeted measures to stimulate women's employment are made available through a system of tax incentives. Working women with three or more children pay 30 percent less in tax. Mothers with five or more children are exempt from tax altogether.

<sup>6</sup> Overview analysis, 2014, p.7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> TDH, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Turkmenistan: The Golden age, 2015b.

<sup>12</sup> Periodic report (a).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

The country also has a comprehensive system of social protection for motherhood and childhood, which provides women with mandatory prenatal, natal and postnatal care, as well as children, especially in the first five years of their lives. The health status of mothers and children up to one year of age is monitored at health centres. There are 208 women's clinics and children's health centres, providing services in the field of reproductive health. The effectiveness of prenatal health care is evident: 92 percent of pregnancies result in successful births.<sup>16</sup>

In Turkmenistan, every third family has five or more children.<sup>17</sup> According to existing national traditions, women raise children and maintain the household. Pregnant women working in agriculture have a shorter working day of six hours, with preservation of the average wage. According to the current rules, this proportion of economically active women is considered to be unemployed in statistical reporting. Large families are encouraged by the system of benefits and privileges. Annually, mothers who have given birth to eight or more children, are awarded with the honorary title, "Ene mähri" ("Mother's Tenderness"). In addition, the Leader of the Nation provides large families with the keys to houses of enhanced comfort. The order "Zenan kalby" ("Female Soul") is awarded to women for their creative accomplishments in industry, science, education and health care.

In the process of the development of the National Action Plan, the recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women were taken into consideration. These recommendations were made in October 2012 at the fifty-third session of the Committee. The "National Action Plan for Gender Equality in Turkmenistan for 2015–2020" is a comprehensive document which outlines the objectives and implementation strategies, and also stipulates the structures responsible for the development and implementation of these objectives with regard to gender mainstreaming in various aspects of women's lives.<sup>18</sup>

Despite some successes in recent years, much remains to be done in order to achieve full gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The following activities are a priority:

- *Continued monitoring of the laws of Turkmenistan for their compliance with regulations and commitments undertaken by Turkmenistan as a result of the signed and ratified conventions and treaties, the preparation of the new revisions and the elaboration of new normative-legal acts;*
- *Further study of international experience and methodologies used in conducting sample surveys and methods of collecting and processing data on gender; adaptation of methodology and the development of tools to conduct surveys; definition of pilot projects; training of interviewers; training of members of the Working group on methodology in data collection; organizing workshops, meetings and consultations;*
- *Continued awareness raising events for different stakeholders (including employees of state institutions, academics, students, representatives of law enforcement agencies, local authorities and voluntary associations); a series of seminars and round tables on international standards and mechanisms for the protection of human rights, including women's rights and gender equality; the expansion of the network of Information Centres on human rights, including the rights of women, with the participation of national and international experts.*

The creation of an economic basis for the realization of gender equality should also be one of the most important goals in the development of the country. This is especially true for the agricultural sector, where the situation of women is similar to that found in other countries in the region:

- *Women in agriculture form the basis of food production, nutrition and family incomes;*
- *Women are very concerned about issues relating to health, education and employment;*
- *In low-income families, women spend a large amount of time (70 percent) on reproductive and domestic activities (childbirth, childcare and household chores);*
- *Women's work often goes unnoticed and is low-paid.*

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> CEDAW, 2012.

This suggests that in order to successfully harness the potential of rural women, more active involvement of women is needed in decision-making processes – in civil society organizations, in local communities, but also at state and local levels, as representatives of local and executive authorities and administration.

It is also necessary to involve women in the management of soil and water resources at farm level. For this purpose, the provision of seminars and training for rural residents, both women and men, is important. This type of work could be achieved either through the development of Field Schools for Farmers, or through specialist information and educational / training centres, either within the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, or in the form of a project with an NGO. The work to involve more women should be combined with awareness raising of experts, including decision-makers on gender approaches.

It is essential to continue raising the awareness of the population, particularly in rural areas, and for both women and men, about the importance of women's equal participation in all processes relating to agriculture and rural development, and to improve women's access to various resources such as land, water, finances and advanced, cost-effective technologies for agriculture. Civil society organizations and resource centres could be involved in the training of rural women and men.

Presentations at the FAO-organized Experts Meeting held in Minsk (25–26 February, 2016), identified issues relevant to the entire region, and significantly, issues concerning statistical data. The experts reflected upon the absence of a common statistical platform, which could reflect gender issues in the development of rural areas and the agricultural sector at country level across the region. At the same time, they pointed to the value and successes of existing practices in the countries of the region.

In order to formulate a streamlined approach to the implementation of outcomes set by FAO at the regional level, it would be appropriate to provide technical support to national statistical services to conduct specific surveys in rural areas, using FAO indicators and standardized analytical tables.

The following recommendations are required to advance gender equality and empower rural women in Turkmenistan:

- *The organization of regional women's business forums and fairs to sell goods and products made by rural women, in order to enhance initiatives and opportunities for small business development among rural women, especially in regions where there are strong local traditions;*
- *The establishment of independent studies involving women from rural communities in order to: (i) determine women's priorities in the development of the industries and spheres of agricultural production; and (ii) assess the existing platforms and opportunities for women's participation in the management of natural and human resources in rural areas, the organization of small businesses in rural areas, the development of personal growth, and ways of enhancing the social welfare of rural women;*
- *The development of a system of measures to enhance the vocational education of rural women; and the organization of small businesses in rural areas for the more effective production of competitive products (particularly for processing agricultural products and rural crafts with access to trading markets). Provision needs to take into account the age and social characteristics of women, and be located in centres within walking distance from homes and without the need for separation from the family;*
- *The development of a system of preferential credits for the purchase of equipment and agricultural machinery by rural women to enhance sustainable agricultural production and create jobs for women in rural communities (in, for example, weaving, processing wool from domestic animals, the production of dried fruit, and canning and other types of storage for agricultural products).*

## References

**Central Council of Women's Union of Turkmenistan.** Official website (available at <http://zenan.gov.tm/content/145>.)

**Central Intelligence Agency.** 2016. *Turkmenistan: The World Factbook*. (available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>).

