

## RESEARCH ARTICLE



# Integrating Gender Relations into Social Policy: An Analysis of Challenges and Approaches

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## Abstract

This research analyzes the integration of gender relations into social policy, focusing on the challenges and approaches within various social protection systems. It begins by examining the heightened interest in social policy over the past decade, highlighting its role in mitigating the adverse effects of economic reforms and alleviating poverty. The study explores the preference for "social policy" over "welfare state" in gender research, particularly in Kazakhstani practice. Key areas of analysis include labor markets, institutional bases of social and gender policy, and the nature of political debates in the field. Critiques of traditional frameworks that overlook non-market labor are addressed, emphasizing the need for gender-inclusive policies that promote equitable responsibility distribution between men and women. "Defamiliarization" is explored as an emerging trend advocating for state-provided services to promote women's economic independence and reduce their reliance on familial support. The research evaluates childcare, elder care, and parental leave policies through case studies and comparative analysis of Kazakhstan and other countries. The findings underscore the importance of integrating a gender perspective into social policy to ensure comprehensive support for all forms of labor, both market and non-market. Policy recommendations are provided to enhance gender inclusivity, aiming to create more effective and equitable social protection systems that support all individuals' well-being and economic independence, particularly women.

**Keywords:** Gender Relations, Social Policy, Social Protection, Defamiliarization, Gender Equality, Childcare and Elder Care, Women's Economic Independence

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The last decade has seen a remarkable increase in attention to social policy, especially concerning social protection systems. This intensified focus has enabled governments to significantly boost their social spending allocations, playing a crucial role in mitigating the adverse impacts of economic reforms and reducing poverty following the extensive failures of the neoliberal model of economic growth. Consequently, this shift has allowed numerous social movements to demand more robust and effective social policies aimed at addressing and alleviating the repercussions of market failures.

In the global academic discourse, particularly among international sources, researchers specializing in gender issues prefer the term "social policy" over "welfare state." This preference is based on the belief that "social policy" more accurately reflects the dynamic nature of ongoing processes and the global changes accompanying them. This terminological distinction is also evident in Kazakhstani practice, where social policy is identified as a distinct area of research. This field encompasses the social insurance and broader social protection systems.

Several interrelated areas have been identified in the theorization of gender and social policy: the nature of labor and employment markets, the institutional basis of social and gender policy, and the character of political debates in social policy. These areas form the cornerstone of contemporary research, underscoring the intricate connections between gender dynamics and social policy frameworks.

Traditional assessments of the social sphere, which do not incorporate the gender dimension, often focus on economic factors such as the economic role of individuals based on their market value, treating hired labor as a commodity in the labor and employment market. Some gender studies adopt similar criteria. For instance, Esping-Andersen's work compares social security systems based on the level of "decommodification" as a criterion for

classifying states, evaluating how social insurance payments mitigate the commodity value of labor.

The relationship between the main institutions of social policy influences the typology of regimes. The effectiveness of social policy is impacted by the active involvement of women in decision-making processes across the state, labor market, society, and family, as well as the interaction between these institutions. Gender-inclusive social policy can be categorized as gender-neutral or gender-sensitive. According to Liebert, such a policy does not grant exclusive rights to any particular group but facilitates certain processes. For instance, a gender-sensitive approach might include mechanisms where the state supports households through adequate pensions, benefits, and insurance instruments for intra-family care of the elderly, sick, and children. This approach ensures that intra-family care is not exclusively a female responsibility, promoting a more equitable distribution of duties between men and women.

Relationships within the family are a focal point for gender scholars. Recent studies advocate for states to be classified as "women-friendly" based on the criterion of "defamiliarization," which refers to the ability of women to live in decent conditions and provide for themselves independently of their family or marital status.

This study aims to analyze the integration of gender relations into social policy, specifically focusing on the challenges and approaches within various social protection systems.

The research is structured into several main parts, starting with an Introduction that outlines the study's background, significance, and objectives. The Literature Review follows, providing historical context, critical theories, and a comparative analysis of global and Kazakhstani practices. The Methodology section details the research design, data sources, and analytical techniques. In the Theoretical Framework, the study delves into labor and employment markets, institutional bases, and political debates, integrating

feminist critiques and alternative gender models. The Case Studies and Comparative Analysis section examines specific countries' policies and compares gender-inclusive approaches. Findings and Discussion summarize vital insights and discuss the impact of gender dynamics on social policy effectiveness. Policy Recommendations offer actionable suggestions for enhancing gender inclusivity in social policies.

