



Photo: UNFPA Kyrgyzstan

Employment

“In the future I want to be a policewoman. Because the police keep order. And I like their uniform”

Akak, 10, is from Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. She lives with her father and older brother. Akak goes to school and also helps her father who has a stand at the bazaar. She visits the Centre for Child Protection every day to get food.

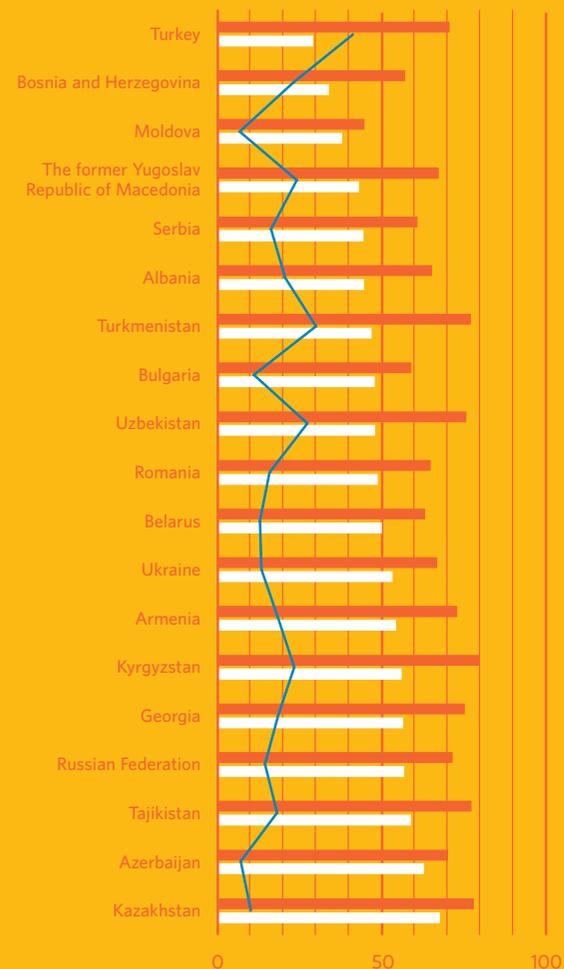
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When more women work, economies grow.

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION, MALE & FEMALE, %



● Male participation rate ● Female participation rate — Gap

Source: The World Bank. Data for 2014.

→ The situation

Although girls often do better in school than boys in this region (see *Education*), there is a clear reverse gender gap when it comes to employment. Far fewer women than men are in formal employment in all countries of the region (see *graph*). The gap is largest in Turkey, where only 30% of women are in the workforce. In contrast, women's labour force participation is relatively high - in several cases above the OECD average of 51% - in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and parts of Central Asia, a legacy of the Soviet Union's efforts to include women in the workforce.



→ Leaving no-one behind

Women with low levels of education are more likely to be excluded from the labour market. In Turkey, for example, large-scale migration to the cities meant that many unskilled women formerly working in agriculture are now unable to take up jobs, as the type of work they can get does not pay enough to afford help with childcare and housework.¹



¹ Female labor force participation in Turkey: Trends, Determinants and Policy Framework, The World Bank, Turkey State Planning Organisation, 2009.

→ Why is it important?

When more women work, economies grow. Studies show that an increase in female labour force participation results in faster economic growth. And as populations age, increasing the share of women in the workforce helps mitigate the impact of a shrinking labour force. But the effects of traditional gender norms, lack of family-friendly work environments, and traditional gender roles keep many women confined to childcare and housework (see *Work-life balance*).



→ What needs to be done?

Investing in the education and employment opportunities of girls and young women, and making affordable childcare available, are key factors for increasing women's labour force participation. Paid parental leave also is crucial, but should not be too long because it can otherwise keep women out of the labour market. This needs to go hand in hand with dismantling traditional gender stereotypes that place lower value on girls and women and expose them to harmful practices and violence.