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**Alternative information on
Kyrgyzstan's implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All
Forms of Discrimination Against Women
in connection with the review of the state report by the UN Committee on the
Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

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Impact of migration on women

By various estimates, migrant workers comprise approximately 12 to 15 percent of Kyrgyzstan's population. Ninety percent of these over 800,000 citizens leave for work in countries of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), with nine out of 10 people choosing Russia. Recent years have seen a trend towards the feminization of migration from Kyrgyzstan: Women make up roughly 45 to 60 percent of the migration flow. Kyrgyz women predominate over female migrants from other Central Asian countries who work in Russia, and they are more likely to travel to work on their own with their female friends or relatives and acquaintances than they are with their husbands or families.¹

This, however, is hardly because women have freedom of choice or want to become migrant workers. Most women prone to migrate note that they lack sufficient authority in the family to make their own decisions: Responsibility for them is assumed by their husbands when they marry and by their parents before they marry. Patriarchal traditions and, often, unquestioning obedience to their elders mean that women's parents and other adult and elderly relatives have a strong influence over them throughout their entire lives. To add to this, daughters are in a more vulnerable position vis-à-vis their parents than sons.² The Kyrgyz believe that daughters are more industrious and forbearing and are readier to sacrifice their own interests for the good of the family. This is why women are seen as the more attractive choice for migration. Many young unmarried women (60 percent of those surveyed by the IOM) leave for migration because of the debts of their parents, who send them to work or permit them to leave to earn money to save the family from poverty. At the same time, in rural areas the departure of women for migration is viewed as "the least loss of hands around the household."³

Nevertheless, for many women migration does open opportunities for emancipation and plays a not insignificant role in their social growth and advancement. In many cases, women working in large cities abroad speak with pride about their experience and earnings: They view work abroad not just as a step towards higher self-esteem and a rung in the career ladder, but also as a way to feed and educate children, provide for elderly relatives, and acquire real estate. Unfortunately, however, not every migration experience ends in success. For women, labor migration means arduous work in difficult conditions that they are forced into by, among other things, the lack of jobs and adequate salaries in Kyrgyzstan.

¹ Report of the International Organization for Migration "The fragile power of migration: the needs and rights of women and girls from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who are affected by migration," 2018, p. 38
https://kazakhstan.iom.int/kazakhstan/sites/kazakhstan/files/documents/22TheFragilePowerOfMigration_FullReport.pdf

² Ibid.

³ "Anna Rocheva: "Migration is woven into the biography of the Kyrgyz woman," *Fergana*, October 2017, <https://www.fergananews.com/articles/9609> [in Russian].

Along with men, women face a number of hardships as both legal and undocumented migrants. These hardships include migration raids⁴ and special mass expulsion operations for minor violations, fraud committed by employers, non-payment or partial payment,⁵ egregious cases of forced labor,⁶ difficulties renting housing, trouble receiving medical care (from one-third to one-quarter of migrant deaths in Russia are from illness⁷), and lack of access to a basic education and preschools for children. But women also experience additional difficulties and risks. Pregnant, multi-child, and single mothers and HIV-positive adolescents and women face multiple discrimination.

Women who leave for migration in EEU countries mainly work in the retail, food, and service sectors or in private households, where they form an “invisible workforce.” The isolation of female migrant workers, which is a problem typical of female migration, coupled with patriarchal stereotypes, increases the risk of gender-based violence, forced labor, and various forms of exploitation. In many cases, women who have gotten jobs through acquaintances or family members cannot even complain about humiliation and violence out of fear that their relatives will not believe them or will make accusations against them. There have even been cases where women who hoped to be hired for promised jobs as nannies or maids on the basis of an advertisement or advice from acquaintances in Kyrgyzstan became victims of human trafficking and were tricked into becoming sex slaves for individuals or even organized brothels.⁸ There have been widespread instances of women becoming the victims of physical violence⁹ or sexual exploitation by male migrant workers, who use these means to force women to pay for their housing or services or for

⁴ Report of FIDH, ADC Memorial, and ILI: “Invisible and exploited in Kazakhstan: the plight of Kyrgyz migrant workers and members of their families,” 2018, p. 12, https://adcmemorial.org/wp-content/uploads/kyrgyz_migrant_workers_in_kazakhstan.pdf

⁵ Ibid, p. 16.

⁶ Ibid, p. 12. Information concerning Russia: ADC Memorial archives.

