



EXAMINING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN SPECA COUNTRIES

23 April 2018

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Acronyms and abbreviations

| | |
|-------|---|
| ADB | Asian Development Bank |
| CA | Central Asia |
| ECA | Europe and Central Asia |
| GDI | Gender Development Index |
| GII | Gender Inequality Index |
| GNI | Gross National Income |
| HDI | Human Development Index |
| HDR | Human Development Report |
| ITC | Information and Communication Technology |
| KPMG | Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdele |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SIGI | Social Institutions and Gender Index |
| SMEs | Small and Medium Enterprises |
| SPECA | Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| USSR | Former Soviet Union (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) |
| WEF | World Economic Forum |

Chapter 1: Setting the stage

1.1 Introduction

The United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was launched in 1998 to strengthen subregional cooperation in Central Asia and its integration into the world economy. The countries of SPECA are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

At the heart of women's empowerment is the need to address gender inequalities in the context of decent work and full and productive employment. The creation of an enabling environment in the SPECA countries for women's economic empowerment to flourish is not without its challenges. Against the backdrop of an uneven distribution of wealth, these economies are transitioning from agriculture to manufacturing and service-based work, increasingly in an urban environment. Despite relatively high human development indicators and economic growth in the SPECA countries, unpaid labour continues to characterise women's work. Furthermore, discriminatory social institutions and norms obstruct realisation of women's economic rights and opportunities.

Therefore, innovative solutions are required to empower women economically to be agents of change in their families and communities. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have created a visionary blueprint for Governments to address these barriers. Building on this momentum, this report seeks to present a comprehensive analysis of key challenges and opportunities for women's economic empowerment in the SPECA region, with a view to identify strategic policy recommendations towards the realisation of an inclusive, prosperous and sustainable future for all.

1.2 Demography and context of SPECA countries

Afghanistan is the most populous country of the region (34.6 million) followed by Uzbekistan (31.8 million) and Kazakhstan (17.8 million). The least populous countries are: Turkmenistan (5.7 million) and Kyrgyzstan (6.1 million). The largest labour share belongs to Uzbekistan (29.9 per cent and 14.2 million) with the smallest share in Turkmenistan (5.1 per cent and 2.4 million).¹

These countries economically represent a heterogeneous group: the primarily natural resources exporting countries of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan; the mainly agriculturally-based smaller economies of Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; and the more industrialized economy of Uzbekistan.²

¹ World Bank Data Bank. Available from: www.data.worldbank.org

² Asian Development Bank, Central Asia Atlas. Available from: www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/27508/central-asia-atlas.pdf

Kazakhstan is the most affluent Central Asian country with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of US\$8,710, whilst Tajikistan and Afghanistan the poorest with GNI per capita of US\$1,110 and US\$580 respectively.³

1.3 Measuring gender equality

At the core of women’s economic empowerment is understanding gender inequality within a society and addressing the underlying issues at a policy level. There are three widely used indices that measure gender inequality and are mutually complementary: The Gender Inequality Index; the Gender Development Index, and the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI).

1.3.1 The Gender Inequality Index (GII)

The Gender Inequality Index (GII) was developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The key variables that form the bedrock of measuring the GII are related to three dimensions - reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market.

Table 1: Gender Inequality Index for SPECA countries, 2015

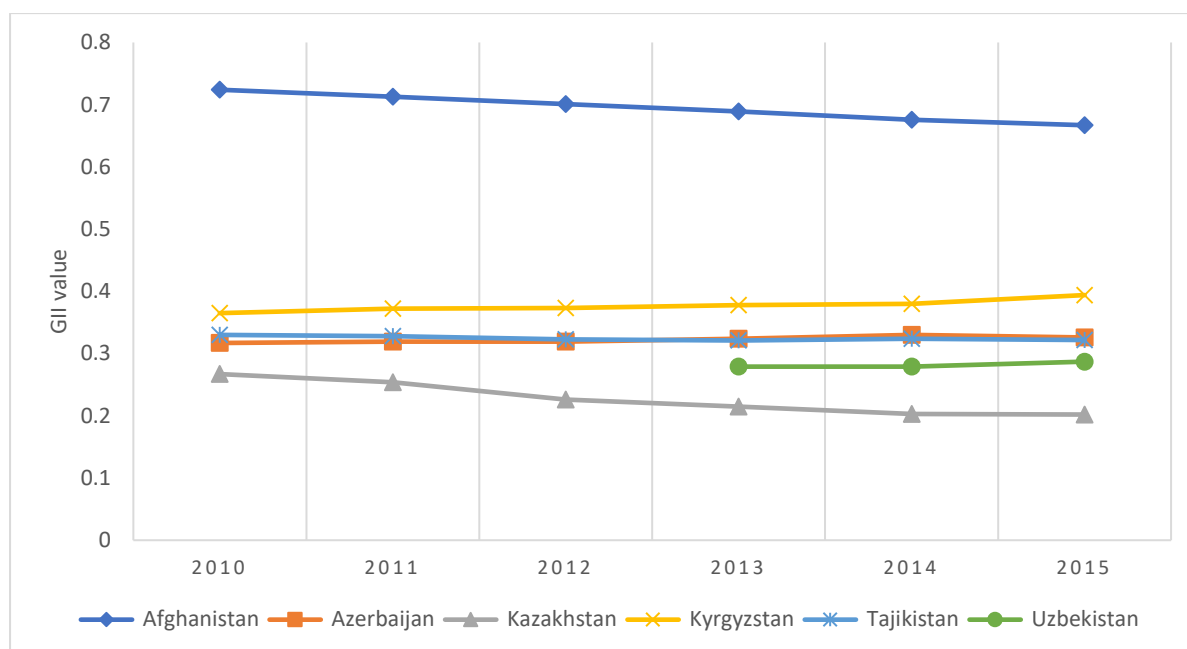
| | GII value | GII rank (out of 159 countries) | Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births) | Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19) | Female seats in parliament (% held by women) | Population with some secondary education (% aged 25 years and older) | | Labour force Participation (% aged 15 and older) | |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|---|---|--|--|----------------|--|------|
| | | | | | | Female (2005-15) | Male (2005-15) | Female | Male |
| Afghanistan | 0.67 | 154 | 396 | 74.0 | 27.4 | 8.8 | 35.4 | 19.1 | 83.6 |
| Azerbaijan | 0.33 | 68 | 25 | 59.8 | 16.9 | 93.9 | 97.5 | 61.9 | 68.3 |
| Kazakhstan | 0.20 | 42 | 12 | 28.0 | 20.1 | 99.7 | 100.0 | 66.1 | 77.0 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 0.40 | 90 | 76 | 39.6 | 19.2 | 100.0 | 99.9 | 59.4 | 77.1 |
| Tajikistan | 0.32 | 65 | 32 | 38.1 | 14.7 | 98.1 | 88.2 | 59.4 | 77.5 |
| Turkmenistan | n.a. | n.a. | 42 | 16.4 | 25.8 | n.a. | n.a. | 47.3 | 77.5 |
| Uzbekistan | 0.29 | 57 | 36 | 17.7 | 16.4 | 99.9 | 99.9 | 48.3 | 76.2 |
| Europe & Central Asia | 0.28 | n.a. | 24 | 26.6 | 19.0 | 78.1 | 85.7 | 45.4 | 70.5 |
| High human development | 0.29 | n.a. | 36 | 27.4 | 21.6 | 66.9 | 74.0 | 56.5 | 77.1 |
| Medium human development | 0.49 | n.a. | 164 | 40.8 | 19.9 | 40.4 | 57.6 | 37.2 | 79.4 |
| Low human development | 0.59 | | 553 | 101.8 | 22.0 | 14.8 | 25.9 | 60.3 | 77.1 |

Source: UNDP Human Development Database. Available from: www.hdr.undp.org/en/data

Note: n.a refers to data not available

³World Bank Data Bank. Available from: www.data.worldbank.org

Figure 1: Trends in the Gender Inequality Index for SPECA countries, 2010-2015



Source: UNDP Human Development Database. Available from: www.hdr.undp.org/en/data
 Note: No data available for Turkmenistan; and no data available for Uzbekistan prior to 2013

As illustrated in Table 1, the GII values for most countries in the SPECA region fall into the high or medium human development groupings, with the exception of Afghanistan. Overall, except for Afghanistan, female education levels in SPECA countries are considerably high and health outcomes for women have been improving over time. In addition, as shown in Figure 1, there have been improvements since 2010, with the greatest progress in Kazakhstan. Afghanistan has the highest level of gender inequality in the region and is ranked 154 out of 159 countries globally. Kazakhstan, with a GII value of 0.202, has the lowest level of gender inequality in the region, lower also than the Europe and Central Asia aggregate of 0.28, and was globally ranked 42.

1.3.2 The Gender Development Index (GDI)

The second index, the Gender Development Index (GDI), compares and contrasts gender disparities by utilising three dimensions of human development: health, knowledge and living standards.⁴ The key variables measured are: life expectancy at birth; years of schooling; and estimated income level.

As Table 2 shows, examination of life expectancy of men and women presents an interesting picture. In Europe and Central Asia, the overall women's life expectancy is 76.3 and for men, the figure is 68.7. However, in SPECA countries, the range is from a low of 62.0 years for women and 59.5 years for men in Afghanistan, to a high of 74.8 years for women in Kyrgyzstan and 67.8 years for men in Azerbaijan. The general pattern in the region is that

⁴ UNDP's GDI Methodology is available from: www.hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-development-index-gdi

women live to their seventies and men reach their sixties, which is slightly lower than the average for the Europe and Central Asian region.

Regarding estimated income per capita, the largest gender disparity is in Afghanistan where women earn about six times less than their male counterparts. The smallest gender gap is Tajikistan where males earn about 30 per cent more than females. Generally, across the region, males earn approximately twice that of females.

The expected and mean years of schooling show that more males attend school than females in the majority of countries, with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan being the exceptions. Afghanistan is at the lowest end of the spectrum regarding mean years of schooling completed by females, at 1.6 in contrast to Kazakhstan 11.7 years.

Afghanistan stands out as a Central Asian country with the lowest life expectancy and mean years of schooling for women and men. On the other hand, Kazakhstan performs the best out of its fellow Central Asian countries and is the only Central Asian country classified by the UNDP as a country with a high level of human development. The other five countries of the region fall into the medium human development category, with the exception being Afghanistan which is considered to be in the low human development grouping.

Table 2: Gender Development Index for SPECA countries, 2015

| | GDI Value | Life expectancy at birth (years) | | Expected years of schooling (years) | | Mean years of schooling (years) | | Estimated gross national income per capita (2011 PPP \$) | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------|------|---------------------------------|------|--|-------|
| | | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| Afghanistan | 0.61 | 62.0 | 59.5 | 8.3 | 13.1 | 1.6 | 5.8 | 511 | 3148 |
| Azerbaijan | 0.94 | 74.1 | 67.8 | 12.6 | 12.7 | 10.3 | 12.0 | 11029 | 21845 |
| Kazakhstan | 1.01 | 74.3 | 64.8 | 15.4 | 14.6 | 11.7 | 11.7 | 16364 | 28226 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 0.97 | 74.8 | 66.8 | 13.3 | 12.7 | 10.9 | 10.7 | 2123 | 4090 |
| Tajikistan | 0.93 | 73.4 | 66.3 | 10.6 | 11.9 | 9.6 | 11.2 | 2100 | 3088 |
| Turkmenistan | n.a. | 70.0 | 61.6 | 10.6 | 11.0 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. |
| Uzbekistan | 0.95 | 71.9 | 65.1 | 11.8 | 12.2 | 11.8 | 12.3 | 3891 | 7668 |
| Europe & Central Asia | 0.95 | 76.3 | 68.7 | 13.7 | 14.0 | 9.9 | 10.7 | 8453 | 17547 |
| High human development | 0.958 | 77.7 | 73.4 | 14.1 | 13.6 | 7.8 | 8.3 | 10214 | 17384 |
| Medium human development | 0.871 | 70.0 | 66.8 | 11.5 | 11.3 | 5.6 | 7.8 | 3314 | 9131 |
| Low human development | 0.849 | 60.7 | 50.8 | 8.5 | 10.0 | 3.6 | 5.6 | 1950 | 3365 |

Source: UNDP Human Development Database. Available from: www.hdr.undp.org/en/data
 Note: n.a. refers to data not available.

1.3.3 The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)

Apart from the GII and GDI outlined above, one further index relevant to this paper is the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) produced by the OECD. The key index

components measured are: discriminatory family code; restricted physical integrity; son bias; restricted resources and assets; and restricted civil liberties.⁵

Table 3 shows how these components compare across the SPECA countries by value and category. Kazakhstan has the lowest SIGI value (0.1196). Afghanistan scores at the other end of the spectrum, with a SIGI value of 0.3224, due to very high values for discriminatory family code and son bias. The other SPECA countries are all categorised as in the medium category: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, with SIGI values of 0.1598, 0.1393, 0.1475 respectively. The results of this Index will be unpacked further in Section 5.1.

Table 3: Social Institutions and Gender Index for SPECA countries, 2014

| | SIGI Value | SIGI Category | Discriminatory family code | Restricted physical integrity | Son bias | Restricted resources and assets | Restricted civil liberties |
|---------------------|------------|---------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Afghanistan | 0.3224 | High | Very High | High | Very High | High | Medium |
| Azerbaijan | 0.2403 | High | Low | Low | Very High | Low | High |
| Kazakhstan | 0.1196 | Low | Very Low | Low | Low | Medium | High |
| Kyrgyzstan | 0.1598 | Medium | Low | Medium | High | High | Medium |
| Tajikistan | 0.1393 | Medium | Medium | Medium | Very High | Low | Medium |
| Turkmenistan | n.a. | n.a. | Low | Medium | n.a. | Low | High |
| Uzbekistan | 0.1475 | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | High | Medium |

Source: OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index. Available from: www.genderindex.org

Note: n.a. refers to data not available.

1.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, taken together, these three indices show that overall, the SPECA region exhibits moderate levels of gender inequality, with certain areas of acute concern obstructing the advancement of women's empowerment. The GII shows that the region performs better than the world average, largely driven by progress on gender indicators in education and a reduction in maternal mortality. A similar conclusion emerges using the GDI, which places the Central Asia countries above the world average in relation to human development indicators, focusing on health, education and living standards. Although life expectancy for females is higher than males across the region, the figures continue to be lower than the average for the Europe and Central Asian region. In addition, the GNI per capita variable shows that males earn on average twice that of females across the region.

⁵ Discriminatory family code is enshrined in social institutions and norms, and relates to legal age of marriage, parental authority, divorce, unequal inheritance rights; restricted physical integrity refers to prevalence of, attitudes towards and laws addressing violence against women as well as rape and sexual harassment; son bias is related to missing women and fertility preferences; restricted resources and assets comprises women's access to land, non-land assets, and financial services; and restricted civil liberties refers to access to public space, political quotas and participation. For further details, please see <http://www.genderindex.org/>

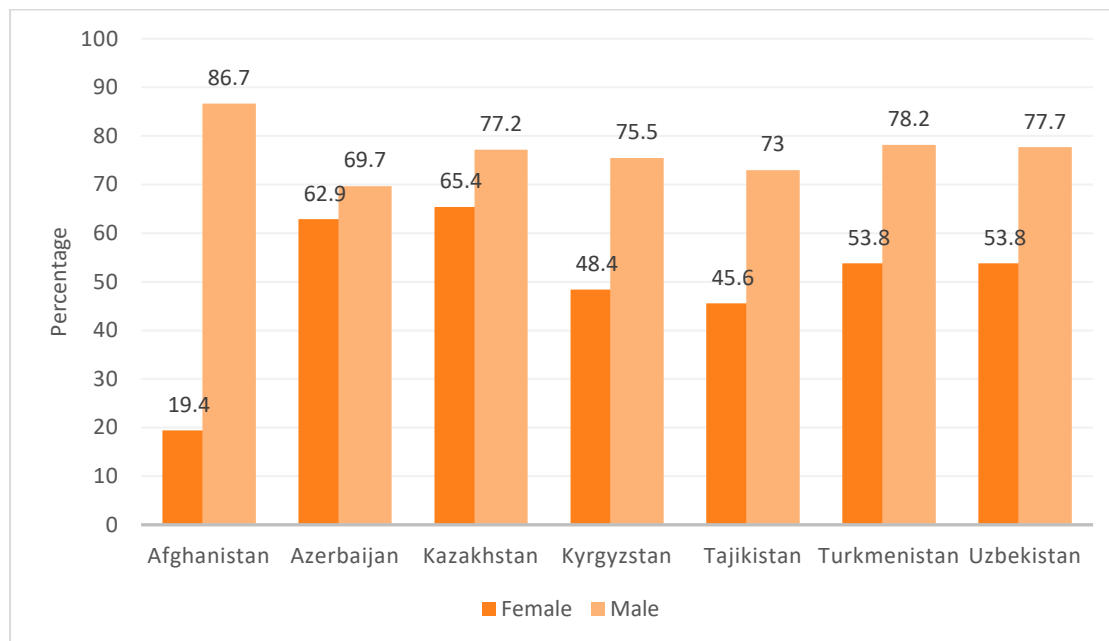
Chapter 2: Women in the labour market

This chapter discusses women in the labour market in relation to the nature of their participation, industrial and occupational segregation, the informal labour market, social protection provisions as well as migration patterns. There are many factors that mediate women’s workforce participation. Social norms and institutional factors such as marital status, family care responsibilities, access to educational opportunities and participation in the decision-making process contributes to women’s engagement in the labour market.⁶ These contributory factors will be explored in further details in the following chapters.

