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## **Gender approach in the state policy of Kazakhstan: the history of implementation, results and problems**

In the article the process of introducing a gender approach into the state policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, its historical stages and achievements was examined. The purpose of the study is a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of gender initiatives, as well as an assessment of the effectiveness of government measures taken to achieve gender equality in the field of work. The objectives of the study include: a historical overview of the key stages of the introduction of a gender approach into public policy in Kazakhstan, an assessment of the impact of gender policy on the socio-economic development of the country, identification of problems on the way to the realization of gender equality. The relevance of the study is due to the need for a deep understanding of the mechanisms for introducing a gender approach into the public policy of Kazakhstan and determining its effectiveness, which contributes to the development of more effective strategies to eliminate gender imbalances and increase the level of gender equality in society. The study aims to contribute to the scientific dialogue on gender studies in Kazakhstan by providing an analytical framework for further research. The chronological framework of the study covers the period from independence in 1991 to 2021, demonstrating a 30-year path of development of gender policy in Kazakhstan.

*Keywords:* gender approach; National Commission for Women's Affairs; gender equality; status of women in Kazakhstan.

### *Introduction*

Since participating in the 1995 Beijing World Conference, Kazakhstan has been actively working to improve the status of women in the country. In 1997, the Council on Family, Women and Demographic Policy was established under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which in 1998 was transformed into the National Commission for Family and Women Affairs, the Concept of State Policy for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Republic was developed and approved [1], the Gender Equality Strategy (Strategy) was adopted in 2005. These measures testified to the decisive turn of the country towards the establishment of gender equality and the recognition of the need to integrate its principles into the process of implementing public policy. Studying the progress of this process is of significant scientific and social interest, as it allows us to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of gender policy and its impact on changing social structures, increasing equality and expanding opportunities for women in Kazakh society.

In this regard, the purpose of this study is to study the history of the introduction of a gender approach into the country's domestic policy through an analysis of the activities of commissions on women's affairs, which act as the main instrument of this process. As part of the implementation of the National Plan for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the country, the commissions intensified the participation of women in socio-political life and the economic sphere, which became a key aspect for achieving gender equality. Compared to the initial stage in the history of independent Kazakhstan, since the beginning of the 2000s, there was an increase in women's representation in legislative bodies, in the public administration system and especially in the sphere of economic activity.

The introduction of the principles of gender equality also stimulated the active participation of women in the activities of non-governmental organizations (in particular, the Association of Business Women of Kazakhstan, the Feminist League, etc.), where they acted both as organizers and active participants, helping to promote equality in all areas where women were involved and their work.

The analysis of the process of introducing a gender approach was carried out with the involvement of a wide range of sources and materials. In particular, documents of various commissions (Council, National Commission, regional commissions — authors) stored in the state archives were reviewed — work plans, minutes of meetings, documents related to the implementation of plans and confirming the results achieved,

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as well as regulations aimed at for the implementation of gender policy. This approach provided a deep and objective analysis of the topic under study. It should also be noted that the study is based on data on the activities of commissions in the northern regions of Kazakhstan — in Akmola, North Kazakhstan and Pavlodar regions, which made it possible to detail the successes achieved based on specific examples.

The chronological scope of the study covers the period from 1991 to 2021. Studying the problem within the framework of the selected historical time allowed us to identify and systematize the key stages and achievements in the implementation of gender policy in the country.

The results of the study are theoretical in nature. They can be used to develop further effective strategies to improve the status of women and achieve gender equality.

From a scientific point of view, a comprehensive study of the problem is important for analyzing the effectiveness of gender policy in Kazakhstan. This allows not only to evaluate the results achieved, but also to identify potential areas for improvement and development in the future. At the level of public administration, such studies can provide the necessary basis for the development and implementation of more effective policies aimed at strengthening the status of women in Kazakh society.

#### *Methodology and methods*

In order to create a comprehensive understanding of gender policy in Kazakhstan, the authors used research methods to assess the historical development, current state and existing challenges in this area. In particular, the applied methodological approach included comparative historical analysis, historiographical review and content analysis.

A brief historical review was conducted to identify the prerequisites for the formation of State institutions aimed at improving the status of women, as well as to analyze the reasons for the introduction of a gender approach. It covers the periods when this issue was first recognized in foreign countries, and the process of its implementation in the Soviet era. The historical analysis made it possible to systematize information about the key stages of recognizing and solving the problem of gender inequality.

The reconstruction of the history of the emergence and development of the activities of the commissions on women and family affairs was carried out on the basis of data collection from archival materials, official documents and periodicals. A qualitative analysis of archival sources made it possible to trace the history of the emergence of National and regional Commissions, determine the directions of their activities and evaluate the results of their work in improving the status of women. The analysis of the sources included a comprehensive study of the content of the documents, their historical context and socio-economic significance, which provided reasonable conclusions about the effectiveness of the commissions.

Combining these methods allowed the authors to identify the causes, recreate the process of introducing the gender approach and its principles into the country's public policy, as well as identify the role of National and regional commissions in this process.

#### *Sources and materials*

The sources of research in the study of the problem were documents from state archives, periodical materials, as well as regulatory documents. In particular, the documents stored in the archives of the Republic of Kazakhstan were studied: the National Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (hereinafter referred to as RK) and the Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (hereinafter referred to as AP RK). The main focus of the analysis was on the study of documents related to the work of the Council, later the National Commission for Women and Family Affairs. This focus allowed for in-depth research and evaluation of the contribution of these bodies to the development and implementation of strategies and programs aimed at improving the social and economic status of women in Kazakhstan.