⁷ “Cargo-200: Causes of death and amounts of compensation,” Information Agency 24, September 2016, https://24.kg/obschestvo/37084_gruz-200_prichinyi_smertnosti_i_summa_kompensatsiy/ [in Russian].

⁸ Report of FIDH, ADC Memorial, and Bir Duino: “Women and children from Kyrgyzstan affected by migration,” September 2016, pp. 33–34, https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rapport_kyrgyzstan_uk-2-web2.pdf

“Women for sale: how Kyrgyz girls end up as sex slaves,” *Knews*, January 2018, <https://knews.kg/2018/01/10/zhenshhiny-na-prodazhu-kak-devushki-iz-kyrgyzstana-popadayut-v-seksualnoe-rabstvo/> [in Russian].

“‘It’s not hard, you’ll learn’: How a 19-year-old woman was forced to work as a prostitute in Dubai,” *Nastoyashchee vremya*, July 2017, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/28612117.html> [in Russian].

⁹ Report of the International Organization for Migration “The fragile power of migration: the needs and rights of women and girls from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who are affected by migration,” 2018, pp. 48–51, https://kazakhstan.iom.int/kazakhstan/sites/kazakhstan/files/documents/22TheFragilePowerOfMigration_FullReport.pdf

other reasons.¹⁰ Female migrants almost never appeal to law enforcement bodies for help because they live in constant fear of their abusers and the state authorities of a foreign country, who frequently accept bribes and threaten deportation.

- Problems with reproductive health

Some women who leave for migration study and acquire new professions, but most are too busy with arduous work and ignore their personal lives and health.¹¹ Female migrants frequently have to deal with problems specific to the health of mothers, newborns, and children,¹² but they rarely seek medical care during the pre- or post-natal periods. The matter of reproductive and child health is particularly important considering the high number of pregnancies and births in migration. Female migrants frequently die during pregnancy or birth because of serious complications from chronic illnesses and lack of access to medical services. For example, in 2017 five of 48 maternal deaths were attributed to migrants.¹³ Even though cases of maternal mortality among internal female migrants slipped from 22.9 percent in 2016 to 11.5 percent in 2018, it is important to consider the jump in maternal mortality among external migrants from 18.2 percent to 33.3 percent respectively.¹⁴

Insufficient attention is devoted to sex education in Kyrgyzstan: It is not customary to speak about this in school, at home, or in society. The continuing reluctance to discuss this topic means that women develop health problems that could be avoided if they knew more about family planning and modern contraception methods. This problem is even more urgent for migrants, who have

¹⁰ “Moscow does not believe in the tears of Kyrgyz women: beatings by the police and at home are typical for female migrants,” *Nastoyashchee vremya*, October 2016, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/28033363.html> [in Russian].

¹¹ “Shakhrezada Adanova: Women are able to endure more than male migrants,” *Radio Azattyk*, November 2018 <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/%D0%BA%D1%8B%D1%80%D0%B3%D1%8B%D0%B7%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD-%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0-%D0%B6%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%89%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%8B-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%82%D1%8B-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE-%D0%B2%D1%8B%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%B5-%D0%BC%D1%83%D0%B6%D1%87%D0%B8%D0%BD-/29583096.html> .

¹² “Labor migration: Where do people go and why?”, Resource Center for the Elderly, January 2019, <http://rce.kg/2018/01/31/trudovaya-migratsiya-kuda-i-zachem-edut/> [in Russian].

¹³ Report of the International Organization for Migration “The fragile power of migration: the needs and rights of women and girls from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who are affected by migration,” 2018, p. 13 https://kazakhstan.iom.int/kazakhstan/sites/kazakhstan/files/documents/22TheFragilePowerOfMigration_FullReport.pdf

¹⁴ Information sheet of the Ministry of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic “On the state of maternal and child health protection services in healthcare organizations of the republic for 2018.” Maternal mortality statistics recorded in Kyrgyzstan.

abortions in illegal clinics to end unwanted pregnancies or, if it is too late to have an abortion, leave their children in maternity hospitals.

