



# PERCEPTIONS OF PRECARIOUSNESS

A Qualitative Study of Constraints  
Underlying Gender Disparities in  
Mongolia's Labor Market

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## **Acknowledgements**

This report is a product of the World Bank's Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice. It was written by Achim Schmillen (World Bank) and Nina Weimann-Sandig (Evangelische Hochschule Dresden) with guidance from James Anderson and Jehan Arulpragasam and inputs from Wendy Cunningham and Tungalag Chuluun. The report was peer-reviewed by Helle Buchhave and Matteo Morgandi. Erdene Ochir Badarch and Obert Pimhidzai gave helpful comments and suggestions. Angar Enkthur, Corinne Bernaldez and Maya Razat provided excellent administrative support.

The authors thank the entire team from the Mongolia Center for Development Studies (MCDS) and in particular B. Bayasgalan for the implementation of the focus group discussions, Ts. Erdenechimeg for conducting key informant interviews, Sarah Iqbal and Alena Sakhonchik for help with the data on the number of legal gender differences by economy, Marc DeFrancis for substantive and copy-editing and B. Temuulen for translations.

The authors also thank the various key contact persons who supported the recruitment of focus group participants. Very special thanks are due to all participants in focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and biographical interviews who graciously shared their knowledge and experiences. Financial support from the World Bank's East Asia and Pacific Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality is gratefully acknowledged.

## Acronyms and Definitions

<b><i>Aimag</i></b>	Province, outside Ulaanbaatar
<b><i>Aimag center</i></b>	Provincial capital
<b><i>Bagh</i></b>	Village, outside Ulaanbaatar
<b><i>Dzud</i></b>	Severe winter in which large number of livestock die
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign Direct Investment
<b><i>Ger</i></b>	Portable felt dwelling structure, also known as a <i>yurt</i>
<b><i>Ger area</i></b>	Ulaanbaatar exurbs, containing both <i>gers</i> and detached houses
<b><i>Khoroo</i></b>	City ward, inside Ulaanbaatar
<b>MCDS</b>	Mongolia Center for Development Studies
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MLSP</b>	Ministry of Labor and Social Protection
<b>MNT</b>	<i>Tugrik</i> , currency of Mongolia
<b>MPDSW</b>	Ministry of Population Development and Social Welfare
<b>SDC</b>	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
<b>SSIA</b>	State Specialized Inspection Agency
<b><i>Soum</i></b>	County, outside Ulaanbaatar
<b><i>Soum center</i></b>	County seat
<b>UCW</b>	Understanding Children’s Work Inter-Agency Cooperation Project
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction, Context and Methodological Approach

As compared to the majority of countries in the East Asia and Pacific Region, gender disparities in Mongolia are relatively muted. At the same time, a number of important gender disparities do exist. In particular, several studies have documented gender disparities in access to economic opportunities, earnings, and productivity. Such gender disparities in the labor market are problematic for at least three reasons. First, the use of women's full potential in the labor market is likely to result in greater macroeconomic efficiency, everything else equal. Second, jobs can be direct instruments of women's development and empowerment. Third, expanding women's labor market opportunities has potentially large positive spillover effects on women's overall agency, control, and power. Nevertheless, the constraints underlying gender disparities in the labor market remain largely unclear, providing little guidance for program design. Moreover, there is little empirical evidence for Mongolia or beyond on the type of support that men and women typically seek in active labor market policies—particularly labor market intermediation services—or for the effectiveness of this support in addressing gender-specific constraints.

To contribute to filling these knowledge gaps, this study uses methods of qualitative social science research, mainly focus group discussions (but including expert interviews and biographic interviews as well) to analyze the mechanisms underlying gender disparities in the Mongolian labor market. The study addresses three interrelated questions: (i) What gender disparities can be identified or confirmed through qualitative research? (ii) What are the reasons underlying the gender disparities? and (iii) Are current government policies, including active labor market policies, effective in addressing gender disparities and, if not, how can their effectiveness be improved? In addition, this study also reviews the relevant economic, institutional, and legal environment, the available quantitative evidence, and existing labor market policies and programs, and makes a number of policy recommendations.

Given the importance of the issue of gender disparities in the labor market, some efforts have already been made to quantify the problem in Mongolia. This study reviews the existing, largely quantitative evidence, which shows that as compared to men, women on average are better equipped with income-generating characteristics in general and a high level of education in particular. This holds true irrespective of whether the education level is measured by enrolment in primary or secondary school, by graduation from higher education, by the education level among adults, or by other indicators. At the same time, women are less likely to make use of their educational attainment by actively participating in the labor market.

With the exception of a short period of time around the year 2006, labor force participation rates in Mongolia have generally been much higher among men than among women. Between 1996 and 2015, the gender gap in labor force participation rates more than doubled from 4.8 percentage points to 12.6 percentage points. In addition, employed women have consistently had lower average earnings than employed men. In 2015, men on average earned 856,000 MNT per month and women 760,700 MNT. (In early 2017, one US dollar was worth about 2,450 MNT.) As a result, the relative gender earnings gap stood at 12.5 percent. Marked differences also exist in the types of jobs typically pursued by men and women. A relatively large share of women—particularly in rural areas—is employed in precarious informal work and unpaid family work, women's participation in entrepreneurial work is far lower than that of men, and the prevalence of men and women in different sectors of activity also differs.

This study complements the existing, largely quantitative literature on gender disparities in Mongolia's labor market with the help of established methods of qualitative social science research, namely focus group discussions, expert interviews, and a small number of biographical interviews. While quantitative research tests standardized hypotheses with the help of statistical parameters and aims to achieve a representative and random sample, qualitative research has different objectives and relies on very different assumptions. In particular, qualitative research aims to reconstruct typical cases by identifying contrasts and common issues in individual experiences and perceptions. Moreover, qualitative research relies on a range of empirically appropriate methodologies, such as focus group discussions

(cf. Glaser and Strauss 1967). For the focus group discussions conducted as part of this study, a professional survey research firm was hired that prepared, implemented, and documented 22 distinct focus group discussions with a minimum of six participants and a maximum of nine participants each. Most focus group discussions lasted between two and three hours. Thirteen focus group discussions were conducted in Ulaanbaatar, seven in *aimag* centers (provincial capitals) and two in *soum* centers (county seats).

## Findings

The study's qualitative approach confirms the range of gender disparities in Mongolia's labor market that had been identified by existing, largely quantitative research, and it paints a picture of widespread precarious employment situations. More specifically, in focus group discussions women of various age groups and levels of education speak of pronounced gender-specific difficulties in accessing jobs and career opportunities. Again, according to the perceptions of participants in focus group discussions, many women that do hold jobs frequently feel trapped in precarious working conditions. Many employees perceive their workplaces to be dependent on norms and values that could be characterized as traditional, hierarchic, and at times even authoritarian. Open mistrust and even fear of managers and employers is widespread. Many workers complain of a lack of long-term job security and an absence of secure wage payments and access to health insurances and pension systems.

Precarious employment situations are perceived as particularly common in the private sector. As documented in World Bank (2016c), wage arrears are considered common, as is the lack of labor contracts and obligations of unpaid overtime. These problems are said to be especially common in the construction sector and in the informal sector generally. Many participants in focus group discussions, and especially those in the informal or semiformal sector, characterize employment relationships by employers' hire-and-fire mentality. While in general not only women but also men are affected by precarious employment situations, some issues are very gender-specific. Importantly, among female workers there is a widespread perception that working hours are insufficiently flexible. According to the discussion participants, this makes it difficult for many women to participate in the labor market and is also perceived as a sign of employers' disregard for the concerns of female workers.

Findings from focus group discussions indicate that the important reasons perceived to underlie the gender disparities in the labor market include both norms, such as prevailing views on men's and women's' roles with respect to marriage, household and care duties, and suitable career choices and jobs, and deficiencies in the political environment and the relatively unavailable government support services and programs. Three contributing causes were considered salient: (i) prevailing societal expectations see women as devoting the majority of their adult lives to supporting their husbands and raising their children; (ii) while some women manage to combine fulfilling those expectations with maintaining a successful career, by many others the quality and quantity of childcare facilities is perceived as inadequate to make this possible; and (iii) some differential legal treatments of men and women appear to cement the acceptance of traditional gender roles. In addition to that, incomplete information is a major constraint. Especially among students, graduates of higher education, and job seekers (especially young and female ones) there is widespread uncertainty about the skills demanded in the labor market and how to find a job without the right personal connections. Job seekers overwhelmingly rely on informal, personal networks for securing positions. While such networks can be quite effective in matching labor supply and demand, they usually work best for job seekers who are already well established in the labor market and thus endowed with a large and tight-knit network.

With regard to policies that could address some of the constraints underlying gender disparities in Mongolia's labor market, the overall legal environment is of course important. In addition to that, a number of interventions targeted at individual job seekers can address specific constraints. Internationally, it is best practice to address job-search constraints related to incomplete information through the establishment of labor market intermediation services (public or private employment services that ideally work in partnership with employers). These services can be particularly effective for women and other groups with relatively little attachment to the labor market.

In Mongolia, a central and integrated Employment Registry and Information Database holds records of job vacancies, registered job seekers, and beneficiaries of active labor market policies and is the basis of Mongolia's labor market information system. In addition, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MLSP) has a comprehensive network of local offices that provide public employment services. However, the information that is available is scattered across different agencies, not systematically analyzed and not presented and disseminated in a user-friendly way targeted at specific segments of the labor market. Younger focus group participants' lack of knowledge about career opportunities also indicates that the MLSP's offices are comparatively difficult to access – at least for some groups, such as secondary school and university students. In addition, certain barriers apparently limit the effectiveness of the MLSP's local offices in addressing job-search constraints related to incomplete information: according to the focus group participants, the experiences with labor and social welfare offices are often largely negative. Registration forms are seen more as an administrative burden than as a useful tool to match labor supply and demand. The number of job vacancies that are publicly listed is perceived as insufficient, in particular for job seekers with somewhat higher education levels. Job councilors are frequently regarded as overwhelmed, uninterested, or unable to find suitable vacancies.

Many countries implement other active labor market policies in addition to public employment services, such as training programs, wage subsidies, and support for entrepreneurship. Mongolia's MLSP also organizes a range of such programs, locally called employment promotion programs. Focus group discussions with job seekers document that awareness of and experience with the employment promotion programs is often limited. Moreover, in the perception of most participants in focus groups who have experience with these programs, they are often an ineffective tool for addressing gender disparities. This is partly because they lack a focus on gender-specific constraints (such as the need to provide child care for beneficiaries of employment training) but also because they are generally seen as insufficiently client-focused and demand-driven.

### **Policy Recommendations**

The findings of this study improve our understanding of constraints underlying gender disparities in Mongolia's labor market and how labor market intermediation services and other active labor market policies, as well as other interventions and policies, can be improved to better address the constraints. The findings from focus group discussions, which are generally very robust and consistent with findings from existing, largely quantitative research, make it possible to draw out several direct policy implications. These are laid out in Table 1, and may be summarized thus: (i) Reform Mongolia's legal environment and the implementation and enforcement of antidiscrimination policies with an emphasis on legally mandating nondiscrimination based on gender in hiring and strengthening monitoring of gender-specific indicators and enforcement of the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality and other anti-discrimination policies; (ii) Strengthen the client orientation of labor market intermediation services and labor market monitoring and analysis; (iii) Foster employment promotion programs and improve their responsiveness to gender-specific constraints; (iv) Strengthen micro-entrepreneurship support to realize the full potential of women as micro-entrepreneurs including through the provision of finance and training for women-owned and -operated micro-businesses.; (v) Expand the quality and quantity of available childcare services to ensure the continuous and productive labor market participation of a larger number of women; and (vi) Influence gender norms and attitudes among employers and the wider population with a focus on implementing awareness campaigns, discussions, and trainings for employers and human resource managers on modern strategies of human resource development and gender-sensitive and age-related work planning..

Table 1. Policy Recommendations Derived from Qualitative Research

General policy direction	Specific policy recommendations (key recommendations in bold)	Implementing agencies and partners
(i) Reform Mongolia's legal environment and the implementation and enforcement of antidiscrimination policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Abolish the remaining legal differences between men and women.</li> <li>➤ Legally mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value</li> <li>➤ <b>Legally mandate nondiscrimination based on gender in hiring.</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Strengthen monitoring of gender-specific indicators and enforcement of the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality and other anti-discrimination policies.</b></li> <li>➤ Facilitate flexible forms of work such as part-time or home-based work and jobs with flexible working hours.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ National Cabinet and Parliament</li> <li>➤ National Committee on Gender Equality</li> <li>➤ Ministry of Labor and Social Protection</li> </ul>
(ii) Strengthen the client orientation of labor market intermediation services and labor market monitoring and analysis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improve the profiling of job seekers and the matching of job seekers with vacancies.</li> <li>➤ Introduce more systematic procedures for deciding which employment promotion program would be most appropriate for a specific job seeker's profile and needs.</li> <li>➤ Strengthen the relevant training of placement officers and other staff of public employment services and of the MLSP's system for staff learning and development.</li> <li>➤ Develop operational protocols and necessary tools for MLSP staff to improve the efficiency and impact of MLSP's services to employers.</li> <li>➤ Strengthen career guidance activities, such as through consultation sessions in secondary schools targeted at both students and their parents.</li> <li>➤ Enhance the scope, quality, and availability of labor market information for job seekers and other users to allow them to make informed decisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ministry of Labor and Social Protection</li> <li>➤ Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports</li> </ul>
(iii) Foster employment promotion programs and improve their responsiveness to gender-specific constraints.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Make employment promotion programs more client-focused and demand-driven.</li> <li>➤ Increase outreach activities to hard-to-reach women (as well as to other groups with relatively poor labor market outcomes).</li> <li>➤ Make the selection of beneficiaries more transparent and consciously select the most qualified or needy beneficiaries (or a combination thereof) based on a systematic assessment of applicants' actual labor market constraints and the appropriate employment promotion programs for addressing them.</li> <li>➤ Consider strengthened investments in job-relevant skill building opportunities for female youth that reduce gender sorting in the labor market.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ministry of Labor and Social Protection</li> </ul>

<p>(iv) Strengthen micro-entrepreneurship support so as to realize the full potential of women as micro-entrepreneurs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Address the unpaid care and domestic work burdens of women in self-employment or micro-businesses.</li> <li>➤ Adopt a gender-sensitive approach to entrepreneurship support programs (for instance by taking into account that a relatively large share of female beneficiaries of these programs aim to work from home).</li> <li>➤ <b>Expand the provision of finance and training for women-owned and -operated micro-businesses.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ministry of Labor and Social Protection</li> <li>➤ Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry</li> </ul>
<p>(v) Expand the quality and quantity of available child care services to assure the continuous and productive labor market participation of a larger number of women.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Strengthen efforts to improve the quality of early childhood education services, especially in rural areas.</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Improve access to early childhood education services through an approach targeted to the most underserved rural areas.</b></li> <li>➤ Explore childcare modalities that target the household environment, such as in-home daycare provision, and evaluate the costs and benefits of <i>ger</i> kindergartens.<sup>1</sup></li> <li>➤ Expand and improve fixed kindergarten services and daycare facilities for children in urban areas (especially Ulaanbaatar).</li> <li>➤ Improve the training of childcare provider personnel and evaluate the need for expanding childcare services for children ages 6 to 12.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports</li> </ul>
<p>(vi) Address gender norms and attitudes among employers and the wider population.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Foster a public discussion about the norms and values underlying the widespread gender disparities in the labor market.</li> <li>➤ Intensify the dialogue on gender issues between the government, labor unions, employers' associations, and other stakeholders.</li> <li>➤ Highlight the importance of gender equality in the labor market and of flexible forms of work, and showcase modern female role models.</li> <li>➤ <b>Implement awareness campaigns, discussions, and trainings for employers and human resource managers on modern strategies of human resource development and gender-sensitive and age-related work planning.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ National Cabinet and Parliament</li> <li>➤ National Committee on Gender Equality</li> <li>➤ Labor unions</li> <li>➤ Employers' associations</li> <li>➤ NGOs</li> </ul>

There remains room for improvement in Mongolia's legal environment and the implementation and enforcement of existing laws. Mongolia's laws do not mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value, do not mandate nondiscrimination based on gender in hiring (even though a planned revision to the Labor Law will likely change this) and do not entitle parents to flexible or part-time schedules. Moreover, while women can retire with full pension benefits at age 55, the corresponding age for men is 60. Overall, the World Bank ranks Mongolia ninth out of 18 countries in the East Asia and Pacific Region in terms of the number of legal differences between men and women (World Bank 2016d). Moreover, even though the Law on Gender Equality and the Labor Law set out various parameters with regard to non-discrimination in the labor market and in spite of the existence of a relatively elaborate

<sup>1</sup> Ger kindergartens are kindergartens that operate in gers (portable felt dwelling structures, also known as a yurts) mostly during the summer. Ger kindergartens are dominantly used as mobile kindergartens in rural areas for the purpose of reaching out to nomadic herder population.

structure for monitoring the implementation of these laws, implementation and enforcement on the ground are often relatively weak. Consequently, it is recommended that the implementation of existing policies be strengthened. This would entail more and smarter investments in the technical and professional capacity of relevant actors such as the subcommittees, subcouncils, and focal points of the National Committee on Gender Equality. Also warranted are measures that facilitate flexible forms of work such as part-time or home-based work and jobs with flexible working hours and a legal mandate of equal remuneration for work of equal value. Though complex to enforce in practice such a mandate would send a strong signal about the importance placed on gender equality and nondiscrimination.

In terms of labor market intermediation services, improvements in the profiling of jobs seekers and the matching of job seekers with vacancies are recommended. Also recommended are more systematic procedures for placing job seekers into employment promotion programs. Implementing these recommendations would require that placement officers and other staff of public employment services be trained and that the MLSP's system for staff learning and development be strengthened. Training activities could include mandatory on-line training courses for all staff and voluntary courses for those willing to expand their knowledge and approaches. The system for staff learning and development could also be expanded to include electronic platforms to share experiences in a systematic way. Focused training sessions to strengthen counseling capacity should ensure a greater linkage of training content with operational and practical issues.

Putting these recommendations into practice would also require the development, piloting, and implementation of appropriate procedures and protocols and of handbooks and guidelines. Based on findings from the focus group discussions with employers, it is also recommended that the MLSP develop operational protocols and necessary tools for its staff to improve the efficiency and impact of its services for employers. This point was also highlighted in Mongolmaa (2016). Finally, it is recommended that career guidance activities be strengthened, for instance through consultation sessions in secondary schools targeted at both students and their parents. These consultation sessions, which should ideally be based on an enhanced scope of data on labor demand and supply, could also be used to raise awareness of the returns to education as well as the problem of skills mismatches across different occupations or sectors. Even if labor market intermediation is strengthened in a way that is generally gender-neutral, the expectation is that the impact will be particularly significant for women. This is because compared to men women on average have less access to informal networks that can be used for finding jobs and are therefore relatively more likely to benefit from a strengthening of formal channels.