2.1 Women’s participation in the labour force

Figure 2 shows the female share of the workforce is largest at 65.4 per cent in Kazakhstan and 62.9 per cent in Azerbaijan. All other countries of the region have female participation rates higher than 45 per cent, except for Afghanistan (19.4 per cent). The main reason for the high female share of workforce participation in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan is the energy-exporting nature of these countries, which has a knock-on effect on other sectors of the economy increasing potential employment opportunities. Agriculture-dependent small economies, such as Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, have recorded lower female participation rates, partly due to the large informal economy. This will be expanded upon further in Section 2.5.

Figure 2: Labour force participation in SPECA countries, men and women, 2016



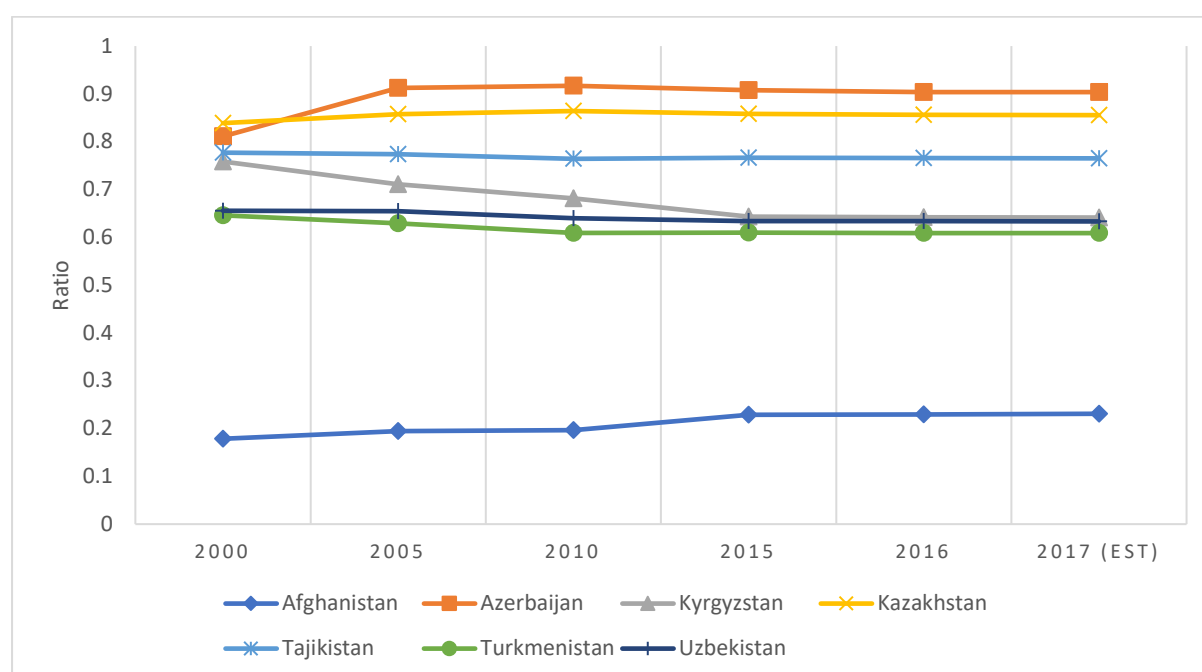
Source: World Bank modelled ILO estimates. Available from: www.data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.MA.ZS

⁶ UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment (2016). “Leave no one behind: a call to action for gender equality and women’s economic empowerment.”

Although women’s labour force participation in Afghanistan lags behind other SPECA countries, it has progressively increased since 2000, rising to 19 per cent by 2016. In addition, 64 per cent of Afghans agree that women should be permitted to work outside the family home. Nonetheless, there are many obstacles to entering the labour force for women, notably, education, skills, and work experience.⁷ Literacy also proves to be a challenge for women in Afghanistan, since literacy rates for women average 17 per cent across the country and in certain provinces drops to under 2 per cent, partly driven by discriminatory sociocultural norms restricting the education of girls.

General trends in Asia and the Pacific region indicate that there has been a decline in the female-to-male ratio in labour force participation, from 0.67 in 1990 to 0.61 in 2016.⁸ However, in SPECA countries, the ratio over this period has remained relatively constant, with a slight increase in Azerbaijan and Afghanistan, and a small decrease in Kyrgyzstan (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Female-to-male ratio in labour force participation in SPECA countries, 2000-2017



Source: ILO Labour Statistics Database (ILOSTAT). Available from: www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/ilostat-home/home?_adf.ctrl-state=eafa6zhmt_86&_afLoop=2147343543978612#!

Note: Data for 2017 is an estimate.

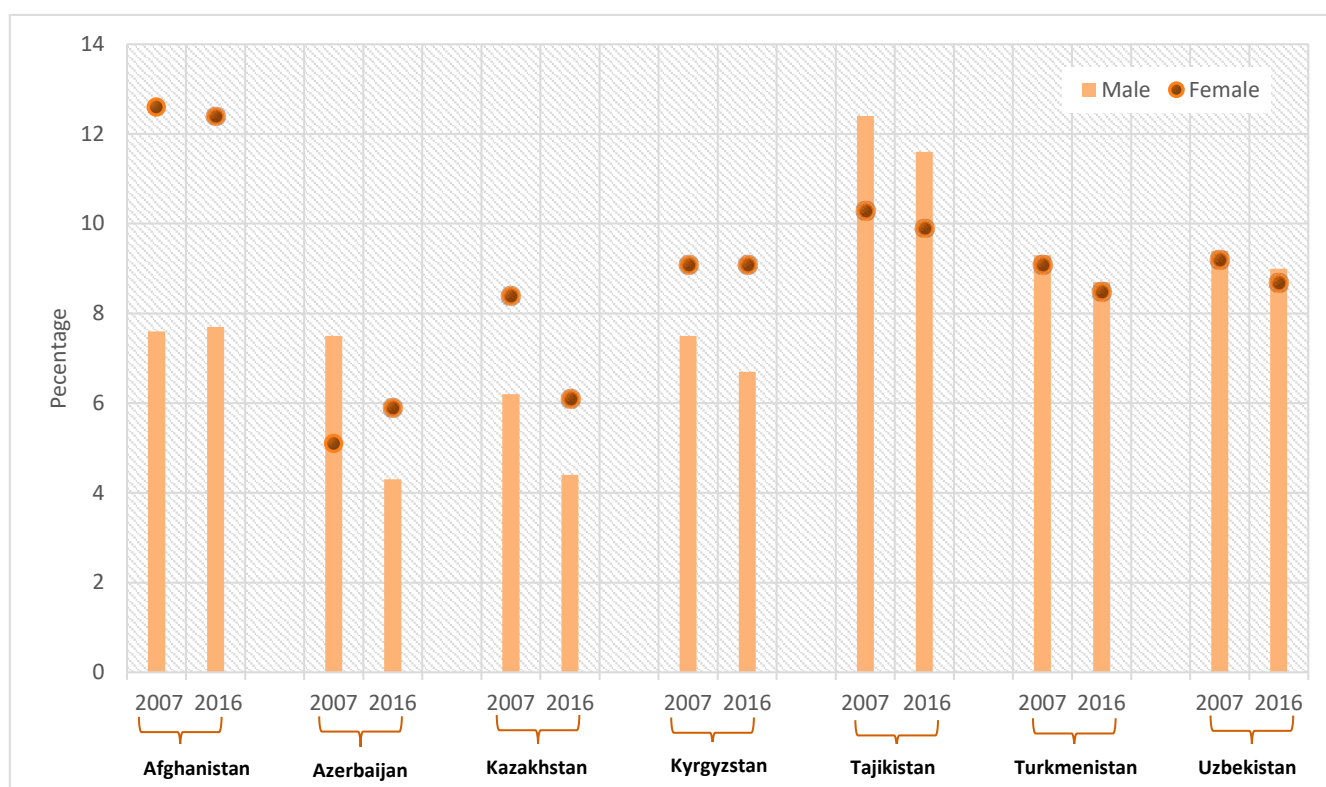
With regard to unemployment, Figure 4 shows that although female unemployment has generally fallen since 2007, the figures are still higher for women than men in 2016 - with the exception of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The highest female unemployment rate in the region in 2016 was observed in Afghanistan at 12.4 per cent and the lowest rate in Azerbaijan, at 5.9 per cent.

⁷ UN Women, Afghanistan country profile. Available from:

www.asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/afghanistan (accessed 28 October 2017)

⁸ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2017). Gender, the Environment and Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok, Thailand: ESCAP.

Figure 4: Unemployment rates in SPECA countries, 2007 and 2016

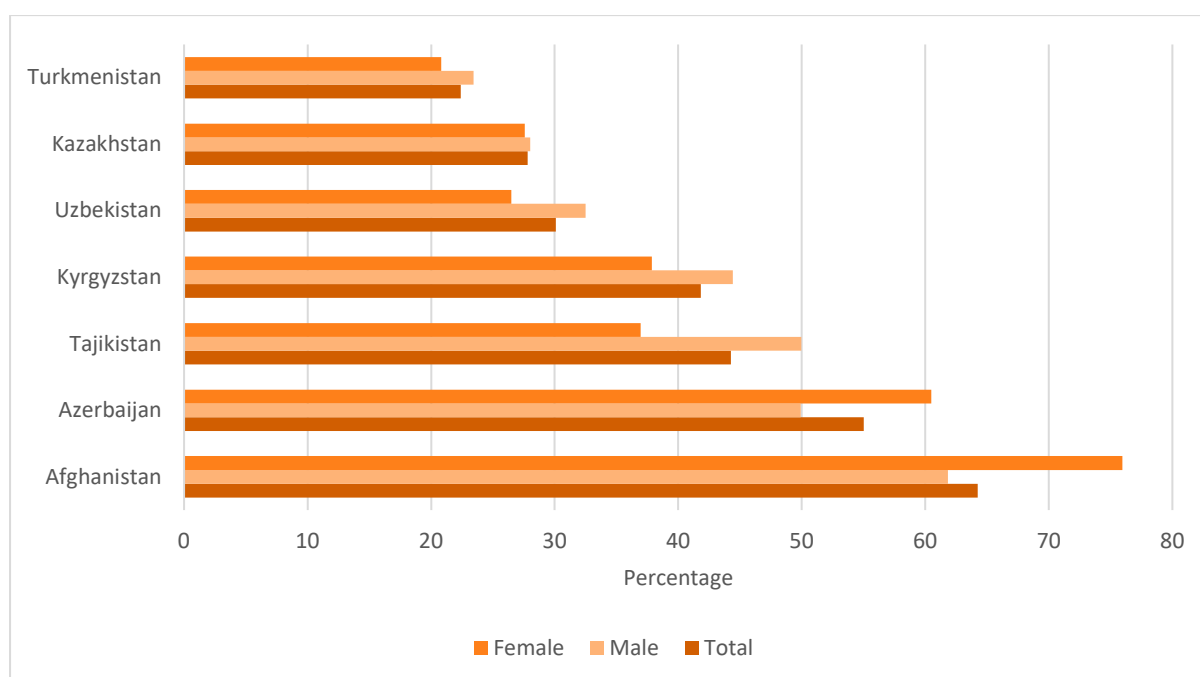


Source: ILO Labour Statistics Database (ILOSTAT). Available from: www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/ilostat-home/home?_af.ctrl-state=eafa6zhmt_86&_afLoop=2147343543978612#!

Despite improvements in the status of women in labour markets throughout the region, this progress has not translated into enhancing quality of employment. The share of women in vulnerable employment in the region – either unpaid contributing family workers or own-account workers, rather than wage and salaried work – is sizeable. Despite the relative higher levels of development and average cost of living in several SPECA countries, working poverty is still a key area of concern.⁹ As shown in Figure 5, more than 30 per cent of the working force in five of the seven SPECA countries are classified as having a vulnerable job, with low wages and minimal or no legal and social protections. In remittance-dependent countries, especially Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, men are more affected by employment vulnerability, thus prompting labour outflows to countries such as the Russian Federation. On the contrary, Afghanistan exhibits significantly greater employment vulnerability for women – partly explained by discriminatory obstacles to their participation in the formal labour market.

⁹ Baschieri, A., and J. Falkingham (2007) *Child Poverty in Tajikistan*. Dushanbe: DFID/UNICEF.

Figure 5: Share of vulnerable employment in SPECA countries, 2018



Source: ILO Trends Unit, “Trends Econometric Models”, prepared for the Global Employment Trends and related reports, Geneva, Switzerland, November 2015.

Note: These are projections for 2018.

2.2 Sectoral segregation

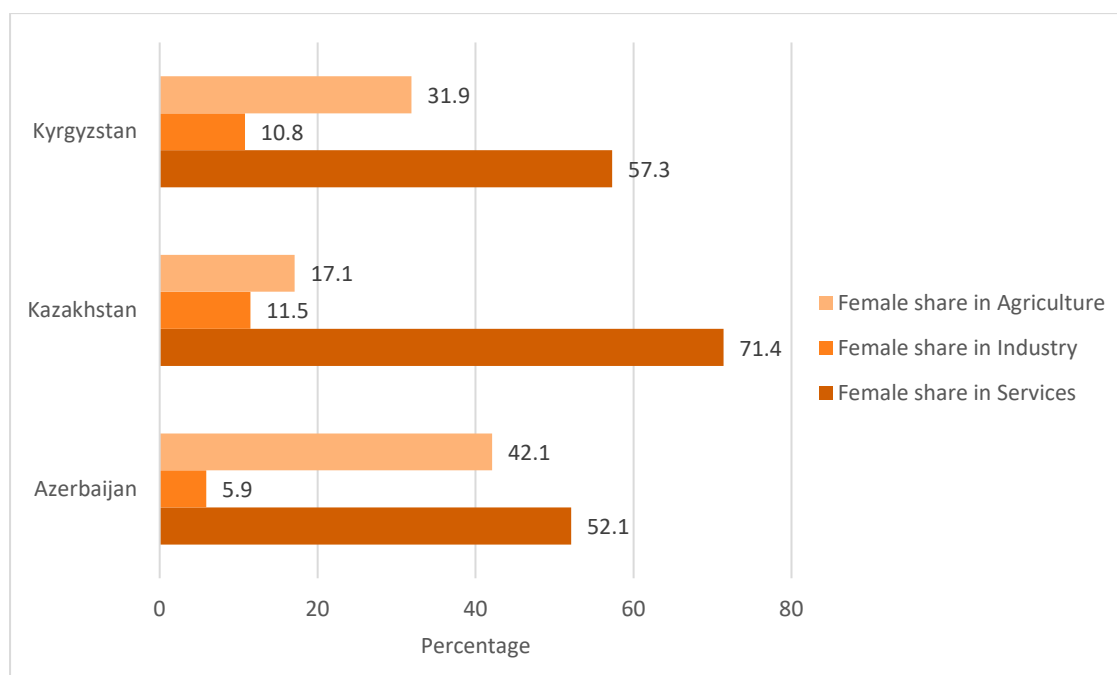
Women’s economic empowerment also relates to the type of work and sectors they occupy. A sectoral analysis of available data in three countries (Figure 6) shows that women are most highly represented in services (above 50 per cent), followed by agriculture (less than 42 per cent), and lastly industry (less than 12 per cent). In comparison to the global trend, there has been a drop of 5.6 per cent in women working in industry, while men’s relative share has increased by 5.3 per cent since 2013.¹⁰

Data for the Asia-Pacific region shows that 58 per cent of economically active women work in the agriculture sector.¹¹ In comparison in the SPECA countries for which data is available, the share of women working in agriculture in Azerbaijan is 42.1 per cent, in Kyrgyzstan 31.9 per cent, and in 17.1 per cent in more industrialised Kazakhstan. However, the engagement of women in agriculture is limited to participation as family members or hired labour for other households, farms or companies, with little or no landholding status.

¹⁰ ILO Labour Statistics Database (ILOSTAT). Available from: www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/ilostat-home/home?_afz.ctrl-state=eafa6zhmt_86&_afzLoop=2147343543978612#!

¹¹ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2017). Gender, the Environment and Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok, Thailand: ESCAP.