Kyrgyz women still view and use abortion as a family planning method. Official statistics do not reflect the actual picture because Kyrgyz healthcare institutions understate the number of abortions.¹⁵ In addition to lack of knowledge, the desire to save money also leads to low demand for contraceptives among female migrants. Female migrants decide to have an abortion more frequently than women living in Kyrgyzstan. Five out of 25 female migrants surveyed in a “Kyrgyz” clinic in Russia admitted to having an abortion. Three of them terminated their pregnancies during migration because of financial challenges and the fear of not being able to care for their children. Two women had abortions upon their return home because of health problems directly connected with their migration experience: Arduous physical and overtime work, stress, and poor nutrition lead to fetal death. The causes underlying decisions to terminate pregnancies emphasize the vulnerability of female migrants and show how migration affects the health of these women.¹⁶

A gynecologist from Kyrgyzstan who works in Russia names work shifts of 12 to 14 hours a day during pregnancy and immediate return to work after birth as two of the main problems of female migrants. This kind of schedule is too hard on the body and has subsequent negative consequences.¹⁷ This is also true for female migrants who travel to Kazakhstan for work.¹⁸

Female Kyrgyz migrants in Russia try to visit so-called “Kyrgyz” clinics, where most of the doctors, who are also Kyrgyz, understand both their language and the specific nature of their situation. Women trust these doctors more and do not have to worry that they will be treated with disdain or that their documents will be checked like they are in regular hospitals. However, the experience of seeking treatment at these medical facilities is not always successful because some of these “underground” offices do not meet the required standards. According to a gynecologist from a Russian clinic, female migrants try to save money by turning to these facilities, which do not guarantee high-quality medical care or bear any liability for the life and health of their patients.¹⁹

¹⁵ “Why migrants from Kyrgyzstan often terminate their pregnancies,” *Kaktus media*, August 2017, https://kaktus.media/doc/361482_pochemy_migrantki_iz_kyrgyzstana_chasto_preryvaut_berem_ennost.html [in Russian].

¹⁶ Interview of Kyrgyz Family Planning Alliance with doctors of a “Kyrgyz” clinic in Ekaterinburg, March 2019.

¹⁷ “Why female migrants from Kyrgyzstan frequently terminate their pregnancies,” *Kaktus media*, August 2017, https://kaktus.media/doc/361482_pochemy_migrantki_iz_kyrgyzstana_chasto_preryvaut_berem_ennost.html [in Russian].

¹⁸ Report of FIDH, ADC Memorial, and ILI: “Invisible and exploited in Kazakhstan: the plight of Kyrgyz migrant workers and members of their families,” 2018, p. 12, https://adcmemorial.org/wp-content/uploads/kyrgyz_migrant_workers_in_kazakhstan.pdf

¹⁹ “Why female migrants from Kyrgyzstan frequently terminate their pregnancies,” *Kaktus media*, August 2017,

Women's experience protecting their reproductive health in receiving countries varies widely, and the services they receive depend to a large extent on chance, in which the human factor plays a significant role. The fact that foreign citizens have little knowledge about well-defined and regulated procedures for the provision of healthcare services creates makes it hard for female migrants to get their bearings.

These circumstances, along with the expense of procedures, the lack of required documents, the fear of additional checks, and the absence of medical facilities in remote regions, mean that many migrants must travel home from Kazakhstan or Russia to give birth. Then they leave their children with relatives and return to labor migration.²⁰

- Difficulties faced by HIV-positive women

In addition to reproductive health problems, the feminization of migration has also led to a jump in the number of people with tuberculosis and HIV. According to the head of the Republican AIDS Center of the Kyrgyz Ministry of Health, the number of women living with AIDS has almost tripled over the past 10 years. For every two infected men, there is one infected woman.²¹ The main means for transmission is sexual contact (over 60 percent of cases,²² which is twice the number for 2008²³). Migrants are believed to be one of the main groups of people living with HIV. Most women who were found to have the virus when their pregnancies were recorded reported that their partners were migrants or that the unprotected sex occurred in migration. Women suffer not just from the negative health consequences associated with HIV, but also from the stigmatization of living with HIV. It was only two years ago that a woman in Kyrgyzstan publicly revealed her HIV-positive status for the first time.²⁴ The risk of HIV infection is yet another reason to condemn women working abroad. Because they fear learning that they may be positive, women often avoid testing, which means that they learn of the infection only upon the advent of certain circumstances like pregnancy or illnesses requiring a doctor's visit. This generally occurs a long time after the initial infection; during this time, women live without the necessary medication. Even when they learn that they are HIV-positive, women often reject therapy because they fear that their relatives or acquaintances will learn, sometimes from medical personnel, that they are

https://kaktus.media/doc/361482_pochemy_migrantki_iz_kyrgyzstana_chasto_preryvaut_beremennost.html [in Russian].