Combined initial and second periodic report of Turkmenistan on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. (a). (available at [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=3&DocTypeID=29](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=3&DocTypeID=29)).

Combined third and fifth periodic report of Turkmenistan on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. (b). (available at [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=3&DocTypeID=29](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=3&DocTypeID=29)).

**CEDAW.** 2012. *Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Turkmenistan*. Fifty-third session, 1 – 19 October 2012. (available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/co/CEDAW.C.TKM.CO.3-4.pdf>).

**National Statistical Committee of Turkmenistan.** no date. *About Turkmenistan*. (available at <http://www.stat.gov.tm/ru/main/info/turkmenistan/>).

Overview analysis of achievements and problems of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) for the period since 1995. Turkmenistan. 2014. (available at <https://www.unecce.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/documents/>).

**The State Information Agency of Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan: The Golden age.** 2015a. *Turkmenistan izbran v strukturu OON po voprosam gendernogo ravenstva [Turkmenistan elected to the Executive Board of the UN entity on Gender Equality]*. 17 April 2015. (available at <http://turkmenistan.gov.tm/?id=8643>).

**Turkmenistan: The Golden age.** 2015b. *Letopis - 2014: Razvitiye velayatov I Ashkhabada [Chronicle - 2014: Development of welayats and Ashgabat]*. 06 January 2015. (available at <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?id=7984>).

**Turkmenistan State News Agency (TDH).** 2015. *Mirovoye priznaniye pozitivnoy gendernoy politiki Turkmenistana [Global recognition for positive gender policy of Turkmenistan]*. 01 September 2015. (available at <http://tdh.gov.tm/index.php/ru/2013-04-29-11-55-24/2013-04-13-07-33-53/14181-2015-09-01-20-08-04>).

**The World Bank.** no date. *Turkmenistan Overview*. (available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkmenistan/overview>). [Accessed 08 October 2016].





**Larisa Kobelyanskaya** has a PhD in Philosophy and is an Associate Professor, researcher and expert in gender issues with more than 30 years of experience. Larisa specializes in studies of gender ideology and politics, education, the socio-political status of women and their security, as well as in the development of social standards and gender expertise. Until 2015, Larisa Kobelyanskaya was the Director of the Department of Family and Gender Policy in the Ministry of Social Policy and the Advisor to the Minister of Social Policy on Gender Equality. She has coordinated UNDP projects on gender equality for more than 15 years. She participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995, Beijing), and in numerous international forums and conferences under the auspices of the UN and also as a member of governmental delegations. Larisa works with several governmental, international and non-governmental organizations as an expert, consultant and adviser on gender issues. She is a member of several expert councils.

## GENDER ISSUES, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS IN UKRAINE

With respect to rural development, Ukraine is oriented towards the EU principles of the market economy. The process of administrative-territorial reform and decentralization that is currently underway aims to lead to the greater participation of all citizens in decision-making and the formation of local budgets that meet the needs of local communities. It is expected that this reform will provide an opportunity for more than a third of Ukraine's population living in rural areas to overcome poverty and secure a decent quality of life. According to experts, competent development and use of agricultural potential in Ukraine would address the issues of poverty eradication and food security, and would also facilitate the export of agricultural products. However, various crises, a difficult political and social context, external aggression and the annexation of part of Ukraine's territory have all had a negative impact on development. The country is in the process of reforming both the governance system as a whole and the management of its various sectors. Furthermore, Ukraine strives for effective public policy with a focus on development and on a decent and continually improving quality of life for its citizens. This type of policy can only be implemented by taking full account of a range of social factors, including a gender component.

After the Fourth World Conference on Women, Ukraine adopted and implemented four state programmes to ensure gender equality, including measures such as: the adoption of the Law "On ensuring equal rights and opportunities of women and men" (2005); the introduction of a systematic gender analysis of legislation<sup>1</sup>; the incorporation of gender-based approaches to education as an integral part of education at all stages; the development of special training programmes for civil servants; and the introduction of individual educational programmes to prevent all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence and human trafficking. Substantial effort has also been devoted to the promotion of leadership programmes for women. All of these activities have resulted in the inclusion of gender issues in the agendas of political parties and government agencies and in strengthening the influence of civil society. They have also changed the gender balance in certain spheres of social life in a positive way.

The rural population represents 31.2 percent of Ukraine's total population of 42.9 million people. Women account for 53.7 percent of the total population and men represent 46.3 percent. It is important to note that in the structure of the rural population, 18.9 percent are children and young people under the age of 18 years, and 22.8 percent are people aged 60 years and older. There are 2 500 rural settlements, and the population of people aged 60 years and over represents more than 50 percent of the total rural settlement population. Women account for 53 percent of the rural population.<sup>2</sup> The rural population is following an ageing demographic trend, mainly due to an increase in the number of single elderly women. The average life expectancy of rural women is ten years higher than the average life expectancy of men. On average, rural women live for 75.2 years and rural men for 64.6

<sup>1</sup> According to article 4 of the law of Ukraine, "On ensuring equal rights and opportunities of women and men", gender expertise is mandatory in the formulation of any legal acts.

<sup>2</sup> The State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2015a.

years. Female pensioners, living in villages, account for 40.7 percent of the village population, and men for only 25 percent. In the structure of the urban population, women of retirement age account for 31.1 percent and men for 21.2 percent.<sup>3</sup> This gender gap is determined by gender issues, which are common across the whole country, but also by issues specific to rural areas. They are associated with well-established social norms and stereotypes. These problems are primarily health-related: men, and in particular rural men, are less likely than women to engage in preventive health care visits and seek treatment for diseases at an early stage; alcohol abuse, smoking and accidents are more prevalent among the male population; and men are more likely to be employed in poor or unsafe working conditions.

