
ISF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

GEDSI Analysis Kazakhstan

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WPS | Women,
Peace
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Helpdesk

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Task Overview

Title of Task: Gender Equality, Diversity and Social Inclusion Analysis Kazakhstan

Requesting Officer: Larissa Kanafina, Political & Governance Analyst, British Embassy Astana; Larissa.kanafina@fcdo.gov.uk

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Task expert: Bénédicte Santoire, PhD

Terms of Reference:

1. Background to assignment

We would like the WPS Helpdesk to help with carrying out the GEDSI analysis for Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan ranks 92 out of 148 in the Global Gender Gap Report, with strong performance in education and health but persistent gaps in economic participation and political empowerment. Rapid economic growth has not reached rural communities, ethnic minorities and youth, and informal work remains high, particularly for women and migrants, with limited social protection. Same-sex relationships are legal, but stigma and discrimination persist, and a new “propaganda” law will aggravate situation with rights and advocacy. We are concerned about the trend this law is indicating and would like to commission further analysis to understand trends and direction of travel for Kazakhstan.

2. Purpose of assignment

Analysis of the context; analysis to identify feasible opportunities that align with UK objectives and deliver measurable GEDSI outcomes; opportunity to enhance women’s rights through the Embassy initiatives in Kazakhstan. The GEDSI analysis will help to inform future GEDSI strategy and programme/policy priorities for the BE Astana.

3. Task outputs, presentation and dissemination

A written product with the analysis, findings, and recommended steps. The product will be shared across the Embassy for the GEDSI to remain central to our work, and will be taken into account when designing and implementing new projects and policy priorities.

Findings and Analysis

1

Country context summary and introduction

Kazakhstan ranks 92nd (out of 148) in the Global Gender Gap Reportⁱ, 0.182 (out of 1) in UNDP's Gender Equality Indexⁱⁱ, and 72nd (out of 181) in the Georgetown University Women, Peace and Security Indexⁱⁱⁱ, demonstrating strong performance in education and health, while still facing ongoing gaps in economic participation and political opportunities for women and marginalised communities. Despite rapid economic growth over the past few decades since the fall of the Soviet Union, benefits have not been equitably distributed. Rural populations, ethnic minorities, youth, persons with disabilities, and those engaged in informal work are disproportionately excluded from economic opportunities and social protection mechanisms. Women and migrant workers are overrepresented in informal and precarious sectors, with limited access to social protections.^{iv} Moreover, gender-based violence is widespread, and women are still underrepresented in government, political leadership, and the security and defence sectors. While same-sex relationships are decriminalised in Kazakhstan, high social stigma and legal discrimination against LGBTQI+ communities persist.

Recent major events, such as the 2022 'Bloody January' and legislative developments, including the adoption of "LGBT propaganda"-style and proposed Russian-style "foreign agent" legislation, contribute to a tightening of civic space and will further constrain advocacy, civil society engagement, and rights-based programming, with certain populations disproportionately at risk, especially feminist and LGBTQI+ organisations and individuals living with HIV. These dynamics unfold within a broader national and regional context characterised by entrenched patriarchal norms, democratic backsliding, and regression in human rights. Furthermore, there have been key developments since 2022. Kazakhstan, a country with a large Russian-speaking population and historically close economic and political ties to Russia due to, among others, its interdependence with Russia over energy, key resources, and transportation routes, has been carefully navigating its relationship with Russia, China, and the West's growing presence in the region, while reaffirming its sovereignty and agency. While not explicitly supporting Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it has benefited economically from an influx of Russian migrants, for example.^v In 2022, inter-ethnic disputes and border conflicts between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan over resources present security, economic, and stability risks for the wider region.

The British Embassy's overarching objective in Kazakhstan is to strengthen the UK's security, growth, and climate partnerships with this strategic ally in Central Asia, reinforce Kazakhstan's sovereignty and prosperity amid geopolitical risks with Russia and China, and promote UK-aligned inclusive values, such as gender equality and social inclusion. The purpose of this assignment is to undertake a Gender Equality, Diversity and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) analysis of the socio-political and economic context in Kazakhstan. Based on the British Embassy's overarching objectives in Kazakhstan and discussions with the team in Astana, the thematic focus areas are the following: 1) Gender-based violence (GBV), health, and protection, 2) Political participation, rights, and freedoms, 3) Women's economic empowerment (WEE) and poverty, 4) Women, Peace and Security (WPS), and 5) Climate and access to resources.