²⁰ Report of FIDH, ADC Memorial, and ILI: "Invisible and exploited in Kazakhstan: the plight of Kyrgyz migrant workers and members of their families," 2018, p. 12, https://adcmemorial.org/wp-content/uploads/kyrgyz_migrant_workers_in_kazakhstan.pdf

²¹ "Chokmorova: there are more HIV-positive women than men in Kyrgyzstan," *Sputnik Kyrgyzstana*, December 2018, <https://ru.sputnik.kg/Radio/20181201/1042243373/chokmorova-kyrgyzstan-sp1d.html> [in Russian].

²² Ibid.

²³ "Chokmorova: today HIV infection is more prevalent among young people," *Radio Azzatyk*, May 2019, <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/29914125.html> [in Russian].

²⁴ "For the first time, a Kyrgyz woman reveals her HIV-positive status," *Radio Azzatyk*, September 2017, <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/28742068.html> [in Russian].

infected.²⁵ Women prefer to refuse social benefits and breast-milk substitutes so that their status does not become known to social workers, who could share this information.²⁶ Many women, particularly women in rural areas and the south, must have permission from their husband or parents to seek treatment at a medical facility and must also be accompanied there by relatives. This hobbles their access not just to HIV diagnosis, but also to HIV treatment. Women have been observed to be treated significantly worse after an HIV-positive diagnosis. While they face disdain, fear, aversion, and even refusal of service in medical and state institutions, worse behavior awaits them at home, where they are treated with abuse, humiliation, isolation, and stigmatization. They may even be denied money and thrown out of the home. Even if a woman has been infected by her husband, she is still accused of being unfaithful and of infecting him.

“I was very hurt when people started accusing me of my husband’s death” [he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and AIDS]. They [the relatives] stopped speaking to me or sitting down to eat with me. They separated out my dishes. They even told the neighbors about me, and those neighbors started pointing fingers at me and looking at me with suspicion. Before this, I milked cows and sold the milk. One day people stopped buying milk from me. I felt very hurt, burst into tears, and left for the city with my children.”²⁷

HIV-positive women have a much more difficult time finding employment than others because they cannot officially receive a work permit in most countries, including popular Russia. Thus, they are deprived of the opportunity for labor migration or must choose to circumvent the law. But the work situation is not any easier in Kyrgyzstan. Even though the law bans people living with HIV from a number of specializations and also establishes a mandatory medical exam for a fairly narrow range of positions,²⁸ employers often require candidates for jobs not covered by the law to present their medical booklet or a certificate attesting to HIV-free status²⁹ (including for positions in daycares, schools, and medical, food, and textile facilities, and even for positions as private nannies³⁰). As a result, women are too scared to even try to find work.³¹ If HIV-positive women continue to work in migration under the threat of exposure for forged documents, they cannot officially receive therapy. Thus, they must either reach an agreement with doctors in Kyrgyzstan

²⁵ Report of Prosvet Public Foundation, “Needs and requirements of women living with HIV in the Kyrgyz Republic,” September 2017, <http://www.afew.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Отчет-полный-рус-min.pdf>, p. 21 [in Russian].

²⁶ Ibid, p. 35.

²⁷ “Women with HIV: It’s impossible to live in our society with this,” *Radio Azzatyk*, March 2018, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan_hiv_aids_women_discrimination/29097905.html [in Russian].

²⁸ “Special list of specializations and positions banned for people living with HIV/AIDS” and “List of workers in certain industries, jobs, professions, and positions subject to a mandatory medical exam,” approved by Resolution of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 296 of April 25, 2006.

²⁹ Information provided by Kyrgyz Indigo, May 2019.

³⁰ Report of Prosvet Public Foundation, “Needs and requirements of women living with HIV in the Kyrgyz Republic,” September 2017, <http://www.afew.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Отчет-полный-рус-min.pdf>, p. 35 [in Russian].

³¹ Ibid, pp. 37–40.

and obtain their medication through acquaintances, or they must refuse treatment, which naturally increases the risk that the virus will spread further.

- Stigmatization of female migrants by fellow Kyrgyz nationals

Even though the mass nature of migration by women has normalized this process in society's eyes, female migrants still face stigmatization in Kyrgyzstan. The accessibility of the internet and means of communication make it easier for the people "responsible" for the reputations of women in migration to use technology to control them. However, the impossibility of constantly scrutinizing women's behavior leads to preventive condemnation in their home country.

