

WOMEN OF KYRGYZSTAN **IN FAMILY AND SOCIETY**

POLICY BRIEF



Women of Kyrgyzstan in family and society

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but is also a prerequisite for achieving peace, prosperity and better prospects for all people around the world. Therefore, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all UN Member States, emphasizes that gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls will contribute decisively to the advancement of all other goals and objectives. Gender statistics show that despite tangible progress in this area, real change for most women and girls in the world is being achieved too slowly. Today, no country can claim to have achieved gender equality. States' laws and cultural traditions present obstacles to achieving full equality. Women continue to receive lower wages than men, have less freedom of choice and are often become victims of violence in its many forms. Global efforts must be mobilized to achieve gender equality and ensure the rights of all women and girls.

In Kyrgyzstan, as in other republics of the former Soviet Union, the picture of gender relations is ambiguous and contradictory. This is explained by the coexistence of different value systems and the institutions that support them. On the one hand, society has preserved the values and institutions of the Soviet period aimed at ensuring gender equality primarily in the family sphere, which were never achieved during the existence of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, during the transition period, there was a reference to the traditional values of the pre-Soviet period, in which women played a subordinate role. At present, in the Kyrgyz Republic, even though there is visible progress in gender equality in public institutions, inequality between women and men still persists in key areas of human development - economic, social, and political. Today, gender equality is a priority area of development in the Republic. Issues related to the role of women and gender development have been included in the most important country documents, including the National Development Strategy

of the Kyrgyz Republic for the period of 2018-2040.

Integral indices of gender inequality show that the Kyrgyz Republic is in the middle of the list of countries of the world in terms of differences between the status of men and women in society (**Fig. 1**). This approximately corresponds to the place of Kyrgyzstan in the ranking of countries according to the general level of development, as measured by the Human Development Index (HDI¹). For example, in 2018 based on the Gender Development Index (GDI²), which reflects gender gaps in human development of the countries in three major indicators: health, longevity, education and living standards, Kyrgyzstan was ranked 90'th next to China, Chili and Mexico. The Gender Inequality Index (GII³), which measures inequalities in the physiological and psychological capabilities

¹ HDI - Human Development Index.

См.: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>

² GDI - Gender Development Index.

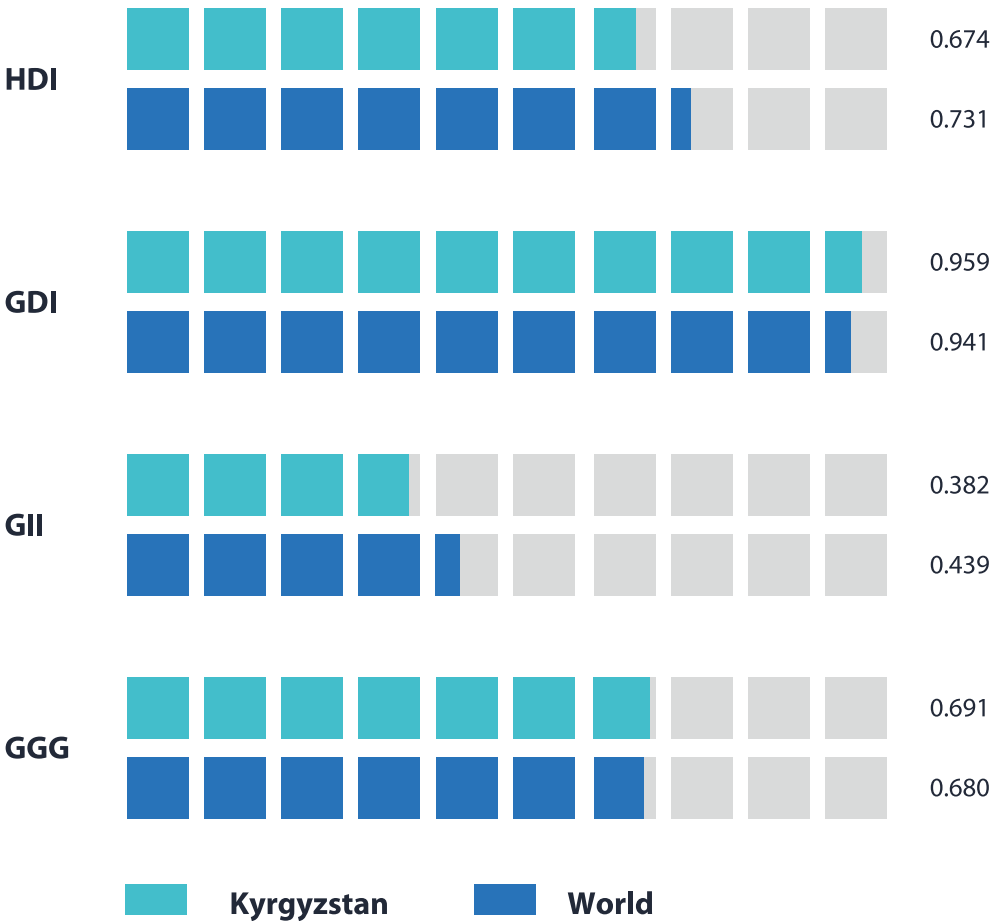
См.: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-development-index-gdi>

