



Situational Analysis of Men and Gender Equality in the Central Asia Region

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gender-equitable men support gender-equitable futures. Engaging men and boys in promoting gender equality and eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a critical priority of the Spotlight Initiative.¹ The Spotlight Initiative is a global initiative of the United Nations which has received generous support from the European Union. It aims to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. One of the six key pillars of the Spotlight Initiative is ‘Prevention,’ which involves engaging men and boys in the ‘promotion of gender-equitable norms, attitudes, and behaviors.’ The inclusion of addressing harmful masculine norms is the result of decades of research on VAWG and sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as advocacy from women’s and other gender equality movements. Such research has found that harmful masculine norms of what it means to be a man contributes to the normalization and perpetuation of men’s violence against women and girls.² As a result, today, there are many examples of programmes engaging men and boys as partners, community leaders, allies, and more, and with that, a growing evidence base demonstrating what works and what knowledge gaps remain.

This Situational Analysis aims to do the following for five Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – who are beneficiaries of the Spotlight Initiative Regional Program for Central Asia and Afghanistan: (1) Synthesize and summarize the evidence on how governments currently address men’s engagement in laws, policies, and national action plans; (2) analyze prevalent gender-related attitudes, perceptions, and practices of men and women in the region; and (3) summarize the best and promising practices on engaging men and boys. The findings and recommendations from this Situational Analysis will inform the development of a men’s engagement strategy and a high-level communications plan to involve men and boys in promoting gender equality in Central Asia.

2. WHY DOES MEN’S ENGAGEMENT MATTER FOR GENDER EQUALITY?

Dating back to the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo and the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, UN agencies are among the leading institutions advocating for the inclusion of men and boys in gender equality (See Box 1). Many UNFPA-supported initiatives work with men and boys to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights, support women’s empowerment, and increase men’s perception of themselves as responsible, caring, and non-violent partners. Such programmes also recognize the diversity of men’s own reproductive and sexual health needs, including those young men who are economically deprived or displaced.³ The Spotlight Initiative also reviewed promising approaches to engaging men, including programmes that work with male peers, engaged fathers, community leaders, and role models, via media campaigns and the arts.⁴ *But what does it mean to engage men and boys in gender equality, and why does it matter when working to prevent violence against women and girls?*

¹ Spotlight Initiative Official Website: <https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/what-we-do>.

² The Prevention Collaborative. (2020). Prevention Foundations Brief 2: Understanding the causes of violence against women.

³ “Engaging Men and Boys” <https://www.unfpa.org/engaging-men-boys#readmore-expand> (accessed 22 Feb 2022).

⁴ Spotlight Initiative. Lessons and Promising Practices of the Spotlight Initiative: Engaging men and boys to transform patriarchal masculinities. November 2021.

Box 1. TIMELINE ON UNITED NATIONS CONVENTIONS AND MEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

1979 – The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) requires that State Parties take all appropriate measures “to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women” (Article 5). More specifically, CEDAW also notes that State Parties must ensure “the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children” (Article 5).

1989 – The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Article 18, states that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. In addition, General Comment No. 15 (2013) on “the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health” highlights the importance of engaging fathers in children’s well-being, maternal and child health and nutrition, and family planning and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues, as well as the importance of quality time spent between fathers and their children, especially for positive role-modeling for boys.

1994 – The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) calls for “the equal participation of women and men in all areas of family and household responsibilities, including family planning, child-rearing, and housework.”

1995 – The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action stresses the importance of addressing the gender imbalance in paid and unpaid care work.

2011 – The Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence was agreed to by the member states of the Council of Europe. It states that men and boys should actively contribute to eliminating all forms of violence covered by the convention’s scope. Furthermore, Chapter III, Article 12 states that all parties should “take the necessary measures to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behavior of women and men to eradicate...all practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or stereotyped roles for women and men.”

2015 – The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework recognizes engaging men and boys as a key strategy to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. For UNFPA, transforming gender norms and changing gender-discriminatory practices is important for achieving the following SDG targets:

- Eliminate all forms of discrimination, violence, and harmful practices against all women and girls (targets 5.1; 5.2; 5.3).
- Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture’s contribution to sustainable development (target 4.7).

- Ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (target 5.6); and ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes (target 3.7).
- Promote shared responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work (target 5.4).
- Support women’s equal rights to economic resources, such as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources (target 5.a).
- Ensure women’s political participation and leadership (target 5.5).
- Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation to promote gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels (target 5.c).

This Situational Analysis aims to understand men’s engagement in the Central Asia region within a broader structure of power and privilege. Researchers studying masculinities (‘what it means to be a man’) have explored how patriarchal societies perpetuate a strict division of roles, responsibilities, and norms between men and women and revere a specific aggressive type of masculinity. This ‘aggressive’ or ‘hegemonic’ version of manhood expresses power and control through the act of violence.⁵ Indeed, multiple studies confirm that men’s violence against women is most common in places where gender attitudes and perceptions of household roles, family, and marriage are most rigid and where women are most disadvantaged regarding access to the property and other productive assets.^{6,7} In addition, **structural and intersectional issues that multiply a man’s experiences of oppression, such as poverty, racism, conflict, and discrimination**, may also push men to over-emphasize the violent aspects of their masculine identity to compensate for what they cannot achieve.⁸ These complex factors, together with men’s own childhood experiences of violence and neglect, paint a reliable picture of where the risk factors for violence against women and girls are greatest.

There are real costs to women and girls when boys and men are not engaged meaningfully in gender equality. Multiple studies have confirmed how women and girls face an increased risk of kidnapping, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, sexual harassment in the workplace, intimate partner and gender-based violence, and shoulder the main burden of house and caregiving work. These inequalities are, in part, directly related to gender-inequitable norms and are perpetuated through discriminatory (or absent) laws, policies, and institutions. Boys and men play a crucial role in ending violence because they are gatekeepers, leaders, and individuals with their hands on the levers of power.

At the same time, gender inequality molds and restricts men’s own lives. Sometimes referred to as the “patriarchal paradox,” the ways in which patriarchal societies have shaped men’s access to social and individual power are *also* the source of their social isolation, a multitude of health risks, and even early

⁵ Connell, R. W., and James W. Messerschmidt. (2005). “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept.” *Gender & Society* 19 (6): 829–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>.

⁶ Heise, L. L. and A. Kotsadam (2015). “Cross-national and multilevel correlates of partner violence: an analysis of data from population-based surveys.” *The Lancet Global Health* 3(6): e332-e340.

⁷ Levtov, R., G. Barker, M. Contreras-Urbina, B. Heilman, and R. Verma. (2014). “Pathways to Gender-Equitable Men: Findings from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey in Eight Countries.” *Men and Masculinities* 17 (5): 467–501. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14558234>.

⁸ Nash, Shondrah Tarrezz. (2005). “Through Black Eyes: African American Women’s Constructions of Their Experiences with Intimate Male Partner Violence.” *Violence Against Women* (11): 1420–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801205280272>.

death.⁹ In some settings, men have a higher disease burden and lower life expectancy than women, often due to prevalent masculine norms that glamorize violence, alcohol abuse, gun ownership, and tobacco consumption.¹⁰ As boys grow up, they are socialized to ascribe to such rigid expectations of manhood. Thus, it is essential to challenge gender inequitable norms because of how they impact the lives of men and boys.

To end men’s violence against women and also improve their own well-being, **men’s power over women’s agency and physical bodies need to be challenged.** As stated by prominent researchers, “deeply entrenched gender norms are not monolithic; they bend and transform under social pressure, macro-level forces, and the daily choices of individuals who endeavor to act (and interact) on their own beliefs and preferences, regardless of prevalent norms.”¹¹ Such approaches to challenge unequal power dynamics are called ‘gender transformative.’ Gender-transformative approaches seek to challenge gender inequality by transforming harmful gender norms, roles, and relations through programmatic inclusion of strategies to foster progressive changes in power relationships between women and men.¹² Some of the specific masculine norms that should be challenged in gender-transformative programmes are described in Box 2. This Situational Analysis will present examples of best practices for engaging men and boys from the Central Asian region.

⁹ Kaufman, M. (1999). “The Seven P’s of Men’s Violence”. www.michaelkaufman.com. (Accessed 22 Feb 2022).

¹⁰ Hawkes, S. and Buse, K. (2013). “Gender and Global Health: evidence, policy, and inconvenient truths.” *The Lancet*, 381: 1783–87.

¹¹ Heise, L., Greene, M.E., Opper, N., Stavropoulou, M., et al. (2019) Gender inequality and restrictive gender norms: framing the challenges to health, *The Lancet*, 393, 2440– 54.

¹² World Health Organization. Gender mainstreaming for health managers: a practical approach [Internet]. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2011. http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789241501064_eng.pdf?ua=1.

BOX 2. THE 5 MASCULINE NORMS THAT INFLUENCE MEN'S USE OF VIOLENCE

The following masculine norms intersect and interact with the global and local political economy; with the historical marginalization of certain racial, ethnic, and sexual identity groups; with other forces of social oppression and disadvantage; and with one's degree of access to supportive government poverty-alleviation and welfare policies – among many other factors, with important variations depending on the form of violence.

1. **Achieving socially recognized manhood:** Often at the core of masculine gendering is the demand that male-identifying persons must achieve and continually re-achieve their manhood.
2. **Policing masculine performance:** The process of withholding the social status of “being a man” is held in place by the continual policing of men's and boys' performance of gender.
3. **“Gendering” the heart:** Around the world, men are typically encouraged to refrain from showing emotional vulnerability and monitored to show only a limited range of emotions.
4. **Dividing spaces and cultures by gender:** Ideas about manhood and womanhood are also created and reinforced by dividing spaces into those considered “male” or “female.” Social spaces (and even “microcultures”) associated with men often become places where violence is rehearsed and reinforced.
5. **Reinforcing patriarchal power:** Violence is ultimately about processes that serve to reinforce power structures that advantage all men over all women, as well as particular men over other men.

Source: Brian Heilman with Gary Barker (2018). Masculine Norms and Violence: Making the Connections. Washington, DC: Promundo-US.

3. METHODOLOGY

This Situational Analysis aims to answer three main questions:

1. What are the key laws and policies in the 5 Spotlight countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) that provide ‘windows of opportunity’ for UNFPA CO's and local organizations to conduct institutional advocacy for men's engagement in gender equality?
2. What are the prevalent attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors related to men and gender equality in the five focus countries, and how do they compare with other countries in the EECA region?
3. What are examples of best and promising practices in Eastern Europe and Central Asia Region for effectively engaging men and boys in gender equality?

To best answer these questions, national experts conducted research on laws, policies, and action plans related to men's engagement and reported findings in a pre-prepared questionnaire. National experts

also interviewed key stakeholders, such as UN staff, to validate their findings. The lead expert conducted a review of white and gray literature (e.g., academic articles, impact assessments, survey research, toolkits, etc.) on gender relations and best practices from around the globe as well as in the five Central Asian countries and conducted additional interviews with gender experts to better understand current practices to promote men’s engagement in the five countries. UNFPA and national experts also reviewed several drafts of this Situational Analysis and provided comments on how to strengthen the content.

4. LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to this Situational Analysis:

1. This is not meant to be an exhaustive review of all policies and practices but rather a targeted literature review to identify areas of opportunity to promote men’s engagement in gender equality and prevention of violence against women and girls.
2. Though this report compares five Central Asian countries, particularly regarding gender-related attitudes and practices, each country has its own rich history, traditions, and cultural contexts that help explain the variation in research findings.
3. This Situational Analysis relies partly on the collection of secondary data such as published reports and studies. Each study utilized a unique methodology for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data. For example, while some studies may be nationally representative, others were “rapid analysis,” meaning that the data collected was meant to provide a snapshot of a specific issue. In addition, topics such as gender, sexuality, and violence are sensitive to discussion in any setting, let alone a research one, and may present a challenge for research teams.

Thus the findings presented in this Situational Analysis must be read with an understanding of these limitations. To address potential biases and help verify that the findings were factually and contextually accurate, the report was reviewed by national experts and staff at UNFPA. The lead expert also made sure to flag any issues she wanted specifically fact-checked by national experts. Experts also reviewed the Russian translation of this report to ensure accuracy in the translation of findings and concepts.

5. ENGAGING BOYS AND MEN IN LAWS AND POLICIES

Well-designed and implemented laws, policies, and programmes can both “transform [gender] norms and improve health,” according to recent research.¹³ They do this by establishing a set of norms, expectations, and priorities for the country. This section details findings on existing laws, policies, and action plans from the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan to better understand how men and boys are engaged (or not) and what actions national actors are taking to prevent violence against women and girls. The findings in this section were researched, written, and verified by national experts who responded to a prepared questionnaire on men’s and boys’ engagement. The questionnaire asked specific questions about laws, policies, and action plans on the following topics:

- Violence Against Women and Girls
- Parental, Maternity, and Paternity Leave
- Harmful Traditional Practices

¹³ Heymann, J. et al (2019) Improving health with programmatic, legal, and policy approaches to reduce gender inequality and change restrictive gender norms. *The Lancet*, 40-52.

The questionnaire was influenced by the *Scorecard on Gender-Based Violence Policies in Conflict & Post-Conflict Settings in Africa* developed by Sonke Gender Justice in collaboration with UN agencies and the MenEngage Alliance.¹⁴

Key Findings from National Experts

- Except for the Republic of Uzbekistan, all current laws in four countries are gender-neutral and do not specifically define violence against women and girls. Gender-neutral language can undermine or hide the gendered and structural dimensions of violence (i.e., most people who commit violent acts against women and girls are men).
- The Uzbekistan law clearly defines what constitutes VAWG and articulates the gendered discrimination, oppression, and restrictions women face. However, domestic violence is not criminalized, and the country has no reliable statistics on VAWG.
- National strategic plans, action plans, and other policy documents in all countries, except Tajikistan, outline specific strategies to address and challenge harmful gender stereotypes, increase accountability, services, and support for women who experience violence, empower women economically and in political decision-making, and, in some settings, outline the need to provide gender equality education schools. These strategies are specific and even aspirational.
- However, men and boys are rarely addressed specifically in strategic and action plans either as allies and individuals capable of challenging harmful gender norms, as individuals who require rehabilitation, or in other capacities. Fatherhood is one of the few areas where men are explicitly referenced. For example, they are identified as individuals who can support a healthy pregnancy and birth or early childhood development.
- Regarding harmful practices, most countries' laws and policies provide clear definitions and punishments for kidnapping and abduction for marriage, establishing a legal age for marriage, and (sexual) exploitation and trafficking. But none of these documents outline the opportunities nor obligations to engage men and boys in preventing these practices.
- Despite the lack of explicit reference to the ways men and boys can be engaged to prevent VAWG, there are opportunities to be more specific in existing as well as future plans and commitments.
- Promisingly, despite the lack of language on the engagement of men and boys at the national level, most countries in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) have already launched campaigns and other types of projects to raise awareness on fatherhood involvement, healthy boyhood, and have worked with decision-makers and influencers such as male religious leaders. These activities will be further detailed in later sections of this Situational Analysis.

The following sub-sections detail by country, the findings, gaps, and opportunities for engaging men and boys. Refer to **Annex 1** for a by-country list of all laws and policies reviewed that informed this section of the Situational Analysis.

KAZAKHSTAN

Violence Against Women and Girls:

The current language in the *Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence* does not reference gender – men, women, or persons of diverse gender identities. Instead, gender-neutral language is used in defining

¹⁴ Downloadable here:

<https://genderjustice.org.za/publication/scorecard-on-gender-based-violence-policies-in-conflict-post-conflict-settings-in-africa/>

physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence and the protections available for those who have suffered violence. For example, sexual violence is defined as “a deliberate unlawful act that infringes on the sexual inviolability or sexual freedom of a person, as well as acts of a sexual nature in relation to minors.”¹⁵ This is also the case concerning the perpetration of violence. For example, the *Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence* prohibits contact between the aggressor and the injured party, providing survivors with the right to receive a place in a shelter and other special services. Despite growing cases of domestic violence against women,¹⁶ there is a lack of specific language that refers to men’s roles in both the perpetration and prevention of VAWG and its gendered, unequal dimensions.

