

## EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR EQUALITY

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines gender equality as a key condition for the democratisation of public life. It focuses on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men across various spheres, including employment, education, family relations, and participation in public and political activities. The article highlights Turkmenistan's gender equality policies, including its cooperation with international organisations, implementation of national action plans, and commitment to international standards such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It emphasises that the country's gender policy is grounded not only in international norms but also in national traditions, which have historically afforded women a prominent position. The article provides examples of social and legislative initiatives aimed at protecting women's rights, improving their reproductive health, and creating conditions for their equal participation in the country's socio-economic and political development.

**Keywords:** *Gender Equality, Women's Rights, Turkmenistan, International Cooperation, Social Policy, Public Activities.*

### INTRODUCTION

Ensuring gender equality through women's empowerment is a vital issue for all countries in the world. And under the leadership of President Serdar Berdimuhamedov, Turkmenistan is reaching new heights of development of the country. Progress across all sectors of the economy is primarily focused on improving the population's living conditions. Women play a significant role in this development, reflecting the high regard and honour accorded to them in our country. Women have full constitutional rights to choose their professions and work in any sector of the economy. As the National Leader of the Turkmen people Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov stated, "*Gender equality is a key part of the global development strategy. We have set ourselves a high goal in this area. This goal includes achieving full gender equality and empowerment for all women. Fulfilling this task is our common duty and joint responsibility*".<sup>2</sup> This demonstrates that the fundamental legal basis for gender equality in Turkmenistan is enshrined in our Constitution.<sup>3</sup> President Serdar Berdimuhamedov is admirably continuing these initiatives of our National Leader in the implementation of important state affairs.

We live in the XXI digital century, in which the role of women has increased significantly. In Turkmen society, women are actively involved in all spheres and sectors of the economy, supported by government policy. 44.4% of the legal frameworks are in place to encourage, ensure, and monitor gender equality in accordance with the SDG indicators<sup>4</sup>. Over the past decades, the total population of Turkmenistan has been steadily growing, while the proportion of women has remained at 50% for the past 60 years (Table 1). The protection of human rights,

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<sup>2</sup> Berdimuhamedov, G. (2016). To new heights of progress. 9<sup>th</sup> volume. Ashgabat, 2016: 493-495.

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of Turkmenistan. Ashgabat, TDNG, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> State Committee of Turkmenistan on Statistics, 2025.

including gender equality, is considered fundamental to the democratisation of public life. Ensuring gender equality is therefore paramount, alongside such fundamental human rights as the right to life, work, education, professional development, and family formation.

**Table 1. Proportion of women in Turkmenistan.**

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2023
Population	1,643,457	2,195,616	2,760,358	3,760,562	4,582,677	5,564,356	6,949,912	7,364,438
Women	841,231	1,123,746	1,442,932	1,957,451	2,319,586	2,834,511	3,546,701	3,753,089
in %	51,2%	51,2%	50,9%	50,8%	50,6%	50,9%	51%	51%

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/>

Gender equality encompasses equal constitutional rights and freedoms for women and men, as well as the equitable distribution of responsibilities within society, fair treatment, and equal application of established norms. It also means that women, equally with men, are subject to the laws, traditions, and spiritual and moral principles of society, and share equal rights and responsibilities.

The adult female literacy rate in Turkmenistan is almost the same as in Europe and Central Asia. The share of women in the labour force has increased from 45.8% in 2019 to over 48% currently. Women hold a significant share of positions in the education and health sectors. In the economic sphere, there is also a positive trend: women make up 32% of entrepreneurs in Turkmenistan, which confirms the growth of their activity and independence in economic activities.<sup>5</sup> These figures indicate significant progress in the country's efforts to create conditions for the active participation of women in governance and in making important decisions.

In general, the share of women in leadership positions stands at 22.4%. In the cabinet of ministers, 22.2% of the portfolios are held by women. They also represent 21.9% in local executive bodies.<sup>6</sup> As of July 2024, there are 32 women out of 125 deputies in the Parliament of Turkmenistan, constituting 25.6 percent of the total number of deputies.

Turkmenistan addresses gender equality with the same comprehensive approach it applies to other human rights issues. The state pursues its policy in this area in close cooperation with major international organisations. Furthermore, Turkmenistan's policies and activities related to women's rights clearly demonstrate the high value the Turkmen people have historically placed on spiritual and moral traditions and the role of women. A core tradition inherited from their ancestors is the perception of women as exemplars of natural beauty, tenderness, and moral purity.