Figure 6: Share of female labour participation, by sector, in SPECA countries, 2016



Source: ILO Labour Statistics Database (ILOSTAT). Available from: www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/ilostat-home/home?_adf.ctrl-state=eafa6zhmt_86&_afLoop=2147343543978612#!

With the onset of increased urbanization, the services sector has grown to become the largest employer of both men and women. By 2015, the services sector characterised 55 per cent of female and 45 per cent of male jobs in the SPECA region.¹² However, the nature of these jobs differs markedly by gender. Women are concentrated in traditionally female occupations, including domestic labour, agriculture, health, education, retail, communication and tourism. In contrast, men tend to be employed in jobs such as maritime and transport services, natural resource extraction, and construction.¹³

Women’s access to productive resources, such as land, labour and capital are fundamental ingredients for women’s economic empowerment. Land is an important source of added value for women and men, since it contributes to an increase in perceived status and relative influence at both the community and household levels. Furthermore, women’s access to and control over land assets improves productivity and long-term household well-being.¹⁴

In the SPECA region, women are often excluded from owning land, with a knock-on negative effect on limited access to credit due to a lack of proven collateral. Although data is scarce in this regard, the proportion of women with landholder status is estimated as merely 17 per cent in Tajikistan and 12.4 per cent in Kyrgyzstan. These figures fall below other countries in

¹² ILO Labour Statistics Database (ILOSTAT). Available from: www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/ilostat-home/home?_adf.ctrl-state=eafa6zhmt_86&_afLoop=2147343543978612#!

¹³ Report of ESCAP Expert Group Meeting on Inequality in North and Central Asia, 24-26 October 2017, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

¹⁴ Allendorf, K. (2007). Do Women's Land Rights Promote Empowerment and Child Health in Nepal? *World Development*, vol. 35, issue 11, 1975-1988; Food and Agricultural Organization (2017) Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2017–2019 for Asia and the Pacific.

Central Asia with available data, namely Armenia and Georgia, where the share is over 29.1 per cent and 29.7 per cent respectively.¹⁵

2.3 Occupational segregation

Figure 7 shows the breakdown of the female share of occupations for SPECA countries by broad occupational categories: skill level 1 (low); skill level 2 (medium); skill level 3 and 4 (high). Among the SPECA countries, Kazakhstan (19.6 per cent) has the highest percentage of women in the low skill category, i.e., elementary jobs, with 18.8 per cent of males in a similar skill category. Tajikistan has the lowest share of females in this category (3.8 per cent), with a corresponding male share of 10.2 per cent.

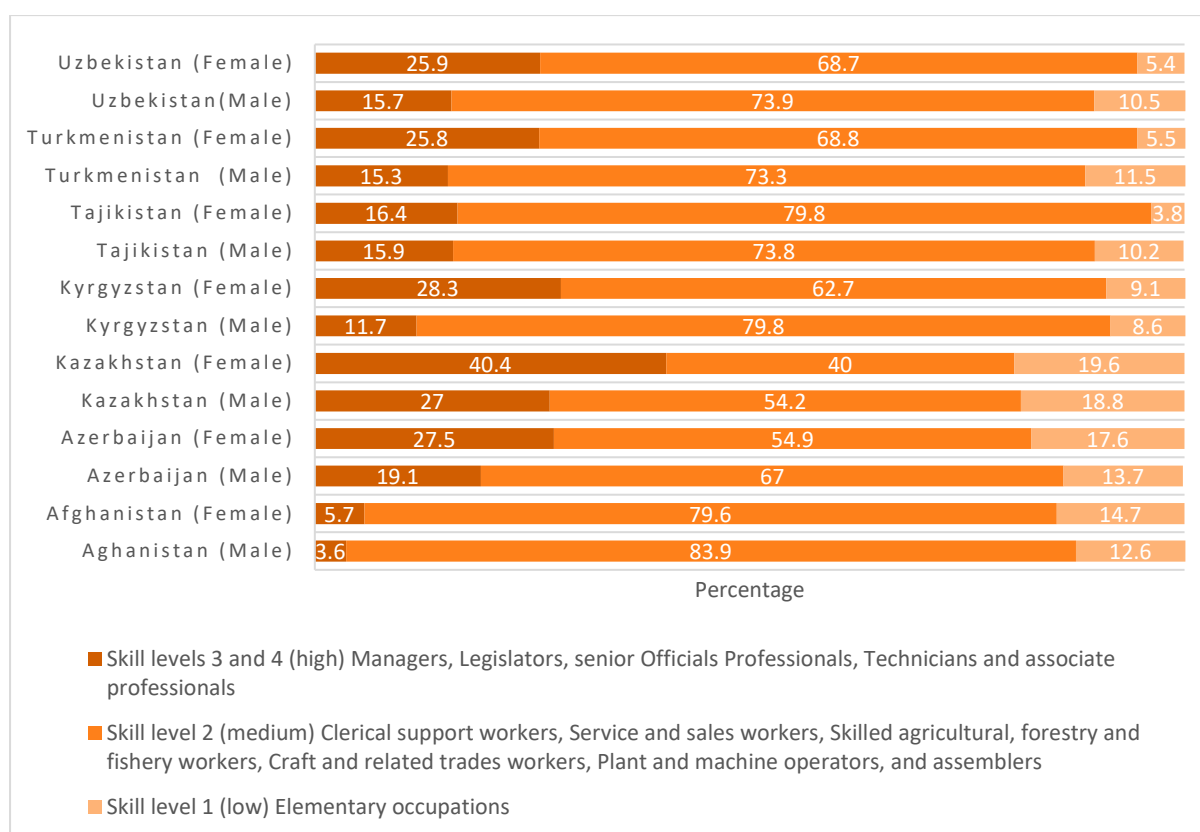
The medium skill level category includes occupations such as clerical workers, machine operators, and skilled primary sector workers. This is the largest category of employment across the region. Kazakhstan has the lowest female share (40 per cent) in this category whilst Afghanistan (79.6 per cent) and Tajikistan (79.8 per cent) have the highest female shares in the region.

In the final category, namely senior officials and skilled professionals, Afghanistan (5.7 per cent) has the lowest share of highly skilled females across the region, yet greater than the male share in this category (3.6 per cent). In comparison, Kazakhstan has the highest share of females (40.4 per cent) in the region, with only 27.0 per cent of males in this category.

The data presented in Figure 7 shows that overall, women have a higher share of skill level 3 and 4 jobs than males in all the SPECA region countries. With regard to medium skill jobs, men outnumber women in all countries, with the exception of Tajikistan. When skill level 1 jobs are examined, males have the greater share in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, with similar shares for both men and women in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Afghanistan and Azerbaijan both have a larger share of females than males in skill level 1 jobs. In sum, these data present a positive picture of female engagement in the workforce at the high skill level, with mixed progress at the medium and low skill levels.

¹⁵ FAO, Gender and Land Rights Database. Available from: www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/data-map/statistics/en/

Figure 7: Share of men and women in occupational categories, SPECA countries, 2017¹⁶



Source: ILO Labour Statistics Database (ILOSTAT). Available from: www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/ilostat-home/home?_adf.ctrl-state=eafa6zhmt_86&_afLoop=2147343543978612#!

Based on recent research forecasts, the impact of digital technologies and automation may threaten female-dominated, low-skilled and labour-intensive office and administrative positions. Such technological innovations will create new opportunities in the STEM-related fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics which may favour males over females, based on current occupation patterns, unless focused measures to redirect this trend are implemented.¹⁷

Furthermore, data on managerial-level positions indicate that the trend still favours men over women. Data from the region is only available for Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan between 2005 and 2015. The average female share of managerial positions is 35 per cent, with an upward trend for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and uneven progress observed in Azerbaijan.¹⁸ This illustrates the low level of female participation in decision-making processes and representation at the highest leadership echelons in the region. The trend is

¹⁶ The International Labour Organization database provides national statistics employment disaggregated by occupation, sex, including employment estimates sex, which contain both nationally reported and imputed data. ILO employment estimates by occupation are presented only using broad occupation categories: skill level 1 (low), skill level 2 (medium) and skill levels 3 and 4 (high).

¹⁷ World Economic Forum (2016a). The Industry Gender Gap: Women and Work in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Cologny, Switzerland: WEF.

¹⁸ ILO Labour Statistics Database (ILOSTAT). Available from: www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/ilostat-home/home?_adf.ctrl-state=eafa6zhmt_86&_afLoop=2147343543978612#!

partly due to discriminatory attitudes and perceptions of women in leadership positions, which will be examined further in Section 5.3.1.

Capacity-building programmes aimed at advancing women's employment are gaining momentum in the region. The aim of such programmes is to equip women with the necessary skills and resources to contribute to economic growth and thereby reduce poverty levels. For instance, the 'Promote' programme was created by the Government of Afghanistan and the United States Agency for International Development, focused on furnishing a new generation of Afghan women with the relevant leadership skills with respect to governance, civil society, and economy (see Box 1).

Box 1: Fostering women's economic empowerment - the case of the "Promote" programme in Afghanistan

The "Promote" programme was created by the Government of Afghanistan and the United States Agency for International Development for the period 2015 to 2019. This comprehensive project consists of four cyclical components aimed at promoting women's employment in Afghanistan: i) formation of Clusters of Community-Based Savings Group focused on income-generating activities for poor women in rural areas and urban hinterlands; ii) provision of business support services, including training modules and facilitation of access to markets; iii) sustainable financing, including through a revolving loan fund; and iv) project management, monitoring and evaluation, and knowledge dissemination.

Current activities

- Improving the growth of women-owned businesses and businesses with a 10 per cent or greater female workforce.
- Providing training and targeted technical assistance to address business needs; making referrals to business service providers; and helping women business owners and managers to foster the growth of skilled women employees.
- Partnering with local educational, vocational, and technical training providers to offer workplace skills development, career counselling, internships, apprenticeships, and job placement to women between the ages of 18 and 30 so they can gain work experience and secure new or better positions.
- Encouraging private companies to improve the workplace environment for women and to expand female staffing.
- Collaborating with other donors and partners to increase women's access to finance and improve the overall enabling environment.

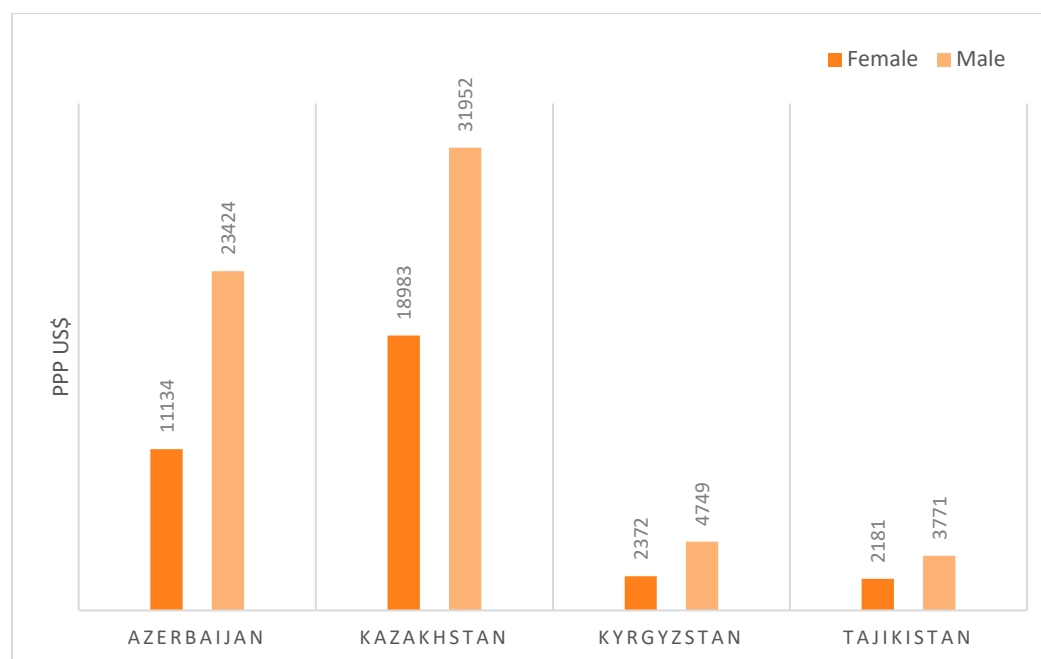
Expected results

- 20 per cent of Promote-supported businesses will move to the next level of enterprise size (for example, to advance from small- to medium- size business).
- 50 per cent (or more) of all Promote-supported businesses will increase revenues by more than 40 per cent within two years after assistance.
- 21,000 women will receive new or better employment (including self-employment).
- 12,600 women will receive a 10 per cent or greater improvement in wages or income.
- 9,500 women participate in activity-supported apprenticeships or internships.
- three gender-sensitive policies, regulations, or reforms will be developed to assist women in the economy.

2.4 The gender income gap

Related to gender gaps in employment and occupational segregation is the gender wage gap that exists in the SPECA region. The World Economic Forum provides data on the gender gap in estimated earned income in these countries, as presented in Figure 8. It is defined as the ratio of female estimated earned income over the male value.²⁰ Where country data is available, there is a considerable earned income gap between men and women in SPECA countries. The female earned income share ranges from 48 per cent of male earned income in Azerbaijan to 59 per cent, in Kazakhstan.

Figure 8: Estimated earned income for men and women, SPECA countries, 2017



Source: World Economic Forum, The Global Gender Gap Report 2017. Available from: www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2017

A number of factors may account for the gender income gap. In addition to gender discriminatory practices in recruitment, promotions and skills development, gender imbalances in access to education as well as women's interrupted work life and part-time work due to competing domestic and care responsibilities are critical factors that contribute to the income gap.

¹⁹ Afghan Women's Economic Empowerment Project (2016). Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) for the Japanese Social Development Fund (JSDF)-funded pilot. Draft for consultation. Prepared by the Aga Khan Foundation Afghanistan (AKF-A).

²⁰ World Economic Forum calculations based on the methodology in UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008.

Enterprise size is also suggested as a factor. Smaller companies seem to demonstrate a smaller gender wage gap based on data from Kazakhstan.²¹ In addition, limited data available for Turkmenistan suggests that the gender income gap is approximately 36 per cent among own-account workers and 30 per cent when small business owners were surveyed.²²

Furthermore, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, there are regional variations in the gender income gap.^{23, 24} The gap also appears smaller amongst the younger demographic in Kyrgyzstan.²⁵

As Figure 9 shows, there has been a general narrowing of the gender pay gap from 2000 to 2015 across the SPECA region. Azerbaijan declined from 54 to 46 per cent. Kazakhstan declined from 38.5 per cent to 34 per cent. Kyrgyzstan declined from 32 to 24.5 per cent. Tajikistan declined from 57 per cent in 200, to 44 per cent in 2010, but increased to 51 per cent 2011.

²¹ Elder, S., Barucci, V., Gurbuzer, Y., Perardel, Y., and M. Principi (2015). Labor Market Transitions of Young Women and Men in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Geneva, Switzerland: ILO.

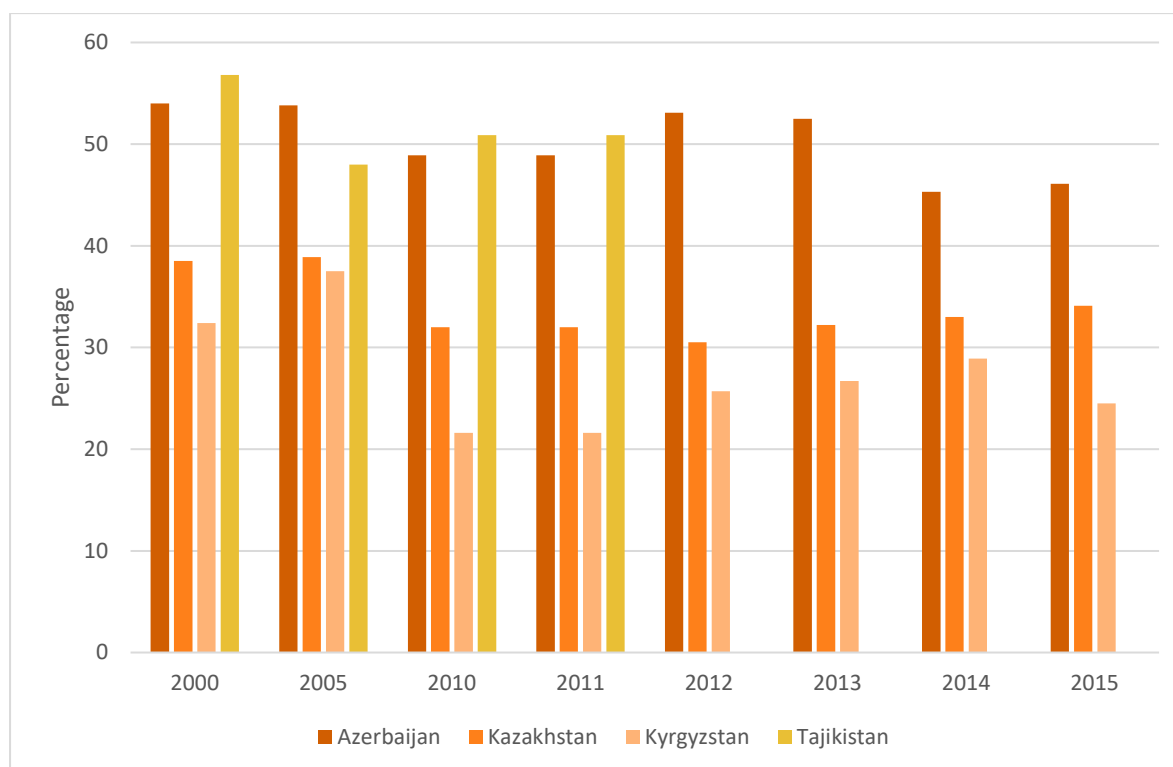
²² United Nations Development Programme (2008) Turkmenistan: Gender Differences in Business. Ashgabat: UNDP.