The *Concept of Family and Gender Policy Until 2030* was adopted in 2016 to ensure “equality of rights, benefits, duties, and opportunities for men and women in all spheres of social life and the elimination of all forms and cases of discrimination on the basis of sex.” With regard to violence prevention, the *Concept of Family and Gender Policy for 2030* is more gender-specific in its language. The Policy aims to achieve parity with regard to rights, benefits, duties, and opportunities for men and women in all spheres of society and to overcome all forms and manifestations of gender discrimination with zero tolerance for domestic violence. It is also progressive in calling for the “eradication of gender stereotypes in society.” It specifically outlines the role that public organizations, such as the *Council of Fathers*, and individuals, such as mothers and *aksakals* (elders), play in promoting violence prevention messages and ending child marriage. Chapter 4 of the policy emphasizes how men’s roles as fathers must be strengthened in raising children. It also states that new measures will be implemented to, among other actions, strengthen men’s participation in childbirth. However, details are lacking on *how* these actions will take place, *who* will carry them out, or how they will be tracked and measured to engage men with the scope of this policy meaningfully. It is also clear that the language of the policy strikes a delicate balance between being aspirational for a gender-equitable future while at the same time grounding the policy in ways that do not alienate certain groups. For example, the policy highlights the importance of preserving ethnocultural traditions (Concept 2.2) while also acknowledging how gender inequitable roles in families must be changed to eliminate women’s “double burden” of earning an income and carrying out most of the household work.

There are currently no rehabilitation programmes available for men to prevent future acts of men’s violence against women. Rather, in the *Policy for 2030*, rehabilitation is offered for victims of violence in terms of “legal, psychological, rehabilitation, and medical assistance” (Concept, Chapter on Violence Prevention). According to Zulfiya Baisakova, Director of the Crisis Centers Union, there are real consequences for the lack of such services:

*“We are trying to put everyone in jail for 15 days. This is wrong. We are not trying to work with aggressors. We do not have certain programmes or centers that would work with those who perpetrate violence. Therefore, a woman understands that he will serve 15 days, and nothing will change.”*¹⁷

According to UNFPA, the *Concept of Family and Gender Policy for 2030* is currently being updated via an internal working group and will include more specific references to men’s roles in the family and “mechanisms for (how) change (happens).”¹⁸

Men and Fatherhood

¹⁵ National Expert Questionnaire for Kazakhstan provided on March 29, 2022.

¹⁶ https://gender.stat.gov.kz/page/frontend/detail?id=85&slug=-70&cat_id=4&lang=ru

¹⁷ <https://informburo.kz/stati/v-kazahstane-dekriminalizovali-bytovie-nasilie-kak-teper-budut-nakazyvat-muzhey-tiranov.html>

¹⁸ UNFPA response to the National Expert Questionnaire for Kazakhstan provided on March 29, 2022.

Though the Republic of Kazakhstan offers paid maternity leave for women of up to 126 days, there is no specific provision for unpaid paternity leave. However, the *Law On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women*, Article 11 states that there must be an equal division of responsibility between men and women in raising children and that marriage and family relationships must be strengthened. In contrast, the *Policy for 2030* similarly states that the institution of the family must be strengthened based on equal partnership of women and men. Given this, there may be opportunities to offer father-specific leave and promote the sharing of the caregiving burden early on.

Harmful Practices

Though there is a specific language concerning establishing a legal age for marriage – 18 years old for men and women – with some specific exceptions such as pregnancy or birth of a child (Law on Marriage and Family, Article 10) – there is no reference to the role men and boys play in both the perpetuation of this practice nor how they can prevent it.

With regard to human trafficking, Article 128 of the Criminal Code "Human Trafficking" states that the "purchase and sale or making other transactions in respect of a person, as well as their exploitation or recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, receipt, as well as the commission of other acts for the purpose of exploitation, shall be punishable by imprisonment for a term of four to seven years with confiscation of property." Similar to the law to end child or forced marriage, there is no specific reference to men's and boys' roles in ending human (including sex) trafficking and exploitation.

Overall Observations

Kazakhstan has made great efforts to achieve gender equality and empower women in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The *National Commission for Women, Family, and Demographic Policy* was formed in 1995 to provide an institutional framework for ensuring gender equality. Kazakhstan ratified CEDAW in 1998 and participated in the Beijing Declaration. The country passed gender-sensitive laws guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for men and women in 2009 as well as the prevention of domestic violence in the same year. In addition, the *Concept of Family and Gender Policy for 2030* was approved in 2016 and is currently being updated. However, despite this progress, Kazakhstan still has substantial gender inequalities concerning women's economic participation, sharing of household and caregiving responsibilities, women's experiences of violence, access to resources and opportunities, and women's representation in decision-making. While there is now some general language on engaging men, particularly as fathers, the current discourse within the existing national gender equality strategy still focuses on preserving family traditions leaving room for controversial and/or ambiguous interpretations. There are opportunities within the existing frameworks and action plans to expand the role of men in rehabilitation, as advocates to prevent VAWG and challenge harmful gender norms, and as gender-equitable fathers.

KYRGYZSTAN

Violence Against Women and Girls

The current violence law of the Kyrgyz Republic, *On Protection and Defense Against Domestic Violence*,¹⁹ does not clearly define the concept of "violence against women and girls." However, there are definitions

¹⁹ <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/111570>

of physical, domestic, psychological, and economic violence. Under this law, there are mechanisms for victims' protection, including protective orders against the perpetrator of domestic violence (Chapter 3, Article 23), while Article 35 states the rights of victims of domestic violence. For example, they have the right to receive social and psychological assistance in state and municipal institutions, as well as counseling, crisis centers, and shelters. The law is gender-neutral ("A person who committed violence"), and men are not identified as a separate category of aggressors. While rehabilitation programmes are available, they are optional and not available in all regions. Within these legal instruments, there is no recognition that men who have experienced violence are likelier to use violence against their partners and children. Within the framework of the Spotlight Initiative, pilot rehabilitation groups for men who have used violence are being implemented in two of the country's largest cities - Bishkek and Osh.

With regard to violence prevention, the *National Action Plan for Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic (2018-2020)*,²⁰ which was approved by presidential decree, defines the main areas of the country's gender policy: the economic empowerment of women, development of the functional education system, eliminating discrimination and increasing access to justice, promoting gender parity in decision-making, and expanding women's political participation and regulatory policy. It specifically includes goals to promote a "culture of intolerance to discrimination and gender-based violence" but is not specific about goals, objectives, or activities that should be carried out to achieve this. A new *National Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2021-2030* and the *National Action Plan for 2021-2023* are currently being developed and will include, among other priorities, the economic empowerment of women, promotion of gender parity in decision-making, elimination of discrimination, and expansion of women's political participation. However, no specific clauses encourage men and boys, especially those in positions of authority, to speak out publicly against gender-based violence or act as advocates for change. At an institutional level, the current gender equality strategy and action plans reference the importance of gender parity but leave it up to elected bodies to decide how this should be done. There is no specific reference as to how local governments, political parties, trade unions, nor other public organizations should work to develop an organizational culture that supports gender equality.

Men and Fatherhood

Although the Kyrgyz Republic offers maternity leave for women of up to 126 days, there is no specific provision for paternity leave. There is parental leave that both parents can share under the Labor Code,²¹ Article 137, "Parental Leave." In the *National Action Plan for Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic (2018-2020)* under Objective: 2.1, there is a language that supports the development of educational parenting programming in pilot communities, including "Disseminating the Experience of the Responsible Fatherhood Program." Objective 2.2 also states that reproductive health education should be in pilot communities to promote "basic knowledge about reproductive health among men in rural areas," another potential entry point to engage men as fathers and young men.

Harmful Practices

The *National Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic by 2020* references cultural and psychological harm or suffering caused as a result of "harmful practices." In this regard, measures have been taken in *The National Action Plan for Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic (2018-2020)*. In recent years, Kyrgyzstan has been improving its legal framework regarding "harmful

²⁰ <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/12728>

²¹ <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/1505>

practices” such as kidnapping girls for forced marriage, forced child marriages, and trafficking due to the publicity of high-profile forced marriage cases. Currently, the law outlines consequences (e.g., fines, imprisonment, “restrictions of liberty”) for coercing persons under the age of 17 into marriage, abduction for marriage, forcing a woman to marry, preventing her from marrying and conducting wedding ceremonies for underage persons. However, these documents do not provide any specific language about the role men and boys play in either the prevention or the perpetration of harmful practices.

Overall Observations

The Kyrgyz Republic ratified major international conventions on women’s rights and gender equality. The country occupies a leading position in the region in developing a national legal framework on women’s rights in compliance with international standards. There is a recognition of equal rights and opportunities between men and women in the Constitution (2007, 2010). There are laws on gender equality, family violence, gender quotas in government, national action plans on gender equality, addressing child marriage, and other harmful practices.

Despite progress in the Kyrgyz Republic to establish a legal and policy framework to advance women’s rights and gender equality, inequalities continue to be pervasive. The Kyrgyz Republic does not include engaging boys and men as part of the state strategy. One reason may be the lack of funds in the state budget because engaging men and boys require additional resources. Since 2014, Kyrgyzstan has been a lower-middle-income country with average annual GDP growth of 3.9 percent. (UNDP, 2021).²² Women’s representation at the decision-making level is also lower than men’s despite best efforts at establishing quotas. Finally, it may be that male decision-makers still hold gender biases relegating gender equality work (e.g., violence, harmful practices, etc.) as “women’s issues.”

More can be done. Opportunities are being taken within the current strategy and action plans to engage men in fatherhood, for example, and more can be done to work with men and boys in schools, within health institutions, and in communities to challenge harmful, masculine norms and stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequalities, and prevent violence against women and girls.

TAJKISTAN

Violence Against Women and Girls

The current language in the *National Law on Prevention of Violence in the Family* states that “domestic violence is an intentional unlawful act of a physical, mental, sexual or economic nature committed by a family member in relation to another family member, which violates his/her rights and freedom, causes physical pain or damage to health or threatens to cause such harm.” Like other Central Asian countries, the language is neutral and does not highlight the gendered dimensions of domestic violence. Interestingly though the law is neutral, the state institutions created to respond to VAWG are specific to women and girls. They include:

- State Centre for the Support of Girl Victims of Violence (2009)
- Inclusion of the Issue of Violence in the Education Curricula (2007 – 2011)

²² UNDP KYRGYZSTAN GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY, 2018-2022. Bishkek: UNDP KYRGYZSTAN, 2021
https://www.kg.undp.org/content/kyrgyzstan/en/home/library/womens_empowerment/gender-strategy-2018-2022.html

- Coordinating Council for the Prevention of Violence Against Women (2006), which formed a Working Group as well (2006 – 2007)
- Crisis Centres for the Rehabilitation of Women Victims of Violence (1995)
- Committee on Women and the Family (1991)

Article 20 of the National Law on Prevention of Violence states that “educational interviews with perpetrators and victims of domestic violence shall be conducted by the subjects of prevention of domestic violence to identify the causes and conditions that led to the occurrence of domestic violence, explain its social and legal consequences, and restore and strengthen family stability.” However, men’s roles in participating in these rehabilitation-like services are not clearly specified.

With regard to violence prevention, the *Program for the Prevention of Domestic Violence for 2014-2023* and its Action Plan more focused on information activities to prevent domestic violence, “preservation of the family,” but involve few activities that challenge harmful gender norms and do not include any reference to engaging men and boys in terms of concept nor concrete goals.

Men and Fatherhood

Tajikistan offers 140 days of paid maternity leave for women under Labor Code, Art. 223. There are also no shared parental or paternity leave benefits for men who become fathers. The Family Code has general points regarding fathers but nothing specific about their roles and contributions as fathers to raising children and families. However, UNFPA and the Committee of Women and Family Affairs developed a “Guidance on Fair and Rational Distribution of Household Responsibilities” as an internal awareness-raising tool to address household-related inequities. This tool consists of seven modules, and module 6 (6.3) includes “increasing the roles of fathers in raising children” and highlights how fathers’ presence positively impacts their household and children’s development.

Harmful Practices

There are several legal instruments providing accountability for perpetuating harmful practices. They include the Family and Criminal Codes, the National Law on the Prevention of Violence in the Family, and the Interdepartmental Commission for Suppression of Human Trafficking. There is no mention of engaging men and boys in addressing harmful practices in any of these legal instruments.

Overall Observations

Tajikistan has made some strides toward achieving gender equality. It ratified The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, and later, on December 3rd, 1999, the Presidential Decree “On Increasing the Role of Women in the Society” was announced. Further, on September 10th, 1998, by the decree of the country’s government, the National Action Plan “On strengthening the role and status of women in the period of 1998-2005” was approved. A few years later, the new law “On State guarantees of equal rights for men and women and equal opportunities for their realization” was adopted in 2005. Last but not least, the law “On prevention of domestic violence” was adopted in 2013. However, there are no concrete goals nor even reference to the role that men and boys play in addressing VAWG, fatherhood, and caregiving, nor the prevention of harmful practices. All of the laws and action plans reviewed were general in language and did not include basic references to gender norms. This leaves vast opportunities to efficiently include men’s engagement in developing such policy documents and subsequent actions.

Violence Against Women and Girls

Turkmenistan does not have a specific comprehensive law defining all forms of violence against women, such as domestic violence, marital rape, or sexual violence in and out of marriage,²³ but there is language in the legal code that addresses SGBV, such as the *Law of Turkmenistan "On State guarantees of ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men"* (August 18, 2015), Article 22. The laws addressing violence are gender-neutral and therefore do not recognize the gendered dimensions of violence. However, in 2018, the Parliament of Turkmenistan and UNFPA conducted an analysis of the national legislation for its compliance with international legal instruments in gender equality. It was recommended that the government consider the issue of improving legislation to address GBV. There are currently no rehabilitation programmes for men who have used violence.

With regard to specific plans for violence prevention, the *National Plan of Action for Gender Equality for 2021-2025*, approved by the Presidential Decree, proposes the integration of a gender approach in the process of developing and implementing state policies. The recommendations of the CEDAW Committee (2012) were considered while designing this action plan. One of the strategic pillars in this plan is "Countering Gender-Based Violence Against Women and Girls," which includes specific activities the state should undertake, including improving criminal legislation on VAWG, providing more responsive law enforcement and psychosocial support service, media training, launching campaigns, better data collection, data transparency, and more gender education in schools. Paragraph 12 of the *National Action Plan on Human Rights for 2021-2025* describes the importance of providing legal, socio-economic, and other types of support for families, "protection of motherhood, fatherhood and childhood," and the prevention of domestic violence. However, in both action plans, no specific language is related to the engagement of men and boys. Men are included, but only when women are also mentioned. For example, concerning women's economic empowerment, "the goal is to strengthen equal rights and opportunities for *women and men* in the socio-economic sphere."

Men and Fatherhood

Although Turkmenistan offers 112 days of maternity leave for women, with additional days in the case of complicated labor or birth of multiples under the *Labor Code (2009), Article 96*, and within the *Code of Turkmenistan on Social Protection of the Population (2012), Article 61*, there is no paternity leave for fathers.

Within existing strategies, the *National Strategy for Early Childhood Development (2020-2025)* seeks to "increase the participation of men in childcare and emotional involvement in the upbringing of their children," while the *National Strategy for Safe Motherhood* highlights the role male partners play in providing emotional support to women during pregnancy and childbirth. Most recently, a campaign within the framework of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality called "#ErkeklerHem" (#MenEngage), launched by UNFPA, intending to engage men in promoting gender equality and positive social norms in society towards women and girls and ending violence against women. The campaign also aims to increase fathers' involvement in promoting family values and raising children and adolescents.

²³ Concluding remarks on the fifth periodic report of Turkmenistan <https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/>

Harmful Practices

According to the *Family Code*, the age of marriage is set at 18 (Article 15) for both men and women, and forced marriage and child marriage is considered a crime (*Criminal Code of Turkmenistan* (162, paragraphs 1 and 2). Choosing the gender of the unborn child is allowed only when using assisted reproductive technologies, provided that there are more than two same-sex children in the family (Law TKM "On Public Health Protection" (2015) (Article 18)). The Law of Turkmenistan "On Combating Trafficking in Human Beings" (2016) defines the organizational and legal framework for combating trafficking in human beings, a set of measures to protect victims of trafficking, rehabilitate them, and provide them with assistance, as well as to prosecute traffickers, and regulates public relations in the field of combating trafficking in human beings. However, in neither legal nor strategic plans are men and boys specifically mentioned as to how to address any of these harmful practices.