People accuse women who leave for migration of abandoning their children and elderly relatives in search of a better, more comfortable life without taking the difficulties of migration into account.³² Parents of their spouses generally do not consider the needs of these migrants, who are actually earning money for their spouse's family, and do not show sufficient concern or understanding.³³

Unfortunately, families where the wife leaves for migration and the husband remains home with the children are criticized, even in cases where the husband remains home for various reasons, including state of health, or does not wish to become a "migrant," and the wives take their children and relatives with them. Rumors often circulate that that no one knows what specifically these women are doing in migration, with the insinuation that they are engaging in transactional sex or living at the expense of other men.

Many Kyrgyz men believe that women are incapable of managing their own lives. Ethnic violence is regularly committed against the potential partners of Kyrgyz women by both individual citizens and organized groups. For example, Kyrgyz "patriots"³⁴ started not just scaring off, but beating, blackmailing, and even raping female Kyrgyz migrants in Russia for having relationships with non-Kyrgyz men in 2011.³⁵ These criminals threaten to distribute videos of the beatings and rapes if the women file reports with the police or fail to meet their demands.³⁶ A large number of clips urging women to avoid starting a relationship with non-Kyrgyz men and showing female migrants

³² Report of the International Organization for Migration "The fragile power of migration: the needs and rights of women and girls from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who are affected by migration," 2018, p. 53 https://kazakhstan.iom.int/kazakhstan/sites/kazakhstan/files/documents/22TheFragilePowerOfMigration_FullReport.pdf

³³ Ibid, p. 40.

³⁴ "Anna Rocheva: 'Askat Aliyev: Kyrgyz migrants are afraid to appeal to the police,'" Ferghana News Agency, May 2017, <https://www.ferghananews.com/articles/9417> [in Russian].

³⁵ "Kyrgyz 'patriots' continue to terrorize Kyrgyz women in Russia," *Radio Azzatyk*, December 2013, <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/25204415.html> [in Russian].

³⁶ "When it's a crime not to date your 'own' people," *Nastoyashchee vremya*, September 2015, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/27255542.html> [in Russian].

"Kyrgyz 'patriots' force women to love their 'own' with threats and beatings," *Nastoyashchee vremya*, February 2016, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/27555822.html> [in Russian].

being humiliated and fully undressed are appearing online.³⁷ One of the young women who survived the abuse killed herself several days later.³⁸ Relatively few people have been prosecuted for these crimes in comparison to the number of crimes that have been committed. The vast majority of members of Kyrgyz society fully support the actions of these ‘patriots.’

*A female migrant in Russia was threatened with “physical violence for getting into a taxi driven by an Uzbek man. A car full of young Kyrgyz men chased after them.” These men started calling and threatening the taxi driver. They then asked him to give the phone to the woman and started humiliating her. When he escaped the pursuers, the frightened driver “asked the woman to get out of his car.” She later explained that she was scared of the negative consequences of possible relationships with non-Kyrgyz men that she was hoping to start.*³⁹

There have also been instances where incorrect information has been distributed. In one case, a clip about a Kyrgyz woman’s rape by a member of another nationality in Moscow had the greatest number of views on social media. It later turned out that the whole clip was fabricated. These kinds of reports result not just in ethnic hatred, but also dishonor the women and contribute to the idea that they are “spoiled.”⁴⁰

In 2018, Kyrgyz activists launched an initiative to restrict women under the age of 26 from leaving the country. The authors explained that migration is “bad for the psyche and soul of women: Family values are lost, and families fall apart.” They stipulated that women should only take tourist or academic trips in the company of male relatives. A similar ban for women under the age of 22 was proposed in parliament six years ago. This initiative did not find any support at the time for economic reasons: Restrictions on the work of young women would have significantly reduced receipts and harmed Kyrgyzstan’s economy.⁴¹

While female migrants face these numerous difficulties, the wives of migrant workers who stay in Kyrgyzstan do not have it any easier. Men in migration are able to control their behavior thanks to various means of communication. Relatives, acquaintances, and, especially, parents of the men help track the “morals” of young women. The situation of daughters-in-law waiting for their husbands in migration is deplorable: They frequently perform all the household obligations while

³⁷ “Come to Moscow and remain a Kyrgyz,” *Gazeta.ru*, March 2016, <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2016/03/14/8122799.shtml?updated> [in Russian].

³⁸ “Kyrgyz ‘patriots’ school women with threats and beatings,” *Nastoyashchee vremya*, February 2016, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/27555919.html> [in Russian]

³⁹ “Anna Rocheva: “Migration is woven into the biography of the Kyrgyz woman,” Ferghana News Agency, October 2017, <https://www.ferghananews.com/articles/9609> [in Russian].