In rural areas, 5.2 million people are employed, representing one-third of the total employed population. The employment rate among women is 51.9 percent and among men it is 62.5 percent. The structure of the employed female population is as follows: 34.8 percent of women work as employees; 1.4 percent are self-employed; and only 0.4 percent are employers. The corresponding figures for rural women are somewhat different: employed rural women account for 25.4 percent; self-employed for 1.1 percent; and employers for 0.3 percent. There are almost two times more housewives in rural areas than in urban areas (11.5 and 6.8 percent respectively). In urban areas, there are almost two times more self-employed men than women, and in rural areas, there are four times more self-employed men than self-employed women. This does not mean that rural women are less willing to engage in entrepreneurship (compared with urban women and rural men), but instead that rural women encounter a greater number of challenges and pressures deriving from the need to combine farm work with household chores.

The living conditions of rural women need to be taken into account as well. Forty-eight percent of rural women have limited access not only to quality health care, but to any health services at all, because of a lack of medical facilities near to their homes. Poor road infrastructure, poverty and a lack of accessible transport also mean that rural women are not guaranteed access to health care services located in large towns and cities. Almost a quarter (23 percent) of households still use furnace (wood or coal) heating. A third (32 percent) of rural women do not have access to drinking water in their homes (they use wells outside their homes), and more than half (58 percent) do not have sanitation or running water in their homes.<sup>4</sup> This is not just an indication of lower quality of life: it is also evidence of both an absence of basic living conditions and extreme poverty. In addition to limited access to infrastructure, there are also problems concerning the pollution of water in wells, power outages and inadequate transport. Among the conditions that hinder life in rural areas are the absence of a network of paved roads in many villages, a lack of information about transport and the poor state of streets. More than a quarter of rural settlements do not have public transport, and 484 rural settlements (with a total population of 57 400 people) are located at a distance of over 10 km from the nearest public transport stop, and 661 settlements (with a total population of 451 600 people) are located at a distance of more than 10 km from paved roads. Less than a half of rural streets (47.8 percent) have a hard coating, and the residents of 442 rural settlements have no access to potable, mains supply water.

Although the overall rate of female unemployment in the country is lower than that of men (8.0 and 9.9 percent respectively, according to ILO research), women are more likely to be registered as unemployed (55.3 percent), which provides them with a level of social security. The average salary of men in Ukraine is still almost a quarter higher than the corresponding wage of women (76.3 percent). This trend is observable in both urban and rural areas.<sup>5</sup> Wages in the agricultural sector are among the lowest in the ranking of wages by sector (72.9 percent of the average wage level in the economy). Taking into account the lower wage level of women in general, it becomes clear that the wages of rural women are among the lowest in the country. This analysis applies both to the agricultural sector as a whole, and to other activities in rural areas.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that the lower wage level will, over time, become converted into smaller pensions. The average pension of women today is 72.4 percent of the average pension of men. The pension gap is also greater than the wage gap. This is a very significant indicator and one which determines quality of life in old age. It also confirms that older rural women are one of the most significant 'at risk' groups in terms of poverty.

<sup>3</sup> The State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2015b.

<sup>4</sup> The State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2015b.

Young single women with children represent another vulnerable group. According to the results of a household survey, in relation to receipt of children's allowance, the number of women exceeded the number of men by 1.3 times, and by 1.4 times in relation to receipt of social benefits and by 2.3 times in relation to receipt of subsidies. Moreover, the percentage of rural residents in these categories exceeded the percentage of urban residents.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that rural residents form the majority of social assistance applicants (in percentage terms) is further confirmation of the lower income level of rural residents, and especially of rural women. At the same time, the level of social protection is determined by the resources that the state can provide to its citizens. Ukraine is currently undertaking a radical reform of social services. This represents a move away from an egalitarian approach towards one which ensures that all components of social protection are targeted. In addition, it provides an opportunity to reduce poverty, including poverty among rural women, and to develop women's potential, which is of particular importance. While reform aims to bring about the improvement of social benefits, it is also necessary to create opportunities for women to take up decent employment and support themselves. In this context, it is worth considering the experience of the State Employment Service. One potential approach to reducing unemployment among rural women is to promote self-employment. In 2015, with the support of the employment service, 16 percent of registered unemployed women and almost 30 percent of men became self-employed in agriculture.<sup>8</sup>

The State Employment Service also uses a practice whereby unemployed persons gain employment with agricultural producers. In doing so, the service pays compensation costs to employers, in the form of a single social contribution for compulsory state social insurance. Although there are only a small number of enterprises in rural areas (and in a large number of rural settlements there are no enterprises at all), this incentive is quite effective and presents an opportunity to employ people who are registered as unemployed.

There is a tendency to employ urban residents in rural areas. This is especially true among internally displaced persons (IDPs). The number of registered IDPs in July 2016 was 1 790 267 people.<sup>9</sup> Sixty-three percent of internally displaced persons are women and they are particularly vulnerable to hardship, poverty and insecurity. Women represent 71.7 percent of unemployed persons within the IDP population.<sup>10</sup>

IDPs who have moved to safe areas often aspire to settle there on a long-term basis. The government has taken a number of decisions to support IDPs in relation to the financing of housing construction (with an improved mechanism for providing long-term soft loans to individual builders of housing in rural areas) and the allocation of land plots for construction. This motivates IDPs to organize community settlements in rural areas and to develop their own businesses focused on agricultural production. The State Employment Service has also contributed to this by providing one-off payments of unemployment benefit to those who are setting up businesses and have relevant business plans. As a result, 22.1 percent of unemployed rural residents registered with the State Employment Service have been employed. This payment is mostly used as start-up capital by women to implement their business projects in rural areas. More than 42 percent of unemployed rural women have become employed in this way. There are numerous success stories about women who have started businesses and examples such as breeding poultry, growing flowers, seedlings and plants and seed production are evidence of this.<sup>11</sup> This approach helps to resolve both issues of unemployment, and also a range of social issues, particularly because women gain the opportunity to support themselves and their family; conversely, a lack of social support leads to an increased burden on women in relation to caring for sick, elderly, disabled and other family members. Women also assume the responsibility for supporting their families in the absence of the men (in families where the men are engaged in combat).