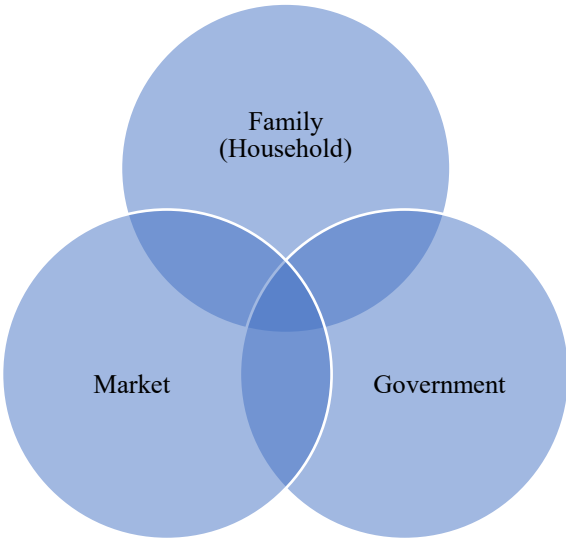
## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The past decade has witnessed a significant surge in interest regarding social policy, particularly in social protection systems. This heightened focus has empowered governments to increase allocations for social spending substantially. These efforts have been instrumental in mitigating the adverse effects of economic reforms and alleviating poverty, following the widespread shortcomings of the neoliberal model of economic growth and dynamism. Consequently, this shift has enabled numerous social movements to articulate demands for more robust and

effective social policies to address and ameliorate the repercussions of market failures [1].

In the global literature, particularly among foreign sources, researchers specializing in gender issues tend to prefer the term “social policy” over “welfare state.” This preference stems from the belief that “social policy” more accurately captures the dynamic nature of ongoing processes and the global changes that follow them. This terminological distinction is also reflected in Kazakhstani practice, where social policy is singled out as a distinct area of research. This field encompasses both the social insurance system and the broader social protection system [2,3].

In the theorization of gender and social policy, several key interrelated areas have been identified: the nature of labor and employment markets, the institutional basis of social and gender policy, and the character of political debates in the field of social policy (Figure 1) [1]. These areas form the cornerstone of contemporary research, highlighting the intricate connections between gender dynamics and social policy frameworks.



**FIGURE 1.** Institutional framework for social and gender policy jobs

*Note:* compiled by authors

Traditional assessments of the social sphere that do not incorporate the gender dimension often focus on economic factors, such as the economic role of individuals based on their market value, where hired labor is considered a commodity in the labor and employment market. Some gender studies adopt the same criteria. For instance, Esping-Andersen's work compares social security systems based on the level of "decommodification" as a criterion for classifying states. This approach evaluates how social insurance payments mitigate the commodity value of labor. However, this framework often neglects the valuation of work performed within the family, a critique notably raised by feminist scholars [4].

The relationship between the main institutions of social policy influences the typology of regimes. The effectiveness of social policy is impacted by the active involvement of women in decision-making processes across the state, labor market, society, and family, as well as the interaction between these institutions. Gender-inclusive social policy can be categorized as gender-neutral or gender-sensitive. According to Liebert, such a policy does not grant exclusive rights to any particular group but facilitates certain processes. For instance, a gender-sensitive approach might include mechanisms where the state supports households through adequate pensions, benefits, and insurance instruments for intra-family care of the elderly, sick, and children. This approach ensures that intra-family care is not exclusively a female responsibility, promoting a more equitable distribution of duties between men and women [5].

Relationships within the family are a focal point for gender scholars, and recent studies advocate for states to be classified as "women-friendly" based on the criterion of "defamilialization." This concept refers to the ability of women to live in decent conditions and provide for themselves independently of their family or marital status [3,6,7]. Typically, social security systems protect formally employed workers, thereby incentivizing informally employed individuals to seek

formal employment. However, this system faces criticism for excluding individuals engaged in-home care, such as caring for the sick or children, from being recognized as informally employed. Housework, predominantly performed by women, often goes unrecognized in labor statistics, leading to the concept of "double employment" for women, who balance official employment with extensive household duties. Lister evaluates social rights using the criterion of "defamilialization" to highlight these issues [8].

