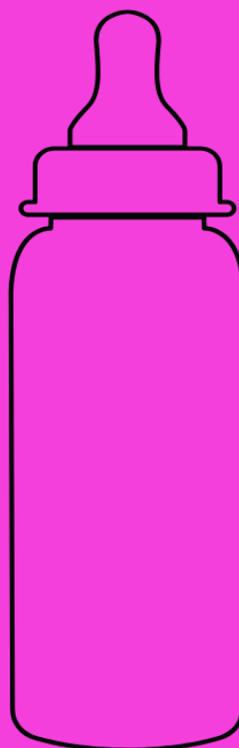


NATALIST POLICIES IN ARMENIA

Policy Brief



© The following is the English summary of a policy brief prepared by the Women's Resource Center NGO.

This policy brief is intended for public policy and legislation makers, advocacy organizations and the general public. It was developed on the basis of the real stories of women about sexual harassment in the workplace and a public survey.

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The demographic policy of the Republic of Armenia is dedicated to fostering an increase in the birth rate. In recent years, several significant adjustments in social and healthcare policies have been undertaken to facilitate this goal.

I. Social policies

The primary cash payments offered by the state to encourage higher birth rates consist of maternity allowances, one-time lump sum childbirth payments and childcare allowances for children below the age of two. It is crucial to acknowledge that lump-sum payments provided by the state to promote fertility can lead to an increase in domestic violence against women and may reinforce women's economic dependence on their partners. Those payment may create a serious incentive for an abusive partner to exert control over a woman's body and reproductive choices.

It is noteworthy that rights-based and effective pro-natalist social policies first of all invest in supporting parents in organizing childcare. In Armenian society, caregivers for children are mostly women. Along with the increase in the number of children in the family, the occupation of women with family responsibilities also increases. As a result, young mothers are often left out of education and the labor market.

To mitigate the disproportionate impact of pronatalist policies on women and for achieving gender equality, the state should:

1. Implement policies and action plans designed to foster gender equality and engage men in family responsibilities,
2. Establish sufficient infrastructure for the facilitation of childcare, including kindergartens and other preschool facilities.

II. Healthcare Policies

In healthcare policies the promotion of fertility is being pursued through the use of anti-abortion rhetoric. The state is also channeling resources towards expanding access to assisted reproductive technologies, showing its commitment to advancing fertility-related objectives.

Notably, in 2016, several restrictions on abortion access were implemented, including prohibitions on sex-selective abortions, introduction of a mandatory three-day waiting period for abortion seekers and mandatory consultations, which are usually conducted with biased content. These changes, along with the awareness campaigns surrounding them, are being utilized to propagate anti-abortion messages through healthcare professionals.

Another significant healthcare concern relates to the limited availability of modern contraceptives, which poses a substantial challenge, particularly for women in rural areas where access to pharmacies is limited.

From a healthcare perspective, attention must also be given to the shortage of healthcare infrastructure, the quality of services provided, and the demanding workloads placed on healthcare professionals.

III. Social Norms and Values, State Rhetoric

Social norms and values definitely influence public policy. There are stereotyped approaches to the role of women in Armenian society and state policies are not exempt from these positions. A common stereotype perpetuates the notion that a woman's unequivocal place in society is within the family, with her primary and paramount role being motherhood. From an early age, women are taught the importance of becoming exemplary wives, fully aware of their family responsibilities.

In this context, it becomes essential to assess how women's autonomy and their right to make informed choices regarding motherhood are manifested. Through the lens of feminist philosophy, the concept of choice for women under hegemonic systems becomes a complex one. Making a truly informed choice requires individuals to have access to comprehensive information about all available options. It becomes challenging to discuss a conscious choice in motherhood when patriarchal norms are systematically promoted at the state level.

IV. Recommendations

1. Enact Policies for Gender Equality and Male Involvement in Family Responsibilities.
2. Ensure universal access to preschool education throughout the entire territory of the Republic of Armenia.
3. Take steps to reshape the public discourse surrounding abortion and educate the public on the right to access safe and legal abortion services.
4. Guarantee accessibility to high-quality maternity and abortion services for all women.
5. While drafting and implementing population policies, prioritize the fundamental principle of autonomy for women to manage their own bodies.

Additional materials:

1. Berlin Institute for Population and Development (2020): "A contested issue. The rise in international opposition to the right to sexual self-determination" : https://www.berlin-institut.org/fileadmin/Redaktion/Englisch/Studien/A_contested_issue/BI_Kairo_eng.pdf
2. European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (2018): "Restoring the Natural Order. The religious extremists' vision to mobilize European societies against human rights on sexuality and reproduction". Brussels: EPF.
3. Wichterich, Christa (2015): "Sexual and Reproductive Rights". Berlin: Heinrich Böll Foundation: [Boell-Foundation: Sexual and Reproductive Rights](#)
4. Gesine Akena, Patricia Hecht and Dinah Riese (2022): "Population policy: Between self-determined family planning and selective birth control". Heinrich Böll Foundation: https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2022-05/Factsheet_Population.pdf



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