The following questions guided the analysis: What are the structural drivers of gender inequalities and social exclusion in Kazakhstan? Specifically, how do these inequalities impact women and girls' access to SRHR, protection from gender-based violence, resources, and access to economic and political opportunity and participation? What are the key dynamics, stakeholders, and trends in the field of WPS in Kazakhstan? What realistic, context-sensitive entry points exist for the British Embassy in Astana to contribute to measurable GEDSI outcomes in the five focus areas?

2

Methodology

The analysis is based on a targeted desk review of the identified themes, primarily using grey literature from relevant United Nations agencies, civil society, the Kazakh Government, and international organisations (both Kazakhstan-specific and broader/regional data). In total, 22 documents (research reports and briefs, shadow reports produced by Kazakh civil society, national reviews, and periodic reports) were analysed and coded in NVivo across the five thematic areas, and 37 web pages were browsed (short articles, webpages, and up-to-date data hubs) in English and Russian. Grammarly and Copilot were used to refine the text's quality, grammar, and delivery, and summarize and tighten jargon-heavy paragraphs (containing no sensitive information). Copies of all prompts are available.

3

Findings of the GEDSI analysis

Gender-based violence, health, and protection

Gender-based violence (GBV) is widespread in Kazakhstan. 16.5% of women and girls aged 18-75 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner during their lifetime; 20.6% have experienced emotional violence, and 6.3% have faced economic violence, with actual figures likely much higher than reported. 7.8% of women aged 20-49 were first married or entered a union before age 18. Additionally, 4.5% of married women report having been kidnapped for marriage.^{vi} Technology-facilitated (TF)GBV is also prevalent in Kazakhstan, and no legal provisions in criminal codes, legislations, or policies exist yet to tackle this emerging form of violence. A UN Women study found that 43% of women in Kazakhstan have experienced at least one form of TFGVB.^{vii}

The Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence was enacted in 2009, defining domestic violence to include physical, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse. It also mandates that local authorities create prevention programs and ensure that victims receive essential services and protection. Legislative advances, such as the 2024 criminalization of domestic violence (“Saltanat Law”) and the 2025 criminalisation of stalking and forced marriage, are significant^{viii}, but the law still fails to define and recognise domestic violence as a distinct criminal offence or adopt a consent-based definition of rape, further, patriarchal norms contribute to normalising violence and low reporting rates.^{ix} Ongoing reforms of the judiciary aim to improve access to justice and strengthen judicial independence to ensure fair and impartial proceedings. Good practices include removing ‘reconciliation’ as a resolution option in cases of physical violence and requiring police to act without a formal victim's complaint. Additionally, the development of digital platforms like *Zan Komegi* has expanded access to free legal assistance.^x

Despite those legislative amendments and recent positive advances, in reality, however, survivors of GBV face multiple barriers (especially those living at the intersection of marginalisation, such as women with disabilities, LBTQI+ women, older women, women living in rural areas and in poverty, and refugees and migrant women): fear of stigma, lack of trust in law enforcement, lack of legal aid and literacy, a gap between legal frameworks and their enforcement, and limited access to crisis shelters and related psychosocial health services across all oblasts (as of 2024, there are only 41 shelters in the whole country).^{xi} Although Kazakhstan has made efforts in the last year to increase the number of trained inspectors and female investigators in crimes related to GBV,^{xii} there is still insufficient trauma-informed training among service providers across the country, such as police officers and judges. CSOs are important in service delivery, awareness-raising, and assistance/solidarity to victims, but their ability to engage in strategic litigation is

limited due to resource constraints and restrictive civic space, particularly harassment and registration barriers for feminist and queer organisations.^{xiii}