This comprehensive approach underscores the importance of understanding social policy not only as a mechanism for economic redistribution but also as a critical domain influencing gender relations and societal equity. By examining these interrelated areas, researchers can better understand the multifaceted impacts of social policy on gender dynamics, thus contributing to more effective and inclusive policy-making. Recent studies emphasize the necessity of integrating a gender perspective into social policy analysis to ensure that both market and non-market labor, particularly caregiving and domestic work, are adequately valued and supported.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study includes several key stages and approaches for a comprehensive analysis of the integration of gender relations into social policy:

*Literature Analysis:* A thorough review of existing academic literature on the topics of social policy, gender studies and social protection systems was conducted. The analysis examined global sources reflecting international experience, as well as studies related to the practice of Kazakhstan. Particular attention was paid to works devoted to the integration of gender perspectives into social policy, including criticism of traditional models and proposals for alternative approaches.

*Comparative analysis:* A comparative analysis of the social policies of various

countries, including Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and other post-Soviet states, was performed. Aspects of social protection were considered, such as childcare policies, elderly care policies and maternity leave policies. The comparative analysis allowed us to identify common trends, successful practices and problem areas in the implementation of gender-inclusive policies in different contexts.

*Case study:* Specific cases of implementation of gender-inclusive social policies in different countries were studied. These cases helped to identify successful practices and existing problems. In each case, support mechanisms were analyzed, such as state pensions, benefits and insurance instruments for intra-family care for the elderly, sick and children. Particular attention was paid to how these measures contribute to the redistribution of household responsibilities and reduce gender inequality.

*Policy recommendations:* Based on the analysis and findings, recommendations are developed to improve gender inclusiveness in social policy. These recommendations aim to create more effective and equitable social protection systems that take into account both market and non-market work. In particular, measures are proposed to improve the availability of child and elderly care services, increase flexibility and compensation for maternity leave, and strengthen gender equality policies.

This comprehensive approach provides a deep understanding of the impact of gender relations on social policy and develops practical recommendations to improve social protection and achieve gender equality.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Integrating Gender Relations into Traditional Models of Social Policy

Based on extensive research and numerous discussions in the field of gender economics, two primary approaches have emerged. The first approach advocates for the integration of

gender relations into existing traditional models of social policy, suggesting transformation through the reconstruction of fundamental categories. Notable researchers such as Orloff A. and Liebert W. contribute to this perspective, each offering distinct frameworks that aim to address gender disparities within social policy [9].

#### *Orloff's Model of Gender-Integrated Social Security*

In her model, Orloff adheres to the traditional social security system but proposes significant modifications to alleviate the burden of domestic work for women. This is achieved by transferring some of these responsibilities to state services. The core of Orloff's model is the triple relationship between the state, market, and family, which she uses to analyze gender stratification and to advocate for providing women with greater access to paid work.

Orloff's approach emphasizes the need for state intervention in redistributing domestic responsibilities, which are traditionally shouldered by women. By doing so, her model seeks to reduce gender inequality and enhance women's participation in the labor market. This paradigm shift is crucial for promoting gender equity and ensuring that women have the same opportunities for economic independence and career advancement as men [10].

#### *Liebert's Perspective on Gender-Sensitive Social Policy*

Liebert W. also contributes to the discourse on gender-sensitive social policy. According to Liebert, integrating gender elements into social policy does not entail granting exclusive rights to a specific group but rather facilitating processes that support households equitably. This includes mechanisms where the state provides support through adequate pensions, benefits, and insurance instruments for intra-family care. Such policies aim to ensure that caregiving responsibilities are shared more equitably between men and women, thereby promoting gender neutrality in family roles.

Liebert's framework aligns with Orloff's in recognizing the importance of state support in achieving gender equity. However, Liebert

further emphasizes the necessity of policies that address both the economic and social dimensions of gender relations, ensuring comprehensive support for all household members regardless of gender [11].

**4.2 Critiques from Alternative Gender Models**

Authors of alternative gender models of social policy, such as Lewis J., Ostner I., Pfau-

Effinger B., Fraser N., and Sainsbury D., criticize the established model of the male breadwinner. They argue that it is insufficient to reconstruct the traditional model of the social protection system by merely including gender aspects, as the model itself is inherently oriented towards a male-dominated world. These scholars contend that a more radical transformation is necessary, one that fundamentally rethinks (Table 1) the assumptions and structures underlying social policies to ensure true gender equity [12-17].