⁴⁰ “Information about the rape of a Kyrgyz woman by a group of young men in Moscow is false – Kyrgyz embassy in Russia,” *Elektronnaya gazeta Kyrgyzstana*, March 2018, <https://elgezit.kg/2019/03/20/informatsiya-ob-iznasilovanii-kyrgyzskoj-devushki-gruppoj-lits-drugoj-natsionalnosti-yavlyaetsya-fejkovoj-posolstvo-kr-v-moskve/> [in Russian].

⁴¹ “If you’re under 26, you stay at home. Kyrgyzstan wants to prevent young women from working abroad,” *Nastoyashchee vremya*, April 2018, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/29187033.html> [in Russian].

simultaneously dealing with hostile attitudes and economic, psychological, and even physical violence.⁴² Men in migration frequently start second families, which only serves to worsen the situation of their young brides. Considering that most marriages are entered into without registration, women do not have any rights to property, financial assistance, or child support.

*A woman who left Kyrgyzstan with her migrant worker husband was forced to return because her passport was expiring. Her husband stopped making contact with her, even though he had promised to send her money for a ticket within one month. N., who was pregnant, soon returned to her husband and found that he was living with a woman from their village. The man beat N. in a rage. "I was covered in bruises and ended up in the hospital. If he had offered to meet to solve the problem, if he had admitted his guilt and asked for forgiveness, I would have forgiven him—he's the father of my child. We had money that we were saving to buy a home. He is a citizen of Russia and was piling up the money in his account. In Kyrgyzstan, I reached an agreement to purchase housing. I told him to come and bring money, but he came with his brother and turned me in to the police [under false pretenses]." N. has no access to their bank account because their marriage was never registered.*⁴³

Even in cases when women are able to earn money and return to Kyrgyzstan, they are frequently met with dismay because of society's patriarchal views and the perception that women should fill the role of homemaker. Upon their return from migration, some young women are greeted with new problems, including difficulty finding work, contemptuous treatment and exploitation by their relatives, bans on speaking with them, rejection by their own families, and the inability to get married.

*"Discrimination and disgrace await a [returning] woman, especially in rural areas. When she returns, she's no one. People think that migration is tantamount to prostitution. Female migrants send money and transfers home for months... It is thanks to them that their relatives can build homes, but when they return, their families reject them. This is especially the case if they have health problems because of their work abroad and cannot have children. The husband's family takes money from them when they return and spends it without asking them. The family even beats them."*⁴⁴

⁴² Report of the International Organization for Migration "The fragile power of migration: the needs and rights of women and girls from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who are affected by migration," 2018, p. 48–51 https://kazakhstan.iom.int/kazakhstan/sites/kazakhstan/files/documents/22TheFragilePowerOfMigration_FullReport.pdf

⁴³ "Migration and family values," *Radio Azzatyk*, October 2017, <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/28770716.html> [in Russian].

⁴⁴ Report of FIDH, ADC Memorial, and ILI: "Invisible and exploited in Kazakhstan: the plight of Kyrgyz migrant workers and members of their families," 2018, p. 40; interview with Gulnara Ibrayeva, head of the NGO Innovative Solutions, Bishkek, November 14, 2017, https://adcmemorial.org/wp-content/uploads/kyrgyz_migrant_workers_in_kazakhstan.pdf

The money that female migrants earn and send home to their husbands' families is often spent without their knowledge on items that do not belong to them or their children. Upon their return, their contribution to the family's well-being is generally ignored and they remain extremely dependent on the decisions of their husband and his family, even when they are living in a house that was built with their own money but to which they have no rights.⁴⁵

- Impact of migration on children; labor by underage female migrants

Migration processes have led to an increase in the number of divorces and single mothers and entail a host of problems connected with children left under a relative's care. Over two-thirds of women believe that migration worsens family relationships.⁴⁶ According to data from UNICEF,⁴⁷ at least 11 percent of children in Kyrgyzstan have one parent in migration and at least five percent have both parents in migration. In general, child-rearing is assigned to women, and public opinion holds them responsible for the fate of minors suffering from the absence of their mothers. Without parental supervision, children often stop attending school, are subjected to violence (physical, psychological, and sexual, including from relatives), and attempt suicide. In critical situations, children can even die.⁴⁸ For example, a total of four children under the age of seven died in December 2018 alone.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Report of the International Organization for Migration "The fragile power of migration: the needs and rights of women and girls from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who are affected by migration," 2018, p. 48–51, https://kazakhstan.iom.int/kazakhstan/sites/kazakhstan/files/documents/22TheFragilePowerOfMigration_FullReport.pdf