In terms of sexual and reproductive health and rights, significant progress has been made over the past 20 years in reducing maternal and infant mortality. Today in Kazakhstan, 40% of the population has access to contraceptives.^{xiv} While adolescent pregnancy rates are relatively low and declining, it remains a concern, particularly among rural women and those with lower levels of education. Abortion is legal up to 12 weeks upon request, but social stigma, judgmental medical practices, and structural barriers such as poverty and lack of services in rural areas limit full access for many women, especially those of marginalised identities. Frequent abortion recourse for family planning impacts women's health, suggesting that many women rely on abortion instead of modern contraceptive methods, and the rate is higher among vulnerable groups, such as teenage girls living in rural areas, women with disabilities, and those living with HIV.^{xv} The COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on reproductive healthcare, increased the maternal mortality rate, especially in rural areas,^{xvi} and worsened issues like domestic violence and human trafficking.^{xvii}

People with disabilities in Kazakhstan encounter numerous obstacles, including social and economic integration issues, barriers to employment, social stigmas, transportation difficulties, inaccessible infrastructure, and limited access to information, communication, and technology, hindering their full participation in society. Data also indicates that women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to GBV and lack the mobility required to access support, social services, medical assistance, and justice.^{xviii}

In Central Asian countries, including Kazakhstan, LGBTQI+ people have limited access to legal, health, and psychological services, housing, and protection mechanisms due to numerous barriers such as social stigma and legal discrimination. Despite that, the Kazakh constitution enshrines equality and non-discrimination based on gender, but it does not include sexual orientation or gender identity, and no legislative mechanism exists to protect LGBTQI+ individuals. Reports detail pressure, persecution, blackmail, and torture against LGBTQI+ individuals (mainly men and trans persons) by law enforcement across the region. The community's vulnerability, discriminatory legal provisions on the grounds of SOGI in the Criminal Code ("lesbianism" and "sodomy" are listed among other sexual acts under the criminalisation of violent, underage or forced sex) or HIV transmission^{xix}, and high social stigma enable abusive officials to act in impunity. In Kazakhstan, undergoing a "surgical sex change" is required for legal gender recognition, compelling trans people who want legal recognition and can access such operations to undergo invasive and humiliating procedures.^{xx} The "LGBTQ propaganda" law, which recently went into effect, is likely to worsen these issues by further institutionalizing discrimination against LGBTQI+ people and providing authorities with an additional tool to suppress the civic rights of marginalized communities. This law, a series of amendments resulting from a citizen petition with over 50,000 signatures, has a vague definition of "propaganda" and aims to "protect" children and minors from the promotion of "non-traditional" values.^{xxi}

The criminalisation of HIV transmission and exposure in Kazakhstan harms the rights of people living with HIV by violating privacy and confidentiality, as fear of prosecution discourages HIV disclosure, testing, and seeking treatment. It also worsens social stigma and isolation, causing discrimination, family breakdowns, and loss of employment.^{xxii} Women living with HIV, especially those in the LGBTQI+ community, practicing sex work, or using drugs, face intersecting violence and systemic discrimination in legal, HIV-sensitive reproductive healthcare and services, and have higher risks of GBV. Despite recent legislative changes, restrictions on women living with HIV staying in crisis centers/shelters still exist.^{xxiii}

Political participation, rights, and freedoms

Kazakhstan has several legal and policy frameworks in place to advance women's empowerment and gender equality. The Strategy on Gender Equality (2006-2016) and a recent update, the Concept on Family and Gender Policy until 2030, address a number of issues, including women's participation in decision-making and equal opportunities. National machineries for gender-related issues include the National Commission for Women's Affairs, Family, and Demographic Policy (hereafter National Commission), which serves as an advisory body to the President of Kazakhstan, with its secretariat housed within the presidential administration, there are also commissions focused on women's issues in all regions of Kazakhstan, operating under *akimats* (local government bodies).^{xxiv} Kazakhstan has made progress in the

collection and dissemination of gender-disaggregated data and is the only Central Asian country with a dedicated division for gender statistics.^{xxv}

