

United Nations

1. Information regarding the questions about education

On gaining independence and positive neutrality, through the personal efforts of our President for Life — the Great Saparmurat Turkmenbashi — the country acquired enormous opportunities for cooperation in various areas of political, public and cultural life, including in the field of education.

The purpose of Turkmen law relating to education is to assure and protect the constitutional right of all citizens to education. In addition, men and women have equal civil rights. Any violation of equality on the basis of sex is punishable by law (article 18 of the Constitution of Turkmenistan).

Education, as the basis for society's spiritual, socio-economic and cultural

In conjunction with the offices of international organizations in Turkmenistan, all the main international instruments on human rights have been published in the national language, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of the United Nations, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international instruments have been widely disseminated. Compilations of international and national instruments enshrining the rights of, for example, children, women and refugees are published on a regular basis. The Turkmen National Institute of Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other organizations, has published 18 similar compilations. These include “Compilation of Turkmen legislation on human and civil rights and freedoms”, “Human rights and justice in Turkmenistan”, “The rights of women in Turkmenistan”, “The legal status of foreign nationals in Turkmenistan”, “The rights of refugees”, “Protection of the rights and freedoms of the individual in Turkmenistan”, “Motherhood and childhood: Turkmen law and international instruments on the rights of women and children”, “International human rights instruments”, “The rights of refugees in Turkmenistan” and “The Great Saparmurat Turkmenbashi: on democracy and human rights”.

2. Information regarding the questions about health

Great attention is paid in Turkmenistan to the protection of maternal and child health. The gradual implementation of the State Health Programme and of the programme for the protection of reproductive health has seen a steady decrease in infant and maternal mortality.

An inter-institutional working commission has been set up with a view to developing a State programme for a transition in Turkmenistan to internationally accepted principles and criteria for determining maternal and infant mortality. In addition to representatives of the Ministry of Public Health and the Medical Industry and the National Institute of State Statistics and Information, the commission’s membership includes experts from the relevant departments of the Ministry of Economic and Financial Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and other institutions. The work of the inter-institutional commission has included the development of a mechanism for the use in medical practice in Turkmenistan of international standards for determining maternal and infant mortality rates.

Today, maternal mortality is defined in Turkmenistan as the death of a woman caused by pregnancy (irrespective of the duration and location of the pregnancy), occurring during pregnancy or within 42 days of a pregnancy ending, for any reason associated with the pregnancy or the strain it places on the body, but not owing to an accident or coincidental circumstances.

The calculation of infant mortality is also based on internationally accepted criteria. Before international standards were adopted, a pregnancy that ended at less than 28 weeks (where the child weighed less than 1,000 grams and measured less than 35 centimetres in length) was considered to have ended before term and was classified as a late miscarriage in medical practice in Turkmenistan. Only if such a premature baby survived for seven days was the birth considered a live birth. Today, the births of all living babies are considered live births, irrespective of the duration

The outline of the main areas of the President's policy with regard to the protection of public health is reflected in the State Health Programme, which was adopted in 1995 and finds its continuation in a national programme known as the strategy for the economic, political and cultural development of Turkmenistan for

positive impact on the quantity and quality of medical services provided to rural women.

To improve standards of housing, utilities and sanitation in rural settlements, comprehensive work is under way on water supplies, disposal and drawdown, in accordance with the measures planned under the strategy for the economic, political and cultural development of Turkmenistan for the period up to 2020.

3. Information regarding the questions about social protection

The acquisition by Turkmenistan of permanent neutrality status has enabled it to expand the legal and regulatory framework for the protection of human rights, particularly women's rights, and for the provision of guarantees regarding their realization.

Having acceded to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Turkmenistan is taking all appropriate measures stipulated in the Convention.

Women in independent Turkmenistan enjoy every right and freedom and participate actively in all areas of public life on an equal footing with men. The country's legislative framework provides all the conditions for the realization by women of opportunities for their active participation in government and public affairs and for their integration in the ongoing reform process.

In accordance with article 18 of the Constitution of Turkmenistan, men and women in Turkmenistan have equal civil rights. Any violation of equality on the basis of sex is punishable by law.

Furthermore, under the Constitution of Turkmenistan, all citizens have the right to work, to choose their profession or employment and place of work according to their own judgement and to be remunerated according to the quantity and quality of the work performed.

Under the Labour Code, any sort of reduction in a worker's pay on the grounds of sex, age, race, nationality, religious conviction or membership of civic organizations is prohibited.