³ GI - Gender Inequality Index.

См.: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>

of men and women in three important aspects of human development: reproductive health, empowerment, and economic status; was just below the world average in Kyrgyzstan the same year and was ranked alongside Brazil and Peru. In the ranking of countries on the global gender gap index (GGG⁴), which takes into account the gap between men and women in economic, political and other spheres, Kyrgyzstan was ranked 86th - above Georgia, China and Hungary.

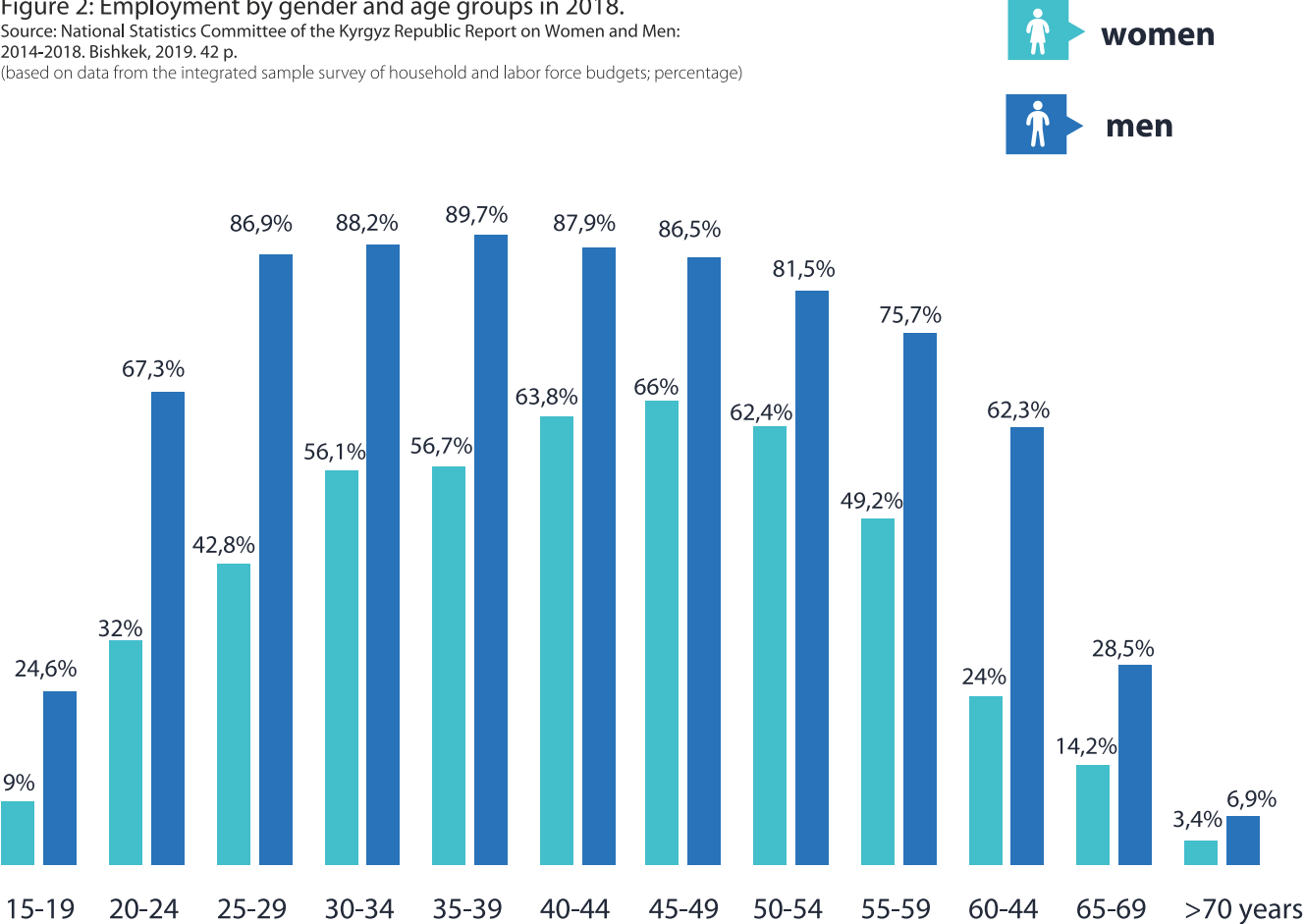
Figure 1. Integral Gender Inequality Indices and Human Development Index in Kyrgyzstan and Worldwide Average, 2018.