Overall Observations

While there is no specific language about the engagement of men and boys in the prevention of VAWG, there is clear direction and emphasis on addressing harmful gender norms and stereotypes in society that underpin violence and women's inequality in the media, classrooms, and the general public. Several promising entry points also exist to integrate concrete program approaches and activities. For example, the *National Action Plan for Gender Equality* outlines goals to implement more gender education in schools to prevent violence, and this can be a way to challenge harmful masculinities among young men and boys. The UNFPA Country Office also considers engaging men and boys as a complementary strategy within the current national plan. With regard to harmful practices, there are also opportunities to be more specific in linking the perpetuation and prevention of harmful practices with some of the goals and objectives in the national action plans for gender equality, particularly as it relates to challenging inequitable gender norms.

UZBEKISTAN

Violence Against Women and Girls

At the national level, gender-based violence response in Uzbekistan is regulated by several laws and presidential decrees. The two most important laws that were adopted in September 2019 are:

- The Law "On guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for men and women". Dated September 2, 2019, № LRU-562.
- The Law "On the Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence". Dated September 2, 2019, № LRU-561.

While the first law establishes the promotion of gender equality as a necessary condition for the prevention of gender-based violence, the second law expands the definition of VAWG, including such terms as "physical abuse," "violence," "psychological violence," "physical violence," "sexual violence" and "economic violence" into the legal framework.²⁴ For example, physical abuse is defined as

"The form of violence against women encroaching on their life, health, freedom and other rights and freedoms protected by the law by causing bodily harms of varying severity, is in danger of leaving, non-renderings of the help to a person who is in the life-threatening provision, making of

²⁴The law of the republic of Uzbekistan about protection of women against oppression and violence, of September 2, 2019 No. ZRU-561 <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=118581>

other offenses of violent nature, application or threat of application of other measures of physical impact.”

Women who experience violence are also entitled to support services, access to free legal consultation, and financial support. Interestingly, though the law explicitly defines VAWG, it uses gender-neutral language concerning perpetration, using terms such as “the person oppressing and committing violence” or “persons prone to harassment.” In addition, domestic violence is not criminalized despite existing laws protecting women from violence and oppression, and there are no statistics on this phenomenon. Mainly, the current statistics available are based on protection orders undercounting the severity and prevalence of the issue.

As for rehabilitation measures for individuals who use violence, Article 29 of the law states that these individuals should have access to a “corrective program” as well as psychological and social assistance to prevent a reoccurrence of violence. These services are also described mainly as punishment measures rather than as a place for healing and rehabilitation.

There is a *2030 Strategy for Gender Equality* that includes measures to eliminate harmful gender norms and discriminatory practices, such as:

- Promoting the principle of non-discrimination based on gender in existing and future school textbooks, teaching materials, and other publications.
- Enhancing a culture of health among women and men, strengthening their reproductive health, preventing marriage between close relatives, and strengthening partnerships between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other civil society institutions to prevent direct and indirect gender inequality.
- Creating an environment that is intolerant of the oppression and violence against women and men and strengthening advocacy to eliminate gender stereotypes with the participation of the media.
- Eliminate gender stereotypes in professions and promote equality in career choices.

However, in none of these measures are men and boys specifically included in activities or plans.

Men and Fatherhood

Uzbekistan offers 126 days of maternity leave for women under Labor Code, Art. 233 and 234., but no paternity leave is available for fathers. Parental leave is available for up to 156 weeks and may be used in whole or in parts by the child’s father, grandmother, grandfather, or another primary caregiver under Article 234. Generally, men are only referred to as fathers in the absence of mothers. For example, “(only) fathers raising children without a mother (in the event of her death, deprivation of parental rights, prolonged stay in a medical institution and in other cases of lack of maternal care for children)” are entitled to the same benefits as mothers. Men as fathers or caregivers are not mentioned anywhere in the National Gender Equality Strategy.

Harmful Practices

The *2030 Strategy for Gender Equality* outlines key goals for addressing forced marriage, such as “strengthening the family” and “increasing the responsibility of all family members in family relations, prevention of child marriages, marriages between close relatives, premature births and family divorces.”

It also calls for research into the causes and conditions of child marriage, marriage between close relatives, early childbirth, and divorce.

With regard to trafficking in human beings, the strategy calls for organizational and legal mechanisms for combating human trafficking and forced labor, prevention, detection, and elimination of oppression and violence. It also supports the development of national action plans to fight against human trafficking and forced labor and the employment of individuals affected by trafficking, incarceration, and more.

As for sexual and economic (labor) exploitation, the gender equality strategy includes goals to raise awareness of the rights of migrant workers and provide services to citizens who work abroad, create decent living and working conditions for citizens who work abroad, collecting data and conducting analysis on gender, labor migration, and human trafficking. However, men and boys are included in none of these strategies to combat harmful practices.

Overall Observations

Domestic violence is also not criminalized in Uzbekistan, which is one of the conditions for creating a violence-free society. While the current *2030 Strategy for Gender Equality* includes provisions to challenge harmful stereotypes and address the unequal division of household responsibilities, such as caregiving, it does not provide a set of specific measures for those responsible for the strategy's implementation. Nor does the current strategy explicitly state the role of men and boys. They are absent in laws and policies addressing violence against women and harmful practices. They are not mentioned as a key group for activities that challenge harmful gender norms and discriminatory practices. Nor are they included, like in other national action plans, for example, as caregivers to support maternal and newborn health. In summary, there are no comprehensive programmes at the national level aiming at the engagement of men and boys in gender equality issues through education and awareness raising except for sporadic projects implemented by UNFPA, EU, USAID, and other international organizations with men's engagement activities (e.g., pilot corrective programmes for abusers, training police officers, religious leaders, medical personnel, etc.).

6. GENDER ATTITUDES, BELIEFS, AND PRACTICES ON MEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Despite numerous declarations that gender equality is an important determinant for overall well-being and governments taking action to create more equal opportunities for all, less is known about what men and women *actually* think and practice in their own lives. This section examines the existing gender attitudes, beliefs, and practices related to violence against women, women's rights and leadership, women's autonomy and right to work, household labor and care work distribution, and gender equality overall. Most of the data presented will focus on the five Spotlight countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – but will also include countries in Eastern Europe for comparative purposes.

GENDER EQUALITY RANKINGS

The UNDP's Gender Inequality Index (GII) provides insights into where Central Asian countries rank with one another. Of the five Spotlight countries, Kazakhstan ranks highest primarily due to its low maternal mortality and high levels of women's representation in political leadership (22.1%) and the labor force

(62.7%). For comparison's sake, other countries that used to form part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics are also included in Table 1. Estonia ranks first in this ranking due to a low maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rate, and universal enrollment in some secondary education. In contrast, Kyrgyzstan ranks last mostly due to having the highest maternal mortality ratio, high adolescent birth rates, and low female representation in government and the labor force. In Turkmenistan, though they are not currently on UNDP's Gender Inequality Index ranking due to a lack of sex-disaggregated data on secondary education, sources cite that in 2020, 92.4% of females and 94.08% of males were enrolled in secondary education.²⁵

TABLE 1: 2020 GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX (GII) RANKINGS²⁶

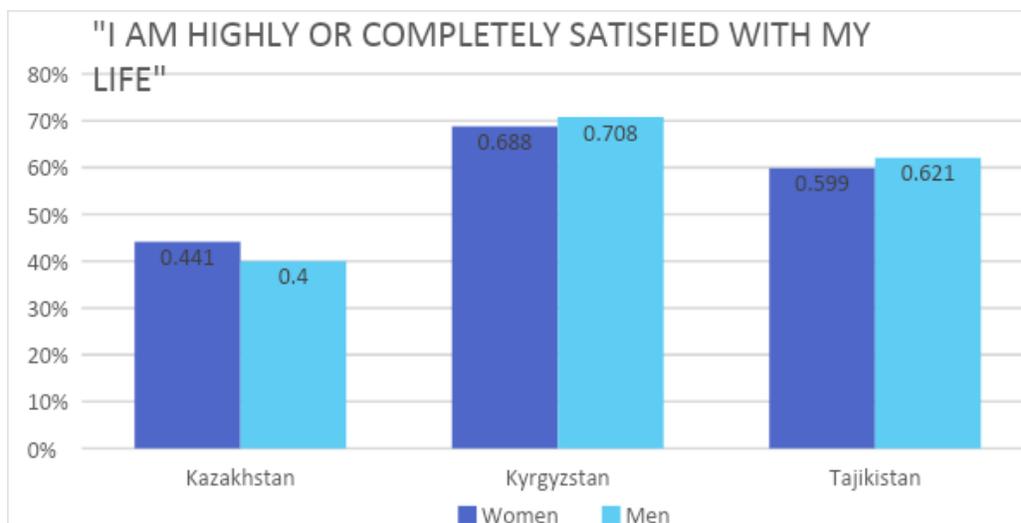
GII Rank	Country	Maternal Mortality Ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births)	Adolescent Birth Rate (births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19)	Share of Seats in Parliament (% held by women)	Population with some secondary education		Labor Force Participation Rate (% ages 15 and older)	
					Female	Male	Female	Male
21	Estonia	9	7.7	29.7	100.0	100.0	57.1	71.0
31	Belarus	2	14.5	34.9	87.2	92.5	57.7	71.8
34	Lithuania	8	10.9	21.3	94.3	97.4	56.5	67.7
41	Latvia	19	16.2	30.0	100.0	100.0	55.7	68.4
44	Kazakhstan	10	29.8	22.1	99.3	99.6	62.7	75.5
46	Republic of Moldova	19	22.4	25.7	96.6	98.1	40.5	46.0
50	Russian Federation	17	20.7	16.5	96.3	95.7	54.8	70.2
52	Ukraine	19	23.7	20.5	94.0	95.2	46.7	63.1
54	Armenia	26	21.5	23.5	97.3	97.2	47.1	65.9
62	Uzbekistan	29	23.8	16.4	99.9	100	52.4	78.1
70	Tajikistan	17	57.1	20.0	93.3	95.7	31.3	52.8
73	Azerbaijan	26	55.8	16.8	93.9	97.5	63.4	69.7
76	Georgia	25	46.4	14.8	97.2	98.6	57.4	80.8
82	Kyrgyzstan	60	32.8	19.2	99.1	98.3	44.8	75.7
--	Turkmenistan	7	24.4	25.0	--	--	51.4	78.3

²⁵ UNESCO <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/tm>. (Accessed 22 Feb 2022).

²⁶ Data downloaded from UNDP's Gender Inequality Index (GII) database (2020)-
<https://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>. (Accessed 22 Feb 2022).

Men's overall life satisfaction can reveal how they perceive their social, political, and economic situations and how they feel about themselves. According to a nationally representative study that included three Spotlight Central Asian countries, men's life satisfaction varies by country, with 40 percent of men in Kazakhstan, 62 percent of men in Tajikistan, and 71 percent of men in Kyrgyzstan saying that they are "highly" or "completely satisfied" with their lives (Graph 1). A gender relations study in Kazakhstan found that 20 percent of men reported experiencing depression 'occasionally' in the past year, and 33 percent experienced stress. This same study found that single fathers, much like single mothers, are more likely to report stress than married men.²⁷ In focus groups with boys and men in Turkmenistan, many were reluctant to admit to having personal problems, to display emotions, or to seek assistance from others. Many of these respondents were also less likely to recognize or acknowledge mental health-related challenges such as depression or even stressful life events.²⁸ These figures may be even higher given mental health's stigmatization and gendered nature, as masculine norms often discourage help-seeking behavior.²⁹

GRAPH 1³⁰



In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, a majority of men worry "very much" or "a great deal" about losing or not finding a job and even more about not being able to give their children a good education (Graph 2). In Tajikistan, almost half of the men worry about both issues. Men's identities and roles as fathers are deeply intertwined with their ability to earn enough income to support their families and can be a source of shame when men cannot meet these societal expectations. While more research would be needed in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, given the significant proportions of men in the three countries that worry about children's education, this could be a promising entry point to begin engaging men as fathers and

²⁷ Alimbekova G.T. et al. "The role of men, their degree of involvement in family life and upbringing of children in Kazakhstan: the results of a comprehensive national sociological study." UNFPA 2021.

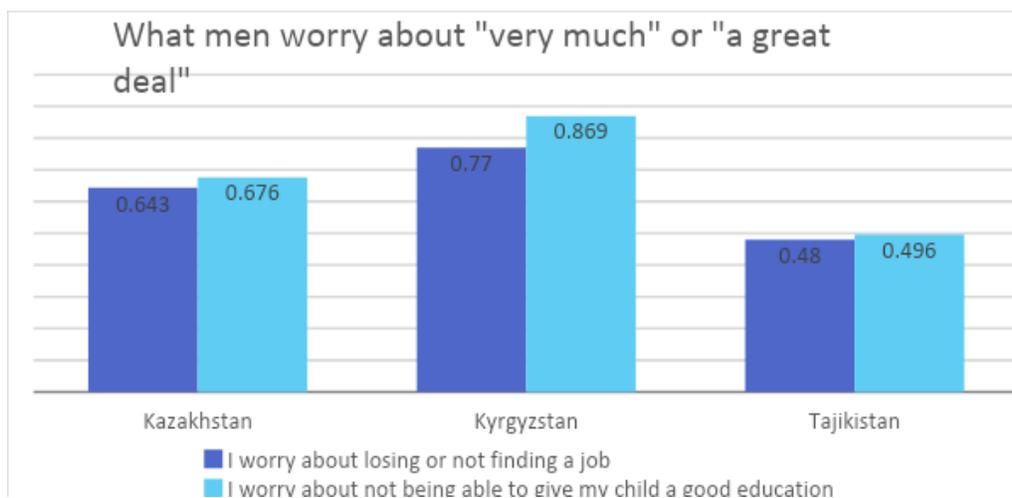
²⁸ "Men, Women And Gender Relations In Turkmenistan: Men's Perceptions And Attitudes." (Ashgabat, *forthcoming*). UNFPA Turkmenistan.

²⁹ Heilman, B., Barker, G., and Harrison, A. (2017). *The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in the US, UK, and Mexico*. Washington, DC and London: Promundo-US and Unilever.

³⁰ Source: *World Values Survey (Wave 7 - 2017-2021) Kazakhstan 2018, Kyrgyzstan 2019, Tajikistan 2020*. Nationally representative sample with participants ages 18 -75 years old.

working to redefine and challenge the restrictive norms that limit men’s identities as “good fathers” to solely providers. Indeed, some countries in Central Asia have already begun embarking on fatherhood-focused program development, as later sections will illustrate.

GRAPH 2³¹



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Though all five Central Asian countries have signed onto CEDAW, a convention that makes governments and other institutions accountable for ending VAWG, this issue continues to be pervasive issues in all settings, with some national studies indicating that Central Asia may have some of the highest rates of violence against women in the world.³²

A World Health Organization global review of available data estimates that 18 percent of women in Central Asia have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives.^{33,34} The rates of ever-partnered women and girls, ages 15-49, who experienced violence by an intimate partner in the past 12 months are as high as 19 percent in Tajikistan, 17 percent in Kyrgyzstan, and 6 percent in Kazakhstan, with rates of lifetime experiences of violence are likely to be even higher. In Tajikistan, a separate study found that 50 percent of married women reported that they had experienced various forms of violence (physical, emotional, sexual, and control).³⁵ Gender

³¹ SOURCE: World Values Survey (Wave 7 - 2017-2021) Kazakhstan 2018, Kyrgyzstan 2019, Tajikistan 2020. Nationally representative sample with participants ages 18 -75 years old.

³² Combating violence against women and girls in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. UNFPA EECA 2015.

