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## **Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment in the Post-Soviet Space: Challenges and Perspectives**

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**Baku, 2023**

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## **Introduction**

The pioneering research paper updates the recurring review on the state of women empowerment in Azerbaijan taking into account the post-Soviet Union countries. The updated women empowerment research aims to assist these countries to achieve their medium-term development targets, fulfill its global obligations under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda and to formulate policy objectives integrating women into the labor force and supporting inclusive development. The focus is on three pillars: (i) the current state of female labor force participation; (ii) challenges they face; and (iii) and provides further recommendations. In both, namely, policies and countries' development agenda, gender equality is to be included into each of these development programs.

The countries have a plan for women's empowerment that sets it as a primary target in national development plan for achieving gender equality outcomes across the country. Under this review, the countries' gender assessment, which mainly consider the female labor force participation in these countries, elaborates the extent to which women enjoy the same rights and opportunities, in which sectors they are highly employed and what obstacles they face that could be of exceptional importance in formulating policy objectives. The analysis also touches some points on women's social and economic empowerment, which pertains to access opportunities and resources, and control their own lives.

The pioneering assessment collected data and reviewed literature and analytical information from a number sources to identify socioeconomic development tendencies of concern to respective governments. In addition, statistical information, academic studies, and country reports from national and international sources were investigated. The types of information consulted included.

The study assesses women's empowerment based on literature review including the references on respective countries and included 11 countries from post-soviet neighbourhood that reflect comparable country statistics and female labor occupation and women's empowerment, documents on laws and policies. Furthermore, the research seeks to provide a response to the question of the impact of economic growth on female employment in the countries studied by employing the relevant data on national basis for each country providing recommendations for governments.

## Literature Review

The pioneering research led to the investigation of the studies that analyze the empowerment of women in economic terms. A number of studies that gender equality and female empowerment are correlated with economic outcomes including growth (Lindley & Lorgelly, 2012) (Kabeer & Natali, 2013) (Dahlum et al., 2022) (Heathcote et al., 2017) (Tsani et al., 2013a) (Luci, 2009). Esteve (Volart, 2004) emphasizes the negative consequences of the exclusion of the women from the labor force indicating that restriction of them to the access of managerial positions leads to the loss of talent. Moreover, the author further mentions that both types of exclusion – from managerial positions and from production in certain sectors – leads to lower investment in human capital, further reducing growth rates. The argument is further bolstered by some authors that mention the exclusion of women results in the diminished innovation and slower technology adoption (Loscocco & Bird, 2012). S. Tsani (2013a) in the case of Mediterranean countries concludes that lowering of region-specific barriers to female labour force participation may have a considerable positive impact on economic growth, while Dahlum (2022) refers the case from a political perspective mentioning the important role of women's political empowerment in technological change.

Several studies demonstrate that the existing gender gaps in education are negatively correlated with economic growth that directly stem from the reduced human capital, with potential ramifications also for technological change (Klasen, 2002) (Knowles et al., 2002) (Thévenon et al., 2012). Using panel data, the authors investigate the effects of gender gaps in education and labor force participation and conclude that gender gaps are associated with reduced economic growth. Provision of the education to the women brings forward the reduced fertility, improved child care that results in the enhanced human capital in the future (Imai et al., 2014). In OECD countries, on average, an additional year of education for girls is estimated to give 10 percent higher GDP per capita (Thévenon et al., 2012). Correspondingly, analyzing data from 1992–2006 in rural India, Imai et al. (2014) find that the mother's education in comparison with the father's is related to better nutritional status of children. These positive findings are further mentioned in a systematic review on gender inequality in educational attainment and economic growth in the paper of Minasyan et al., (2019).

Whilst literature convincingly demonstrates positive effect of the women inclusion in labor market on economic growth, little is known about political inclusion. The authors Sundström et al, Paxton, Wang, (2017) argue multidimensional aspects political empowerment of women and stress the importance of female labor in politics. Finally, better political representation can enhance the participation of women in the economy (Ghani et al., 2013).

Another subsection of the literature strongly emphasized the need for financial access and the role of microfinance (Kim et al., 2007) (Thanh, 2021) (Garikipati, 2008) (Rahman et al., 2017), while few studies look into the importance of the access to infrastructure (Winther et al., 2017). Concerning the informal institutions that negatively affect women entrepreneurship, some

authors(Gimenez-Jimenez et al., 2020)(Pollack & Jusidman, 1998)(Chant & Pedwell, 2008) attached importance to the issue.

A bunch of literature analyzed the phenomenon individually in post-soviet countries. For example, Pinkovetskaia & Ginzburg(2018) conclude that gender gap in entrepreneurship in Russia has declined significantly and entrepreneurial activity among women reached the level of some developed European countries, however biased gender norms cast women behind men according to Anaïs Caroline (*The Economic Empowerment of Women in Russia*). Analyzing other countries reveal that the following studies mention the significance of female labor in Tajikistan(Shemyakina, 2016), Kyrgyzstan(Akbulaev & Aliyeva, 2020), Belarus(*Female*,2005). Ukraine is in the process of a serious demographic transition need adequate labor policies and higher labor force participation is of crucial significance to boost labor force productivity(Kupets, 2014)(Lehmann & Pignatti, 2021).Recent policies of the government of Kazakhstan claim a strong commitment to promoting gender equality in employment(Meurs et al., 2021).Mazalliu & Zogjani(2015) conclude that south east european countries should develop the female labour force in their economies to tackle economic problems challenges in modern economy.

In the literature, a number of key studies exist that draw the analysis of the phenomenon at the level of some regional or individual countries or at the level of some gender related aspects. In light of the before-mentioned factors and literature sources, we aim to investigate female labor force participation in light of CIS countries shedding light on the countries specifically.

## **Data and Methodology**

Examining the broad literature revealed a strong association between economic growth and female labor force participation rate, and an appropriate rich set of research confirms a positive relationship (Baerlocher et al., 2021)(Tsani et al., 2013b)(Almutairi, 2022)(Doğan & Akyüz, 2017). Since there is not enough econometric research on the topic for the countries examined in this article in the provided literature review, the following econometric analysis examines the relationship between women's labor force and economic growth.

Referring to the existing literature analyzing the economic growth and female labor force participation rate, we developed our econometric model as follows:

$$FLPR_{i,t} = b_0 + bGDP(pC)_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

*FLPR<sub>it</sub>* - the labor force participation rate of females

*GDP (pC)<sub>i,t</sub>* – GDP per capita

where FLPR is the female labor force participation rate and GDP (pC) is GDP per capita. We consider GDP per capita as a proxy of economic growth (Prados de la Escosura, 2017). To perform econometric analysis, balanced panel data is employed for 11 CIS countries for the period of 1998-2020 with 253 observations. The econometric model has been applied in order to

estimate the effects of economic growth labor force participation in the CIS region, where female labor force participation is the dependent variable and income per capita is independent variable. The quantification of the exact female labor force participation is given to have the necessary estimations. Data on the female share of labor as well as income per capita of the respective countries has been extracted from the World Bank database. The model has been estimated using the software EViews of which results are exhibited below:

### Graph 1. Panel regression analysis of the model

Dependent Variable: LABOR  
 Method: Panel Least Squares  
 Date: 08/30/22 Time: 10:56  
 Sample: 1998 2020  
 Periods included: 23  
 Cross-sections included: 11  
 Total panel (balanced) observations: 253

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	46.26021	0.223662	206.8311	0.0000
EGROWTH	1.52E-12	6.14E-13	2.473620	0.0140

Source: Authors' calculations, 2022

As seen from the aforementioned figure, the model furthermore confirmed the arguments mentioned in the literature producing positive results. It is found that the Common Wealth of Independent countries record positively significant association between economic growth and female labor as seen from the probability amount which is under the 0.0005 level. That is to say increasing economic growth yields more female force into labour market in these countries. The significance of the findings indicates the policy implications.