²³ OP Cit., Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on statistics (2011). Women and Men in Kazakhstan 2006-2010, Statistical collection, Astana. [Available from: www.stat.gov.kz/getImg?id=WC16200032269](http://www.stat.gov.kz/getImg?id=WC16200032269)

²⁴ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2012). Women and Men in the Kyrgyz Republic: 2007-2011 Compendium of Gender Disaggregated Statistics. Bishkek.

²⁵ Baumann, A., Jansova E., and E. Saar (2013). Transition from School to Work in Kyrgyzstan: Results of the 2011/12 Transition Survey. The European Training Foundation.

Figure 9: Gender pay gap in monthly earnings, SPECA countries, 2000-2015



Source: UNECE, Statistical Database. Available from: <http://w3.unece.org/PXWeb/en>

Note: No data available for Tajikistan from 2012 – 2015.

At the sectoral level, the gender pay gaps in the SPECA region are also pronounced. In Kazakhstan, the gender pay gap in education and food services was 91 per cent and 59 per cent, respectively.²⁶ The UNDP found similar gender pay differences across industrial sectors in Turkmenistan.²⁷ An example from Kyrgyzstan indicates that a higher gender pay gap is evident in sectors dominated by women.²⁸

There are several caveats that need to be highlighted when examining the available data on the region. Monthly earnings, which are commonly used, may be seen to exaggerate the size of the gender pay gap.²⁹ In several countries in the region, apart for Kazakhstan, labour tends to be informal, thus wages as such are not a satisfactory indicator to measure the gender pay gap. The prevalence of agricultural labour, characterized as household labour and often unpaid, also adds to the difficulty of measuring the gender pay gap.

²⁶ Elder, S., Barcucci, V., Gurbuzer, Y., Perardel, Y., and M. Principi (2015). *Labor Market Transitions of Young Women and Men in Eastern Europe and Central Asia*. Geneva, Switzerland: ILO.

²⁷ United Nations Development Programme (2008) *Turkmenistan: Gender Differences in Business*. Ashgabat: UNDP.

²⁸ Anderson, K.H., Esenaliev, D. and E. Lawler (2015). “Gender Earnings Inequality After the 2010 Revolution: Evidence from the Life in Kyrgyzstan Survey, 2010 – 2013”. Presented at the Life in Kyrgyzstan survey conference, 2015.

²⁹ Brainerd E (1998). “Winners and Losers in Russia’s Economic Transition”. *American Economic Review* 88, pp. 1094-1116.

However, examples of good practices from across the region can serve as a strong impetus to transform the business environment by advocating the benefits of having high gender equality standards, establishing corporate leadership in promoting gender equality and ensuring that women have access to safe and healthy workplaces (see Box 2).

Box 2: Eradicating gender discrimination in the workplace - the case of "AB" Restaurants, Kazakhstan

"AB" Restaurants is the first company in Central Asia to sign on to the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), a joint initiative of UN Women and the UN Global Compact, which places gender equality at the heart of good business practices.

"AB" Restaurants is the biggest restaurant chain in Kazakhstan, with 25 restaurants in several cities and 850 employees. A recent human resources analysis showed that 80 per cent of employees are women. Moreover, 24 of the 25 restaurant directors are women and 90 per cent of restaurant managers are women.

"AB" Restaurants realized that there are many barriers that women face in the workplace, and not everywhere do women have the same opportunities. This prompted the company to sign the WEPs and together with UN Women Multi-country office in Kazakhstan, called upon other companies to support gender equality. They serve as an example for the business community of Central Asia in showcasing that companies can and should support women. Together with UN Women they have engaged male opinion leaders, prominent Kazakh bloggers and journalists in an awareness-raising campaign on women's economic empowerment. The campaign also produced a public service announcement for screening in Kazakhstan cinemas. In addition, media partners launched a month of gender and empowerment articles, interviews and opinion pieces on its platform.

Source: UN Women, February 2017. Available from:

www.eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/02/take-five-askar-baitassov-weps

2.5 Informal employment

Employment is characterised by a high degree of informality in the SPECA region. The informal sector contributes to increased employment in several of the SPECA countries. Nonetheless, the size of the informal economy may have a destabilising effect on the macro and micro economy of a state. Moreover, informal employees do not have the same recourse to social protection or employment benefits as their formal peers do.

The informal sector in SPECA countries, much of which is agricultural, accounts for a greater part of the private sector, notably in relation to SMEs and own-account workers. The informal economy in the SPECA region has been estimated to be approximately 40 per cent in size.³⁰ Further data on the size of the informal sector in SPECA countries suggest that Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are at comparable levels of 42 per cent.³¹ Kazakhstan's informal

³⁰ Schneider, F., A. Buehn, and C.E. Montenegro (2010). Shadow Economies All Over the World: New Estimates for 162 Countries from 1999 to 2007. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 5356.

³¹ There is some conflicting evidence on Kyrgyzstan. Schneider et al's paper (above) indicates the average figure to be 40.4 per cent for the period 1999-2007, yet other research suggests the figure may be considerably higher Sayakvaev and Mokrousova, 2014; Hushkadamova, 2013; Faizova, Kozhevnikova, Kashipova, Zinurova and Egorova, 2015.

sector is estimated to be 32.8 per cent,³² whilst just 14 per cent of the work force are employed in the informal sector in Turkmenistan.³³

These informal sector jobs are characterised as low quality, seasonal or temporary in nature, and predominantly of an agricultural nature. Moreover, the share of workers in the informal sector has increased over time.³⁴ Persisting stereotypes, differences in access to education and vocational training for women and men, the structure of the labour market, as well as gender-based discrimination at entry and in work are among the causes that lead to women's overrepresentation in the informal sector.³⁵

The World Bank notes that in 2007, 47 per cent of those classified as being in the informal sector in Tajikistan were in agriculture, and were predominantly women.³⁶ In Tajikistan, push factors include insufficient family income or loss of the male bread winner due to the civil war, leaving women with little option than to enter the precarious, informal sector.

A report on Kyrgyzstan further notes that those working in the informal sector are typically female, young, with limited education, and working in agriculture, on their own plots of land.³⁷ In 2009, 36.2 per cent of those employed in the informal sector in Kyrgyzstan were women. The informal non-agricultural sector in Kyrgyzstan is primarily populated by women who work in the production of clothing, local market trading as well as shuttle trade. Similar findings from Uzbekistan shows that 70 to 80 per cent of informally employed vendors in bazaars are female, and that 50 per cent of bazaar-based shuttle traders are female.³⁸

Although the informal sector in Turkmenistan is the smallest of the SPECA countries, it is notable that it employs a sizeable proportion of women, with an estimated figure of 57 per cent.³⁹

2.6 Social protection provisions

Despite the limited availability of sex-disaggregated data for the SPECA region, it can be argued that labour market gender inequalities correlate with relative access to social protection systems. Social protection strengthens women's empowerment and agency by

³² Zhusupova, A. (2003). Phenomenon of Self-employment in Kazakhstan as the Reflection of Specificity of Social and Economic Development. Almaty: Institute of Global Economy and Policy (IGEP) under the Fund of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

³³ Report of ESCAP Expert Group Meeting on Inequality in North and Central Asia, 24-26 October 2017, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

³⁴ Strokova, V.; A. Mohamed Ihsan (2017). Tajikistan Jobs Diagnostic: Strategic Framework for Jobs. Jobs Series; No. 1. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

³⁵ Maltseva, Irina. (2007). Gender equality in the sphere of employment. Dushanbe: United Nations Development Fund for Women.

³⁶ World Bank, Tajikistan - Living Standards Survey 2007. Available from: www.microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/72

³⁷ World Bank (2009). Social Safety Net in the Kyrgyz Republic: Capitalizing on Achievements and Addressing New Challenges. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

³⁸ Asian Development Bank (2014) Uzbekistan: Country Gender Assessment. Manila, the Philippines: ADB.

³⁹ Report of ESCAP Expert Group Meeting on Inequality in North and Central Asia, 24-26 October 2017, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

increasing their capacity to negotiate at both the domestic and community level, access resources as well as participate in the labour market.

Over the past two decades, a number of SPECA countries have made reforms to their social protection systems inherited from the former Soviet Union. Overall, the current trend among several of the SPECA countries is a shift away from the previous system of universal social protection towards more targeted schemes.⁴⁰

The total national social protection spending as share of GDP ranges from 5.60 per cent in Afghanistan to 11.16 per cent in Uzbekistan. Of this, social insurance tends to constitute the bulk of social protection spending, followed by social assistance, especially in the form of targeted cash transfers. Spending on labour market programmes is generally very low in all countries.⁴¹

An interesting example is the national social protection system in Uzbekistan which provides extended income security to the working age population through a comprehensive package of unemployment allowances, temporary disability allowances and coverage for work related injuries. Due to the universal and largely non-contributory nature of the system, coverage reaches close to 100 per cent of all active working-age citizens.⁴²

As opposed to contribution-based social insurance schemes, social assistance programmes are often a flat-rate benefit funded by general taxation and targeted towards specific groups, such as the poor and children in poor families. The majority of SPECA countries have at least one social assistance program targeted specifically at families with children. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan also have universal child benefits (birth grants or child care benefits for very young children).

Pensions contribute considerably to poverty reduction amongst both older persons and multi-generational households. In five out of seven SPECA countries, old-age pensions cover a sizeable proportion of the retired population. In Kyrgyzstan, pensions contribute to 26 per cent of total household consumption of the poorest recipient households.⁴³ However, the overall adequacy of these benefits is insufficient and thus, older persons, especially women, continue to live on or below the subsistence minimum.⁴⁴ In addition, SPECA countries are characterised by large informal economies and sizeable migration outflows, both of which have had a detrimental impact on the contributory pension schemes.

Active labour market programmes also constitute an essential element of social protection in reducing unemployment, as well as bridging the skills gap in the labour market.

⁴⁰ Menchini, L., Marnie, S., and L. Tiberti (2009). *Child Well-Being in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: A Multidimensional Approach*. Innocenti Working Paper IWP-2009-20. Florence, Italy: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

⁴¹ International Labour Organization (2010). *World Social Security Report 2010-2011. Providing Coverage in Times of Crisis and Beyond*. Geneva, Switzerland: ILO.

⁴² ESCAP, *The Social Protection Toolbox*. Available from: www.socialprotection-toolbox.org

⁴³ Gassmann, F. (2010). *To what extent does the existing safety net protect the poor?* Background paper prepared for the World Bank.

⁴⁴ Falkingham, F. and A. Vlachantoni, (2010). *Pensions and Social Protection in Central Asia and South Caucasus: developments in the post-Soviet era*. University of Southampton, U.K.

Unfortunately, these programmes only comprise a small share of total spending on social protection in all SPECA countries.

Therefore, the majority of SPECA countries should consider broadening and deepening their social protection provisions to ensure access to quality essential services for all, including to support women's economic empowerment. In this respect, well-designed and implemented social protection schemes are a crucial vehicle of inclusive, pro-poor growth, but must be anchored in national legislation and go beyond the provision of short-term safety nets. Furthermore, good practices from across the Asia-Pacific region illustrate that these systems are both feasible and affordable, but require strong political will.

2.7 Impact of migration

Migration as an income earning strategy characterises many of the SPECA countries, with significant implications for the local labour market. Following the demise of the Soviet Union, and against the backdrop of limited labour market opportunities coupled with growing populations in the SPECA countries, there was an increase in internal rural-urban migration as well as outward migration to the growing Russian and Kazakhstan markets. Migration from Tajikistan was particularly pronounced during this time, with nearly two out of five families having family members who had mainly migrated to the Russian Federation. These migrants were predominantly men, and sought work in sectors such as construction.⁴⁵

Notably, the status of gender equality in a country affects the gender balance of migration. For instance, Kyrgyzstan, which is characterized by relative higher equality, is conducive to more gender-balanced migration, with women making up almost half of the migrants and many of them being under the age of 30. On the contrary, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have much stricter norms for women's mobility; and thus, migration from these two countries is mostly male, with less than a fifth of women in migration flows.⁴⁶

One key attraction of the Russian Federation for migrants is the higher remuneration, ranging from 3.2 times the average wages in Uzbekistan to almost eight times higher than comparable wages in Tajikistan. Based on Bank of Russia data, the economies of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are the most dependent on remittances from the Russian Federation. Remittances to Uzbekistan account for 7 per cent of its GDP, Tajikistan, 20 per cent of GDP, and Kyrgyzstan, almost 15 per cent of its GDP.⁴⁷

The Russian Federation's vision of labour migration has an important gendered consequence related to the lack of legal grounds for the labour migrant's family members to stay long term. The 90/180 rule does not permit stays of more than three months unless the migrant possesses a patent (work permit), residence permit or other special documents. This situation leads to

⁴⁵ Report of ESCAP Expert Group Meeting on Inequality in North and Central Asia, 24-26 October 2017, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

⁴⁶ Rocheva, A., and E. Varshaver (2017). Gender Dimension of Migration from Central Asia to the Russian Federation. *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, vol. 32, No. 2.

⁴⁷ Shpilina, T., E. Kryukova, E. Vasiutina, P. Solodukha, and O. Shcheglova (2017) Informal Employment in SCO Countries: Realities and Prospects. *European Research Studies Journal*, Volume XX, Issue 2B.

even more limited opportunities for migrants to bring their families with them, and usually the family members who have to stay behind are women.⁴⁸

The impact of male migration in the region is illustrated by the example of Tajikistan (Box 3), where women are often left behind with the responsibility for the family, in-laws, household, and family agricultural plots, despite their lack of access to the necessary resources and skills to engage in all these activities.

Box 3: The impact of male migration on women in Tajikistan

The Gender Livelihood and Socio-Economic Study in Tajikistan provides an assessment of the impact of male migration on women left behind. The study shows that women face difficulties obtaining the necessary credits to enable them to, for example, purchase land, buy materials or start their own business. According to the baseline study, personal funds and savings are used to invest in agricultural activities. Women farmers also lack access to water, arable land, energy sources, fertilizers and seeds – these issues further diminish their ability to improve their livelihoods, but also negatively impact on their health, education opportunities, as well as the well-being of their households.

Source: Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) (2014). Tajikistan: Gender Livelihood and Socio-Economic Study

However, initiatives taken by governments and non-government bodies (Box 4) demonstrate possible measures to improve vulnerable women's access to jobs in the formal sector, develop their business skills and enable access to legal and financial services, thus increasing opportunities for educational, economic, and political inclusion.

Box 4: Empowering women from migrant families in Tajikistan

Since 2014, over 3,000 women in Tajikistan have formed self-help groups thanks to a UN Women project, funded by the Joint UN Human Security Trust Fund Programme and the Government of Norway. The project targets vulnerable women in the Rasht Valley and Khatlon regions, particularly the growing number of women abandoned by a mass outflow of male labour migrants. The self-help groups help women develop job or small business skills and access essential legal and financial services.

The project has provided comprehensive legal, social and economic support to abandoned families of migrant workers in two regions of Tajikistan, from 2013 – 2016. To date, 1,283 women from migrant families received free legal aid and mass media campaigns raised 4,798 women's awareness of women's rights.

In Tajikistan's Sughd Province, UN Women also partnered with the Committee for Family and Women's Affairs to introduce District Task Forces to provide women with free legal counselling on land and property rights. The model worked so well that the national Government expanded it across the country – nearly 20,300 women used the services in 2014 and 2015. In addition, 18 districts launched One Stop Shops that link people to public services and local officials. This enables at least 500 families annually to solve their complex issues through simplified access to around 12 public services performing 'as one' and helping vulnerable population.

⁴⁸ Rocheva, A., and E. Varshaver (2017). Gender Dimension of Migration from Central Asia to the Russian Federation. *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, vol. 32, No. 2.

Furthermore, Women's Watch Groups, developed jointly by UN Women and women's advocates, have begun to conduct household monitoring and proactively seek out the most vulnerable citizens, the clear majority of whom are women and girls.