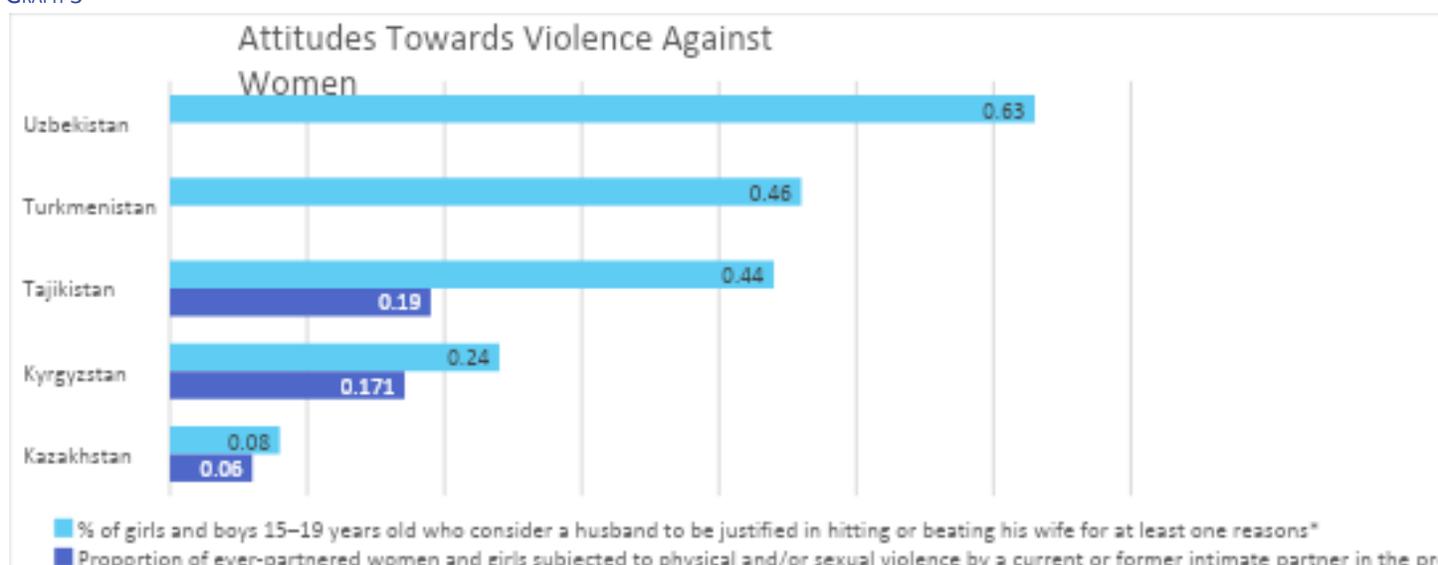
³³ WHO (2018), Global, regional, and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence, World Health Organisation, page 24, Table 4.2.

³⁴ These rates do not include Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as they do not use the “gold standard” for valid prevalence data on violence against women such as the WHO Multi-country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence against Women. For this reason, some researchers believe IPV prevalence would be higher if these countries were included in estimates.

³⁵ Violence against Women in Marriage: a general population study in Khatlon oblast, Tajikistan // Project to reduce violence against Women (PROWAV) in Tajikistan. Report prepared by Dr. R. Haar, International Consultant, Swiss Cooperation Office-Tajikistan. – Dushanbe, 2005. – P.11

inequitable norms play an essential role in perpetuating and normalizing violence. Among the countries where there is data, there seems to be an observable correlation between the acceptability of VAWG among adolescents (“a husband is justified in beating his wife for at least one reason”) and its prevalence (Graph 3). A study in Tajikistan found that the acceptability rates of violence may be higher among older generations – 97 percent of men and 72 percent of women agreed that a woman must tolerate violence to keep her family together.³⁶ The acceptability rates of violence against women are highest in Uzbekistan (63%) and Turkmenistan (46%), where coincidentally, finding reliable statistics on women’s experiences of violence continues to be a challenge. A rapid analysis study on men and gender relations conducted by UNFPA in Turkmenistan states that “there is a real gap in calculating the real numbers because gender-based violence goes unreported by victims [and] relatives.”³⁷ In this same study, when men were asked where they had heard about gender-based violence, 35% of them preferred not to respond, and 17% reported that GBV was “nowhere to be seen,” illustrating how difficult it is to determine the true scope and magnitude of the problem in some settings.

GRAPH 3³⁸



A UNFPA study from Kazakhstan on men and gender relations found that 21% of men and 9% of women agreed that a woman must endure violence to save her family, with the highest levels of agreement

³⁶ “Knowledge, attitudes, and practices of perception of gender roles and gender-based violence in 6 districts in Tajikistan.” (2016) Oxfam GB and Z-Analytics Company.

³⁷ “Men, Women And Gender Relations In Turkmenistan: Men’s Perceptions And Attitudes.” (Ashgabat, *forthcoming*). UNFPA Turkmenistan, page 35.

³⁸ *Source for Prevalence of VAW: UN Women Global Database on VAW which draws from the Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy. 2017. Sample Survey on Violence Against Women in Kazakhstan. Astana, Kazakhstan: Statistics Committee; National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (NSC), Ministry of Health [Kyrgyz Republic], and ICF International, 2013. Kyrgyz Republic Demographic and Health Survey 2012. Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, and Calverton, Maryland, USA: NSC, MOH, and ICF International; Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan, and ICF. 2018. Source for VAW Attitudes: UNICEF global databases, 2021, based on DHS, MICS and other national surveys.*

*Reasons: If his wife burns the food, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children or refuses sexual relations.

among men who identified as “strongly religious” (41%).³⁹ Though religion and spirituality are a source of comfort, cultural belonging, and identity for many, some religious institutions can interpret religious texts and teachings in ways that justify and perpetuate gender inequality. Indeed, there has been a re-emerging conservatism that supports more stereotyped gender norms and roles throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia region.⁴⁰ These norms perpetuate unequal power dynamics that privilege men’s roles and responsibilities, making it more socially acceptable to use violence to establish control.

A study from Kyrgyzstan found that the more often a husband physically abuses his female partner, the more likely he is to abuse his children physically, and the more likely his female partner will physically abuse her children.⁴¹ The high rates of violence against women and the normalization of violent behaviors in the community are also some of the elements fueling the co-occurrence of violence against women and violence against children. Other factors include the prevalence of marital conflict and a perpetrator’s childhood experiences of violence.⁴²

FATHERHOOD AND HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING

Fatherhood is a promising entry point to engage men and boys in gender equality because it offers a way to connect with communities on shared values meaningfully and because research shows how fatherhood involvement can support women’s equality and children’s well-being.⁴³ Numerous UN conventions (Box 1) illustrate how governments also see men’s involvement in the home as critical to challenging gender inequitable norms that can give women more opportunities to live a more fulfilling life outside the home. However, the goals to achieve a more gender-equitable future, as envisioned in these conventions, have still not been fully achieved in the Central Asian region.

There is no country in the Central Asian region where men and women spend an equal amount of time on unpaid care work where data is available. In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, women spend more than twice as much of their day on unpaid work, with the most considerable gender disparity in Uzbekistan (316 minutes for women vs. 129 minutes for men per day) (Graph 4). In a separate study from Kyrgyzstan, compared to men, women spend **three** times as much time doing domestic work and **twice** as much taking care of and bringing up their children.⁴⁴ Other countries in the Eastern European region mirror the trends in Central Asia, with women spending as many as three more hours per day on unpaid care work than men.

³⁹ Alimbekova G.T. et al. “The role of men, their degree of involvement in family life and upbringing of children in Kazakhstan: the results of a comprehensive national sociological study.” UNFPA 2021.

⁴⁰ Combating violence against women and girls in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. UNFPA EECA 2015.

⁴¹ Ilibezova, L., et al. “Gender norms and practices in the questions of maternal health, reproductive health, family planning, fatherhood and domestic violence in Kyrgyzstan”. UNFPA 2013.

⁴² Leah Kenny, Ben Cislighi et al. 2019. Addressing Social Norms at the VAW/VAC Intersection Learning Group on Social Norms and Gender-related Harmful Practices Convened by the Gender, Violence and Health Centre (GVHC) of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM).

⁴³ Barker, G., Garg, A., Heilman, B., van der Gaag, N., & Mehaffey, R. (2021). State of the World’s Fathers: Structural Solutions to Achieve Equality in Care Work. Washington, DC: Promundo-US.

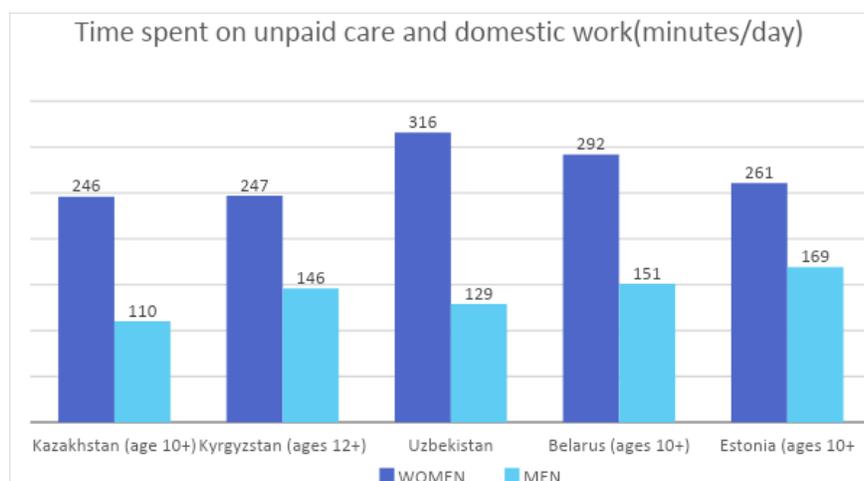
⁴⁴ Ilibezova, L., et al.

DEFINITION OF UNPAID CARE WORK

Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, defines unpaid care work as including “domestic work (meal preparation, cleaning, washing clothes, water, and fuel collection) and direct care of persons (including children, older persons and persons with disabilities, as well as able-bodied adults) carried out in homes and communities” with no financial recompense.

It is important to note that these national-level statistics obscure the gaps between rural areas and capital cities, for example, where the cost of living in a city often necessitates dual incomes (and women doing less domestic work). In contrast, rural areas may rely more on traditional gendered divisions of both income-earning and caregiving roles. However, what is clear is that there is a significant and persistent gender divide in unpaid care work in the region.

GRAPH 4⁴⁵

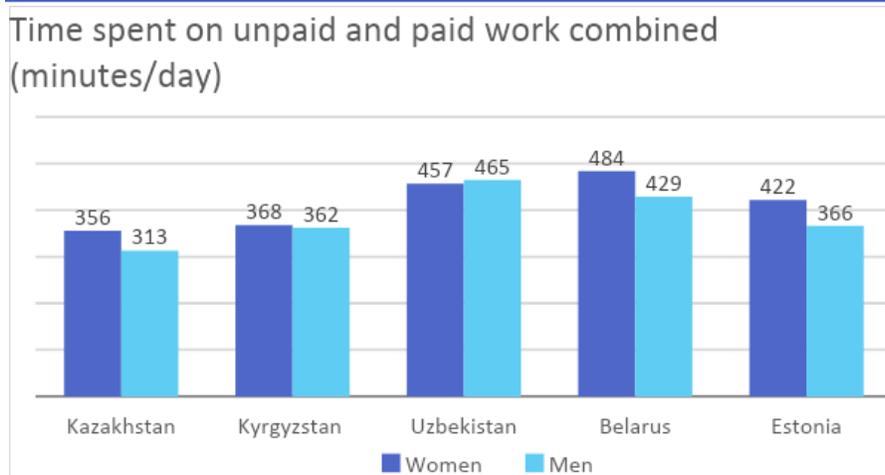


As illustrated in Graph 5, women in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan continue to spend more time working per day than men when paid work is also factored in. This phenomenon is known as the “double burden,” a common and gendered experience where women must earn an income to support the family in addition to shouldering the majority of household and caregiving tasks. In some countries, the double burden may be especially acute for those women who work over 40 hours a week. In Kyrgyzstan, of those men and women who work over 40 hours a week, women were twice as likely as men to work over 61 hours per week. Employed women were also less likely to have time off or, if they had days off, were offered fewer days than employed men.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Source: United Nations Statistics Division Time Use Data Portal (unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/timeuse/index.html). Except for Uzbekistan, all data and metadata are compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division based on country-level data from national statistical offices, supplemented by data from EUROSTAT, OECD, UNECE and UNECLAC. Last updated in August 2018. For Uzbekistan, data is from The State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, Household Survey 2018.

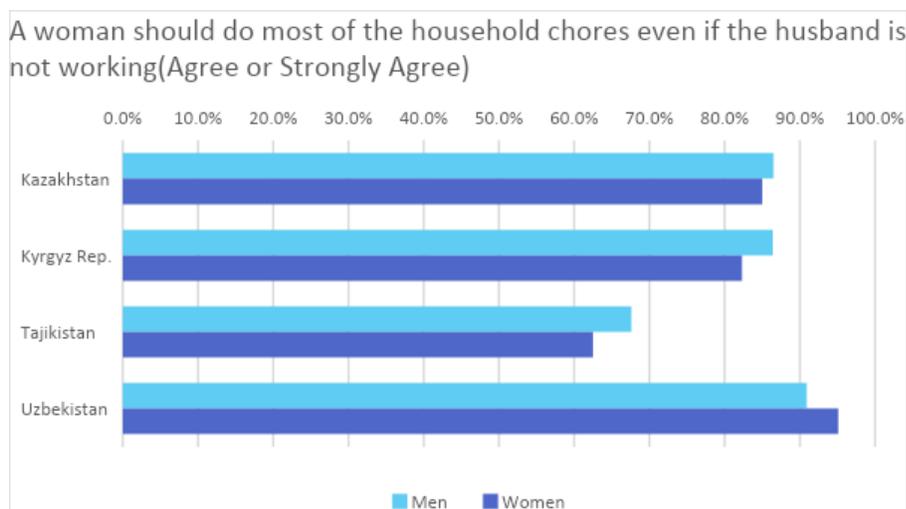
⁴⁶ Ilibezova, L., et al. “Gender norms and practices in the questions of maternal health, reproductive health, family planning, fatherhood and domestic violence in Kyrgyzstan”. UNFPA 2013.

GRAPH 5⁴⁷



However, even in hypothetical situations where men are *not* working, a large majority of both men and women respondents in four Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) “agree” or “strongly agree” that women should still do most of the household chores (Graph 6). According to most women in Kazakhstan, men should never wash the bath and toilet (59%) nor do laundry (52%).⁴⁸

GRAPH 6⁴⁹



⁴⁷ Source: United Nations Statistics Division Time Use Data Portal (unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/timeuse/index.html). Except for Uzbekistan, all data and metadata are compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division based on country-level data from national statistical offices, supplemented by data from EUROSTAT, OECD, UNECE and UNECLAC. Last updated in August 2018. For Uzbekistan, data is from The State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, Household Survey 2018.

⁴⁸ Alimbekova G.T. et al. “The role of men, their degree of involvement in family life and upbringing of children in Kazakhstan: the results of a comprehensive national sociological study.” UNFPA 2021.

⁴⁹ Source: Aktakke, Nazli and Aran, Meltem A. and Munoz Boudet, Ana Maria, *Gender Relations in Europe and Central Asia: Results from the Life in Transition Survey III* (April 12, 2019). World Bank Publications, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3426165> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3426165>

Graph 7 further serves to illustrate how deeply divided men's and women's roles are in four Central Asian countries, with a majority of both men and women agreeing that "it is better for everyone if a man earns money and women take care of the home and children." The high levels of agreement among women illustrate how complicated gender dynamics can be when responsibilities are closely linked with identity and community expectations. In Tajikistan, researchers found that women often reinforce these dynamics, with one woman saying to her husband after he attempted to help with housework: *"It's a woman's work, don't! What would the neighbors say?"*⁵⁰

Although gender studies in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan cite that there is progress among some families to create more gender-equitable homes, there is still a perception that women's roles are to preserve family values and raise children while men are perceived as the head of the family ensuring the financial stability of the family. For example,

"The study has brought forth how roles in Turkmen families seem to be distributed according to a patriarchal order - men being responsible for the socio-economic security of the family, and women for household and children's education." – Gender Relations Study in Turkmenistan

"Parenthood is often identified with motherhood. This is reflected in the presence of many stereotypes and practices relating to the questions of motherhood, fatherhood, raising children, and division of domestic work. The opinion that pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare are purely female responsibilities is prevalent among Kyrgyz families" – Gender Relations Study in Kyrgyzstan

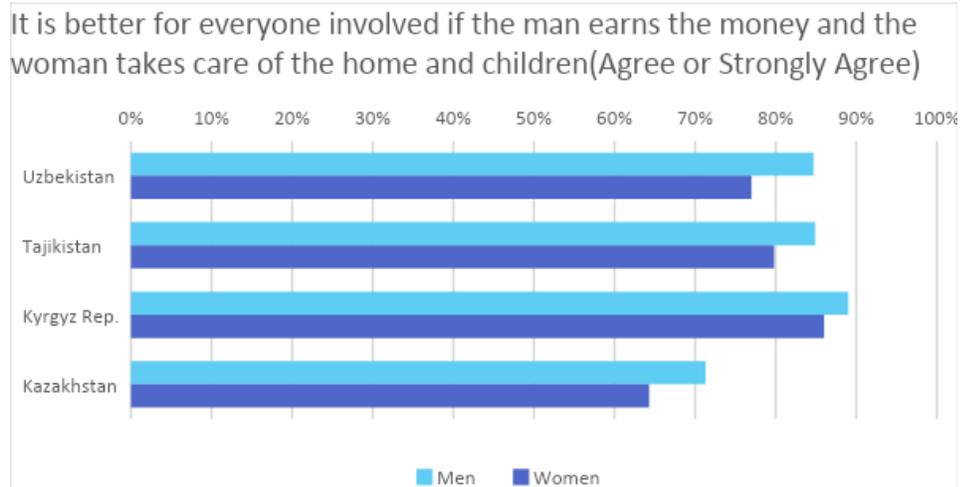
"The results of the study presented in this report showed that in most Kazakh families, women often perform childcare responsibilities. There is a lack of involvement of fathers in the upbringing and care of minor children." – Gender Relations Study in Kazakhstan

Non-transferable paternity leave is now seen as a promising entry point to begin reshaping the division of roles and responsibilities of caregiving. However, there continue to be challenges with regard to offering this entitlement as well as encouraging its uptake when it is indeed available. The UNDP office in Uzbekistan conducted interviews among male staff on the factors that affect their decision to take parental leave.⁵¹ The interviews revealed many of the barriers that prevent men from taking paternity leave even when it is offered:

- Underestimation of the importance of the father figures during the first year of a child's life, i.e., assuming that they would "hardly be useful," as mothers typically take the caregiving lead and are considered more capable of child care.
- Fear of being ridiculed and stigmatized by the other male colleagues who adhere to inequitable gender norms.
- A "workaholic" culture and having difficulty arranging a backstop to fill in during the employee's absence.

