

# Gender Equality in North Cyprus (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus)<sup>1</sup>

**Fatma Güven Lisaniler.** Assistant Professor in Economics, Eastern Mediterranean University, north Cyprus

## Introduction

North Cyprus is no exception in the world experience of gender inequality. Gender inequality exists in education and is even more apparent in economic and political life. According to the latest Population Census (1996), 10.3% of women are illiterate compared to 3.2% of men. Most of the women have graduated from primary or secondary school.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the percentage of men in career-oriented educational institutions, such as postgraduate institutions, is higher compared to women<sup>3</sup> (SPO, 1999, Table 9: 25). Although gender inequality exists, it can be said that considerable improvements have been made regarding increasing opportunities for women to take advantage of education services. Despite improvements in education, the participation of women in economic and political life is still very limited. Only two thirds of women who

are of working age participate in the labour market (SPO, 1999, Table 19: 38).

In addition to this, a limited number of women hold managerial positions in the public and private sectors<sup>4</sup> (SPO, 1999, Table 32: 82). Even though women were given the right to vote and be elected in 1960, it was only after 30 years that women were elected as MPs. However, representation of women in parliament is very low.<sup>5</sup> In 1993, there were only three women elected, and in 1999 the number increased to 5 which is equivalent to only 8%. At present, despite the fact that the head of the parliament is a woman, there are only three women parliamentarians, and out of ten ministers there is only one woman minister. In addition, there is neither a woman mayor in five districts and nor a rector in the five universities in north Cyprus.

However, from a broad historical perspective, great improvements have been achieved

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1. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus has a population of 208,886, a surface area of 3,355 km<sup>2</sup> and is situated on the northern side of the island of Cyprus, the east of the Mediterranean Sea. It is only recognized by Turkey.

2. Literacy rate for women who do not hold a diploma is 12.1%, for men it is 10.4%. 38.9% of literate women graduated from primary school (for men 36.5%), 14% graduated from secondary school (for men 12.5%), 36% graduated from high school (for men 33.2%).

3. 7% of women graduated from university or higher education. For men the rate is equal to 10.8%.

4. In the public and private sectors, the percentage of women in management positions was 20%.

5. The percentage of women who were representative in parliament was 8%.

in the Turkish Cypriot community regarding gender equality. Compared to the 1930s, when women were represented only in a number of professions, as hat makers, weavers, dressmakers, midwives, hairdressers, embroiderers, dairy farmers, wedding aids,<sup>6</sup> teachers and unpaid workers in agriculture (Cahit, 2002: 381), nowadays women hold positions in almost all professions except for a few such as taxi or bus drivers, fire-fighters, caretakers, and builders (SPO, 1999: 220). Until 1946, Turkish Cypriot women were traded to Arabs,<sup>7</sup> denied the right to vote and be elected, discouraged from appearing in public, and married against their will. Nowadays, Turkish Cypriot women have equal rights in law, choice of spouse, keeping their family name, and voting and being elected.

### Steps Taken towards Gender Equality in the Turkish Cypriot Community

In the Turkish Cypriot community, the first steps towards gender equality were taken on 28th May 1951 with the Turkish Family Law (Chapter 339) and the Turkish Family Court Law (Chapter 338). In 1952, following this first step, women were granted the right to receive equal education and in 1960, following the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus, they were also granted the right to vote and be elected.

The principle of equality in the 1960s Constitution, which stated that female teachers were obligated to leave their jobs upon marriage, has been removed from the Constitution and the unequal pay term was changed

in 1977 (Atalay, 1998). In the years following the 1974 events, the population resettlement in the north and south led to the economic and political restructuring of law to address the needs of the Turkish Cypriot community, and the right for equal pay was achieved with the Teachers' Law. Fifteen years later, in February 1996, the government of north Cyprus, with the efforts of five women Members of Parliament and women's organizations, accepted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

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In the following years, the Women and Family Issues Department was established and perhaps the most important step taken was the new Family Law, which came into force in January 1998. Under this law, women did not need the consent of their husbands to have paid work outside the home. Also, women who did not have the opportunity or the permission to work were granted 50% of material possessions earned since marriage, which provided them with security. And, finally, women were allowed to carry on their family names and, under the former Family Law, the statute granting the "husband as head of the family" was abolished, which led to greater equality between the sexes with regard to family roles. In February 2002, a law came into force changing the Women and Family Issues Department into the Women's Studies Department. After the International Labour Organization (ILO)

6. Name given to the person who goes to the bride's house to prepare the woman for the wedding. They do not have a permanent business address.