⁴ GGG – Global Gender Gap Index.
Cm.: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf

The analysis of the main components of inequality in the public sphere of gender inequality indices shows that the strongest inequality in favor of men has developed in the economy and politics. Thus, the employment rate of men remains higher than that of women in all age groups (Fig. 2). The most significant gap is observed in the 20-39 age group, which is due to the fact that women leave work due to the birth of a child. One of the factors contributing to the current situation is the low coverage of children in pre-school education throughout the country (25%). The shortage of kindergartens remains a serious obstacle to women's economic opportunities, since the education, upbringing and care of children falls mainly on mothers who have to reduce their economic activity and lose their qualifications.

Figure 2: Employment by gender and age groups in 2018.
Source: National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic Report on Women and Men: 2014-2018. Bishkek, 2019. 42 p.
(based on data from the integrated sample survey of household and labor force budgets; percentage)



Legislation and policy in the Kyrgyz Republic are sufficiently favorable for pregnant women and working lactating mothers. In practice, however, the system of State support for pregnant women and working mothers is not effective enough. The time for maternity leave and its normal duration are being officially provided mainly by public and large private institutions. In the private sector and the informal economy, the rights of pregnant and breastfeeding mothers are most often not respected. Difficult economic conditions and the reluctance to lose income from work result in many women not taking maternity leave.

Many pregnant women continue to work almost until delivery.

Despite significant progress in recent years, gender inequality in income levels persists in the Kyrgyz Republic. Gender imbalances in income are the result of discriminatory factors on the labour market, in employment, in access to professions, in recruitment, in remuneration for the same

work, and in promotion. Statistics on the ratio of women's wages to men's show that despite the high level of women's human capital (they are better educated than men), their wages are lower than men's, although there has been a gradual narrowing of the gap in recent years. One factor in this situation is the concentration of women in sectors such as health, social services and education, where salaries are lowest.