As detailed in Gassmann, Francois and Trindade (2015), Mongolia's employment promotion programs hold immense potential for improving labor market outcomes across the country. Women's participation in most of the programs is also relatively high, which means they have the potential to address gender disparities in the labor market and successfully strengthen women's opportunities and outcomes. However, to realize the programs' full potential, a number of reforms are needed. Generally speaking, it is recommended to make the programs more client-focused, demand-driven, and appropriate for addressing specific job seekers' actual labor market constraints (also see Mongolmaa 2016). With regard to more specifically addressing constraints underlying gender disparities, recommended reforms include increased outreach to hard-to-reach women. In addition, it is recommended that the selection of beneficiaries of employment promotion programs become more transparent and be based on the conscious selection of the most qualified or neediest persons (or a combination thereof) based on a systematic assessment of applicants' actual labor market constraints and the appropriate employment promotion program for addressing them. At labor and social welfare offices, moving away from the first-come, first-served approach would be particularly beneficial for female job seekers, many of whom do not have the flexibility their male counterparts have to appear at the labor and social welfare office to register for programs at fixed times and queue for long hours. Finally, it is worthwhile to strengthen investments in job-relevant skill building opportunities for female youth to reduce gender sorting in the labor market and create pathways to stable careers.

Given the large proportion of women in the labor market who are active in micro-entrepreneurship, it is recommended that female micro-enterprises be strengthened. Osborne (2017) collects best-practice policy recommendations in the fields of gender and micro-entrepreneurship from the relevant literature. She addresses three interrelated areas: (i) outdated norms; (ii) reforms to the policy framework; and (iii) improvements in access to factors of production and markets. In the area of norms, Osborne's recommendations focus on addressing the inequitable distribution of household or family responsibilities. Policy action is central to creating an enabling policy and legal and regulatory frameworks for female microenterprise access and performance. Improving access to factors of production and markets can make the labor market more conducive to advancing women's prospects in micro-entrepreneurship. A combination of financial support for micro-entrepreneurs with nonfinancial interventions such as business skills development and training, mentoring, and the facilitation of market linkages has been demonstrated to have a particularly positive impact on women. For Mongolia's country context, a number of recommendations appear particularly crucial. In light of the findings from focus group discussions, these include the importance of addressing the burdens of unpaid care and domestic work, adopting a gender-sensitive approach to entrepreneurship support programs (for instance by taking into account that a relatively large share of female beneficiaries of these programs aim to work from home), and expanding financial and nonfinancial support for women-owned businesses.

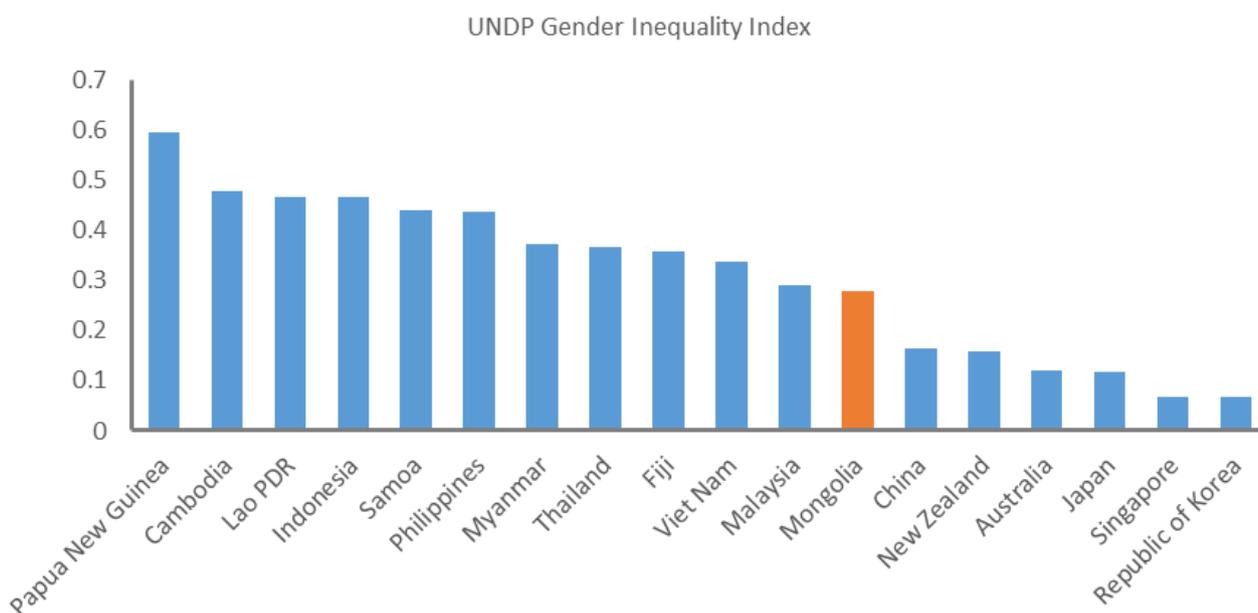
To assure the continuous and productive labor market participation of a larger percentage of women in Mongolia, it is further recommended to improve the quality and quantity of available elderly care and, in particular, childcare and early childhood education services. Largely following World Bank (2016b), a number of action areas are of particular importance. First, it is recommended that the insufficient access to early childhood education services be addressed through an approach targeted to the most underserved rural areas of the country. To foster the inclusion of hard-to-reach populations such as nomadic herders, community- or home-based modalities targeting the household environment should be explored, and the costs and benefits of *ger* kindergartens should be evaluated. Second, in urban areas—especially Ulaanbaatar—investments to expand fixed kindergarten services in the public or private sectors could improve access. Third, in order to improve the equity and effectiveness of current public investments in early childhood education, efforts to improve quality should be paramount. Quality improvement efforts should target rural areas, where quality issues are most acute. Fourth, further efforts should be made to improve the education and training of the staff of childcare providers. Fifth, further analytical work on early childhood education is needed, including to better understand gender differences in certain dimensions of early childhood development and whether there is a need for an expansion of childcare services for children ages 6 to 12.

Finally, it is recommended that a public discussion be fostered across Mongolia's society about the norms and values underlying the widespread gender disparities in the labor market, including through more intensive dialogue on gender issues between the government, labor unions, employers' associations and other stakeholders. In the process of this public discussion, awareness of the importance of gender equality in the labor market could be highlighted, and modern female role models who combine family responsibilities and a professional career could be showcased. In the context of addressing norms and values, employers' concerns with respect to hiring and supporting female staff would also be crucial. Not all of these concerns are based on direct discrimination. Instead, employers often perceive disadvantages when hiring female workers that could in fact be addressed by the employers themselves if they relied on more modern strategies of human resource development, starting with simple changes like granting more flexible working hours or allowing work from. As even in the absence of a legal mandate it will often be in the employer's interest to grant more flexible working hours or allow work from, it is recommended to raise employers' and human resource managers' awareness about how modern strategies of human resource development and gender-sensitive and age-related work planning can both improve gender equality and increase firm productivity and profits. In practice, this can be implemented through awareness campaigns, discussions, and trainings for employers and human resource managers.

## Section 1: Introduction

As compared to the majority of countries in the East Asia and Pacific Region, gender disparities in Mongolia are relatively muted (see Figure 1.1). At the same time, a number of important gender disparities do exist. In particular, several studies have documented gender disparities in access to economic opportunities, earnings, and productivity—including the policy note “Mongolia: Gender Disparities in Labor Markets and Policy Suggestions” (World Bank 2013). The constraints underlying these gender disparities remain largely unclear, providing little guidance for program design. Moreover, there is little empirical evidence for Mongolia or beyond on the type of support that men and women typically seek in active labor market policies, in particular in labor market intermediation services, and little evidence on the effectiveness of this support in addressing gender-specific constraints.

Figure 1.1. UNDP Gender Inequality Index by economy, 2015



Source: UNDP.

Note: The UNDP Gender Inequality Index captures gender disparities in the areas of reproductive health, empowerment and labor market participation. A greater index value denotes greater gender inequality.

To contribute to filling these knowledge gaps, this study uses methods of qualitative social science research to analyze the mechanisms underlying gender disparities in the Mongolian labor market. The study addresses three interrelated questions: (i) What gender disparities can be identified or confirmed through qualitative research? (ii) What are the structural or other reasons underlying the gender disparities in Mongolia’s labor market? (iii) Are current active labor market policies effective in addressing gender disparities? And how can their effectiveness be improved?

The study confirms a range of gender disparities identified by previous quantitative research. These include difficulties for women of various age groups and education levels to access jobs and career opportunities in spite of their generally higher educational attainment as compared to men. As documented in Osborne (2017), this inability of women to make full use of their income-generating capabilities is problematic for at least three reasons.

First, jobs are an important instrument of development and empowerment. The *World Development Report 2013* (World Bank 2012) assesses how jobs drive development along three dimensions: by increasing living standards; by raising productivity; and by increasing social cohesion. At the individual level, a job is an instrument of

empowerment, skills, behaviors, and aspiration. Even basic formal and self-employed jobs, such as microenterprise and casual work without a contract, can advance decision-making power at home and control over assets, which can be particularly significant for women (cf. Morton et al. 2014). Second, better use of women's potential in the labor market is likely to result in greater macroeconomic efficiency, everything else equal. Obstacles to women's access to labor market opportunities reduce the average productivity of a country's firms and negatively affect the way production is organized in the economy, lowering efficiency. Cuberes and Teignier (2012) measure the effects on economic growth of obstacles to women's access to labor market opportunities, finding that gender inequality in the labor market generates an average loss of income per capita of 14 to 15.5 percent in OECD countries. In developing countries, the average income loss is 16 to 17.5 percent. Finally, expanding women's economic opportunities has potentially large positive effects on women's agency, control and power. In turn, these factors are central to achieving individual well-being and overall development outcomes.

This study finds strong indications that both cultural norms, such as prevailing views on gender roles with respect to marriage, household duties, and suitable career choices, and deficiencies in the political environment and in available services and programs are important forces underlying the gender disparities in Mongolia's labor market. More specifically, the prevailing expectation is that women should devote the majority of their adult lives to supporting their husbands and raising their children, and the quality and quantity of childcare facilities is often perceived as inadequate to allowing women to both fulfill that expectation and have a successful career. Current active labor market policies are ineffective in addressing gender disparities, partly because they lack a focus on the specific gender-specific constraints but also because they are generally seen as not sufficiently client-focused and demand-driven.

The findings of this study will improve our understanding of constraints underlying gender disparities in Mongolia's labor market and how they can be addressed with active labor market policies, labor market intermediation services, and other interventions. This has several direct policy implications. According to World Bank (2016d), Mongolia ranks ninth out of 18 countries in the East Asia and Pacific Region in the number of legal differences between men and women such as for instance those related to signing a contract, being considered head of household, doing the same jobs and enjoying the same statutory retirement age, so there is room for improvement in the legal environment. More importantly, legal antidiscrimination policies are not always implemented or enforced. Concerning active labor market policies and labor market intermediation services, there is room for improving their focus on clients' and employers' demands, for instance by considering that a relatively large share of female beneficiaries of entrepreneurship support programs might aim to work from home and assuring that employment training is of sufficient length to satisfy employers' skill needs. There is also a more general need to improve these interventions' implementation with respect to outreach, beneficiary selection, quality of intervention, and post-intervention support. Finally, an expansion in the quality and quantity of available elderly care and childcare opportunities is crucial for assuring the continuous and productive participation of a larger percentage of women in Mongolia.

The importance of understanding the constraints underlying gender disparities in Mongolia's labor market is further highlighted by the prominent place the topic of gender and the labor market occupies in relevant gender, country, and practice strategies. For instance, the World Bank's Gender Strategy 2016–2023 (World Bank 2015) lists the lifting of constraints on more and better jobs for women and men as one of four strategic objectives. Besides, the World Bank's *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development* (World Bank 2011) identifies gender differences in access to economic opportunities, earnings, and productivity as a priority for domestic policy action. Inside Mongolia, the country's Comprehensive National Development Strategy 2008–2021 (Parliament of Mongolia 2008) stresses the promotion of gender equality as a strategic objective and explicitly mentions the cultivation of a culture of equal participation of men and women in the sphere of labor relations. Finally, one of the key principles of Mongolia's Law on Promoting Gender Equality is to mainstream gender into government policies, program, and projects.

This study is closely related to the body of literature that uses mostly quantitative methods to document gender disparities in Mongolia. The most prominent exponent within this literature is the World Bank's 2013 policy paper on this subject (World Bank 2013). The policy paper documents that while Mongolia has made strong progress on key gender-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and while many gender indicators in education and health are better than in comparator countries in the East Asia and Pacific region, benchmarking Mongolia against other countries nevertheless reveals considerable inequalities between men and women with respect to economic and political power and decision-making. In the context of labor markets, the same paper finds that gender disparities are especially prominent in the type of work women do—mostly unpaid work with limited engagement in self-employment/entrepreneurial activities and with high levels of occupational segregation—and in the wages that they are paid. In addition, it shows that women have a relatively limited presence in managerial positions.

Also of relevance are the reports by ILO (2013) and Rand Corporation (2015) that focus on youth labor markets and document both important differences and similarities between the challenges faced by male and female youth. In addition to that, Gassmann, Francois, and Trindade (2015) focus on the labor market outcomes of vulnerable groups and argue that together with internal migrants, workers in the informal sector, those with precarious jobs, and both the young and older workers, women are among the most vulnerable groups in Mongolia's labor market. Based on their analysis, they argue that increasing the labor force participation rate of women is one of the main challenges for the Mongolian government, but also that more research is needed to better understand why so many Mongolian women, particularly those with high levels of education, do not work.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of existing qualitative work, Reva et al. (2011) use a series of focus group discussions over a two-year period from mid-2009 to early 2011 to analyze the impacts of the economic crisis that started around 2009. They find evidence that labor markets were key transmission channels of the economic crisis and that the crisis led to an increase in discrimination in the labor market (including with regard to discrimination based on gender, age, and physical appearance). At the same time, growing economic hardship also made women shift from nonpaid domestic labor to income-generating activities outside of their households. World Bank (2016c) takes a mixed methods approach and combines quantitative, qualitative, and spatial analyses to investigate the extent, nature and spatial distribution of poverty in Mongolia's capital, Ulaanbaatar, to identify sources of vulnerability for poor and excluded populations. Among other findings, the report uses results from focus group discussions with women in Ulaanbaatar to show that prospective employers demonstrate negative attitudes toward women of various age groups. It finds that employers often explicitly ask younger women about their plans to have children, while somewhat older women are oftentimes perceived as unemployable due to their childcare duties.

The rest of this study is structured as follows: Section 2 provides context on the institutional and legal environment in Mongolia and summarizes existing findings on gender disparities in the country's labor market and updated evidence from recent rounds of the National Statistics Office's labor force survey. Section 3 describes how the study applies the relevant research methods of qualitative social science research, namely focus group discussions, expert interviews, and a small number of biographical interviews, elaborating the precise methodological and qualitative data collection techniques used. The main empirical analysis follows in Section 4, which largely focuses on the findings from various focus group discussions and frames them to juxtapose the experiences and perceptions of members of various groups. For instance, findings from focus group discussions with female college students and graduates are juxtaposed with those from focus group discussions with male college students and graduates, while findings from focus group discussions with single mothers are juxtaposed with those from discussions with married mothers. Section 5 discusses policy recommendations and concludes.

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<sup>2</sup> Other relevant quantitative evidence on gender disparities in Mongolia's labor market is documented in World Bank (2007), Pastore (2008), UCW (2009), Batchuluun and Dalkhjav (2014).

## Section 2: Context

### 2.1. Economic, Institutional and Legal Environment

Mongolia is a landlocked country in northern Asia covering 1.6 million square kilometers and about three million inhabitants, 1.3 million of whom live in Ulaanbaatar, the country's capital. With a population density of around 1.9 inhabitants per square kilometer, Mongolia is the world's least densely populated country. Its official currency is the *tugrik*, abbreviated MNT. As of early 2017, one US dollar was worth about 2,450 MNT. Administratively, Mongolia is divided into Ulaanbaatar and 21 *aimags* (provinces). Ulaanbaatar is further divided into districts and *khoroos* (city wards). *Aimags* are further divided into *soums* (counties) and *baghs* (villages). Provincial capitals are called *aimag* centers and county seats are *soum* centers.

A large segment of Mongolia's economy depends on the extraction and export of natural resources. This has led to a pronounced cyclicity in economic activity. Between 2010 and 2014, when commodity prices were high, Mongolia experienced strong economic growth and rapidly declining poverty. Since 2014, the dampening of commodity markets and slower growth in China, Mongolia's main trading partner, have led to a fall in export earnings and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows. The result has been a severe economic crisis. The economic growth rate fell from 7.9 percent in 2014 to less than 0.1 percent in 2016. With regard to the labor market, the labor force participation rate decreased from 63.7 percent of the adult population in the third quarter of 2014 to 61.6 percent in the third quarter of 2016, and the unemployment rate rose from 6.4 percent of the labor force in the third quarter of 2014 to 9.4 percent in the third quarter of 2016. Mongolia's medium-term outlook is more positive, however, since an eventual recovery in FDI inflows is projected to begin to support growth and job creation (IMF 2016).

Mongolia's Constitution enshrines basic principles of gender equality and prohibits gender-based discrimination. In Article 16 it stipulates that "men and women have equal rights in the political, economic, social, and cultural life and family relations." Furthermore, Article 14 stipulates that "everyone shall be free from any type of discrimination based on his/her ethnicity, language, race, age, sex, social status, wealth, employment, position, religious belief, viewpoints and education level." A number of legal documents contain more specific provisions on gender equality. Legal documents particularly relevant with regard to gender and the labor market include the Law on Promotion of Gender Equality (passed in 2011), the Labor Law of 1999, the Employment Promotion Law (2011, amended 2016), the Law on Education (2002, amended 2006), the Law on Pre-school Education (2008, amended 2016), the Law on Social Welfare (2012), and the Law on Child Care Services (approved in 2015 but not yet implemented).

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC 2014) provides a comprehensive review of all legal documents that include provisions to promote gender equality. According to the review, before 2011 Mongolia lacked a specific law on gender. Hence, the ratification of the Law on Promotion of Gender Equality was a significant step forward. Among its most important provisions, it sets out the responsibilities of public agencies with regard to gender discrimination and ensuring adequate representation of women at all levels of government. It also mandates the establishment of a complaint mechanism through the National Human Rights Commission and employment dispute commissions.