⁵⁰ "Knowledge, attitudes, and practices of perception of gender roles and gender-based violence in 6 districts in Tajikistan." (2016) Oxfam GB and Z-Analytics Company, page 13.

⁵¹ "Paternity leave – To take or not to take?" (2014). UNDP. Accessed at: <https://www.uz.undp.org/content/uzbekistan/en/home/ourperspective/ourperspectivearticles/2014/03/06/paternity-leave-to-take-or-not-to-take-.html>.



This does not mean men do not wish to spend more time with their children at home. In Kazakhstan, 67% of men agreed, "I would agree to work less if I could communicate more with my children," and 61% agreed that they "spend too little time with children because of [their] work."⁵³

Limiting women's participation in the paid workplace not only prevents women from reaching their full potential but also cements a pathway for future generations of girls by imposing on them the expectation that they, too, will be expected to fill this singular role. Unpaid care work limits women's and girls' opportunities for education, employment, and participation in political life, reduces their earning power, and keeps them dependent on the men in their families.⁵⁴ Such conditions that limit women's participation in the workforce and access to productive resources are connected with a **higher prevalence of violence against women**.⁵⁵

And the progress toward a future of equality is not guaranteed. In Kyrgyzstan, they see intergenerational changes in caregiving, sometimes going in an even less progressive direction due to rapid economic, political, and social changes. For example, youth in Kyrgyzstan aged 16 to 18 are much less likely to regularly see their father sharing household and caregiving chores with their mother than today's adults did when they were young (Graph 8).⁵⁶ Research shows that men and boys who saw their fathers engage in domestic duties are more likely to be involved in housework.⁵⁷ This "intergenerational transmission of care" can be a powerful disruptor of the inequitable care divide in the home.⁵⁸

⁵² Source: Aktakke, Nazli and Aran, Meltem A. and Munoz Boudet, Ana Maria, Gender Relations in Europe and Central Asia: Results from the Life in Transition Survey III (April 12, 2019). World Bank Publications, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3426165> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3426165>

⁵³ Alimbekova G.T. et al.

⁵⁴ Razavi S. "The Political and Social Economy of Care in a Development Context: Conceptual Issues, Research Questions, and Policy Options. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. 2007.

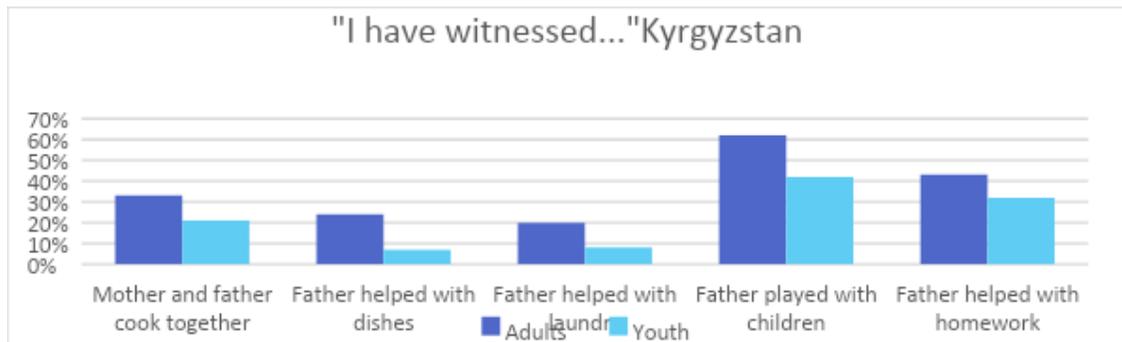
⁵⁵ Heise, L. L. and A. Kotsadam (2015). "Cross-national and multilevel correlates of partner violence: an analysis of data from population-based surveys." *The Lancet Global Health* 3(6): e332-e340.

⁵⁶ Ilibezova, L., et al.

⁵⁷ Barker, G., Contreras, J.M., Heilman, B., Singh, A.K., Verma, R.K., and Nascimento, M. *Evolving Men: Initial Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)*. Washington, D.C.: International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Promundo. January 2011.

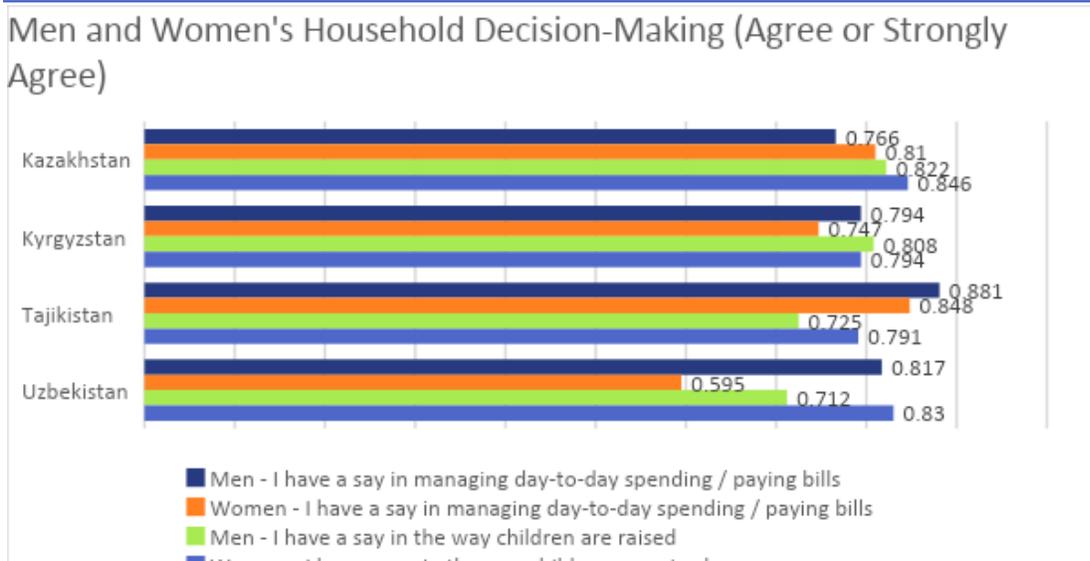
⁵⁸ Levto, R., et al. *State of the World's Fathers: A MenCare Advocacy Publication*. Washington, D.C.: Promundo, Rutgers, Save the Children, Sonke Gender Justice and the MenEngage Alliance, 2015, page 84.

GRAPH 8⁵⁹



With regard to household decision-making, men tend to have more influence over day-to-day spending and paying bills, except for Kazakhstan, while women tend to have more decision-making power when it comes to deciding how children are raised (Graph 9). In Turkmenistan, 27% of respondents agreed that men make most of the decisions in the family.⁶⁰

GRAPH 9⁶¹



There is little data available on the participation of men in maternal and newborn health in Central Asia, but getting fathers involved at this early stage is one of the promising entry points to begin engaging men in gender equality. This is because new fatherhood can be a moment for transformative change

⁵⁹ Ilibezova, L., et al. "Gender norms and practices in the questions of maternal health, reproductive health, family planning, fatherhood and domestic violence". UNFPA, 2013. IMAGES Kyrgyzstan

⁶⁰ "Men, Women And Gender Relations In Turkmenistan: Men's Perceptions And Attitudes." (Ashgabat, *forthcoming*). UNFPA Turkmenistan, page 35.

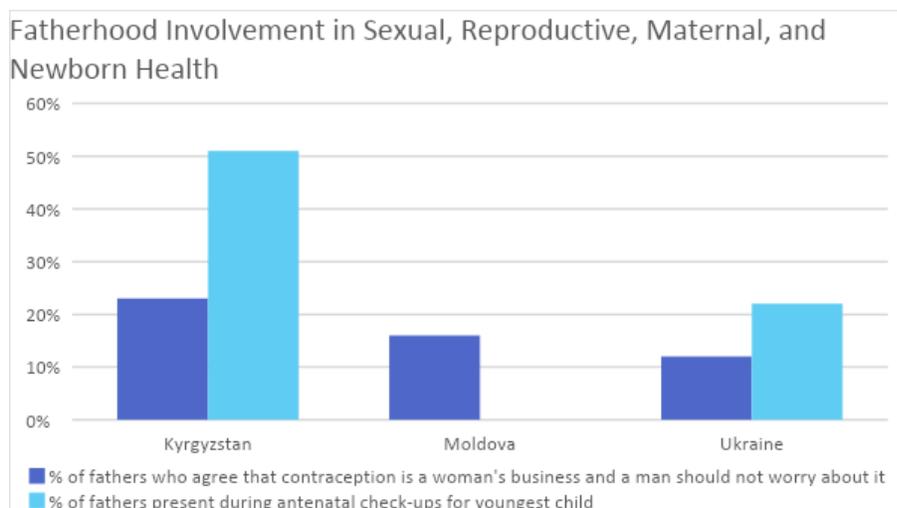
⁶¹ Source: Aktakke, Nazli and Aran, Meltem A. and Munoz Boudet, Ana Maria, Gender Relations in Europe and Central Asia: Results from the Life in Transition Survey III (April 12, 2019). World Bank Publications, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3426165> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3426165>

when men reimagine a better future for their children.⁶² As Graph 10 shows, more than 50% of fathers in Kyrgyzstan have attended prenatal care visits. It is also important that institutions support men's presence in healthcare spaces. A doctor from Bishkek states,

"I think that there are many benefits from the man being present at the birth of his children. It makes the process more difficult for the doctors – the husbands often interfere. But it is very good for the wife. She is calmer and feels safer, so labor is better. Most importantly, however, it makes families stronger."⁶³

According to Kazakhstan experts, there are now more fathers than ever caring for children and fathers who inform the public about the benefits of fatherhood through multiple sources, social networks, and blogs about parenthood.⁶⁴

GRAPH 10⁶⁵



Fathers' involvement with children ages 3-5 is already happening. In Graph 11, men in all five Central Asian countries are already engaged in multiple activities that support early childhood development. Fatherhood involvement in early stimulation and responsive care is defined as:

- o Reading books to a child,
- o Telling stories to a child,
- o Singing songs to a child,
- o Taking the child outside a home,
- o Playing with a child,
- o Spending time with the child naming, counting, or drawing things

⁶² Barker, G., Garg, A., Heilman, B., van der Gaag, N., & Mehaffey, R. (2021). State of the World's Fathers: Structural Solutions to Achieve Equality in Care Work. Washington, DC: Promundo-US.

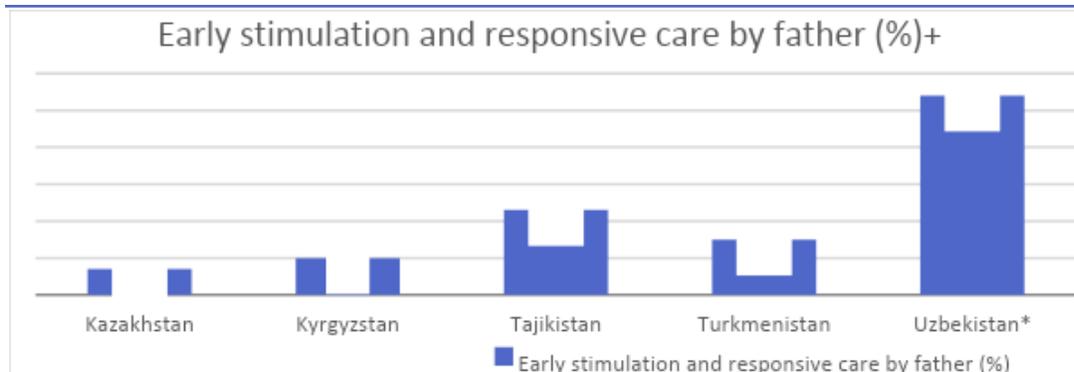
⁶³ Ilibezova, L., et al. page 33.

⁶⁴ Alimbekova G.T. et al., page 96.

⁶⁵ Source: Levto, R., et al. State of the World's Fathers: A MenCare Advocacy Publication. Washington, D.C.: Promundo, Rutgers, Save the Children, Sonke Gender Justice and the MenEngage Alliance, 2015. Authors' analyses of Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS). Data originally retrieved in Spring 2014. (Kyrgyzstan – DHS 2012; Moldova – DHS 2005; Ukraine – DHS 2007).

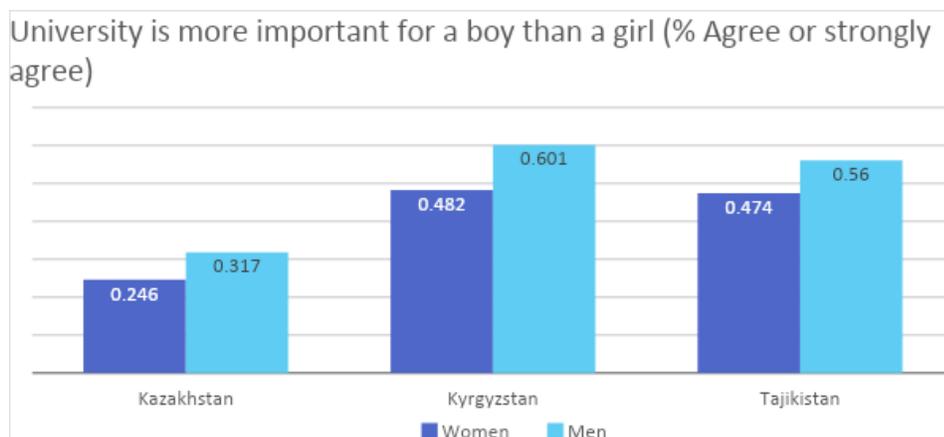
Though the rates of fatherhood involvement appear somewhat low, it is partially because these are men who participated in *four or more* of the above activities in the past three days. There may be men who already do these activities but not as frequently or only participate in select activities.

GRAPH 11⁶⁶



There are gender inequitable beliefs held by men regarding girls’ access to higher education. As many as 60.1 percent of men in Kyrgyzstan and 56 percent in Tajikistan agree that university is more important for a boy than a girl (Graph 12). It is also important to note that a quarter to as many as nearly half of the women also agree with this statement showing how women also internalize and perpetuate gender-inequitable norms.

GRAPH 12⁶⁷



⁶⁶ Source: UNICEF global databases, 2021, based on DHS, MICS and other national surveys.

^{*}Early stimulation and responsive care by father is defined as “Percentage of children 36–59 months old whose father has engaged in four or more of the following activities to promote learning and school readiness in the past 3 days: a) reading books to the child, b) telling stories to the child, c) singing songs to the child, d) taking the child outside the home, e) playing with the child, and f) spending time with the child naming, counting or drawing things.”

^{*}Data from the third and fourth rounds of MICS (MICS3 and MICS4) refer to father’s engagement in **one or more** activities to promote learning and school readiness, while the definition was changed in the fifth round (MICS5) to reflect father’s engagement in **four or more** activities. Therefore, estimates of early stimulation and responsive care by fathers from MICS3 and MICS4 are higher than those based on results beginning with MICS5.