Since its independence, Kazakhstan has overall increased women's representation in politics at all levels of governance and in elections. For example, a 2020 amendment to the Elections Act and the Political Parties Act established a mandated quota that 30% of candidates on party lists must be women and youth. In 2022, an Act was signed into law to reserve a mixed quota of 30% of parliamentary seats for women, youth, and persons with disabilities. But the actual numbers overall remain consistently below those targets. Women represent about 18% of the *Mazhilis* members, the lower house of the Parliament (a notable decrease from 27% in 2022), and 20% of the Senate members. Over the past two decades, the proportion of women in executive branch political positions has never exceeded 12%.^{xxvi} In *maslikhats* (local representative bodies), women account for 21% of deputies. About 55% of civil servants are women, and in the Supreme Court of Kazakhstan, 48% are women.^{xxvii} 22% of the National Congress's (an advisory body under the President) members are women. Women actively participated in Kazakhstan's 2023 parliamentary and local elections, but they still made up a minority of candidates and elected officials. In early 2023, women accounted for about one-quarter to one-third of all registered candidates in the Senate, the *Mazhilis*, and local *maslikhats*. Their share among those who actually ran was similar. After the elections, women held 18 of the 98 seats in the *Mazhilis* and 786 of the 3,415 seats in *maslikhats*, showing that women remain underrepresented in elected positions despite their strong participation.^{xxviii} There are currently three women Ministers in the Government (out of 21 Ministers).^{xxix}

Several obstacles hinder women's political representation and their full, equal participation in decision-making, including traditional gender norms and stereotypes^{xxx}. Obstacles also include high levels of violence against women in politics (exceeding the European and Central Asian average)^{xxxi}, like physical attacks, psychological harassment, increased media scrutiny, and various forms of TFGBV, such as online smear campaigns, sexual harassment, trolling, and doxing, among others. Additionally, these inequalities are worsened by other identity aspects such as age, disability, and sexual orientation.

As in other countries of the post-Soviet space, women are underrepresented in formal politics but overrepresented in civil society and NGOs. Given women's overall low levels of political representation, such spaces offer women key opportunities to influence policy. However, these openings are limited; the government mainly consults a small group of selected NGOs,^{xxxi} and the civic space is increasingly restricted. Despite positive advancements, such as the President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's "Listening State" initiative to improve communication between the State and civil society, the civic space is, in reality, shrinking. As of 2025, Freedom House assigns Kazakhstan a score of 23 (out of 100), classifying it as a 'consolidated authoritarian regime'. In this regime, neither parliamentary nor presidential elections are free or fair, the media is under state control, and freedoms of speech, association, and assembly are restricted and penalized.^{xxxiii}

The recent rollback in human rights and shrinking civic space has higher costs for marginalised communities. A regional trend of human rights deterioration, democratic backsliding, repression of the opposition, human rights defenders, and marginalised groups is visible in Kazakhstan, exemplified by Russian-style legislation, the recently enacted "LGBTQ propaganda" law and the proposed "foreign agent law" that, if passed, would further restrict civil society's ways of organizing and foreign funding, as seen in countries like Russia, Hungary, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan, for example.^{xxxiv} For example, recent CEDAW shadow reports show that some Members of Parliament have called for the legal designation of the Kazakh feminist CSO "Feminita" as an "extremist" organisation, and numerous cases of harassment, digital surveillance, attack of protesters by police officers, restrictions on organising protests, and freedom of speech have been reported by feminists, LGBTQI+ and human rights defenders CSOs^{xxxv} as well as those working on HIV and harm reduction.^{xxxvi}

Women's economic empowerment and poverty

After the fall of the Soviet Union and Kazakhstan's independence, the country's rapid economic restructuring and growth significantly improved human development and incomes, and reduced unemployment and the overall poverty rate. However, this rapid economic growth has not reached everyone equally (i.e., rural communities, ethnic minorities, and youth), and there are still marked regional disparities

between urban centers and rural areas across a vast country. The latest data shows that Kazakhstan has a robust participation rate for women in the labor force, indicating that women constitute 63% of the workforce, a percentage much higher than the regional and global averages.^{xxxvii} Additionally, 2021 amendments to the Labour Code eliminated exclusions related to a list of professions prohibited to women.^{xxxviii}

The economic shocks (i.e., the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the 2014 decline in oil prices, the 2015 currency depreciation, and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine) have exposed structural vulnerabilities that disproportionately affect low-income households and marginalised communities. These groups experience intensified impacts as employment opportunities decrease, consumer prices and loan rates increase, and a lack of savings leaves them without a secure financial safety net. Women, particularly those heading households with children and elderly women living alone, are especially susceptible during periods of economic instability. These shocks also hit the hardest sectors where women are concentrated, such as social services, health care, education, agriculture, culture, and the service sectors. Because women are concentrated in lower-paying, part-time, and service-sector jobs rather than in higher-paying industrial positions, their employment is more vulnerable to economic fluctuations. Consequently, women face a higher risk of economic shocks and unemployment compared to men, and current formal unemployment rates and the economically inactive population show distinct gender patterns.^{xxxix}