The project also contributed towards the addition of abandoned wives and children of migrant workers as a new category of socially vulnerable group in the Government's Decree #448 passed on 2 July 2015, which facilitates their access to free legal, economic and psycho-social services.

Source: UN Women, September 2016. Available from:

www.eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/09/feature-story-abandoned-wives-of-tajik-migrants-overcome-hurdles

More recently, the global financial crisis in 2008 led to a decline in construction-related employment, the traditional sector for male migrants, and a subsequent drop in remittance inflows. This became a push factor for female migrants, especially due to the heightened service sector demand. Therefore, female migrants from SPECA countries are increasingly occupying the domestic and care worker market in the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan.

A large proportion of these female migrant workers are often undocumented, thus questioning the accuracy of migration statistics. Furthermore, women are more likely to officially register as migrants in Russia, yet work in informal, non-contract, low-skilled occupations, despite their relatively higher educational levels.⁴⁹

According to a survey of female migration from all members of the Commonwealth of Independent States⁵⁰ to the Russian Federation, women from Central Asia were found to be the most vulnerable group: they endure the worst living conditions and face major problems in terms of gaining access to medical services, yet they send home the largest portion of their salaries as remittance.⁵¹

⁴⁹ International Labour Organization (2010). Migration and Development in Tajikistan – Emigration, Returns and Diaspora.

⁵⁰ The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) comprises Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine. This survey also covers Georgia but excludes Turkmenistan.

⁵¹ Tyuryukanova, Ye. V. (ed.) (2011). Zhenshhiny-migranty iz stran SNG v Rossii [Female migrants from the CIS States in Russia]. Moscow: MAX Press.

Chapter 3: Unpaid work

Women’s reproductive labour – the unpaid and often invisible care economy – enables the productive labour of others: men and women. For instance, data from European Union household and time-use surveys estimates that the market value of women’s unpaid work could range from one quarter to one third of a country’s gross domestic product.⁵²

In shouldering the larger share of domestic and care responsibilities, women in SPECA countries are exposed to time poverty, which limits their economic choices. Their mobility is constrained due to domestic work, childcare and meal preparation, as well as other productive work. Socio-cultural norms, include those governing the limited access to finance and decision-making further exacerbate this situation.⁵³ It must be noted that women’s unpaid care work is often categorised as ‘invisible’ and not part of the household economy.

3.1 Status of unpaid work in SPECA countries

Table 4 compiles the latest available time use survey per country, showing paid versus unpaid care work carried out by men and women. Mirroring the global picture, women across Central Asia are primarily responsible for unpaid care and domestic work. In all countries of the SPECA region, men spend more of their time on paid work whilst women engage in two to three times more unpaid work in a 24-hour period. When both paid and unpaid work, such as domestic work and caring for children, are taken into account, in most countries, women work longer hours than men.

Table 4: Average time spent (in hours) on paid and unpaid work in a 24-hour period

| Country | Year | Age | <i>Paid work</i> | | <i>Unpaid work</i> | |
|------------|------|-----|------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|
| | | | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| Azerbaijan | 2008 | 15+ | 4.7 | 1.7 | 2.1 | 6.1 |
| Kazakhstan | 2012 | 10+ | 3.4 | 2.2 | 1.9 | 4.1 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 2015 | 12+ | 3.6 | 2.0 | 2.4 | 4.1 |
| Uzbekistan | 2006 | 15+ | 5.5 | 3.6 | 2.3 | 4.6 |

Source: UN Statistics Division, Time use data portal. Available from: www.unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/timeuse/

In comparison to the OECD region, the time spent by women on unpaid work at 4.6 hours is similar to the SPECA countries, apart from Azerbaijan. However, women’s paid work hours

⁵² Giannelli, G., Lucia Mangiavacchi, L. and L. Piccoli (2010) GDP and the value of family caretaking: how much does Europe care? Institute for the Study of Labour (IZA), Discussion Paper Series No. 5046. Available from: www.ftp.iza.org/dp5046.pdf.

⁵³ Thorpe J., M. Maestre and T. Kidder (2016). Market systems approaches and unpaid care work. Conceptual Framework. London: DFID, BEAM Exchange.

in the OECD (3.6 hours) region is significantly higher than in most SPECA countries, aside from Uzbekistan.⁵⁴

The data available for the region on number of hours per day spent on childcare is limited to just two countries – Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. When childcare as a main activity is examined, females spend on average 1.4 hours per day in Kyrgyzstan (in 2010), more than twice that of their male counterparts. In the case of Uzbekistan (in 2006), females spend nearly three times as much time (0.98 hours) than their male counterparts.⁵⁵ In both countries it appears that rural women may allocate more time to childcare.⁵⁶ It must be noted that a potential inconsistency is that childcare may be divided into a primary activity or indeed a secondary activity where the parent may simultaneously be involved in other paid or unpaid labour.⁵⁷

The data on inactive labour due to domestic responsibilities by sex is available for just three countries in the region. In Kazakhstan, 11 per cent of women report that this is the reason for their labour market inactivity. The figure for Kyrgyzstan is 35 per cent, and for Tajikistan, the figure is 60 per cent. Furthermore, Tajikistan reports a figure of 20 per cent for males, whilst the corresponding figure for the other countries is less than 1 per cent.⁵⁸ Domestic responsibilities also impact on women in other ways, including having to take leave to care for sick children which, in turn, impacts their labour market availability and dependability – as shown by evidence from Tajikistan.⁵⁹

Much research supports the principle that policies focused on women’s economic empowerment in developing and transitional markets need to prioritise affordable childcare.⁶⁰ Public provision of such services catalyzes women’s participation in and retention in the labour force.⁶¹ For instance, in the context of central Asia, an increase in pre-school attendance for under threes, is correlated to an increase in female labour participation from 4.5 per cent in 2001-02 to 15 per cent in 2012-13 in Kazakhstan.⁶²

The equal sharing of responsibilities as well as provision of the requisite infrastructure and social protection measures can play an important role in redressing unequal burdens of

⁵⁴ OECD, Statistical Database. Available from: www.stats.oecd.org

⁵⁵ Meurs, M., and V. Slavchevska (2014). Doing it all: Women’s employment and reproductive work in Tajikistan. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, vol. 42, issue 3, pp. 786-803.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Short, S. E., F. Chen, B. Entwisle, and Z. Fengying (2002). Maternal Work and Child Care in China: A Multi-Method Analysis. *Population and Development Review*, 28(1), pp. 31–57.

⁵⁸ Maltseva, Irina. (2007). Gender equality in the sphere of employment. Dushanbe: United Nations Development Fund for Women.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Buvinić M., Furst-Nichols, R. and E. Courey Pryor (2013) A Roadmap for Promoting Women’s Economic Empowerment. UN Foundation and Exxon Mobil Foundation.

⁶¹ İlkkaracan, İ., K. Kim, and T. Kaya (2015). The Impact of Public Investment in Social Care Services on Employment, Gender Equality, and Poverty: The Turkish Case. Levy Economics Institute; Antonopoulos, R., and K. Kim. (2011) Public Job-creation Programs: The Economic Benefits of Investing in Social Care: Case Studies in South Africa and the United States. Working Paper No. 671. New York: Levy Economics Institute; Kabeer, N. (2012) Women’s Economic Empowerment and Inclusive Growth: Labour Markets and Enterprise Development. SIG Working Paper 2012/1.

⁶² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012). Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now. Paris, France: OECD

unpaid work. Of note is that provisions for maternity leave vary from 90 days in Afghanistan up to 140 days in Tajikistan. Data on paternity leave on the other hand is scarce, with the available information showing that where it is available, fathers only have very few days at their disposal after the birth of a child and in many cases, any leave they are able to take is often unpaid.⁶³

In the case of childcare support, an analysis of data show that most SPECA countries provide subsidized or publicly provided childcare as well as child allowances to parents. However, regarding the allocation of leave to employees who have a sick relative, only Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan provide such leave.⁶⁴

3.2 Urban-rural divide

In comparing data on hours spent on unpaid and paid work on a rural versus urban basis, it is evident that men and women in the countryside spend more time on unpaid work, than their urban counterparts.⁶⁵ However, it is interesting the gender gap in this aspect is narrower than in urban areas, which may be partly explained by the sharing, albeit in a gendered way, of household duties – for instance, women take care of cooking, cleaning and caring, whilst men are responsible for house maintenance.⁶⁶

When comparing pre-school enrolment rates and women’s labour force participation, it is apparent that one cannot necessarily be correlated with the other. For instance, in Kyrgyzstan, the national enrolment rate for pre-school children was 14.5 per cent, with a high of 29.9 per cent in urban areas and a low of 8 per cent in rural areas.⁶⁷ However women’s labour force participation is not observed to be higher in urban over rural areas. In fact, women in rural areas are more likely to juggle work in agriculture along with childcare, which may be less feasible in an urban and more formalised work environment.⁶⁸

Nonetheless, improvements in the availability of childcare infrastructure, mentioned in the section above, have been a significant step in expanding opportunities for rural women to participate in the labour force.⁶⁹

⁶³ ESCAP analysis using the World Bank, Women Business and the Law Database 2016. Note: no data available for Turkmenistan.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Meurs, M., and V. Slavchevska (2014). Doing it all: Women’s employment and reproductive work in Tajikistan. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 2014, vol. 42, issue 3, 786-803.

⁶⁶ Walker, J., N. Berekashvili, and N. Lomidze (2014). Valuing Time: Time Use Survey, the Capabilities Approach, and Gender Analysis. *Human Development and Capabilities*, 15(1), pp. 47 – 59.

⁶⁷ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2012) Women and Men in the Kyrgyz Republic: 2007-2011 Compendium of Gender Disaggregated Statistics. Bishkek.

⁶⁸ Short, S. E., F. Chen, B. Entwisle, and Z. Fengying (2002). Maternal Work and Child Care in China: A Multi-Method Analysis. *Population and Development Review*, 28(1), pp. 31–57.

⁶⁹ Women in Europe for a Common Future (2014) Empower Women, Benefit for All: Gender Livelihood and Socio-Economic Study, Kyrgyzstan. Baseline Report, WECF.

Chapter 4: Women's entrepreneurship

4.1 Trends in women's entrepreneurship

Women's entrepreneurship is increasingly being recognised as a pivotal pathway towards fostering women's economic empowerment and realising the vision of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. By setting up and managing a business, women can achieve economic independence, overcome poverty through asset building and improve their well-being as well as that of their families and communities.

Women's entrepreneurship displays large variations in the region. According to the World Bank's Enterprise Surveys, the share of firms with female participation in ownership range from as low as 2.2 per cent in Afghanistan to 49.4 per cent in Kyrgyzstan. In addition, the proportion of firms with majority female ownership is significantly lower in all countries, with the highest figures seen in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan at just 16.4 per cent.

Table 5: Firms with female participation in ownership and majority ownership, 2013

| Country | Per cent of firms with female participation in ownership | Per cent of firms with majority female ownership |
|-------------|--|--|
| Afghanistan | 2.2 | 0.5 |
| Azerbaijan | 4.5 | 2.0 |
| Kazakhstan | 28.3 | 16.4 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 49.4 | 16.4 |
| Tajikistan | 32.7 | 8.0 |
| Uzbekistan | 29.2 | 7.9 |

Source: World Bank. Enterprise Surveys. Available from: www.enterprisesurveys.org

Note: Data for Afghanistan is for 2014.

Moreover, data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor allows an in-depth exploration of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. The ratio of males and females in total early-stage entrepreneurial activity⁷⁰ at 0.99 indicates that in Kazakhstan, men and women have equal opportunities in establish and develop an enterprise. In addition, 64 per cent of women were motivated to become entrepreneurs due to an opportunity or a business possibility, compared to 32 per cent who were driven by necessity since there were no better options for earning a living.⁷¹ However, the favourable entrepreneurial ecosystem in Kazakhstan is likely to differ from the other economies in the SPECA region.

While entrepreneurs in general face considerable barriers, women entrepreneurs face additional disadvantages which hold them back. Example of barriers for women

⁷⁰ The total early-stage entrepreneurship activity measures the percentage of persons (ages 18–64) who are in the process of starting up their business or have recently started one. This includes those who have yet to pay wages for more than three months (nascent stage), and also new entrepreneurs who have paid salaries for more than three months but no more than 42 months.

⁷¹ Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2017). National Report: Kazakhstan 2016/2017. GEM, Graduate School of Business (GSB) of Nazarbayev University and Economic Research Institute.

entrepreneurs to establish, manage and develop an enterprise, include discriminatory sociocultural norms; policies and legislation that are blind to the specific circumstances, needs and interests of women; limited opportunities for capacity development; and restricted access to finance, credit and ICTs. The domestic demands on women in terms of unpaid care and household obligations across all countries in the SPECA region restrict their time and market access.

Furthermore, the type of ventures that women entrepreneurs invest in tend to be sector-specific and with limited high margin opportunities. Kazakhstan serves as the exception, where the share of women in high-tech ventures stands at 52.1 per cent and in low-tech ventures, at 49.1 per cent.⁷² For other countries across the SPECA region, an additional challenge is that most female-owned companies are generally smaller and employ fewer workers than their male counterparts, which have led to lower profits and poorer performance.⁷³

The expansion of the private sector has been highlighted as key to employment growth and fostering women's entrepreneurship. Research has shown that the private sector share of GDP in Turkmenistan is 25 per cent, in comparison to 75 per cent in Kyrgyzstan.⁷⁴ Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are both characterised as having a higher share of women in public sector employment, than in the private sector. Where there is a higher participation of females in the private sector, typically, they are employed in the agricultural sector. Furthermore, much female activity in the private sector across SPECA countries, is informal, and thus proves difficult to measure. Women entrepreneurs who are informally working in agriculture typically sell product grown on their own small plots of land. Those women working in a secondary sector are often engaged in textile manufacture as well as trading (both bazaar vending and shuttle trade).⁷⁵

4.2 Creating an enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship

The key factors that support the creation of an enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship in the SPECA countries are: i) policy and legislative frameworks; ii) finance and credit; iii) capacity development; iv) business support and networks; and iv) information and communication technology (ICT). These areas are highlighted in further detail below.

i. Policy and legislative frameworks

Where enterprise promotion policies exist in SPECA countries, few address the specific needs, interests and challenges of women entrepreneurs in establishing, building and managing businesses. National women's machineries play a critical role in raising the profile of priority issues of importance for women and driving national policies to address them. Effective policy

⁷² Zbierowski, P. (2017). The Aspirations of New Technology-Based Firms in CEE and CIS Countries. *Foresight and STI Governance*, vol. 11, issue 3, pp. 50-60.

⁷³ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (2009). *Achievements and Prospects for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship in the Republic of Uzbekistan*. Geneva, Switzerland: UNECE

⁷⁴ World Bank (2012) *World Development Report 2013: Jobs*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank

⁷⁵ Report of ESCAP Expert Group Meeting on Inequality in North and Central Asia, 24-26 October 2017, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

implementation is dependent upon line ministries recognizing their role in mainstreaming gender, including conducting gender impact assessments and addressing the different needs and interests of women and men as applicable to their mandates. In addition, there is a critical need to ensure a policy focus on small and informal enterprises, where women are often concentrated - so they are provided equal opportunity for establishment and growth, relative to larger, more established enterprises.

Major challenges cited by women entrepreneurs include multiple complicated, costly and time-consuming procedures, along with a lack of consistency and coordination between government ministries and agencies. Thus, it is necessary to streamline processes for business registration and licensing, providing a “one stop shop” for information, guidance, application submission and follow up.

Women entrepreneurs will be in a better position to start and develop their businesses if they can rely on supportive national social development policies and measures, such as access to education at all levels, affordable quality childcare services, as well as social protection schemes, including pensions and health care.

Although there is some way to go, countries in the region are increasingly recognising the need to support and encourage women entrepreneurs to realise their full potential (Box 5).

Box 5: Harnessing multi-stakeholder partnerships to promote women's entrepreneurship in Tajikistan

Policymakers from Tajikistan visited Turkey to learn from the national experience in creating an enabling environment for women. The delegation gained insights into new models to support and build opportunities for women entrepreneurs, especially among disadvantaged women. Several institutions and offices associated with facilitating entrepreneurship for women were visited, including banks, academic institutions, and incubators for women’s start-ups.

Participants discussed barriers to women’s entrepreneurship in Tajikistan. In rural areas, for example, social and family pressures to put family first limit possibilities for women entrepreneurs. However, the large emigration of men out of the country has resulted in an increased in working women.

The Government of Tajikistan is taking concrete steps to strengthen women’s economic empowerment. It supports the development of income earning activities, establishment of business incubators, and empowering women and girls to claim their land, business and property rights. The key learning point from the study tour was to understand the innovative horizontal and vertical linkages established between government, international organizations, financial organizations, NGOs with women entrepreneurs at the centre – a critical strategy which could be implemented in Tajikistan.

