

Policy Brief | RIGHTS AND CHOICES FOR ALL EMPOWERING WOMEN TO LIVE WITH DIGNITY AND FREEDOM FROM FEAR

Issue overview

Gender equality is intrinsically linked to sustainable development and is vital to the realization of human rights for all. The overall objective of gender equality is a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions, interests and talents; share household responsibilities and domestic chores and are completely free from coercion, intimidation and gender-based violence both at work and at home.

Gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Therefore, a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives.

Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same; only that access to opportunities and life chances is neither dependent on, nor constrained by, their sex. Achieving gender equality requires women's empowerment to ensure that decision-making at private and public levels, and access to resources are no longer weighted in men's favor, so that both women and men can fully participate as equal partners in productive and reproductive life. Gender equity on the other hand is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field.

EQUITY
LEADS TO
EQUALITY

A woman's ability to control her decisions about her sexual and reproductive health and marriage are at the heart of her ability to become empowered, including with education, employment and participation opportunities. Without this, all other investments in women's equality, such as livelihood support and economic empowerment, will be insufficient. When a woman or a girl faces discrimination, violence, or a harmful practice, she is deprived of her full potential.

Yet, despite solid evidence on the centrality of women's empowerment to realizing human rights, reducing poverty, promoting development, and addressing the world's most urgent challenges, gender equality remains an unfulfilled promise. Without an enabling environment including where men and boys are supportive, non-violent and caring, a woman has less opportunity to flourish.

Gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls and advancement of reproductive rights are critical prerequisites for achieving the UNFPA three transformative results contributing to the 2030 Agenda: (a) ending preventable maternal death, (b) ending unmet need for family planning, and (c) ending gender-based violence (GBV) and all harmful practices.

Turkmenistan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1997, and its Optional Protocol in 2009.

Turkmenistan nationalized all relevant Sustainable Development Goal 5 indicators on Gender Equality.

 **58.4%**
women, 15-49 justify violence against women

 **42,2%**
women, 15-49 make own informed decisions: sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care

Trends in Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan has ratified all the major human rights treaties related to gender equality, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and legal reforms to harmonize the national legislation with international standards are ongoing. Yet, gender-based discrimination persists, including GBV and acceptance of such within the context of a traditional patriarchal society. As an example, 58.4 percent of women aged 15-49 years justify violence against women due to the established traditional gender roles of women in a family and society (as reported in the 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey for Turkmenistan) and public concern about this issue is growing. While there are legislative references addressing violence including punishment of perpetrators, there is a need to address prevention and institutional support to survivors. The Review of national legislation, facilitated by UNFPA in 2021, revealed significant gaps when it comes to social support services for GBV victims, ranging from the absence of definition of GBV to lack of legal provision to fully support GBV services.

The results of the assessment of the implementation of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2015-2020 provided a basis to continue strengthening gender equality and preventive measures for GBV at all levels. The second National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2021-2025 includes for the first time a specific reference to prevention and response to domestic violence. As such, it provides a vital mechanism to address such sensitive issues and envisages relevant actions regarding the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee.

In 2020, Turkmenistan completed the first-ever survey on health and status of a woman in family in an attempt to assess the situation of domestic violence against women.

As part of its commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Turkmenistan nationalized all relevant SDGs including SDG 5 on Gender Equality. Turkmenistan is among the first countries globally to collect data and report on the SDG indicator 5.6.1 on the informed decision of a woman on reproductive health care. The data collected in 2019 under the MICS showed that 42.2 percent of women age 15-49 were free in making their informed decisions on reproductive health.