## Azerbaijan

The development of entrepreneurship is a key factor in the growth of employment rate, economic prosperity and innovative activities raising the productivity of firms and economies, and accelerating structural changes (Kritikos, 2014). Entrepreneurs are considered the shapers of the economy by creating new resources and new opportunities, and by initiating and leading new business activities. In the field of entrepreneurship including labor force participation, the role of women is of exceptional importance in building a backbone of the economy and supporting societal development (Susruthan & Jencypriyadharshany, 2018). Female labor force participation in economic activities as well as in entrepreneurial environment appear to be constructively beneficial in the form of the establishment of new workplaces, promotion of economic and social development and activation of human capital assets (Ahmadov, 2020). Taking the importance of the phenomenon into account that bolsters research necessity, it stipulates the need for researchers to carry out a wider analysis in this field in the context of Azerbaijan identifying the challenges they encounter and providing key recommendations.

In a way towards sustainable development, increasing the economic empowerment of women is a vital prerequisite to achieve a highly integrated approach to national development. In this vein, supportive mechanisms aimed at the development of women's entrepreneurship are enshrined in the Strategic Roadmap adopted on December 6, 2016. These measures include crediting, taxation and other discounts for female employment. In addition, the development of information support, and the formation of business incubators and women entrepreneurship associations are embodied in the provisions (*Strategic Roadmap*, 2016). As part of women's workforce development, female entrepreneurs receive training and support from SMBDA in the implementation of business ideas<sup>1</sup>. The self-employment program implemented by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population substantially differed with its outstanding benefits compared to other social protection measures by establishing new small and microbusinesses that certainly plays a significant role in inclusive development, financial security of families, and reduction of poverty contributing to women entrepreneurship in part<sup>2</sup>.

According to the data provided by World Bank, in the year 2021, the share of women among the total labor force in Azerbaijan accounted for 48.3 percent, and the men contained 51.7% of wage workers<sup>3</sup>. Female labour is mostly represented in the field of health, art and education. Women made up 73.3% of the workers in educational services, 77.6% in health and social services, and 62% in recreation, entertainment and art. In terms of entrepreneurial engagement, table 1 illustrates the share of private entrepreneurs by women and men as of January 2021. As seen from the table, compared to male entrepreneurs, the figure for women entrepreneurs is noticeably lower. In the list of most female-dominated occupations, 36.3% of women are

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<sup>1</sup> <https://smb.gov.az/en/nav/development-of-womens-entrepreneurship>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sosial.gov.az/umumimelumatozunumewgulluq>

<sup>3</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=AZ>

engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing, 21.1% women in trade, transport means, and 15.3% and 6.3% in other fields of services and household activities respectively<sup>4</sup>.

It should be noted that, although entrepreneurial activities have remarkably developed in the country in the aftermath of disintegration, the signs of the former socialism system and central planning with the absence of private business culture still seemed and gender stereotypes on women's entrepreneurship posed obstacles to women's business engagement. Socio-economic contributions and entrepreneurial potential of rural women remain largely unrecognized and untapped. Thus, promoting rural women's participation in economic and social life should be a priority. Women's training in vocational education, in particular in the technical field, and acquisition of knowledge and experiences about the market economy and business are necessary to step up as the survey carried out by SMBDA further approved the need to improve the business knowledge and skills of women entrepreneurs<sup>5</sup>. The development of women's entrepreneurship should be analyzed in three aspects: legal, financial and ethical, and concessional finance should be allocated. The women entrepreneurs business outlook survey (*Women, survey.*) results indicate that the main factors that motivate women to be business owners are *financial independence, make extra financial gains and self-sufficiency*. However, the main challenges they encountered were categorized as raising financial capital, competition, team composition, lack of experience, proper business training and resources, business network, and esc. Moreover, women expressed interest in finding additional financial sources, formulating a business plan and business strategy, identifying target profit, efficient management of work in uncertainty, and learning the marketing, branding and use of social media. Taking these into consideration, it requires wider dissemination of relevant business knowledge and skills among women. The Gender Assessment Report (UNDP, 2018) reveals that due to a number of barriers women have to encounter, in order to succeed, they require a wider list of facilitating factors such as appropriate education, family support, gender-equal treatment, and greater mobility in public space. Azerbaijan in the process of diversifying the economy emerges with promising potential to accelerate the development of female entrepreneurship. However, empowering women entrepreneurs to harness their economic potential faces number of *obstacles* that were identified in this study.

Apparently, the development of female entrepreneurship is enshrined in the strategic development of Azerbaijan particularly following the plunge in hydrocarbon prices, and improvements were made to a certain degree. However, the conservative mentality embedded in the societal system is found to be the main predicament that prevents women's participation in entrepreneurial activities. Moving beyond the basic access to financial, the psychological, social and skills' constraints on women entrepreneurs need to be tackled. Compared to men, women represent fewer part of the country's entrepreneurs and their activities are mostly concentrated in low-skilled fields. To overcome the related challenges, women's use of ICT is of particular significance. ICT, technology development can play a turning role in contributing to gender equality and women's participation. Appropriate ICT knowledge and IT-related services can act as an important factor in advancing gender equality across a number of sectors.

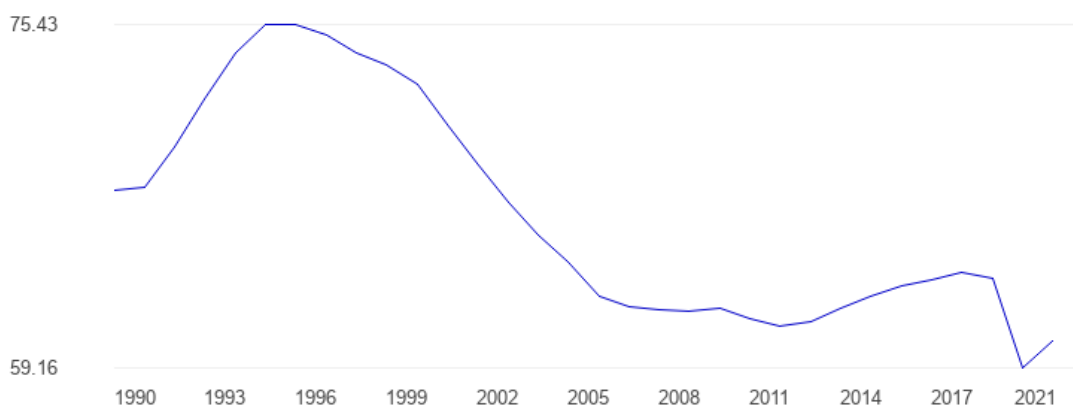
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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/labour/?lang=en>

<sup>5</sup> <https://smb.gov.az/en/nav/development-of-womens-entrepreneurship>

From the side of the government, the engagement of women in decision-making processes and planning in infrastructure investments can improve the process of decision-making. Moreover, public-private partnerships, international organizations, and research institutes can combine efforts in developing diverse projects aimed at awareness-raising to combat gender-related stereotypes and promote women in business, science and technology. Network dimensions between the related organizations of the system should be strengthened to be a voice for all women, and the government should expand to a wider extent the training and education for women business owners on financial literacy, accessing credit, and starting and developing their own business. In a path toward a globally integrated and economically diverse country, it is essential that women's empowerment is an integral part to the strategies of socio-economic development.

**Figure 1. Female labor force participation rate in Azerbaijan**



*Source: The Global Economy, theglobaleconomy.com, 2020*

## **Russia**

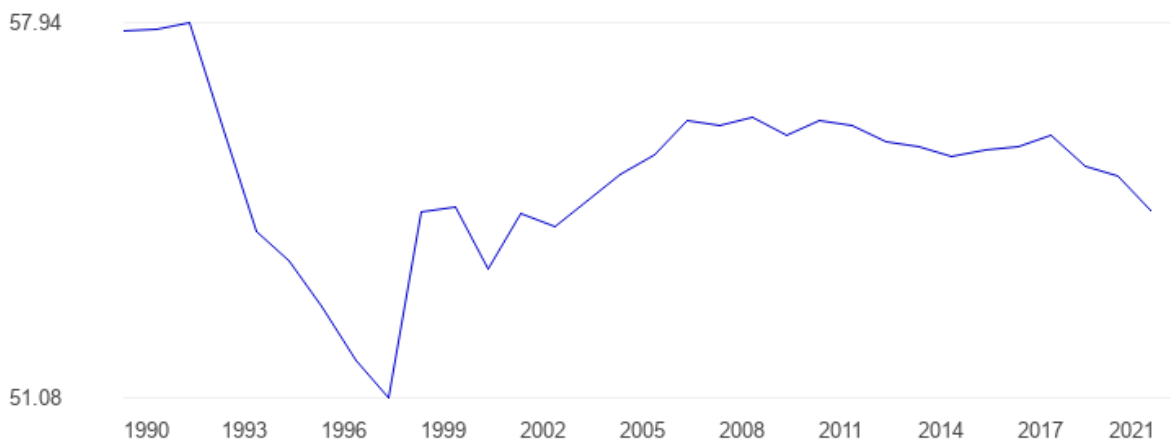
In Russia, increasing tendency for female participation rate is observed. The policy of the Russian Federation towards women is enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation. The National Strategy of Actions in the Interests of Women for 2017–2022 approved by the Order of the Government of the Russian Federation dated March 8, 2017 was developed by the government with the participation of social partners. This strategy envisages improving the economic status of women, preventing social violence against them, increasing the participation of women in public life and ensuring the growth of social welfare of them, and etc. In addition, the decree established a coordinating council for the implementation of the strategy. According to the labor code, the employee is obliged to provide equal payment system for both genders.