Collective pay bargaining, which involves combining the mechanism of State wage regulation with the economic independence of enterprises of all types of ownership, has become an effective means of managing wages while according a greater place to the human dimension at all levels of economic management.

The conditions of pay of heads of Government and administrative bodies and employees of budget-financed institutions are regulated by the State, while enterprises determine independently the type and systems of payment and wage and salary rates. However, the State acts as a guarantor of the agreements reached and ensures that there is a balance between the interests of all the parties in the labour relations and that the basic rights and guarantees accorded to workers are preserved.

To this end, a system of social partnership has been established in the area of social and labour relations. Since 1992, trilateral sectoral labour (pay) agreements have been concluded between Government agencies, trade unions and representatives of enterprise owners (employers). These agreements stipulate the parties' mutual obligations and regulate the following aspects of social and labour

relations: organization of work, pay, social guarantees, hiring and firing of workers, measures to increase the efficiency of production, strengthening of work discipline, prevention of labour disputes and consideration of workers' interests during privatization.

Such agreements are aimed at ensuring respect for the economically grounded

health and social services, in hospitals and restaurants, in agriculture, and in enterprises engaged in real estate and other types of activity.

The number of women wishing to lease State property in order to engage in entrepreneurial activity is growing dramatically.

Radical changes in Turkmenistan's economy and on the labour market (the development of the private sector and of new forms of labour recruitment, the exponential increase in the number of economic actors) and difficulties in applying traditional data-gathering methods have called for the adoption of new concepts and definitions and new methods of data collection.

In order to gather the necessary data on problems related to employment and ensure that it is reliable, it has been found advisable in Turkmenistan to conduct systematic (quarterly) sample surveys of employment-related problems by administering questionnaires to households.

This method of statistical data collection is widespread in countries with market economies. It is the most flexible data-gathering method of all and ensures that interrelated information is obtained on various aspects of employment (composition of the labour force by sex, age, etc.).

The importance of women's social function allows them to determine their employment status for themselves. In addition, the State affords them social guarantees.

For example, in accordance with the Law of Turkmenistan "On pensions", adopted on 25 January 2006, women have the right to retire on a pension on reaching the age of 57, i.e. five years earlier than the age fixed for men. Moreover, the pension granted is paid irrespective of whether the woman continues to work.

The indicator used in calculating the pension entitlements accrued is life expectancy following retirement, which is defined as average longevity for men and women combined. Since women retire five years earlier than men, this means that their accrued pension entitlements are greater.

In accordance with the Law "On State benefits", adopted on 17 July 1998, women are granted the following types of benefit:

- Maternity benefit — paid to women working in enterprises, organizations and establishments of all types of ownership, women studying in higher and secondary specialized education institutions and women serving in the armed forces or in internal affairs agencies who take maternity leave (duration of payments — at least 112 calendar days, with the right to an extension of 16 or 40 calendar days, depending on the reasons);
- Childcare benefit — paid to women who take leave to care for a child (payments continue until the child reaches the age of 3).

In addition, in accordance with article 19 of the Law "On pensions", these periods are included in women's length of service when the amount of their State pension is calculated.

At the initiative of the President of Turkmenistan, a large-scale cultural policy has been developed and is being implemented. It includes a range of measures providing for the revival of ancient traditions and customs and national holidays,

more widespread use of the native tongue as the official language, the development of all types of professional and folk arts, the steady increase of the population's level of education, and the development of book publishing and the mass media.

One of the most important cultural traditions of the Turkmen people is the

At the same time, it should be noted that, while the realization of these goals certainly depends on joint efforts by United Nations Member States, the key role in addressing problems belongs, first and foremost, to countries themselves, drawing on their own capacity to overcome their difficulties.

The Millennium Declaration includes eight goals in the areas of education, health and women's empowerment, and 18 targets. Of the 18 targets related to the goals of the Millennium Declaration, which are to be met by 2015, Turkmenistan has already fulfilled 13. It has therefore reformulated these targets, taking into account the parameters of the strategy for the economic, political and cultural development of Turkmenistan for the period up to 2020.

Goal 3 of the Millennium Declaration is to promote gender equality and empower women.

Turkmenistan is pursuing a national policy aimed at achieving gender equality. It should be noted that there can be no universal model for gender equality. Each country must elaborate its own strategy for achieving gender balance in society, taking into account its own peculiarities.

Family values have tended to predominate in Turkmenistan. Accordingly, women have traditionally played a large and honoured role. The continuity of the best traditions and the fundamental role played by women are reflected in the works of the President of Turkmenistan Saparmurat Turkmenbashi, including *Ruhnama* and others.