7. The period between the First and Second World War when Turkish Cypriot women were sold to Arabs at a price charged between £10-15 to overcome economic difficulties.

Conventions and CEDAW, this law was the third guarantee from government to women for the establishment and improvement of rights regarding equality and protection.

Despite all the efforts, gender inequality still exists in the economic, political and social life in north Cyprus. The ratio of representation of women in the labour market does not correlate to their population ratio. Only 27% of the labour force is female even though they make up 47% of the population. 34.2% of women of working age (15-65) are economically active (SPO, 1999). In the private sector only 2% of women have managerial positions.

## Historical Background

“North Cyprus” is an unrecognized isolated country with limitations on economic, social, cultural and political development. This has been a major obstacle in its political and economic development and gender equality. In spite of all these complications, north Cyprus was listed as 53rd among 174 countries in the world classification with respect to the Human Development Index (HDI) (Yetkili, 1999: 35), and 63rd with respect to the Gender Related Development Index (GDI) (Güven-Lisaniler and Uğural: 2001: 16). The index difference between the HDI and the GDI shows that women in north Cyprus do not benefit from health, education and income to the same extent as their male counterparts. According to the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), it is listed as 55th (Güven-Lisaniler and Uğural, 2001: 17). The index value of north Cyprus, which is 0.396, proves that there is inadequate provision of

equal economic and political opportunities for women.

Before the 1960s, the Turkish Cypriot community was composed of farmers, small-scale tradesmen, merchants, teachers and civil servants. Between 1963 and 1974 (the period covering the civil war and Turkish intervention), they were then compressed into small isolated regions and cut off from production and trade. During these years, men worked in combat, as teachers, civil servants, tradesmen, merchants and farmers. As for women, those in urban areas were homemakers and those in rural areas, besides being homemakers, worked as unpaid family workers. Amongst the women who were living in urban areas, there were undoubtedly those who were teachers, nurses, civil servants, tailors and hairdressers. A few of them worked in trade and the fact that people still remember the names of women who worked outside the home during that period proves how few they were in number (Yildiz, 2001: 48-49).

### *Women in north Cyprus do not benefit from health, education and income to the same extent as their male counterparts*

In Turkish Cypriot society, the initiation of women into paid labour outside their home was a result of the high labour demand due to the rapid economic development after the 1974 events. Turkish Cypriots resided scattered around the island prior to the 1974 events, and after the resettlements they started living communally in north Cyprus under a central authority called the Autonomous Turkish Cypriot Administration.<sup>8</sup> The Turkish Cypriot community, which was reduced to non-existent economic activity and was restrained from

8. During 1963-74, Turkish Cypriots were ruled primarily by the Turkish Cypriot Administration and later the Autonomous Turkish Cypriot Administration. Following the 1974 Turkish intervention, the Turkish Cypriot Federate State was formed. Finally, after 1983, it became the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus thus declaring its independence (and only recognized by Turkey).

production between the years of 1963 and 1974, regenerated its economy. This caused an enormous demand for labour; indeed, it increased the job opportunities for women in both the private and public sector and in rural and urban areas.

Today, 56% of the working age population of north Cyprus is part of the labour force. This ratio is 40.4% for women and 70.2% for men. In other words 60% of women are not working outside the home and are not seeking employment. Out of these, 24.8% are students and 6.5% are retired. It can be deduced that, despite the fact that they are neither students nor retired, 40% of women who can work are not looking for jobs and they remain out of the labour force.

Women were only employed in certain sectors. 83% of employed women are salary and wage earners. The ratio of self-employed women is 13.7%. The ratio of women entrepreneurs is limited to 1.7%. The ratio of male employers is 4.8%, which is more than twice as many as women employers. The unemployment ratio of women in north Cyprus, both in rural and urban areas and for all age groups, is 2 or 3 times higher than that of men. Within the 20-24 age group, where unemployment is the highest, 76% are women.

### Why Women Stay Out of the Labour Force

Turkish Cypriot women stay out of the labour force mainly because of the earnings differentials, occupational segregation, unequal distribution of unpaid work, attitudes towards working women, and the gender gap and segregation in education.

