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GENDER ASPECTS OF EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL PROTECTION IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS IN THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

Economic, social and demographic contradictions in the processes of rural development and agricultural production represent some of the most important issues for the improvement of Belarus’ socio-economic situation and strengthening the country’s security. The response to these issues is shaped by their socio-political importance and national significance, particularly since Belarus is an active participant in international regional integration within the Eurasian Economic Community and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and a contributor to world food security.

The problems relating to rural development are articulated and addressed within the State Programme for Village Revival and Development (2005-2010), and the State Programme for Sustainable Rural Development (2011-2015). Recently, a draft State Programme for Development of Agrarian Business in the Republic of Belarus for 2016-2020 has been developed. The main goal of these programmes is to increase (i) the productivity and efficiency of agricultural production, (ii) the competitiveness of agricultural products and food in the global agrifood market and (iii) the saturation of the domestic market with domestic agricultural products in the volume and quality required for sufficient nutrition of the population.

The Republic of Belarus’ gender policy is based on generally accepted international norms enshrined in UN Conventions and other international instruments. These aim to address all forms and manifestations of sex discrimination and to create conditions in which everyone has the right, regardless of sex, to full realization of personal potential. To date, legal, organizational and administrative measures have been taken to ensure the full development of women in order to improve their social status and to respect the rights of women on an equal basis with men. Traditionally, emphasis was placed on the sectoral and occupational structures of women’s employment, conditions of work and remuneration, opportunities for increased knowledge and career growth, and reducing unemployment.

Gender statistics in the Republic of Belarus include a broad range of indicators in relation to population, family, health care, education, employment, economy, social activities and other topics. The field of gender statistics is continuously being improved, thereby expanding the possibilities for comparative analysis of the situation of women and men; and several issues of the statistical handbook “Women and Men in the Republic of Belarus” have been published.

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1 Ministry of Agriculture and Food in the Republic of Belarus.
2 Ministry of Agriculture and Food in the Republic of Belarus.
3 Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus (a).
Women represent 53.5 percent of the total population of the Republic of Belarus. In rural areas, women account for 52.3 percent of the rural population. This can be explained by the longer duration of women's lives compared with men's (in urban areas the life expectancy ratio is 79.2 and 69.1 years; in rural areas it is 76.1 and 64.1 years).

Analysis of the dynamics of employment in rural areas in various sectors of the economy shows that in 2014, the agricultural sector was the largest employer in rural areas (41.5 percent), followed by education (11.2 percent) and industry (13 percent). This suggests that agriculture continues to be the main sector of employment in rural areas. The main producers of agricultural products are agricultural enterprises (76.2 percent), agricultural holdings (1.7 percent) and household farms (22.1 percent). It is worth noting that agricultural employment is uniform and is primarily determined by the concentration of the rural population in large- and medium-sized agricultural enterprises. Men are better represented in agricultural employment than women (57.8 percent in 2014). Some gender stereotypes prevail in society, and there are various professions, positions and fields of work that are still perceived as male or female. This leads to gender inequalities in the distribution of male and female workers in agriculture.

Comparative analysis of the level of education of agricultural workers shows that the level of education is higher for women than it is for men. More than 30 percent of women working in agriculture have participated in higher and secondary vocational education (across the whole economy this figure is approximately 60 percent), compared with only 23.2 percent of men (42.2 percent in the economy as a whole).

There are 10,900 women in the Republic of Belarus who hold management positions in agricultural enterprises, or 45.6 percent of the total number of managers in agriculture, compared with 13,000 or 54.4 percent of men. Wages in agriculture, hunting and forestry are currently approximately 76.1 percent of the national average level and 72.2 percent of the wage level in industry: this is one of the lowest indicators in the whole economy. In 2013, the average salary for women in agriculture was 89.6 percent of the average wage for men in the same sector. Moreover, in recent years there has been a continuing trend towards gender differentiation in the labour wages of men and women.

According to the law, the loss of a job is an insured event and an employee has the right to receive payments of state social insurance. However, unemployment benefits are very low and are implemented with strict conditions. This leads to a sharp decline in the living standards of the unemployed. In addition, the allowance does not meet the minimum needs of the unemployed, and in turn, this does not offer an incentive to seek support from the employment service.