⁶⁷ Source: World Values Survey (Wave 7 - 2017-2021) Kazakhstan 2018, Kyrgyzstan 2019, Tajikistan 2020 <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>

Research shows that involved, gender-equitable fatherhood is not only good for women and their families but also good for men themselves.⁶⁸ In Kazakhstan, it was found that men who take a significant part in the upbringing of their children are satisfied with life and themselves.⁶⁹

“They brought the baby, put him on my chest, and told me to stay with him for two hours. I was so happy. I was holding something so close to my heart. I looked at my son. He was moving and squeaking. He peed on me a couple of times. Although I knew what would happen, everything was so unexpected. I cannot tell you how happy I was.” - **Excerpt from an interview with a 26-year-old man, Bishkek**

7. BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS

Many of the issues presented in this section point to the need for gender-transformative approaches to directly challenge these gender inequitable norms. This next section will look at some of the best practices.

The field of research on ‘what works’ to engage men and boys in gender equality has grown over the past two decades, and this section aims to synthesize some of the evidence globally, as well as present promising practices from Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

GLOBAL EVIDENCE ON ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN GENDER EQUALITY

Globally, most of the evaluation evidence on engaging men and boys is from interventions focused on community mobilization (such as campaigning) and small-group education (such as after-school programmes). *What constitutes success in such programmes?* Most men’s engagement programmes focus on shifting individual and relationship-level attitudes about violence, health-seeking behavior, and gender equality more broadly, as well as encouraging non-violent and more gender-equitable relationship behaviors and dynamics. Overall, comprehensive reviews find that program findings are either mixed or effective when changing attitudes towards violence and that changing behaviors, particularly when it comes to violence perpetration, is particularly challenging.^{70,71} Part of the reason why the evidence is mixed on shifting attitudes and behaviors is because of the wide variation in program design, implementation, and evaluation between interventions. For example, a comprehensive review of one of the most adapted programmes for young men, Program H, by Promundo, found that there were major differences between programmes with regards to:

- Where the programme was implemented (e.g., in schools versus communities)
- Whom it was implemented with (e.g., boys only versus boys and girls, different age groups)
- The length of a single cycle of intervention (e.g., six sessions versus 24)
- The length of a single session (e.g., 45 minutes versus three hours)

⁶⁸ Levto, R., et al. State of the World’s Fathers: A MenCare Advocacy Publication. Washington, D.C.: Promundo, Rutgers, Save the Children, Sonke Gender Justice and the MenEngage Alliance, 2015.

⁶⁹ Alimbekova G.T. et al. “The role of men, their degree of involvement in family life and upbringing of children in Kazakhstan: the results of a comprehensive national sociological study.” UNFPA 2021.

⁷⁰ Ricardo C, Eads M, Barker, G.T. Engaging boys and young men in the prevention of sexual violence: a systematic and global review of evaluated interventions. (2011). Sexual Violence Research Initiative and Promundo. Pretoria, South Africa.

⁷¹ Ruane-McAteer E, Gillespie K, Amin A, et al. (2020). Gender-transformative programming with men and boys to improve sexual and reproductive health and rights: a systematic review of intervention studies. *BMJ Global Health*;5:e002997.

- How the programme was designed (e.g., group education only versus group education plus teacher training plus community campaigns)
- How it was evaluated (i.e., measures and analysis vary).
- The measures used constitute an achievement of expected outcomes. Some programmes were designed with a specific focus on preventing violence against women and girls, while others were also designed to promote SRH or reduce HIV risk, so the significant outcomes of one study may not be appropriate and/or significant for another.⁷²

This diversity in program design and evaluation approaches often complicates the ability of researchers and practitioners to make definitive conclusions about what works.

However, what we do know is as follows: in terms of program design, programmes that had *multiple components*, such as group education plus community mobilization, and were *multi-level* by focusing on community members plus members of institutions were more effective in achieving positive outcomes than single-component and single-level interventions.^{73,74} In addition, the most effective programmes engaged participants for longer than three months and were delivered by trained facilitators, peer educators, or professionals.⁷⁵ The *Prevention Collaborative* summarized ten elements of effective VAWG prevention programmes based on evaluation findings from programmes funded by UKAID’s “What Works” Program. The ten elements include:

1. Rigorously planned, with a robust theory of change, rooted in knowledge of local context.
2. Address multiple drivers of VAW, such as gender inequity, poverty, poor communication, and marital conflict.
3. Especially in highly patriarchal contexts, work with women and men, and where relevant, families.
4. Based on theories of gender and social empowerment that view behavior change as a collective rather than solely an individual process, and foster positive interpersonal relations and gender equity.
5. Age-appropriate design for children with a longer time for learning and an engaging pedagogy such as sport and play.
6. Carefully designed, user-friendly manuals and materials supporting all intervention components to accomplish their goals.
7. Integrate support for survivors of violence.
8. Optimal intensity: duration and frequency of sessions and overall programme length enable time for reflection and experiential learning.
- 9.

⁷² Doyle, K., & Kato-Wallace, J. (2021). *Program H: A review of the evidence: Nearly two decades of engaging young men and boys in gender equality*. Washington, DC: Promundo-US.

⁷³ Ruane-McAteer E, Gillespie K, Amin A, et al.

⁷⁴ World Health Organization (2007). *Engaging men and boys in changing gender-based inequity in health: Evidence from programme interventions*. Geneva.

⁷⁵ Ruane-McAteer E, Gillespie K, Amin A, et al.

5. Use group-based participatory learning methods for adults and children emphasising empowerment, critical reflection, communication, and conflict resolution skills building.
10. Staff and volunteers are selected for their gender-equitable attitudes and non-violence behavior and are thoroughly trained, supervised, and supported.

These program design elements should be carefully considered in designing men's engagement programmes under the Spotlight Initiative.

To date, there is little evidence on how gender-transformative programmes can shift power dynamics at a structural level, meaning that not many evaluated men's engagement programmes focus on shifting policy, changing dynamics within government institutions, or broader community norms.⁷⁶ However, though not evaluated, there are documented examples of men's engagement programmes that successfully pushed for progressive and inclusive policy changes and were able to shift norms within institutions such as school administrations and gender-focused government ministries. Many of these programmes had both funding and existing relationships with institutional counterparts enabling their success.^{77,78}

Finally, there is an ever-present risk of doing harm when engaging men and boys in programmes, such as unintentionally reinforcing harmful gender and power dynamics in homes and communities. For example, fatherhood-focused programming can further strengthen men's control in the home by extending their decision-making power to how children are raised and cared for rather than promoting shared decision-making and open communication. Therefore, there must be guiding principles on how to work with men and boys that focus on challenging unequal power dynamics, accountability to women's rights organizations and domestic violence survivors, and an understanding of the unique challenges and vulnerabilities men face as gendered beings. See Box 3 for ideas on core principles of working with men and boys to prevent violence.

⁷⁶ Ruane-McAteer E, et al.

⁷⁷ Doyle, K., & Kato-Wallace, J.

⁷⁸ Promundo and UNFPA. (2016). Strengthening CSO-Government Partnerships to Scale Up Approaches. Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality and SRHR: A Tool for Action. Washington, D.C.: Promundo-US and New York City, NY: UNFPA.

Box 3. CORE PRINCIPLES TO STRENGTHEN VIOLENCE PREVENTION WORK WITH MEN AND BOYS

BY THE PREVENTION COLLABORATIVE

Promote human rights: Work with men and boys on gender equality and the prevention of male violence must not detract from efforts to empower women. It should be framed within a women's rights agenda and promote the human rights of people of all gender identities.

Remain accountable to and ally with women's rights organizations: This includes promoting women's leadership in activities to engage men, protecting women-only spaces, and monitoring programmes to prevent them from becoming male-dominated.

Promote positive visions of change by and for men: This includes making men aware that they are part of the solution to ending violence, have specific skills needed in work, and can act in the best interests of their families and communities.

Respond to men and boys' own vulnerabilities: The many ways in which patriarchal relations of power can damage the lives of men and boys have been well documented, including their own experiences of male violence.

Be responsive to survivors: Prevention activities often lead to an increase in survivors disclosing their experiences of violence. It is important to ensure that prevention programmes are linked to services for survivors, which can respond to their health, welfare, and legal needs.

Be inclusive of and responsive to diversities among men: Factors such as class and caste, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, literacy, and age shape expressions of manhood and produce differing experiences of power and marginalization for different groups of men. Approaches to engaging men in gender equality work must be sensitive to these diversities among men.

Excerpted from: Greig, Alan (2018) Strengthening Prevention Work with Men and Boys in Community Settings. The Prevention Collaborative.

USING THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

One way to visualize the diversity of approaches focused on engaging men and boys is to use the Socio-Ecological Model adapted to address violence against women and girls.⁷⁹ This model provides a conceptual framework for a comprehensive approach to working with men and advancing gender equality. The model emphasizes that to change individual behavior, programmes need to not only work with individuals but *also* address the systems and groups—peers, families, communities, media, and policies — that influence how people internalize, reproduce and reinforce gender inequitable norms. This multi-component approach is beneficial because it increases the chances that individuals will be impacted by the program's diverse interventions repeated and in different ways. As stated previously,

⁷⁹ Heise, L. Violence Against Women: An Integrated, Ecological Framework. *Violence Against Women*. 1998;4(3):262-290. doi:10.1177/1077801298004003002.

designing programmes in such a way - working on changing individual people and their social context simultaneously – will lead to more sustainable change.

Below is a very brief description of the Ecological Model (Table 2), along with example resources that demonstrate the different levels of action required to shift gender attitudes, practices, and norms meaningfully.

Table 2. The Ecological Model: Action Levels for Effecting Sustained Social Change	
Strengthen <u>individual</u> knowledge and skills	Help men and women understand how current gender and social norms affect their lives, promote changes in attitudes and beliefs about gender equity, increase skills, and change specific targeted behaviours.
Example Resource:	Curriculum-based education: Young Men’s Initiative’s “Program M: M Manual” (https://youngmeninitiative.net/en/)
Create supportive <u>family</u> relations and peer environment	Help improve the quality of intimate relationships, reduce gender-based violence, and create a supportive peer and family environment for gender-equitable relationships.
Example Resources:	Improving the quality of couple relationships: Promundo’s “Program P” curriculum for fathers and couples. (https://promundoglobal.org/programmes/program-p/)
Mobilize <u>communities</u> through a community-centered approach	Create an enabling social environment supportive of gender equity and male involvement by engaging communities through a variety of means, such as joint community planning, media, outreach, mobilization, events, etc.
Example Resource:	Media Campaigns and Events: “The MenCare Georgia Campaign” by UNFPA-Georgia (https://georgia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MenCare%20Brochure.pdf) Community dialogues: “Stepping Stones” in English (http://www.mrc.ac.za/gender/stepping.htm)
Influence policy and legislation reform at the <u>societal</u> level	Develop strategies for reforming and implementing national, regional and district laws and policies that positively transform the social environment
Example Resource:	Advocacy: Many resources related to advocacy and male involvement available on the MenEngage Alliance website: http://www.menengage.org/

PROMISING PRACTICES IN EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

The programmes presented below are not an exhaustive list of all of the men’s engagement programmes in Eastern Europe and Central Asia but rather feature some of the more innovative programming that works at multiple levels of the socio-ecological model. Few of these programmes, except for Caring for Equality in Armenia and the Young Men’s Initiative in the Balkans, have been rigorously evaluated and are adapted from other evidence-based programmes.

Table 3. Best and Promising Practices on Men’s Engagement

Country	Program Description
<p>Armenia</p>	<p>“Caring for Equality”</p> <p>The Caring for Equality Programme by WorldVision aims to contribute to the prevention of prenatal sex selection in Armenian families and communities. Aimed at people ages 18 to 59 years old, many of the programme’s activities, which were conducted with youth and with couples, seek to address the underlying roots of son preference by challenging harmful gender norms, specifically around masculinity; by promoting the inherent equality of girls and boys and the value of girl children; and by thoughtfully engaging men and boys as allies in gender equality. The main part of Caring for Equality is group education sessions conducted once a week over 12 weeks.</p> <p>At the National Level, the program sought to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote policies combatting gender-based violence and prenatal sex selection ● Create an enabling legal and institutional environment for policies that would best serve the needs of vulnerable women, girls, and their families in communities. ● Map and facilitate the cooperation of local and regional formal and informal structures mandated to address women’s, children, and family issues. ● Facilitate the creation of a unified religious vision/strategy on gender equality and prenatal sex selection. <p>Community and Family Level, the program sought to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Transform families by promoting change in gender social norms and engaging them in group education sessions ● Engaging influential individuals such as adolescents, active community groups, and faith leaders in gender equality promotion activities, and fostering an equitable and non-abusive environment in families, schools and community in general. ● Engage community-based social workers, especially in identifying and preventing gender-based violence cases and prenatal sex-selection issues at the household level.

**The Balkans
Region**

“The Young Men’s Initiative (YMI)”

The two main components of the Young Men’s Initiative are group education workshops and social norms campaigns. The group education workshops within YMI were based on a gender-transformative curriculum adapted from Promundo’s Program H. The activities within the classroom sessions are designed to elicit critical reflection on the gender norms that drive violence and other unhealthy behaviors among young men in the region. According to CARE, “The workshops are highly participatory and address health and relationships issues from a gender lens, including sexual and reproductive health, communication and negotiation, drug and alcohol use, anger management, and violence prevention.”

The social norms campaigns are designed to reinforce key messages from the curriculum but at broader social levels: across an entire school, neighborhood, community, and even country. Most often, the campaigns used the moniker and catchphrase “Be a Man” in local vernacular and comprised a wide variety of promotional materials, social media outreach, and strategic actions and events for the school or public. The majority of these events were directly organized and carried out by student members of “Be a Man clubs,” many of which remain active. In later implementations of the project, YMI workshop sessions, retreats, and campaigns were facilitated in each site by local implementing organizations: Centar E8 (Belgrade), Peer Educators Network (Prishtina), the Asocijacija XY (Sarajevo), and Status M (Zagreb).

CARE International. (2018). Young Men Initiative.

https://youngmeninitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YMI_PROGRAM-Brochure-ENG.pdf

Belarus**“A New Look at the Role of the Father”**

This project was launched by the Republican Public Association “Belaya Rus” and the Social and Educational Institution (SPU) “Fatherhood.” This program is an adaptation of a program from Sweden that focuses on implementing the following activities:

- Motivational, educational seminar “Give A Child A Father.” Seminars are held in the format of parent meetings in schools, universities, technical schools, colleges, and other educational institutions.
- Fathers' Support Groups “50 Important Fatherhood Habits of the Father.” Group education sessions to create a safe space to exchange experiences with trained facilitators;
- Holding the annual round table “FATHERHOOD” with the involvement of interested ministries and departments, public organizations, and academia.
- Conducting scientific and practice-based conferences on the topic of fatherhood, with the involvement of both domestic and international experts, including psychologists, sociologists, neurologists, teachers, and others.
- Conducting seminars for adolescent boys on responsible fatherhood in general education schools and other educational institutions;
- Holding a Minsk volleyball tournament “25:23” among courtyard teams with fathers.
- Local communities are informed through the SPU “Fatherhood” and the PA “Belaya Rus” official websites.

Belaya Rus '(2020). A new look at the role of the father. URL:

<https://belarus.by/news/novosti-proektov/novyy-vzglyad-na-rol-otsta/taynyy-i-yavnyy-vred-bezotsovshchiny>

Georgia**MenCare Campaign in Georgia**

Based on the findings from the “Men and Gender Relations” study in Georgia conducted in 2013, UNFPA Georgia and their local partners launched the MenCare Campaign to promote men’s involvement as equitable, nonviolent fathers and caregivers and to encourage men to support gender equality. It is an adaptation of the global MenCare Campaign coordinated by Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice. By engaging men as agents of change in the pursuit of gender equality and family well-being, MenCare Campaign opens opportunities for men to contribute to the well-being of society.