In this era of renewal and progress for our independent nation, respect for women has become an inexhaustible force strengthening our society. Reverence for women and the recognition of motherhood as a sacred value are central principles of state policy. In accordance with the Code of Turkmenistan on Social Protection, which was amended on 13 July 2024,<sup>7</sup> women who have become mothers receive state benefits until their child reaches three years of age, and citizens reaching retirement age are provided with pensions or social benefits. These benefits for young mothers are provided regardless of employment status. If a woman is employed,

<sup>5</sup> State Committee of Turkmenistan on Statistics, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> State Committee of Turkmenistan on Statistics, 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Code of Turkmenistan "About social protection of the population" (of October 19, 2012; as amended on 13 July, 2024)

she is granted maternal leave. Upon expiration of maternity leave, the right to unpaid parental leave is granted until the child reaches the age of three years. Furthermore, the government supports women's entrepreneurship through financial aid programmes and professional training.

In matters of reproductive health, special attention is traditionally given to women in Turkmenistan, considering their crucial role in forming and preserving the health of future generations. State policy is aimed at actively supporting motherhood and creating optimal conditions to ensure a healthy start to life for every child. In particular, one of the most notable measures is the provision of special breaks for breastfeeding mothers who are studying or working, allowing them to take breaks every two hours during the workday. This not only promotes the physical and mental health of children but also helps women balance their work responsibilities with child-rearing, as evidenced by the increase in the proportion of working mothers and the rise in breastfeeding rates to levels recommended by the State of World Population report.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the country is actively implementing comprehensive measures to protect maternal and child health, including early diagnosis and disease prevention programmes, access to free medical services for mothers and children, and extensive educational outreach. As a result of such initiatives, according to national health statistics, child mortality rates in Turkmenistan have significantly decreased in recent years, and the coverage of pregnant women and new mothers with medical services has reached nearly 100%.

The unique support measures provided to mothers in Turkmenistan make the country one of the world leaders in the social protection of motherhood and childhood. For example, special financial benefits and child allowances, along with the expansion of the network of preschool institutions and early childhood development centres, significantly ease the burden on women in fulfilling their family and professional responsibilities.

Today, Turkmen women actively exercise their rights and are well represented in all areas of public life—from government and politics to education, science, and business. According to statistics, the proportion of women in leadership positions in Turkmenistan is steadily increasing and currently constitutes a significant portion of civil servants and members of parliament.<sup>9</sup>

## INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

This article has been prepared on the basis of a content analysis of government strategies, programmes, as well as statistical data from the World Bank and reports from other international organisations. Relevant information regarding international experience in empowering women equality in some areas like, education, healthcare, economic and political empowerment is presented.

### **Economic empowerment:**

A comprehensive review of economic empowerment initiatives across different countries, focusing on microfinance, vocational training, and access to resources. Countries like Rwanda have implemented vocational training geared toward women to foster entrepreneurship and

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<sup>8</sup> UNFPA (2024). Weaving a Stronger Fabric: Solutions for a More Equitable World. *State of World Population report 2024*, <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/swp2024-english-240327-web.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Law of Turkmenistan of June 18, 2016 No. 409-V "About the state awards of Turkmenistan" [*Türkmenistanyň 2016-njy ýylyň 18-nji iýunyndaky №409-V Türkmenistanyň döwlet syýaglary hakyndaky kanun*]

job readiness. Initiatives like Grameen Bank in Bangladesh demonstrate the potential of microloans to empower women economically by allowing them to start small businesses<sup>10</sup>

### **Education:**

It is widely recognised that education benefits individuals and contributes to national development. Educating women and men increases their subsequent earnings equally and expands future opportunities and choices for both boys and girls. However, educating girls yields many additional socioeconomic benefits that benefit society as a whole. These benefits include increased economic productivity, higher family incomes, and improved infant and child health and survival. Promoting gender equality in educational institutions leads to higher enrolment rates and helps ensure that men and women of all ages can benefit from education.

Examples of such programmes are:

- *Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes:* In countries like Mexico (Oportunidades) provide families with financial incentives to ensure girls complete their education.
- *STEM Initiatives:* Programmes encouraging girls to pursue education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) have gained traction in various nations, aiming to break traditional gender roles.<sup>11</sup>

### **Health:**

Initiatives that provide reproductive health information and services along with economic support can empower women, as seen in Bangladesh's projects aimed at improving maternal health through the provision of integrated services. Training women as health workers in their communities has improved health outcomes and empowered those women economically.