**TABLE 1.** Alternative gender models

#	Study	Main critiques	Proposed alternative approach
1	Jane Lewis	The model is outdated and male-biased	Develop policies promoting gender-neutral caregiving
2	Ilona Ostner	Overlooks women's unpaid domestic labor	Emphasize shared caregiving responsibilities
3	Birgit Pfau-Effinger	Reinforces traditional gender roles	Integrate gender equity across all policy areas
4	Nancy Fraser	Limits women's economic independence	Support dual-earner/dual-career households
5	Diane Sainsbury	Inadequate for modern family dynamics	Reflect diverse family forms in policy development

*Note:* compiled by authors

**4.3 Recent Research and Emerging Trends**

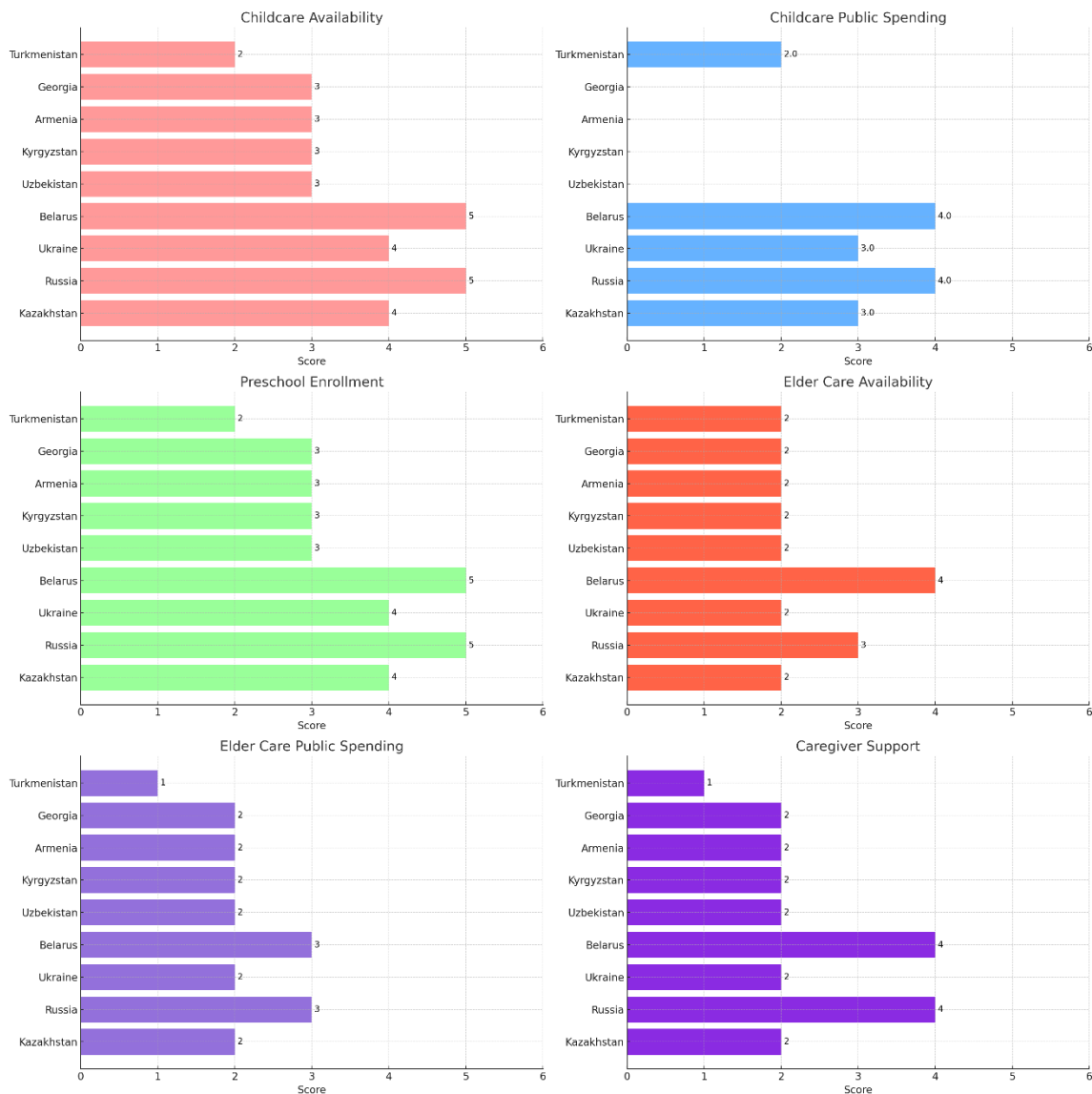
Recent studies underscore the importance of integrating a gender perspective into social policy analysis. These studies highlight the need for policies that value both market and non-market labor, particularly caregiving and domestic work, which women predominantly perform. Scholars advocate for a more inclusive approach that recognizes the economic contributions of domestic work and supports gender equity in all spheres of life.