Activities include:

- A day-long module for Men Talking to Men (MTM) interactive meeting/ training sessions. The module includes specific activities to help participants rethink the stereotypes related to masculinity, explain the importance of sharing household responsibilities, and promotes respect and support for reproductive health and the rights of partners/spouses, etc. The overall aim of the MTM meeting/training is to expand the circle of like-minded men and to foster social support for the idea of men’s role and place in advancing gender equality.
- Public book readings in schools led by male government leaders, authors, and celebrities
- Supporting public talks, such as at TedX Youth, about the importance of involved fatherhood
- Public Father’s Day celebrations coordinated by local NGOs that involved musicians and children activities.
- the Georgia Football Federation supports Father’s Football Cup with fathers as coaches and mixed teams that invited girls and boys between the ages of 8 and 12 to participate.
- “Fathers’ Blog,” where famous Georgian fathers blog about spending time with their kids, explaining their involvement in caring for their children, and discussing having fun together. The blog also allows the readers to share stories about their own fathers.
- A photo project called “Fathers of Tbilisi” was inspired by the famous *Humans of New York*. “Fathers of Tbilisi” portrays ordinary men in the streets and parks of Georgia caring about and spending quality time with their children.
- Publication of children’s books such as “Lullabies for Lilly” and “Letters to Our Children.”

Kazakhstan**“The MenEngage Campaign – Active Involvement of Men Into Family Life”**

Launched in 2019, this campaign aims to involve husbands and fathers in family life, sharing household responsibilities, raising children, and caring for them, to strengthen the institution of the family, promote gender equality and end domestic violence. With a broad coalition of partners, including the National Commission for Women, Family, and Demographic Policy under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Information and Social Development, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, NGOs (ROO "Union of Fathers" and others), UN agencies, online bloggers and celebrities.

Successful activities under this campaign included:

- “Guidelines for Men: How to be responsible father and husband”
- A package of materials for conducting training on responsible fatherhood. This includes guidelines for trainers, participant materials, videos, and more.
- Eight workshops for trainers were held, with over 150 people participating. In addition, a group of trained trainers and opinion leaders was formed.
- Several media campaigns to promote the concept of men's involvement were launched, including a campaign during the COVID-19 lockdown, a podcast for men, and engagement in several talk shows about the role of the father in the family.
- In Kazakhstan, the annual Republican Forum of Fathers is a large-scale dialogue platform for members of Parliament; ministries; international organizations, NGOs representing the interests of men, fathers, mothers and children, including fathers who raise children with disabilities; religious organizations, media representatives and media personalities.
- A gender relations study, "The Role of Men, Their Level of Engagement in Family Life and Parenthood in Kazakhstan“ was conducted in 2021. The study covered 17 regions of Kazakhstan with 2,125 respondents.

A desk study of men's engagement materials was conducted as part of the preparation of the “Men's Guide: how to be an engaged father and husband”. Major findings included:

1. The father’s participation in communication with the child before birth and during infancy demonstrates the personal maturity of a man.
2. Men who take a significant part in the upbringing of their children are satisfied with life and themselves. They have higher self-esteem;
3. Scientists even link productivity at work to family life satisfaction;
4. The most important factor in a man’s relationship with a child is the relationship with his father, the adoption of the stereotype of his behavior, masculinity, and behavior in the family;
5. Successful fatherhood is characterized by active participation in the upbringing of children, interest in the child’s success, and frequent communication with him;
6. Fatherhood is the highest level of development of a man’s personality.

Kyrgyzstan

“The Positive Fatherhood Campaign” in Talas and Kemin

Based on the results of a gender research study, UNFPA Kyrgyzstan launched the “Positive Fatherhood” Campaign in collaboration with civil society organizations, the Ministry of Health and local administrations. As part of the campaign:

- Healthcare providers from the Childbirth Preparation Schools within the Centres for Family Medicine were trained on a gender-sensitive approach in working with pregnant women and on male involvement in sessions preparing parents for delivery. An additional session on male involvement in childbirth preparation was added to the schools’ training manual.
- Teachers from vocational schools were sensitized on gender, existing gender stereotypes, how men and boys can be involved in achieving gender equality, prevention of GBV, and the role of vocational schools in educating the younger generation on living gender-equitable lives. As part of this component, boys were taught about their responsibilities to communicate non-violently with peers, both boys, and girls, in their communities.
- Students at vocational schools – boys and girls aged 14 to 16 in two districts – participated in a workshop on gender, gender stereotypes, harmful practices towards girls such as bride kidnapping, violence among peers, and family relationships, focused particularly on fathers. As a result of this workshop, the students agreed to organize peer-group discussions on topics related to violence among peers, bride kidnapping, and domestic violence. A “Boys’ Club” was also created in Kemin Region, aiming at educating a critical group of young boys on positive masculinity and non-violent communications with peers, both boys, and girls, in their communities.
- Local government officials were trained on gender sensitization, GBV, and discussions on existing gender stereotypes that affect family relationships, specifically issues that come up between couples related to family planning and childcare responsibilities.

UNICEF #SuperDads campaign

In 2017, UNICEF launched a new campaign to celebrate fatherhood and highlight the importance of love, play, protection, and good nutrition for the healthy development of young children’s brains. David Beckham, Hugh Jackman, Novak Djokovic, and famous fathers in Kyrgyzstan Mirbek Atabekov, Janar Akaev, Kairat Primberdiev, Ilyaz Abdrazakov, Semetei Sultanov joined the initiative #SuperDads #EarlyMomentsMatter.

The main goal of this campaign was to remind everyone that one does not need to have a superpower to be a “super dad.” You need to play with your child, hug, love, protect and spend more time. The more fathers, mothers, and other family members shower their babies and young children with love, play, good nutrition, and protection, the better their chances are of optimal health, happiness, and learning ability.

The #SuperDad initiative was part of the UNICEF #EarlyMomentsMatter campaign, which aims to increase understanding of how positive experiences in early childhood can determine the future health of children, well-being, the ability to learn, and even how much they will earn when they grow up.

“Foundations for Health and Empowerment (F4HE)”

Launched in 2020, the Mountain Societies Development Support Programme (MSDSP KG) coordinated by Foundations for Health and Empowerment (F4HE) aims to improve the health and wellbeing and enhance the equitable development and empowerment of women, girls, their families, and their communities. This initiative comprises four integrated components:

1. Foundations for Health (F4H)
2. Foundations for Children (F4C)
3. Advancing Gender Equality through Civil Society (AGECS)
4. Advancing Canadian Champions for Development (ACCD)

The MSDSP KG is based on the first three components, and now organizations have two sub-projects under the F4H and AGECS components. Under F4H, MSDSP KG developed health promotion magazines for men ("Ayai-Ata") and for boys ("Oh, Djigit"). Every year, 4,200 copies of two magazines will be produced for men ("Ayai-Ata") and for boys ("Oh, Djigit"). The main topics in the journals will be related to the transformation of gender norms and traditions, especially in the field of SRHR, mental health, early childhood development, and education, as well as other health topics.

The purpose of creating a series of magazines from 2021 to 2024 is to promote the concept of responsible adolescence through role models in the magazine and coverage of topics in which it is important to express healthy masculinity and rejection of stereotypes that harm boys. The essence of responsible adolescence is that responsible, healthy masculinity is an opportunity to be kind and empathetic and find peaceful ways to solve problems, whereas one of the norms of traditional masculinity is aggression, the position that a young man should solve all his problems exclusively in a militant way and be able to stand up for himself physically.

IMAGES Kyrgyzstan

Launched in 2021, this research report "Gender equality and gender relations in the pilot communities of the Spotlight Initiative was prepared based on the results of the study The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), conducted within the framework of the Initiative of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, the UN and the European Union Spotlight Initiative,

implemented in 12 pilot municipalities and villages of Chui, Osh, and Naryn regions of Kyrgyzstan.(United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA).

UNFPA Spotlight initiative “MenCare Campaign”

In 2021, as part of the Spotlight initiative, UNFPA is working on ***Fatherhood Programmes*** to build skills, especially in the areas of nonviolent conflict mitigation, communication and joint decision-making, and the importance of transforming harmful power relations at the household and family level. To ensure other “at risk” men and adolescent boys in discussing and preventing domestic violence, UNFPA has included materials on gender equality, positive masculinity, and zero tolerance for violence against women and girls in vocational and religious schools (madrassas) curricula. To this end, UNFPA, through implementing partners working with communities, also identified positive deviants in the religious community (part of the core group) to work with them to study and attract positive deviants to support work with potentially more stable religious leaders.

The UNFPA implementing partner is the NGO "Kyrgyz Family Planning Alliance" (NGO "KFPA"), which carried out the following activities:

- o A rapid assessment in pilot sites to learn about the current situation on the implementation of gender equality rights and the existing practices and attitudes of men to their role in the family and society. Based on the results of the rapid assessment, a training module for mentors and a flipchart for working with the population have been developed.
- o Training on leadership skills of 45 mentors on responsible fatherhood.
- o The trained group of mentors mobilizes men to enhance their participation in family issues, parenting and child care, family planning, and reproductive health, as well as in decision-making processes at the family and community levels.
- o Mentors have worked in pilot sites with key project groups for three months. The project is expected to reach approximately 7000 people.
- o A round table of partners, including the state, municipal, private, and civil sectors, to ensure conditions for implementing the project at the local community level. As a result of the round table, an Action Plan was developed and adopted in each pilot district to involve men in responsible fatherhood issues.
- o The campaign "Kamkor ata" (Mencare) was carried out, which contributed to the adoption of new positive forms of active involvement of men in fatherhood based on principles of equality.

Moldova**“Fathers’ Clubs”**

Announced in 2020, eight pilot clubs dedicated to supporting men and the equal sharing of household and family responsibilities are to be established in the districts of Straseni and Falesti in Moldova over the next two years under the "EU 4 Gender Equality: Together Against Gender Stereotypes and Gender-Based Violence" programme funded by the European Union and implemented by UN Women and UNFPA.

The Fathers’ Club will be a place where current and future fathers can find support and resources, enabling them to participate actively in child rearing and in activities traditionally regarded as female-dominated. Many clubs will promote ways fathers can engage with their children, including indoor and outdoor games. The clubs’ activities will increase fathers’ sense of self-efficacy to engage with their children meaningfully, inform them of the principal stages of child development, parental rights, and responsibilities, create support communities for fathers, and ways of dealing with stress and family conflict.

<https://moldova.unfpa.org/en/news/premiere-moldova-%E2%80%93-eight-fathers%E2%80%99-clubs-be-established-straseni-and-falesti-assistance-european>

Tajikistan**Martial Arts to End Gender Discrimination**

Organized by UNFPA, respected martial artists joined a network of male advocates dedicated to advancing the rights and equality of women. The network, initiated by the National Taekwondo Federation, is supported by UNFPA, UN Women, and other UN agencies. Activities include “Summer Camps” to train martial artists in gender equality, violence prevention, community organizing, and public speaking.

Equipped with these tools, the martial artists – mostly men – speak out against gender inequality and violence at martial arts lessons, matches, and public gatherings. They also appeal to the public in videos and major media campaigns. The Federation has trained over 500 young athletes and cooperates with five different sports federations.

Engaging Male Muslim religious Leaders in Addressing GBV

UNFPA during its years-long partnership with the Committee on Religious Affairs and Regulation of National Traditions, Celebrations, and Ceremonies (CoRA) has successfully enabled Muslim religious leaders (MRL) to communicate correct information on the issues of HIV, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) to their constituents. Further, the inclusion of SRH-related themes into Friday prayers (which are attended by men only) throughout the country as well as the broadcasting of radio and TV programmes, strengthened the awareness of most conservative groups in Tajikistan as to the prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STI). These partnerships and work with faith-based organizations are key to enhancing efforts to prevent Violence against women and girls (VAWG), early marriages, and other types of harmful practices and promote gender equality. The main achievements include:

- Building the capacity of faculty and students of the Islamic Institute of Tajikistan and male MRLs from various districts based on the adapted UNFPA training module on prevention of SGBV, HIV and STI prevention, family planning, and other SRH issues as well as support and referral for victims of GBV for religious leaders that contains information on how to incorporate tools to end Domestic Violence into religious community work.
- Development and dissemination of handbooks for the MRLs on the prevention of GBV, brochures on Islam and Gender, and Ramadan Calendars with the inclusion of GBV prevention messages for the constituents.
- Broadcasting radio programmes on GBV prevention with the participation of experts from the Islamic Institute, developing and broadcasting video clips on GBV on national TV with more than 2 million people reach, conducting an open competition for the presentation of the best article on the prevention of SGBV among imamkhatibs and imams of mosques and other awareness-raising campaigns.

<p>Turkmenistan</p>	<p>The #ErkeklerHem (#MenEngage) campaign for the 16 Days of Activism</p> <p>The #ErkeklerHem campaign encourages men and boys to promote positive social norms at home and work, embrace equal, respectful, healthy relationships, and support human rights for all. The campaign focuses on three key areas where men can engage in their families, in the community, and workplace:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Fatherhood and caregiving – with the notion that men have the right to participate fully in family life and parenthood; 2) Male involvement in Reproductive health and Rights – men play an essential role in family planning, ensuring maternal and newborn care, and serving as allies in women’s health; and 3) Male involvement to end sexism - men can help prevent negative social norms leading to violence against women in the community and at work. <p>During the 16 Days, UNFPA posted messages on all social media channels, including animated facts, statistics, key messages, and a call to action. They also launched a #MenEngage campaign page complementing the existing regional Eastern Europe & Central Asia MenEngage Platform and aims to provide a set of resources, instruments, evidence, and ideas to support the policy-makers, partners in gender equality, especially men and boys, in championing gender equality in Turkmenistan. On this campaign page, UNFPA will publish information about news, policy, campaigns, research, videos, and interviews for discussion for partnering with men and boys.</p>
<p>Ukraine</p>	<p>"Daddy, Read to Me!"</p> <p>Coordinated by UNFPA in Ukraine and local partner Mystetskyi Arsenal, this program focuses on the importance of equal sharing of family responsibilities, as well as the role of fathers in children’s development. The project focused on launching public book readings, to which famous fathers were invited to read books to children. The event’s purpose was to focus on the importance of equal sharing of family responsibilities and the role of fathers in children’s development. Fathers were also invited to share personal stories of their experiences of fatherhood to show the people of Ukraine that men and women can and should play equally active roles in raising children. In addition, celebrities participated in a special radio program at the radio station "Strana FM" ("Country FM") to talk about fatherhood, and two interviews with famous fathers about their parental experience were published in widely-led magazines "Elle" and "Viva."</p> <p><i>Source: UNFPA and MenEngage Platform (2017). Regional Fact Sheet on the Gender Transformation Programme of the United Nations Population Fund Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia.</i></p> <p>https://menengage.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MenEngage-Newsletter_RUS.compressed.pdf.</p>

8. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an enormous opportunity in the five Central Asian countries to push for greater gender equality by engaging men and boys within the Spotlight Initiative. The stakeholders in the five Central Asian countries – government, UN Institutions, local civil society organizations, researchers, and activists - are in a position to add incredible value to the field of engaging men and boys by designing, testing, evaluating, and documenting what works to prevent violence in their setting. Below are the recommendations for engaging men and boys, informing a regional strategy development for the Spotlight Initiative in Central Asia.

For Research

Close the data gaps on gender dynamics to better advocate for men’s involvement. Though some countries in the Central Asia region have gathered or are in the process of gathering more data on gender relations, there are many places where this is lacking or where the type of data that is being collected makes it difficult to make definitive conclusions (e.g., small sample sizes, lack of qualitative data, etc.). In some countries, there is no reliable data on violence against women and girls, while other countries lack data on gender attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions, particularly around masculinities.

Given the focus on men and fatherhood in many national gender equality strategies and action plans, future research could focus on understanding the current level of men’s involvement in various caregiving activities and better understanding what positive trends are already taking shape and what gaps exist. There could also be more research to understand better how inequitable norms of masculinity also harm men’s own well-being as well as their own relationships. This could include asking questions about mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual risk-taking behavior, and men’s own childhood experiences of violence. Such data would make a stronger link between gender norms, stereotypes, and how men's and boys’ lives are also affected.

In addition, research into violence against women and girls has mainly focused on physical and sexual violence. Still, future **areas should deepen understanding of men’s behavior beyond physical and sexual violence, including emotional and economic violence.**

Conduct evaluations of gender-transformative projects and programmes engaging men and boys to build the evidence base on what works. Though there is a deeper understanding of how to meaningfully engage men and boys in preventing VAWG, there needs to be more research on effective programming in Central Asia. Programmes that adopt evidence-based approaches and do innovation should be well-documented, and results should be shared with the broader violence prevention field.