### **Political Empowerment:**

The analysis of political strategies indicates that initiatives such as quotas and gender-sensitive policymaking have successfully increased women's representation in politics, including quotas and gender-sensitive policymaking. Countries such as Sweden and Rwanda have successfully used quotas to increase women's representation in legislative bodies. And organisations like UN Women offer leadership training designed to prepare women for political roles in their communities and governments.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, policies and initiatives aimed to empower women and promote gender equality span across various sectors, i.e., education, health, and economic empowerment. Initiatives in countries like the United States and various European nations have focused on providing resources, mentorship, and scholarships specifically for girls in these fields. Overall, the various initiatives demonstrate a comprehensive approach to empowering women and promoting gender equality. By addressing barriers in education, health, and economic participation, these policies not only benefit women but also contribute to broader societal development. The evidence from various countries highlights the importance of targeted interventions that consider the unique challenges faced by women in different contexts.

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<sup>10</sup> UN Women, 2015. "Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights." Available at: UN Women Publications.

<sup>11</sup> [www.care.org](http://www.care.org).

<sup>12</sup> Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>

## A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO GENDER EQUALITY IN TURKMENISTAN

Turkmenistan addresses gender equality with the same comprehensive approach it applies to other human rights issues. The state pursues its policy in this area in close cooperation with major international organisations. Furthermore, Turkmenistan's policies and activities related to women's rights clearly demonstrate the high value the Turkmen people have historically placed on spiritual and moral traditions and the role of women. A core tradition inherited from their ancestors is the perception of women as exemplars of natural beauty, tenderness, and moral purity.

In this era of renewal and progress for our independent nation, respect for women has become an inexhaustible force strengthening our society. Reverence for women and the recognition of motherhood as a sacred value are central principles of state policy. In accordance with the Code of Turkmenistan on Social Protection, women who have become mothers receive state benefits until their child reaches three years of age, and citizens reaching retirement age are provided with pensions or social benefits. These benefits for young mothers are provided regardless of employment status. If a woman is employed, she is granted unpaid leave with job security.

The state policy of Turkmenistan aimed at ensuring gender equality actively contributes to the improvement of women's status across all spheres of public life. According to official data for 2022, the proportion of women in leadership positions reached 22.4%, while female representation in the national Parliament constituted 25.7%. These figures indicate significant progress in the country's efforts to create conditions for the active participation of women in governance and in making important decisions<sup>13</sup>.

In the economic sphere, there is also a positive trend: women make up 32% of entrepreneurs in Turkmenistan, which confirms the growth of their activity and independence in economic activities. This fact is supported by active state assistance for women's entrepreneurship through financial aid programmes and professional training<sup>14</sup>.

In matters of reproductive health, special attention is traditionally given to women in Turkmenistan, considering their crucial role in forming and preserving the health of future generations. State policy is aimed at actively supporting motherhood and creating optimal conditions to ensure a healthy start to life for every child. In particular, one of the most notable measures is the provision of special breaks for breastfeeding mothers who are studying or working, allowing them to take breaks every two hours during the workday. This not only promotes the physical and mental health of children but also helps women balance their work responsibilities with child-rearing, as evidenced by the increase in the proportion of working mothers and the rise in breastfeeding rates to levels recommended by the World Health Organisation.

The unique support measures provided to mothers in Turkmenistan make the country one of the world leaders in the social protection of motherhood and childhood. For example, special financial benefits and child allowances, along with the expansion of the network of preschool institutions and early childhood development centres, significantly ease the burden on women in fulfilling their family and professional responsibilities.

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Today, Turkmen women actively exercise their rights and are well represented in all areas of public life—from government and politics to education, science, and business.

These examples clearly illustrate that gender policy in Turkmenistan is based not only on international legal standards but also on traditional national values that have been historically shaped and inherited through generations. In this regard, Turkmen legislation ensures equality between men and women, strictly prohibiting discrimination based on gender and creating equal opportunities for their realisation in social, economic, and cultural life.<sup>15</sup>

The state has signed and ratified a number of fundamental international documents, such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which demonstrates Turkmenistan's firm intention to implement global gender equality standards. Such an active policy enables the real participation of women and girls in the sustainable development of the country, strengthens their role in civil society, and provides a foundation for the harmonious and stable socio-economic development of the nation.