Unlike the international trends, the share of women in informal employment in Russia is less than that of men (Panov, 2014). However, the formalization of female labor force participation rate remains a strategically important government priority. Currently, more than 10 million women in the Russian Federation are raising children at pre-school age. In



order to facilitate re-entry of women into the labour market after childbirth, the availability of pre-school education for children under the age of three (and between 3 and 6 years of age) is being further developed. In the regions of the Russian Federation, it is planned to create 255,000 new places in kindergartens and at least 16,000 additional places in the private sector of pre-school education for children under 3 years of age by 2024. These measures can reduce women's unpaid domestic burden as well.

Figure 2: Female Labor Force Participation rate in Russia



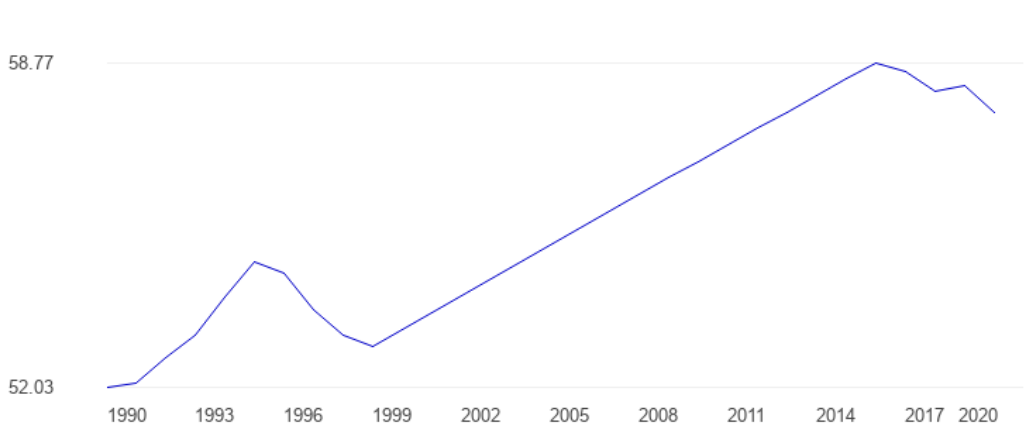
Sectoral observation of female labor yields a diverse range of vocational occupations. In the year 2021, positions with the highest number of female job occupants seem to have been regarded in the form of salesperson, education specialist, business, healthcare personnel, individual services, law, humanities, art, culture, food and clothing industry and etc<sup>6</sup>. Although good tendencies develop along the period, some factor play a unfavorable role in a way towards to female entrepreneurship development. Although, there is no obstacle in terms of legal regulations and rules, informal institutions can restrict the phase of progress. For example, institutional theories could be developed to increase the role of women in economic engagement. Other influential barriers are found to be the following: managerial incompetence together with financial illiteracy, mistrust to the government and the myth of female entrepreneurship, with corruption and social prejudices being of less significance (Seliverstova, n.d.). Unlike some western countries, the Russian Federation's policy on women in the labor market is based on tripartism, i.e., active participation of government, trade unions and employers in its development and implementation. Clearly, due to national circumstances, Russia aims at ensuring a balance between demographic and labor market policies(Beletskaya & Zotova, 2020). This should be facilitated through the policies implemented, and the narrowing of the gender gap in labor market participation needs to be accelerated.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1036348/russia-most-popular-jobs-among-women/>

## Belarus

Similar to other former Soviet countries, literacy of the female force has been quite high in Belarus. The country's adult literacy rate –those age 15 and over that can read and write—in 1999-2006 was, according to the UNDP Human Development Indicators, 98.9%, divided in 99.0% for men and 98.8% for women, of course resulting in nearly 100% women to men parity. For the year of 2007, the youth literacy rate accounted for 99.8% and 99.7% for young women and men respectively. Education seems to be the area in which gender equality in Belarus has been most fully achieved (Hughie-williams & Martin, 2010). In actual figures, according to the World Bank, women accounted for 48.9% out of the whole labor force<sup>7</sup>. Figure 4 illustrates the female labor force participation rate over the longer period.

**Figure 4**



*Source: The Global Economy, theglobaleconomy.com, 2020*

As seen from the graph, dramatically rising improvement in the inclusion of female labor force to the economically active population is experienced in the previous two decades. The average value for Belarus during that period constituted 55.39 % with a minimum value of 52.03 percent in 1990 and a maximum value of 58.77 percent in 2016. The recent figure from 2020 is 57.73 percent. For comparison, it can be noted that the world average in 2020 based on 181 countries is 49.61 percent, according to World Bank, indicating a fair share of Belarusian women.

Belarus is considered to be a country which considerably invested in country's human capital. From legal point of view, no difference or discrimination against women is found in legislation and labor code. At the level of tertiary education, women outnumber the figure for men as men prioritize vocational education. Its possible reasons are attributed to the facts that women face barrier in labor market and men do not perceive higher education as prestigious. Even though, women are better educated, they still experience disadvantageous situation concerning managerial positions' attainment. The wage gender gap appears to be the highest in male-

<sup>7</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=BY>

dominated occupations (mining, manufacturing) and the least in female-dominated sectors such as education, health and social work. Women are generally employed in lower paid sectors. According to the statistical committee of Belarus, the sectors in which female labor force participation is notably higher are wholesale and retail trade, repair of transport vehicles, hospitality, public catering, education, health, social security, entertainment and etc<sup>8</sup>.

Like other CIS countries, the impact of informal institutions in Belarusian society seem to negatively affect the female employment process as well. Although discrimination is forbidden legally, in real life cases, it is observable. In traditional aspects, the role of women is undervalued as leaders and executives<sup>9</sup>.

To overcome these gaps and make an improvement in this sphere, in the year 2017, the National Action Plan for Gender Equality in Belarus for the period of 2017-2020 was adopted. The aim of the program is to develop mechanisms for introducing a gender approach in implementing public policy measures<sup>10</sup>. As far as middle managerial positions concerned, there are many women in these positions. However, senior management positions are mostly male occupied. A group of certain professions are either feminized or masculinized. It should be noted that traditional role of women for Belarus is important and it should be maintained. The success of gender related policies depends on the inclusive, comprehensive and serious approach of the government.

## **Armenia**

The population of Armenia is 2,988,099. The current male population (46.5%) is 1,390,809, whereupon, the current female (53.5%) is 1,597,290. The number of employed persons are 904.00 thousand persons as of June 2021, and the number of unemployed persons is 56.10 thousand as of March 2022. According to the World Bank, the male labor force participation rate was 71.1%, whereas the female labor force participation rate was 62.6% in 2020. Female/male ratio in entrepreneurship was 0.64 in 2019 while regional average was 0.75, and local average was 0.71.