Along with them, the main source base was the documents of the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (hereinafter referred to as the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan), the National Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (hereinafter referred to as the CSA of Republic of Kazakhstan), the State Archive of the Akmola region (hereinafter referred to as the SAAR), the State Archive of the city of Kokshetau (hereinafter referred to as the SA of the city of Kokshetau), the State Archive of the Pavlodar Region (hereinafter referred to as the SAPR), the State Archive North Kazakhstan region (hereinafter SANKR), the State Archive of Astana city (hereinafter SA of Astana city), which is mainly due to the implementation of this work within the framework of a scientific project aimed at studying the daily lives of women in the northern regions of Kazakhstan. The documents of the funds of the noted archives reflect the socio-economic picture in the regions of the northern regions of Kazakhstan in the decade of the 1990s of the XX century and

in the first decade of the 2000s. They include a wide range of materials, including minutes of meetings, activity reports, official correspondence. These sources provided an opportunity to study the history of the formation and functioning of regional commissions on women's affairs, as well as on the socio-economic development of the northern regions of the republic.

The analysis of publications in periodicals of the northern regions of Kazakhstan showed significant results of the activities of the regional commissions on women's affairs, expressed in the intensification of women's socio-political activities and the development of women's entrepreneurship.

Also, in order to identify the key elements of the process of integrating a gender approach into the state policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the following normative legal acts were considered: The Concept of State Policy for the Advancement of Women in the Republic, the National Action Plan for the Advancement of Women in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Gender Equality Strategy.

The sources and materials used contributed to the definition of the mechanism for introducing a gender approach into the internal policy of the republic, the effectiveness of the implemented normative legal documents, the degree of effectiveness of the work of commissions on women's affairs, as well as a deep understanding of socio-economic transformations in women's lives and the impact of state initiatives on their social status.

### *Discussion*

Gender issues, which include a multifaceted set of issues, are one of the most comprehensively studied in the foreign scientific community. This area of research covers a wide range of topics, including the analysis of gender stereotypes, the impact of gender differences on social, political and economic processes, and consideration of issues of gender equality.

Gender issues belong to a number of multidisciplinary and are studied by both social and humanitarian sciences, as well as other sciences, where various aspects of gender issues are explored.

In the foreign scientific tradition, research on gender issues has a rich history, starting with the “women's studies” of the mid-20th century and up to modern research within the framework of gender theories [2; 165].

The beginning for the formation of a scientific direction was the Suffrage movement in the struggle for gender equality, which arose in the UK and the USA in the late XIX — early XX centuries. The famous Russian historiographer of social history L.P. Repina writes that the struggle waged by feminists against male chauvinism became an incentive for the rapid development of “women's history”, whose areas of interest included “almost all issues related to the lives of women of past eras” [2; 167].

The “women's history” formed by gender historians has over time transformed into the history of gender relations, which is rapidly developing in the socio-humanitarian science of many countries in the modern period. Her scientific discourse is a huge field, including the study of various aspects of women's lives and gender issues. For example, studies by foreign historians and sociologists Kathleen Canning [3], Joan Wallich Scott [4] and many others emphasize the versatility of gender history and its role in modern socio-humanitarian sciences, confirming the thesis of its importance and relevance in the international scientific community.

The suffragette movement also determined the emergence of institutions for the promotion of gender equality, which appeared in Great Britain and the United States of America in the late XIX — early XX centuries, stimulated the emergence and development of various organizational structures aimed at implementing the principles of gender equality [5]. These bodies subsequently became a tool for integrating a gender perspective into public policy and public life in many countries, primarily developed ones, contributing to a gradual change in public consciousness and reducing gender inequality.

In the Soviet space, the ideas of suffragettes received a response at the beginning of the XX century. After the establishment of Soviet power in Russia and the national outskirts, they are reflected first in Lenin's decrees aimed at establishing gender equality, and then in the basic laws of the USSR — the Constitution and laws on marriage and family (for example, the Family Code of the USSR 1968).

In the early stages of the Soviet period, the creation of specialized departments for working with women, the so-called “women's councils”, served as one of the key tools for implementing gender policy aimed at ensuring equality and enhancing women's participation in public life. During this period, prominent figures of the women's movement N.K. Krupskaya, I.F. Armand, A.M. Kollontai, K.N. Samoilova played a significant role in the actualization of women's issues [6; 13]. It was on their initiative that women's councils were

established, the main purpose of which was to ensure equality between women and men in public life and in the field of work.

Women's councils were active throughout the entire Soviet period of history and their tasks were in many ways similar to those faced by the commissions on women's affairs, but later, and included the integration of women into public production, the eradication of illiteracy, addressing issues of protection of motherhood and childhood, encouraging women to actively participate in socio-political life.

Throughout the Soviet period, the activities of women's councils were actively promoted, which was reflected in numerous scientific papers and publications. These works, in accordance with the ideological requirements of the era, sought to emphasize the positive results of the activities of women's councils. Y.A. Ibragimova in her research notes that special works devoted to the life and everyday life of women before and after the October Revolution aimed to demonstrate a significant improvement in the status of women as a result of revolutionary transformations [6; 13]. The main thesis of these studies was that before the establishment of Soviet power, women experienced difficult living conditions and oppression, which were overcome thanks to revolutionary changes that liberated women.