Expanding women's access to resources – both tangible and intangible (decision-making, information, specialized knowledge, land, financial savings and loans, among others) – is critical for addressing both gender issues and social problems.

<sup>7</sup> UNDP, 2015b.

<sup>8</sup> The statistics and information used in this article were provided to the author by the State Employment Service upon request and for the preparation of the article.

<sup>9</sup> Information from the Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and IDPs of Ukraine.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> According to data provided by the State Employment Service.

According to the results of a UNDP survey, conducted within the framework of a study on the situation of women living in rural areas, only 16 percent of rural women participate in various social and professional organizations. Political organizations involve only two percent of rural women and NGOs only five percent. According to women interviewees, the main way of taking part in the resolution of village and community problems is through participation in local elections. This was affirmed by 53 percent of respondents. However, more than a third of rural women (36 percent) said that they do not have any role in the resolution of village problems. Gender stereotyping and an excessive workload were identified by rural women as the main barriers to social activity.<sup>12</sup>

According to the results of the local elections held in Ukraine in 2015, there have been slight increases in the numbers of women represented at council level: in regional councils from 11 to 15 percent; in district councils from 23 to 24.8 percent; and in rural councils from 46 to 46.6 percent. According to experts, some increase in the representation of women at local level is associated with the constraints of the resources, which the local authority distributes and manages. Under recent administrative reform, the main part of the budget has been transferred to the local level, which creates opportunities for women to gain greater access to financial management and resources. Since the process of reform has only recently begun, the impact on gender balance will become apparent over time. However, women's growing interest in governance is evident. Special programmes on women's leadership, implemented by NGOs, have already had a positive impact. Educational and awareness raising activities on gender issues among women and men, at the grassroots level and among officials, including those working in the fields of agriculture and rural development, are also very important. They should aim towards overcoming stereotypes concerning the roles of women and men and should be adapted to modern patterns of social relationships, including those within the family.

It has become increasingly difficult to resolve the problems of social protection exclusively through the redistribution of payments from the budget. It is, therefore, time to consider alternative possibilities. One solution is the division of responsibility among all members of civil society, including the private sector, NGOs, and even those who are directly in need (as one of the goals is their active involvement rather than passive consumption). Such practices exist in other countries and their implementation is acute for Ukraine. As the Ukrainian government incrementally reduces the categories of people entitled to social assistance and the volume of this assistance, this type of "involvement" becomes vital. At the same time, the government has implemented targeted subsidies to compensate for the financial losses associated with changes to various social benefits. This type of change is perceived somewhat ambiguously by society. Furthermore, it is not yet possible to analyse the impact of these innovations on people's quality of life because they have only just started and primarily relate to housing subsidies (a minimum period of time is required to assess the full impact of these changes).

IDPs have become a new social group within the rural population. When residents of cities or towns become internally displaced, many migrate to live in rural areas, often without any prior experience of working in the agricultural sector. There are many women with children within this migrant population. They come to rural areas in search of more affordable housing, to gain access to cheaper food products and to grow agricultural products for sale. However, they often do not have sufficient resources and skills. The government needs to focus on this category, not only in terms of assistance, but also in terms of the capacity building of human resources.

Other vulnerable groups include older women and men, and women with children living in the liberated territories or the so-called "grey zones" (a type of neutral zone between the parties to the hostilities, resulting from the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the frontline under the Minsk Agreements). It is critical that these groups secure access to food and the possibility of basic survival. People who originally lived in these predominantly steppe villages and towns worked on the land growing agricultural products. As a result of the hostilities, this area has become unusable for agriculture for an indefinite period. For residents, this means a lack of access to food and livelihoods.

Recent experiences in Ukraine have shown that social policies should focus on more than social security needs (for example, payments and benefits). In this narrow form, such policies are unproductive, and promote benefit dependency rather than agency and capacity building. Therefore, it is necessary to develop social assistance programmes that include all stakeholders and facilitate

<sup>12</sup> UNDP, 2015a.

their activity. This includes access to programmes of high-quality education and professional growth across the life course, and the creation of jobs in remote areas. For rural women and men, it would be another opportunity to extend their working age and increase their competitiveness, in order to compensate for small pensions and to experience a higher standard of living.

Many social problems in rural areas are extremely gender sensitive, and their resolution requires a complex approach, including the use of gender policy instruments. Quite often, in order to achieve common goals for both women and men, completely different tools are needed. It is important to take into account the gender-specific problems of rural women and men, and programmes of state and local development require the budgetary resources to resolve them.

## References

**The State Statistics Service of Ukraine.** 2014. *The socio-economic situation of rural settlements of Ukraine. The statistical compendium.* Kiev.

**The State Statistics Service of Ukraine.** 2015a. *The population of Ukraine as of 1 January 2015.* Kiev.

**The State Statistics Service of Ukraine.** 2015b. *Women and men in Ukraine.* Kiev.

**The State Statistics Service of Ukraine.** 2015c. *Social indicators of standard of living of the population. The statistical compendium.* Kiev.

**The State Statistics Service of Ukraine.** 2015d. *Socio-demographic characteristics of households in Ukraine in 2015 (according to a sample survey of household living conditions of Ukraine). The statistical compendium.* Kiev.