The Tajik delegation left Turkey with new ideas and possibilities for future action, including organising a forum on female entrepreneurship, creating affordable childcare services, increasing the length of maternity leave, and promoting crowdfunding for women entrepreneurs.

Source: UN Women, June 2016. Available from:

www.eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/06/turkey-shares-women-s-economic-empowerment-experience-with-tajikistan

ii. *Finance and credit*

Studies highlight access to finance as the biggest constraint on growth for all SMEs, with women-owned businesses generally facing larger barriers than their male counterparts.⁷⁶ The International Finance Corporation's Enterprise Financial Gap Database shows that 63 to 69 per cent of women-owned SMEs in developing countries are unserved or underserved by financial institutions – a financing gap of \$260–\$320 billion.⁷⁷ In the primarily agricultural SPECA region, property ownership adheres to the traditional patriarchal system. Even when women have legal ownership of land, family authority will preclude their ability to make unilateral investment or spending decisions.⁷⁸ Moreover, guarantees needed for external financing may be beyond the scope of most women's personal assets and credit track record.

A number of trends reflect the environment for financing of women entrepreneurs in the SPECA region. Formal borrowing to fund a start-up or to expand a business or farm is generally rare in SPECA countries. One survey shows that only 8 per cent of entrepreneurs formally borrow,⁷⁹ with the trends even more pronounced amongst women. Based on UNECE data for 2014, the proportion of those who borrowed to start, operate or expand a farm or business in the SPECA countries was highest in Kyrgyzstan – 7.7 per cent of whom were male and 5.3 per cent, female. Tajikistan was the second highest with 4.1 per cent male and 2.1 per cent female, followed by Uzbekistan with 1.5 per cent male and 0.7 female. In general, males were more likely to borrow than females (twice more likely in Tajikistan), with the exception being Kazakhstan, where females were more slightly likely to borrow than males.

Women-owned businesses start with both lower levels of overall capitalization, lower ratios of debt finance than men-owned businesses and much less likelihood of using private equity or venture capital.^{80,81} It has been noted that women entrepreneurs use only one third of the starting capital than that of men, irrespective of the sector they are in.

The majority of women business owners have had to rely to a significant extent on self-generated finance during the start-up period of their business, due to difficulties in accessing financial networks.⁸² Data from Uzbekistan suggests that that women primarily source start-

⁷⁶ Marlow, S., and D. Patton (2005). All credit to men? Entrepreneurship, finance and gender. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 29, 717; Carter, S., Shaw, E., Lam, W., and F. Wilson. (2007). Gender, entrepreneurship, and bank lending: The criteria and processes used by bank loan officers in assessing applications. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 31(3), 427–445.

⁷⁷ Stein, P., O.P. Ardic and M. Hommes (2013) Closing the Credit Gap for Formal and Informal Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. Washington, D.C.: International Financial Corporation (IFC).

⁷⁸ Report of ESCAP Expert Group Meeting on Inequality in North and Central Asia, 24-26 October 2017, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

⁷⁹ World Bank, Global Findex 2014. Available from: www.datatopics.worldbank.org/financialinclusion

⁸⁰ Brush, C., Carter, N., Greene, P., Gatewood, E., and M. Hart (2001). An investigation of women-led firms and venture capital investment. Report prepared for the U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy and the National Women's Business Council.

⁸¹ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (2009). Achievements and Prospects for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Geneva, Switzerland: UNECE.

⁸² Carter, S., Anderson, S., and E. Shaw. (2001). Women Business Ownership: a review of the academic, popular and internet literature. Report for the Small Business Service, Department of Marketing, University of Strathclyde.

up funding from family or friends, and simultaneously identify access to credit as being a key obstacle to business development.⁸³

Furthermore, studies argued that socially constructed and learned ideas about gender and entrepreneurship limit women's ability to accrue social, cultural, human, and financial capital and place limitations upon their ability to generate personal savings, have credit histories attractive to resource providers, or engage the interest of loan officers, angel investors, and venture capitalists.⁸⁴

iii. Capacity development

Capacity development needs among women entrepreneurs vary significantly, with differences in education levels, skills and enterprises. However, women entrepreneurs often have less access to opportunities to pursue higher education, specialized training and job experience than men entrepreneurs. The rising costs of paid domestic support, in the context of inequitable division of domestic responsibilities between women and men, further restricts women entrepreneurs' ability to allocate time for capacity development.

The issue of training and mentoring highlights many of the intersecting challenges faced by women entrepreneurs as they seek to establish, sustain and grow successful businesses. Comprehensive policies and programmes designed to enhance the capacity of women entrepreneurs are needed that embrace generic knowledge, such as literacy, and more specialized skills, such as accountancy. Policies and programmes also need to remove the constraints to women's entrepreneurship associated with traditional gender roles allocating primary responsibility for household activities to women. Existing examples from the region highlight the potential for other countries to learn and emulate these good practices (Box 6).

Box 6: Boosting capacity and skills of women entrepreneurs in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan

The National Association for Business Women in Tajikistan and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have adapted the Gender and Entrepreneurship Together (GET) Ahead programme as an inclusive approach to reach out to women entrepreneurs in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. GET Ahead emphasizes both the practical and strategic needs of low-income women who want to strengthen their basic business and management skills, despite low levels of literacy. The ILO, in its continuous efforts to boost employment and small enterprise development, links-up with various donor organisations and UN field support bodies to adapt and localize the GET Ahead training concept. (www.ilo.org/wed)

Source: GET Ahead for Women in Enterprise Training Package and Resource Kit

iv. Business support and networks

In a similar vein to challenges regarding training and mentoring mentioned above, women entrepreneurs participate less frequently than men in formal networks that provide skill and

⁸³ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (2009). Achievements and Prospects for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Geneva, Switzerland: UNECE

⁸⁴ Gatewood, E.J., Carter, N.M., Brush, C.G., Greene, P.G., and M.M. Hart. (2003). Women entrepreneurs, their ventures, and the venture capital industry: An annotated bibliography. Stockholm: ESBRI; Marlow, S., and D. Patton (2005). All credit to men? Entrepreneurship, finance and gender. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 29, 717.

capacity development opportunities. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that the most effective way to provide business support to women entrepreneurs is through centralised centres supported by government agencies.⁸⁵ The encouragement of networks of women entrepreneurs and/or networks of mentors supporting women entrepreneurs is seen as a key policy priority by specialist support organizations. Women's business associations and other NGO networks can support women's businesses by providing information and contacts, customized training in managerial skills and marketing, access to credit and financing and advice on how to overcome barriers to entrepreneurship.

The influences of role models are also widely recognised as a catalyst for women to start-up and grow a business.⁸⁶ Moreover, the importance of social networking in entrepreneurship's activity have been addressed by many scholars.⁸⁷ Networks provide business owners with access to the resources necessary to establish and grow a business, access to markets, ideas, information, advice, business opportunities, and other resources.

A long-standing element of theory in women's entrepreneurship has suggested that male and female entrepreneurs differ in their approaches to social networking.⁸⁸ Such differences were described in terms of both the contents of their networks as well as the process of creating and managing a network – with women often at a disadvantage in terms of formal and informal networks.⁸⁹ Informal sources of advice are common for women and men, with women most often using family and friends, and men using professional acquaintances, and to a lesser extent, family and friends.⁹⁰

In the Central Asian context, examples including from Tajikistan illustrate how Governments and NGOs are taking the lead in supporting women's SME development through promoting networking and self-help groups (Box 7).

Box 7: Harnessing the potential of networking and self-help groups to support women's entrepreneurship in Tajikistan

The Central Asia Regional Migration Programme (CARMP) in Tajikistan being implemented by UN Women, jointly with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Bank, supports rural Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in getting access to micro-credits, trains members to start their own businesses and supports joint economic initiatives. To date, the Migration Programme has assisted 1,966 families in Sughd Province through partnerships with the Self-Help Groups which undertake diverse activities such as, crop farming, cattle breeding, milk

⁸⁵ Sannikova, E. (2007). Regulatory Impediments to Enterprise Development: Mobilizing Women's Economic Potential. Geneva, Switzerland: UNECE

⁸⁶ Quimby, J. L. (2006). The influence of role models on women's career choices. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 54, pp. 297–306.

⁸⁷ Gulati R., N. Nohria, and A. Zaheer. (2000). Strategic networks. *Strategic Management Journal*, 21(3), 203–215.

Hoang, H., and B. Antoncic. (2003). Network-based research in entrepreneurship: A critical review. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 18, 165-187.

⁸⁸ Rosa, P. and Hamilton, D. (1994). Gender and ownership in small UK firms. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 18(3), pp. 11-27.

⁸⁹ Gray, C. (2006). Absorptive capacity, knowledge management and innovation in entrepreneurial small firms. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, 12(6), 345-360.

⁹⁰ Robinson, S., and Stubberud, H. A. (2011). Sources of advice in entrepreneurship: Gender differences in business owners' social networks. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 13, pp. 83–101.

processing, rabbit breeding, dry fruit processing, knitting, carpet weaving, dressmaking, trading, seed breaking, and more.

Such activities have not only increased household incomes and economic independence, but also promoted social networking between migrants' families. Women unite in groups around their common interests, supporting each other, gaining new skills and knowledge, and making their own decisions.

The Head of the Department of Women and Family Affairs noted that this project has changed the lives of many migrant families for the better and helped provide work for a large number of rural women. Increasingly, it is being recognised that the creation of small-scale business is a key step towards the development of rural areas of Tajikistan.

Source: UN Women, April 2013, Available from:

www.eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/04/rural-women-gain

v. Information and communications technology

Research shows that women do not have the same access to information and communication technology (ICT) as men. For the purposes of this sub-section, ICT may be defined as various hardware and software media platforms, most commonly comprising mobile phones, smartphones, computers and internet access.

The relative development of ICT infrastructure is uneven across the SPECA region countries. The World Economic Forum's Networked Readiness Index shows that, for SPECA countries with available data, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are at the fore (ranked 39 and 53 respectively), while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (ranked 95 and 114 respectively) are lagging behind.⁹¹

The limited data available also suggests that access to and usage of ICTs is still predominantly higher for men over women in the SPECA region. Indeed, at a global level, women are still 21 per cent less likely to possess a mobile phone than men.⁹² Explanatory factors include lower skill levels; time constraints and family responsibilities precluding access to potential ICT training; traditional socio-cultural norms; and lower income levels limiting ownership of such devices.⁹³

ICT access and utilization can boost women's enterprise creation and greatly improve the competitiveness of female-owned firms.⁹⁴ For example, ICTs can provide women-owned enterprises with access to information on potential markets, buyers, suppliers and producers, business networks, financial services, business development support services, and government services such as sources of training and business advice.

As women often experience differential access to technology, care must be taken in how ICT technologies are provided to communities to ensure that women are not excluded. Having

⁹¹ World Economic Forum (2016b). Global Information Technology Report 2016. Geneva, Switzerland: WEF.

⁹² Broadband Commission Working Group on Broadband and Gender (2013). Doubling Digital Opportunities: Enhancing the Inclusion of Women and Girls in the Information Society. ITU and UNESCO.

⁹³ International Center for Research on Women (2010). Bridging the Gender Divide. Washington, D.C.: ICRW

⁹⁴ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2010). Information Economy Report 2010. Geneva, Switzerland: UNCTAD.

women entrepreneurs active in the sector as ICT providers could be a start in improving access to information, markets and sources of assistance.

Developing partnerships to provide information and communication technology skills training for women entrepreneurs will also prove to be invaluable in SPECA region. A good practice is evident in Kazakhstan, where the Union of Kazakhstan Women Entrepreneurs in association with the mobile telephone company, JSK Kcell, organised a training for women entrepreneurs on utilising mobile telephones for business purposes by (see Box 8).

Box 8: Developing partnerships to provide ICT skills training for women entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan

Within the framework of a project on women's leadership, the Union of Kazakhstan Women Entrepreneurs and the mobile phone company, JSK Kcell, have provided training on the use of mobile phones for women's business activities. The Union organized the groups and sessions whilst representatives of Kcell delivered the training. In 2013, 250 women entrepreneurs were trained in the cities of Taraz, Aksu, and Karaganda. According to feedback received, the women found the training very useful and the company regards the program a success.

Source: ADB Briefs (2014). Using Information and Communication Technology to Support Women's Entrepreneurship in Central and West Asia.

Chapter 5: Social and institutional norms

Having discussed women in the labour market, unpaid work, and women's entrepreneurship, this section examines the social and institutional context within which women's economic empowerment operates in SPECA countries. The first section provides an overview of social institutions and norms in the SPECA region, whilst the second section examines the political and legislative landscape which women find themselves in.

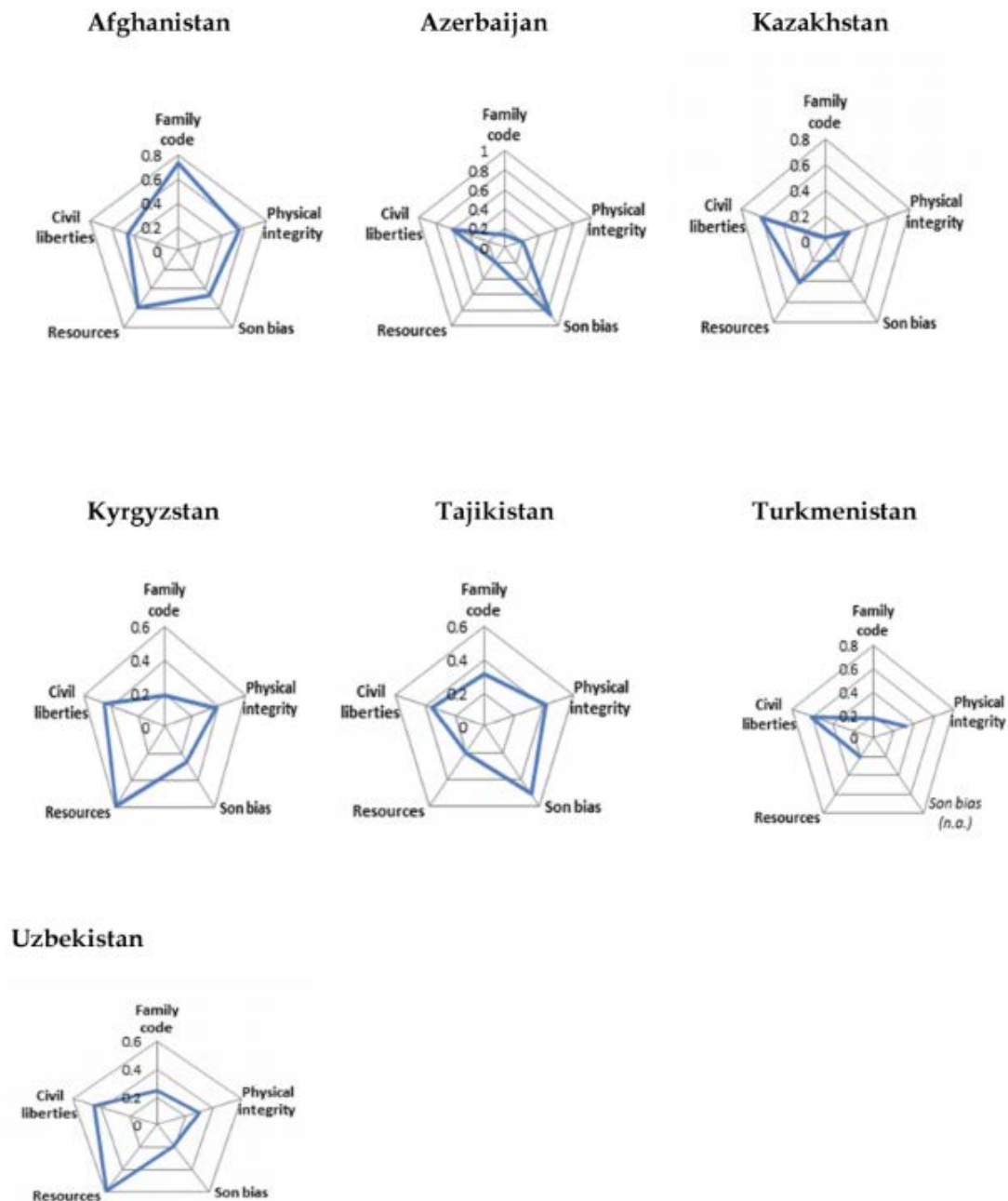
5.1 Social institutions

The OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index provides a framework for comprehending the degree of discrimination against women through the comparative examination of formal and informal laws, attitudes and practices that restrict women's and girls' access to rights, justice and empowerment opportunities. The Index consists of four variables: discriminatory family code; restricted physical integrity; son bias; restricted resources and assets; and restricted civil liberties.⁹⁵

Figure 10 depicts these dimensions graphically across the SPECA region countries. Overall, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan are ranked 'high' in regard to levels of discrimination. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are ranked 'medium', with Kazakhstan being ranked 'low'.