Despite the relevance of the "women's theme" in the Soviet period, as an independent scientific field of research, it was formed in the "Gorbachev" time, when historians had the opportunity to master Western concepts based on their factual material. At that time, the Russian Association of Women's History Researchers, the Russian National Committee of the International Federation of Women's History Researchers, and research centers at universities and universities in Russia were established. During this and the subsequent period in Russia, N.L. made a great contribution to the development of gender studies. Pushkareva is a Russian historian specializing in the study of the life history of women [7]. According to modern researchers, N.L. Pushkareva is a methodologist of the gender approach in international studies. Her scientific methodology, based on the application of Ranke's methodology, includes "the analysis of a large number of studies and the collection, comparison and study of historical sources" [8; 76–84], which allows for a multidimensional analysis of the lives of women in different historical eras. By the way, the methodology of the eminent scientist is actively used in everyday studies of Kazakh authors Z.G. Saktaganova [9], K.K. Abdrakhmanova [10; 6–17], in particular, devoted to the study of women's lives.

The creation of special institutions for the study of gender issues and women's history, the conceptualization of problems contributes to the active development of these research areas in Russia to the present time.

In Russian historical science, the beginning of the study of gender issues dates back to the turn of the 1990s–early 2000s. Although it should be emphasized that the emergence of interest in these issues on the part of Kazakhstani researchers dates back to the end of the XX century, to the time of the appearance of a fundamental work by A.D. Azhibaeva devoted to a comprehensive analysis of the women's issue in Kazakhstan [11]. The exclusivity of A.D.'s research. Azhibaeva's idea was that for the first time it presented a scientific analysis of the interaction of political, social and cultural factors influencing the formation of gender roles in Kazakh Soviet society, marking a significant contribution to the study of gender issues in Kazakhstan, especially important against the background of rethinking Soviet history and culture in the late 1980s.

In the early 1990s, in the context of socio-economic changes taking place in Kazakhstan against the background of the transition to a market economy, there was a transformation in approaches to the study of gender issues in historical science, which was expressed in the appeal to the study of women's history. This period was characterized by the deepening of social problems directly related to women, which, in turn, actualized the need to rethink and conceptualize women's history, in this regard, in the 1990s and early 2000s. There have been active attempts in the Russian scientific community to assess the historical role of women not only in the context of their contribution to the development of society, but also in changing their social status in the context of a new historical reality [6; 20].

In these years, the problems of women's history will be analyzed at scientific and practical conferences, international congresses and seminars, as well as by the country's participants [6; 14].

The relevance of women's history and gender issues increased as public policy emphasized women's issues. In particular, in 1997 in the "Strategy of Kazakhstan-2030", in 1998 in the Address to the people of the country by the first President of the country N.A. Nazarbayev announced specific state plans to improve the situation of women and increase their role in the life of the state. To significantly change the situation in this direction, it was planned to take a number of measures, in particular, "to increase the role of the Council on Family Problems, Women and Demographic Policy", "to increase the representation of women in all government bodies" [12].

In this regard, since the late 1990s. Problems of women and family began to be actively discussed in Kazakh society. Under the leadership of the President of the country, Forums and congresses of women of Kazakhstan were held, from the stands of which proposals for achieving social equality were voiced, directions for the activities of commissions and women's non-governmental organizations were determined [13; 13-14].

Attention to the initiatives put forward within the framework of these events is reflected in scientific works analyzing the contribution of women to the development of socio-political and economic spheres. The same issues have also been actively studied in the sociological aspect.

In the early 2000s, after the adoption of the Gender Equality Strategy, interest in research in this area sharply increased in the scientific community, which led to the publication of a significant amount of scientific papers on gender equality and the status of women in Kazakh and Kazakhstani societies.

Over time, the relevance of scientific research on gender issues in Kazakhstan only increased and was associated not only with the turn of state policy in this direction, but also with the formation of a scientific direction in the historical science of Kazakhstan related to the study of women's history, the history of women's everyday life [6; 9; 10].

Despite the apparent vastness of the range of issues studied, gender issues in Russian historical science demonstrate significant gaps in research. Researchers mainly focus on the formation of social history, the analysis of gender aspects of the socio-economic development of the republic, attempts are made to analyze gender policy in the country. The issues of the history of women and their role in the formation and development of Kazakhstan and Kazakh society in historical retrospect, the women's movement in the republic, as well as the formation and activities of state institutions on gender issues remain poorly studied. These gaps in scientific knowledge led to the choice of the topic of this study. The coverage of these aspects is an attempt to fill the existing scientific vacuum, to analyze both the historical development and the current state of gender aspects in politics, which is key to understanding their impact on the social development of the country.

### *Results*

The historical path of the evolution of gender policy in Kazakhstan begins with the establishment of Soviet power in the early twentieth century. One of the main steps of the new Soviet government in this direction were actions to establish gender equality in Kazakhstan, as a result of which decrees were proclaimed on the abolition of the *kalym*, on the establishment of equality.

Since September 1919, the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) began to create party committees for work among women [14; 6]. The work of its departments, the so-called "women's councils", was aimed at activating the activities of women in the struggle for their rights and participation in the construction of socialism.