**UNDP.** 2015a. *A Comprehensive Study of the Situation of Women living in Rural Areas.* Kiev.

**UNDP.** 2015b. *Millennium Development Goals. Ukraine: 2000–2015. National Report.* Kiev.







**Bakhodur Eshonov** is an expert in development policy. In the early 1990s, he worked in a range of government institutions in Uzbekistan (State Planning Committee, Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations, State Committee for Forecasting and Statistics). In 1994, he joined UNDP as the coordinator of the first National Human Development Report of UNDP. He later worked in different positions at UNDP. While working for the UNDP Country office in Uzbekistan, he introduced and implemented a number of important projects and initiatives, including support to the Government of Uzbekistan in the formulation of the first national medium-term Welfare Improvement Strategy. Bakhodur Eshonov was the founding director of the Center for Economic Research ([www.cer.uz](http://www.cer.uz)), one of the most well-known and respected think tanks in Central Asia; and of the “Economic Review” ([www.review.uz](http://www.review.uz)), one of the most prestigious periodicals in the country. The Center for Economic Research (CER) has worked with many talented researchers and has published over 200 research reports covering a wide range of development issues.

## TRANSITION OR TRANSFORMATION?

### SOCIAL AND GENDER ASPECTS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE REFORM STRATEGY IN UZBEKISTAN

The transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, which had become the ultimate aspiration by the end of the 1980s, has not been as fast and as easy as many initially expected. Moreover, almost a quarter of a century later, many of the postulates of this transition, based on the so-called Washington Consensus, are not necessarily considered to be the only right ones anymore. Markets cannot be built overnight, free trade doesn't always create jobs, private initiatives do not necessarily ensure better quality and accessibility, and the openness of immature financial systems can make national economies extremely vulnerable to external shocks.

In analysing the experience of reforms in Uzbekistan, it is important to consider the many factors that determined the choice of development strategy and instruments of its implementation (which are not static, but change and are adjusted at each stage of the reforms).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, an analysis must look beyond the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market one, to consider the systematic and gradual transformation of the economy, society, institutions and spatial development, all within a coherent development strategy. This transformation was not so much an economic transformation, but a social one, covering all dimensions of development. Accordingly, the numerous components and dimensions of development are neither static nor isolated from each other: they must be understood in a broader context of **transformational dynamics** capturing their complexity and interrelatedness.<sup>2</sup>

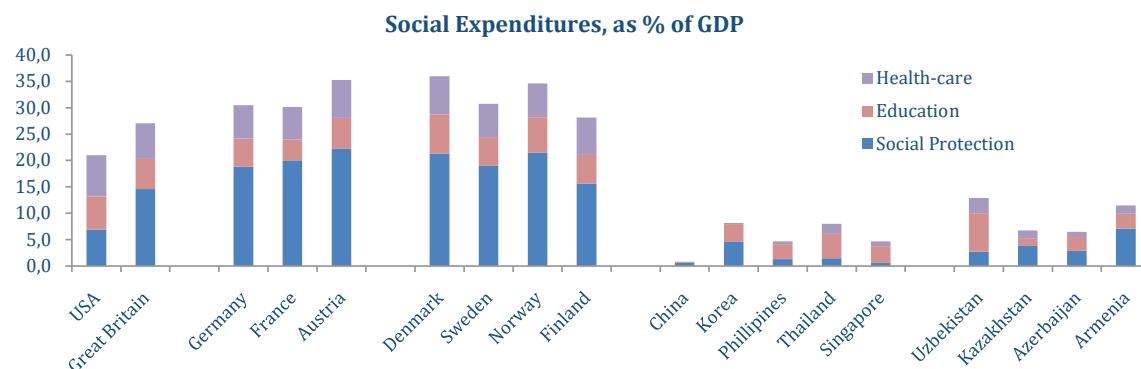
Since 2000, the main objective of socio-economic policy has been to maintain the delicate balance between the goal of reducing poverty and the need to mobilize investment for the development of industry and infrastructure and to accelerate structural transformation as a basis for sustainable longer term growth.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See also, McKinley, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> See also, UNDP & ILO, 1995.

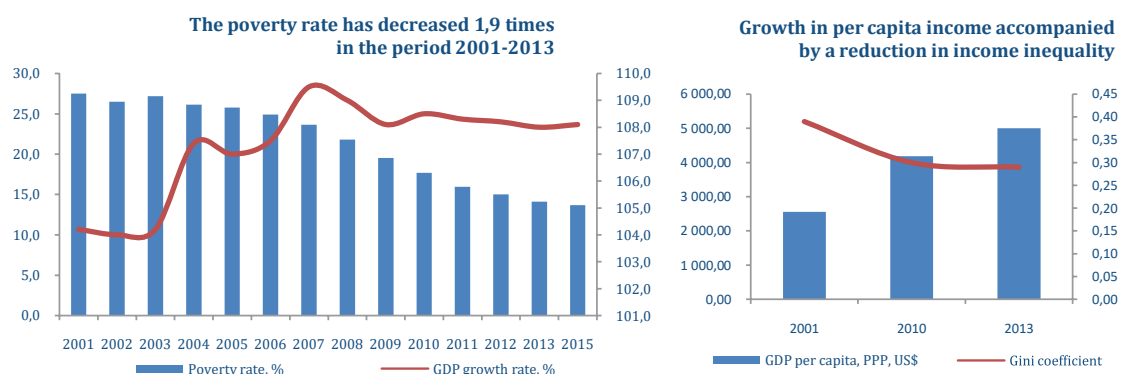
<sup>3</sup> UNDP & CER, 2015.

