Elder Care in Kazakhstan: Gaps and Implications for Employment and Gender Equality

Kazakhstan has made significant progress in establishing a legal framework for elder care and implementing comprehensive reforms aimed at improving employment, citizens' well-being, and social protection. However, the projected doubling of the share of people aged 65 and over is expected to substantially increase demand for care services and place additional pressure on the country's underdeveloped elder care sector. Current state policy primarily targets older people living alone and persons with disabilities, while the statutory responsibility for supporting elderly parents largely falls on their adult children, with limited support from the state or employers.

This study examines elder care as a key component of social infrastructure that shapes daily life, social well-being, labor market outcomes, and gender equality. It considers institutional care, paid home-based services, and unpaid family care. The analysis is based on a review of the legal and institutional framework, a survey of 200 households providing care for older family members, and four focus group discussions conducted in urban and rural communities in northern and southern Kazakhstan. The study included rural settlements located both close to and far from urban centres, with differing levels of social infrastructure development and standards of living Northern and southern Kazakhstan were purposively selected because they represent distinct cultural and social contexts, including differences in family structures, caregiving norms, gender roles and expectations,

The findings show that elder care remains predominantly unpaid and home-based and is largely provided by women, while institutional and paid care services provided at home account for only a minor share of total care provision. This pattern reflects both entrenched socio-cultural norms and structural gaps in the care infrastructure. The limited availability, uneven quality, and restricted accessibility of institutional and community-based services, together with the high cost of paid care, constrain household choices and reinforce reliance on informal family care.

The analysis of the legal framework identifies important gaps in care legislation and social protection that hinder the redistribution of unpaid care work and restrict women's participation in the labor market. At the same time, the elder care sector has significant potential to contribute to job creation, employment growth, population well-being, and broader economic development.

The study's findings highlight the need for a comprehensive long-term care policy that supports family caregivers, expands affordable and high-quality home care, and develops residential and day care services. Such a policy would help redistribute care responsibilities between families, the state, employers, and the market and also to improve social well-being, gender equality, and labor market outcomes. The findings

provide a basis for future CGE analysis of the socioeconomic impacts of expanding Kazakhstan's care system, services, and infrastructure.

This study is supported by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan within the framework of the project AP26100389 "Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) Model for the Development of the Care Economy in Kazakhstan: Promoting Employment and Gender Equality".