Thus, at the beginning of the 20th century, the legal reforms implemented by the Bolsheviks and aimed at freeing women from the foundations of patriarchal traditions and ensuring their equality with men marked the initial stage in establishing gender equality in society, opening up new opportunities for women to participate in the social, political and economic life of the republic.

For most of the 20th century, there was a further strengthening of the status of women in Kazakh Soviet society. The implemented gender policy, focused on actively promoting the advancement of women, as well as on affirming their equality, both *de jure* and *de facto*, has demonstrated significant achievements. Women in Kazakhstan found opportunities to realize their potential in a wide range of areas of government activity, including science, technology, engineering and geology, as well as actively participated in the public administration system.

The achievements of women in areas traditionally perceived as "masculine" have been significant and comprehensive. The figures of women holding the positions of directors of state farms, machine operators, miners, builders, economists and others became an integral part of everyday life, which symbolized the destruction of traditional gender stereotypes in the professional field.

The number of women scientists has increased dramatically — they accounted for 40 % of the total number of scientists in the country. For example, in 1975 there were 117 female doctors in the republic, about 3 thousand candidates of sciences. In 1985, there were already 3,932 female candidates of sciences, 1,186 associate professors, 474 researchers, 111 professors [11; 164].

The active integration of women into a variety of professional spheres was evidence of the expansion of horizons of activity for women, as well as the principle of equal opportunities for all members of society, regardless of gender, which collectively reflected the goals of gender policy at that time.

Throughout the Soviet period, women's councils played an important role in promoting the ideology of gender equality. Their activities covered a wide range of tasks, including improving women's working conditions, improving their educational and professional level, as well as participating in solving social and cultural issues. By the 1970s, the number of women's councils in Kazakhstan was 4,250, and about 28,500 women were involved in their work [6; 48].

It is noteworthy that the women's councils, which were one of the manifestations of Soviet ideology, actively carried out their activities until the end of 1991 — until the time of the republic's secession from the Soviet Union. Traditional meetings were held at which various social issues related to women and the family were discussed. For example, judging by the protocols and materials of the women's councils for 1991 in the districts of the Kokshetau region, reports on work, on elections to the body, on participation in regional congresses and much more were considered at meetings [15; 1]. The following formulations are found in the adopted decisions: “to consider the main task of the district Council for Work among women to further involve women in socio-political activities, promote their role in industrial life, educate women in the spirit of patriotism, internationalism, high citizenship and social activity”, “to assist women in the successful fulfillment of maternal and family responsibilities, to provide assistance in professional training and advanced training”, “to direct the efforts of women's councils on a daily basis to organize a healthy, cultural life, to improve housing and communal services, household, medical, commercial services for the population”, etc. [15; 1, 5, 19], which indicated the serious involvement of women's councils in the process of determining the directions and regulation of women's daily life, solving social problems.

Despite the apparent success of the gender policy implemented in Soviet Kazakhstan, it is important to emphasize that at present this policy is undergoing a stage of scientific reassessment. In particular, the researcher of women's history G. Abdykulova expresses an ambiguous attitude to the gender policy of the Soviets. In her opinion, the goal of gender policy in the republic in Soviet times was not so much the establishment of de facto equality, but the acceleration of Sovietization in the republic, the destruction of identity and traditional foundations, which Kazakh society continued to adhere to, and Russification. And women, “freed” from the action of Kazakh customs, were supposed to become assistants to the Soviets in carrying out these tasks [16; 33].

The actively advancing process of establishing gender equality in the republic slowed down by the 90s of the XX century, in the period after Kazakhstan gained sovereignty. During this period, stagnation became noticeable not only in the implementation of gender policy, but also in the application of a gender approach in the development of public policy in new conditions. The 1990s. They were characterized by significant difficulties in the field of social management and control by the Kazakh government, mainly due to the acute economic instability that gripped the country after secession from the Soviet Union.

As a result of the current socio-economic situation, there has been a significant reduction in the representation of women in many fields of activity, even in those traditionally associated with women's work. This trend was a direct consequence of large-scale unemployment in the republic, primarily affecting the female part of the population.

In the context of the formation of market relations in Kazakhstan and the need to adapt to new realities, the work of most women began to focus on the field of trade, which eventually led to the formation and fairly successful development of women's entrepreneurship. The work of the other part of women has traditionally been concentrated in the fields of education and health. However, neither active entrepreneurial activity, nor even the concentration of labor in social spheres, has made significant changes in the social status of women in the country.

The existing gender asymmetry in various fields of activity showed the need for the state to take targeted measures to implement the principles of gender equality, as well as integrate a gender approach into the process of planning domestic policy.

The introduction of the position of Presidential Adviser on Family and Women's Issues in 1994 became a key moment in the political modernization of socio-economic policy, reflecting the state's desire to improve the social status of women in the republic and addressing gender issues.

The determinant of the next significant stage in this direction was Kazakhstan's participation in the Fourth World Conference on Women's Issues, which was held under the auspices of the United Nations in Beijing in 1995. At this historic meeting with delegates from 189 countries of the world, Kazakhstan demonstrated its commitment to international efforts to promote gender equality [17; 138].

The adoption by Kazakhstan of the Beijing Platform for Action, which covered a number of priority areas, including promotion in the economy, participation in management structures, development of institu-

tional mechanisms for improving the situation, and others [17], as well as the need to implement the international obligations assumed, became a powerful impulse to integrate a gender approach into all aspects of the internal policy of the state.

