

Priorities of Public Policies aimed at Preventing Gender-Biased Sex Selection and Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia



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The efforts to prevent sex-selective abortions in Armenia, specifically implementation of the 2015-2017 Action Plan on Preventing Sex Selective Abortions elaborated in 2015 with the support of the International Center for Human Development (ICHD), the European Union and UNFPA, and ratified by the joint decree of the Minister of Health and Minister of Labour and Social Affairs; a series of initiatives carried out by UNFPA and ICHD in 2017-2018; and several projects implemented by other non-governmental organisations, resulted in significant mitigation of the practices of gender-biased sex selection. However, these achievements are still rather fragile and may not be sustained in the light of current political, economic, social, cultural and security challenges. When the country faces serious challenges in the systems that are there to manage uncertainties, including challenges regarding effectiveness of the newly introduced funded pension system and employment services, absence of health insurance and high levels of poverty, any crisis may result in further reduction of fertility rate, which in the light of prevailing gender stereotypes and undervaluation of a girl child will aggravate sex-selective practices, will skew the sex ratio at birth even further and will trigger detrimental consequences. To rest on our laurels and enjoy the current achievements will be an excessive luxury for our country.

In the medium term it is important to sustain the continuity of the previous efforts, both as regards to the methodology and consistency. However, the current government does not seem to appreciate the importance of this, and welcomes 2019 without a state programme and plan of actions to prevent gender-biased sex selection. It is high time to sober up, straighten the fallen flag, mobilise all the stakeholders in time and space, and continue the arduous and coherent effort. Time passes irrevocably, whereas the present achievements are still revocable. Therefore, any moment may see disastrous consequences for human rights and security.

In the medium term it is important to continue awareness raising activities, though not in the same scope, with the same targets and messages. Specifically, the focus of awareness raising should be on appreciating the economic role of women in ensuring the prosperity of their families, communities and the economy in general, as well as on promoting the model of a family with more than one breadwinner.

There is a need to considerably increase policy formation and implementation activities, especially initiatives, programs and budgeting for participation of women in labour force, and for balancing work and life both for men and women. Particularly, it is pertinent to design and implement initiatives that support introducing and expanding the scope of early childhood care services. Such measures, even if implemented in the medium term, will have significant positive impact both in terms of preventing sex selection and increasing the state budget revenues, as ICHD research and analysis for 2017-2018 show.

It is important to initiate awareness raising and capacity building activities for opinion leaders, public servants, officials responsible for the formation and implementation of relevant policies, public service providers, and representatives of CSOs, academic community and FBOs.

It is imperative to finalise and ratify the state programme and action plan for preventing gender-biased sex selection in the first quarter of 2019, and to allocate adequate resources in annual state budgets for 2020 and onwards, in order to implement the planned actions, because CSOs and



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international development partners cannot carry all the financial burden of addressing an issue of such public significance forever. A country that secures funding for new equipment and cars for state agencies, as well as for business trips of state officials, can certainly seek resources for overcoming one of the gravest challenges to its security.

Finally, it is important to ensure annual monitoring of the situation and implementation of the state and other large-scale programmes targeting prevention of sex selections, as well as to conduct vital research and analysis of the existing evidence, by allocating a dedicated line in the state budget.

All the above-mentioned recommendations need to be acted upon as soon as possible, when the pride in the achievements of the joint effort of the state and the society has not yet been replaced by the bitterness of irreversible losses to result from inaction.



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