There is still a significant gender imbalance in favor of men at the level of political positions in state and municipal bodies of the country. In the area of women's political participation, the trend of the "pyramid" persists, with women, who make up 52% of the electorate, having representation in the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic at 16%. Since independence, the representation of women in parliament has not reached the level of the Soviet period. The latest history of the Republic knows the parliament with zero representation of women. The mechanism introduced for quotas for wo-

men in the electoral lists of political parties is imperfect - parties have successfully used various methods for squeezing women out of parliament after elections. The situation with the representation of women is particularly difficult at the level of local representative bodies, where it makes up about 10 per cent of deputies. In 2016, the number of women deputies at the local level decreased by almost 5 times compared to the Soviet period. More than 70 ayil keneshes have zero female representation. In 2010-2011, for the first time in the history of the Kyrgyz Republic, the President was a woman. However, over the years of independence, there have been only a few examples of women elected to the post of mayor and appointed as heads of regional and district State administrations.

Women are much more represented among employees in public sector, where their share in 2019 exceeded 40%. At the same time, there are certain institutions where men are significantly predominant, for example, the General Prosecutor's Office

(82%), the State Customs Service (about 80%), the Office of the President (about 80%), the Ministry of Transport and Communications (about 76%), the Accounts Office Chamber (about 75%), Government Office (74%), Ministry of Agriculture, Food Industry and Land Reclamation (over 71%). Female employees are predominant in the National Statistical Committee (72%), the Ministry of Labor and Social Development (more than 73%), the State Intellectual Property and Innovation Service (about 70%), the Ministry of Health (about 67%), and the State Registration Service (about 66%), as well as the Ministry of Education and Science (60%).

It should be noted that there are areas in which women have had an advantage over men since Soviet times. These are education, health and life expectancy. Women, both in urban and rural areas, have a higher level of education than men. Thus, according to the 2009 census, of all population between the ages of 25 and 64, 18.5% of women had higher education and 18.9% had secondary

and primary vocational education. For men, these estimates were 15.6% and 18.2%, respectively. Since then, the difference has increased in favor of women. Firstly, among students in higher education, women make up the majority: 53% in 2019. Second, their proportion is higher among students in secondary vocational education (56%).

Another advantage of women over men in Kyrgyzstan is a higher life expectancy. In 2018, life expectancy at birth for men was 67.4 years, for women - 75.6 years. With such a life expectancy 78% of born boys and 90% of newborn girls will survive up to 60 years. The main reason for such strong differences is the gender characteristics of behavior. In men, they are more inclined to risk and use violent ways of conflict resolution, they consume large amounts of alcohol and tobacco, are being inattentive to their own health and experience lack of a culture of regular visits to medical institutions. In many ways, these behavioral traits are the result of the mismatch of traditional values and roles, which many men and women in Kyrgyzstan are

practicing, to the modern requirements. Traditionally men are the head of the family and the owner of the house, but value of gender equality in society and family is a requirement of modern world.

The family in the Kyrgyz Republic has been and remains the main form of organization of life and the most important unit of social protection of the population. Only less than 2% of the country's population lives alone. Half of the population lives with spouses and / or children, another 46% are part of extended families, and the rest are in compound households. The data of recent censuses and sample surveys reveal a trend of family consolidation in the republic, which is manifested in an increase in the average household size, a decrease in the number and proportion of single-person households, and single-family households (a married couple with children). On the contrary, the proportion and number of households representing extended families and complex families is increasing. At the same time, the most

vulnerable socially and economically incomplete nuclear families (one of the parents with children under the age of 18) and older people are increasingly remaining in complex households, which provides them with additional social protection.