Expenditure on the social sphere and social protection in Uzbekistan has traditionally been very high. In the period 2001 to 2013, during an era of accelerated economic growth and an increase in the total expenditure of the state budget, the share of social expenditures in the state budget grew from 47.6 to 58.6 percent.<sup>4</sup> While it is important to highlight the direct impact of these commitments by the State, we must also take into account the effects on domestic political economy and transformational changes. Firstly, social spending involves taxes on the real economy and, accordingly, the limitation of resources for private sector investment. In contrast to the fast growing economies of South-East Asia, where social spending has only recently started to increase after decades of rapid growth, Uzbekistan (as well as other countries in the region) have consistently maintained a high level of social spending in their budgets.



Secondly, investment in the social sector actually represents investment in human capital, in social transformation, and, in the end, in a new quality of human development.<sup>5</sup> Thirdly, the maintenance and increase of expenditure on education and health care also means the maintenance and increase of employment, in particular women's employment. Although the wages in the so-called 'budget sphere' (public sector) are, as a rule, lower than in other sectors, employment in the social sectors, as well as in the rapidly growing service sector, has helped to maintain the level of participation by women in economic activity, in particular against a backdrop of significant pressure on the labour market due to structural and institutional changes, both in industry and in agriculture.

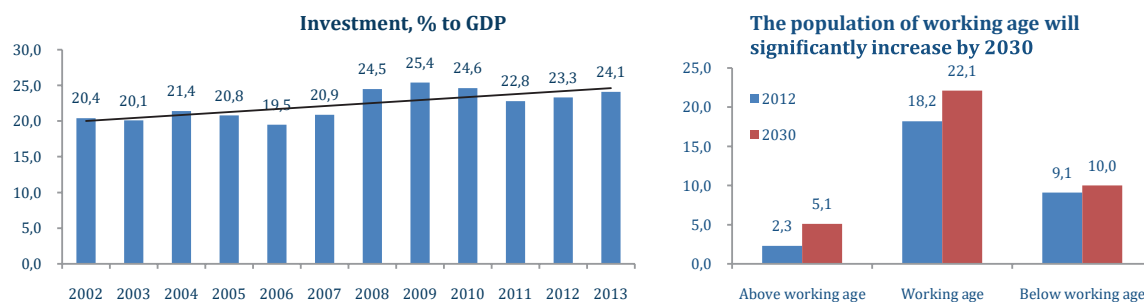
The government has managed not only to reduce the level of poverty, but also to prevent serious income level stratification. However, in the medium and long term, the issues of maintaining and boosting people's incomes and ensuring their sustainability, and reducing the gaps in living standards between the urban and rural populations, and between women and men, could be addressed not so much by expanding social support programmes, but by increasing the employment rate in the processing industries (including agro-processing industries<sup>6</sup>) and in the fast-growing service sector, especially in rural and peri-urban settlements.



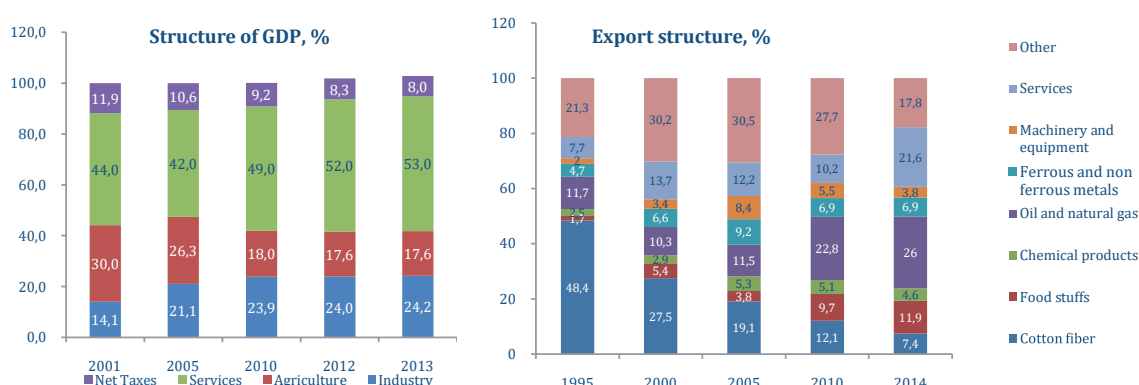
<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> A vivid illustration of how investment in changing stereotypes can encourage girls to participate in sports. This includes a range of measures from the provision of free sport uniform to the training of women coaches. As a result, "today, 47% of girls, and in rural areas - 44.7%, are engaged in sports". (available at <http://www.press-service.uz/ru/news/5230/>).

<sup>6</sup> Food industry of Uzbekistan will increase exports twofold by 2020, and Food industry enterprises of Uzbekistan produce more than 3 thousand products of food.

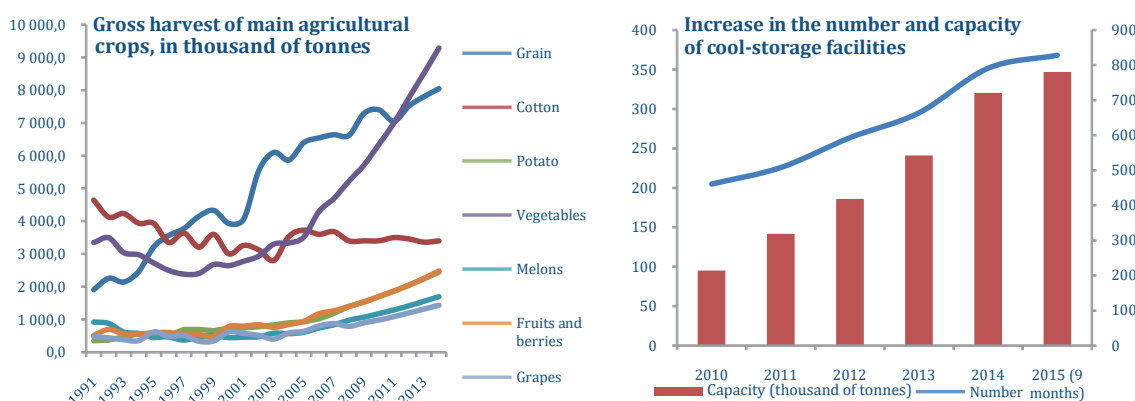


This is particularly relevant given the current and expected transformation of the demographic structure including: a sharp rise in the working age population (especially in rural areas); growth in the number of retirees; and a corresponding change in the demand for social services. However generous the programmes of social support are, they will not be able to offer a long-term solution to the issues of growth in incomes and the improvement of living standards, without creating productive jobs for both women and men in the formal sector.



