

Egypt. The light at the end of the tunnel. CC BY 2.0

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Masculinities and Transition: Summary Brief

“If we start at the beginning: the patriarchal way in which society functions is really at the heart of the problem”

(ÖZGE BERBER-AGTAŞ, PROGRAMME AND ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER, INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION (ILO) TURKEY, 2016)

This brief is based on a larger report (Edström *et al.* 2019) that explores how economic transition in Egypt, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Ukraine has been experienced by different groups of men, and its impacts on gender relations. It aims to assist the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and other stakeholders to consider ways of engaging men as agents of positive change for gender equality – alongside women and girls – as well as to complement women-focused interventions in projects and investments to enhance both the resilience of transitions and equality of opportunity.

Profound social and economic transitions over the past 30 years have shaped women’s lives and opportunities in Egypt, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Ukraine in varying ways. In contrast to the Soviet-era emphasis on women’s ‘dual role’, constructions of femininity in contemporary Ukraine prioritise domesticity and motherhood, despite their ongoing, widespread participation in employment. A similar emphasis on women’s domestic and caregiving responsibilities is evident in Kazakhstan. Motherhood remains a defining feature of gender role expectations for women in both Egypt and Turkey, at the same time as women’s entrepreneurship is celebrated as a mark of both women’s empowerment and national development. In all four countries, women’s economic opportunities are constrained by vertical and

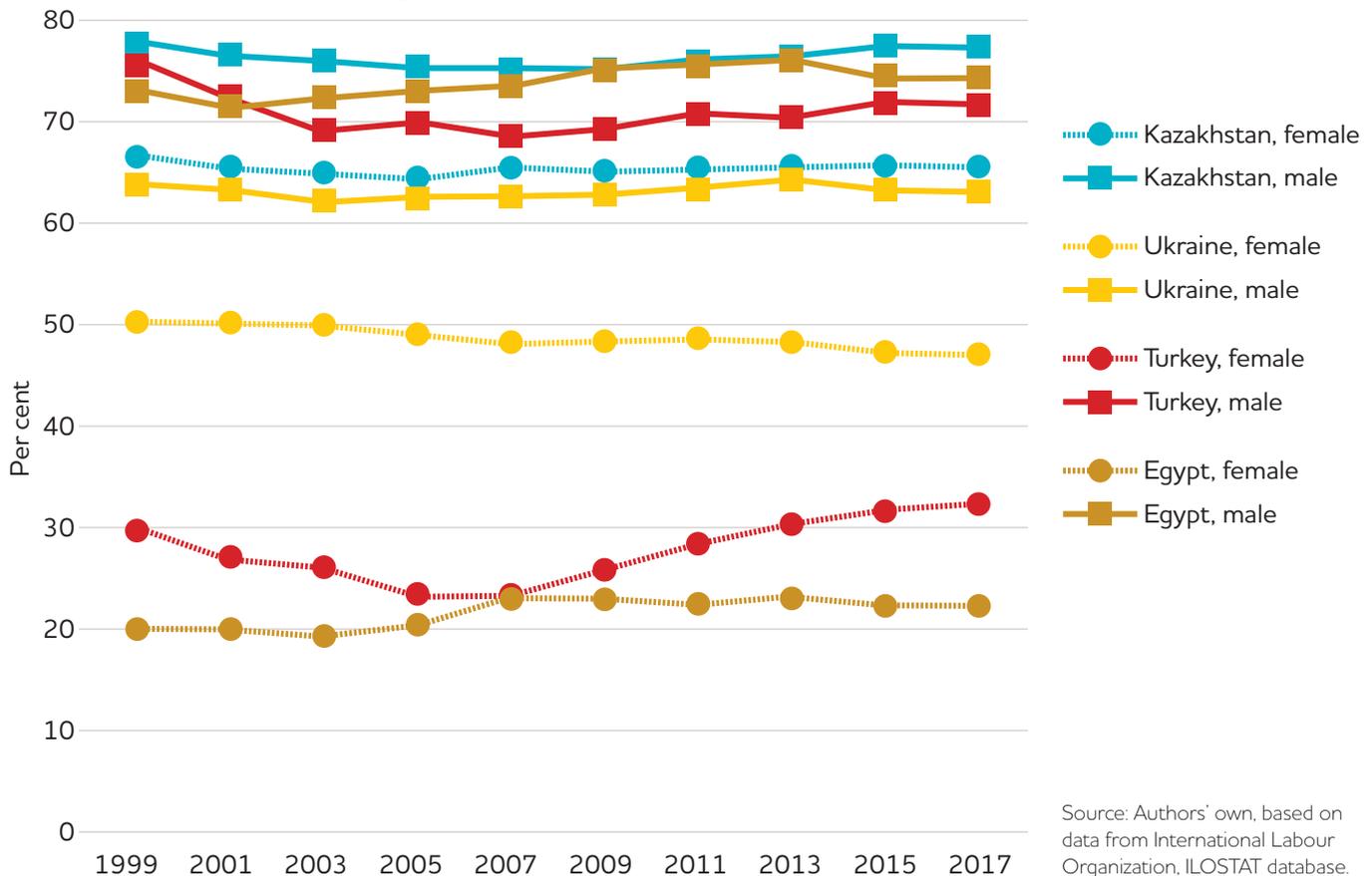
horizontal gender segregation in the labour market, with women’s waged work being concentrated in traditionally feminised and lower-paid sectors.