⁹⁵ Further details on the SIGI variables can be found at: www.genderindex.org

Figure 10: Dimensions of the Social Institutions and Gender Index in SPECA countries, 2014



Source: OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index. Available from: www.genderindex.org

With the exception of Azerbaijan, the scores for restricted resource and assets, which measure access to land, non-land and financial resources, are high. The SPECA region also records poor performance on civil liberties and political empowerment, with Kazakhstan performing slightly better than others in terms of women’s presence in parliament and the ministries. This will be explored further in Section 5.3.

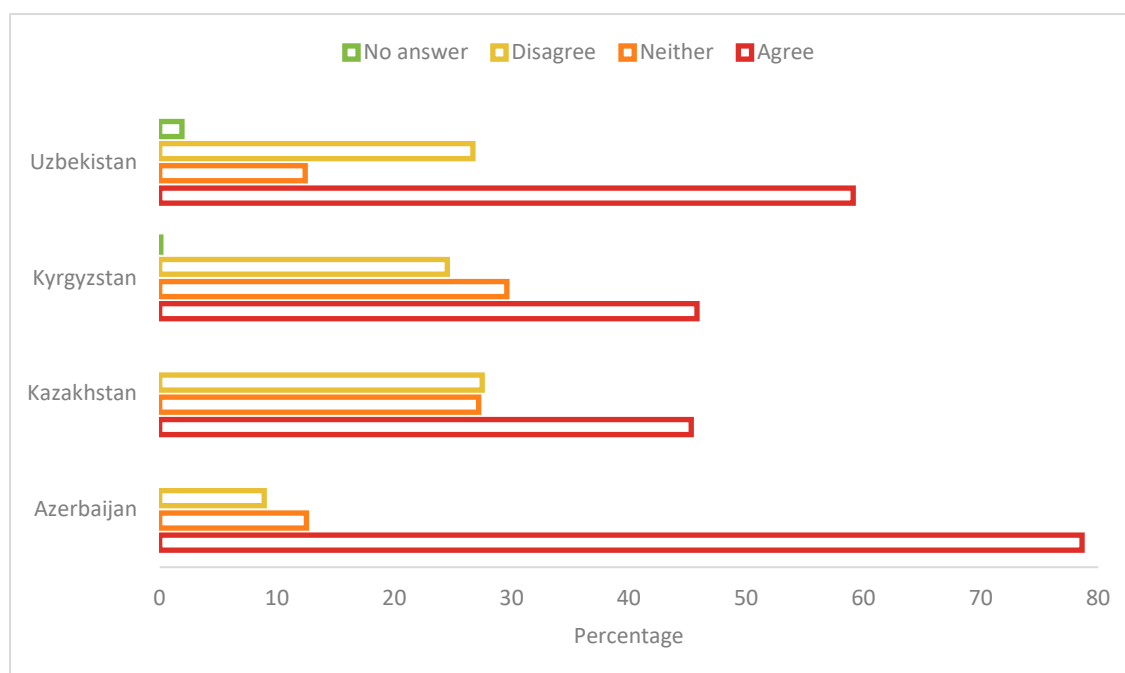
With the exception of Afghanistan, SPECA members are generally on par with other Europe and Central Asian countries in terms of laws and regulations that protect women’s rights.⁹⁶ However, as seen by the notably low values for family code and physical integrity in some countries, there are challenges in the implementation and enforcement of legal provisions due to patriarchal social norms. Age at marriage and domestic violence, in particular, are two areas that call for the attention of governments. This will be examined in further depth in Section 5.3.

5.2 Impact of discriminatory norms

Underlying gender inequalities are often entrenched discriminatory sociocultural norms and values. One such norm is related to the distribution of labour and the perception that a woman’s role is primarily in the home.

In this regard, the following diagrams depict responses to key normative questions as part of the World Values Survey. As Figure 11 shows, across Central Asian countries, more than 50 per cent of respondents indicate that when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women. In the case of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, close to 80 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively, reply in favour of men having greater rights to jobs than women. The prevalence of traditional norms and values have a significant bearing on constraining a woman’s participation in the labour market.

Figure 11: When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women



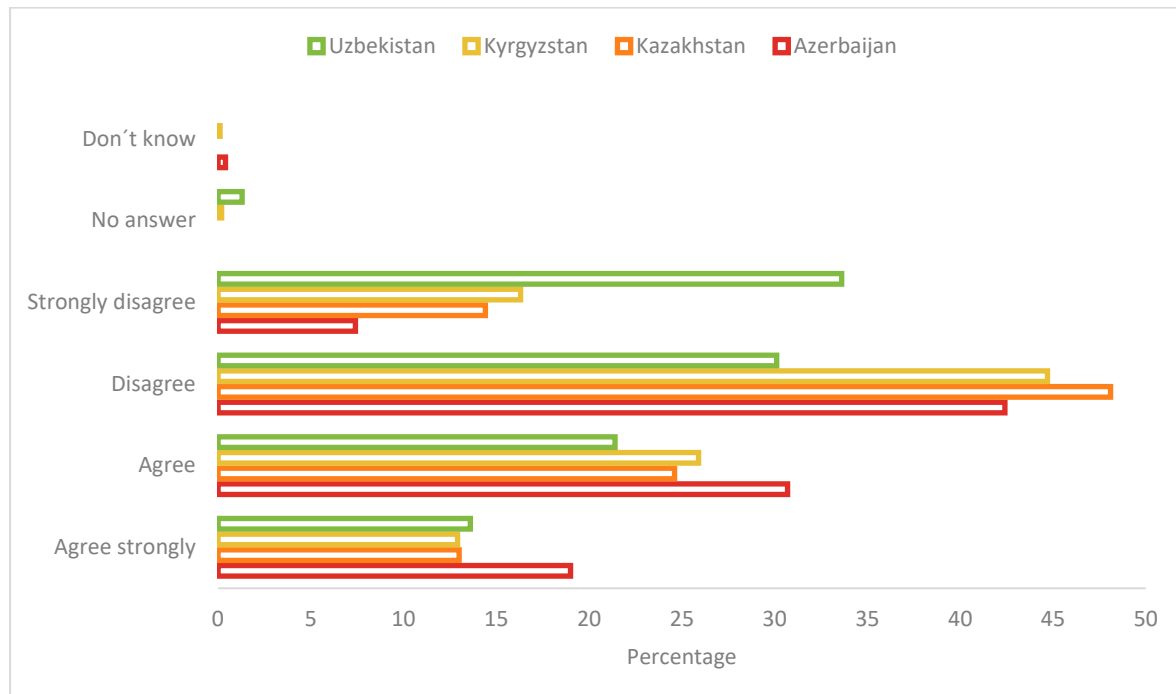
Source: World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010 - 2014. Available from: www.worldvaluessurvey.org

When the question was posed that when a mother works for pay, whether the children suffer (Figure 12), the majority of respondents across the region disagreed. However, a significant

⁹⁶ World Bank, Women, Business and the Law 2016 database. Available from: www.wbl.worldbank.org

proportion agree with this statement and, in Azerbaijan, this figure comprises almost half of the respondents. This suggests that sociocultural norms and values dictate that women may still be expected to stay at home rather than being active in the labour market.

Figure 12: When a mother works for pay, the children suffer



Source: World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010 - 2014. Available from: www.worldvaluessurvey.org

Despite these regressive attitudes towards gender, there are efforts to promote positive role models in order to expand women’s opportunities and their economic empowerment (see Box 9).

Box 9: Changing social norms in Tajikistan

Aisulu Jenaliev, 48, has gone from being an abandoned wife of a migrant worker without the means to support her family, to leading a self-help group and collective that runs Jirgatol district’s first dairy production facility in north-east Tajikistan. Her entire perspective has changed since participating in the project. “Earlier, my only wish for my daughter was that she got a good husband, a good household and a piece of land. Now, I want a good education for her,” says Jenaliev.

In February 2016, she participated in a “Cheese Exchange” initiative by UN Women, where Tajik and Swiss women cheese makers came together to share skills and develop new dairy products for Tajikistan. The experience completely changed my perspective on life. I had never been outside my village before, but I got to visit the capital city Dushanbe and Switzerland. I learned many new things, and not just related to the cheese-making business. I learned that women can have more freedom and opportunities, that men can help share domestic work. I also engage my sons, who are 12 and 14, in household work, so I can focus more on my business.

Source: UN Women, March 2017. Available from: www.eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/03/in-the-words-of-aisulu-jenaliev

5.3 Political and legislative landscape

5.3.1. Women's participation in politics and leadership

A growing body of research illustrates the benefits of an increased presence of women leaders in political, economic and social spheres. The participation of women in local government, state and national legislatures, as well as in public and private executive positions in a range of countries, has been shown to enhance female voter turnout and political participation, the inclusion of gender-sensitive policy agendas and public service responsiveness to female citizens.⁹⁷

Several reports from the Asia-Pacific region have identified the multiplier effects of women managers on economic growth and business outcomes. For example, a study by the Australian National University indicates that for every 5 per cent rise in women's leadership, there is approximately a 1 per cent rise in GDP. In addition, an empirical analysis of the Singapore Stock Exchange (SGX) companies over the period 2009-2012 found that a greater proportion of female directors had a positive effect on firm performance measured by return on assets (ROA) and return on equity (ROE).⁹⁸

The positive influence of female political leadership has also been shown to be pronounced in terms of health and educational policy and expenditure. Additionally, the role of women's movements and leadership in wider civil society has been shown to be a critical factor in influencing national policy agendas and priorities – for instance, in the adoption by States of comprehensive laws to prevent violence against women.⁹⁹

Turning to data on the proportion of seats held by women in the various parliaments across the SPECA region, the picture is mixed for the period from 2011 to 2016 (Figure 13). In Afghanistan, partly due to a constitutional requirement regarding women's participation, it records the largest share of women in the lower House in the SPECA region, at 27.7 per cent.¹⁰⁰ Amongst the other countries, both Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have registered a notable increase in women's participation, whilst Azerbaijan and Tajikistan have not seen much change, but with declines in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Nonetheless, women's parliamentary representation in SPECA countries compares favourably to the average for Europe and Central Asia, which was 25 per cent in 2014.

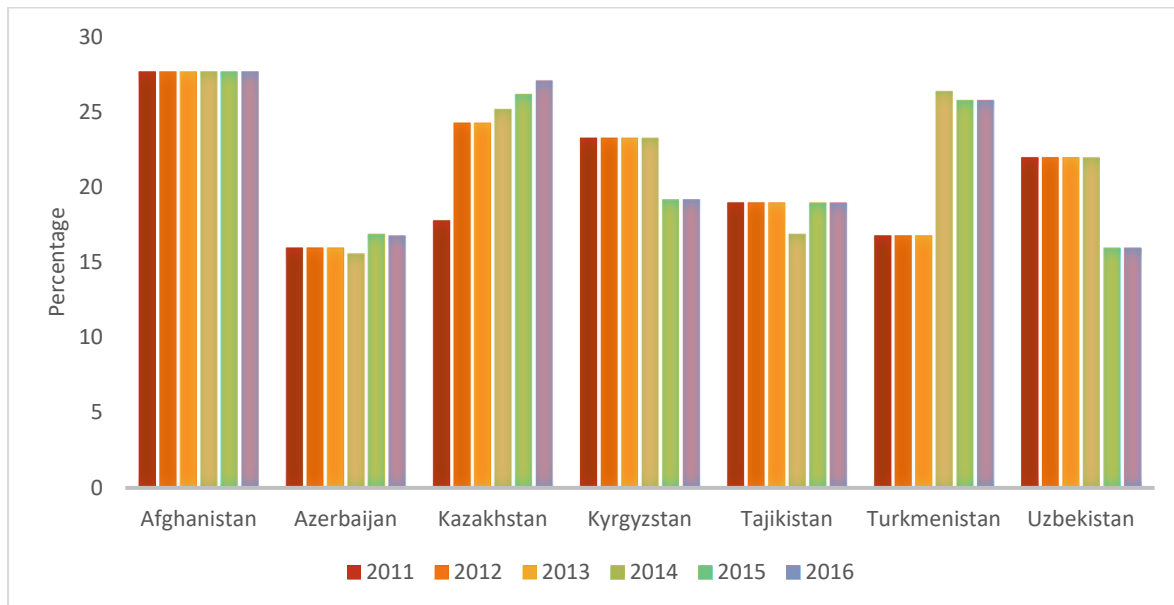
⁹⁷ Iyer, L., Anandi, M., P. Mishra and P. Topalova (2012) *The Power of Political Voice: Women's Political Representation and Crime Outcomes in India*; Htun, M.N., and M.P. Jones (2002) *Engendering the right to participate in decision-making: electoral quotas and women's leadership in Latin America*.

⁹⁸ Dieleman, M., M. Qian, and M. Ibrahim (2013) *Singapore board diversity report: Time for women to rise*. Singapore Centre for Governance, Institutions and Organisations (CGIO) National University of Singapore.

⁹⁹ Overseas Development Institute (2015) *Women's voice and leadership in decision-making: Assessing the evidence*. London, U.K.: ODI.

¹⁰⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2017). "Women in National Parliaments"; see <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif011217.htm>

Figure 13: Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments in SPECA countries, 2011-2016

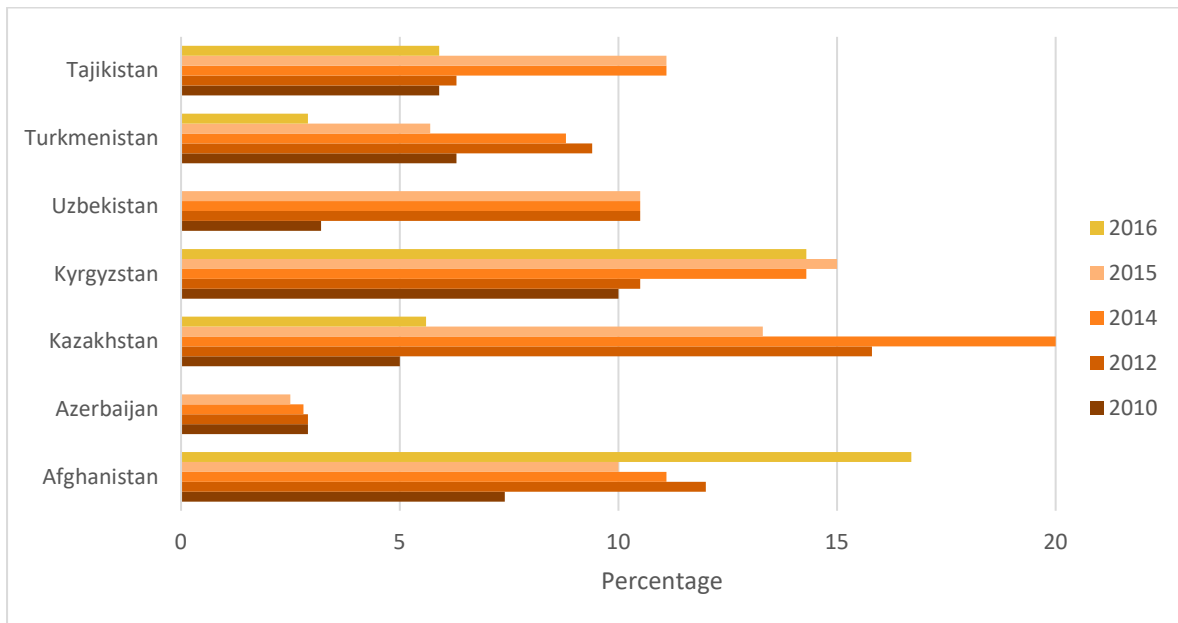


Source: Gender Statistics, World Bank Data Bank

Note: This refers to the representation of women in the lower house of national parliaments.

However, at the government cabinet level, the representation of women as ministers (Figure 14) falls below the Europe and Central Asia average of 21 per cent for 2014. Only Afghanistan has registered a consistent increase across the period with 17 per cent of women ministers in 2016, up from 12 per cent in 2010. Notably, Azerbaijan has the smallest share at 2.5 per cent in 2016.