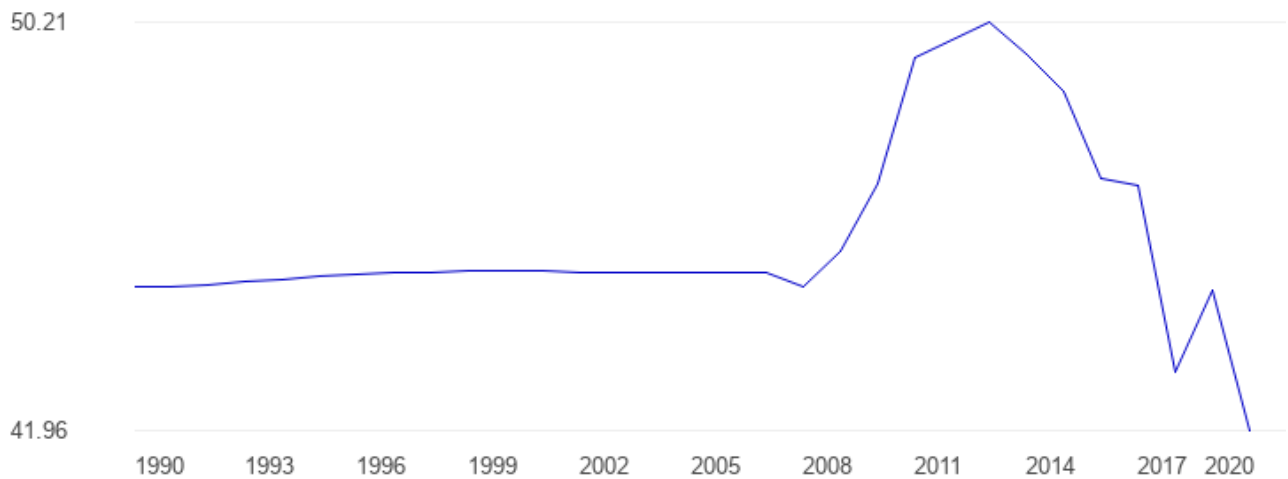
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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.belstat.gov.by/en/ofitsialnaya-statistika/Demographic-and-social-statistics/employment/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://blogs.worldbank.org/europeandcentralasia/has-belarus-really-succeeded-pursuing-gender-equality>

<sup>10</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/policy-monitoring-platform/policy-gender-equality-belarus>

**Figure 11. Female labor force participation rate in Armenia**



*Source: The Global Economy, theglobaleconomy.com, 2020*

A stable trend in Armenia between 1990 and 2008 was followed by a sharp increase between 2008 and 2012, and then a sharp downward trend in the remaining years until 2020.

Armenia experienced an average value of 45.81 % over that time, with minimum values of 41.96 % in 2020 and maximum values of 50.21 % in 2013. 41.96 % is the most recent estimate for 2020. Based on data from 181 nations, the 2020 global average is 49.61 %.

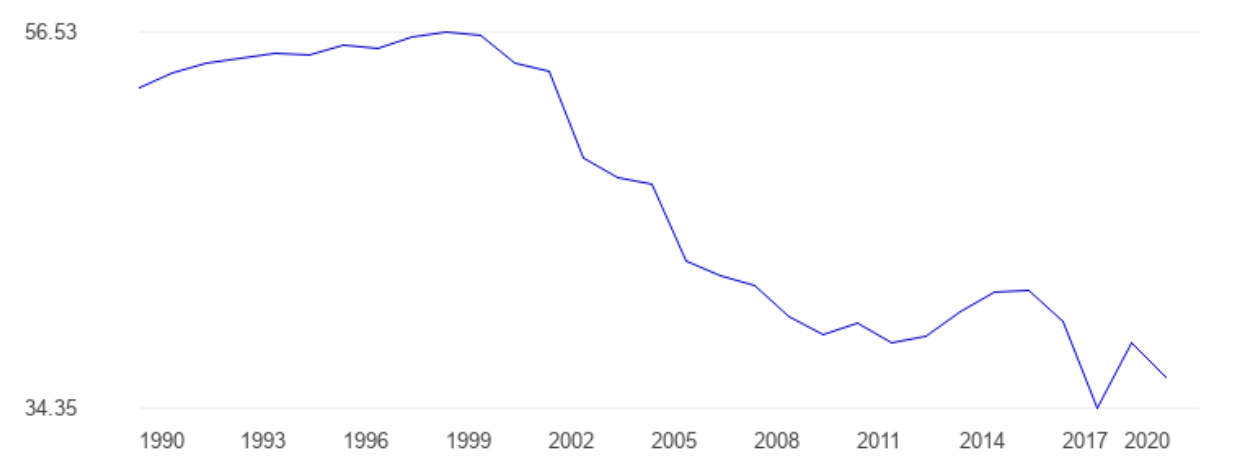
The Republic of Armenia has amended the Electoral Code in 2011 to include gender-sensitive quotas and passing a law in 2013 known as the "Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men" that guarantees equality between men and women in all spheres and offers protection from discrimination. In addition to signing the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, Armenia pledges to guarantee the efficient implementation of the Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities. Armenia has approved a new Constitution in December 2015, as well as the new Electoral Code went into effect on June 1, 2016, in addition to the Law "On Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men," which was ratified on May 20, 2013. It raises the quota for women's representation in elective bodies from 20% to 25% of women this year with the intention of raising it to 30% by 2021.

The followings are the challenges for development business in Armenia; many SME assistance programs lack unity and coordination, participation of the private sector in SME development plans, collaboration between commercial and academic institutions to use new features, use of young professionals' inventive and creative capabilities, and obtaining financing.

## Moldova

According to the report provided by the UN, the proportion of population living below the national poverty line is at 9,6%. In 2019, the level of poverty among women accounted for 25.6%, and among men 24.8%. In 2021, Moldova was constituted 28th out of 156 analysed countries in terms of the Global Gender Gap. To promote gender equality and empowerment of women, Moldova has made international and national commitments through universal declarations and many conventions. To avoid legal bias and guarantee legal parity between the genders with regard to labor force, in February 2006, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova adopted the Law on Ensuring Equal Opportunities between Women and Men. In addition, approved by the Government Decision on 28.04.2017 for the period of 2017-2021, the main goal of the Strategy on ensuring equality between women and men in is to foster the role of the law in the implementation of the protection of human rights and strengthening of society as a whole. Although women predominate in the population, a series of stereotypes in the society that influence the gender balance in the country. That is to say women's reputation in the society is being negatively perceived such as being "weaker". Women seem to be less confident and optimistic concerning the business. In education sector, women opt for higher education and are more educated(Report, 2021). In official figures, Figure 5 illustrates female labor force participation rate since 1990ies.

**Figure 5:** *Female labor force participation in Moldova*



*Source: The Global Economy, theglobaleconomy.com, 2020*

As enlightened in figure 5, labor force participation among women is comparably lower than men, and the tendency experienced downwards, in particular after 2000s. The average value for Moldova within the specified that period made up 46.84 percent with a minimum of 34.35 percent in 2018 and a maximum of 56.53 percent in the year 1999. The latest value from 2020 is 36.11 percent. For comparison, the world average in 2020 based on 181 countries is 49.61 percent indicating a slower progress behind the international average.

**Note:** The female labor force participation rate is the percent of the female population ages 15 and older who are economically active.

The world bank highlights 46.3% female labor force among the economically active population of Moldova<sup>11</sup>. Women are subject to segregation in highly paid jobs and are being mostly employed lower paid jobs. They tend to hold occupation in the feminized sectors of the economy which include public administration, health and social assistance, education, trade, restaurants, hotels. For example, women account for more than 80% of labor force in health sector<sup>12</sup>. A new report of World Bank suggests that supporting female entrepreneurship is of particular importance for the country's economy where the inclusion of women remains at a low level. In Moldova only a quarter of enterprises are represented by women. Further investment in this sphere should be encouraged as they demonstrate propensity to use more female labor. Informal institutions in this country are not exceptions neither. There is evidence that with growing firms in size, women lose the ownership to males which can be attributed to the control of capital and power. Women in the industries where lag behind the men could be supported or barriers to them could be removed through a targeted government action<sup>13</sup>. Government should bolster women to participate in the labor force, improve opportunities for them to combine work with family obligations and reduce gender pay gap providing more incentives for entrepreneurial activities of women(WDI, 2018).

## **Kazakhstan**

The World Bank statistics unveil that the share of women in labor participation rate account for 48.2% in 2021, while figure 6 illustrates longer historical series of female employment in the last three decades in Kazakhstan. The average value for Kazakhstan within this period is reported to be 65.26 percent with a minimum of 63.2 percent in 2017 and a maximum of 66.67 percent in 2008. The last figure in the graph from 2020 makes up 63.62 percent. In comparative terms, the world average in the year 2020 on 181 countries was 49.61%<sup>14</sup>.