A special body was established, the Council on Family, Women and Demographic Policy, which is tasked with developing a strategy to improve women's living conditions and initiating appropriate regulatory and legal support aimed at eliminating gender imbalance in all areas of social life and improving the social status of women. The steps taken have demonstrated Kazakhstan's resolute course towards introducing the principles of gender equality into the country's national policy.

To fulfill the tasks assigned to the National Council, similar Councils on Family, Women and Demographic Policy (hereinafter referred to as the Council) were established in the regions of the republic under the akims of all regions. In some areas, even a special position was introduced to organize their work, as, for example, in the Pavlodar region, in which, by the decision of the akim, "the position of adviser-secretary was introduced into the staffing table of the secretariat of the Small Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan" [18; 1].

The tasks of the regional Councils included "defining priorities and developing recommendations for the formation of a comprehensive state family and demographic policy, assistance in developing a comprehensive system of social, economic, legal and psychological support for families, women and children, the formation of an information base in order to identify the real situation of women, families and children in the economic, social, political and cultural spheres life" [18].

The active work of the Councils aimed at analyzing the living conditions of women in various regions has made it possible to identify key problems. The areas where gender and social issues were acutely faced by society were highlighted, requiring their urgent solution and inclusion in the public policy agenda for further regulation.

As a result of the coordinated work of the national and local Councils, in 1997 the Concept of State Policy for the Advancement of Women in the Republic was developed and approved, which defines the overall strategy and priority areas of State policy. According to her, it was necessary in the country, first of all, to ensure "respect for women's rights in accordance with the rights and fundamental freedoms of man and citizen; conditions for women's full participation in public life; equal rights in the labor market; women's health protection; prevention of violence against women" [19; 24–36].

In 1998, Kazakhstan joined the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which once again emphasized the need for the state to address the problems of women and gender equality. Therefore, in the same year, N.A. Nazarbayev, in his Message to the people of the country, emphasized the key role of integrating a gender perspective into the process of political and social development of Kazakhstan. The President noted that the increased participation of women in the public, social, economic and political life of the country is one of the fundamental aspects of democratization and political liberalization [12].

On the initiative of N.A. Nazarbayev, in 1998 the Council on Family, Women and Demographic Policy was transformed into the National Commission for Family and Women Affairs (hereinafter — the National Commission), which significantly expanded its powers [6; 66]. The activities of the National Commission were regulated by the Regulation approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Within its competence, this body could initiate and participate in the development of draft laws and regulations, strategies, concepts and government programs related to women and family issues. One of the main tasks of the National Commission was to create conditions for the active inclusion of women in the political, socio-economic spheres of life of the republic.

The National Commission was headed by Aitkul Baygazitovna Samakova, whose position was equated to the position of minister. The Commission consisted of 28 people — representatives of the scientific community, the cultural sphere, employees of industrial enterprises, entrepreneurs of small and medium-sized businesses, as well as civil servants.

In order to effectively implement the tasks of the National Commission on the ground, regional, city and district commissions were established in the regions of Kazakhstan (for example, documents on the establishment of a commission in the North Kazakhstan region [20], which are the same as the previous ones. The councils were formed under the administrations of akims. Their work was determined on the basis of a Provision developed in accordance with the national regulations.

The National and regional commissions were mainly composed of women who had a deep understanding of the socio-economic problems faced by women both in the regions and in the country as a whole. They sought to provide a comprehensive approach to solving urgent and critical issues related to women's inter-

ests. The priorities of their activities were “the participation of women in politics, government, the economy, their employment, family problems and protection from violence” [21; 86]. One of the primary tasks assigned to them by the President of the republic was to stimulate the active participation of women in the political life of the country [22; 14].

In 1999, an important result of the Commission's activities was the development of a National Action Plan for the Advancement of Women in the Republic of Kazakhstan, which included 12 priorities identified by the 4th World Conference [23; 71].

In the same year, Kazakhstan ratified the UN Convention on the Political Rights of Women.

Kazakhstan's obligations to international organizations, as well as the need to implement the key provisions of the Concept for the Advancement of Women, along with solving social problems identified in the course of the activities of the National and regional Commissions, set the State the task of regulating gender and related issues. In this regard, during the first decade of the 2000s, several important policy documents and laws were developed and adopted with the direct participation of the National Commission. In particular, in November 2003. The Government decree adopted the Concept of Gender Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Exactly two years later, in November 2005, the Strategy of Gender Equality in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2006–2016 was approved by Presidential Decree. In December 2009, the Laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On State guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for men and women” and “On the prevention of domestic violence” were signed.

Thus, during the decade from 1995 to 2005 years a legislative framework was created to establish gender equality in the country, ensure equal rights and opportunities for both men and women, and guarantee the protection of women's rights.

Among all the adopted documents, the Gender Equality Strategy (hereinafter referred to as the Strategy), aimed at “ensuring real equality of rights and opportunities for men and women” in Kazakh society, was the most important document for the implementation of the tasks of the National Commission [24; 73], since the “expected results” of the Strategy were to be “gender sensitivity” of civil servants and managers at all levels, equal participation of women in all processes of social development [25].

