

## GENDER EQUALITY IN TURKMENISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

In Turkmenistan, gender equality is a fundamental principle of democracy. As an active member of the international community, Turkmenistan has acceded to key international conventions and consistently strengthens its national legislation in this area. The monthly, widely circulated women's magazine, "Zenan Kalby" ("Woman's Heart"), covers the full spectrum of Turkmen women's lives. Information on gender equality is disseminated through various media channels, including dedicated radio and television programmes, as well as regular articles and reviews in newspapers and magazines. To enhance awareness among all stakeholders regarding human rights and gender equality, Human Rights Information Centres have been established. These centres regularly host discussions, meetings, and round tables addressing issues related to state and legal development, and the protection and implementation of citizens' rights and freedoms, including gender equality. In sum, a review of key indicators related to the status of women and gender disparities demonstrates that Turkmenistan has undertaken substantial and purposeful work, resulting in demonstrable progress.

**Keywords:** Gender, gender equality, gender equality, gender policy, sustainable development, discrimination, self-realisation, awareness.

### GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES IN TURKMENISTAN

Gender is now a key consideration in global public relations, education, science, culture, and social policy, representing a new vision for social relations and interaction. The concept of 'gender' (from the Latin *genus*, meaning 'kind') refers to the equal opportunities and rights of women and men. While some interpret gender simply as women's pursuit of power, it is, in fact, a broad and pressing societal issue concerning equality between the sexes. Undeniably, women face challenges in society, and thus, the international community rightly emphasises their well-being and advancement. Gender, in today's global context, offers a new paradigm for public relations, education, science, culture, and social policy, shaping a new model of social relations and mutual understanding.

As Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, the National Leader of the Turkmen people and Chairman of the People's Council (*Halk Maslahaty*) of Turkmenistan, notes, "In Turkmenistan, gender equality is one of the basic foundations of democracy. Its encouragement in all spheres of society contributes to improving the quality of life, and its practical implementation is one of the most important areas of Turkmenistan's socio-economic policy".<sup>2</sup> Since its early years of independence, Turkmenistan has pursued an active gender policy aimed at strengthening the principles of equal participation of women in all spheres of public and political life.

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<sup>2</sup> Berdimuhamedov, G. 2018. *Turkmenistan on the way to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals*. A: TGIS.

As an active member of the international community, Turkmenistan has acceded to key international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1996, and its Optional Protocol in 2009. The country has also embraced conventions in the field of human rights, treaties, agreements, and instruments approved by the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and the UN Millennium Declaration 2000 and is committed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. Since 2006, Turkmenistan has systematically submitted consolidated and periodic reports to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, detailing its implementation of the Convention's provisions.

For Turkmenistan, ensuring gender equality entails identifying and eliminating all social barriers that impede individual expression. It also involves creating equal social opportunities for individuals to realise their full potential in all spheres of life, according to their individual preferences, regardless of gender. Thus, the Government of Turkmenistan consistently implements measures to advance gender equality, which is an integral component of the country's state policy.

Turkmenistan consistently strengthens its national legislation. According to Turkmen law, 'gender-based discrimination' refers to the restriction or infringement of a person's rights and opportunities, or the diminishing of their dignity, based on their gender. 'Equal rights' are defined as state-established and protected norms and rules that guarantee equality between women and men in all spheres of social and political life.<sup>3</sup>

Notably, the Constitution of Turkmenistan has been amended to include stronger provisions for ensuring gender equality across all aspects of public and state life. Article 29 of the Constitution states: "A man and a woman in Turkmenistan have equal rights and freedoms, as well as equal opportunities for their implementation. Violation of equality on the basis of gender entails liability established by law".<sup>4</sup>

Gender equality is constitutionally guaranteed in Turkmenistan, grounded in the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol. Turkmenistan systematically disseminates information about CEDAW, its Optional Protocol, and the Committee's key recommendations throughout the country, with particular attention to women and girls in rural and remote areas.

## **GENDER EQUALITY PRACTICES IN THE COUNTRY**

The monthly, widely circulated women's magazine, "*Zenan Kalby*" ("Woman's Heart"), covers the full spectrum of Turkmen women's lives. Furthermore, CEDAW and its Optional Protocol are disseminated through mass media, including dedicated radio and television broadcasts, and regular articles and reviews in newspapers and magazines.

As part of the joint European Commission, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project, "Strengthening the National Capacity of Turkmenistan to Promote and Protect Human Rights", initiated by the Government of Turkmenistan, a publication titled "Women's Rights in Turkmenistan" was released.

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<sup>3</sup> Law of Turkmenistan "On state guarantees of ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men" 2015. *Bulletin of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan*, No. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Constitution of Turkmenistan (new edition) 2016. *Bulletin of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan*, No 3, Art. 131.