⁴⁶ "Gender in society perception study," UNFPA, 2016, https://kyrgyzstan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/GSPS_english.pdf

⁴⁷ UNICEF press release "Over 277,000 children in Kyrgyzstan left without parental supervision due to labor migration," May 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/ru/%D0%9F%D1%80%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%81-%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7%D1%8B/%D0%B2-%D0%BA%D1%8B%D1%80%D0%B3%D1%8B%D0%B7%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%B1%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B5-277000-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B9-%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%8B-%D0%B1%D0%B5%D0%B7-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BC%D0%BE%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0-%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B9-%D0%B8%D0%B7-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D1%82%D1%80%D1%83%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B9>

⁴⁸ "The cost of migration. A generation of Kyrgyz children is growing up without parents," BBC, April 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-47773112> [in Russian].

⁴⁹ "Four children of migrants killed in one month. What's happening in Kyrgyzstan?", *Nastoyashchee vremya*, December 2018, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/migrant-children-murders-kyrgyzstan/29675811.html> [in Russian].

Underage girls are also not immune to the impact of migration.⁵⁰ Some leave for migration with their parents and are frequently deprived of access to education in an unknown country. Others travel to work alone or with relatives, also sacrificing education in favor of earnings. Girls aged 12 to 17 are often sent to work as nannies in Kazakhstan and Russia, generally for fellow Kyrgyz nationals. They usually work under an agreement with the parents, and their salaries, which are generally low, are sent directly to their families. These underage migrants are essentially trapped in the apartment all day, have virtually no days off, and have no opportunity to make their own decisions or manage themselves or their time. The risk of physical, psychological, and sexual violence presents no less of a threat: If they are subjected to violence, they have no one to complain to and cannot drop their jobs and return home. These girls do not even receive a basic education (even though they sometimes continue to be enrolled in school in Kyrgyzstan), which makes it difficult for them to find a good job in the future.⁵¹

Even though women's participation in migration is slowly leading to their financial autonomy and independence, they still experience a number of negative consequences. The patriarchal foundations of Kyrgyz society, which the government does not criticize and even sometimes supports, have significantly slowed the process of emancipation for women, helped retain gender discrimination, and deepened the isolation and vulnerability of female migrants.

Recommendations:

- Take measures to protect female migrants from discrimination and gender-based violence;
- Launch informational campaigns to combat gender stereotypes and traditional practices that degrade women;
- Conduct comprehensive, effective investigations of cases of domestic violence and other crimes against women and young female migrants, including online harassment;
- Launch informational campaigns to explain the rights of women and children based on registration of marriage;
- Advise citizens of the importance of having a complete medical exam, including HIV testing, prior to and following migration;
- Adopt measures to ensure that women have equal access to healthcare regardless of their legal status;
- Create an accessible and effective system of medical exams for female migrants;
- Teach women about methods of contraception and the need for prenatal and postnatal care;
- Improve healthcare workers' knowledge about the reproductive health of female migrants;
- Improve the legal literacy and awareness of female migrants, particularly concerning factors that impact their health;
- Adopt measures to reduce the health risks related to work activities;

⁵⁰ "According to official data from the Kyrgyz Ministry of Internal Affairs...almost 13 percent are children under the age of 17." From the article, "On the problems migrant children have receiving medical care in Russia," *Radio Azzatyk*, July 2019, <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan-russia-migrants-children/30022981.html> [in Russian].

⁵¹ Report of FIDH, ADC Memorial, and ILI: "Invisible and exploited in Kazakhstan: the plight of Kyrgyz migrant workers and members of their families," 2018, p. 49–50, https://adcmemorial.org/wp-content/uploads/kyrgyz_migrant_workers_in_kazakhstan.pdf

- Create a system to help female migrants find work and integrate into society upon their return home.