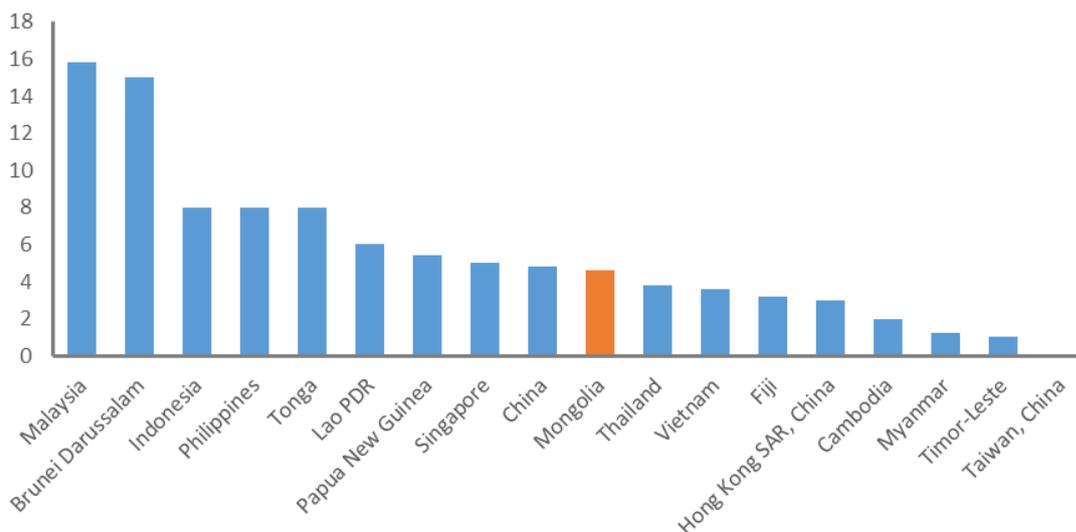
The main agency charged with monitoring the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality on the ground is the National Committee on Gender Equality. As detailed in SDC (2014), the committee was established in 2005 and comprises 33 members, including key Ministers and representatives from the private sector and civil society. It has a Secretariat located at the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MLSP)—which was created by the merger of the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Population Development and Social Welfare (MPDSW) in July 2016—and subcommittees in Ulaanbaatar, its districts, and all *aimags*. The committee also has subcouncils in all ministries and in each district's Governor's Administrative Office. Various gender focal points have also been appointed.

With regard to the Labor Law, Article 7 stipulates that "discrimination [and the] setting of limitations or privileges in labor relations based on nationality, race, sex, social origin or status, wealth, religion, or ideology shall be prohibited"

and that “If an employer has limited an employee’s rights and freedom due to the specific requirements of the job’s duties when employing an employee, employer shall be obliged to justify the grounds for doing so.” The article also sets out that employers are not allowed to ask questions regarding a prospective employee’s private life, marital status, or pregnancy, unless the question is related to the work or duty to be performed.

At the same time, in their current form Mongolia’s laws do not mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value, do not mandate nondiscrimination based on gender in hiring (even though a planned revision to the Labor Law will likely introduce this principle as well as prohibiting sexual harassment at the workplace) and do not entitle parents to flexible/part-time schedules. Moreover, while women can retire and receive full pension benefits at age 55, the corresponding age for men is 60. Overall, the World Bank’s analysis ranks Mongolia ninth out of 18 countries in the East Asia and Pacific Region in the number of legal differences between men and women, that is in the number of ways women and girls can legally be treated differently than men in areas such as for instance those related to signing a contract, being considered head of household, doing the same jobs and enjoying the same statutory retirement age (World Bank 2016d). This position means that some important gender differences do exist in the legal environment (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1. Number of legal gender differences by economy



Source: World Bank 2016d.

Even though the Law on Gender Equality and the Labor Law set out various parameters with regard to nondiscrimination in the labor market and beyond, and in spite of the existence of a relatively elaborate structure for monitoring the implementation of these laws, implementation and enforcement on the ground is often weak. For instance, SDC (2014) notes that not all subcommittees, subcouncils, and focal points of the National Committee on Gender Equality are very active. This is largely attributed to a poor understanding and awareness of the relevance and importance of gender equality, but in addition a general lack of technical and professional capacity is cited; gender focal points are likely to take on the duties associated with this function in addition to their main tasks. SDC (2014) also argues that the weak capacity of both the committee and its Secretariat limits their effectiveness. In a similar vein, the Understanding Children’s Work Inter-Agency Cooperation Project (UCW 2009) argues that enforcement of the labor laws remains an area of concern, noting that while responsibility for labor inspection lies with the State Specialized Inspection Agency (SSIA), its mandate extends only to the formal sector. It further notes that government reports on occupational injuries group information on injuries to both children and women as a single category, making it impossible to determine the extent of occupational injuries among either children or women.

In recent years, the Government of Mongolia in general and the MLSP in particular have recognized and emphasized the importance of labor market policies and programs, including with respect to addressing gender disparities in the labor market. Mongolia's Sustainable Development Vision stresses the formulation and implementation of policies and programs to support employment and reduce the unemployment rate. It also explicitly mentions the need to train the younger generation with proper knowledge and skills to have decent work or run a private business, to ensure gender equality in social development, and to create a favorable environment for equal participation in social welfare. Moreover, in 2011 a Law on Employment Promotion was adopted, stipulating that the government should create employment opportunities, link investment policies with employment promotion measures, regulate labor demand and supply, train a workforce consistent with labor demand, improve data and statistics on employment, and expand the scope of unemployment insurance.

Internationally, job search constraints related to incomplete information tend to be widespread, and it is best practice to address them through public employment services in partnership with private service providers and employers and the provision and dissemination of labor market information and analysis. Public employment services can address job-search constraints by facilitating the matching of labor demand and supply, and access to labor market information can help job seekers and others make more informed decisions, including on education, training, and career development.

In Mongolia, the MLSP has implementation systems in place that can serve as a starting point for addressing gender-related labor-related constraints. It has a comprehensive network of local labor and social welfare offices, both in *aimag* centers (provincial capitals) and in districts of Ulaanbaatar, that provide public employment services like job listing, labor intermediation, and career counseling. There is also a capital city labor department in Ulaanbaatar. These labor and social welfare offices are generally accessible to both men and women. According to MLSP data, in 2015 53.6 percent of the job seekers registered at labor and social welfare offices were women and 46.4 percent were men. In addition, a central and integrated Employment Registry and Information Database holds records of job vacancies, registered job seekers, and beneficiaries of active labor market policies. This database also forms the basis of Mongolia's labor market information system.

In 2014, the Government of Mongolia spent 49.8 billion MNT (then about USD 27.4 million or a bit less than 1 percent of the entire budget of about 7,031.4 billion MNT) on active labor market policies, locally called Employment Promotion Programs. A recent review of these programs' implementation (Mongolmaa 2016) explains that the programs are designed to translate the employment promotion of target groups as stipulated in the Employment Promotion Law into action. Furthermore, they are supposed to contribute to the policy priorities of the government. Based on the proposal submitted by the MLSP, at the end of each year the tripartite National Employment Council endorses the list of Employment Promotion Programs to be implemented in the following year as well as the corresponding budgets.

The Employment Promotion Programs target a variety of target groups such as job seekers, persons at risk of becoming unemployed, persons with difficulty finding work, herders, owners of micro-businesses, the self-employed, and individuals at the onset of establishing a partnership or cooperative. Currently, the following seven programs are operating: (i) an entrepreneurship and microbusiness support program; (ii) an employment training and job support program; (iii) a youth employment promotion program; (iv) an employment promotion program for people with disabilities; (v) a herders employment promotion program; (vi) a public works program; (vii) a career guidance and counseling program; and (viii) an elderly specialists advisory support project.

While no Employment Promotion Programs are specifically gender-targeted, the MLSP monitors access by men and women. According to MLSP data, most programs are accessed equally by both genders and some are in fact accessed more frequently by women. For instance, two of the MLSP's flagship programs are the employment training and job support program and the entrepreneurship and microbusiness support program. A central element of the first program is employment training to equip job seekers with technical skills during a six-to-eight-week classroom-based training period. In 2015, 66.1 percent of beneficiaries of the employment training program were female and

33.9 percent were male. The entrepreneurship development program provides support for microentrepreneurship, mainly by providing new and existing microenterprises with microloans. While prospective program beneficiaries are screened for their eligibility by the MLSP, commercial banks determine the beneficiaries' creditworthiness and administer the loans. In 2016, 47.4 percent of beneficiaries receiving microloans were female and 52.6 percent were male. Other notable employment promotion programs include one focused on disabled citizens, which gives grants to disabled people who want to start or expand a microenterprise and provides subsidies to employers of disabled workers; and another, the herders' employment promotion program, which gives out loans and grants for restocking livestock, provides herders with equipment and tools, and organizes various trainings for herders.<sup>3</sup>

Although MLSP data show that beneficiaries of both genders can access the MLSP's Employment Promotion Programs, a number of barriers limit the programs' effectiveness in addressing labor market constraints and improving job seekers and microentrepreneurs' access to labor market opportunities. Specific barriers include very limited local flexibility, shortcomings in the area of monitoring and evaluation, and a lack of demand orientation (Mongolmaa 2016). This has negative consequences for both men and women, but it is particularly problematic for women because, as documented in World Bank (2013), in Mongolia far fewer women than men are self-employed, particularly in urban areas. Consequently, World Bank (2013) argues that strengthening women's opportunities as entrepreneurs should be a key policy priority for reducing gender disparities in Mongolia's labor market.

With financial and technical support from the World Bank, the MLSP recently embarked on an ambitious reform program that will include supporting new opportunities for starting and growing a sustainable microenterprise, with a focus on job creation through the provision of comprehensive financial and non-financial support. This program is currently under preparation and will address labor market constraints related to a lack of labor demand and, more specifically, to the development of a growing and productive microenterprise sector in Mongolia. Based on international evidence that providing a package of training and financing is particularly effective for female microentrepreneurs, an extensive range of nonfinancial services will be integrated with access to affordable finance.<sup>4</sup>

Gassmann, Francois, and Trindade (2015) note that beyond the realm of labor market policies, other policies and measures are important for the promotion of gender equality in Mongolia's labor market. These include the provision of affordable child care facilities and investments in preschool education. According to World Bank (2016b), during socialist times, every rural *soum* in Mongolia had at least one nursery or *cruche* for children below the age of three as well as one kindergarten for children ages three to six. Based on this legacy, the Education Law passed in 1991 prescribed that preschool education was to be included in the general educational structure. However, in the early 1990s the number of nurseries and kindergartens fell significantly due to local governments' budget constraints during Mongolia's transition from a socialist to a market economy. In parallel, enrolment in nurseries and kindergartens fell substantially (from about 97,000 in 1991 to about 60,000 in 1994), and about 2,000 teachers who had been engaged in preschool education lost their jobs.

With Resolution No. 46, passed in April 1995, the Government of Mongolia established a National Program on Preschool Strengthening. It set out, in some detail, the government's intentions for the development of preschool education and included an ambitious implementation plan for the period 1995 to 2000. This program aimed to create a favorable preschool education structure appropriate to both nomadic and sedentary populations; support nongovernmental preschool education institutions; improve curriculum, methodology, and the provision of training facilities; support family education among preschool children; and strengthen the skills of preschool educators to meet modern requirements (UNESCO 2006).

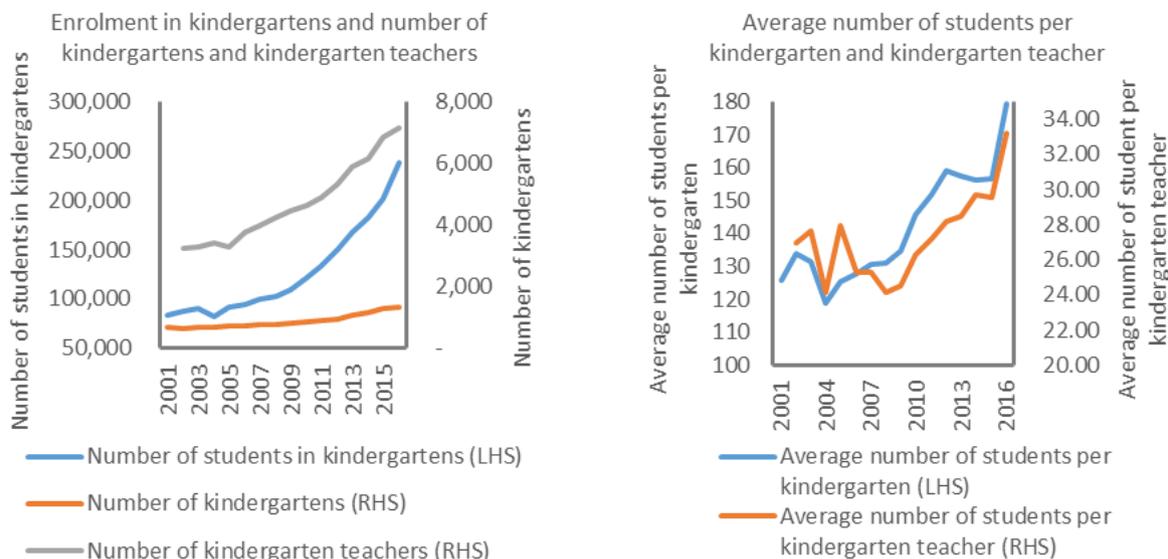
However, during the 1990s, as local governments' budget constraints persisted and it became more and more common to bring up young children under age three within the household, policies were also introduced to enable mothers to take care of their own young children. These included the provision of a child home care allowance

<sup>3</sup> Gassmann, Francois and Trindade (2015) and Mongolmaa (2016) provide more detailed descriptions of public employment services, labor market information systems and active labor market programs in Mongolia and their main strengths and weaknesses.

<sup>4</sup> See World Bank (2016a) for details on the MLSP's reform program and Buvinic and Furst-Nichols (2013) on how combining financial and nonfinancial support is particularly effective for female microentrepreneurs.

through the Law on Social Welfare. Partly as a result of these policies, the number of children attending nurseries and kindergartens remained low throughout the 1990s. As a consequence, it became financially impossible (and, arguably, unnecessary) to maintain a close-knit web of underutilized nurseries and kindergartens throughout Mongolia. Eventually, a decision was made to reorganize nurseries into independent institutions specialized in providing care and recreation for children from vulnerable communities. In turn, where necessary, kindergartens would open classes for younger children.

Figure 2.2. Enrolment, teacher staffing, and student-teacher ratios in kindergartens, 2001–15



Source: National Statistics Office.

In recent years, the demand for child care services has grown again, while due to the previous cuts existing kindergartens have struggled to cope. Over the last 15 years, the number of students in kindergarten increased from 87,300 in 2001 to 238,100 in 2016 (according to data from the National Statistics Office). Over the same time span, the number of kindergartens and kindergarten teachers also increased, but at a rate insufficient to keep pace with the rapid increase in enrolment. While the number of kindergartens increased from 655 in 2001 to 1,327 in 2016 and the number of kindergarten teachers from 3,253 in 2002 to 7,169 in 2016, over the same time span the average number of students per kindergarten jumped from 126 to 180 and the average number of students per kindergarten teacher from 27 to 33. Figure 2.2 illustrates these changes over the period.

In addition, it has become common for many children not to be allocated a spot in any kindergarten. A 2014 government news release described the situation this way: “In 2013, a total of 247,104 children aged between 2-5 years were registered in Mongolia. [...] nearly 30 percent of them are unable to attend kindergarten” (Office of the President of Mongolia 2014).

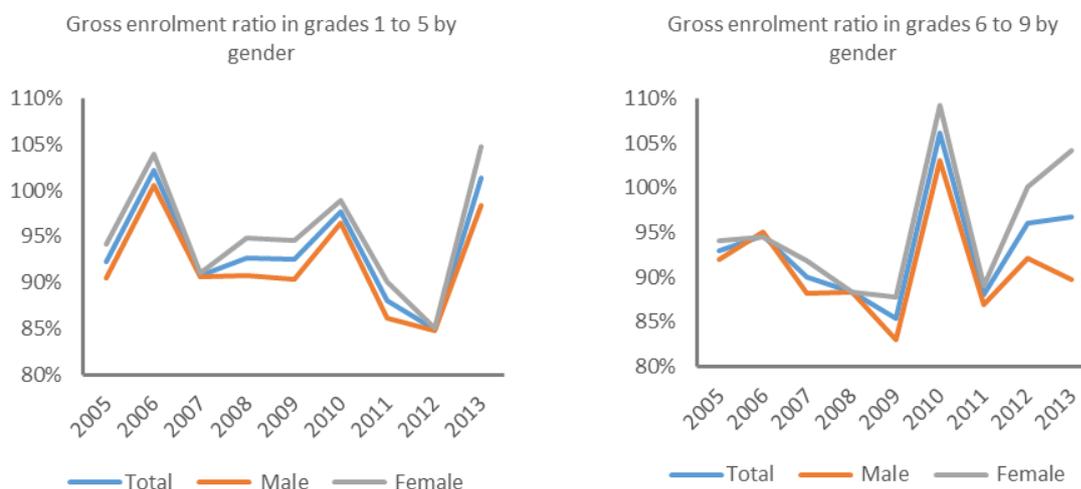
The Law on Preschool Education was approved in 2008, and among other provisions it stipulated that the costs of providing food, books, manuals, and toys for children attending state-owned kindergartens as well as norm-based variable costs should be fully financed from the state budget. While World Bank (2016b) points out that the law was a major breakthrough in improving access to affordable preschool education, the law further increased the pressure on nurseries and kindergartens to cope with steadily rising enrolment numbers. A new Law on Child Care Services passed in 2015 and originally planned to take effect starting October 1, 2016, was supposed to relieve some of this pressure. It would allow individuals to take care of five to 20 children in their own homes and to get paid by the government for such services. However, due to the current economic difficulties, the implementation of this law has been postponed indefinitely.

Overall, in spite of Mongolia’s sincere efforts to ensure and enhance gender equality in all sectors of society and its good performance as compared to many other countries in East Asia and beyond, important challenges remain. Many reports highlight the need to strengthen the implementation of existing provisions to promote gender equality. In addition to the yet-to-be-implemented Law on Child Care Services, the following 2013 recommendations from the World Bank remain particularly relevant to the labor market: (i) Fully implement the Law on Gender Equality; (ii) Increase funding for the National Committee on Gender Equality; (iii) Introduce affirmative action regulations in sectors where women are acutely underrepresented; (iv) Review retirement laws to ensure that women are not induced to retire earlier than they want to; (v) Review childcare and maternal/paternal leave policies; and (vi) Promote gender equality policies in the private sector (World Bank 2013). In spite of important progress made since the publication of that World Bank report, many of its recommendations remain pressing even today.