Despite the high level of education and economic activity outside of home compared to men, the traditional distribution of labor and resources in households continues to persist in many families. Time budget studies (2010 and 2015) show the existence of a steady, unchanging inequality in the distribution of workload in the family between women and men. In a family women end up being responsible for raising children, ensuring rest and entertainment of family, satisfying physiological needs, and helping relatives and friends. Moreover, such a distribution of responsibilities finds support in society. About 80 percent of the women and men surveyed believe that in the family a woman should take care of home and children, and a man should earn.⁵

Domestic violence against women is one extreme manifestation of gender inequality. In 2003, on the initiative of the women's movement, the Law on Social and Legal Protection from Domestic Violence was adopted in order to develop more effective mechanisms for the protection of persons affected by domestic violence. In this regard, in April 2017, the Kyrgyz Republic adopted a new Law on the Security and Protection from Family Violence. In fact, in many cases, domestic violence begins from the moment a family is created. Based on the results of 2016/2017. "Gender in the Perception of Society" research, more than 20% of marriages in the Kyrgyz Republic are committed by abducting a bride (with or without her consent), the proportion of forced marriages is 6%. Moreover bride kidnapping for marriage purposes in the rural areas happens twice as often as in urban area.⁶ According to the data of Demography and Health Survey held in Kyrgyzstan in 2012⁷, every fourth married woman in the country in age of 15 to 49 years has been abused either physically or sexually

by her husband or partner, and 17% of respondents has experienced abuse within the last 12 months before the survey. During pregnancy, 7% of women experienced physical abuse. At the same time, a large part of the population of the republic tolerates violence against women, and there is a widespread opinion in the society that a husband has the right to discipline his wife in any way. So, every third woman and every second man think that it is permissible to hit a wife in some cases. Women themselves justify violence in cases where a woman does not care for children well enough, leaves the house without telling her husband, if the woman objects to her husband, refuses him sexual intercourse or if her food burns when she is cooking.

⁵ Gender in Perception of Society Survey, Bishkek, 2016. National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic; p. 47 Available at: <http://www.stat.kg/ru/statistics/gendernaya-statistika/s>

⁶ Gender in Perception of Society Survey, Bishkek, 2016. National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic; p. 29 Available at: <http://www.stat.kg/ru/statistics/gendernaya-statistika/>

⁷ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (NSC), Ministry of Health [Kyrgyz Republic], and ICF International. 2013. Kyrgyz Republic Demographic and Health Survey 2012. Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, and Calverton, Maryland, USA: NSC, MOH, and ICF International.

Noteworthy is the situation of women whose husbands went to work in other countries, primarily in Russia. In 2019, according to Russian data, more than 450 thousand citizens of Kyrgyzstan entered the migration register for the purpose of “work”, of which approximately 2/3 were men. As a result of labor migration, the traditional family structure is disrupted, and the domestic burden on the remaining women has increased. In traditional families, women after marriage live with their husband's parents and remain with them when the husband leaves to work abroad. Wives of male migrants conceived suffer from social prejudice and poverty, as well as being abused by the husband's family.⁸

According to the experts' estimates, the Coronavirus pandemic flared up around the world can cause multiple negative outcomes for women. In particular, this refers to an increase in the frequency of unplanned pregnancies and an increase in the number

of cases of the family violence under quarantine. In case of its long duration this will be accompanied by a drop in incomes and an increase in unemployment. Many men who worked abroad and transferred their earnings home will return to their homeland and will not find work. In the context of the expected economic crisis, a return to the situation that was observed in the 1990s is possible. At that time many of the women⁹, in any way, tried to ensure the survival of their families, agreeing to additional and low-paid jobs, while men could not overcome their pride and preferred to remain unemployed or part-time. But unlike the 1990s in modern Kyrgyz society, a woman is more protected by legislative initiatives of the state, by the activities of national and international organizations.

⁸ FIDH Women and Children of Kyrgyzstan Involved in Migration. September 2016, #675

⁹ See <https://www.unfpa.org/news/millions-more-cases-violence-child-marriage-female-genital-mutilation-unintended-pregnancies>

The author of the analytical report: *Denisenko M. B.* - Deputy Director of the Institute of Demography, Head of the Department of Demography, Institute of Demography, Higher School of Economics.

Policy brief is financed by United Nations Population Fund in Kyrgyzstan