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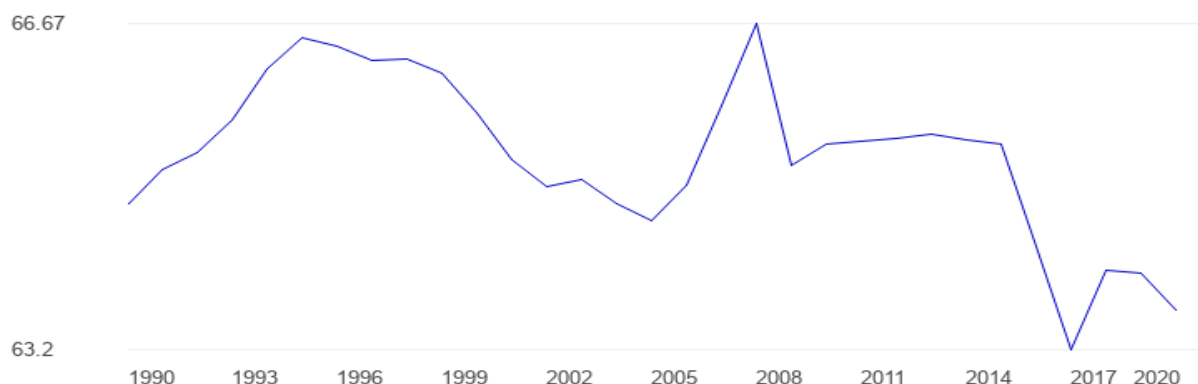
<sup>11</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=MD>

<sup>12</sup> <https://moldova.unwomen.org/en/munca-noastra/economic-empowerment>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/11/23/supporting-women-entrepreneurship-in-moldova>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Kazakhstan/Female\\_labor\\_force\\_participation/](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Kazakhstan/Female_labor_force_participation/)

Figure 6: Female Labor Force Participation rate in Kazakhstan



Source: *The Global Economy*, [theglobaleconomy.com](http://theglobaleconomy.com), 2020

The figure exhibits active engagement of a fair share of the women in the country. Kazakhstan with its remarkable experience in achieving economic growth has been taking an exemplary role in promoting the cooperation in Central Asia. According to the report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2018), Kazakhstan has implemented several national policies promoting gender equality with an emphasis on specific issues affecting women, and the principles of gender equality were articulated in the country's development plans. However, the country's progress toward gender equality has not kept pace with its other successful strategies. Although female access to education and health system is high, the country scores at a limited amount for political empowerment and improving women's access to economic opportunities. Provision of gender equality in economic sectors is one of seven priority areas of the government's *Strategy for Gender Equality for the period of 2006–2016*. However, state policies relevant to gender equality are still mostly enshrined in social sector initiatives, with no strategic goals articulated for other sectors of the country's development, such as transport, urban infrastructure, or energy. Additionally, underrepresentation of women in political life appears to be a very critical problem, and officials have spoken out in favor of increasing the number of women in government. Women represent a minority among parliamentarians, ministers.

In education sphere, the similarities to other CIS countries and gender related vocational discrepancies seem to have been observed in Kazakhstan as well. Young men highly likely tend to pursue a degree in technical training such as energy, transport, and construction, whereas young women prefer to obtain studies in the field of pedagogy, health, education, humanities. It should be noted these persistent gender related stereotypes as well as informal institutions affect these process that perpetuate the patterns in labor market. Subsequently, these patterns translate into lower paid jobs for women usually in the public sector and higher paid jobs for men<sup>15</sup>. Labor market in Kazakhstan exhibit gender related segregation with women largely represented in

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/stat?lang=en>

public sector of the country. The report indicates that women demonstrate less economic empowerment in the formal economy than men, and opportunities for them lie in informal sector or in self-employment. Childcare and domestic work are common sectors among the women through which they enter labor market, and women also are underrepresented in upper managerial positions. These educational and occupational segregation directly contributes to the gender wage gap impeding inclusive economic growth that stipulates the need for the government to take into consideration.

## **Uzbekistan**

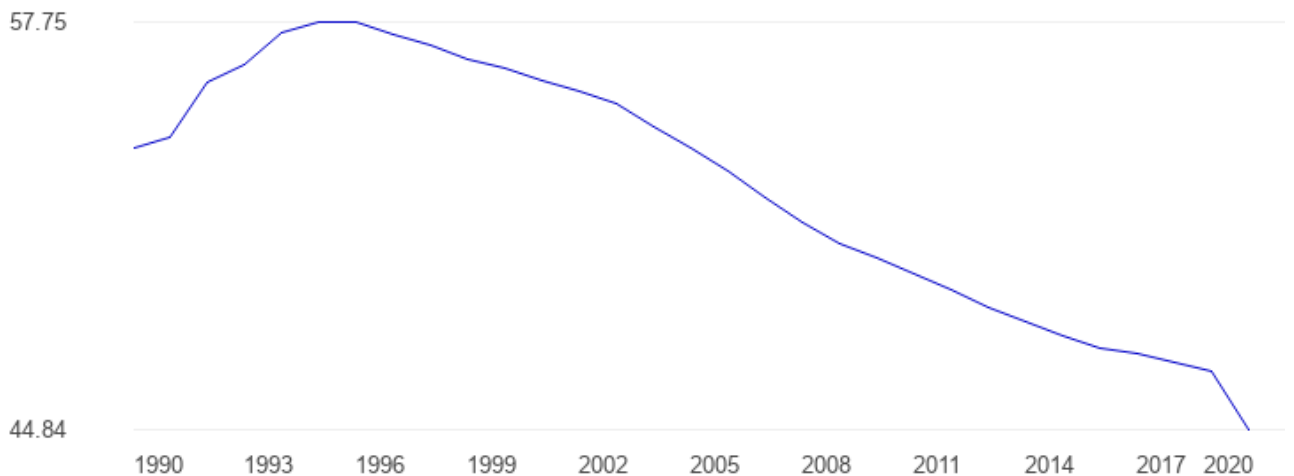
Uzbekistan is another post-Soviet space country in Central Asia with a 35,603.443 population. Separately, 17527.1 thousand are men, while 17527.1 thousand are women at the beginning of 2022. 14980.7 thousand people are economically active population. The ratio of the number of employed population to the working age population was 66,9 %, while the unemployment rate was 9,6 % in 2021. The share of small business and private entrepreneurship is 44.7 % of GDP, 21.6 % of the industry, 76.5 % of construction, 14.7 % of export, and 49.5 % of imports in 2022 from January-march.

Increased employment of women, students, the disabled, and retirees will result from flexible labor process organization at small businesses. Radical changes have been made in the form and substance of employment, particularly in light of the coronavirus epidemic, which is currently affecting practically every country in the globe. People's conventional way of life has altered due to factors including remote employment, social protection, the requirement to improve individual orders of service, the creation and growth of delivery services, family businesses, and freelancing. As was already noted, the importance of small businesses to the economy of our nation is demonstrated by their contribution to the growth of employment among the people and the creation of new jobs. According to the data, private entrepreneurship and small enterprises in our nation created more than 34 of all jobs between 2016 and 2020, which is greater than in many other industrialized nations. The relatively increased employment in a significant area of the economy and the detrimental effects of the coronavirus outbreak on employment in small firms are the causes of this indicator's minor fall in recent years.

The majority of Uzbek women entrepreneurs work in the low-profit service sector. The top three industries are retail food and non-food trade, baking and cooking, and sewing and tailoring. The majority of Uzbek women who start their own businesses do so out of necessity rather than an opportunity to escape unemployment (poverty). Therefore, they either hold another full-time work or it is an addition to their weekend household duties. The majority of Uzbek women business owners emphasize the urgent necessity for expanding financial inclusion and concentrating on enhancing entrepreneurial ability and skills.



**Figure 7. Female labor force participation rate in Uzbekistan**



*Source: The Global Economy, theglobaleconomy.com, 2020*

As can be seen from the graph, the indicators moved in a downward trend throughout other years, except for 1993-1996. With a minimum of 44.84 % in 2020 and a maximum of 57.75 % in 1996, Uzbekistan's average percentage over the time was 52.54 %. 44.84 % is the most recent number from 2020. Based on data from 181 nations, the 2020 global average is 49.61 %.