## 2.2. Gender Disparities in the Labor Market

**Lower school enrolment: A weakening trend among boys.** As documented in data from the National Statistics Office and a number of relevant publications, gender disparities in access to economic opportunities, earnings and productivity are one of the most striking features of Mongolia’s labor market (ILO 2013; ADB 2014; Gassmann, Francois and Trindade 2015). In general, labor market outcomes are poorer for women than for men. At the same time, not all notable gender differences are solely in men’s favor. In fact, some labor market indicators actually favor women and in terms of some productive characteristics women also do better on average.

Figure 2.3. Gross enrolment ratios by gender

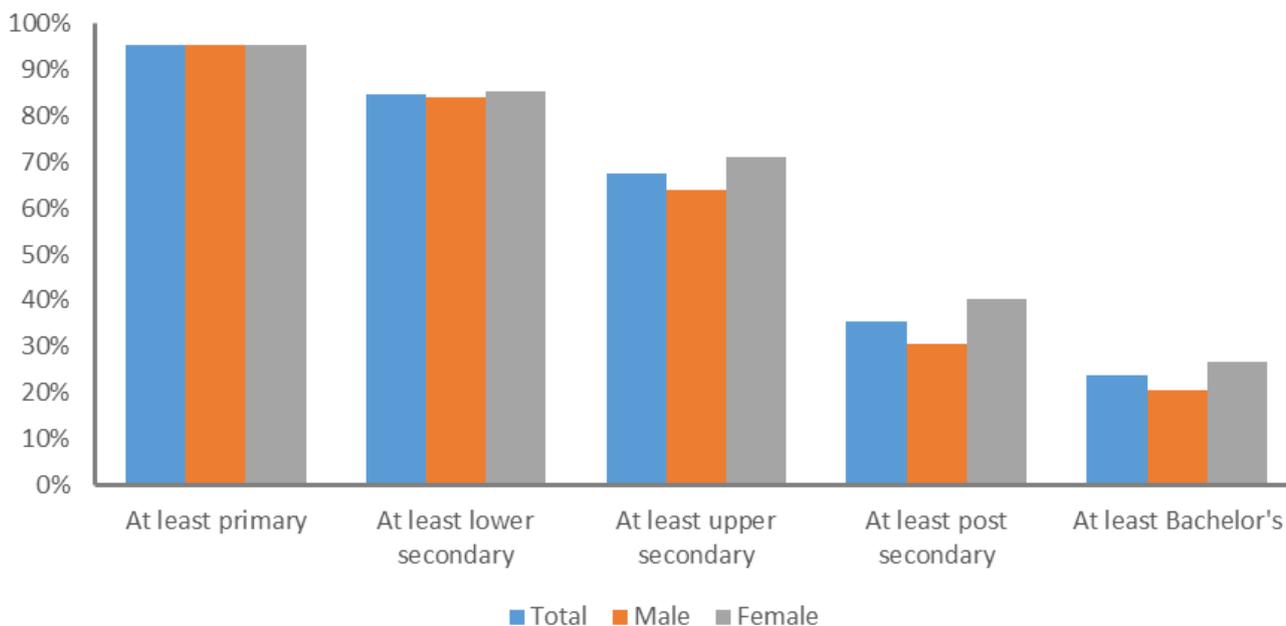


Source: National Statistics Office.

Figure 2.3 visualizes time series for gross enrolment ratios by gender for both grades one to five and grades six to nine. As the figure shows, school enrolment ratios have been traditionally higher for girls than for boys. This discrepancy between genders has increased further in recent years. In 2005, the gross enrolment ratio for boys in grades one to five was 90.5 percent while for girls it stood at 94.1 percent. It should be noted that gross enrolment ratios are calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled in certain grades by the number of children who are of the corresponding age brackets. In other words, gross enrolment ratios include students whose age is outside the official age group for a certain grade. Thus, if there is late enrolment, early enrolment, or grade repetition, gross enrolment ratios can exceed 100 percent. For girls in Mongolia this happened, for instance, in 2013 when the respective gross enrolment ratio in grades one to five for girls was 104.8 percent, while that same year for boys the ratio was considerably lower at 98.3 percent. As a consequence, the difference in gross enrolment ratios in grades one to five between girls and boys somewhat increased from 3.6 percentage points in 2005 to 6.5 percentage points in 2013.

As compared to the early years of schooling, differences between boys' and girls' gross enrolment ratios have recently been even more pronounced for higher grades. This is a relatively new phenomenon. Again, as visualized in Figure 2.3, in 2005 there were only minor differences in gross enrolment ratios in grades six to nine between genders. The respective gross enrolment ratio stood at 94.1 percent for girls and 92.0 percent for boys. Since then, and in particular since around 2012, very pronounced gender differences in gross enrolment ratios in grades six to nine have emerged. In 2013, the ratio in grades six to nine stood at 104.2 percent for girls. This was 10.1 percentage points higher than in 2005 and only 0.6 percentage points lower than the gross enrolment ratio among girls in grades one to five. In contrast, in 2013 the corresponding ratio among boys in grades six to nine was 89.8 percent, a significant drop from their ratio in 2005 and significantly lower than the ratio among boys in grades one to five. Altogether, these numbers suggest that in recent years almost all girls have attended primary and lower secondary education while a significant proportion of boys have been dropping out of school before the end of grade nine.

Figure 2.4. Educational attainment of population 25 and older by gender, 2010



Source: National Statistics Office.

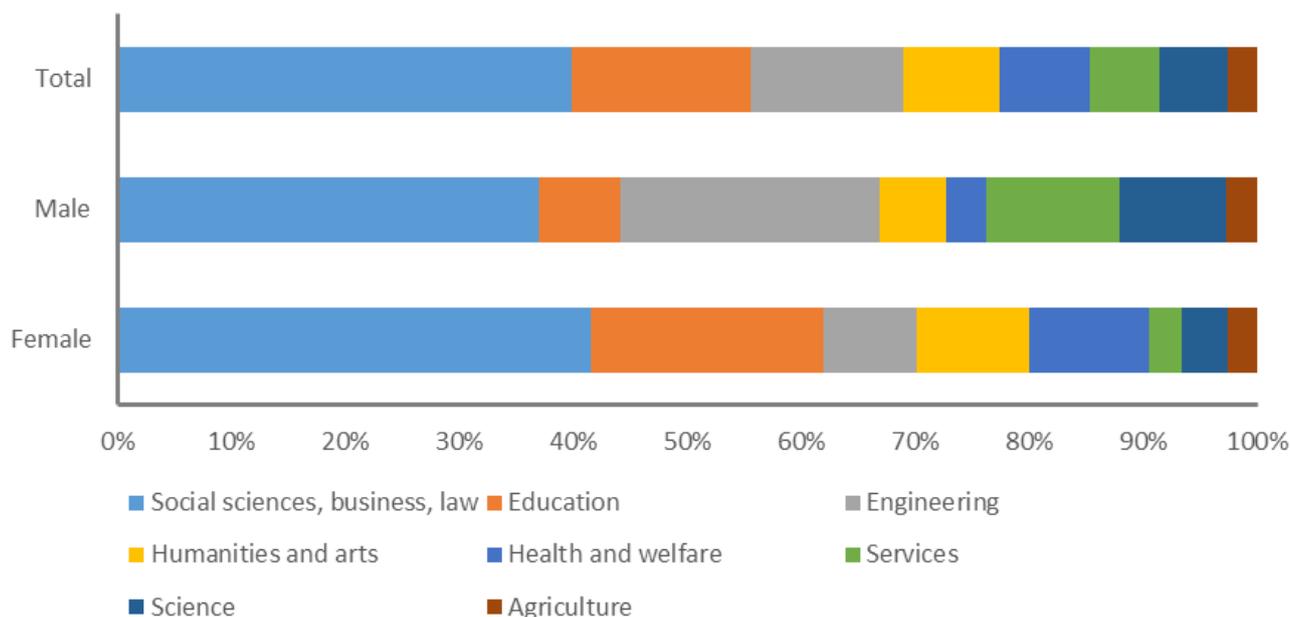
**Educational attainment: Consistently higher among women.** Complementing the data on children's gross enrolment ratios, Figure 2.4 contains data from 2016 on the educational attainment of Mongolia's adult population age 25 and older. Given the attributes of the time series of gross enrolment rates already discussed above, it should come as no surprise that educational attainment is generally higher among women age 25 and older than among adult men and that gender differences among adults are particularly pronounced for higher levels of educational attainment.

In Mongolia, primary school completion rates are very high and gender differences in primary school completion rates are marginal at best. In 2016, 95.4 percent of men had completed at least primary education, and the same was the case for 95.6 percent of women. This resulted in a gender gap in primary education completion rates of just 0.2 percentage points. At 84.1 percent versus 85.3 percent, completion rates for lower secondary school were also quite similar between the genders. In contrast, significant gender differences emerge when one focuses on adults with at least upper secondary education. According to data from the National Statistics Office for 2010, 71.1 percent of women have completed at least upper secondary education, 40.1 percent have finished at least some form of post-secondary education, and 26.8 percent hold at least a bachelor's-level degree. Among men, completion rates of at least upper secondary, post-secondary, and bachelor's-level education are consistently lower: 63.8 percent, 30.7 percent, and 20.5 percent, respectively. At almost 10 percentage points, the gender difference in these post-secondary education completion rates appears particularly striking.

According to data from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences, in the academic year 2013/14 33,850 students graduated from Mongolia's various institutions of higher education with some form of diploma, that is, with a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, or a doctorate. From the perspective of analyzing gender differences in the labor market, two points about these graduates stand out. First, in the academic year 2013/14, almost two-thirds of all graduates were women. This reinforces the general picture of higher rates of educational attainment among women. Second, female graduates tend to be clustered in very different fields of study than male graduates. Generally, women are more likely to study in fields involving personal or cultural services, while men are more prone to pursuing fields like science and engineering. Evidence backing this second point is depicted in Figure 2.5.

The figure shows that both men and women are most likely to graduate with a degree in either the social sciences, business, or law. Forty-two percent of female and 37 percent of male graduates have a degree in one of these fields. For women, the second most popular field is education (which is pursued by 20 percent of female but only seven percent of male graduates), whereas a relatively large number of men earn a degree in engineering (23 percent of male versus eight percent of female graduates). Women are also relatively more likely to obtain a degree in the areas of health and welfare (11 percent versus three percent for men) and in the humanities and arts (10 percent versus six percent for men). In contrast, a relatively large share of men flock to the sciences (nine percent of male graduates, as opposed to four percent of female ones) and in the services field, which includes the relatively popular area of security services (12 percent of male graduates but only three percent of female graduates). Agriculture is the only field of study that is about equally selected by men and women; however, at about three percent of graduates of either gender, it is a relatively unpopular field.

Figure 2.5. Graduates from higher education by field of study and gender, 2016

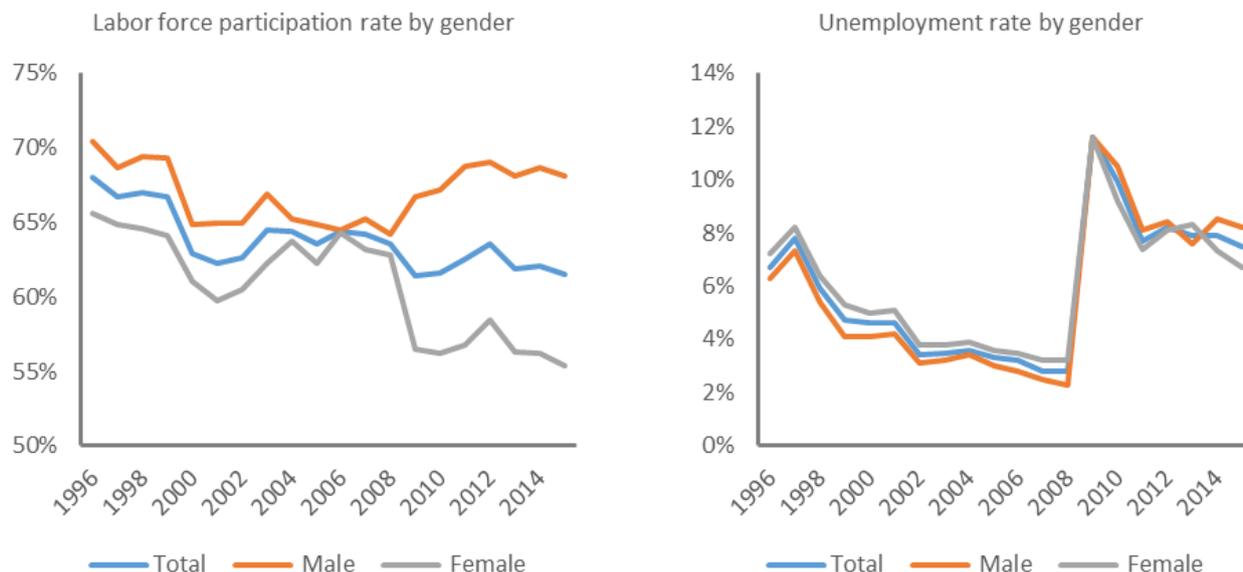


Source: Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences.

**Labor force participation: Men much more active than women.** Even though female graduates of higher education are relatively less likely to have a degree in the fields of science or engineering, the gender data on children’s school enrolment ratios, figures on graduation from higher education, and numbers on educational attainment among adults all seem to indicate that women are on average equipped with better income-generating characteristics than men (Pastore 2008 estimates that in Mongolia, earnings rise by about 4.2 percent with each additional year of education). At the same time, women are much less likely to make use of these characteristics by actively participating in the labor market. This is evident from the left-hand panel of Figure 2.6, which shows the time series for labor force participation rates by gender from 1996 to 2015. (Labor force participation rates are defined as the share of the population age 15 or older that is either in work or out of work but actively looking for a job and available to take on an employment opportunity at short notice.)

Figure 2.6 shows that with the exception of a short period around the year 2006, labor force participation rates in Mongolia have generally been much higher among men than among women. What is more, over the last 20 years female labor force participation rates have been on a downward trajectory, while male rates have been relatively stable. In 1996, the first year for which relevant data are available, 70.4 percent of men and 65.6 percent of women were active in the labor market. This resulted in an overall labor force participation rate of 68.0 percent and a gender gap of 4.8 percentage points. In 2015, the labor force participation rate among men stood at 68.1 percent, only a slight decrease of 2.3 percentage points as compared to 20 years earlier, but among women the rate had dropped to 55.4 percent. When compared to the female labor force participation rate in 1996, this represented a decrease of 10.2 percentage points. It also meant that between 1996 and 2015, the gender gap in labor force participation rates had more than doubled, rising from 4.8 percentage points to 12.6 percentage points.

Figure 2.6. Labor force participation rates and unemployment rates, by gender, 1996–2014



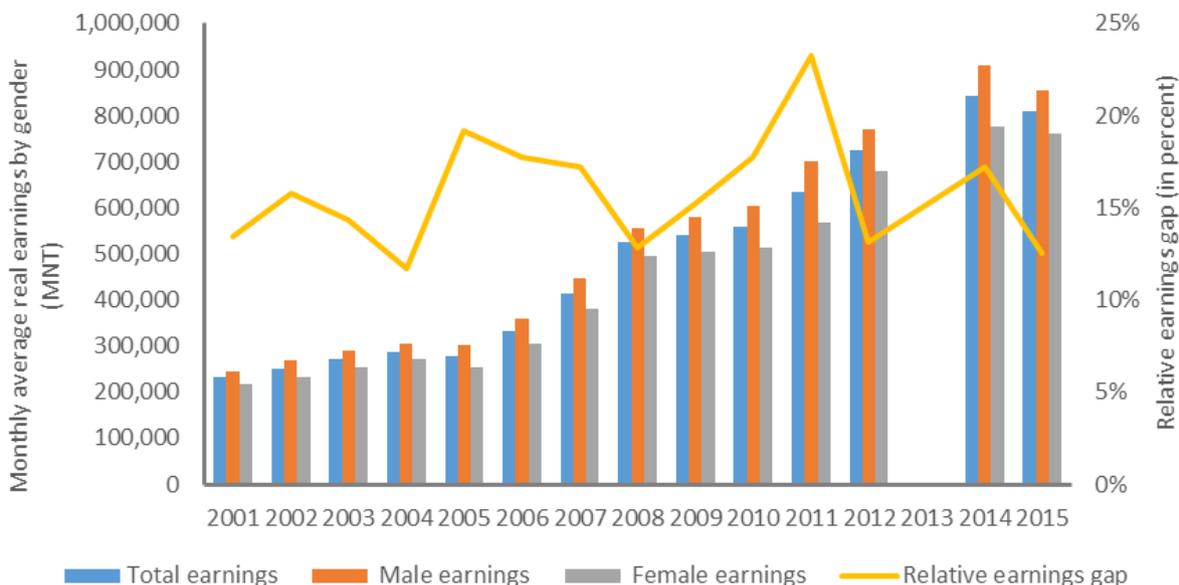
Source: National Statistics Office.

**Unemployment: A reversal in gender patterns.** Among those individuals who are active in the labor market, the unemployment rate (depicted in the right-hand panel of Figure 2.6) has not necessarily been more pronounced among women than among men. On the contrary, at least in recent years, the unemployment rate has been more elevated for men. For instance, in 2015 it stood at 8.2 percent among men while it was 6.7 percent among women, resulting in an overall unemployment rate of 7.5 percent. Looking back over the last 20 years, there have been some episodes when unemployment was higher among women than among men; in fact this was the case in all years from 1996 until Mongolia’s economic crisis in 2009 led to a surge in unemployment among both men and women.

In many ways, the year 2009 proved to be a turning point both for the unemployment rate overall and the difference in unemployment rates between men and women. With an unemployment rate of 11.6 percent for both men and women, 2009 was the year with the highest recorded unemployment rate since 1996 (although that record might be surpassed in 2017 if the current economic crisis continues). It is also the year after which unemployment never returned to the low levels recorded in the mid-2000s and instead seems to have reached a permanently higher plateau. Most notably in the context of this study, since 2009 unemployment rates have always been higher for men than for women (with the notable exception of 2013; see Gassmann, Francois, and Trindade 2015).

**Average earnings: Growing fast but still lower for women.** While in recent years unemployment rates have been higher among men than among women, over the last 15 years employed women have consistently had lower average earnings than employed men. This is evident from Figure 2.7. The figure depicts monthly real earnings for both men and women from 2001 to 2015 as well as the relative earnings gap between genders. It shows that in 2001, monthly earnings expressed in 2015 prices stood at 245,600 MNT for men and 216,500 MNT for women. This resulted in a gender earnings gap of 13.4 percent, that is, monthly average earnings were 13.4 percent higher for men than for women. During the last 15 years, monthly average real earnings have grown fast. Partly due to periods of rapidly rising commodity prices in the mid-2000s and between 2010 and 2014, monthly average real earnings grew on average by 9.8 percent per year.