Much less is known about men’s experiences of economic transition and reactions to the diverse changes in women’s circumstances. In Ukraine, men’s gender identity is increasingly tied to individual economic success and being the breadwinner for one’s family. Men in the lower echelons of the labour market face increasing challenges in meeting these expectations (World Bank 2017). Male ill health is an emerging concern in Kazakhstan, where men have significantly lower life expectancy and there are extraordinarily high rates of suicide among juvenile boys (Dubok and Turakhanova 2017). Studies in Turkey show that while less authoritarian ideals of masculinity have

evolved in recent decades, many men remain conflicted and unable to let go of the benefits of deeply embedded male privilege (Şimşek and Öner 2015). Some groups of young men are turning to a consumerist lifestyle as a way to construct a meaningful masculine identity in a time

of rapid social change (Yavuz 2015). There are also signs of change in Egypt, where recent studies suggest that a significant minority of men hold gender-equitable views and that many men need support for their mental and physical wellbeing (El Feki, Heilman and Barker 2017).

Labour force participation rates, by sex: comparative trends across four countries (% of male/female population ages 15+)



Source: Authors' own, based on data from International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database.

Policy context and study methods

Governments in all four transition countries studied have developed policies to address gender and the status of women, but attention to the role of men and masculinities has been limited overall. For example, gender policy in Ukraine remains almost entirely focused on women. Notwithstanding recent legislative paternity leave provisions, gender policy is developed within an equal opportunities framework focused on women's access to the public sphere, with little attention to men's public and private roles. Kazakhstan (2016) recognises the persistence of gender stereotypes and their impact on segregation in the workforce, linked to women's burden of care. The government has set several targets for women's advancement and for reducing domestic violence and the gender gap in life expectancy, noting that prevailing norms of masculinity can damage men's health, from work-related stress and substance abuse. Despite progressive social and human resources policies aimed at women in Turkey, their labour force participation has remained low. Female entrepreneurship has become seen as a solution to increasing women's role in the economy as well as for their individual

empowerment, although there is little systematic analysis of progress or the broader impact of female entrepreneurship on gender equality. Egypt, which also has very low female labour force participation, has made recent efforts to address gender inequality in access to finance. The government has identified gaps in policies and services that inhibit women's ability to establish and sustain small and medium-sized enterprises, and has taken measures to address this.

The four countries were selected for their significance within their sub-regions, the availability of relevant sources in the form of EBRD-supported projects and investments, and logistical feasibility. The study comprised a literature review and primary research in each country, focusing on sectors with particular importance for EBRD's work on gender equality. Four pairs of researchers conducted key informant interviews and focus group discussions with respondents, including government and corporate counterparts and project beneficiaries. In total, 79 men and 81 women were interviewed, ranging from managers, employees and small-scale entrepreneurs to community members.

Findings



Limited perception of equal opportunities problems in the workplace and economy

Across the four countries, many male and female respondents were sceptical about the need for specific equal opportunities policies and strategies. A widespread view was that there was no gender discrimination at work and that current laws – and, in some cases, employers’ proactive strategies – were ensuring this. Yet, most respondents also acknowledged that women continue to face barriers to economic advancement.

Gender inequalities attributed to women’s choices and ‘natural’ role in family life

In all countries, problems of gender-based vertical and horizontal occupational segregation were recognised, but often attributed to women’s own choices and capabilities. The view that women have a ‘natural’ propensity and social responsibility to be the main caregiver in the family was pervasive across all four countries.

Men’s traditional gender role as primary breadwinner remains dominant

The pervasive view that men are expected to be the primary breadwinner in the family is the corollary of the emphasis on women’s roles as caregivers. Across all four countries, male respondents expressed varying levels of resentment about initiatives targeting support for women at work. Even where men expressed support for women’s economic empowerment, it was often conceived of as being supplemental to men’s primary breadwinner responsibility. Furthermore, policy efforts to redistribute the burden of family caregiving have met with little success.

Above

Men fishing in Kasap Demirhun, Istanbul, Turkey.
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Findings

The costs of men's traditional gender roles are beginning to be recognised

This study suggests that there is some recognition of the pressures men face as a result of social expectations to fulfil the breadwinner role. In Ukraine, many felt that men's work–life balance remains skewed, and that men are at risk from both the effects of work-related stress and coping mechanisms such as excessive alcohol use. Concerns about a lack of work–life balance and its impacts on men's health were also expressed in the other three countries. Many male respondents in Egypt reported having struggled to provide for their families in the wake of the flotation of the Egyptian pound (November 2016 onwards). Young men in both formal and informal employment spoke of anxiety, depression and resentment towards policies seen as impoverishing the most vulnerable.