Restrictions on women's employment rights

Women's vulnerable position in the labor force is not limited to the impact of migration, which they are forced into because of the lack of jobs in Kyrgyzstan. According to government statistics for 2017, women comprised only two-fifths of the economically active population,⁵² while the number of people of working age is almost evenly split between men and women.⁵³ Even though 57 percent of the country's population is female, government statistics show that the employment rate of women slipped from 39 percent in 2013 to 38 percent in 2017.⁵⁴ Sixty percent of women are employed in the grey economy, mainly in the retail, service, and agricultural sectors.⁵⁵ Women perform a number of unpaid and unregistered jobs because of their imposed obligations to manage the household, raise children, and help elderly relatives. There are more unemployed women than men (57 percent in 2017⁵⁶), with only one-third of those covered by state support measures holding paid community service jobs.⁵⁷ Women continue to be paid 74 percent and even 60 percent in some regions of what men receive.⁵⁸ The state explains this difference not only by the underrepresentation of women in managerial positions, but also by the specifics of gender employment in certain lower-paid sectors: Women continue to predominate in low-paying sectors (social services and healthcare – 83.6 percent, education – 80.6 percent, hotels and restaurants – 58.4 percent, manufacturing – 47.0 percent).⁵⁹ However, the authorities are not taking sufficient measures to change this situation, thus essentially acknowledging that it is acceptable.

⁵² National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, employment statistics, <http://www.stat.kg/ru/statistics/zanyatost/>

⁵³ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, gender statistics, <http://www.stat.kg/ru/statistics/zanyatost/>

⁵⁴ Fifth periodic report of Kyrgyzstan to CEDAW, 2019, pp. 27–28, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fKGZ%2f5&Lang=en

⁵⁵ Fifth periodic report of Kyrgyzstan to CEDAW, 2019, pp. 27–28, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fKGZ%2f5&Lang=en

⁵⁶ “Women make up 57 percent of the unemployed in Kyrgyzstan,” *Radio Azattyk*, November 2017, <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/28868926.html> [in Russian].

⁵⁷ “Contemporary state of the labor market and workforce productivity in Kyrgyzstan. Analysis,” Economist Financial Publishing Company, May 2019, <https://economist.kg/2019/05/12/sovremennoe-sostoyanie-rynka-truda-i-proizvoditelnosti-truda-v-kyrgyzstane-analiz/>

⁵⁸ “Women make up 57 percent of the unemployed in Kyrgyzstan,” *Radio Azattyk*, November 2017, <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/28868926.html> [in Russian].

⁵⁹ “Kyrgyz women: numbers and facts,” National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, March 2017, <http://www.stat.kg/ru/news/8-marta-kyrgyzstan-otmechaet-mezhdunarodnyj-zhenskij-den/> [in Russian].

The problem of women's employment has nothing to do with competence level. Even though priority is given to educating boys, girls who have started school are more likely to complete their educations at a higher level than men.⁶⁰ Twice as many women than men have a secondary professional education, while 17 percent have a complete or partial higher education, as compared to 14 percent of men.⁶¹

The government intentionally restricts the labor of women in certain sectors, including sought-after, desirable, and well-paid jobs, and ignores not just the grey economy and unemployment, but the large-scale involvement of women in labor migration. Article 303 of the Labor Code and Resolution of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic "On a List of Harmful and/or Dangerous Industries, Jobs, Professions, and Positions Banned for Women"⁶² forbid women from holding 446 jobs under the pretense of protecting their reproductive functions. In displaying purported "concern about women's health," the state ignores the recommendations of international bodies to stop its excessive protection of reproductive health,⁶³ which effectively results in employment discrimination against women. In this way, the state not only violates the principle of non-discrimination in the employment sector, which deprives women of access to available jobs and the opportunity to choose their professions, reduces their chances of gaining financial independence, and forces them to agree to more complicated living conditions in labor migration, but also supports entrenched stereotypes by putting patriarchal views above gender equality.

Recommendations:

- Revoke the listed of professions banned for women and delete Article 303 from the Labor Code;
- Guarantee women equal access to work; support reforms to labor laws by conducting informational campaigns to popularize specializations previously closed to women; enroll more women in departments that have not generally been popular with women;
- Promote the idea of gender equality not just in the employment sector, but in other sectors; stop the spread of patriarchal stereotypes about the role of women in society and the family.

⁶⁰ "How are things going for the fair ladies of Kyrgyzstan?", *Novye litsa*, March 2018, <http://www.nlkg.kg/ru/projects/being-a-woman/kak-dela-u-prekrasnyx-dam-v-kyrgyzstane> [in Russian].

⁶¹ "Kyrgyz women: numbers and facts," National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, March 2017, <http://www.stat.kg/ru/news/8-marta-kyrgyzstan-otmechaet-mezhdunarodnyj-zhenskij-den/> [in Russian].

⁶² Fifth periodic report of Kyrgyzstan to CEDAW, 2019, para. 100, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fKGZ%2f5&Lang=en

⁶³ For more information on the CEDAW decision on the individual complaint, see: <https://adcmemorial.org/www/11416.html?lang=en>