Figure 2.7. Monthly average real earnings by gender and relative earnings gap, 2001–15



Sources: National Statistics Office and World Development Indicators.

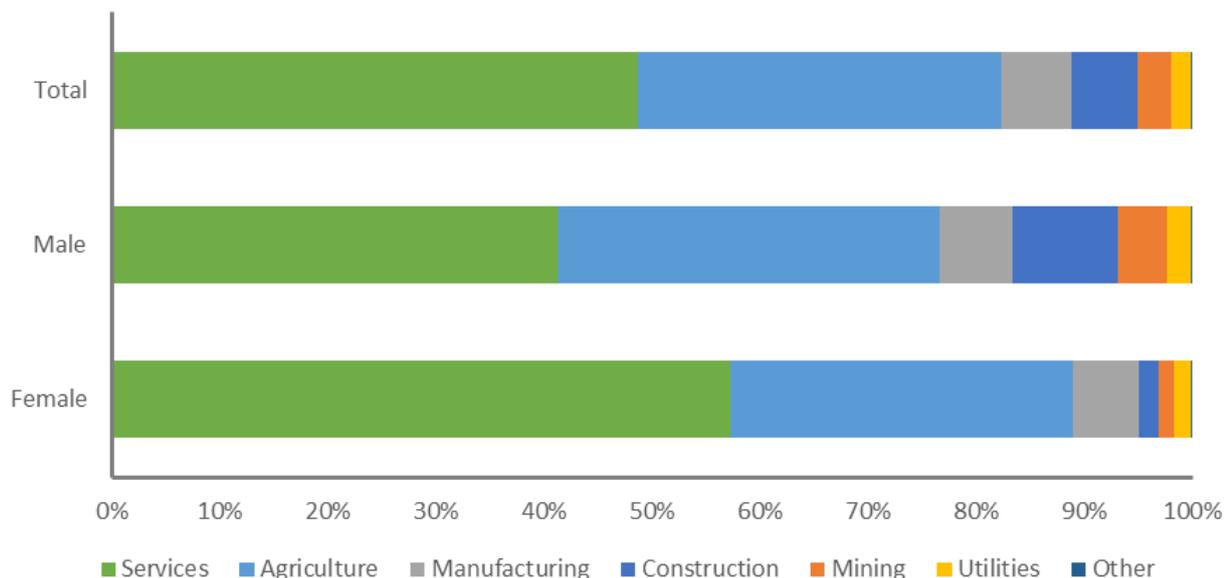
Note: Real earnings are expressed in 2015 consumer prices; data are not available for 2013.

It should be noted that the lack of a pronounced medium-run trend in the size of the relative gender earnings gap between 2011 and 2015 masks some significant swings in the years between. The most significant gender gap in relative earnings in the last 15 years was recorded in 2011, when men on average earned 23.3 percent more per month than women. In contrast, the smallest gender gap in relative earnings between 2001 and 2015 occurred in 2004; in that year, the gap only amounted to 11.7 percent.

**Marked differences in the types of jobs filled by men and women.** In Mongolia, marked difference exist in terms of the jobs typically pursued by men and women. Gassmann, Francois and Trindade (2015) note that a relatively large share of women—particularly in rural areas—are employed in insecure informal work and unpaid family work. Moreover, World Bank (2013) stresses that women’s participation in entrepreneurial work is far lower than that of men. Far fewer women are self-employed compared to men, particularly in urban areas.

The prevalence of different sectors of activity also differs between men and women. This is evident from Figure 2.8, which shows how jobs are distributed among different sectors of the labor market as a whole and among men and women. All data depicted in the figure are for the third quarter of 2016, the most recent period for which they are available. The figure demonstrates that in Mongolia overall and for both men and women, the service sector is by far the most important sector of employment. Overall, 48.7 percent of workers in Mongolia are active in services.

Figure 2.8. Distribution of employment by sector of economic activity and gender, 2016



Source: National Statistics Office.

In spite of the country’s rapid structural changes and urbanization in recent years, agriculture (which also includes forestry, fishing and hunting) continues to play an important role in jobs. In 2016, the sector employed about 33.6 percent of all workers. In addition to services and agriculture, manufacturing and construction are also important sectors, with 6.5 percent of workers employed in manufacturing and 6.1 percent in construction. By international standards, the percentage of workers engaged in manufacturing is relatively low and the percentage active in construction comparably high. All other sectors play only minor roles in overall employment. It is noteworthy that is true even for the mining sector, one of the main drivers of Mongolia’s overall economic growth

In addition to illustrating the overall picture of the structure of employment by sector, Figure 2.8 also gives some clear indication of differences in terms of work between men and women. It makes it clear that the service sector plays an even more important role for women than for men, specifically that 57.2 percent of all women with a job are employed in services as compared to 41.2 percent of all men. In contrast, men are overrepresented in almost all other sectors. In particular, 35.4 percent of men work in agriculture as compared to 31.7 percent of women, 6.8 percent of men are active in manufacturing as opposed to 6.1 percent of women, and 9.8 percent of men have a job in the mining sector compared against 1.9 percent of women.<sup>5</sup>

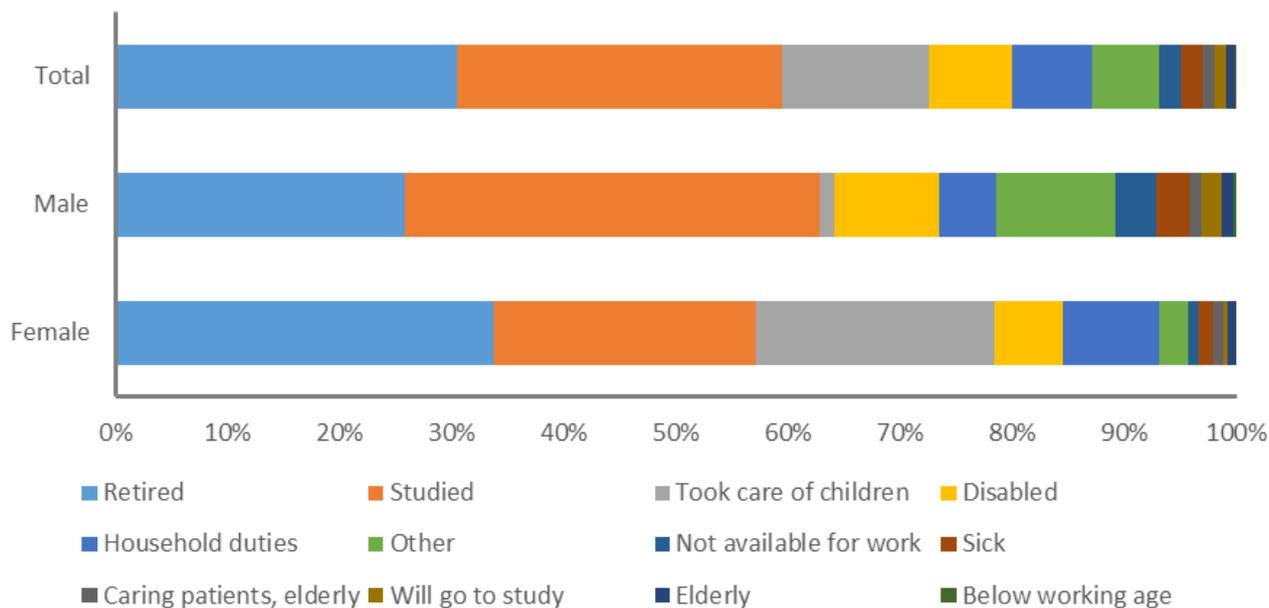
While a detailed quantitative analysis of the gender pay gap is beyond the scope of this study, the numbers reported in Figure 2.8 offer at least one potential explanation for why sizeable differences in mean earnings between men and women persist, even though women’s educational attainment is generally higher than men’s. Specifically, this pattern might be due to the sorting of women and men into relatively high-paying versus low-paying sectors. More specifically, the strong presence of women in the service sector—a sector traditionally characterized by relatively low wages (see Gassmann, Francois and Trindade 2015) and the sizeable number of men active in mining, manufacturing and construction—at least some of which generally pay relatively well—give some indication of why average earnings might be higher for women than for men.

<sup>5</sup> As mentioned in World Bank (2013), in Mongolia gender-specific differences in sectors of economic activity go hand in hand with occupational segregation by gender. Gassmann, Francois and Trindade (2015) note that while agricultural occupations are the most prevalent occupations for both men and women, women are relatively more likely to work as services workers or professionals, while men are relatively more likely to be engaged as craft and trade workers or as plant and machine operators and assemblers.

Decomposing the earnings gap between men and women, World Bank (2013) finds that differences in observed productive characteristics can only explain a small portion of it. World Bank (2013) shows that if women’s observable productive characteristics were rewarded the same way as men’s are, women would earn *higher* average wages than men. Thus, instead of observable characteristics, unobserved factors that influence the returns to productive characteristics—like societal attitudes, differing aspirations, or plain discrimination—appear to explain most of the earnings differences between genders. In fact, they might even explain the sorting of men and women into different sectors. In section 4, this study uses methods of qualitative social research to explore some of these potential factors in detail.

**Child care duties as an important reason for women being out of the labor force.** A deeper exploration of the factors underlying women’s comparatively low labor force participation rates is also best explored with the help of qualitative evidence and therefore left to Section 4 of this study. At the same time, it is helpful to look at data from the labor force survey regularly conducted by the National Statistics Office to develop hypotheses and illuminate the bigger picture. In particular, the National Statistics Office’s labor force survey regularly asks individuals who report that they are not in the labor force about the main reason for their inactivity. The answers to this question from the latest round of the labor force survey (conducted in the third quarter of 2016) are depicted in Figure 2.9. During the survey, inactive respondents could pick from 13 different reasons for their inactivity, ranging from household duties to disability to being below the legal working age. In some respects, the general picture that emerged for the main reasons for inactivity was similar for both men and women. At the same time, a number of noteworthy differences between genders emerged as well.

Figure 2.9. Distribution of reasons for inactivity among those out of the labor force, by gender, 2016



Source: National Statistics Office.

According to the National Statistics Office, both men and women most often indicate that being retired or studying is the main reason for their inactivity. Among women, 23.3 percent give studying as the number one reason while among men 36.9 percent do so. Retirement is given as the main reason for being out of the labor force by 33.8 percent of women and 25.8 percent of men (Rand Corporation [2015] notes that gender-specific early retirement laws negatively affect participation rates among older women). Among the remainder of respondents, the incidence of certain reasons for inactivity differs markedly between men and women. Strikingly, childcare is given as the main reason for inactivity by 21.3 percent of women but only 1.4 percent of men; this means women are more than 15 times more likely than men to cite this reason.

Gassmann, Francois and Trindade (2015) also investigate reasons for inactivity by gender and note that a large number of women with higher education remain inactive due to housekeeping and childcare duties. They argue that this is contrary to what one would find in other countries, and that from a social investment perspective such inactivity among educated women is a waste of the public and private resources invested in education. The data from the National Statistics Office used both here and by Gassmann, Francois, and Trindade (2015) do not make it possible to investigate why women are much more likely to be engaged in childcare activities than men. But the fact that they are 15 times more likely to mention childcare duties when asked about their main reason for inactivity unquestionably points to the importance of this topic.

Other notable results from the survey visualized in Figure 2.9 include these: women are more likely than men to cite household duties as a reason for their inactivity (cited by 8.7 percent of women and 5.0 percent of men) and caring for the elderly is not or not yet a frequently cited reason for inactivity for either gender (cited by only 1.0 percent of inactive women and 1.1 percent of inactive men). Given that Mongolia is at the onset of a rapid aging process, and that hardly any policies or systems are in place to address the resulting challenges, these percentages are likely to rise rapidly in the near future.<sup>6</sup>

### **Section 3: Methodological Approach**

In terms of methodological approach, this study for the most part relies on established methods of qualitative social science research, namely focus group discussions, expert interviews, and a small number of biographic interviews. While quantitative research deals with statistical parameters and aims to achieve a representativeness and random sample, qualitative research makes very different assumptions. In particular, the objective is not to test standardized hypotheses. Instead, qualitative research aims to reconstruct typical cases by identifying contrasts and common issues in individual experiences and perceptions. This is only possible if contrasting cases are actually present in the sample so the composition of an appropriate sample according to observable attributes is of paramount importance. While statistical representativeness plays no role in a qualitative research design, one has to show that the sample exhibits the appropriate contrasts. In addition, it is necessary to use an empirically appropriate methodology (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Focus group discussions are one prominent methodology of qualitative social science research. The underlying methodology has been developed mostly within the last 20 years. Important contributions include Bohnsack's (2014) refinement of the methodological approach of Mangold (1973) to use focus group discussions as a method to gather the collective consensus of a group. The premise of this approach is that focus group discussions offer insights not into individual opinions but into collective knowledge that is updated during the focus group discussion. In other words, focus group discussions are an ideal approach to analyze the values and standards of certain groups and compare them to the common values and standards of society.

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<sup>6</sup> Also see Rand Corporation (2015) for an investigation into the reasons underlying labor force nonparticipation of youth.

Focus groups discussions are usually led by a moderator. The role of the moderator is to guide the discussion while disturbing the process of updating as little as possible (Weimann-Sandig 2014). Moreover, it is good practice to have a separate secretary who takes notes during the discussions and supports the moderator with respect to logistical tasks.<sup>7</sup>

For the purpose of this study, a professional survey research firm, the Mongolia Center for Development Studies (MCDS), was hired that prepared, implemented, and documented 22 distinct focus group discussions with a minimum of six participants and a maximum of nine participants each. For each focus group discussion the firm deployed one moderator to lead the group discussion and one secretary to record the comments word-for-word and assist the moderator. Focus group discussions were also recorded electronically. Before, during, and after this field work, data quality was the top priority. For every focus group discussion, survey instruments were provided to the survey research firm. These included (i) detailed thematic guidelines to guide the discussions; (ii) a template of less than one page that the moderator and secretary were to fill out to summarize the focus group discussions from their perspective; and (iii) a questionnaire of less than one page to be filled out by focus group participants (largely to gather basic socio-demographic information). All material gathered during focus group discussions was transcribed and translated into English immediately following the discussion and then systematically coded with the help of MAXQDA.

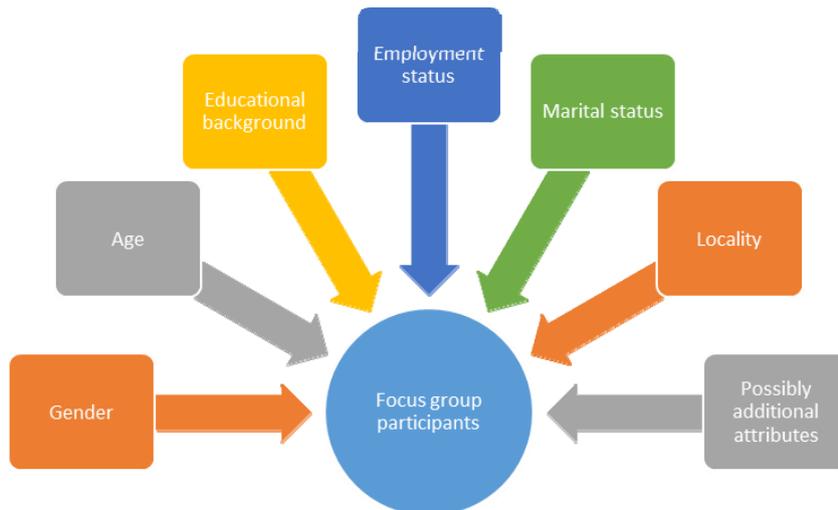
Before these focus group discussions were held, a one-day training workshop was organized for the moderators and note takers. The objectives of the training workshop included (i) reaching a common understanding of the expectations from focus group discussions; (ii) providing detailed explanations of the roles of the moderator and secretary; (iii) discussing how to encourage participants to speak out openly; and (iv) providing detailed instruction on how to acquire participants, guide the focus group discussions, and prepare the transcripts and other materials. Additionally, a “Field Survey Guidance Manual” was prepared by the survey research firm and used as a handbook during the training and the subsequent field work.

Most focus group discussions lasted between two and three hours. Thirteen focus group discussions were conducted in Ulaanbaatar, seven in *aimag* centers and two in *soum* centers. The discussions were spread out over four different districts of Ulaanbaatar (Sukhbaatar, Bayangol, Songinokhairkhan, and Nalaikh) and three *aimags* (Khovd, Dornod, and Dundgobi). The districts and *aimags* were selected because of their different characteristics regarding socioeconomic and regional structures (e.g., the three *aimags* represented the three main regions of Mongolia). As a preparation for the focus group discussions, a small number of biographical interviews were conducted. Based on these exploratory interviews it was decided that the composition of focus group discussions should depend on the following six attributes also visualized in Figure 3.1: gender, age, educational background, employment status, marital status and locality. For some focus group discussions, participation was further restricted according to additional criteria. For instance, for some discussions participation was restricted to owners or human resource professionals of either small and medium or larger firms, or to the disabled, or to individuals with internal migration experience. The precise composition of the 22 focus group discussions, according to participants’ observable characteristics, is summarized in Table 3.1, while Appendix A provides further details on the planning, implementation, and analysis of the focus group discussions.

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth pointing out that focus group discussions are very different from group interviews: while group interviews alternate questions by the moderator and answers by participants, in a focus group discussion the moderator only stimulates the conversation among participants but as far as possible avoids influencing them.

Figure 3.1. Attributes for selection of focus group participants



Source: Authors.