Poverty and access to the labour market are profoundly shaped by systemic and intersecting forms of oppressions and identities in addition to gender. Informal work remains high in Kazakhstan, especially among women and migrants, who lack social protection. Vulnerable employment (i.e., without formal work arrangements, social protection, and safety nets), however, is slightly lower among women (24.5%) than among men (25%), but is well above the regional average for Europe and Central Asia (11% and 14.5%).^{xl} Despite ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Kazakhstan faces ongoing challenges in fully integrating people with disabilities into society and the workforce. Efforts are underway to promote disability inclusion,^{xli} but progress is hindered by poor accessibility, limited inclusive education, and low employment rates among persons with disabilities.

LGBTQI+, particularly trans people, face high levels of violence and discrimination in employment.^{xlii} Social stigma and the lack of anti-discrimination legislation and protection mechanisms prevent LGBTQI+ people from fully protecting their labor rights, making them particularly vulnerable to violence, discrimination, and working in the informal economy, such as sex work; in turn, sex workers are subject to violence by clients, the judicial system, and law enforcement on a daily basis.^{xliii}

Like in many other countries, Kazakhstan faces a significant issue of time poverty, with women more likely than men to take time off for childcare, elderly care, and unpaid domestic work, which can hinder their career growth. Despite most Kazakh women participating in the workforce, they dedicate more hours to household chores than men do: data show they spend three times as many hours on unpaid care and household work.^{xliv} The government has implemented measures to help balance work and family responsibilities (men have a right to take a paternal leave). Although national labor laws protect the right to family life, women frequently encounter barriers to exercising these rights. The law does not specify penalties for violating women's labor rights, such as those related to maternity and childcare leave. Additionally, the lack of clear procedures for addressing discrimination cases threatens women's access to maternity and childcare leave.^{xlv}

The digital gender gap (i.e., the percentage of individuals using the internet or mobile technologies) is small in Kazakhstan.^{xlvi} Regarding women's access to financial services and capital, 86% of women have an account at a financial institution (compared to 88.5% of men)^{xlvii}, and 19% and 62% of women own a credit card and a debit card, respectively (compared to 23% and 58% of men).^{xlviii} World Bank data show that fewer women than men save money formally and borrow from formal financial institutions.^{xlix}

Demographically, Kazakhstan is simultaneously a young nation with an aging population,^l underscoring the importance of age disparities and youth engagement in any analysis. In recent years, Kazakhstan has developed legal and policy frameworks on youth, such as the Law on State Youth Policy (2015, amended 2022), which expanded the youth age bracket to 14–35 and introduced the Youth Development Index (YDI). Other strategies include the State Youth Policy Concept 2023–2029, the establishment of Youth Resource

Centers, and the Comprehensive Plan to Support Youth 2021–2025, which focuses on youth employment, innovation and entrepreneurship, digital skills, civic engagement, and regional development.^{li}

Women, Peace and Security

Women, Peace and Security (WPS) is an emerging landscape in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan adopted its first National Action Plan on WPS in December 2021, for the period of 2022 to 2025, late compared with other Central Asian countries, which adopted their first NAPs nearly a decade ago (Kyrgyzstan 2013, Tajikistan 2015).^{lii} The first NAP, developed by the National Commission for Women’s Affairs and Family and Demographic Policy, is a short 5-page document without Monitoring and Evaluation indicators, a budget, or any mention of civil society participation. The plan focused on three main goals, which are primarily inward-facing: supporting women’s and men’s participation in peacebuilding, preventing and protecting women and girls from violence in conflict settings, and promoting gender analysis in policymaking, leadership, and budgeting. It also aimed to increase women’s roles in defense, peace, and disarmament processes, strengthen gender perspectives across the defense and security sector, and use media to help prevent gender-based violence.^{liii} The first NAP is currently outdated, but the Government is preparing a second NAP, with no indication of whether civil society is involved in the process.^{liiv}

