



Women in Ukraine

Sociological Assessment Highlights

by Margaret Kopala

In sharp contrast to the statistic that 70% of all unemployed in Ukraine today are women, those women who have the dubious fortune of being in their 40's, divorced, and living in small towns at least have the comfort of knowing that they are the most highly employed group of women in their population. In fact, the employment rate among divorced Ukrainian women is 83% and that among women between the ages of 40-49 is 87%.

In and of itself, however, being a woman provides no employment advantage in Ukraine. On the contrary, as in the entire society, the level of unemployment among women has increased over the last five years. Today, women are represented mostly in the low-paid state sector of the economy and have income levels 30% lower than men. Worse, they are seldom allowed into, or are often pushed out from the most prestigious jobs with high social and financial status. In addition, most shoulder the double burden of work plus housekeeping.

These are among the findings of a recent sociological assessment undertaken by the Ukrainian Center for Women's Studies in Kyiv. In collaboration with the Social Monitoring Center of the National Institute for Strategic Studies, the Ukrainian Center undertook the study to prepare for the United Nation's Fourth World Conference on Women being held in Beijing this year.

In addition to employment, basic indicators studied in the survey include income level in state and public sectors; age and marital status; urban and rural differentials; education and current tendencies; health, including birth control, sex education, and violence against women.

Women currently predominate in various branches of industry and agriculture, particularly in the state sector of the economy, which employs 25% more women than men. According to the report, this means that all the problems of a collapsing state economy reflect much more on women. For instance, state social benefits which accrue to motherhood and other family functions create an unwelcome environment for women in the private sector, which is neither able nor willing to provide similar social benefits. This, the report suggests, is resulting in the marginalisation of female labour.

Kyiv is the hub of the transition from the Soviet state economy to an independent Ukrainian market economy and it is here that the unemployment rate is highest, most particularly for women. While this is in part due to the fact that many of the city's occupants are students, large numbers of people are engaged in "grey market" activities - that is, working in non-registered private businesses, trades, and as hired workers at private homes and firms. Thus new relations in the working place are developing in Kyiv in a way not being

experienced in the rest of the country.

The report notes that in Soviet society, staying out of work was both a stigma and a criminal offence, and many people would not admit being out of work unless it became very critical. Assuming this attitude continues in independent Ukraine, the report goes on to suggest that unemployment rates may be higher than indicated since women responded to the survey on a self-evaluation basis. Tellingly, among women with children under 3 years of age, 35% are working. In other words, more than a third of women entitled to legal benefits (maternity leave in Ukraine is available until a child is 3 years of age), are not using them and go to work. On the other hand, however, and reflecting a universal dilemma among women, 24% of respondents cited family obligations as the main reason preventing them from pursuing a career and earning more money. Asked whether they would choose not to work, almost 40% said yes, provided the necessary conditions were in place. However, for the sake of pension provisions, many remain at their jobs.

While the survey reveals a general level



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