At the international level, Turkmenistan has made specific commitments and consistently implements the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration, and the Platform for Action to progressively ensure the rights and opportunities of women and girls. In April 2021, at a meeting of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Turkmenistan was elected a member of the UN-Women Executive Board for 2022–2024.

In December 2020, the second "National Action Programme on Gender Equality in Turkmenistan for 2021–2025" was approved. It was developed with advisory support from the UNFPA. This programmatic document aims to create conditions for the equal participation of men and women in all spheres of society.

Every four years, Turkmenistan submits national reports to the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, detailing its implementation of the CEDAW provisions. These reports include information on key legislative, institutional, administrative, and other practical measures implemented during the reporting period. In 2022, in accordance with Article 18 of CEDAW, Turkmenistan's Sixth Periodic Report was approved and submitted.

Turkmenistan is undertaking extensive work to expand women's participation in all spheres of the nation's socio-political life. Women are widely represented in the activities of Turkmenistan's three registered political parties and actively participate in the country's socio-political landscape.

Women hold significant positions in government agencies, local executive and representative bodies, local government bodies, and the Mejlis of Turkmenistan.

## CONCLUSION

Turkmenistan's gender equality policies demonstrate a multifaceted approach that integrates both international standards, such as CEDAW, and deep-rooted national traditions and values. The state's holistic initiatives, from economic empowerment to social support and reproductive health, showcase a dedicated effort to create equitable opportunities for women and advance their participation in all aspects of national life.

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<sup>15</sup> Constitutional Law No. 448-V (2016). *On approval of the Constitution of Turkmenistan in a new edition*. Ashgabat, September 14, 2016.

The success stories presented in this article show a commitment to achieving gender equality within the unique context of Turkmen culture and national identity. Further research could explore the specific challenges and opportunities faced by women in accessing and benefiting from these policies.

The state programme aimed at achieving genuine equality for women and raising their status in public and political life in Turkmenistan has largely been based in national and international legal frameworks. Therefore, equality between men and women is now a core value of the law. The effectiveness of Turkmen women's right to work, as enshrined in the Constitution and other national legislation, is evident. This demonstrates the firm establishment of equal access to professional opportunities, all types of work, and careers in general.

Gender equality, as a factor in strengthening national unity and cohesion, is a significant step towards developing a democratic and gender-oriented society. It is in this format that gender equality forms an effective basis for the harmonious development of modern Turkmenistan's state and society. Based on the above, the following findings and conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, over the past 60 years, the proportion of women in the country has been 50%, which indicates a balanced reproduction of the population. We believe that this is indirectly facilitated by measures to improve women's health, as a result of which there is a decrease in the mortality rate among women in childbirth, as well as a reduction in the number of teenagers becoming mothers. We believe it is important to continue working in this direction, while paying special attention to educating women in the field of protecting and preserving their health, as well as the health of children.

Secondly, the level of female literacy is high, and it corresponds to the levels of Europe and Central Asia, which is an important indicator of the development of society. As M. Gandhi said: "If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation". Thus, female literacy is a key step towards the formation of an educated society. At the current stage of global development, it is important to expand women's access to new forms of education, as well as improve their digital literacy. As international statistics show, countries with a high level of gender equality, such as Iceland, Sweden, Norway, occupy leading positions in the development of their economies. It should be noted that Turkmenistan is taking significant steps to ensure gender equality<sup>16</sup>.

As noted earlier, women's voices play a key role in the formation of gender-sensitive policies. An important area is also the successful implementation of this policy. In this regard, a promising step is to attract women to the civil service and their further promotion to leadership positions.

Experts believe that it will take more than 200 years to achieve complete gender equality in the world. The adoption of laws, although important, does not always accelerate this process. Global transformations in social values, foundations and traditions are necessary. However, we believe that progressive movement towards ensuring gender equality will overcome all barriers and ensure equality not only in statistics, but also in politics, economics and other areas. The WEF analyses gender gaps in various sectors and calculates the rate of progress. The 2021 report indicated that, at the current rate of progress, it would take approximately 135.6 years to close the global gender gap, but some estimates suggest that if current trends continue, it could take longer than 286 years in certain regions or specific domains.

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<sup>16</sup> World Economic Forum. (2023). *Global Gender Gap Report 2023*. Available at: WEF Gender Gap Report.