Uzbekistan is pursuing an active industrial policy designed to mobilize investments, provide sustainable, high rates of economic growth and a shift in focus from the production of raw materials to finished products with higher added value.<sup>7</sup> By the mid-2000s, on the back of improved terms of trade, the share of investment reached 25 percent of GDP. This has helped to radically change the structure of the economy.<sup>8</sup> The share of agriculture in GDP fell from 35 percent in the late 1990s, to less than 20 percent by 2010. Moreover, it is anticipated that the share of agriculture in GDP and in the employment sector will further decrease due to an increase in the share of industry and services.

The changing structure of agricultural production, involving a growing share of fruit, vegetable and oil crops, the introduction of new agricultural technologies and the establishment of new, modern supply chains and value chains, also encompasses corresponding changes in the pattern of agricultural enterprises. At present, there are no large cooperative farms, established on the basis of the Soviet collective farms, and there is no fragmentation into small plots.<sup>9</sup>



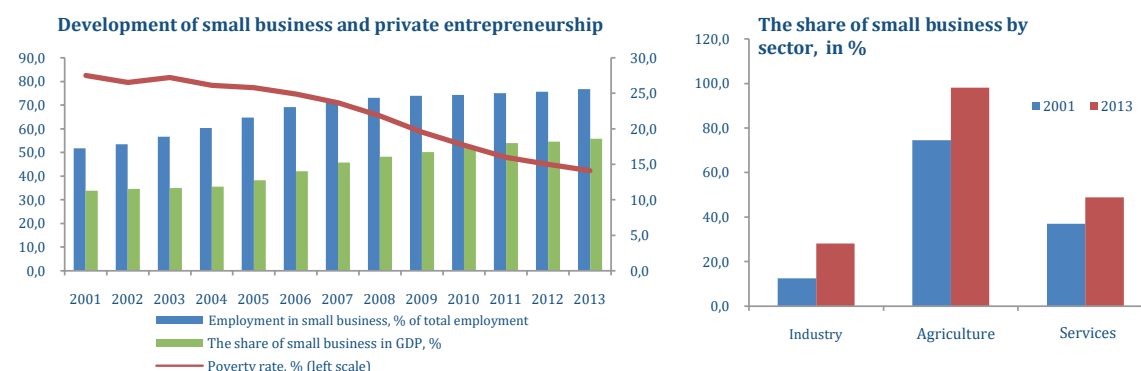
<sup>7</sup> UNECA, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> See also, Popov & Chowdhury, 2016.

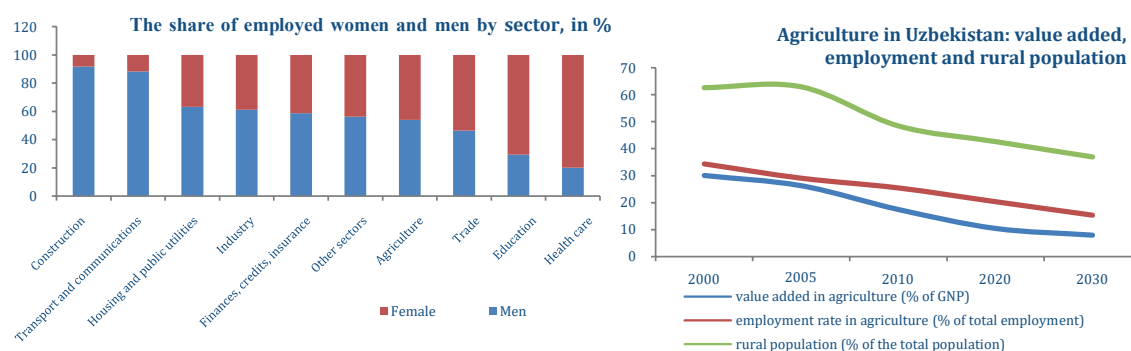
<sup>9</sup> The issue of the size of land plots was discussed in the framework of preparation for the study, "Macroeconomic Policy and Poverty in Uzbekistan", UNDP& CER. 2005, and remains a subject for debate.

The main focus was, and remains, on the search for the optimal size of plots, there by ensuring "economies of scale", increasing the productivity of agricultural enterprises, and promoting cross-sectoral cooperation, in which agriculture / rural settlements are not only the suppliers of agricultural products, but also generate a new type of demand for infant national / domestic industries, the service sector and R&D.<sup>10</sup>

The development of small business and entrepreneurship (along with investment in the social sector, where the rate of women's employment has been traditionally high) has improved the employment rate of women.<sup>11</sup>



In the period from 2000 to 2013, the proportion of women in employment has increased from 44 percent to 45.7 percent. In 2012, the heads of 40.4 percent of small businesses and 13 percent of microenterprises were women.<sup>12</sup> However, although women accounted for more than half (52.6 percent) of all workers in the agricultural sector in 2008, only 17 000 (7.2 percent) out of a total of 235 000 registered farms were headed by women. Within the general reduction of the employment rate in agriculture, the share of women is declining more rapidly. In 2005, 32 percent of all working women and 26.4 percent of male workers were engaged in agriculture: by 2010, the share of women had declined to 28.5 percent, and the share of men to 25.5 percent.<sup>13</sup>



However paradoxical it may appear, the empowerment of women in rural areas is related to the displacement of women from agriculture and their engagement with the growing employment opportunities in the processing industries and in the service sector. This is also essential for ensuring the future of agricultural development and food security.<sup>14</sup> More importantly, these structural changes – the pattern of ownership and the structure of GDP (particularly in the agricultural sector) – generate respective positive multiplying effects going far beyond pure economics.

