

GENDER EQUALITY AS A FACTOR OF STRENGTHENING UNITY AND COHESION IN TURKMENISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This publication examines the work being carried out to promote a gender equality policy for the full, sustainable, and harmonious development of the state and society. The article describes gender equality as a legal value informing the explanation and implementation of the domestic and foreign policy of independent, and neutral Turkmenistan. The main components of gender equality are discussed, and the right to difference within a gender-focused approach to the country's comprehensive development is considered.

Keywords: *gender, gender equality, right to difference, gender approach, human rights, right to work, state, equal rights, society.*

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality signifies a society where men and women have equal opportunities, rights, and responsibilities in all spheres of life. It means both genders have equal access to education and healthcare, to leadership positions and power, and to achieving financial independence through employment or entrepreneurship. It also means having the same opportunities to realise personal and professional needs and interests. A crucial condition for achieving gender equality is the empowerment of women across various spheres of social development, coupled with the active participation of men in this endeavour.

The issue of gender equality, as a cornerstone of a democratic society, consistently garners significant interest within the academic community, both domestically and internationally. It is evident that the full realisation of all human rights is unlikely when official discourse advocates for gender-based distinctions. Currently, Turkmenistan is creating all the necessary conditions, ranging from support for gender equality to guaranteeing it legally.

Application of international legal standards and Turkmenistan's national legal mechanisms strive to ensure equal access to various fields of employment for all genders. Eliminating and preventing the negative consequences of professional inequality, while acknowledging the particular vulnerabilities women may face, are key tasks currently before both legislators and law enforcement officials.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To understand the social and legal dimensions of gender equality, an interdisciplinary approach was employed. This methodology draws upon research examining the state's role in defining and shaping the social status of men and women, and how these roles evolve under specific conditions. The formal legal method was also used to analyse the legal mechanisms designed to ensure equal legal status for all genders.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

While the lived experiences of men and women differ significantly due to women's reproductive roles, social and cultural norms, and customs, these differences should not negatively impact their well-being or lead to discrimination. Rather, they should be addressed through equitable access to economic, social, and political opportunities.

Modern global development and the complexities of globalisation also influence the status of women. Protecting women's rights contributes to stronger democracies, improved living standards, and greater social stability and mobility.

Nations where women enjoy their rightful place, including autonomy in life choices, equal rights, and equal opportunities to participate in public and governmental affairs, tend to be more stable, resilient, and better equipped to face the challenges of the 21st century.

Since its independence, Turkmenistan has actively pursued measures to improve the status of women and achieve gender equality. Article 29 of the Constitution of Turkmenistan states, "Men and women in Turkmenistan have equal rights and freedoms, as well as equal opportunities for their implementation. Violation of equality on the basis of gender entails liability established by law" (Constitutional Law, 2016). National legislation provides legal instruments and guarantees to achieve balanced gender representation in government bodies, ensure equal opportunities for women's economic independence, improve their working conditions and expand employment opportunities, and create conditions for the equal exercise of rights and responsibilities within families.

These guarantees are enshrined in various codes, including the Family Code, Labour Code, Electoral Code, Civil Code, and the Code on Social Protection of the Population, as well as in such laws as the Laws on Employment of the Population, on Education, on the Protection of Citizens' Health, on Civil Service, on State Guarantees for Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, and other regulatory legal acts.

On January 22, 2015, the President of Turkmenistan approved the "National Action Program for Gender Equality for 2015-2020." This programme served as a mechanism for further promoting gender equality, aiming to create the necessary conditions for women's expanded participation in all spheres of state and society. Close cooperation with the UN and other international organisations was prioritised, contributing to the successful implementation of gender policy in the country. Subsequently, in 2020, the second "National Action Plan for Gender Equality in Turkmenistan for 2021-2025" was approved.

In 1996, Turkmenistan acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and in 2009, it acceded to its Optional Protocol. Turkmenistan also adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from the Fourth World Conference on Women. To fulfil these commitments, Turkmenistan has developed a strategy for promoting gender equality and is working to incorporate generally recognised international legal norms and standards related to equal opportunities for men and women into national legislation and practice. In this context, the national socio-economic development programmes are closely aligned with the UN Millennium Declaration, which identifies gender equality as a key goal related to protecting the health of women and children, improving education, and advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) plays a vital role in supporting Turkmenistan's efforts to promote gender equality. This support includes technical assistance, such as

organising workshops and meetings, as well as facilitating study tours to explore international best practices for improving national legislation on this issue.

According to the UN, "Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world." Critically, gender equality is enshrined as the Sustainable Development Goal 5: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." This goal addresses issues such as eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, including human trafficking; recognising the value of unpaid care work and promoting shared family responsibilities; ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities in political, economic, and public life; and guaranteeing access to reproductive health services and economic resources.

Turkmenistan's progress in implementing its gender policy was affirmed in the country's second Voluntary National Review on the Sustainable Development Goals, presented at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development held in New York in July 2023.

Here are some key statistics (News Central Asia, 2023):

- In 2022, women held 25.7% of seats in the national Parliament;
- Women held 21.7% of seats in local representative bodies (*'halk maslahaty'*);
- In 2022, women comprised 22.4% of leadership positions;
- In 2021, women made up 42.5% of the workforce in large and medium-sized enterprises;
- In 2022, women constituted 32.5% of entrepreneurs;
- Girls represent two-thirds of students in secondary vocational education institutions;
- The share of female students in higher vocational education institutions has also significantly increased, reaching 42.5% by 2022;
- Currently, women constitute 46% of the total workforce in Turkmenistan's institutions and enterprises.