Figure 14: Proportion of women in ministerial level positions in SPECA countries, 2010-2016

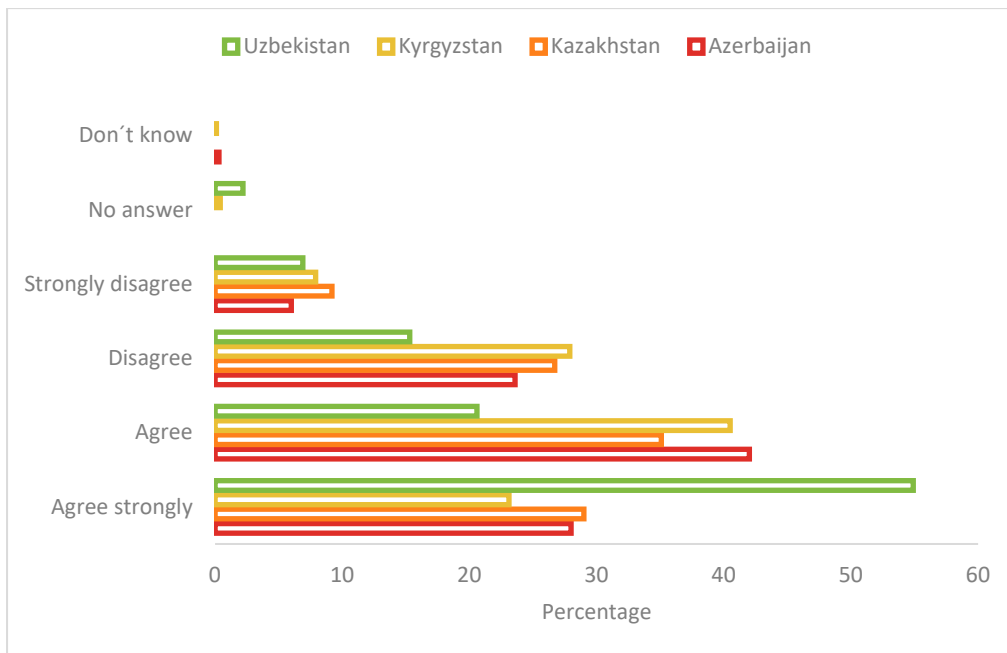


Source: Gender Statistics, World Bank Data Bank

Beyond the political arena, there is limited data available across the SPECA countries on women’s leadership in the economic sphere. However, mirroring the global picture, although women have a relatively strong representation at the administrative level, they are few who participate at the higher level of public sector management, be that in supervisory or senior manager positions.

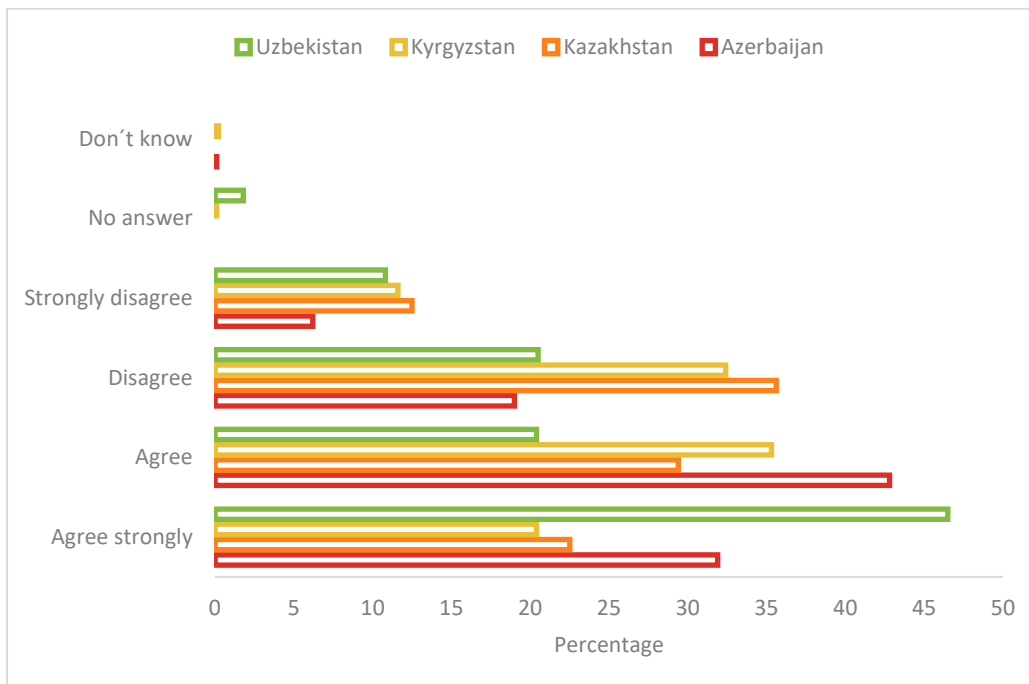
The figures are partly symptomatic of prevalent sociocultural norms in the region which perceive men to make better leaders than women in both politics and in the boardroom. As shown by Figures 15 and 16 below, over 60 per cent of respondents in Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan agree or strong agree with this statement.

Figure 15: On the whole, men make better political leaders than women



Source: World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010 - 2014. Available from: www.worldvaluessurvey.org

Figure 16: On the whole, men make better business executives than women do



Source: World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010 - 2014. Available from: www.worldvaluessurvey.org

This data supports the strong need for transformative strategies to change existing norms, dismantle barriers and harness the leadership potential of women across the region. Alongside the paramount need to repeal discriminatory legislation and regulations, affirmative action measures, such as quotas, have significantly boosted the percentage of

women in leadership positions across Asia and the Pacific. Such measures, along with a range of others, are being increasingly promoted in the SPECA region (Box 10).

Box 10: National Forum in Kyrgyzstan calls for gender quotas in local councils

Today, despite an extensive legislative base guaranteeing gender equality, Kyrgyzstan still suffers from high and rising inequalities. Women are largely excluded from decision-making and hold only 10 per cent of local council seats – part of a steady decline from 19 percent of local council seats held by women in 2004, to 17 percent in 2008 and 12 percent in 2012.

To help reverse the trend, the UN Women’s Joint Programme on Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment and UNDP provided training and organized events last year for more than 200 rural women in Kyrgyzstan on such topics as how to run for local elections, develop their platform to mobilize support, speak publicly, and work with voters.

The First Forum of Women-Deputies of Local Councils was held with the support of UN Women, UNDP and the British Embassy in Kyrgyzstan at the initiative of the Center for Gender Studies, Alliance for Budget Transparency, and the Women Support Center in January 2017. The Forum concluded with a resolution that calls for special measures to ensure women’s participation of no less than 30 percent in the councils at all levels. It urges strengthening the implementation of the legislation on gender equality, including prevention of early marriages, domestic violence, and women’s political participation. It also calls for an annual increase in representation of women holding political positions in state and municipal organizations.

Source: UNDP (2017). “First Forum of Women-Deputies of Local Councils calls for introduction of gender quotas.”

5.3.2 Legislative frameworks

Legislation is a critical component in creating an enabling environment for women’s empowerment. Table 6 outlines key legislation related to women’s participation in the labour market. Amongst the SPECA countries, Tajikistan stands out for mandating equal remuneration for work of equal value and it mandates non-discrimination based on gender in terms of hiring.

Nonetheless, there are still restrictions in place on the types of unsuitable or hazardous jobs that can be performed by women, which are linked to regulations formulated during the time of the Soviet Union. It has been noted that this has contributed to reducing the potential earning capacity of women in the region.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ World Bank, Women, Business and the Law 2016 database. Available from: www.wbl.worldbank.org

Table 6: Legislation on women's labour market participation in SPECA countries, 2016

| Country | Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value? | Does the law mandate non-discrimination base on gender in hiring? | Can women and men do the same jobs? |
|---------------------|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| Afghanistan | No | No | No |
| Kazakhstan | No | Yes | No |
| Kyrgyzstan | No | No | No |
| Tajikistan | Yes | Yes | No |
| Turkmenistan | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Uzbekistan | No | No | No |

Source: World Bank, Women, Business and the Law 2016 database. Available from: www.wbl.worldbank.org

Aside from labour market participation, in the face of male migration outflows, particularly to the Russian Federation, sex ratios are also creating competitive pressures on parents to marry their daughters at a younger age. Moreover, there are several ways to circumvent the legal minimum age which exposes girls, particularly in rural areas, to severe risks such as disruption of education, lower age at first pregnancy, and hampered access to property in case of divorce and exposure to domestic violence.¹⁰² In addition, the absence of inheritance rights for widows in Afghanistan remains a key area of concern.¹⁰³

Gender norms that justify wife beating are also still prevalent in the SPECA countries where no criminal penalties exist for domestic violence.¹⁰⁴ For example, there is no legal framework to combat domestic violence in Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. A common challenge across the countries is the lack of enforcement of existing laws on domestic violence and sexual harassment. Transforming social norms and strengthening implementation of legislation are critical to preventing and ending violence against women and girls.

However, several positive legal changes have taken place in SPECA countries in recent years. For instance, differences in retirement ages for men and women in Kazakhstan will be eliminated by 2027. In Tajikistan, the Government has created public childcare services to catalyse women's participation in the workforce.

¹⁰² OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index. Available from: www.genderindex.org

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ World Bank, Women, Business and the Law 2016 database. Available from: www.wbl.worldbank.org

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Main findings

This report has noted that gender inequalities in economic participation remain widespread in the SPECA region. Women's participation in the force remains lower than their male counterparts in all countries, aside from Kazakhstan. Furthermore, there are more women unemployed than men in most SPECA countries, apart from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, partly due to high rates of male out-migration.

At the sectoral level, the services sector characterised more than half of jobs for women, with a concentration in traditional fields such as domestic labour, health, education, retail and tourism. Notably, women occupy a higher share of the higher skill level categories in all SPECA countries, with the exception of managerial positions where the reverse trend is evident. One key issue in the SPECA region is women's lack of access to factors of production, such as land, labour and capital, all of which are critical to empowering women economically.

Women in this region are also more likely to engage in insecure forms of employment. In countries with a high share of agricultural employment, women are over-represented as contributing family workers. The major push factors for working in the informal sector include inadequate family income and the absence of a male bread winner. Generally speaking, social protection systems have been well-established across the SPECA countries, owing partly to the legacy of the former Soviet Union. Yet, the quality and adequacy of these programmes is uneven across the region whilst the size and scale of the informal sector impacts adversely on these programmes, not least in regard to contributory pension schemes.

Labour migration to the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan has had a strong impact on the SPECA region. Migrants tend to be mostly men, whilst women are left behind with the responsibility for the family, in-laws, household, and family agricultural plots, despite their lack of access to the necessary resources and skills to engage in all these activities. More recently, there is an increased feminisation of migration with women migrants taking up positions as domestic workers despite their relatively high educational qualifications.

Across Central Asia, women are primarily responsible for unpaid domestic and care work. The significance of women's reproductive labour for the functioning of all countries and their economic productivity has been recognized in target 5.4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Thus, in the pursuit of sustainable development, recognizing, respecting and redistributing unpaid domestic and care work is a global, and therefore also regional priority.

Entrepreneurship is a key component of women's empowerment but remains relatively low in most SPECA countries. There is a need for gender-responsive entrepreneurship policies and programmes to create the fertile ground to promote women entrepreneurs to flourish, with access to financial services, technology, training and capacity development as well as networks.

Furthermore, discriminatory social and institutional norms contribute to deepening gender inequalities in the SPECA region. Women face a high level of discrimination in accessing resources, including land, property and financial assets, as well as in terms of political empowerment. Although there has been progress in developing laws and regulations that protect women's rights, there are challenges in the implementation and enforcement of legal provisions due to discriminatory social norms. Age at marriage and violence against women, in particular, are two areas that call for the urgent attention of governments.

Beyond the findings of this report outlined above, and within the context of environmental change and growing recognition of the need for climate action, the green economy could also present an innovative opportunity for enhancing women's economic empowerment in the SPECA region.

Around 50 million green jobs - for example, in sectors such as renewable energy, forest protection and rehabilitation, water and sanitation infrastructure, green housing, and environmental regulation - will be developed worldwide in the next 20 years.¹⁰⁵ The SPECA region should capitalise on this through facilitating the transition to a more sustainable economy.

Engendering the green economy is increasingly on the agenda of SPECA countries. Realization of fruitful green economy policies will also involve the active contribution and cooperation of all stakeholders, representing ministries, national agencies, regional institutions, civil society organizations, private sector and the public at large.

6.2 Policy recommendations

In light of the above findings, the following recommendations are those which require urgent attention in order to effectively foster women's economic empowerment in the SPECA region, with a view to achieve not only gender equality but advance towards the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

- i. Bridging the gender gaps related to women's labour force participation, pay and working conditions;

Transforming the world of work requires the removal of structural barriers, discriminatory laws and social norms to create equal opportunities and outcomes for women and men. Levelling the playing field entails strengthening legal and institutional frameworks for full employment and decent work for all women. These include the prohibition of discrimination in the recruitment, retention and promotion of women in the public and private sectors as well as ensuring safe workplaces free from violence or harassment. In addition, such frameworks must ensure equal opportunity for men and women, including those regarding statutory working hours, retirement age, pay, and benefits. In addition, promoting women's access to decent work in the green economy

¹⁰⁵ UNRSID (2012) Gender in the Green Economy. Available from: <http://www.unrisd.org/news/stevens> (accessed on 30 October 2017)

would contribute to all three dimensions of the 2030 Agenda – economic, social and environmental.

- ii. Ensuring provision of women workers with comprehensive social protection and income security;

There is a need to examine and appraise the viability of the current social protection system and strengthen a gender-responsive approach at all levels. While vestiges of the old social protection systems built up under the former Soviet system still prevail across the SPECA countries, issues of coverage and quality must be addressed to ensure it reaches the furthest behind, including women and girls.

- iii. Guaranteeing men and women’s equal access, ownership and control of, land, property and other resources;

Women’s access to land and property is central to women’s economic empowerment, as land can serve as a base for food production and income generation, as collateral for credit and as a means of holding savings for the future. Land is also a social asset that is crucial for cultural identity, political power and participation in decision making. Key areas to ensure women realise their land rights include: guaranteeing these rights in the constitution; implementing gender-sensitive land laws, policies and programmes; ensuring equal inheritance rights; combating multiple forms of discrimination faced by women in accessing land; and promoting meaningful participation of women in decision-making related to land and property.

- iv. Recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work;

Targeted measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute women’s disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work are essential. These include flexibility in working arrangements, and the provision of infrastructure, technology and public services, such as accessible and quality care facilities for children and dependent older persons.

- v. Fostering an enabling environment for women’s entrepreneurship;

An enabling entrepreneurial ecosystem for women entrepreneurs is vital to achieve sustainable development. Key building blocks include: promoting gender-responsive policies for enterprise creation and growth; ensuring that women entrepreneurs have the necessary skills and resources to start and grow their own enterprise; providing timely information to women on markets and opportunities; creating a more open, accessible, and innovative financing environment; facilitating women’s access to networks; and facilitating training schemes, including on the utilisation of the latest digital technologies for women’s enterprises.

- vi. Promoting the leadership of women in political, economic and social spheres;

While women in SPECA countries are engaged in politics or business, there are few women that have been promoted to the higher echelons of government or executive levels of companies. Going beyond increasing the numbers of women in leadership at all levels, there also needs to be a concerted focus on the impact and quality of leadership. In addition, strong female role models across all sectors would contribute to dispel discriminatory attitudes towards women in leadership positions.

- vii. Harnessing technological innovations to promote greater financial and digital inclusion of women and girls;

Governments should facilitate the use of ICTs for women, by adopting policies which support the flourishing of innovative technologies, including through targeting ICT skill development and training opportunities both within the school curriculum and for women at all levels. Improved access to technology will, in particular, allow women-owned SMEs to improve their business processes, access different markets, promote products widely, and leverage a range of financial services.

- viii. Examining and addressing the implications of labour migration, especially on women and their families;

Given the size of remittances as a proportion of GNI across the region, the implications of outward migration are critical, especially for women and families of labour migrants who are left behind. Moreover, the scarcity of research on gendered impact of migration highlights the necessity of further studies, including on effective strategies to develop support mechanisms for those women who do not receive financial assistance from their husbands.¹⁰⁶

- ix. Mobilizing sustained financing, including through gender-responsive budgeting;

The ambition of the 2030 Agenda must be matched with an equally ambitious level of financing means. Domestic, international, public and private sources of financing must be mobilized, to meet commitments under the gender equality goal (SDG 5) and gender-related targets in other SDGs. Gender-responsive budgeting is an invaluable tool to enable equitable distribution of resources to women and men, girls and boys in accordance with their differential needs and priorities. Such a gender analysis will enable line ministries to make better budget choices by underscoring existing gender gaps and the impact of public expenditures on the structural causes and consequences of gender inequality.

- x. Enhancing sex disaggregated data as a basis for more evidence-based decision-making.

¹⁰⁶ Rocheva, A., and E. Varshaver (2017). Gender Dimension of Migration from Central Asia to the Russian Federation. *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, vol. 32, No. 2.

Gender-responsive statistics require different perspectives, priorities and needs of women and men to be reflected in all statistical themes, as well as in all statistical processes, including the development of definitions and classifications, data collection, compilation, analyses and dissemination. In the development of this report, detailed discussion in some domains hampered by the non-availability of data for an adequate number of countries in the region, but also by the lack of comparable data due to possible variations in concepts, definitions and data collection methods used across countries. Therefore, countries should invest in strengthening capacities of National Statistical Offices as well as devote sufficient funds to conduct comprehensive surveys on critical issues such as violence against women and unpaid care work.

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