

Post-Communist Transition Takes Toll on Women

Bratislava, Slovak Republic, 12 December 2007 – The post-communist transition in Central and Southeast Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States has seen reductions in women’s wages and employment rates relative to men’s, as well as declines in political representation and well-being, according to the December issue of *Development and Transition*, which is being released today.

The vast majority of women have suffered economic setbacks in the form of deepening poverty and unemployment, as well as growing economic insecurity and exploitation, Patrícia Eszter Margit writes in the lead article of *Development and Transition*, a joint publication of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the London School of Economics.

‘The gaps between winners and losers in transition are large, and many women are still unable to take full advantage of the new opportunities’, argues Margit, who has recently been named Media and Gender Officer for the Office of the Hungarian Prime Minister. ‘The battle is now being fought to make the labour market take full account of the needs of women’.

Anna Matveeva links some of the region’s most serious gender challenges—apparent in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus—to the armed conflicts that have occurred there, as well as to relatively low incomes and the re-emergence of traditional gender roles in these countries.

‘The most important safety valve for social discontent is the high labour migration, mostly to Russia, which receives over 70 percent of labour migrants from Central Asia, but also to Kazakhstan,’ writes Matveeva, who is a Visiting Fellow with the Crisis States Research Centre of the London School of Economics.

Recent UNDP survey data from Azerbaijan suggest that cultural stereotypes continue to determine gender roles in that country, while data from Moldova and Uzbekistan shed light on the impact of migration on household roles and the challenges facing female migrant labourers.

Sarah Ashwin of the London School of Economics argues that in Russia women’s ‘double burden’ of work and household management have had hidden benefits, while men’s freedom from domestic responsibilities and license to drink partly explain why

male life expectancy in Russia remains about 14 years below that of women and 16 years below the EU average.

Ben Slay, Director of the UNDP Bratislava Regional Centre, places the unfavourable male mortality trend in a broader demographic context. Slay points out that the trend in Russia is not shared by most other countries in the region, and it began well before the Soviet collapse.

‘Because many of Russia’s disturbing mortality trends began decades before the USSR collapse, they should not be ascribed solely to the post-Soviet transition’, writes Slay.

About the newsletter: *Development and Transition* is a joint publication of the United Nations Development Programme and the London School of Economics. It aims to be a forum for policy-oriented discussions and debates about how the nature, evolution and challenges of development and transition intersect in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and also Turkey.

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