In the medium term, Turkmenistan will continue to implement the National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Turkmenistan for 2021-2025 in seven strategic areas:

1. Strengthening and improving the legislative framework to achieve gender equality;
2. Ensuring gender-responsive healthcare;
3. Promoting equal access to education;
4. Combating gender-based violence against women and girls;
5. Promoting the economic empowerment of women and girls;
6. Increasing women's participation at all levels, including in the political and public spheres;
7. Strengthening institutional mechanisms to support gender equality.

During this era of stability and prosperity, women have made significant contributions to the nation's progress. Turkmenistan prioritises ensuring a fulfilling life for women and mothers, along with the reliable protection of their rights. The development of women's opportunities is being successfully advanced through the integration of a gender perspective into national strategies and programmes.

The fact that women comprise half of the country's workforce demonstrates their enjoyment of the constitutional right to work. Women hold prominent positions in the highest levels of

state power and administration, as well as in science, education, culture, art, healthcare, and sports, actively and widely contributing to these fields.

Women hold 25.4% of positions at various levels of government, indicating their active participation in decision-making. These include the Vice Prime Minister of the Cabinet of Ministers, ministers, deputy ministers, rectors of higher educational institutions, heads of non-governmental organisations, diplomats, doctors, teachers, prosecutors, and judicial officials. Women constitute 42.3% of the workforce in the economy, and their representation is even higher in the socio-cultural sphere, averaging 63.7%, including 66.2% in education, 63.7% in healthcare, and 63.7% in other sectors (Atayewa, 2015).

Gender equality in public administration is evident in the appointment of women to positions that influence national policy at the regional, provincial, and national levels. From municipal elections to elections for the Mejlis (the highest legislative body), the number of women participating has steadily increased. Notably, since 2006, the Chair of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan has been a woman. Furthermore, as a result of progress in gender equality, 33 of the 125 deputies in the current Mejlis of Turkmenistan are women, representing 26.4% of the body.

Another example is the Academy of Public Administration under the President of Turkmenistan. Of the four departments operating within the Academy, four are headed by women, further demonstrating the commitment to gender equality at the state level.

Each day in Turkmenistan is marked by achievements and progress. Comprehensive national development programmes are being successfully implemented, and hardworking women actively participate in these large-scale endeavours. Working selflessly across various sectors of the economy, they make significant contributions to further strengthening national unity and cohesion.

Turkmen women actively participate in the nation's public life. Their contributions to raising worthy sons and daughters, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren - thereby shaping a literate, erudite, patriotic, and hardworking generation, and establishing principles of healthy living - cannot be overstated. The contributions of women in explaining and implementing the domestic and foreign policy of an independent, neutral Turkmenistan deserve respect. It is important to emphasise that a strong and wise generation has always been nurtured by the traditions of the Turkmen people, a heritage spanning five thousand years, and it is the duty of every family to uphold these noble traditions. Women, drawing upon their rich experience in raising children and shaping new generations, play a vital role in preserving and protecting these family values.

High morality, kindness, compassion, and determination are among the admirable qualities of Turkmen women. Their skill and diligence are evident in the beautiful carpets and paintings they create. This exquisite art, passed down through generations from mother to daughter, has become a unique educational tradition.

For their significant contributions to strengthening Turkmenistan's independence, sovereignty, and legal status of permanent neutrality; reinforcing national unity and cohesion, and the moral foundations of Turkmen society and families. Ensuring the continuity of spiritual origins and Turkmen traditions; nurturing the younger generation and instilling in them respect for national values, historical heritage, unique customs and rituals, patriotism, hard work, courage, and heroism; and for their particularly fruitful social activities, women are annually awarded the Order of Turkmenistan "Zenan kalby", and are also bestowed with

honorary titles such as “Türkmenistanyň at gazanan halyçysy” (Honored Carpet Weaver of Turkmenistan) and “Ene mähri» diýen hotmatly at” (Honorary title of Mother's Love) (Government of Turkmenistan, 2016).

The state's concern for women reflects a healthy, humane, and moral society. The personal attention given to this issue by the National Leader, Chairman of the Halk Maslahaty Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, and the President of the country, Serdar Berdimuhamedov, is key to the successful implementation of relevant programmes.

CONCLUSION

According to the complete population and housing census conducted in Turkmenistan in December 2022, men comprise approximately 50% of the population, while women constitute slightly more than 50% (State Statistics Committee, n.d.). The state programme aimed at ensuring genuine equality for women and improving their position in social and political life has established a firm national and international legal foundation. Today, gender equality stands as a fundamental legal value.

Promoting gender equality is not only a matter of basic social justice and a necessary component of democracy, but also a crucial step toward achieving sustainable development goals and building social relations based on principles of justice, integrity, and tolerance. The effectiveness of Turkmen women's exercise of their right to freedom of labour, as guaranteed by the Constitution of Turkmenistan and other regulatory legal acts, is evident. This underscores the consolidation of equal access to professional activities, all types of work, and career advancement in general. This, in turn, helps dismantle gender-based asymmetries in existing social structures. Gender equality, as a factor strengthening national unity and cohesion, represents a decisive step forward in the development of a democratic, gender-sensitive society. In this context, gender equality serves as an effective foundation for the harmonious development of the modern Turkmen state and society.

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