In collaboration with international organisations and foreign embassies accredited in Turkmenistan, long-term humanitarian programmes are being implemented to raise public awareness of fundamental international human rights documents, with a particular focus on CEDAW and its related instruments, targeting women and girls.

To raise awareness among all stakeholders on human rights (including women's and children's rights) and gender equality, Human Rights Information Centres regularly conduct discussions, meetings, and round tables. These events address topics related to state and legal development, and the protection and implementation of civil rights and freedoms, including gender equality.

Workshops are held in all regions of Turkmenistan for a wide range of participants, including civil servants, educators, healthcare professionals, law enforcement officials, and representatives of public associations. These seminars aim to increase public awareness of gender equality, further integrate gender equality principles into all spheres of life and strengthen women's role in society.

The National Action Plan for Gender Equality in Turkmenistan (NAP), approved by Presidential Resolution and grounded in the Constitution of Turkmenistan, aligns with key provisions of numerous international instruments. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UN Conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and on the Political Rights of Women, final documents of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), the Sustainable Development Goals, and documents from the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and other international organisations.

To promote awareness of gender issues, representatives of the Women's Union of Turkmenistan, in collaboration with UN Women in Turkmenistan, regularly conduct seminars in Ashgabat and throughout the country for elected members of *gengeshes* (local councils).

Efforts are underway to raise public awareness, particularly among young people, regarding equality in family and marital relations. Programs are being developed and implemented to actively engage women in the activities of state authorities and administration, and to improve their educational attainment and professional training.

Integrating women into the political and public life of society is a key element of democratisation in Turkmenistan. National legislation ensures women's substantive representation in elected bodies of state power and administration. Turkmenistan is actively working to expand women's participation in the socio-political life of the state. In December 2020, the second "National Action Plan for Gender Equality in Turkmenistan for 2021-2025" was approved, outlining "...a number of specific measures in various areas..."<sup>5</sup> The success of these measures is reflected in the high number of women represented in the *Mejlis* (Parliament), in leadership and administrative positions, and in professional and technical roles, indicating that women have broad opportunities in the country's socio-political and economic spheres.

In Turkmenistan, women and men have equal access to education. According to the 2022 census, the literacy rate for the population aged 15 and older was 99.8% for women, 99.9% for

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<sup>5</sup> National Action Plan on Gender Equality of Turkmenistan for 2021-2025, 2020. A.: TGIS.

men, and 99.9% for both women and men aged 15-24, demonstrating near-parity in educational attainment. Educational institutions of all types and levels in Turkmenistan have no gender-based admission restrictions, providing strong evidence of non-discrimination against women in education. During their studies, girls and boys have equal rights, receive equivalent education aligned with state educational standards, have equal access to supplementary education based on their interests, utilize textbooks and educational materials free of charge, and benefit equally from social protection measures.

While the global stereotype of 'women's professions' and 'men's professions' persists to some extent, efforts are being made to address this issue. Women participate equally in the same sports as men. The extent of women's participation in the workforce reflects their level of economic activity. According to the State Statistics Committee of Turkmenistan, as of 1 January 2024, the total working-age population of Turkmenistan was 4,046,100, of which women constituted over 56%.<sup>6</sup> Women comprised 43.5% of the total workforce in large and medium-sized enterprises. A significant proportion of women are employed in healthcare, physical education, social services, education, lending, finance and insurance, and the hotel and restaurant sector. Women also have a substantial presence in manufacturing, information and communications, and trade and catering. This demonstrates the vital role women play in implementing large-scale social programs and contributing to stable GDP growth, which reached 6.3% in 2024.

At an expanded Cabinet of Ministers meeting on February 7, 2025, President Serdar Berdimuhamedov noted that Turkmenistan's GDP growth reached 6.3% in 2024, with investment plan fulfilment at 253.1%. The development of the private sector is a key priority. Currently, the non-state sector produces import-substituting and export-oriented goods and continued stable growth of the national economy depends on further development in this area. Women constitute 17.4% of the workforce in non-state sector enterprises.

In conclusion, a review of key indicators related to the status of women and gender disparities reveals that Turkmenistan has made notable progress in these areas, and the development of gender policy remains an ongoing process.

## CONCLUSION

Since its early years of independence, Turkmenistan has actively pursued a gender policy focused on strengthening women's equal participation in all spheres of public and political life. For Turkmenistan, ensuring gender equality means identifying and eliminating all social barriers that impede this participation.

Efforts are underway to raise public awareness, particularly among young people, about equality in family and marital relations. Programs are being developed and implemented to actively engage women in state authorities and administration, and to enhance their education and professional training. Consequently, Turkmenistan has made demonstrable progress in gender equality and policy development.

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<sup>6</sup> Statistical Yearbook of Turkmenistan 2023. *State Statistics Committee of Turkmenistan, 2024.*