## **Georgia**

Georgia is a 3 688.6 thousand population country located in the Caucasus. Males are 1,769,995, while females are 1,918,652 in the country as of January 1, 2022.

The labor force is 1490.7 thousand people, employed is 1201.1 thousand, unemployed is 289.6 thousand and the unemployment rate is 19.4 % in the first half of 2022. The total 15+ population is 1607.8 thousand people, the labor force is 628.3 thousand people, employed is 522.8 thousand people, hired is 417.0 thousand people, self-employed is 105.6 thousand people, the not-identified worker is 0.2 thousand people, Population outside the labor force is 979.5 thousand people in the first term of 2022. The unemployment rate is 16.8%, the labor force participation rate is 39.1 %, and the employment rate is 32.5 % in the first quarter of 2022.

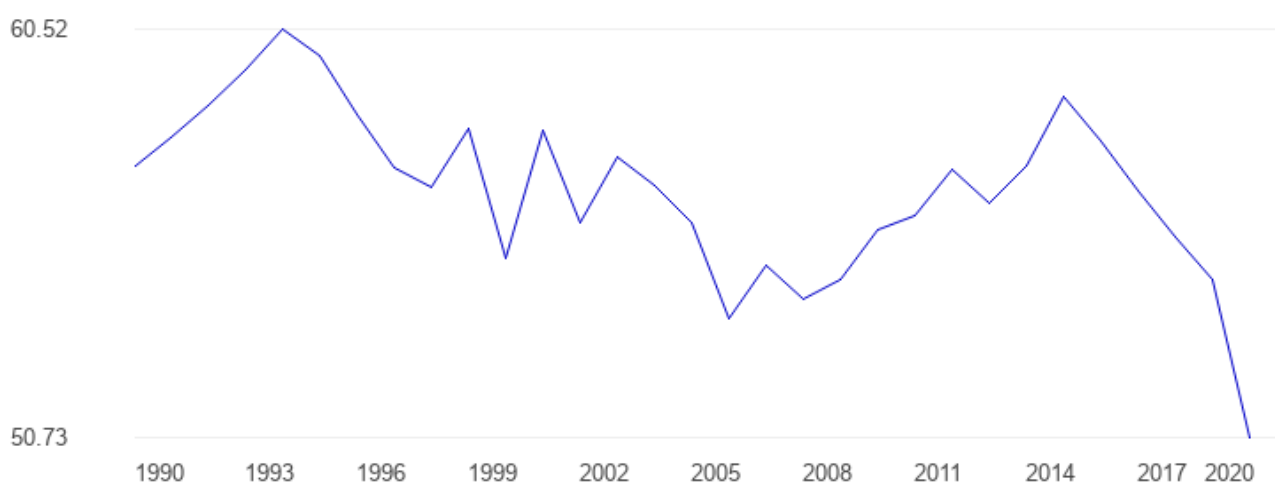
In response to the COVID-19 epidemic, following the information obtained from Terabank in Georgia investigated the requirements of its business clients and has since trained 50 businesses, of which 42% are run or controlled by women, in e-commerce, branding, marketing, and strategic communications.

In 2021, there were 37 female CEOs of Fortune 500 businesses, compared to just one in 1998. However, this represents just 7.4% of the list's CEOs. The number of women in these jobs has only increased generally upward during the previous four years.

Women hold just 20% of the top roles in both the public and commercial sectors. In the formal economy, women receive two-thirds of what males do. Real estate is rarely owned by women. In

Georgia, male offspring often inherit real land and other immovable property. The traditional role of women is to marry and engage in the family and household chores. Despite the fact that more women graduate from college, there are still more women unemployed than males. Politicians who are women are subject to considerably closer examination. While at least three males with obvious impairments have served in the Georgian administration and in the Parliament, no women with disabilities have ever done either. Contrary to popular belief, women with impairments are not well-represented in either the women's or the disabled people's movements. Only one handicapped woman is employed by each of the women's groups examined, according to research done in 2016 by the New Opportunities Platform.

**Figure 8. Female labor force participation rate in Georgia**



*Source: The Global Economy, theglobaleconomy.com, 2020*

As can be understood from the graph 8, fluctuations in the indicator were observed during the years 1990-2020. In 2020, it can be seen that the indicator fell sharply.

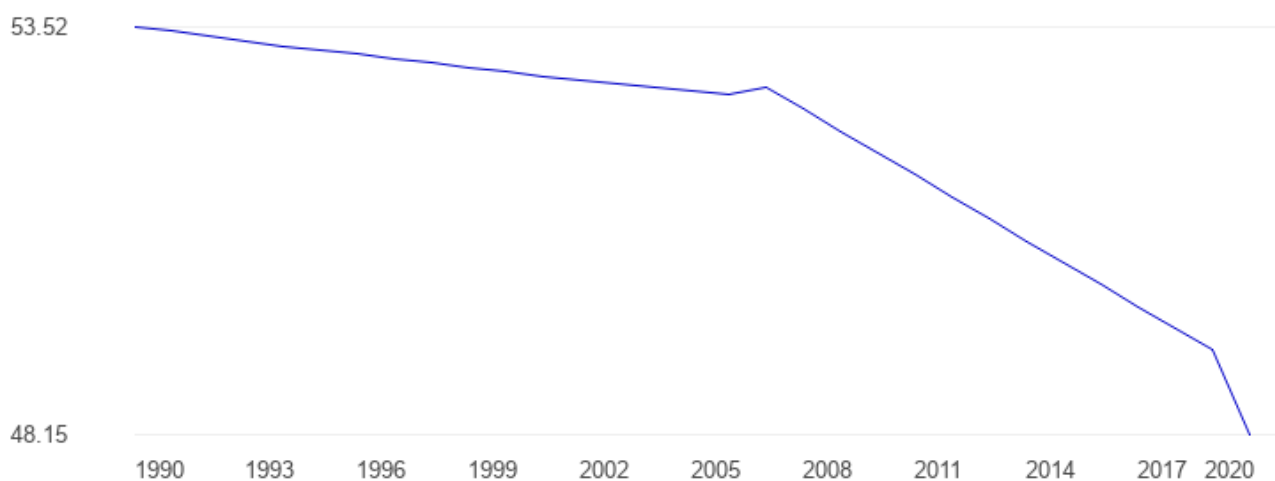
Georgia experienced an average value of 56.66 % over that time, with a minimum of 50.73 % in 2020 and a maximum of 60.52 % in 1994. 50.73 % is the most recent number from 2020. Based on data from 181 nations, the 2020 global average is 49.61 %.

## Ukraine

The population of Ukraine is 43.467 million. In Ukraine, there were 86.33 males for every 100 females in 2020. From 75.2 men for every 100 females in 1950 to 86.33 males for every 100 females in 2020, Ukraine's male-to-female ratio rose at an average yearly rate of 1.00 %. The number of employed persons was 14701.70 thousand while unemployed persons were 316.40 thousand in December 2021. According to the World Bank, the female labor force participation rate was 48.15% in 2020. However, the female labor force to total labor force was 47.7% in 2021.

Only 46% of the indicators required to track the SDGs from a gender perspective were accessible as of December 2020, with gaps in several crucial areas, including unpaid care and domestic labor, information, and communications technology skills, and the representation of women in local governments. Additionally, several sectors lack equivalent approaches for routine monitoring, including gender and the environment, women's access to assets (including land), physical and sexual harassment, and poverty. For Ukraine to fulfill its commitments to the gender-related SDGs, it is crucial to close these gender data gaps.

**Figure 9. Female labor force participation rate in Ukraine**



*Source: The Global Economy, theglobaleconomy.com, 2020*

Between 1990 and 2005, the indicator, which was in a slight downward trend, showed a small increase between 2005 and 2006, but in the remaining period until 2020, it continued in the form of a downward trend.

With a minimum of 48.15 percent in 2020 and a top of 53.52 percent in 1990, the average figure for Ukraine throughout that time was 52.02 percent. 48.15 percent is the most recent number from 2020. Based on data from 181 nations, the 2020 global average is 49.61 percent.

Gender equality and diversity have moved up the corporate leaders' priority list in recent years. But many Ukrainian businesses still do not find what has become the standard for multinational corporations to be a compelling notion. These ideas must to be included into Ukrainian strategic business goals, especially in light of COVID-19's effects on the labor market and on women in particular.