For Policy Advocacy

As the results from this Situational Analysis show, there are written commitments in the form of laws, policies, action plans, and strategies from nearly all five countries to challenge harmful gender norms that empower women and promote equality. However, more can be done to include specific and tangible strategies to engage men and boys. Shifting the policy environment to be more inclusive requires a broad partnership of organizations and stakeholders with a combination of sensitization and institutional advocacy. This could include:

Ensuring local and national organizations’ sensitivity and deep understanding of their government’s goals and how men’s engagement can help them achieve their priorities in existing national action plans and strategies. This will include demonstrating how men’s engagement in gender equality will add value.

Ensuring advocacy tasks are clear and in line with what governments can realistically achieve. Present evidence from other countries on the benefits of men’s engagement in preventing violence against women and girls and how it also benefits men’s own well-being, and how violence prevention can alleviate pressure on other institutions, such as the criminal justice system, by diversifying approaches to addressing violence outside of purely punitive measures. As the diverse array of fatherhood-focused interventions shows, promoting shared parental leave and encouraging fathers to take a greater role in caregiving can be a non-threatening entry point and promote public-private partnership collaboration.

Doing “gender” without the “g.” In some settings, the work on gender equality has become highly sensitive and politically charged. In this case, organizations may need to reframe how they talk about gender by emphasizing the benefits to families and societal harmony while ensuring that their activities are carried out with gender equality as a key principle.

Working to sensitize policymakers and other institutional actors on the importance of men’s engagement and for those who are most supportive, make their roles visible by highlighting them as “allies” and “advocates.” Support male government representatives to understand gender through their own lived experiences as men. Making it personal can help to mobilize male leaders to become valuable advocates for gender equality.

Connect with the MenEngage Alliance. With a vast network of organizations working towards the goal of promoting men’s engagement in gender equality, organizations should become members of both the global network as well as the EECA and European MenEngage networks. Such connections will open up learning opportunities as well as moments to share how Central Asian countries are developing and adapting new approaches.

Programming for Families and Communities

Programmes in Central Asia should aim at challenging and transforming persistent gender stereotypes about men’s roles in society by implementing gender-transformative programming. Evidence from this Situational Analysis shows that both men’s and women’s attitudes, perceptions, and practices, though changing according to voices from the field, are often inequitable and can prevent the achievement of meaningful gender equality. These attitudes, behaviors, and norms restrict and divide men’s high-value and productive roles and women’s low-value and reproductive roles. Gender-transformative approaches aim to challenge these norms by questioning where they come from and working to reimagine more egalitarian families, communities, and societies.

Take advantage of the growing evidence base on ‘what works’ to end violence against women. As presented in this Situational Analysis, there are now standards as to what constitutes evidence-informed programmes and violence prevention approaches. They should be informed by a strong theory of change and accountable feminist principles, be multi-level and multi-component, culturally relevant, delivered with high quality by trained facilitators, implemented over a period of time longer than three months, and include realistic and achievable outcomes, among other factors. Organizations and institutions should consider these elements as they design their men’s engagement programmes.

Pick a contextually relevant entry point to engage men and boys, and start there. Young men? Fathers? Religious leaders? Like women and girls, men and boys play many societal roles – as partners, fathers, students, activists, religious leaders, and power holders. There are many programmes that engage specific groups of men and boys or are flexible enough that the programmes can be adapted to engage new groups of men and boys. Organizations should reflect on where their existing strengths are in terms of expertise, reach, and influence and start from there.

Make visible the work of men and boys by evaluating programmes and promoting experience exchange between Central Asian countries. There is little evidence – if any – of rigorously evaluated programmes engaging men and boys in Central Asia. This is both a gap and an avenue of great potential for Spotlight countries to test innovative approaches, informed by evidence, in their diverse contexts and share what they learn with other countries in the region.

Below is a list of all the legal instruments and policy documents reviewed by national experts to better understand how governments are (or are not) engaging men and boys.

<i>Violence Against Women and Girls</i>		
Kazakhstan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence 2009 (Last update in 2021) ▪ Code of Administrative Offenses, Article 73-1, 73-2 ▪ Criminal Code, Article 10. Marriage (marital) age ▪ Article 128 of the Criminal Code “Human Trafficking” <p><i>Pending as of 2022:</i> Bill on “On Combating Domestic Violence” 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Concept of Family and Gender Policy Until 2030
Kyrgyzstan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On state guarantees of equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women” (August 4, 2008); ▪ The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On Protection and Defense Against Domestic Violence” (April 27, 2017); ▪ The Appendix 3 (to the Resolution of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic dated August 1, 2019, No. 390) is the Model Intervention Program for violent behavior changes for perpetrators of domestic violence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The National Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic by 2020; ▪ The National Action Plan for Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic (2018-2020); ▪ The National Action Plan for Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic (2018-2020); ▪ The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On Protection and Defense Against Family Violence” (April 27, 2017).

<p>Tajikistan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Law on the Prevention of Violence in the Family (2013) ▪ Criminal Code and Code of Administrative Offenses (2010) ▪ Constitution of the Country (2003) (Art. 18, 35) ▪ State Programme on the Main Areas of Government Policy in Upholding the Equal Rights and Opportunities of Men and Women (2001 – 2010) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Strategy for the Activation of the Role of Women in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2021 – 2030 and Action Plan for 2021-2025 (for the implementation of the strategy) ▪ National Strategy for the Mobilization of the Women in Tajikistan (2011 – 2020) ▪ National Development Strategy till 2030 ▪ National Action Plan for the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 2242. ▪ Poverty Reduction Strategy (2007 – 2009) ▪ Medium-Term Development Program for 2021 – 2025 and Action Plan. ▪ National Plan of Action for Enhancing the Status and Role of Women (1998 – 2005)
<p>Turkmenistan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Law of Turkmenistan "On State guarantees of ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men" (August 18, 2015), article 22 ▪ Code of Turkmenistan " On Administrative Offenses"(2013), Article 334 ▪ Criminal Code of Turkmenistan (May 10, 2010) ▪ The Law of Turkmenistan "On Social Services" (December 18, 2021), Articles 16, 21 ▪ Family Code of Turkmenistan (January 1012, 2021). Articles 3, 93 ▪ Law of Turkmenistan " On Prevention of Offenses "(August 22, 2020) Articles 5, 19 ▪ Law of Turkmenistan "On Employment of the Population" (June 1816, 2021), Article 7 (12)) ▪ Law of Turkmenistan "On Psychological Services" (June 8, 2019), Article 16, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Action Plan for Gender Equality in Turkmenistan for 2015-2020 (NAPGE 2015-2020) ▪ National Plan of Action for Gender Equality in Turkmenistan for 2021-2025 (NAPGE 2021-2025) ▪ National Action Plan on Human Rights in Turkmenistan for 2015-2019 (NAPHR) ▪ National Action Plan on Human Rights in Turkmenistan for 2021-2025 (NAPHR) ▪ National Action Plan for the Implementation of Children's Rights in Turkmenistan for 2018-2022 (NAPICR)

Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Law “On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women.” Dated September 2, 2019, № LRU–562. ▪ The Law “On the Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence,” dated September 2, 2019, № LRU–561. ▪ The Law “On the Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence,” dated September 2, 2019, № LRU–561. ▪ Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Art. 118, 119, 121, 128, 129, 135, 136, 137. 	Currently, there is no separate action plan or Strategy addressing VAWG.
<i>Harmful Practices Against Women and Girls</i>		
	Laws, Policies, and Language on Harmful Practices Reviewed	
Kazakhstan	<p>Early forced marriage: Law on Marriage and Family, Article 10. Marriage (marital) age</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The marriage (marital) age is established for men and women at 18. 2. Registration authorities at the place of state registration of marriage (matrimony) reduce the age of marriage (matrimony) for a period of not more than two years if there are the following good reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pregnancy; ▪ The birth of a shared child. <p>Article 128 of the Criminal Code "Human Trafficking": Purchase and sale or making other transactions in respect of a person, as well as his exploitation or recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, receipt, as well as the commission of other acts for the purpose of exploitation, shall be punishable by imprisonment for a term of four to seven years with confiscation of property.</p>	

<p>Kyrgyzstan</p>	<p>The National Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic by 2020 contains a reference to cultural and psychological harm or suffering caused as a result of “harmful practices”. In this regard, measures have been taken in The National Action Plan for Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic (2018-2020).</p> <p>In recent years, Kyrgyzstan has been improving its legal framework regarding “harmful practices” such as kidnapping girls for forced marriage, forced early marriages and human trafficking. In 2018, after high-profile cases involving the murder of a girl for forced marriage, the Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic (October 28, 2021) was amended and supplemented:</p> <p><u>Chapter 26</u></p> <p>Article 172 Abduction of a Person for the Purpose of Marriage (1. Kidnapping of a person for marriage, - shall be punishable by imprisonment for a term of five to seven years. 2. Kidnapping of a child for entering into de facto marital relations or for marriage, - shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of seven to ten years.)</p> <p>Article 173. Coercion to enter into de facto (actual) marital relations</p> <p>Article 174. Forced marriages</p> <p>Article 175. Violation of the age law at religious practices</p>
<p>Tajikistan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family Code ▪ National Law on the Prevention of Violence in the Family ▪ Criminal Code ▪ Interdepartmental Commission for Suppression of Human Trafficking
<p>Turkmenistan</p>	<p>According to the Family Code, the age of marriage is set at 18 (Article 15) for both men and women. Forced marriage and early marriage are considered crimes (Criminal Code of Turkmenistan (162, paragraphs 1 and 2).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Choosing the gender of the unborn child is allowed only when using assisted reproductive technologies, provided that there are more than two same-sex children in the family (Law TKM "On Public Health Protection" (2015) (Article 18). ▪ Sanctions and liability are established for trafficking in human beings in the Criminal Code Turkmenistan (2010) (Article 129-1), e.g., using a person to be engaged in sex work for the purpose of sexual exploitation (Article 142),

	<p>The Law of Turkmenistan "On Combating Trafficking in Human Beings" (2016) defines the organizational and legal framework for combating trafficking in human beings, a set of measures to protect victims of trafficking, rehabilitate them and provide them with assistance, as well as to prosecute traffickers, and regulates public relations in the field of combating trafficking in human beings.</p> <p>In Chapter II, "Methods of influencing victims of trafficking in human beings and forms of their exploitation," Article 7, "Methods of influencing victims of trafficking in human beings," defines that the exploitation of victims of trafficking in human beings can be carried out using the following methods of influence:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. physical coercion with the use of violence or (and) narcotic and psychotropic drugs, alcohol and strong drugs; 1. economic coercion in the form of debt bondage or other material dependence, including slavery or a situation (condition) similar to slavery; 2. psychological coercion by blackmail, deception, deception or threats of violence; 3. legal dependence in connection with adoption or guardianship. <p>Article 8. The following types of exploitation of victims of trafficking in human beings are indicated:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exploitation of human physiological organs and tissues for transplantation and (or) biomedical research; 2. Exploitation of women for reproductive purposes as surrogate mothers; 3. Exploitation of human labor (forced labor) in the sphere of everyday life, production, agricultural work, as well as in the field of health care. In the sphere of criminal business (in the production of illegal products), other criminal or illegal activities; 4. Sexual exploitation; 5. Exploitation of a person in armed conflicts, military operations, or armed formations. <p>Turkmenistan has a National Plan for Combating Human Trafficking for 2020-2022.</p>
<p>Uzbekistan</p>	<p>In 2019, the Government adopted the National Gender Strategy (NGS), which can be regarded as an action plan to achieve gender equality till 2030. The NGS has provisions that address harmful practices.</p> <p>With regards to forced marriages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strengthening the family, increasing the responsibility of all family members in family relations, prevention of early marriages, marriages between close relatives, premature births, and family divorces.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● analysis of the causes and conditions of early marriage, marriage between close relatives, early childbirth, family divorce, and support for scientific, practical, and fundamental research in this area. <p>With regards to trafficking in human beings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creation of effective Organisational and legal mechanisms for combating human trafficking and forced labor, prevention, detection, and elimination of oppression and violence; ● support the development of national action plans based on strategic goals in the fight against human trafficking and forced labor; ● employment of citizens affected by labor migration, human trafficking and returning from penitentiary institutions, taking into account gender aspects, assistance in their social rehabilitation. <p>With regard to sexual and economic (labor) exploitation: A special fund has been set up under the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations to support individuals working abroad and protect their rights and interests. The National Gender Equality strategy envisions implementing the following measures to address economic (labor) exploitation, especially regarding migrant workers. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supporting the development of national action plans based on strategic goals in the fight against human trafficking and forced labor. ● Employment of citizens affected by labor migration, human trafficking, and returning from penitentiary institutions, taking into account gender aspects and assistance in their social rehabilitation. ● Raising the level of awareness of migrant workers about their rights and organization of services to protect the rights of citizens working abroad. ● Creation of decent living and working conditions for migrant workers and their families abroad, including their social support, through the establishment of interaction between the specially authorized state bodies of national and foreign countries. ● Support for developing interagency statistics on gender labor migration and human trafficking. ● Comprehensive analysis of external and internal migration, its impact on the country's socio-economic development, and improvement of legislation in this area.

<p>Kazakhstan</p>	<p>Yes. 126 days. In case of complicated childbirth or the birth of two or more children, 70 days of leave are given after birth. Legal Basis: Labor Code, Art. 99</p>	<p>No, only unpaid. Legal basis: None</p>	<p>Law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women”, Article 11: To ensure gender equality of the rights and obligations of men and women in marriage and family relations and the upbringing of children is carried out through:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increasing the prestige of the family, strengthening marriage and family relations, promoting the values of marriage and family; 2. Equal division of the responsibility of men and women for the upbringing of children <p>There is also language on strengthening the institution of the family through the formation of family relations based on equal partnership of men and women (The Concept of Family and Gender Policy Until 2030).</p>
<p>Kyrgyzstan</p>	<p>Yes. 126 days. In case of complicated childbirth or the birth of two or more children, an additional 14 additional days are given. Legal Basis: Labor Code, Article 307.</p>	<p>No, but there is parental leave which can be shared by both parents. Legal basis: Labor Code, Article 137 “Parental leave”</p>	<p>In the National Action Plan for Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic (2018-2020), within the framework of Chapter 2, “Development of the functional education system,” there is the Objective: 2.1. “Development of the functional education system in the field of literate parenting in pilot communities.” This objective includes the “Disseminating the Experience of the Responsible Fatherhood Program” event. This event involves men only. In Chapter 2, Objective 2.2. states about the “Creation of a functional education system in the field of reproductive health in the pilot communities.” There is an event, “Creating a system for disseminating basic knowledge about reproductive health among men in rural areas,” where men are considered a special group for training to promote reproductive health issues.</p>

Tajikistan	Yes. 140 days. Legal Basis: Labor Code, Art. 223	No Legal basis: None.	The Family Code has some general language but nothing specific to fathers.
Turkmenistan	Yes. 112 days. Legal basis: Labor Code (2009), article 96. Code of Turkmenistan on Social Protection of the Population (2012) Article 61	No Legal basis: None	<p>In the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development (2020-2025), one of the goals of the strategy is to increase the participation of young men in child care and their emotional involvement in the upbringing of their children. In the National Strategy for Safe Motherhood, there is a reference to male partners who provide constant emotional support to women during pregnancy and childbirth and their presence as partners in childbirth.</p> <p>Within the framework of the National Action Plan (4.4)- There is a reference to a campaign #ErkeklerHem (#MenEngage), launched by UNFPA to engage men in promoting gender equality and positive social norms in society towards women and girls and ending violence against women. The campaign also aims to increase fathers' involvement in promoting family values and raising children and adolescents.</p>

<p>Uzbekistan</p>	<p>Yes. 126 days.</p> <p>Legal Basis: Labor Code, Art. 233 and 234. The Law “On guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for men and women,” dated September 2, 2019, № LRU–562.</p>	<p>No, but there is shared parental leave of up to 156 weeks that the main caregiver, including the father, can take.</p> <p>Legal basis: Labor Code, Article 234</p>	<p>Men are referred to as caregivers only in case of absence of mothers. For example, Article 238 of the Labour Code has provisions regarding benefits for persons raising children without a mother:</p> <p>Guarantees and benefits provided to women in connection with motherhood (limitation of night work and overtime work, involvement in work on weekends, and assignments on business trips, as well as the provision of additional holidays, the establishment of preferential working conditions and other guarantees and benefits established by legislative and other regulatory labor acts), apply to fathers raising children without a mother (in the event of her death, deprivation of parental rights, prolonged stay in a medical institution and other cases of lack of maternal care for children), as well as guardians (custodians) of minors.</p>
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