Kazakhstan has been an active supporter of the WPS agenda in multilateral spaces (notably at the WPS Annual Open Debates) and through women’s participation in UN peacekeeping, prior to adopting a NAP.^{liiv} In 2018, a Kazakh military contingent—among them women military officers—was deployed with the Indian battalion *Indbat* on missions in UNIFIL and MINURSO, as well as in other missions (i.e., MONUSCO, MINUSCA, UNDOF, UNMISS, UNTSO). The country has expanded training for women military advisers and gender specialists, delivering UN-certified courses and leadership programmes for over 200 officers, law enforcement staff, and journalists at a training centre in Almaty (Kazsent). Kazakhstan also collaborates with neighbouring Central Asian states on gender and peacekeeping training. Under the UN strategy, Kazakhstan aims to increase the share of women military officers serving in peacekeeping operations to 15% of contingent troops and 25% of women UN military observers by 2028, but the reality is far behind those targets.^{livi} Although Kazakhstan is among the top three largest troop-contributing countries in the Europe and Central Asia region (with Serbia and Türkiye), the representation of women in those troops remains significantly low. As of January 2026, Kazakhstan’s contribution to UN Peacekeeping missions totals 156 uniformed personnel (including experts on mission, staff officers, and troops), of whom only three are women.^{liiii} The security sector, too, remains male-dominated, with 15.4% of the police personnel in Kazakhstan being women,^{liiii} but there are encouraging numbers (e.g., the number of women in leadership positions within the Ministry of Defense has doubled since 2022).^{liix}

Kazakhstan has also been active in the sphere of countering and preventing violent extremism (C/PVE). For example, the country, in collaboration with UN Women, UNICEF, psycho-social experts, and religious leaders, launched two humanitarian initiatives—Operation *Zhusan* and *Rusafa*—from 2019 to 2021, which repatriated over 700 Kazakh citizens, mostly women and children, family members of Islamic State fighters from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq.^{lix}

In terms of diplomacy, Kazakh women diplomats remain significantly underrepresented. Currently, 3 out of 68 ambassadors are women; only one of the six permanent representatives of Kazakhstan to international organisations is a woman; and at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters, 36% are women, with 17% holding senior positions.^{lix} Kazakhstan became a signatory of the Compact on Women, Peace, and Security and Humanitarian Action under the Generation Equality initiative in 2023, showing active engagement in WPS multilateralism.^{liix}

Between 2020 and 2023, bilateral aid (in absolute gains, constant prices) directed at gender equality and women’s empowerment initiatives increased significantly, notably because of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Despite those gains, the share of bilateral aid supporting gender equality initiatives and women’s rights organisations in Central Asia declined, even though they play central roles on the front lines of crisis response, service delivery, and recovery.^{liix}

Climate and access to resources

Research shows that not only does climate change exacerbate existing gender inequalities and increase women's domestic workload, facing heightened insecurity, displacement, migration risks, and limited access to resources and decision-making, but it is also a driver of conflict, as water scarcity fuels competition between communities and states in Central Asia. The construction of Afghanistan's Qosh Tepa canal and the influx of Afghan refugees further increase pressure on shared water resources and risk escalating tensions. Shifts in water availability are already creating tensions between upstream states of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) that depend on rivers for agriculture and hydropower, and downstream states (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) that rely on them for crop irrigation. Weak implementation of transboundary water agreements compounds political, economic, and military tensions. In the Ferghana Valley, competition over water and land also intensifies long-standing border and ethnic disputes.^{lxiv} A good practice of women's leadership in water governance and diplomacy is the Chu-Talas Commission, headed by women on both sides (Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan).^{lxv}

Despite women's crucial roles in managing water, food, and household resources, women (along with other marginalised communities) remain significantly underrepresented in climate policy and decision-making, conflict resolution, water governance structures, land management, and disaster planning. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, property is predominantly owned by men, as land reforms occurred after the fall of the Soviet Union, periods which were marked by uneven processes regarding the legal status of property, the allocation of property rights, land control, the real estate market, and the size and structure of land available for agricultural use.^{lxvi} Women are also overrepresented in the agriculture sector, which is highly vulnerable to production losses from climate change impacts on temperature and water resources. Moreover, the diverse perspectives and specific needs of people, for example, women, people living with disabilities, or the elderly, are often lacking in disaster risk reduction plans. In Kazakhstan, the Concept on Gender and Family Policy does not mention gender in this sector, nor in climate change adaptation planning.^{lxvii}