### Occupational Segregation

The north Cyprus labour market is highly segregated. The horizontal segregation index for

main sectors of employment was 20 and for main professions was 35.9% (Güven-Lisaniler and Ugural, 2001: 17). According to the results of Aldemir's research, which was carried out on the population employed by the state, the vertical segregation index was 42.6%.

### *Women taking part in low-productive, low-paid or lower-ranked jobs receive lower income, thus causing gender inequality*

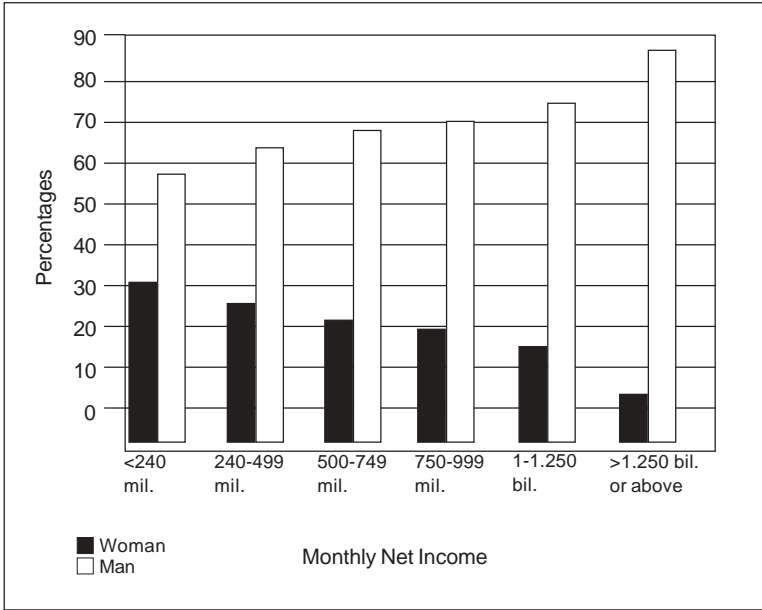
The horizontal and vertical occupational segregation index values show that, even though the service sector is the dominant sector in the economy, gender-based occupational segregation in north Cyprus' labour market leads to the continuation of gender inequality. Women taking part in low-productive, low-paid or lower-ranked jobs receive lower income, thus causing gender inequality in north Cyprus and hindering the participation of women in the labour force.

### The Earnings Differentials

The field study was conducted by a women's association, the Turkish Cypriot University Women's Association, in 2001, and presents qualitative and quantitative data about Turkish Cypriot women's employment and education profile. In the findings, women form the majority in lower levels of earnings intervals, while in the higher levels the ratios of women decrease. The percentage of women in the lowest earnings interval is 37.7%, but decreases to 10% in the highest earnings interval.

When earnings are considered in the light of educational background, they fluctuate. However, the general pattern remains unchanged: 77% of women who are primary school graduates receive minimum wage or less, whereas for men this figure is 27%. Even though the earnings differentials are lower for secondary school and university graduates,

The Percentage of Men and Women in Every Monthly Net Income Interval (North Cyprus Overall/2001)



Source: Turkish Cypriot University Women Association, *Gender Profile in Education & Employment Report*, Nicosia, TCUWA Woman Produce and Research Library, November 2001.

they still exist. While 20% of women who are university graduates earn more than three times the minimum wage, the percentage of men who receive this amount is 32%.

Unpaid Work and Attitudes towards Working Women

The findings also show that women keep 67.7 hours spare on average per week for housework, compared to 34.5 hours kept spare by men. Women who are out of the labour force show their *family commitments* as one of the reasons why they stay out. Women who are presently unemployed but have worked at some point during their lives give *family responsibilities* as one of their reasons for leaving their jobs.

Another finding, as seen from the answers given to the questions about women and work,

is that 48.7% of women verified the statement that “A child’s education will be adversely affected by having a working mother.” The statement “A working woman will cause family problems” was verified by 34% of women and the statement “For a decent and proper family life the woman should not work” was verified by 28% of women. However, the statement “I do not find it right for women to work” was agreed by 11.2%.

By considering all the statements and answers given by women, it is possible to reach a general conclusion by women: “I find it right for women to work as long as the proper family routine is maintained, that it does not lead to family disputes and especially does not adversely affect the children’s education.” This means that women *want to work* in paid jobs outside the home as long as they are the *forms*

*of employment* that do not hinder their children's education, do not interrupt the routine of their family, do not create family problems, and finally do not cause them to neglect or delay their household duties.