7 strategic areas of NAP on Gender Equality 2021-2025:



Strengthening and improving
Legal framework
for gender equality



Ensuring
Gender-responsive Healthcare



Fostering
Equal access to Education



Countering
Gender-based violence
against women and girls



Economic empowerment
of women and girls



Advancing
Women's participation
including the political and social dimensions



Strengthening
Institutional arrangements
for support of gender equality

UNFPA in Action

For almost three decades, UNFPA has been a strategic partner of the Government of Turkmenistan in advancing women’s empowerment and promoting gender equality. UNFPA’s response to promoting gender equality in Turkmenistan includes

- (a) supporting Turkmenistan’s national human rights system in fulfilling its obligations as part of the international human rights treaties and conventions it ratified, including CEDAW;
- (b) supporting the implementation of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality in areas where UNFPA can provide its expert support;
- (c) developing the capacity of policy makers and civil servants in gender-sensitive policies and gender mainstreaming;
- (d) building capacity of national institutions and professionals on ways to address gender equality issues; and
- (e) institutionalizing a multi-sectoral approach to GBV, consisting of constructive cooperation among health, psychosocial and law enforcement sectors to support GBV survivors.

UNFPA will support the Government in using data generated from the national **survey on health and status of a woman in the family** to formulate effective actions towards ending GBV.

Integration of **gender education** in the courses of the Academy of State Service under the President of Turkmenistan is an important initiative to educate mid-level decision makers on gender equality and on how to mainstream it into socio-economic programming and policy actions. A course on gender-sensitive reporting for media professionals developed and piloted at the department of journalism of the International University for Humanities and Development is another important contribution to nurturing a culture of speaking up about gender equality issues in the country.

UNFPA joined efforts with the Government of Turkmenistan and other UN Agencies to implement a

Joint Programme entitled “**Improving the system of social protection through the introduction of inclusive quality community-based social services**”.

The purpose of the Joint Programme is to foster a transformative change in the current system of social service delivery in Turkmenistan, to reach out to the most deprived and vulnerable population and to address their specific needs. The Programme aims to design a new model of inclusive community-based services for vulnerable population groups, including women facing gender-based violence.

UNFPA also joined its efforts with other UN agencies to support the Government of Turkmenistan in successful implementation of the Immediate Socio-economic Response Plan to acute infectious disease pandemic. The Plan envisages actions to put in practice a **multi-sectoral response to GBV** with community-based social services to mitigate the impact of pandemic on women. Globally, the pandemic, with its lockdowns, social distancing and other forms of restrictions on movement, has only intensified violence against women and girls, particularly in, but not limited to, the domestic sphere.



Photo: UNFPA Turkmenistan | Sergey Mirzoev

National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Turkmenistan 2021-2025, developed with UNFPA support, will continue creating an enabling environment for girls to realize their potential.

New priorities of partnership in 2021-2025

To support the Government of Turkmenistan in addressing the issues of human rights and gender equality, especially for those furthest left behind, five immediate determinants are required:

1. Enhanced capacity of national institutions to better respond to the needs of rights holders.
2. Improved national legislation to address gender equality issues.
3. Promoted inclusive participation of partners, especially men and boys, and youth.
4. Improved accountability of duty bearers.
5. Advanced results-oriented planning and monitoring.

UNFPA will contribute to all these five determinants by:

- 1 introducing an educational curriculum on **gender equality for civil servants** and post-graduates;
- 2 piloting a **community-based social-worker model engaged in GBV** identification, assessment and case management to reach out to the most deprived and vulnerable populations;
- 3 supporting the development of a **law on GBV**;
- 4 establishing an advocacy platform with **men and boys engagement** to address discriminatory gender and cultural social norms;
- 5 introducing **multi-sectoral response mechanisms to GBV** and reaching those furthest behind, including women and girls with disabilities.



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Let's Talk, Dad!

- #ReaditStore
- #TeenAdultDialogue
- #MenEngage
- #ErkeklerHem

Photo: UNFPA Turkmenistan

Partners

The key partners are the Parliament of Turkmenistan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Turkmenistan, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Turkmenistan, the State Statistics Committee of Turkmenistan, the Institute of State, Law and Democracy of Turkmenistan, Women's Union of Turkmenistan and other relevant stakeholders.

Sources:

The State Committee of Statistics of Turkmenistan and UNICEF. 2016. 2015-2016 Turkmenistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, Key Findings. Ashgabat, Turkmenistan: The State Committee of Statistics of Turkmenistan and UNICEF.

UNFPA: Delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.



United Nations Population Fund in Turkmenistan

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