Emerging research also explores the concept of "defamilialization," which refers to the state's role in providing services that enable individuals, especially women, to live independently of their family roles. This approach is gaining traction to promote

women's economic independence and overall well-being, regardless of their marital or family status.

Integrating gender relations into traditional models of social policy requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the intersections of state, market, and family. By adopting frameworks that redistribute domestic responsibilities and support gender equity, policymakers can create more inclusive and effective social policies that promote the well-being and economic independence of all individuals.

Focusing on two main aspects – access and financing of care services, as well as policies on maternity leave, social benefits and gender equality – is essential for a better understanding and analysis of gender policies in the context of social protection (Figure 2).



**FIGURE 2.** Availability and financing of care services

*Note:* compiled by authors

These graphs and descriptions provide an overview of the current status and differences in access to and support for child and elderly care across countries.

*Childcare Availability*

The graph shows the levels of childcare availability in different countries. Russia and Belarus stand out as having the highest availability, while Turkmenistan has moderate availability with an increasing trend.

*Childcare Public Spending*

Russia and Belarus also lead in government spending on child care, which is higher than in Kazakhstan. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Georgia show low but increasing expenditures, while in Turkmenistan, expenditures remain low.

*Preschool Enrollment*

Russia and Belarus again lead the way with high preschool enrollment rates. Kazakhstan

and Ukraine are showing growth in this indicator, while Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Georgia are at a moderate level. Turkmenistan has a low recording rate.

#### *Elder Care Availability*

Belarus has the best availability of care for the elderly; however, most countries, including Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and others, rely mainly on family care and have limited availability.

#### *Elder Care Public Spending*

Belarus and Russia stand out for their moderate government spending on elderly

care. In other countries, costs remain low, and in Turkmenistan, they are deficient.

#### *Caregiver Support*

Belarus and Russia provide better support for caregivers than Kazakhstan. Support is limited in other countries, and in Turkmenistan, it is very limited.

Policies on maternity leave, social benefits, and gender equality (Table 2) provide a comprehensive understanding of the status and effectiveness of various aspects of social protection aimed at supporting gender equality and family well-being.

**TABLE 2.** Comparative analysis of key aspects of social policies related to maternity leave, social benefits and gender equality in different countries

Criteria	Kazakhstan	Russia	Ukraine	Belarus	Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia (Armenia)	Turkmenistan
Maternity Leave	126 days, compensated	140 days, compensated	126 days, compensated	126-140 days, compensated	126 days (140 days), low compensation	112 days, low compensation
Paternity Leave	Available, limited use	Available, moderate use	Available, limited use	Available, moderate use	Available, limited use	Not available
Parental Leave Flexibility	Limited	Higher flexibility	Growing flexibility	Higher flexibility	Limited	Very limited
Unemployment Benefits	Available, limited	More generous	More generous	Comprehensive	Limited	Very limited
Social Assistance	Available, often insufficient	More accessible	More generous, economic challenges	Comprehensive	Limited	Very limited
Housing Support	Limited	Better than KZ	Limited	Better than KZ	Limited	Very limited
Gender Equality Policies	Present, uneven enforcement	Better than KZ	Stronger policies, varied implementation	Significant focus, societal lag	Limited	Very limited
Work-Life Balance Support	Growing, limited	Better than KZ	Growing, moderate	Better than KZ	Limited	Very limited
Gender Pay Gap Measures	Present, slow progress	More effective measures	Stronger policies	Significant focus, slow progress	Limited	Very limited
<i>Note:</i> compiled by authors						

Russia and Belarus stand out as the countries with the most generous and comprehensive social protection and gender

equality measures. They provide extended and well-compensated maternity leave (140 days and 126-140 days, respectively), moderately



used paternity leave, flexible parental leave, comprehensive unemployment benefits, and social assistance. These countries also have more robust gender equality policies and support for work-life balance, making them leaders in social policy.