It should be noted that during the decade, during which all the efforts of the state were aimed at creating a legislative framework for the introduction of a gender approach, the social status of women in the country remained without due attention. This time was characterized by a decrease in the participation of women in many areas of labor activity, which was due to the economic crisis, which was protracted, as the researchers note, throughout the 1990s and until the middle of the first decade of the 2000s.

One of the significant negative phenomena of this period was unemployment, which had the most noticeable impact on the social status of the population, affecting, without exception, all layers of society. Reorganization, optimization and closure of economically ineffective enterprises became commonplace phenomena of this time, which led to a further increase in unemployment and worsening social problems. For example, according to the Statistics Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in 2000 the unemployment rate relative to the economically active population was: in Akmola region — 14.3 %, in Kostanay region — 15.7 %, Pavlodar region — 13.8 %, North Kazakhstan region — 14.9 % [26; 10].

Government efforts to address this problem among women have often proved ineffective. The percentage of employed women has traditionally remained lower compared to men, which was largely due to the specifics of the offers on the labor market — the so-called “male” professions dominated among job offers. For example, in 2002 in the Employment Center of Kokshetau, Akmola region, out of 55 jobs offered by 15 enterprises, 75 % were in working specialties traditionally associated with male labor, while only 5 % of vacancies were intended for women [27; 11]. This highlighted the structural features of the labor market characteristic of this period, and also pointed to the emerging gender stereotypes in the field of employment at that time.

Limited professional opportunities forced women, who make up a significant part of the country's population, to look for alternative ways to realize their opportunities. In particular, the spread of women's entrepreneurship became a new phenomenon at the turn of the 1990s and early 2000s.

In the early 2000s, women worked in various, mostly “female” fields of activity. For example, 69 thousand women worked in the sectors of the economy in Akmola region, which accounted for 45 % of the total number of employees. In the field of public administration, the proportion of women was 60 %, 75 % of women worked in secondary education, and 76 % of the total number of employees in each of these spheres worked in the health sector [28; 3]. However, in the process of reforming the State economy, women employed in these sectors faced serious challenges: they either received insufficiently high wages, or lost their

jobs during the ongoing optimizations. This situation led to the fact that women, former doctors and teachers, began to reorient themselves to other fields of activity, in particular to trade, in search of more stable sources of income.

It is noteworthy that for women in conditions of unemployment and low wages, entrepreneurship became the niche for self-realization that they needed, their “own” sphere in which they could freely implement their business ideas without competing with men.

Within the framework of various projects initiated by the state, women were trained in the basics of entrepreneurship, underwent short-term vocational training, and received loans to open their own business. For example, at the initiative of the National Commission, 150 million tenge were allocated from the republican budget in 2002 for the development of women's entrepreneurship, thanks to which 300 business projects put forward by women entrepreneurs were credited [6; 75].

They opened shops, beauty salons, sewing workshops, laundries, and training centers. For example, according to archival data, in 2005 in Astana, if the number of employees in the field of small business was 71,508 people, of whom over 60 % were women. Only in the sphere of trade and services about 3 thousand subjects — more than 70 %, were headed by women [29; 90].

So successful women entrepreneurs, the so-called “businesswomen”, became the basis for the formation of a new elite social group among the economically active female population.

The observed positive changes in the sphere of women's economic activity testified to the process of self-regulation in an environment where for a long time there were no effective state measures to solve social problems affecting the interests of women. It also indicates the ability of women to adapt to changing conditions and find new ways to ensure their well-being and participation in the economic life of the country, despite shortcomings in government policy in this area.

Since the middle of the first decade of the 2000s, the application of the gender approach has become more noticeable, it has become a reflection of the effectiveness of the implementation of the adopted policy documents. Positive changes have been observed in various fields of women's activity.

There was a noticeable activation of women in the socio-political sphere of Kazakhstan, which indicated the formation of new prospects for their participation in the development of the country. Although minor, significant transformations took place in the process of including women in public administration, which emphasized the gradual deepening of their integration into key government structures. For example, during 2002–2004, women became akims of regions 2 times — in 2002 in North Kazakhstan and in 2004 in West Kazakhstan regions. Women were appointed deputy akims in Akmola and Karaganda regions [30; 10–12].

There has been an increase in confidence in women in the role of foreign diplomats. An example of this is the appointment of women to key diplomatic positions in the international arena, including Akmaral Arystanbekova, Birganym Aitimova and Madina Zharbosynova, who demonstrated the expansion of opportunities for women in public administration and international relations [6; 69].

Despite the noticeable changes, it is important to note that, given the significant proportion of women in the total population of the republic, their representation in public administration structures was clearly insufficient. This fact underlined the need to continue efforts aimed at achieving gender equality and increasing women's participation in key sectors of the State apparatus. Therefore, an important task of the National Commission was to stimulate the active participation of women in the political process of the country. It was expected that as a result of these efforts, their representation at the decision-making level of at least 30 percent would be achieved, as planned under the Gender Equality Strategy.

One of the strategies to increase women's participation in political life has been their involvement in the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The first NGOs appeared in Kazakhstan in the early 1990s, but their number increased sharply in the second half of the 1990s due to the release of the Law “On Public Associations”. In particular, in the early 2000s in the republic, “about 300 non-governmental organizations and public associations working in the field of protecting the rights and legitimate interests of families, women and children, including 150 women” took an active part in solving socially significant problems.