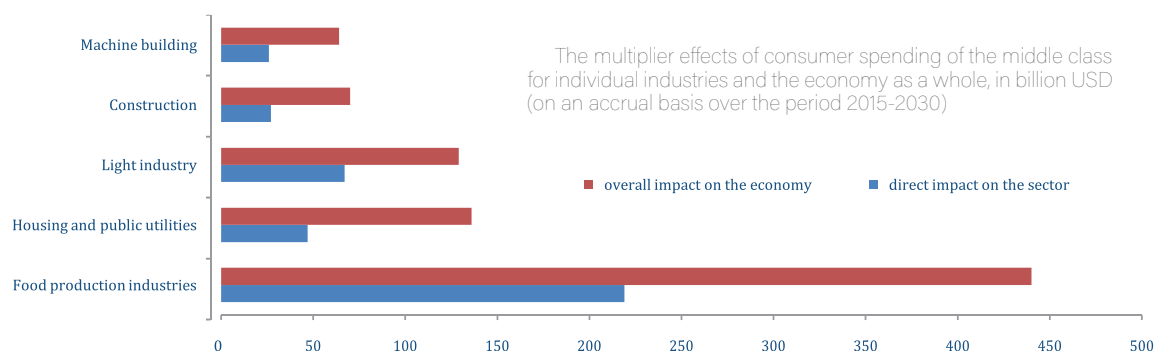
<sup>10</sup> A good example of stimulating the connection between science and production is the annual [Innovation Fairs](#) (see for example "[Uzbekistan plans to boost R&D](#)").

<sup>11</sup> Asian Development Bank, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> UNDP & CER, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> FAO, 2011.



There are no “blueprint” solutions to gender equality issues in agriculture, but some principles are universal and lessons can be drawn from best practices.<sup>15</sup>

In Uzbekistan, this issue has been addressed by a range of institutions, and targeted interventions aimed at: i) eliminating gender inequality in education; ii) eliminating gender inequality in employment; and iii) ensuring equal opportunities for women and men in, for example, decision-making processes, among others.<sup>16</sup>

However, the impact of these programmes and, ultimately, the improvement of the status of women (and men) in rural (and urban) areas, depends not only on the presence or absence of targeted programmes, but on how effectively and harmoniously these programmes are integrated into the overall logic and dynamics of transformations associated with changes in the economic structure and the pattern of the real sector, with the reformatting of spatial structure with new poles of growth, and in the end, with the transformation of the structure of society, including up to patterns of behaviour.<sup>17</sup> The empowerment of women in rural areas is very strongly associated with the pace and quality of industrialization and urbanization<sup>18</sup>. Not only does the employment of rural women in the processing industries and in the service sector result in decent jobs, higher and more sustainable incomes, and the spillover effects of demand for industrial products. The most important consequences are the new quality of the representation of women in the labour market, the new status of women, increased levels of education, improved socialization, and in the end, new opportunities for realizing the potential of human development.

## References

**Asian Development Bank.** 2014. *Uzbekistan: Country Gender Assessment*. (available at <http://www.adb.org/documents/uzbekistan-country-gender-assessment-2014>).

**CER.** 2014. *Social Policy for Economic Transformation and Social Sustainability: New Social Contract in the New Stage of Development*. (available at [http://www.cer.uz/upload/iblock/b22/afzdblrd\\_zmqz\\_2\\_nuktwxcuvqa\\_en.pdf](http://www.cer.uz/upload/iblock/b22/afzdblrd_zmqz_2_nuktwxcuvqa_en.pdf)).

**FAO & CFS.** 2016. Urbanization, Rural Transformation and Implications for Food Security - Online consultation on the background document to the CFS Forum. *FSN Forum Discussion*. 15 March - 06 April 2016. (available at <http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/activities/discussions/urbanization-rural-transformation>).

**FAO.** 2011. *Women in Agriculture: Closing the gender gap for development*. (available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i2050r.pdf>).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> UNDP & CER, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> A study undertaken by CER (2014) is of note in this context and addresses the issues of a changing social contract.

<sup>18</sup> FAO & CFS, 2016.

**McKinley, T.** 2010. *The Puzzling Success of Uzbekistan's Heterodox Development*, No. 44, January 2010. London, Centre for Development Policy and Research. (available at <https://www.soas.ac.uk/cdpr/publications/dv/file56073.pdf>).

**Popov, V. & Chowdhury, A.** 2016. *What can Uzbekistan tell us about industrial policy that we did not already know?* DESA Working Paper No. 147, February 2016. (available at [http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2016/wp147\\_2016.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2016/wp147_2016.pdf)).

**UNDP & CER.** 2005. *Macroekonomicheskaya politika i bednost v Uzbekistane [Macroeconomic policy and poverty in Uzbekistan]*. Tashkent, Uzbekistan. (available at [http://www.cer.uz/upload/iblock/e22/lmppr\\_ru.pdf](http://www.cer.uz/upload/iblock/e22/lmppr_ru.pdf)).

**UNDP & CER.** 2015. *Millennium Development Goals Report. Uzbekistan - 2015*. Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

**UNDP & ILO.** 1995. *Social policy and economic transformation in Uzbekistan*. Unpublished report.

**UNECA.** 2016. *Transformative Industrial Policy for Africa*.





ISBN 978-92-5-109192-0



9 7 8 9 2 5 1 0 9 1 9 2 0

I5575E/1/12.16