Turkmenistan, unfortunately, consistently exhibits the least supportive policies across multiple criteria. It provides the fewest days of maternity leave with low compensation, does not provide paternity leave, and has minimal parental leave flexibility, unemployment benefits, and social assistance. Gender equality policies and support for work-life balance are also minimal. Turkmenistan ranks last on all criteria, starkly indicating the urgent need for significant improvements in social policy.

Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Armenia occupy intermediate positions, offering moderate measures of social support and gender equality policies. In these countries, maternity leave is compensated between 126 and 140 days, paternity leave is available, but with limited use, and parental leave flexibility is limited. Unemployment benefits and social assistance are also present, but less generous than in Russia and Belarus. These countries desire to improve but still need significant reforms to reach leaders.

Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia, while showing limited efforts, are also demonstrating a promising trajectory in their social policies. Despite offering low compensation for maternity leave and limited provisions for flexibility in parental leave, these countries have seen positive trends in increasing the availability of social benefits and assistance.

Their gradual improvements, despite limited resources, are a beacon of hope, indicating potential for further development.

#### **4.4 Summary of Key Findings**

##### *Childcare and Education Services*

Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus: Kazakhstan is improving but still lags behind Russia and Belarus, which have more developed childcare systems and higher public spending. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Georgia,

Turkmenistan: These countries have limited childcare availability and low public spending, though Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan show some signs of growth.

##### *Elder Care Services*

Kazakhstan and Similar Countries: Kazakhstan and its peers, including Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Georgia, and Turkmenistan, rely heavily on familial care with low public spending on elder care. Russia and Belarus: Slightly better elder care services compared to Kazakhstan and its peers, but still largely reliant on family.

##### *Parental Leave Policies*

Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus: These countries offer compensated maternity leave, with Russia and Belarus having more flexible parental leave policies. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Georgia, Turkmenistan: Offer maternity leave but with lower compensation and less flexibility in parental leave policies.

##### *Social Benefits and Support*

Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus: Kazakhstan has limited unemployment benefits and social assistance, while Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus offer more generous systems. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Georgia, and Turkmenistan: Have limited social benefits and support systems, with Turkmenistan being particularly limited.

##### *Gender Equality Policies*

Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus: Kazakhstan has policies but inconsistent enforcement, while Russia and Belarus have stronger measures in place. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Georgia, Turkmenistan: Generally have limited gender equality policies and slow progress in this area.

Kazakhstan, while making notable progress in defamilialization, especially in childcare and early education, still faces challenges similar to those in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Georgia, and Turkmenistan. These challenges include limited public elder care, less flexible parental leave policies, and inadequate social benefits. Russia and Belarus generally provide better support in these areas. To further reduce reliance on familial support, Kazakhstan and

its peers could enhance public elder care services, increase the flexibility and compensation of parental leave, and improve social benefits and gender equality policies [18-22].

*Analysis of gender policy in Kazakhstan*

Gender policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan is related to all post-Soviet countries. The pre-independence general Soviet social protection system provided all citizens equal social guarantees and government assistance. The support system for women was exceptionally well built through various insurance instruments (benefits, assistance to young mothers, nurseries, access to universal education, and help in obtaining an apartment); as a result of the information blockade, the implemented social policy developed in the form of a separate direction not in line with global gender trends within the framework of the Soviet ideology of gender equality. Although effective in content, social policy needed ambivalence [21].

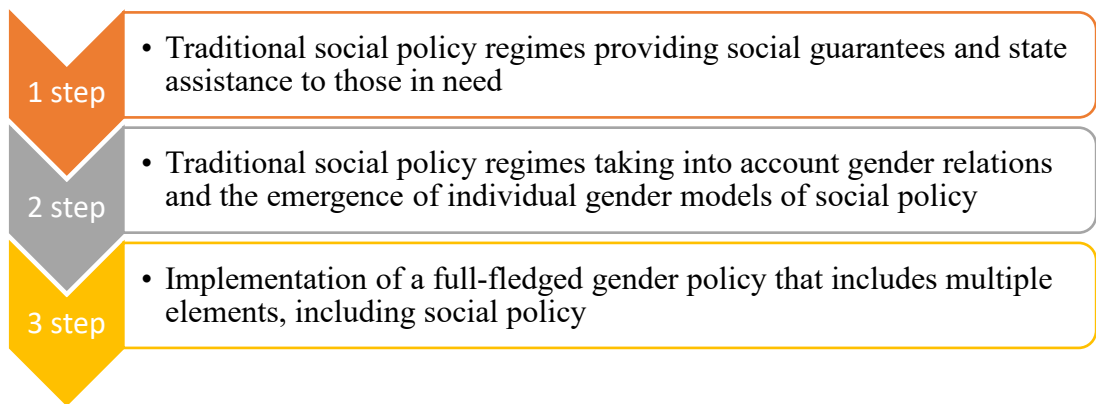
Despite its autonomous development, some scientists recognize that the Soviet model can be classified as a welfare state policy according to the typology of welfare regimes [22].