4

Conclusion and overarching recommendations

As shown in the current GEDSI, Kazakhstan ranks highly overall on key gender and human development indicators, has ratified all essential international human rights treaties and instruments, and is officially dedicated to promoting women's rights and gender equality through dedicated laws, institutions, and international agreements. However, the analysis shows that several gender gaps are evident in certain areas, worsened by patriarchal social norms and beliefs. Repeated evidence across the thematic areas indicates a significant gap between policy or legal commitments and actual implementation, with some marginalised groups poorly protected or not protected at all and at high risk (e.g., LGBTQI+ communities, people with disabilities, people living with HIV, queer and feminist organisations).

Based on the GEDSI, there are several entry points and opportunities for the British Embassy in Astana to act primarily as a convener, funder, and advocate. Gender is not explicitly mentioned in the mission statement, but the UK's objectives in Kazakhstan (security, growth, and climate) are directly connected to all issues discussed in the GEDSI, and all five thematic areas are interconnected, creating many opportunities for cross-thematic and cross-sectoral programming. In a context of fiscal and political uncertainty, it is not about reinventing the wheel but rather about funding and supporting proven effective initiatives within the country and the region. The following sections explore those opportunities based on the GEDSI analysis findings and examples of good practices from UK Embassies elsewhere in the broader region, and conclude with overarching, Embassy-level recommendations.

Where the Embassy can act as an advocate

1. **Use the British Embassy's leadership and reputation to advocate to the Kazakh Government and its relevant State agencies for stronger legal protections against discrimination**, including amendments that explicitly recognise sexual orientation and gender identity as protected characteristics, the development of TFGBV-specific legislation, and support for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention.
2. **Position Kazakhstan as a partner in global efforts to end violence against women and girls through senior-level political exchange on gender issues**, including through the Prime Minister's gender envoy, Parliament, and the Foreign Secretary.
3. **Use the British Embassy's leadership, reputation, and soft power engagements to oppose discriminatory laws**, including the newly enacted "LGBTQ propaganda law," by maintaining dialogue with both the Kazakh Government and LGBTQ civil society, and by encouraging the government to respect its engagements and alignment with international human rights standards and mechanisms, like the Universal Periodic Review.

→ Example of successful practice: UK-FCSO funding through the project "Strengthening the Resilience of Trans-Led Community Organisations in the Region" in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Türkiye and Ukraine has channelled funding through Right Side NGO, a trans- and sex workers-led organisation based in Armenia, to conduct research and deliver a training on crisis preparedness and resilience-building for 15 trans activists and organizations involved in advancing trans rights and to build their capacity to carry out effective advocacy on legal gender recognition across the region. This type of initiative is an example of how the British Embassy in Kazakhstan could realistically oppose discriminatory laws through soft power, support for LGBTQ civil society, and capacity strengthening for relevant NGOs.^{lxviii}

Where the Embassy can act as a funder

4. **Allocate programme funding that addresses interconnected and multi-sectoral issues at once**, such as: TFGBV, gender mis/disinformation, PCVE, and early-warning systems at the water-climate-peace nexus. For example, this can include supporting cross-border, gender-sensitive, and community-level environmental monitoring, early-warning systems, and the integration of modern digital tools for conflict prevention.

→ Example of successful practice: A proven efficient and "value for money" entry point for this is through the funding of feminist and women's rights organisations. The recently published "Peace under pressure: Protecting Women, Peace and Security" report by the International Development Committee's House of Commons committee features a number of recommendations, in part based on evidence by experts and practitioners, notably *Kvinna till Kvinna* Eastern Europe and South Caucasus regional office. In their written submission^{lxix}, they underlined how crucial it is to provide multi-year, flexible, core and direct funding to feminist and women's rights organisations and networks, especially in a region (including Central Asia) marked by democratic backsliding and anti-gender backlash. In that regard, they note the importance of adaptable, simplified reporting procedures to reduce administrative burdens on smaller women's organisations.

→ Example of successful practice: The UK has recently announced new funding to support victims of non-consensual intimate image abuse in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This includes training civil society organizations on how to use a pioneering global platform, 'STOP NCII.org', which is at the forefront of technology and TFGBV prevention.^{lxx}

5. **Allocate programme funding to initiatives that strengthen synergies between the WPS and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas**, for example, by establishing joint WPS/YPS

fellowships or awards that elevate young women leaders and peacebuilders, and by offering seeding grants to Youth Resource Centers and youth networks.