Turkmen women play an active part in the country's economic, public and political life.

Turkmen women — the focus of State attention and the objects of universal love — work on an equal footing with men in the most varied sectors of the economy. Many women occupy positions of responsibility in Turkmenistan's ministries and departments, in sectoral administrative bodies and in the sectors themselves. The proportion of women among the deputies in the Majlis (Parliament) of Turkmenistan — 16 per cent — is 1.6 times higher than the world average. In addition, 14 per cent of members of the gengeshi (local councils), 42 per cent of officials of administrative structures, 60 per cent of health-care authority employees and 60 per cent of workers in the fields of education, science and culture are women. Elections to Government and administrative bodies are conducted in accordance with the Law "On guarantees of the electoral rights of citizens of Turkmenistan", adopted on 22 April 1999, and based on the principles of universal suffrage and equality of rights of men and women. Candidates for election to representative bodies are elected directly by citizens, voting in elections is by secret ballot, and no monitoring of the expression of the will of the voters is permitted during the voting.

On 15 September 1999, the Majlis (Parliament) of Turkmenistan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Political Rights of Women, which states that women are entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public functions on equal terms with men (information supplementary to paras. 66-75 of the national report).

Women make up almost half the labour force and more than 44 per cent of employed persons. The proportion of working-age women (from 16 to 57 years)

who are economically active is fairly high in Turkmenistan, almost 70 per cent (without counting those engaged in domestic work). The proportion of women among persons working in the State sector is 43 per cent, in the non-State sector 45 per cent. A large percentage of women working in the State sector are employed in large and medium-sized enterprises (more than 40 per cent). In addition, it should be noted that the level of education of economically active women in Turkmenistan is higher than that of men.

Women are successfully combining economic and public and political activity with childbearing. The birth rate in Turkmenistan is one of the highest in the world.

Each year, in the global *Human Development Report*, UNDP ranks countries according to their human development index (HDI). Turkmenistan belongs to the group of countries in the medium human-development category. Since 1993, UNDP has calculated a gender-adjusted HDI (GDI). In Turkmenistan, GDI is close to one (0.967 in 2004), which means that the differences between men and women in terms of human development are minimal.

The progress made by Turkmenistan towards achieving gender equality is reflected in the Gender Development Index (GDI) of 161.8159.4103 in 2004, which is higher than the world average of 100. The progress made by Turkmenistan towards achieving gender equality is reflected in the Gender Development Index (GDI) of 161.8159.4103 in 2004, which is higher than the world average of 100.

Organized Crime, the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

Our country, while strictly adhering to the obligations it has undertaken and acting from a position of neutrality, actively supports all United Nations initiatives and decisions, and the fact that it has signed documents aimed at making people's lives more secure and stable is eloquent testimony to this.

Turkmenistan is consistently implementing the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and of the documents adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 4 and 5 September 1995), thus guaranteeing women the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

Mindful of the 12 critical areas of concern set out in the Beijing Platform for Action, in 1999 Turkmenistan adopted a national plan of action establishing the following priorities:

- Creation of a mechanism for coordinating actions at the local, national and international levels;
- Participation of women in the work of Government and administrative bodies and in the process of formulating and adopting administrative decisions;
- Education and vocational training for women;
- Women and health;
- Women and the economy;
- Women's rights;
- Women and the mass media.

The priority areas established under the National Plan of Action in line with the Beijing Platform for Action reflect pressing issues that will be resolved through more active participation by women in all areas of public life and comprehensive mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the long-term planning and implementation of specific programmes.

As mentioned previously, the centuries-old Turkmen cultural tradition of respecting and honouring women, an effective and comprehensive legal framework enabling women to exercise their rights fully, the active participation of women in all areas of public life, including Government and administrative bodies, and the equal status of men and women in marriage and family relations, including child-rearing in society. This is a tradition that has been preserved and strengthened over the centuries.

Dokmachi women's football team of the Ministry of Textiles took part in a women's football tournament held in Bulgaria in 2005. In addition, in July 2004, the *Neitralny Turkmenistan (Neutral Turkmenistan)* and Turkmenistan newspapers and the weekly publication *Novosti Turkmenistana (Turkmenistan News)* published articles on a female student of the Turkmen Polytechnical Institute whose project, which made possible a considerable increase in gas extraction, won first prize in a competition for young scientists and who was awarded a diploma by the President of Turkmenistan. It should also be noted that, each year, a large number of female students and schoolgirls take part in the young scientists' competition inaugurated by the Ministry of Education and the Makhtumkuli Youth Organization. The majority of reporters and journalists in Turkmenistan are women. These examples are convincing testimony to the absence of gender stereotypes in Turkmen society.