The largest NGO in the republic was the Association of Businesswomen (hereinafter — ABL): there were more than 15,000 people in its ranks. As a Republican public non-governmental organization, the Association united women engaged in the business sphere of society: in politics and public administration, business, science and education, healthcare and culture [6; 79].

Public associations headed by women operated in all regions of Kazakhstan [6; 80]. For example, in 2005, 6 “women's and gender” NGOs were actively working in the Akmola region [31; 70], among which

the activities of the public association “Feminist League” and the “Center for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship” [32; 56].

The activities of non-governmental organizations focused on solving specific social, economic and political problems related to the status of women. These organizations have made a significant contribution to supporting and stimulating women's entrepreneurship, provided psychological assistance and support, and actively worked to promote the principles of gender equality and protect women's rights [6; 79].

During the first decade of the 2000s, another initiative of the National Commission in order to intensify the socio-political activities of women was the creation of Schools for Women's Leadership.

The Republican Network of Women's Leadership Schools consisted of 69 NGOs from all regions of Kazakhstan, which were engaged in training women in management and competitiveness skills. These schools are still functioning today and their main task is to “form a personnel reserve of women to nominate them for socio-political, legislative work, as well as in government structures and executive authorities” [33].

The mass media played a special role in popularizing the participation of women in the political life of the country. Through publications, analytical materials and educational campaigns in print and digital media platforms, the female population was encouraged to actively participate in political processes in the country and participate in legislative elections. For example, a small publication in the regional newspaper of the Akmola region that “in Kokshetau, the representation of women in the list of candidates for deputies to the Maslikhat from the Nur Otan party increased 3 times — from 11 to 30 %” testified to the active implementation of state plans to involve them in political processes in the regions [34].

The clear achievements of women in various fields of activity were also demonstrated by publications in the media. Articles on the successes of women in the fields of entrepreneurship, public service, education, health, politics, state and local government testified to the drastic changes that took place in the second decade of the 2000s, in contrast to the situation that existed throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. For example, the regional newspaper of the Akmola region “Stepnoy Mayak” often publishes articles about successful women entrepreneurs of the region. In one of them, the story is dedicated to the founder of the Fashion House “Akai” Galiya Aldabergenova, who in modern economic conditions has found herself in the role of an entrepreneur. In her interview with the newspaper, she notes that “today there is serious state support for women entrepreneurs”, thanks to which she managed to create and develop her business [35]. And there are many such examples in every region of the republic.

Summarizing some of the results of the implementation of program documents aimed at introducing the principles of gender equality, for example, in matters of attracting women to public administration, it can be noted that, if in the period from 1990 to 1999 the representation of women in the Senate and the Mazhilis of the Parliament decreased 2 times [6; 68], then by 2018 their share in the Mazhilis was “almost 30 %” — “29 deputies out of 107 are women. In the Senate of the Parliament, three out of six committees were headed by female senators” [6; 69], which practically corresponded to the “expected results” of the Gender Equality Strategy.

In the field of small and medium-sized businesses in Kazakhstan, thanks to the active support of state institutions for women's initiatives, the proportion of women entrepreneurs has increased even more over the past two decades. This can be shown by the example of statistical data for the Akmola region, according to which “as of November 1, 2019, out of 110,457 legal entities operating in the region, 3,021 heads are women (28.9 %). In large enterprises, 13.2 % of managers are women, in small enterprises — 29 %, in medium-sized enterprises — 28.7 %. At enterprises with state ownership, female managers make up 49.5 %”. These figures confirmed the consistently active participation of women in economic spheres of activity at the regional level in the modern period.

The main results of the state's work to improve the status of women in the country were summed up in 2018 — the year of the 20th anniversary of the work of the National Commission. The results and significant achievements in establishing gender balance at the decision-making level were announced by its Chairman Gulshara Abdykalikova at the International Conference “Family and Gender Policy of Kazakhstan: Achievements and Prospects”, held in Astana on December 7. In her speech, G. Abdykalikova noted that progress has been made in the representation of women in politics. According to her report, “today 22 % of the total number of deputies or 34 women are parliamentarians, whereas according to the results of the 2011 elections there were 29 or 19 % of them. The proportion of women in maslikhats at all levels is also 22 % (17 % in 2011), and in Kostanay region it exceeds 30 % (31.6 %). The representation of women in political parties ranges from 33 to 57 %. About 55 % of women work in the civil service, and more than 10 % of political civil servants” [36].

Another important result of G. Abdykalykova's work noted the expansion of economic opportunities for Kazakh women and the creation of conditions in the country for the development of women's entrepreneurship, evidence of which is the leading position in the field of small and medium-sized businesses — over 500 thousand companies are headed by women [37].

In one of his interviews, the first secretary of the Council for Women's Affairs N.A. Kayupova, also summing up the work of the National Commission, noted that achieving gender equality in the country was the main goal of their efforts. In her opinion, significant progress in integrating women into power structures and increasing the number of women entrepreneurs is proof of the effectiveness of the commission's activities over all the years of its existence [6; 161].

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion of this study, it should be noted that during the period under study, the initiatives of the first President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, N.A. Nazarbayev, aimed at ensuring gender equality and improving the status of women in the country, coupled with Kazakhstan's accession to important international treaties, contributed to the development of an institutional mechanism. During 1995–2005 years regulatory framework aimed at establishing gender equality and providing equal rights and opportunities for both men and women was laid, the main contribution to the development of which was made by the Council, transformed into the National Commission for Family and Women Affairs and its regional offices.