→ Example of successful practice: The ‘Building Resilience in the Eastern Neighbourhood’ (BREN) project in Armenia has advanced women and youth leadership by providing subgrants to local groups like the Frontline Youth Network, a youth-led organization working in border communities. They collaborate closely with teachers and education agencies to promote peace education across the country. Their efforts within ISF UK-funded initiatives led to two approved handbooks—one on countering disinformation and another on trauma-sensitive education—used in schools.^{lxxi}

- 6. Continue programming for female military officers and expand training in the security sector,** building on the training that was organized by the UK Ministry of Defence in partnership with UN Women Kazakhstan in early 2026.^{lxxii} Possibly extend similar capacity-building to police officers and other law enforcement bodies where women remain underrepresented and where gender-sensitivity is especially crucial for GBV response.

Where the Embassy can act as a convenor

- 7. Support the Kazakh Government in developing its second National Action Plan on WPS,** for example, by funding inclusive consultations and convening women’s rights organisations, civil society, UN partners, and state institutions, and by regularly connecting with the WPS focal point in the Government. As a convenor, the Embassy should ensure allocating enough time and resources to make these platforms more inclusive and accessible to marginalised voices and expertise (i.e., not only from capital-based and well-established NGOs), such as directly inviting smaller, lesser-known organisations and funding travel and accommodation costs for representatives from rural areas to participate, when possible.

→ Example of successful practice: UK ISF’s funding in Armenia through the BREN project has contributed to making the newly-adopted third National Action Plan process significantly more inclusive of civil society than the first two plans by convening a variety of civil society actors together in dialogue with the Government, which was not the case before.^{lxxiii}

- 8. Support ongoing regional efforts to develop a WPS Regional Action Plan led by the UN Women Europe and Central Asia regional office and local stakeholders,** by playing a convening role in consultations and initiatives promoting cooperation among Central Asian states on water and climate security, emergency preparedness, humanitarian action, social norm change, youth engagement, and PCVE, and by funding activities of the plan, once available (expected for March 2026).^{lxxiv} This should be done with the same attention to inclusivity as mentioned in recommendation #8.

- 9. Convene and fund regional cooperation and peer learning events.** In contexts of shrinking civic space, regional peer learning, strategic coordination, and cross-border solidarity are essential for broader goals of inclusive governance, democratic resilience, and security. As a traditionally underfunded and overlooked region, the UK could support such events in the context of Central Asia, in partnership with relevant international NGOs working in the region (e.g., the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders). This should be done with the same attention to inclusivity as mentioned in recommendation #8.

→ Example of successful practice: In the Western Balkans, the *Kvinna till Kvinna* Foundation, supported by the UK’s FCDO, organised a regional networking and exchange meeting in February 2026 (Democracy and Resilience in the Western Balkans: Supporting Feminist Change Agents 2.0 programme),^{lxxv} which aimed to strengthen feminist civil society and democratic accountability in contexts of gender backlash, political polarisation, and shrinking civic space.

Overarching, Embassy-level recommendations:

10. **Establish regular civil society consultation mechanisms** by convening annually or biannually meetings with women’s rights, disability, LGBTQI+, and youth organisations, as well as with migrant and Afghan women’s organisations, if feasible at the British Embassy (with appropriate security and safeguarding measures), to ensure diverse and sustained input into policy, strategy, and programming. This way, the Embassy can act as an intermediary between the Kazakh government and civil society in a meaningful way without putting them at risk of legal or physical threats.
11. **Integrate gender analysis into political and economic weekly reporting at the British Embassy** by adding a separate briefing to the Embassy’s teams that are interested and specifically working on GEDSI-related developments. Consider occasionally inviting a civil society representative to contribute to a portion of those weekly reports, if feasible
12. **Continue existing good practices at the British Embassy** by consistently amplifying women’s empowerment through public diplomacy, initiatives, and success stories across the Embassy’s events, social media, and campaigns. For example, the ‘Ambassador for a Day’ campaign, which aims to motivate and empower young women to become future leaders.

5

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