Table 3.1. Composition of focus groups

Group	Gender	Age group	Educational attainment	Employment status	Marital status	Locality	Other attributes
1	female	20-30	tertiary	Mixed	mixed	Sukhbaatar district	N/A
2	female	20-30	tertiary	Mixed	mixed	Khovd <i>aimag</i>	N/A
3	male	20-30	tertiary	Mixed	mixed	Sukhbaatar dirstrict	N/A
4	male	20-30	tertiary	Mixed	mixed	Dornod <i>aimag</i>	N/A
5	female	30-50	at least secondary	Inactive	mixed	Bayangol district	N/A
6	female	30-50	at least secondary	Inactive	mixed	Dundgobi <i>aimag</i>	N/A
7	female	30-50	mixed	Unemployed	mixed	Songino-khairkhan	N/A
8	female	30-50	mixed	Unemployed	mixed	Nalaikh district	in ALMP
9	female	30-50	mixed	Unemployed	mixed	Dornod <i>aimag</i>	N/A
10	male	30-50	mixed	unemployed, spouse empl.	mixed	Nalaikh district	N/A
11	male	30-50	mixed	unemployed, spouse empl.	mixed	Khovd <i>aimag</i>	N/A
12	female	30-50	mixed	Employed	single mother	Nalaikh district	N/A
13	female	30-50	mixed	Employed	single mother	Dundgobi <i>aimag</i>	N/A
14	female	30-50	mixed	Inactive	single mother	Bayangol district	N/A
15	female	30-50	mixed	Inactive	single mother	Dornod <i>aimag</i>	N/A
16	female	20-50	mixed	Mixed	mixed	Songino-khairkhan district	disabled
17	female	50-60	mixed	Inactive	mixed	Bayangol district	N/A
18	mixed	mixed	mixed	Manager	mixed	Sukhbaatar district	from SME
19	mixed	mixed	mixed	Manager	mixed	Songino-khairkhan district	from large firm
20	female	mixed	mixed	Herder	mixed	Khovd <i>aimag</i> (Erdeneburen <i>soum</i> )	N/A
21	female	mixed	mixed	Herder	mixed	Dundgobi <i>aimag</i> (Erdenedalai <i>soum</i> )	N/A
22	female	mixed	mixed	Mixed	mixed	Songino-khairkhan district	internal migrant

To complement the findings from focus group discussions, a number of key informant interviews were conducted by a local consultant. Altogether, the local consultant prepared, implemented, and documented 12 key informant interviews with the management of labor and social welfare offices (the offices' directors or chief technical officers), other qualified staff of labor and social welfare offices (such as placement officers or career counselors), the heads of the social policy departments in the offices of *aimag* governors, and other relevant experts. To achieve geographical balance, the key informant interviews were spread out over three different districts of Ulaanbaatar and three *aimags*, with different characteristics regarding their socioeconomic and regional structures. The educational background of the experts in the different labor and social welfare offices displayed great variety. There were economists, teachers, human resource managers, and so on. For every key informant interview, detailed thematic guidelines to guide the discussions were prepared. All key informant interviews were recorded electronically. Later, electronic recordings were transcribed and translated into English.

## Section 4: Findings

### 4.1. Perceptions of female and male students and graduates

#### *Drivers of education decisions*

The female students and graduates in our discussion ranged from 20 to 24 years of age and studied or graduated in different subjects, including demography, Japanese law, journalism, international relations, and public administration or economics. All were unmarried, and only few of them had permanent boyfriends. The male students and graduates were between ages 20 and 29; one of them was already married and had a young son, and the others were single and mostly had no permanent girlfriend. In contrast to the common differences in fields of study that could be documented for the wider population of university students in Mongolia, they were studying nearly the same subjects as the female discussants.

Asked about the reasons why they had chosen their subjects, all the discussants, both male and female, made clear that their families play an important role in decision-making. Older family members including elder sisters or brothers influence the students by telling them about their experiences or discussing the status of the chosen profession.

From Focus Group 1: Female university students and graduates ages 20–30, mixed employment and marital status.

Speaker 6: *My grandparents have influenced me a lot in deciding to choose to major in international relations at university.<sup>8</sup> [...] So when I graduate my college, I'm not planning to pursue master's degree right away. The number of available jobs at the market is very limited. So I think I'll focus on developing myself as an individual, maybe go to another country for some time and live there for 3-4 years, find a job and work there even if it means to be a dishwasher. After gaining some experience living abroad, I'll return to my home country and think of the next steps.*

From Focus Group 3: Male university students and graduates ages 20 – 30, mixed marital status: mixed employment and marital status.

Speaker 4: *We humans, in general either follow someone else, or make others follow us. And we also make our choices depending on our surroundings, or based on advice of those who surround us. Eighty percent of my family members are in the military. [My family] also wanted me to become a soldier, and I tried, but I couldn't because of personal reasons. Then my mother suggested that I become a journalist, as I was good with speaking and writing. I don't regret at all that I followed her advice and made this choice.*

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<sup>8</sup> Note that here and elsewhere, underlining within an interview excerpt indicates our (the authors') emphasis, to draw attention to salient statements.

The social status of the chosen subjects plays an important role for many discussants. They wanted to demonstrate that they have the ability to study important subjects. This was especially true for those students and graduates who took law as their subject, stressing its high social reputation. Many discussants stressed that it was important for them to take a subject that would enable them to go abroad and get international experience and knowledge. In the discussion, they stressed that international experience was viewed as a key to getting a good-paying job in Mongolia.

### ***Life Plans of young female students and graduates***

Asked about their life plans within the next five to ten years, all the female students and graduates participating in the focus group discussions were planning to get a job after graduation. Most of them wanted to get as much work experience as possible – but often only for a short period such as two years, and they seemed to be very ambitious. Asked about this short period of time, most of the discussants explained that they were following the traditional life plan: a Mongolian girl has to be married before the age of 29, because after that age she would be judged a spinster and run the risk of ending up permanently single.

From Focus Group 1: Female university students and graduates ages 20–30, mixed employment and marital status.

*Speaker 8: I'm planning to complete my master's by spring of 2018. After graduating, I'm going to look for a job of my profession. If I won't find a suitable job, I'll open my own company. So, right now I'm thinking what kind of a company that would be. If I do end up running my own company, within 5 years or in 2022 my company will have established its share in the market and will be running smoothly. [...] For the next 5 years I don't have any plans for marriage and family, because I'm only 22 now. If I get married too early, I'll have to support my husband's career and dreams, and look after children. Then I'll have to give up my dreams for a career. So, I think in the first 5 years after graduation I'll build my own career, and in the following 5 years, when I'll be 27 or 28, I'll start a family.*

By getting married, a young woman often has only one or two more years until the first child is born, and the birth marks a career interruption. So job experiences were discussed as having to occur within a short period of time, and consequently discussants were pretty much focusing on their studies or first career steps. The discussion also highlighted the fact that none of the women discussed having careers after the period of motherhood. It seems that their aim is not to have a life biography consisting of a permanent labor market inclusion but one that includes just a short career after graduation, just enough to justify their university education.

It was frequently mentioned that with the decision to marry, supporting the husband would be the wife's central aim, and her own career would be secondary. The minority of discussants who did not want to give up their careers stressed that they would likely have to live life as single women and would likely to go abroad for a longer period of time. Working while their children were under age three was not mentioned as a possibility by any of the discussants. Many mentioned that institutional care in kindergartens is deemed unsafe and is not seen as an appropriate way to take care of children. Instead of thinking about institutional childcare, there was a wide discussion about—and high ambition for—founding their own small companies, because this would enable them to better reconcile family and work by allowing flexible working hours and, as well, enabling them to have their own property if the marriage ended in divorce.

Compared to their own life plans, the female discussants stressed, male graduates focus more on going abroad after university to earn as much money as possible and then to earn a high salary after returning to Mongolia. The financial aspect is seen as essential for young men, because society expects them to support their parents when they are older and also to be the main breadwinners for their own families. It was also stated that male graduates seemed to be under special pressure, because more and more female students are focusing on their careers before marriage and are therefore viewed as competitors to the men in searching for good jobs. As a result, male students and graduates are becoming more competitive.

Young female students and graduates are aware that most Mongolian men, even the younger ones, anticipate that women will follow the traditional role model, and nearly everyone accepts this. Supposedly, the first of only two ways for women to have a career is to delay marriage as long as possible, up to an age that is still accepted by society. The other possibility is to decide to forego marriage and to remain single. The supposedly increasing number of single mothers was discussed as a matter of fact. Having no husband does not automatically mean having no children from the female discussants' viewpoint, although they are of the opinion that Mongolian society does not fulfill all the needs of single parents.

### ***Life plans of young male students and graduates***

The life plans of the male students and graduates participating in the focus group discussions in general seemed more relaxed compared to those of the female discussants. Although many of them are focusing on their careers, getting married and starting a family is also an integral part of their life plans within the next five to ten years. According to the young men in the focus group discussions, women are regarded as “the driving force of men” while men are seen as the central motor to develop Mongolian society. Because women routinely quit their jobs when they have a baby, they are not judged to be a constant part of the labor market. The development of society, in the young men's discussion, was characterized as depending on different economic outputs from men and women.

The young men stressed that more and more women with college degrees want to have a career before they marry, and that means they are concentrating on their studies or work and do not want to have a serious relationship while in their young twenties. The men described young women as more ambitious than men, and some of the discussants asked themselves if this was really necessary. In their eyes, ambitious women are not very attractive and tend to end up permanently single and as outcasts. The competition between both genders is seen as not very helpful, because in the end men are seen as having to serve as the main breadwinners and should therefore have the better opportunities to find good, highly paid jobs.

Discussion of the conflicts between the life plans of young female and male students and graduates touched on the same issues. Many male discussants stressed that they would not tolerate a wife who concentrated on her career and did not support the husband's aims. Although many of them stressed that couples need to discuss their roles and that men do have to help with family issues, the discussion mainly centered on the careers of men and the role of women as the ones who must deal with family issues and take care of the children. In the eyes of these male discussants, single mothers still are unacceptable, because most of them will have to go back to their parents to get financial help and free childcare. The men's important role as father and provider of the family was mentioned again and again in this context, mirroring the points raised in the discussion among female college students and graduates.

### ***Summary***

These discussions of their life plans give us detailed insight into the expectations of young educated Mongolians. Most interestingly, starting a career and studying a subject that promises to be rewarding or to have a high impact on society are both deemed essential by all students, male and female. Also, acquiring five to ten years of work experience is an integral part of their life plans. But it also appears that the age of 29 or 30 marks a very important line in Mongolian society: according to the participants, women have to fear that they will not find a partner or husband afterwards. Especially for young women, life plans are therefore divided into two parts: life as a young single, when they are enabled to start a career, and life as a wife and mother, which leaves little or no scope for fulfilling a career.

The work attitudes of young female students and graduates could be described as caught between career wishes and upholding social values. The expectations of society are taken quite seriously, and the female discussants made clear that they were dealing with social values and standards that most of them were not willing to violate; many of those who were so willing were planning to leave the country. The impacts of family, of what other people think of them, and of how they themselves judge others all influence both young men and young women.

## 4.2. Perceptions of a good job for young men and women

A central aim of the focus group discussion with students and graduates was to find out whether female and male attitudes and expectations toward jobs were different. Indeed, there are different perceptions. While many of the female discussants stressed that a good job consists of defined working hours and no overtime work, a high salary is not very important to them; in contrast, a regular salary is strongly preferred. Many young women also want to have a job where it becomes clear that they are at the top, which means that they want to supervise a team as a sign of leadership.

From Focus Group 2: Female university students and graduates ages 20–30, mixed employment and marital status.

Speaker 1: *A good job is a job that you want and can do well. [...]*

Speaker 3: *A good job is probably a job that you like and can do well. If I can't do the job well, it would be difficult to say it's a good job.*

Speaker 2: *A good job is a job that enables you to communicate with others, looks good, feels good and has a nice working environment/climate [e.g. one that offers flexible hours and no overtime].*

These preferences show the dilemma young Mongolian women face: On the one hand, they want to attain leading management positions as soon as possible; on the other hand, they do not want to work overtime because of the family obligations they anticipate having later. Considering the work and leadership experience required for many jobs young women aspire to, these two wishes are nearly incompatible.

With regard to preferred employers, those companies are generally preferred that pay the cost for kindergartens or have their own arrangements for employees' child care. Asked what they think men would judge to be a good job, many female discussants answered that this is often directly connected to a high salary.

From Focus Group 1: Female university students and graduates ages 20–30, mixed employment and marital status.

Speaker 1: *I think the amount of salary plays an important role [for men]. This is because they have to take care of their families. I think most of our men today, if they got paid a high salary, they would be willing to work overtime or nonstop.*

Speaker 8: *For some young men, as long as the salary was high, they would do anything as a job. They think as long as they can make money, they can take [the job].*

In fact, the discussions with male graduates and students reached the same conclusion: that many men consider salary the most important thing. Many men also noted that the company one works for should have high prestige. Doing overtime work is common and is regarded as an indicator of a person's work ability. Given these outlooks, men see no chance of reducing their working time in order to care for family issues, especially child care. Doing part-time work is seen as a typical female job characteristic.

### ***Job search behavior***

The current labor market situation is judged about equally by male and female students and graduates. With regard to academics, it is seen as nearly impossible to get a job right after graduation because Mongolian employers want two years' work experience at least. So without private networks or family members to help them into a position, most new graduates have no chance to get a qualified job. Therefore, more and more students are starting to do internships to convince employers that they not only have theoretical knowledge but practical experience. In order to find work as a professional, most of the discussants said they would consider going abroad, because other countries are perceived as more open to employing young graduates. International experience is also seen as essential for a career in Mongolia because most employers ask after it in job interviews. In general, job candidate selection is regarded

as not being objective but instead based on individual preferences, and the fact that many employers do not provide clarity on their desired skill profiles makes it difficult to assess their wishes and needs.

From Focus Group 3: Male university students and graduates ages 20–30, mixed employment and marital status.

Speaker 3: *Today, there is high shortage of available jobs. Truth be told, there are really no jobs nowadays. [...] In the civil service, [...] as new government takes office a big turnover takes place every four years – it has become a tradition now. We are so dependent on politics. [...] The private sector still hasn't been established well. Many young people want to start their careers as private businessmen, but they face too many risks. [...] Even in rural areas, the most pressing issue is unemployment.*

Speaker 8: *In Mongolia today, every employer is looking for your [work] experience. But when you are a new graduate, what [work] experience you can talk about. This is a very rigid requirement, plus there is an age limit. The employers go so far as to require good looks and proper physical appearances. It is as though the skills of a person and the high grades that they completed their studies with have nothing to do with the requirements of a job. There are many good examples of employers around the world, where [an international company] asks who you are really as a person, and what you can really do well; [a different international company] asks whether you can work in a team. But in Mongolia, such rules do not apply. [...]*

Speaker 5: *I'll share from my own experience. I graduated [college] in June of 2016. I looked for a job for two months, then I stopped. But I observed a few things. First, what [Speaker 8] has just said is true. Employers look for work experience. It doesn't matter whether your GPA is high, or what skills you have. The only question that concerns them is if you have had any work experience. I participated in a 5-stage selection process of [a bank]. There were 30-40 candidates, some experienced and some not. When we got into the last stage of the selection, the directors' interview, they asked whether I had any prior work experience. They also asked if I had graduated college abroad. Although I had a very high score, another student who had graduated abroad was given the job.*

Working in the civil services sector is regarded as a good step within the labor market, but it is only possible to those who have private connections and are willing to lose their job after every election, since many civil servants are generally all fired and replaced by new people whenever a new political party wins the elections. Basically, almost every civil service job is like an appointment, where high officials hire only their relatives and friends. Many young professionals also perceive that they have no chance to build their own businesses because loans are only given out to those who have a permanent working contract or properties. Many women stress that they are treated differently within the job selection process. They are asked when they want to start a family and often have to sign contracts promising that they are not pregnant yet. Examples were offered in the discussions—by both male and female participants—of women being fired because they were pregnant.

### ***Reconciliation of family and work***

Young female discussants tend to be dealing a lot more with the reconciliation of work and family than men do. Whereas the male students and graduates had nearly no opinion towards a better reconciliation of family and work and stressed that the best thing would be to have a husband who earns enough money, women discussed the whole topic in detail. Interestingly, most of the female discussants were of the opinion that the best solution is to have a husband who earns enough money so that they did not have to work and could concentrate on family and children. Care work, which we define as work done free of charge and which includes not only childcare but also elder care and family management, is viewed in Mongolia as a typically female responsibility. In the eyes of many discussants, men are unwilling to deal with family issues, so a strong wife is necessary.

Related to this topic in the course of discussion was the issue of heavy drinking and alcoholism. According to discussants, many men frequently drink large amounts of alcohol when they are married. Although the female discussants said that more highly educated men do not drink as much as less educated men, in general male heavy

drinking and alcoholism was characterized as a phenomenon of modern Mongolian society, one that poses a threat to women because, as they attested in the discussion, they suffer from violence that results.

The reasons many men start drinking alcohol in large amounts, it was stated, at least partly stem from the insufficient labor market situation: that is, men drink because of bad working conditions or extended working contracts or because they cannot find a job. This can create a vicious circle, because drinking alcohol in large amounts leads to disorientation and depression, which causes many men to give up searching for new jobs or harms their chances in competing with others.

From Focus Group 1: Female university students and graduates ages 20–30, mixed employment and marital status.

Speaker 3: *I think it's alcoholism. It may also depend on the level of education. [A husband in his] proper mind and with proper education won't be seeing his wife going exhausted, and him continuing to drink all the while.*

Speaker 8: *It's quite rare that someone who is highly skilled and educated will become an alcoholic. [Educated] men have a better chance of finding work and having something to do rather than to go drinking. But in order to find an educated husband with high skills, you have to be an educated woman yourself and develop yourself as well. It's hard to find such men.*

To enable couples to get along, in these discussants' eyes there should be programs that prevent alcoholism or help men to deal with alcohol in moderation. With regard to workplaces, many young women felt all gender inequality should be forbidden by law and that the government should implement special gender considerations in all policies. The social welfare system was criticized severely. Instead of giving a certain amount of money to mothers for every child that is born as was done as part of the Child Money Program at the time of the focus group discussions, they felt, the money should be used to establish a good system of childcare, from the first year to school age. In the eyes of many discussants, a sustainable family policy is needed. Childcare should be fully financed by the government so that women can be seen as an essential part of labor market. Within companies, they suggested, new work policies should be used, such as flexible working times for mothers. They also raised the idea of combining family and workplace policies, for example making it possible to arrive at work after children have been brought to school or kindergarten. At the moment, work hours are not connected to the institutional childcare system, so most mothers have no chance to return to their workplaces. According to discussant, to convince employers that female employees should be kept on after becoming mothers, a governmental framework of laws and better enforcement are needed.

### **Summary**

As visualized in Figure 4.1, the discussions among the male and female students and graduates leaves a picture of the Mongolian labor market that stresses the power of the employers. Because of the economic slowdown and because more and more female students want to have a career before getting married and having children, the number of job offers are more limited than the demand for positions. This has led more competitive behavior among both men and women. Within the job selection process, male and female discussants stress that there are gender inequalities: women are asked about their life plans and have to assure employers that they will not become pregnant within a certain time. Employment selection is therefore perceived to be based not on objective criteria like good exam results and skills needed for a job but on gender characteristics. In addition, social expectations and attitudes concerning what an ideal life plan should be for men and women might prevent women from having an equal part in the labor market. Clientelism presents still another barrier: It seems to be an aspect of work that younger labor market participants perceive as much as older ones (see other discussions below). With regard to the reconciliation of family and work, the male participants did not pay much attention to the topic, perhaps because traditional gender roles have meant that many of them have had no personal experience of it as an explicit conflict. The perceptions of the female discussants, however, showed an awareness of the missing linkage between labor market and family policies, as well as a demand that governmental policies establish gender equality in companies.