A study of the activities of the National Commission since its establishment has shown the implementation of a large amount of work, during which special attention was paid to increasing the level of women's participation in socio-political and economic life, which demonstrates a significant contribution to promoting the principles of gender equality and to expanding opportunities for women in these fields of activity. Through their activities in NGOs, women actively participated in the public life of the republic, were represented in the fields of state and local government, small and medium-sized businesses.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that the activities of the National Commission have not yet achieved their ultimate goal. Despite notable successes in achieving gender balance in the political and economic spheres, the commission still faces many unresolved issues related to improving the conditions and quality of life of women. This is confirmed by the social tension observed in 2019, when mass protests of women took place in the country, caused by insufficient social support from the state and the high level of public debt to banks.

These problems, which, it would seem, affect the entire Kazakh society, concerned, for the most part, women, since housing and household insecurity and deteriorating financial situation were acutely felt by them, on whose shoulders were the main concerns in families, especially those with many children.

In order to resolve the most acute social problems that have developed, as well as generally improve the standard of living of the population, the state, headed by the new President Kassym-Jomart Kemelevich Tokayev, took a number of measures that were consistent with the tasks set in his election program [6; 63]. In particular, since April 1, 2019, the provision of targeted social assistance has been intensified, a one-time withdrawal of credit debt from most of the socially vulnerable population, including large and low-income families, has been made. To solve the problem of unemployment among women, which was caused by the fact that many professions in modern conditions were not in demand or were low-paid, the implementation of the Enbek program was initiated, according to which retraining in new specialties in demand in the labor market was carried out, women continued to be taught the basics of entrepreneurship [6; 63]. As a result of the actions taken over the next six months, many acute social problems, in particular those related to the status of women, were removed from the agenda.

The noted facts are evidence that the country still needs efforts to develop and implement a more effective social policy both from such a special body as the National Commission, whose main goal is to improve the status of women in the country, and the State as a whole.

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Г. Әбдіқұлова, Г. Мұсабалина

## Қазақстанның мемлекеттік саясатындағы гендерлік көзқарас: жүзеге асырылу тарихы, нәтижелері және мәселелері

Мақалада Қазақстан Республикасының мемлекеттік саясатына гендерлік көзқарасты енгізу барысы, оның тарихи кезеңдері мен жетістіктері қарастырылған. Зерттеудің мақсаты — гендерлік бастамалардың эволюциясын жан-жақты талдау, сондай-ақ еңбек қызметі салаларында гендерлік теңдікке қол жеткізу мақсатында қабылданған мемлекеттік шаралардың тиімділігін бағалау. Зерттеудің міндеттері: Қазақстанның мемлекеттік саясатына гендерлік тәсілді енгізудің негізгі кезеңдерін тарихи шолу, гендерлік саясаттың елдің әлеуметтік-экономикалық дамуына әсерін бағалау, гендерлік теңдікті жүзеге асырудағы мәселелерді анықтау. Зерттеудің өзектілігі Қазақстанның мемлекеттік саясатына гендерлік тәсілді енгізу тетіктерін терең түсіну және оның тиімділігін анықтау қажеттілігімен түсіндіріледі, бұл гендерлік теңгерімсіздікті жою және деңгейін арттыру бойынша тиімдірек стратегияларды әзірлеуге ықпал етеді. Зерттеу ары қарайғы зерттеулерге сараптамалық негіз бере отырып, Қазақстандағы гендерлік зерттеулер бойынша ғылыми диалогқа үлес қосуды көздейді. Зерттеудің хронологиялық шеңбері Қазақстандағы гендерлік саясаттың 30 жылдық даму жолын көрсете отырып, тәуелсіздік алған 1991 жылдан 2021 жылға дейінгі кезеңді қамтиды.

*Кілт сөздер:* гендерлік көзқарас, Әйелдер істері жөніндегі ұлттық комиссия, гендерлік теңдік, Қазақстандағы әйелдердің жағдайы.

Г. Абдыкулова, Г. Мусабалина

## Гендерный подход в государственной политике Казахстана: история внедрения, результаты и проблемы

В статье рассмотрен процесс внедрения гендерного подхода в государственную политику Республики Казахстан, его исторические этапы и достижения. Целью исследования является комплексный анализ эволюции гендерных инициатив, а также оценка эффективности принятых мер государства в достижении гендерного равенства в сфере трудовой деятельности. Задачи исследования включают в себя: исторический обзор ключевых этапов внедрения гендерного подхода в государственную политику Казахстана, оценку влияния гендерной политики на социально-экономическое развитие страны, выявление проблем на пути реализации гендерного равенства. Актуальность исследования обусловлена необходимостью глубокого понимания механизмов внедрения гендерного подхода в государственную политику Казахстана и определения его действенности, что способствует разработке более эффективных стратегий по устранению гендерного дисбаланса и повышению уровня гендерного равенства в обществе. Исследование стремится внести вклад в научный диалог о гендерных исследованиях в Казахстане, предоставляя аналитическую основу для дальнейших исследований. Хронологические рамки исследования охватывают период с момента обретения Независимости в 1991 году и по 2021 гг., демонстрируя 30-летний путь развития гендерной политики в Казахстане.

*Ключевые слова:* гендерный подход, Национальная комиссия по делам женщин, гендерное равенство, положение женщин в Казахстане.

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