The Ukrainian labor market has both transverse and longitudinal employment segregation. According to UNDP research for Ukraine, there are 40 more women than males in positions of leadership and management overall. However, according to a UN Women gender assessment, women hold just 18% of senior management roles in major Ukrainian companies and 25% in medium-sized companies. The industries of transportation, construction, agriculture, extraction, and

energy are especially dominated by males. Only in the field of education do women outnumber males (69 percent). Hospitality, trade, health, the arts, and entertainment are examples of sectors that might be seen as gender balanced (45–55 percent of leaders are women).

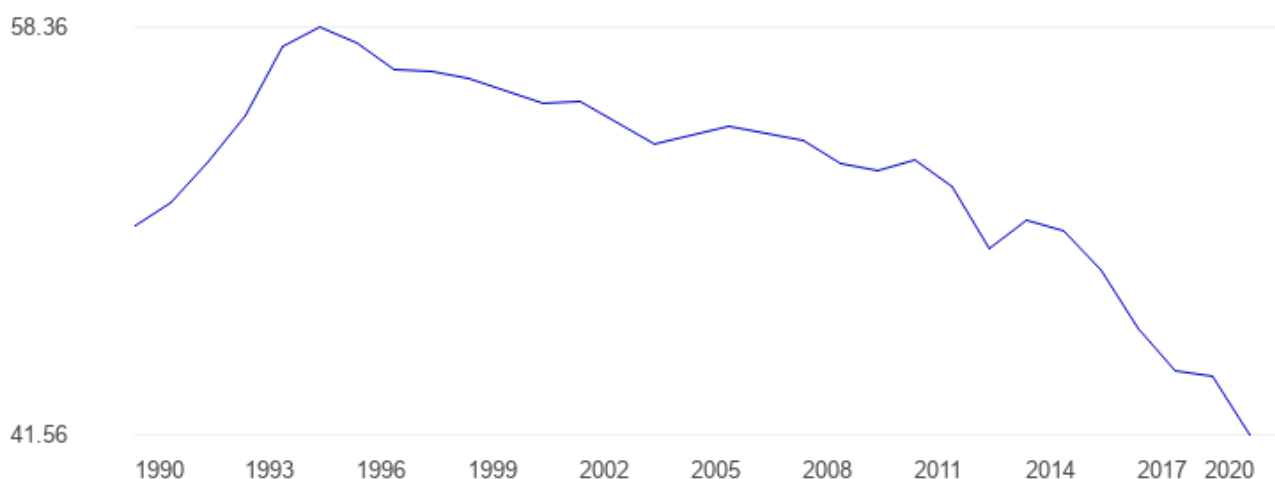
Instead of joining business groups, women entrepreneurs in Ukraine typically rely on their family, friends, and informal networks for assistance.

Related to new government regulations and the health of the economy, there are more obstacles to entrepreneurship now than there were ten years ago.

## Kyrgyzstan

The population of Kyrgyzstan is 6.7 million people as of 1 June 2022. The females are 3,398,610, males are 3,348,713 people in the country. The labor force was 2595.4 thousand, employment population was 2445.2 thousand persons, and unemployed persons were 150.2 thousand in 2020. Employed males were 1495.4 thousand people, while employed females were 949.8 thousand people in 2020. Without a doubt, there is a gap between males and females in Kyrgyzstan. The number of employees of small and medium-sized enterprises was 519.6 thousand people in 2020. By kind of economic activity, women make up 38.4% of the workforce in 2021. The majority of them are employed in the light industry, the beauty sector, trade, tourism, and catering. Women make up 93% of the workforce in the real estate industry, 84% in health and public services, 80% in education, and 60% in the hotel and restaurant industries.

**Figure 10. Female labor force participation rate in Kyrgyzstan**



*Source: The Global Economy, theglobaleconomy.com, 2020*

The graph 10 shows that, with the exception of 1993–1996, the indicators went in a negative direction during the rest of the years.

During that time, Kyrgyzstan experienced an average value of 52.4 %, with minimum values of 41.56 % in 2020 and maximum values of 58.36 % in 1995. 41.56 % is the most recent estimate for 2020. Based on data from 181 nations, the 2020 global average is 49.61 %.

The "National Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic to Achieve Gender Equality" and the "National Action Plan to Achieve Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic" were formed by government decree in 2012. The Decree includes methods to increase economic prospects for women, including evaluating the obstacles to their employment and fostering corporate education on labor laws and gender-sensitive concerns.

It outlines methods for encouraging female entrepreneurship, such as giving them access to capital. The Decree also makes reference to partnerships with the private sector to increase women's entrepreneurial potential and vocational training programs for women.

The government endorsed a five-year initiative in 2020 to encourage and advance female entrepreneurship. Through specific loans and financial tools in state banks, it increased economic active women's access to financial services. The government has pledged to guarantee that women would get 40% of a "Guarantee Fund" for entrepreneurship.

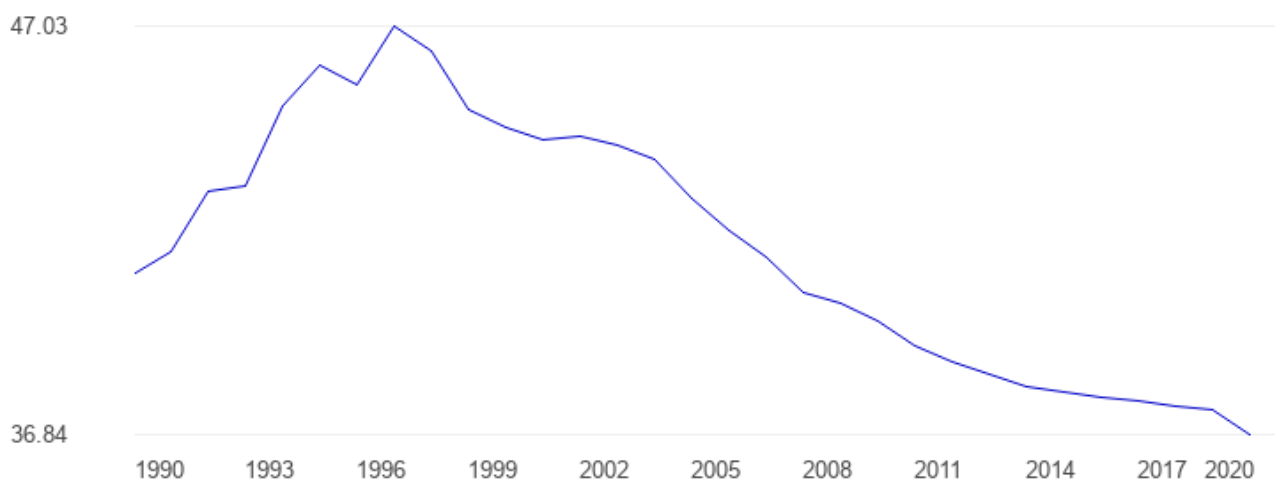
According to an ILO business evaluation, the biggest obstacles for female entrepreneurs in Kyrgyzstan include an insufficient knowledge, a lack of funding for business startups, unfavorable tax laws, and challenging administrative processes.

Other challenges include how women are treated and acted in the traditional kinship structure, as well as how few opportunities there are for women to acquire financial literacy. Another difficulty for female entrepreneurs is gender-based prejudice resulting from maternity and pregnancy. Family is where gender-based prejudice begins, not society at large.

## **Turkmenistan**

The population of Turkmenistan was 6,117,933 people in 2021. Roughly, males are 3,012,000, females are 3,106,000. There were 96.98 males for every 100 females in 2020. The total labor force of Turkmenistan was reported to be 1,943,398 in 2021 by the World Bank's collection of development indicators. Turkmenistan's female labor force participation rate (percent of women aged 15 to 64) was 54.99 percent in 2020. While the percentage of men (ages 15 to 64) was reported to be 81.94 percent in 2020. The female employment in industry (as a percentage of total employment) was estimated by the ILO to be 38.28 % in 2020, whereupon, the male employment rate of 45.7 % in the industry (as a percentage of all male employment) in 2020. 3.7037 % of Turkmenistan's cabinet seats were held by women in 2020, according to statistics. Female family workers made for 5.33 % of all female employment in 2020. Male family workers made for 2.631 % of all male employment in 2020. Employers, female, were recorded as 1.102 % in 2020, while employers, male were recorded as 2.379 % in 2020. The ratio of female to male youth unemployment (percentages for ages 15 to 24) was reported by the ILO to be 54.36 percent in 2020.