One clear example of the absence of gender stereotypes in Turkmenistan is women's unlimited access to jobs long regarded as belonging to the male domain, such as driving, including in public transport (for example, many women work as trolleybus drivers in Ashgabat), or programming, as the following data show.

Students of vocational secondary schools by subject area, as at the beginning of the 2003/04 school year

<i>Subject area</i>	<i>Percentage of total</i>		<i>Distribution by sex, shown as percentage</i>	
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
Economy and planning	20.1			

reproductive health among men, women and adolescents. The electronic newspaper addresses issues in sections with such headings as “Gender: theory and practice”, “Women and the law”, “School of Health” and “Women and Society”, which not only highlight the status of women in Turkmen society but also serve as a major educational tool, raising readers’ awareness of current legislation in various areas of public life, reproductive rights, reproductive health and vocational training for women. For example, in 2004, an international business trainer wrote a column for the newspaper in which he set out a series of steps whereby women could set up their own businesses.

On 7 April 1994, at a conference of female representatives of each of the country’s regions, the Gurbansoltan-eje Women’s Union of Turkmenistan was founded as a voluntary, popular, authoritative and influential civic organization, forming part of the national *galkynysh* (revival) movement. The Women’s Union now has a membership of more than one million Turkmen women united by shared views and interests. It is registered with the Ministry of Justice of Turkmenistan and is a legal entity. The Women’s Union is a nationwide institution; its branches and primary organs are in operation throughout Turkmenistan: in the velayats (regions), cities and etraps (districts), and in enterprises, organizations, vocational secondary schools and schools of higher education.

The Women’s Union is not a commercial organization; it does not collect membership dues, nor does it pay its members for work that they may undertake for the Union; all activities are conducted on a strictly voluntary and public basis.

The organization’s supreme body is the Union Congress, which consists of plenipotentiary representatives from the nationwide branches. During periods between Congress and conference meetings, the Union is governed by the Central Council and the Chairperson. The first Women’s Congress took place on 16 March 2002. It analysed the work of the Union, elected new members to the Central Council and t

The practical implementation of decisions, plans and recommendations for the further advancement of women drawn up and adopted by the Women's Union at its congresses, conferences and meetings is achieved through mechanisms such as the Union's Chairperson, its Central Council, an inter-ministerial group, a working group, resource centres and centres for reproductive health.

The Central Council is the supreme executive body of the Women's Union and the supreme administrative body in relation to all the Union's subsidiary bodies and organs.

The Central Council of the Women's Union:

- Conducts its activities in accordance with the goals and objectives set out in the Charter of the Women's Union, periodically reporting to the Union's subsidiary bodies on its activities;
- Submits proposals to Government and administrative bodies regarding issues related to the status of women and implementation of the programmes of the President of Turkmenistan for the protection of maternal and child health and the promotion of healthy lifestyles;
- Promotes, in accordance with Turkmen Law, participation by women's organizations in the conduct of national referendums and elections of khalk vekilleri (people's representatives) deputies of the Majlis (Parliament) and members of the gengeshi (local councils);
- Lends advisory, methodological and other assistance to the Union's subsidiary bodies and organs and trains its active members.

The activities of the Central Council are directed by the Chairperson. The meetings of the Central Council are called by its Chairperson and are held when necessary, but no less than twice a year. Matters relating to the current activities of the Central Council are addressed through instructions issued by the Chairperson, which are approved at Council meetings if necessary.

The inclusion of leaders of the Women's Union in the membership of the Khalk Maslakhaty (People's Council), which is the supreme representative organ of popular power, helps to ensure that women's interests are taken fully into account in strategic decision-making and in formulating and approving national programmes for the development of Turkmenistan, and attests to the prestige of the women's movement in Turkmen society.

On 11 April 2006, Ashgabat hosted an international conference on the theme "Turkmen Women in the Golden Age". The event was organized by the country's leading civic organization, the Gurbansoltan-eje Women's Union of Turkmenistan.

The conference, which focused on the achievements of Turkmen women in the Golden Age in the politics, governance, economy, culture and public life of Turkmenistan, was attended by participants from almost 50 countries worldwide, which demonstrates the genuine interest of the international community in events taking place in Turkmenistan.

As a State Member of the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other authoritative international organizations, independent, neutral Turkmenistan complies fully with its human rights obligations. Turkmenistan, which considers universally recognized international legal norms to