However, the term "gender" was an alien and Western concept in the Soviet past [23].

The Kazakhstani social protection system had its characteristics. Being a derivative of the Soviet system, it promoted the idea of gender equality, but at the same time, during the reform period, social policy was inconsistent [21]. Also, despite the state-supported gender policy, there were manifestations of sexism based on traditional gender stereotypes.

**5. DISCUSSION**

An analysis of world literature showed that early gender studies in the field of social security considered mainly the typology of social policy regimes (Esping-Andersen, Orloff A., Connor O.), and most subsequent concepts in theorizing gender aspects were built based on this triple model "State- Market- Household" and on the possibility of integrating gender relations into existing models. Over time, the research direction took on a different character, and social policy was analyzed from a different angle (Figure 3), where the criterion was "defamiliarization" [2].



**FIGURE 3.** From social policy to gender policy

*Note:* compiled by authors

Introducing a novel concept, we witnessed the emergence of new individual models of social policy. These models, in contrast to the traditional ones that depicted a man as a breadwinner and a woman as a housewife,

were met with criticism. Even in families where both partners were employed equally, the woman was still traditionally assigned the role of educator and housework responsibility.

The new models, however, considered "dual employment," social guarantees of the state and the market, increased access to paid work, women's economic activity, and division of household labor. Thus, social policy began to act as a component of gender policy.

#### *Limitations and recommendations of the study*

The study's literature review was limited. Literature and resources were selected using the following keywords: gender and social policy, gender economics, and gender indicators of the social protection system.

In the analysis of the theoretical chapter, the concepts of "decommunization" and "destabilization" were mainly considered since they were directly related to the typology of regimes of social states. At the next stage, the scope of research will be expanded, and relatively new concepts will be considered: "degeneration" and "feminization of poverty."

This study analyzed secondary statistical data, carefully selected for their "validity" and "reliability." We relied on widely recognized gender-sensitive indicators, greatly facilitating data systematization and comparative analysis of social policies in non-Western countries.

However, it was observed that there is a shortage of official statistical data on many indicators related to gender economics. In such cases, it is recommended to conduct research based on primary data. Therefore, our subsequent analysis will include a survey and expert interviews to ensure the robustness of our findings.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This research underscores the importance of integrating gender relations into social policy to create more inclusive and equitable social protection systems. Over the past decade, the increased focus on social policy has been instrumental in mitigating the adverse impacts of economic reforms and reducing poverty. The preference for the term "social policy" over "welfare state" in gender research

highlights the dynamic nature of these processes, particularly in Kazakhstani practice.

The study examined vital areas such as labor markets, institutional bases of social and gender policy, and political debates. Traditional social policy frameworks often overlook non-market labor, primarily performed within the family, leading to significant gender disparities. The research highlighted the need for gender-inclusive policies that promote equitable responsibility distribution between women and men.

"Defamiliarization" emerged as a crucial trend, advocating for state-provided services to enable women's economic independence. Case studies and comparative analyses of Kazakhstan and other countries revealed varying degrees of effectiveness in childcare, elder care, and parental leave policies. Findings indicate that incorporating a gender perspective into social policy ensures comprehensive support for all forms of labor, both market and non-market. Policy recommendations include enhancing public elder care services, increasing the flexibility and compensation of parental leave, and improving social benefits and gender equality measures.

Future research should continue to explore new concepts such as "degeneration" and "feminization of poverty" while addressing the limitations of current data availability. By focusing on these areas, policymakers can develop more effective and inclusive social policies that support all individuals' well-being and economic independence, fostering a more equitable and just society. The role of academics in this process is crucial, as their research can provide the necessary insights to shape these policies effectively.

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