**Figure 12. Female labor force participation rate in Turkmenistan**



*Source: The Global Economy, theglobaleconomy.com, 2020*

As can be seen from Figure 12, while there is an increasing trend in Turkmenistan between 1990-1997, the indicator of women's participation in the labor market is gradually decreasing during 1997-2020.

Turkmenistan experienced an average value of 41.58 % for that time period, with minimum values of 36.84 % in 2020 and maximum values of 47.03 % in 1997. 36.84 % is the most recent figure from 2020. Based on data from 181 nations, the 2020 global average is 49.61 %.

### **Executive summary**

The purpose of the Post-Soviet Countries Gender Assessment (CGA) is to develop a strategic vision for integrating gender concerns into programs and operations in these countries, formulate and integrate the new policy directions into development targets. This Country Gender Assessment updates the previous research directions and incorporates a review on the countries' experiences in implementing gender mainstreaming in its portfolio and integrating female labor into the country's total has two main components labor force during the period of independence. The assessment methods have multidimensional approaches from: the review of the status of gender equality and women's empowerment in the country, based on a literature review and current trends, key statistics, and policy documents to the achievements and challenges they face in developing the programs and operations, and provides recommendations the way forward to improve outcomes.

After gaining independence following the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, post-soviet countries made effort to restructure and grow their economies at an accelerated pace, aided by potential revenue sources. As a result, some countries have emerged as an important economic and political powers in Trans-Eurasia with rising per capita incomes. On their growth trajectories, the countries oriented the policies based on inclusive development bringing female labor force participation into scenario.

*Azerbaijan:* the share of women among the total labor force in Azerbaijan accounted for 48.3 percent, and the men contained 51.7% of wage workers<sup>16</sup>. Female labour is mostly represented in the field of health, art and education. The women in the country face challenges such as the national mentality factor, male dominance, informal institutions, lack of financial capital and its access and etc. Network dimensions between the related organizations of the system should be strengthened to be a voice for all women.

*Russia:* the figure for women as part of the total labor force accounted for 48.6%. Female job occupants seem to have been regarded in the form of salesperson, education specialist, business, healthcare personnel. Influential barriers are found to be the following: managerial incompetence together with financial illiteracy, mistrust to the government and the myth of female entrepreneurship, corruption.

*Belarus:* According to the World Bank, women accounted for 48.9% out of the whole labor force. The sectors in which female labor force participation is notably higher are wholesale and retail trade, and repair of transport vehicles. The impact of informal institutions in Belarusian society seems to negatively affect the female employment process as well.

*Armenia:* According to the World Bank, the male labor force participation rate was 71.1%, whereas the female labor force participation rate was 62.6% in 2020. The followings are the challenges for development business in Armenia: many SME assistance programs lack unity and coordination, participation of the private sector in SME development plans.

*Moldova:* The world bank highlights 46.3% of female labor force among the economically active population of Moldova. They tend to hold occupations in the feminized sectors of the economy which include public administration, health, and social assistance, education, trade, restaurants. Informal institutions in this country are not exceptions neither. Women lose the ownership to males which can be attributed to the control of capital and power

*Kazakhstan:* The World Bank statistics unveil that the share of women in labor participation rate account for 48.2% in 2021. Childcare and domestic work are common sectors among the women through which they enter labor market. Persistent gender related stereotypes as well as informal institutions affect these processes that perpetuate the patterns in labor market.

*Uzbekistan:* Female labor force participation in the year 2020 accounted for 44.84%. The top three industries women work are retail food and non-food trade, baking and cooking, and sewing and tailoring. The majority of Uzbek women business owners emphasize the urgent necessity for expanding financial inclusion and concentrating on enhancing entrepreneurial ability and skills.

*Georgia:* 50.73 % is the most recent number of female labor force participation from 2020. The traditional role of women is to marry and engage in the family and household chores. The problem of informal institutions prevails in Georgia as well which described below.

*Ukraine:* According to the World Bank, the female labor force participation rate was 48.15% in 2020. Only in the field of education do women outnumber males (69 percent). Hospitality, trade, health, the arts, and entertainment are examples of sectors that might be seen as gender

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<sup>16</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=AZ>

balanced. Instead of joining business groups, women entrepreneurs in Ukraine typically rely on their family, friends, and informal networks for assistance that stipulates the need for more accessible finance.

*Kyrgyzstan:* 41.56 % is the most recent estimate of female labor for 2020. The majority of them are employed in the light industry, the beauty sector, trade, tourism, and catering. The biggest obstacles for female entrepreneurs in Kyrgyzstan include an insufficient knowledge, a lack of funding for business startups, unfavorable tax laws, and challenging administrative processes.

*Turkmenistan:* Turkmenistan's female labor force participation rate (percent of women aged 15 to 64) was 54.99 percent in 2020. Informal institutions including lack of financial capital were found to be obstacles in this direction.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In this study, based on 11 post-Soviet countries, aspects such as women's participation in the labor force, economic empowerment, entrepreneurial activities, distribution in economic fields, and roles in society were investigated. The research focuses on women's labor force participation and economic empowerment, while conducting research through econometric analysis. The analysis proved that the relationship between economic growth and female labor force of CIS countries is positive. There is a significant association with economic growth and female labor force that means the more economic growth means more female labor force in the economy.

There are some common challenges for all 11 countries such as national mentality factor and male dominance, lack of family support, lack of financial means and difficulties in raising capital, lack of business and technical knowledge, and lack of skills, the largely unrecognized potential of women in rural areas, lack of proper education, and, finally, lack of business networks. These common challenges have been able to be listed broadly as follows:

- **National mentality factor and male dominance:** Female activity in entrepreneurship is less frequent. The principle of the male-dominated culture, and trends from the post-soviet era, and societal stereotypes affect this process.
- **Lack of family support:** in the realization of female employment within the family restrictions are observed due to a conservative mentality. Some families limit the range of educational choices for girls to traditional vocations that bring a negative impact on their future career.
- **Lack of financial means and difficulties in raising capital:** In entrepreneurial activity, economic discrimination against women is observed. The use of financial means for women is restricted.
- **Lack of business and technical knowledge, and lack of skills:** Women's access to emerging knowledge, is restricted that lays down the need for proper education and training. Women are engaged in less skill and less knowledge-oriented sectors.
- **The potential of women in rural areas remains largely unrecognized.** This is partially influenced by the conservative mindset in some regions.



- **Lack of proper education:** High-quality entrepreneurial education at universities is a vital prerequisite to building an entrepreneurial culture among women.
- **Lack of business networks:** Gender-based social and business limits access to necessary resources.

The recommendations on the eliminating the occurred issues:

- **Conduct training and targeted awareness-raising campaigns** for women and men respectively to receive the support of a family member and increase the spirit of entrepreneurship in women. This approach can have an informative role for them and have equal levels of understanding encouraging more female entrepreneurs. These trainings can include families in upbringing the children so that they do not pose obstacles to children engaging in entrepreneurial activities.
- **Establishment of entrepreneurial culture at universities and schools.** Reinforcing knowledge-based entrepreneurial education since childhood starting from the kids' entrepreneurship programs can have a crucial impact on young generations where students can be motivated to create, innovate and take risks.
- **The establishment of a women entrepreneurship fund** can scale up women's access to financial sources. In addition, the **provision of special discounts and concessional loans** can support women to build financial capacity and receive the capital support they need.
- **Ensuring education and relevant scientific training** opportunities on a sustainable basis for women, especially in the regions increasing their ability to establish and pursue a business besides the field of agriculture.
- **To develop female rural entrepreneurship,** improvement of market connectivity, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, credit facilities, and vocational training can act assist the process to bolster the capabilities of women in those areas.
- **In legal terms,** special legislation regulating the women entrepreneurship in Azerbaijan can be prepared that can simplify the business procedures. The application of the plans envisaged in the Strategic Roadmap should be accelerated.
- **Special programs** can be designed to support the **work-life balance of women with children** in order to encourage their active role in the economy.

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