In 2014, the number of unemployed people in rural areas represented 19.5 percent of all unemployed people in the country. Women accounted for 37.5 percent of all registered unemployed people. The average duration of unemployment among women is 3.3 months (among men it is 2.6 months). Although the level of registered male unemployment exceeds the level of women's, women need more time to find a job. There is a higher number of long-term unemployed women than there is men.

The analysis shows that the most disadvantaged groups in the labour market are: women with children; graduates without work experience; women approaching retirement age; disabled women; and women in professions (in the existing competitive conditions, men are preferred in professional roles). Moreover, after becoming unemployed, some women leave the labour market or find jobs with a lower social status.

One of the main priorities for state policy is the creation of conditions which facilitate the qualitative development of human potential and provide a healthy and decent life for all members of the population. The State Programme on Social Protection and Employment Assistance for 2016-2020 was developed to implement this priority.

7 The decree of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, dated 30 January 2016, N 73.
Within the country, coordinated and harmonized approaches to food security, access to food and education on nutrition have been developed and implemented. These are demonstrated by the “Concept of National Food Security of the Republic of Belarus” and the “Concept of State Policy in the Field of Healthy Nutrition of Population of the Republic of Belarus until 2020”. These take into account territorial differentiation and seek to prevent adverse changes in the food market. It is important to note that in a market economy, disposable income is a key factor in determining whether or not households consume food in the volume and variety that meet the standards of food security.

In Belarus, the minimum subsistence level is the criterion by which a household is classified as low-income. The subsistence minimum rate is based on the minimum set of material goods and services necessary to ensure human life and health, as well as mandatory payments and contributions. The analysis shows that between 2000 and 2014 there was a significant decrease in the shares of the low-income urban and rural populations. Within the total low-income population, approximately 43 percent were residents of rural areas. In addition, between 2000 and 2014, women formed the predominant group within the low-income population (approximately 55 percent).

In the Republic of Belarus, social security and social assistance measures include: minimum social guarantees (minimum wage, pensions, scholarships, grants); and state targeted social assistance provided to particular categories of citizens (families) to maintain their income at the minimum guaranteed level and to support them in solving their problems. Pensions include old-age pensions and pensions on a preferential basis. Alongside this, the state social standard in the field of social services has been introduced. In addition, it should be noted that Decree No. 3 was adopted: “On the prevention of social parasitism”.

Thus, research on the gendered aspects of employment and social protection in the context of development in rural areas in the Republic of Belarus allows us to establish the following conclusions.

Rural areas in the Republic of Belarus have considerable resources. However, for several years, the number of rural settlements has been decreasing because of migration by the rural population, especially young people, to urban areas. In order to eliminate negative trends in rural development, programmes of support for rural areas are being implemented. Agriculture is the major employer of the rural population, and employment prospects in rural areas depend largely on the dynamics of, and level of economic efficiency in, agricultural production. In addition, the agricultural sector is seen as the field of moral and spiritual values and the centre of culture, and represents a unique type of lifestyle in the nation. Women play an important role in rural households: their activity is directly connected with the home, family, traditions, reproduction, bringing up children and ensuring the continuity of peasant generations.

Implementation of the gender policy in the Republic of Belarus is based on the legal, organizational and administrative standards of gender equality. The implementation of the principle of equality is ensured by providing women with equal opportunities for obtaining education and professional training, implementation of the right to work and remuneration for it, socio-political and cultural activities and special measures in the fields of labour protection and women’s health care. There are numerous opportunities for the self-realization of women, and their participation in socio-economic activity can take a variety of forms. Important steps are being taken to improve the labour conditions of rural women, and to reduce the number of positions and professions with unhealthy working conditions. At the legislative level, there are no discriminatory practices in relation to women.

Timely measures of an economic and social nature have been developed in the Republic of Belarus in order to avert the negative consequences of the crisis: employment, social protection and food security strategies are in place to prevent social shocks, and to ensure a quick and effective response to existing and new problems in society.

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11 Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus (b).
12 The Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus, No. 3, dated 2 April 2015.
References


13 Date of access here and below – 16-22 February 2016.