Figure 4.1. Issues highlighted by university students participating in focus group discussions



Source: Authors.

### 4.3. Perceptions of jobless middle-aged women and men

#### *Ideal life plans of middle aged women and men*

Asked about the dreams and life plans they had in their teenage years, all groups of middle-aged women and men answered that those dreams had been strongly influenced by the paradigms of the socialist regime. Although everyone focused on his or her dream job, the situation during socialism was characterized by all as totally different. The end of the socialist regime was described as a time when the economy totally collapsed and the working situation became worse for those who already had been employed. Consequently, parents and other relatives were very critical in their advice, most not wanting their children to go into the same profession they had been in but instead to pursue an education that would better equip them for the demands of a capitalist job market.

A number of participants stated that after the transition from socialism to capitalism, there was no more free access to universities, which meant that parents had to spend a certain amount of money, and those who couldn't afford to do so advised their children to take some short, inexpensive vocational training, such as to become a cook or hairdresser. For some, this opened up new possibilities.

From Focus Group 5: Females ages 30–50 who have at least completed secondary education, are out of the labor force, and are either married or cohabitating.

Speaker 3: *I grew up in [an aimag], in the countryside. I dreamed of becoming an artist since childhood. When I was in school, I always found myself singing or dancing in performances and talent shows. But when we were graduating 10<sup>th</sup> grade (end of high school then), during 1992-1994, it was a very difficult time. My parents didn't have any money. If you lived in the countryside then, you could hardly afford to buy flour, not to even mention paying for your children's college. So I couldn't go to college at all. I came to Ulaanbaatar, went to all types of courses including hairdressers, cooks etc. I was pretty much enrolling in all courses that were relatively cheap and offered some skills. Eventually I was hired into [an international company]. [...] Then I got married when I was 34, and had twin boys and a girl. After I had given birth to my baby girl when I was 37 I stopped working, and have since been taking care of family and just being busy with life. I can say that pretty much that all that I'd dreamed of and envisioned of my future, has not come true in my life. Everything turned opposite of what I had dreamed of.*

### ***Psychological consequences of being out of work***

There is little difference in the general attitudes toward unemployment between jobless men and women in that age group. Both genders feel frustrated that they are not able to find a job and both have the same fears of being worthless for society. The handling of unemployment nevertheless seems to be different. Many male discussants explain that they are searching for “artificial employment” such as cleaning the yards, working in the garden, or helping friends with their work. Only a few of them do typical household things such as cleaning and cooking. But all of them are feeling as not in the right place and responsible for the bad financial situation of their families:

From Focus Group 10: Males ages 30–50 who have at least completed secondary education, are unemployed or out of the labor force, and whose wives are employed.

Speaker 1: *If you stay at home for longer periods, you become lazier. Then you start becoming afraid of taking jobs that require hard labor. Also, you get so used to housework. Sometimes you even start pondering that it might be better to stay at home and take care of the household than to endure the drudgery of work. Then there is also an aspect of you starting to argue with your family and faultfinding, when you stay at home for too long, so it's just not the best place to stay for a long time. It's better if you are employed outside your home.*

Speaker 3: *I just cannot endure sitting at home. I always try to find something to do. Maybe clean our yard, or something else. I don't like staying at home, if I do, I start arguing my wife. Staying at home is not a pleasant thing. [...]*

Speaker 2: *It's not easy to stay at home, you start thinking about a lot of things. If you watch TV, you start imagining if you were younger you could do this or that. You really start thinking much about money, and it's hard. All you think is, how can you find money. [...]. I cannot stress [enough] how difficult it is to stay at home.*

Many of the jobless female discussants explained that they are busy with their household duties and with the education of their children, yet this is not satisfying to them. They complained that unemployment reduces individuals to their traditional roles and takes away opportunities for self-fulfillment. The central thought that emerged was that unemployment causes dependency—either on the husband or on the wife who is still working. The original partnership, which both men and women regarded as a balanced partnership, then turns into an imbalanced one.

From Focus Group 5: Females ages 30–50 who have at least completed secondary education, are out of the labor force, and are either married or cohabitating.

Speaker 3: *Previously, when I worked, I'd put some of my salary to savings, and use some at my own discretion. But now I'm dependent on my husband for finances and income. We must make best use of the money that my husband is earning. And then there is another problem, people who work think that people who stay at home just do nothing and eat and drink someone else's money. People make remarks such as why won't you place your kids somewhere and go find a job. You can totally start feeling judged and looked down upon. But when I consider employment, it means my children will be neglected and there will be no one to take care of house duties.*

Speaker 5: *Not having a job is no fun at all. It makes you financially dependent on others. When you want to buy something you want, you have to discuss it with your husband. Nowadays everything has become easily controllable [...]. Although husbands give you their pay cards, they get instant messages on their phones for every transaction made. Then they start asking what you bought on that money. Not only that, I also have a sister, who lives in poverty. Of course, as a sister, I want to help her and give her money sometimes. Although my husband says I can help her, always a problem arises when I do so. When I was employed myself, I could spend my money as I wanted. Surely that gives some kind of pleasure. It's also very difficult when you want to take some dancing classes or go to a gym. My husband says he's sweating so hard to make money on his business, whereas I'm wasting money taking fancy classes.*

In sum, the one who earns the money decides how to spend it. Nearly all the women in this discussion suffer from having less freedom than they had before they became jobless to decide how to spend their money on their own. Also, they report having no money for personal needs. The main difference between the genders, they felt, is that they sometimes would like to have money for going to the gym or the hairdresser or for buying fashionable clothes, while they believe the men would rather use extra money to go to the pub and drink alcohol.

In the eyes of participants of both genders, these activities mean taking part in society, but the difference is that women arguably want to improve their appearance by spending money in order to get a new job, while some of the men seem to be more passive and frustrated and hang around with other unemployed friends, feeling a little better by drinking alcohol. Another difference is, that the relationship between the partners seems to change more when the husband becomes unemployed and the wife still has a job. The jobless male discussants spoke more about disputes and conflicts than the females did.

From Focus Group 10: Males ages 30–50 who have at least completed secondary education, are unemployed or out of the labor force, and whose wives are employed.

Speaker 1: *I'd say it's as if the genders [of me and my wife] had changed. When my wife talks on the phone with her friends, she calls me a housewife who is staying at home and doing nothing but housework. [...]*

Speaker 1: *When I worked as a miner, I came [home] with money. I usually came with a full bag of coal for heating, 50-60 thousand MNT in my pocket and maybe had shared couple bottles of vodka with my friends. But my wife wasn't upset with me, she met me with a smile and took the money. She cooked me a good, hot meal. Of course, if I don't bring [home] money I have no right to drink. [My wife] will not trust me with any money. She'll be afraid I'll use it for alcohol, not for bread for home.*

These experiences might reflect different causes. First of all, women are more used to staying at home because they perceive that society still expects them, and not the men, to care for their families and look after the children. In all the focus group discussions—independent of age, educational background, and gender—the traditional role models were very much in the heads of men and women of every generation. Although many women want to work, for various reasons they make family and household their priority.

On the other side, men suffer a lot when they become unemployed due to not being viewed within these role expectations. Being at home means accepting a new role model, one that enables the wife to go to work and has the husband doing household things and looking after the children. The awareness for men is the same as that for women: unpaid care work is not seen as real work, and therefore it is not really satisfying, because society claims it as just what is normally expected and offers no appreciation. But for many jobless men, the caregiver role is a challenge they are often facing for the first time in their lives. They feel violated in their role as the male breadwinner, unable to support their own family and being on the fringes of society. Interestingly, having their own experiences of feeling worthless and confined indoors with children does not seem to cause most male discussants to have a new understanding of women's feelings about these challenges. Asked what they would do if they had a new job, most of them answered that they would encourage their wives to stay at home and organize the family and household things.

### ***The perceived role of education***

All over the world, education is seen as the key to improving living conditions and is treated as a central human right. Education is important both for the economic development of countries and individuals (Allmendinger 2013). The term *education* embraces many things, not only the acquisition of formal certifications such as diplomas but the cognitive and other skills that can be acquired both through schooling and throughout one's whole life. This emphasis on a lifelong-learning process has been established in many developed countries, especially those dealing with demographic changes and skills shortages (Weimann-Sandig, Wehmeyer, and Wirner 2016). In fact, in those countries that already have been working on schedules for lifelong-learning, moving from the first awareness that

lifelong-learning and the education of elderly persons is necessary to making later job training a working reality has taken a long time. Employers have long been reluctant to concentrate on training older employees (Bellmann, Leber, and Dummert 2014).

In Mongolia, being highly educated means having the best chance to get a well-paying job and starting a career from the moment of one's university graduation, and this is the picture many of the male and female students described in our group discussions. Although work experience must be documented by internships or through being hired as a working student—which was a central statement made by both genders—having a university degree offers young people the best possibility of entering the labor market, even though there may be differences in opportunity among the different professions.

At the same time, the results of the other focus groups show, that while education is important, success in the Mongolian labor market also depends on other indicators. In some cases, those other indicators are perceived to be so overwhelming that education takes a minor place. In particular, concerning unemployed women and men between ages 30 and 50, group discussions participated in by both women and men of every educational background revealed that Mongolian employers appear to be concentrating their hiring with special attention to age. Our participants all perceived that independent of gender, people age 40 or older face challenges and problems getting back into the labor market. This perception echoes results by another World Bank study, *Urban Poverty in Ulaanbaatar: Understanding its Dimensions and Addressing the Challenges* (World Bank 2016c).

### ***Perceptions of ageism***

Ageism was perceived to be a major problem by many participants in all the focus groups. Specifically, it was regarded as a serious problem by participants in the groups of women and men between ages 30 and 50, independent of their educational background, who are out of work and married to a partner who is employed at the moment. The middle-aged female focus group participants generally ranged in age from 32 to 43. Their professions reflected the different fields of work where most women hold jobs, namely in health services (nurses and doctors), gastronomy (cooks), trade (shop assistants), and education (teachers). Very few of them were factory workers or worked as engineers (especially in mining industry).

By participants in these groups, the age of 40 is seen as a crucial boundary age for both women and men, although women described it more clearly as affecting their employment. Many women over 40 felt discriminated against by employers because of their appearance at that age and the fact that at that point they no longer look as attractive as they did in their twenties. The female discussants said their employers refuse to employ women in their 40s as sales women or shop assistants because they “look too old.” Indeed, according to participants, job advertisements mostly seek people between the ages of 20 and 32.

From Focus Group 5: Females ages 30–50 who have at least completed secondary education, are out of the labor force, and are either married or cohabitating.

Speaker 2: *I'd say it's age. I have a seasonal job and I work in tourist camp during the summer. Then in the fall, when I come to Ulaanbaatar to find a job, they say I'm too old for the position and make me feel like I'm an old grandma or something. But you shouldn't treat people like that. In foreign countries, people work until they cannot work anymore. But you don't see that in Mongolia.*

Speaker 1: *I'd also say age matters a lot. When you apply for a job, go there and show your documents and professional certificates, you find yourself being judged by looks and appearances only. If you go there, say, in not very presentable clothes, they'd almost ask you if you came to wash floors or something. I think the biggest issue in Mongolia is judging people by appearances and showing discrimination. I have had a bad experience like that happening to me. There are a lot of people who just make judgments by looks. Of course, as a woman, you take it very personally.*

Many male discussants spoke about the physical constraints that employers are afraid of when employing elder men. They rely on healthy, younger men to do jobs in the mining industry or as craftsmen. In general, many of the unemployed men in our discussion groups work in professions where a certain amount of physical strength is needed. Due to both economic and weather conditions in Mongolia, many of these male jobs are non-permanent ones, consisting of either seasonal work or limited contracts, especially in the mining industry or construction. Due to assumptions about bad health conditions, employers appear to sort out the older employees and rely on younger and supposedly healthier ones, and this is believed to lead to higher unemployment among men without tertiary education starting already between ages 35 and 40.

From Focus Group 10: Males ages 30–50 who have at least completed secondary education, are unemployed or out of the labor force, and whose wives are employed.

Speaker 6: *When I went to [a tourist camp] for a job interview, they asked me how old I was and told me I was too old for the job. [...]*

Speaker 3: *If people consider us as old and outdated, they should start paying us pensions and other benefits for disability. [...]*

Speaker 5: *I'm 41 years old now, and I can do any job just as well as any 25 or 30-year old. I think I can be just as strong as them. I can actually work harder than them, not less.*

Speaker 6: *I heard comments like, "You are too short for this job". "We want someone taller than you". I asked them, "How come? I completed my military service, I held a gun, why are you not taking me for this job?" The answer was that they are hiring a taller man.*

In sum, in the focus group participants' perception, discrimination is very common in the Mongolian workplace. First, there seems to be discrimination based on age, and both genders talked about discrimination based on their appearances. This societal attitude toward age and other characteristics is discussed as a general problem in the Mongolian labor market.

### ***Perceptions of disabled women***

Generally, disabled people participating in the focus group discussions seemed very actively looking to establish themselves in the labor market. Many had almost no experience with long-term permanent employment, but despite that they did not hesitate to attend vocational trainings, which they actively search for themselves. They regard education as the central factor that one could use to minimize the fact that one is disabled. Their perception is that the more special knowledge and skills one has, the better one's chances at getting a job. In practice, many disabled people think that they have to meet the needs of employers at a very high level to convince them that they are as qualified as non-disabled people, in order to get a job.

Although the Law on Social Protection for People with Disabilities, adopted in 2005, states that companies with more than 50 employees have to employ at least one disabled person and offers wage subsidies from the Employment Promotion Program for Disabled Citizens for companies that do so, focus group discussants reported that employers often hesitate to employ workers with disabilities. They said that for disabled persons, being employed in public services is much simpler than getting a job in the private sector. Unlike women discussants without disabilities, many of the disabled female discussants did not agree that there was a general gender disparity in the labor market. For disabled persons, they thought, no gender bias is noticeable. For both men and women with disabilities, getting a job is possible for those who attend special trainings and show active involvement in job seeking. One might expect that married women would think there is no gender gap in employment, but even some single mothers declared that being disabled is free of gender aspects.

In contrast with other, non-disabled women, disabled women—whether they were single mothers, elderly, or married and unemployed—may receive benefits from a dedicated, active labor-market program, the employment promotion program for disabled citizens. Through this program, disabled persons can receive grants of up to 3 million MNT to start or expand a microbusiness. In this context, they can also rely on the so-called Songino self-employment centers (ILO 2015) where they can develop business projects that can be shown to the labor and employment offices administering the employment promotion program for disabled citizens. The offices then decide if a grant is authorized.

While grants can in principle be valued at up to 3 million MNT, focus group discussants said the actual amounts vary and are often only between 500,000 and 1 million MNT. Many of the discussants who got those grants appreciated them in principle but claimed that the amount does not meet the needs of their businesses.

From Focus Group 16: Females ages 20–50 who have mixed education, are unemployed, of mixed marital status, and with recognized disabilities.

Speaker 7: *The credits aren't enough to start a new business.*

Speaker 2: *The 1 million MNT credit was insufficient, but I took the credit in order to grasp an opportunity.*

Speaker 5: *In 2015, a 500,000 MNT project credit was allotted. Actually, my project was about to establish a small sewing factory. The allotted credit wasn't sufficient ... The price of the cheapest sewing machine is 640,000 MNT, and my project plan was to receive 850,000 MNT in credit through the labor and social welfare office.*

Speaker 4: *Actually, my project credit's total amount was 3 million MNT, but the labor and social welfare office requested that I divide the credit evenly among three people. I agreed with that suggestion. How could I care only about myself?*

In general, getting financial support is perceived to be relatively easier for disabled women. However, the analysis of focus group discussions indicates that while getting such support is possible, this does not necessarily enable disabled women to launch successful microbusinesses.

From Focus Group 16: Females ages 20–50 who have mixed education, are unemployed, of mixed marital status, and with recognized disabilities.

Speaker 3: *Within 1 year I made lot of stuff from felt, was enrolled in business proposal writing training 3 times, then wrote and submitted a business proposal, but I haven't heard anything since. [...]. I want to continue making things from felt, but I have no more money and need some equipment. [...]*

Speaker 2: *I turned one room at my home to a studio, where I make some handcrafted products from felt. In 2013, I was enrolled in [a] loan program from the labor and social welfare office. So, in 2014 and 2016, I received two loans worth of 1 million MNT each. The requirements included writing a business proposal according to a standard [template], having a space for running a business and having some goods and products available.*

## **Summary**

To put it in a nutshell, while the educational background of the Mongolian people has been rising within the last ten years for both men and women, there is not (yet) a system for accessing the labor market that is solely based on qualifications, skills, and educational background or even the much-sought-after work experience. Instead, the individual expectations of employers seem to play an important role or at least are perceived to do so according to the focus group discussions. Considering the focus groups held with students and graduates as well and analyzing what those discussants said about getting a job after graduation, one finds that an additional factor apparently influences job possibilities more than education: cronyism and discrimination. Cronyism and discrimination was described as a primary and common way to get a job, independent of discussants' ages.

The limited labor demand in Mongolia implies a power imbalance between employers and employees, which apparently gives employers the possibility of choosing relatively freely whom they want to employ and for how

long. The measure of what is viewed as an ideal working person does not correspond to the actual different faces of society. Elderly women are often marginalized, as well as elderly men and disabled persons. Many jobless women cannot find a way into the labor market or, if they do, not into well-paid or constantly paid positions. Younger people are perceived to be reduced to a traditional gender role model, which especially prevents many young, educated women from having a successful career due to short work contracts and job losses due to maternity leave.

Interestingly gender disparities seem to play no major role within the group of disabled persons who are looking for jobs. One explanation could be that there is a so-called common identity that allows no gender differences, with the fact of being disabled welding together women and men. This might be underlined by the findings of the World Bank study, *Urban Poverty in Ulaanbaatar: Understanding its Dimensions and Addressing the Challenges* (World Bank 2016c) which examines the challenges disabled persons have to face in everyday life due to the absence of handicapped-accessible streets, main buildings, supermarkets, and so on. Another explanation may be that the number of jobs for disabled persons is so small that there is no difference between traditional role models and biological role expectations. A third explanation could be that disabled women are largely working in the public sector in jobs, such as teaching and education, where men are underrepresented, and therefore do not experience gender disparities.

#### **4.4. Reasons for inactivity and perceptions of government support**

##### ***Access to financial support from the government and market***

As mentioned in the discussions on age and labor market, the perception that employers' attitude is that people over 40 are "too old" to be employed causes pessimism among jobless women and men and impacts their willingness to do job seeking. The perception that without outside support they may have no chance to get a real job causes them to ask whether the government might be able to help them out. Here many men as well as women request financial support programs that enable them to start their own small businesses. Many women want to have their own shops where they can sell products, especially those they have tailored or made on their own or that have been made by other women in the neighborhood. They like the idea of being linked with other women to help one another. Men tend to focus on farming and planting vegetables or owning handcraft services; while they too often want to have their own small businesses, they sometimes tend to hesitate to cooperate with others.