Gender stereotypes persist, but attitudes to gender roles and equality are in flux

Gender stereotypes continue to affect working lives and economic opportunities. Most male respondents in Turkey approved of women and men working together, but many still felt that childcare is more natural for women. Men's attitudes towards changing gender relations varied across and within the countries, from progressive to ambivalent to conservative views. Differences did not correlate closely with class or occupation; some of the most egalitarian views were expressed by male blue-collar workers. While younger men were seen as more likely to believe in greater gender equality, age could also affect others' perceptions of men's masculinity, as Egyptian young men were often stereotyped as work-shy.

Informal aspects of workplace culture and practice limit progress in achieving gender equality

A prevailing view among management in several countries was that meritocratic professionalism obviated the need for specific equal opportunities initiatives. This co-existed with the acknowledgement that decisions on hiring or promotion for women are often influenced by the age and presumed likelihood of pregnancy of a female candidate. Some interviews with female respondents in Kazakhstan raised the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as the more general issue of bullying.

Below
Worker making
concrete at a
production
plant in
Kazakhstan.
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Strategic implications

Progress on women's economic advancement remains constrained by persistent and pervasive gender stereotypes, reinforcing gender segregation at work and the gendered division of labour at home. These stereotypes appear to flourish even though all of the countries are in the midst of transitions to more modern market economies. Indeed, the literature and this study suggest that dislocations within these transitions – the loss of state welfare service provision or increased job insecurity, among others – have been accompanied by renewed gender traditionalism, perhaps to provide a sense of order amid rapid social and economic change.

Promotion of gender equality is traditionally framed in terms of closing the inclusion 'gap' for women. This study indicates a need to broaden the conception of gender strategy in two ways: (1) to focus on changing gender relations, not just including women; and (2) to recognise the *gender effects and dynamics* of all projects.

Two key strategic implications follow from such a broadened conception of gender strategy:

► **Complement women-focused interventions with initiatives to change gender relations**

In terms of financing and entrepreneurship, this could include targeting male business partners of female entrepreneurs and supporting male business advisors to be champions for gender equality. A gender relations approach to equal opportunities in employment and skills could strengthen human resources (HR) departments' capacities to identify and address restrictive patriarchal aspects of workplace culture. For access to services, there is a need to broaden the focus to address service gaps in the care economy and to increase men's involvement in care work.

► **Work directly with men as agents of positive change alongside women**

There are several entry points to engage men as agents of positive change in gender relations, most notably in relation to work–life balance and men's health. Campaigns can highlight the health risks of gender stereotypes, which tie masculinity to over-work and the main breadwinner identity. Greater efforts are also needed to increase men's involvement in care, their knowledge of healthy lifestyle choices, and uptake of health services.

Recommendations

Directions for internal capacity building and technical cooperation:

- Make men, masculinity and gender relations visible in internal work and challenge gender stereotypes – in problem analyses, investment strategies and for institutional change.
- Use stereotype-defying examples to illustrate gender strategies to disturb gendered monopolies in particular areas of work or training, both in capacity building and in technical cooperation.
- Challenge patriarchal mindsets in multiple ways. Within programmes promoting female entrepreneurship, the male business partners of female entrepreneurs and male business mentors are untapped resources as male champions for women's economic advancement.
- Include masculinities-aware HR advice in equal opportunities strategies and business advisory services.

Directions for projects and investments:

- Integrate issues of men, masculinity and gender relations along the value chains of investments, through engagement with key personnel in HR management and training, and through business advice and training targeting female entrepreneurs.
- Continue to help to formalise the economy by tackling corruption, thereby stemming the growth of gender inequality resulting from the abuse of patriarchal power.
- Correct market failures in access to gender-sensitive personal financial services, so that clients can access

loans, mortgages and pensions without resorting to men working excessive hours and women facing a 'second shift' of care work in the home.

- Invest strategically to minimise key constraints to gender equality. For example, as childcare is a common obstacle for women in business, be proactive in supporting gender-equitable crèche businesses.
- Build on the good practices of companies focusing on community development to positively engage men alongside women and children.

Directions for policy dialogues:

- Encourage and facilitate national policy dialogues and strategies targeting men's health problems.
- Promote national dialogues on gender and masculinities with in-country stakeholders, on (1) gender equality in socioeconomic policy on the 'care economy'; (2) promoting men's engagement in childcare; and (3) better gender-balancing within educational streaming to technical and social subjects.
- Support business and trade union leaders to speak out publicly against traditional gender stereotypes about women's and men's 'roles'.
- Champion positive examples of supportive male partners to highlight that appropriate work–life balance is not solely women's responsibility.
- Support the development of campaigns to improve work–life balance, emphasising that shared responsibilities within the family are a win-win for women and men alike.



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