### Gender Gap in Education

Even though the education level of women increases from one generation to the next, compared to men it is still lower. A large number of women terminate their education at primary or secondary school level and a smaller percentage move on to higher levels.

Unemployment amongst women who are primary school graduates is 50%, whereas this ratio falls to 14% for women who are university or high school graduates. When these findings are jointly evaluated, it is evident that education removes the effect of the most significant obstacles due to gender role segregation in north Cyprus.

### Laws Organizing the Family Unit and Working Life in North Cyprus

As was mentioned in the introduction, north Cyprus possesses the important legal framework that supports gender equality. This legal framework for equality consists of the north Cyprus Constitution,<sup>9</sup> Labour Legislation,<sup>10</sup> Family (Marriage and Divorce) Legislation<sup>11</sup> and Legislation for the Women's Studies Department (Constitution, Duty and Working Principles).<sup>12</sup>

The legal framework is further strengthened on an international level by agreements on gender equality, which are accepted but not signed because north Cyprus is not politically

recognized by the international community. Furthermore, the International Labour Organization Convention<sup>13</sup> and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women<sup>14</sup> also support this legal framework.

There are articles in the north Cyprus Constitution which stress the importance of gender equality: Article 8 adheres to the decree that "everyone without any form of discrimination is equal under law"; Article 49 adheres to the decree that everyone "has the right and responsibility to work"; Article 48 adheres to the decree that everyone "has the right to work in any profession of their choice"; and Article 50 states that "no one will be forced to work in a job that is not suitable for their age, strength/capability or gender".

In the Labour Legislation, Article 2, which adheres to the decree that "contracts cannot be annulled based on gender", and Article 21, which adheres to the decree that "persons of all genders with the same productivity and qualification will receive equal pay for equal work", are the important articles for gender equality and segregation/discrimination based on gender.

When the Family (Marriage and Divorce) Legislation came into force and replaced the Turkish Family Legislation, which included articles discriminating against women and dictating the roles and statuses of men and women in the family, these articles became invalidated. For example, Article 7 of the Turkish Family Law prohibited marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man; Article 48

9. Official newspaper no. (RGN) 43/85

10. RGN 49/1992 in effect from 12th May 1992.

11. RGN 10/1998 in effect from 26th January 1998.

12. RGN 12/2002 in effect from 26th February 2002.

13. Law (11/1993, RGN:29) Concerning the approval of the ILO Conventions: No. 198, about principles of unionisation and collective agreement; No. 158, about principles of the termination of the contract by employer; No. 111, about the gender discrimination by job and occupations; No. 100, about equal pay for equal valued jobs.

14. Law concerning the approval of the UN's Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women Agreement.

stated that “the father has the right to decide on the religious education their child will receive”; Article 37 stated that “the man is the head of the marital union”, that “the man solely has the right to choose the area of inhabitation, is responsible for providing for the family”, that “the woman is responsible for household duties and only acts as an aid in providing for the family”. With the Family (Marriage and Divorce) Legislation coming into force the aforementioned articles were abolished and the legal framework established prevents inequality within family life.

Moreover, Article 37 of the new Family Legislation adheres to the decree that “all possessions acquired during the period of marriage must be equally divided between the parties”, and this secures the welfare and future of women who did not have the opportunity to work or who were not permitted to work in paid jobs outside the house.

### *The statement “children can only carry the family name” supports the man’s dominance in the family*

Additionally, Article 37 in the old Family Legislation, which stated that women had to take the man’s surname, has been modified and in the new Family Legislation states that either surname can be adopted as the family name according to the agreement between the spouses. In circumstances where they cannot come to an agreement, the man’s surname will be taken as the family name. If this is the case, the woman will bear her own surname before her family name. While women have been given the right to keep their surnames legally, the children can only bear the family name. Although this article appears to give women the right to maintain their surnames, it comes with the condition that they also bear their husband’s name. Furthermore, the statement “children can only carry the family name”

supports the man’s dominance in the family. The Women’s Studies Department Legislation is important in the sense that it forms the legal basis for the aforementioned articles to be put into practice in everyday life.

The principle of equality that was the aim of the national legislation, international frameworks and institutions such as the Women’s Studies Department, was not achieved. The research findings show that gender inequality still prevails. It is important to take steps to identify the reasons for this inequality which is still prevalent despite the legal framework.

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