From Focus Group 10: Males ages 30–50 who have at least completed secondary education, are unemployed or out of the labor force, and whose wives are employed.

Speaker 7: *Even if we want to start a small business or enterprise, no funds or grants will be ever available to us. Only those with connections, with money and power can access those resources. If we apply for 10 million MNT, they'd never approve. So no matter what we want to do, there is no way we can get any funding. [...]* Money flows through other "channels".

Speaker 5: *I learnt planting vegetables when I was in Russia. And I want to do gardening and planting, but the issue of collateral always comes up. There is no chance they'd believe in me. After several tries, you get totally disappointed and discouraged.*

Access to finance for starting a business depends on the availability of appropriate collateral, and in Mongolia for a long time only real estate was accepted as collateral by financial institutions (although recently some financial institutions have begun to accept certain movable assets as well). But many jobless men and women often lack collateral. In the focus groups, some women explained that the only time they had to accrue any savings was when they were young and could go abroad or take every job they were offered because they had no family and no family duties. Because of long-term unemployment or certain periods when have to drop out of the labor market because of child care, some families have to live from their savings and have no chance to start their own business.

From Focus Group 7: Females ages 30–50, who have mixed education, are unemployed, and of mixed marital status.

Speaker 6: *When you lose your job, first you start spending a little bit of money you saved, then you start spending more, and soon there is nothing left.*

Speaker 3: *When I was working I saved little by little, and had saved around 2 million MNT. Then I lost my job, started using from my savings and sure enough, soon there was no money left to spend.*

Speaker 2: *You can save money only when you have a job. And when we have proper savings, we have a secure future. If you have nothing, it's no use talking about secure life. It's not necessary to give an inheritance to our children, but at least to have enough savings to be able to give them proper education. If they have good education, they can make a good life. Recently I attended [a training]. There I met a guy I knew from before. He was sharing about how he saves a portion of his income for health, travel and other needs of his family. As I was listening, I'll be honest, I was a little jealous of him. I thought he was very smart, responsible and full of purpose. I also want to save, and dream of it, but unfortunately I can't find a job.*

As a consequence of a lack of access to finance and other barriers to starting their own businesses, many focus group participants feared becoming poor in old age and that they would not be able to give their children an appropriate education. Many women especially worry about how to go on in the future and sometimes to a large extent rely on financial support in the form of social welfare from the government.

The government's most important program for financial support in the form of social welfare is the Child Money Program. Until recently, Mongolia was one of the few developed countries in the world with a universal and relatively generous child allowance, the Child Money Program. For every child below age 18, the family was entitled to an allowance of 20,000 MNT per month. Recently, eligibility for the Child Money Program was reduced to the lower 12 out of 20 economic welfare categories (each of which capture 5 percent of the population as determined by Mongolia's implementation of the proxy means methodology described for instance in Onishi and Chuluun, 2013). In other words, only 60 percent of children (and around 50 percent of households) are now eligible for the Child Money Program. Many of those who received the Child Money Program up until now said they have been saving this money for the purpose of getting their children a good education. Based on this experience, the new regulations regarding eligibility for the Child Money Program were by some discussed as being advantageous only for the "really poor people" but not for those middle-class families that are also struggling to make ends meet.

From Focus Group 7: Females ages 30–50, who have mixed education, are unemployed, and of mixed marital status.

Speaker 7: *I'm only saving our children's 20,000 MNT from the Child Money Program. In the beginning I was spending that money, but as my husband advised me to save that money I started saving it, and now I have about 1 million MNT saved.*

Speaker 2: *Now they set a threshold for giving Child Money. If your family is below category 10, then you continue getting Child Money, and if you are above that, you are not eligible. Many families were dependent on this transfer, and it hit them really hard.*

It is not only rural people who fear poverty in old age but also many of those who are living in urban areas. According to discussants, while in rural areas the possibility of doing herding or farming and exchanging products with other families might be a way to handle financial and material shortages and family bonds tend to be very strong, the situation sometimes seems to be quite different in urban areas. There, most people are employees with no easy chance of running their own business or even becoming self-sufficient. This perception of discussants corresponds to the findings of World Bank study, *Urban Poverty in Ulaanbaatar: Understanding its Dimensions and Addressing the Challenges*, which also highlights the poverty challenges of urban dwellers. At the same time, poverty rates continue to be higher in rural as compared to urban areas and the study also points out that climate change in particular will be affecting rural people and their herding and planting results (World Bank 2016c, 10f.)<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Appendix B provides more detailed findings from focus group discussions with herdswomen.

## ***Inactivity and care work***

A special focus group was dedicated to women ages 50 to 60. One of the objectives was to learn whether the care needs of older family members or grandchildren and other reasons influence these women's participation in the labor market. Many discussants in this group had advanced education as lawyers, chemists, veterinary surgeons, interior designers, or engineers. This illustrates the gender equality in higher education that had been a principle of the socialist period. Some of these women also showed great affection toward the decorations initially introduced in the socialist era, such as medals and honors for civil engagement.

From Focus Group 17: Women ages 50-60, with mixed education, out of the labor force

Speaker 1: *My profession is chemist. I am an honorary citizen of [a district]. My family received a "Best Family of [a district]" tribute last year. I really appreciated that my family became the best family, and I am also trying to be the best myself.*

Two main reasons were named in the discussion as to why women between ages 50 and 60 are often unemployed or out of the labor force: many of them have to take care of their elderly parents and relatives, and many have to take care of their grandchildren, in particular in instances where working mothers hesitate to send their children to institutional child care because of its perceived bad quality.

From Focus Group 17: Females ages 50-60, who have mixed education, and are out of the labor force.

Speaker 5: *I have three children. I've completed vocational training as a dressmaker. My husband is employed. I used to sew clothes upon order. My mom is over 80 years old and she has become bedridden. So I quit my job and have been looking after my mother for two years now. [...]*

Speaker 6: *I have two daughters. I am a technologist by profession and my husband is a mining engineer. In order to enable my husband and daughters to work, I chose to stay at home to take care of the all household work. Recently I had a grandchild, so I'm [also] looking after my grandchild.*

Most of these discussants confirm that they miss being employed and having regular social contacts with colleagues. When asked why they are not searching for new jobs, though, some said it depends on the social attitude toward age. Many reported experiences with employers who did not want them, once they turned 40, similar to what was described by middle-aged participants in other focus group discussions. To do something useful or be seen as a useful part of society, which is very important to these women, they do the necessary but unpaid care work. As mothers, some also do not apply for jobs because they know the difficulties their own grown children have getting a job. So some discussants believe that it is much better to let those young people have access to the limited labor market of Mongolia.

From Focus Group 17: Females ages 50-60, who have mixed education, and are out of the labor force.

Speaker 1: *The reason for unemployment really lies in the attitude of today's society. What do I mean by that? I've reached this [advanced] stage of my life, but I still want to work. But [employers] would not accept me because of my age. If people of my age were given opportunity to work, we'd be more apt to be punctual, honest and hardworking. However, we're not appreciated in the society.*

Speaker 9: *The most common challenge for people of our age is age discrimination, and secondly, there are not many jobs available in the market. The problem of shortage doesn't only relate to us, it's also a big issue for younger generation. If they give us an opportunity to work, we'd be willing to do any type of work. The market economy has taught us to go beyond our professional limits and taught us many life skills. [...]. I want to share one very sad example. There is a friend of my husband, he's 44 years old. He went to fill out an application [form] following an ad. But the person who was administering the process said to him, "Oh no, you are 45 years old! Why haven't you told me? It's a very expensive paper". People aged 45-50 are treated as less valuable than paper.*

As a consequence of labor market constraints, some older people in Mongolia become more and more dependent on the financial support of their children. Some older participants in focus group discussions had been out of work so long they could not even afford to buy clothes but were dependent on gifts from friends and family members. Getting help from friends and relatives is common, where it is possible. But most of these older jobless people's friends are of the same age and they are often also out of work; asking relatives to do them favors is sometimes viewed as the only option.

From Focus Group 17: Females ages 50-60, who have mixed education, and are out of the labor force.

Speaker 5: *My siblings and relatives help me out. My friends are jobless as me, so they cannot help. Recently my sister has bought meat for her family for winter.<sup>10</sup> She offered me to get some meat from her, so in these ways my family helps out a lot.*

Speaker 8: *I'm the oldest of my family. My younger siblings all have jobs. When I celebrate Lunar New Year,<sup>11</sup> they help me put food on the table. But of course I cannot expect them to help out in such ways all the time.*

A significant number of the older focus group participants who are out of work would like to retire and draw a pension. Some perceive that coverage by the social protection system is incomplete for older individuals that have not yet reached the retirement age while others consider the (contributory) pension system to be insufficiently developed and say they have no chance to receive the work years needed for drawing a significant pension. This sentiment is more common among women than men because of their often more limited working years.

From Focus Group 17: Females ages 50-60, who have mixed education, and are out of the labor force.

Speaker 2: *For us, who haven't reached pension age, there no services whatsoever. But for pensioners, there are such things as pensions, going to sanatoriums on discount etc. So people of our age are stuck somewhere in the middle between the young and old. Sometimes it almost feels like being left in limbo. [...]*

Speaker 2: *Only the people with disability or of old age receive social benefits. That's why I want to reach 55 and retire. Retirement will enable me to receive public transportation services for free and I can apply for a pension loan.<sup>12</sup>*

For many participants, being employed means independence and the ability to live carefree in old age. The jobless women are worried about what they will do when they get older and are more dependent on health care and medical support. Making ends meet is only possible by leading a hand-to-mouth-existence. Saving is impossible, with saved funds often already used for the education of the children. Money is received from grown children or from the (mostly seasonal) work of husbands. Nevertheless, many jobless women in the focus group discussions stress that they do belong to the middle class and that there are people with worse living standards. Social distinctions seem to be essential, especially for those who used to run their own businesses or to be successfully established in the labor market.

From Focus Group 17: Females ages 50-60, who have mixed education, and are out of the labor force.

Speaker 1: *Only my husband works. We are using his salary for everyday needs. We really don't have any chance to save money. And only thanks to our patience we're not borrowing any money from others.*

Speaker 2: *When I was working myself, I always made sure I saved some, even if that meant denying myself certain needs and wishes. Now that I don't have a job anymore, I started using from the savings and we're also using money earned by my children, for our daily needs.*

Speaker 5: *There are many families out there with much harder life than ours. Comparatively, our [economic situation is] somewhat at an average level.*

<sup>10</sup> Mongolians stock meat to consume in the winter.

<sup>11</sup> The festival of the Lunar New Year is celebrated by the Mongolians

<sup>12</sup> A pension loan is a loan that is repaid through the borrower's pension payments.

Nearly all of the older participants in our focus group discussions who were out of work were afraid of being threatened by poverty when they are older and said they were willing to do nearly every job that was offered to them. For instance, cleaning people's houses was named as a temporary job that enables the women to buy necessary goods.

### ***Lack of child care services***

The reconciliation of family and work is discussed two different ways by the group of jobless older women. First, many stress that women are as capable as men and therefore need to have the chance to play an active role in the labor market. They state that the role of women and men that was in place during the socialist era seems more and more old-fashioned in their eyes, because nowadays young men are doing more household things. But, second, they also stress that most family affairs are still managed by women.

In order to be a permanent member of the Mongolian labor market, women say they do need a good public childcare system that could enable them to work. The current situation worries many of these women because there are not enough places in kindergarten. Discussants said parents have to queue to obtain kindergarten placements for whole days, and that sometimes places are given out by lottery. They also spoke about the childcare system in socialist times that enabled women to go back to work two month after the birth of a baby, because it included a consistent system of nurseries, kindergartens, and schools. They expressed the feeling that as young mothers, things then were totally different from nowadays, because women were satisfied with their jobs and didn't have the impression of being reduced to being a mother and housewife. Many participants in focus group discussions think the government should invest more in a good quality and quantity of childcare services.

From Focus Group 17: Females ages 50-60, who have mixed education, and are out of the labor force.

Speaker 3: If we can send our children to kindergarten, we can work freely without any worries. But nowadays, you have to *stand in a long line* and maybe even stay overnight in order to get your child registered in public kindergarten. It has gotten even worse now that parents have to draw names like in a lottery, and whoever wins gets selected.<sup>13</sup> That is deciding our children's future through mere luck. [...]

Speaker 6: I have two daughters. In order to have my daughters working and living well I have to be their backbone and look after their children. *For a woman, unless she has someone to help her with her household duties, it would be very hard to balance work and family.*

Speaker 2: In the [socialist] system, we had to start working 56 days after giving birth to a child. At that time, there existed [...] nurseries. We could leave our children at a nursery and go to work. Today, we [again] need this kind of setup.

Speaker 4: [During socialism], jobs of women were protected while they were on maternal leave, so it provided peace and security to us women. The more peace you have in your heart, the more productive you are. And if individual citizens are productive in their jobs, the country will develop.

The results of the expert interviews underline the results of the group discussions. By various experts, the childcare challenge and the lack of satisfying childcare solutions are seen as the main reasons for high joblessness among women. Again according to different experts, *aimags* that are financially independent because of good industrial taxes are able to build new kindergartens and see this as having positive effects on female labor force participation. It should also be noted that many of the interviewed experts focused on the *quantity* of available childcare and stressed that there are sufficient numbers of kindergartens in their *aimags*, while many families in focus group discussions claimed that they cannot give their children to the care of these institutions because of a lack of *quality*. This discrepancy in emphasis between experts and discussants indicates that there has not been sufficient public discussion about both the quantity and quality of childcare institutions in Mongolia.

<sup>13</sup> The Capital Education Authority (CEA) decided to adopt an admission ticket system, where kindergartens register all children but enroll them through a lottery.

### ***Perceptions of public employment services***

To alleviate social inequality and poverty, governments all over the world are working not only on social protection programs that provide income support but also on public employment services and other active labor market programs that aim to qualify job seekers or otherwise try to enable them to apply for a greater variety of jobs. Therefore, another aim of the group discussions was to hear about people's experiences with such active labor market programs, with special regard to gender issues. Both female and male discussants were asked about their experiences with labor and social welfare offices and the support they were given.

The experiences that unemployed women described having with the different labor and social welfare offices are oftentimes absolutely negative. Some discussants explained that they felt badly treated, not as clients but as petitioners. Others indicated that there was no respect shown in the communications, and that they felt dependent on the good will of the administrators. The quality of service was also frequently criticized; for instance, some women indicated that only jobs with relatively low requirements regarding educational qualifications were available while others complained that they had received different and contradictory information regarding possible vocational trainings.

From Focus Group 17: Females ages 50-60, who have mixed education, and are out of the labor force.

Speaker 4: *In labor and social welfare offices, there are enough jobs available, but many of them are jobs of cooks, drivers and some type of assistant work. But there are very few high skill jobs.*

Among the older jobless women, the experiences with labor and social welfare offices were mostly negative ones as well. Nearly all of the female discussants registered at their labor and social welfare office but few received any personalized intermediation services or received any job offers. Grown children and relatives who registered at the labor and social welfare offices were sometimes offered jobs where the employers didn't pay the wage. In the eyes of many discussants', labor and social welfare offices do not to care about placing clients into good-quality jobs.

From Focus Group 17: Females ages 50-60, who have mixed education, and are out of the labor force.

Speaker 4: *I recently registered with [the labor and social welfare office] as a job seeker. They asked me to fill out an application and told me they'd contact me, but it never happened.*

Speaker 5: *Many years ago, I was registered as a job seeker. [The labor and social welfare office] contacted me asked if I was interested in a position of tailoring instructor.*

Speaker 6: *I too registered about two years ago. But I haven't received any offers. [...]*

Speaker 7: *There were some instances when my children weren't paid their salaries at jobs which had been intermediated through the labor and social welfare office.*

As the results of the expert interviews show, some experts are thoughtfully dealing with the fact that many unemployed people hesitate to come to the labor and social welfare offices because they think that will not get any help. On the other hand, the experts have little knowledge of how to solve this problem. Many of them stress that getting knowledge from labor market specialists from international organizations or from other countries that have successfully implemented modern labor market programs would be very helpful. For example, the process of career counseling is regarded as both modern and a necessary form of help, but according to many experts at the moment there does not exist an appropriate, modern approach or atmosphere in Mongolia for counseling. For instance, job counselors often lack specific training. Some experts regard the career centers' physical environment as a hindrance, including the layout of some newly introduced one-stop-shop service centers where job counselors sit behind a glass front and maintain a huge distance from clients.

From Expert Interview: Head of district labor and social welfare office.

*[Career counseling] was discussed for many years. But only now is it being implemented within our sector. It is very important. We have one person who is becoming specialized in career counseling. Her name is S. I think it is not possible to give counseling through the glass windows at the one-stop service center.*

Many experts in the labor and social welfare offices also acknowledge that while gender mainstreaming has become a governmental topic within the last years, it is also just beginning. At the moment, experts frequently say there is no cooperation between the labor and social welfare offices and the employers with regard to gender equality. Employers decide freely whether they prefer men or women for their job vacancies. The representation of men and women in leading positions in public administration is also seen as unequal. According to the experts, these jobs are strongly influenced by political networks and are given to those who strongly support the respective government. That is why those jobs change with every election. Since men have more time to spend on political issues and to work for a political party, they are more heavily represented in leading positions.

### ***Perceptions of employment promotion programs by middle-aged and older women***

Some of those middle-aged female participants in focus group discussions who were without a job and took part in vocational trainings explained that labor and social welfare offices did not organize the trainings well but, instead, simply told everyone to come to them. In the end, there was such a high number of participants that one could not train or practice properly and one could not get a certificate.

From Focus Group 7: Females ages 30–50, who have mixed education, are unemployed, and of mixed marital status.

Speaker 2: *I don't like how the labor intermediation officers communicate with people. It almost seems they are looking down upon you as bunch of jobless, second class citizens. My husband and I filled out applications for jobs, but there was no follow up whatsoever. Then I heard from someone that there will be [vocational trainings] offered [...], backed with state funding. So I went to [a district labor and social welfare office]. I greeted a lady there and asked if there were any classes offered, to which I got a very abrupt answer asking me who had told me about it. Then I apologized and asked if I can get any information about it. She gave me a fierce look, [and] said there was no information available. [...] [Later], I was able to get a voucher for attending a hairdresser's training from [a] one window service center;<sup>14</sup> [...] [but only] because someone I knew was running such courses at their salon [...]. You cannot imagine how many people were there. And it was only the people who were lucky to find out about this. There were still many left who were not informed. There were [many] people who wanted to acquire some kind of job skills, and they were really fighting [...] to get these vouchers. Only thanks to my friend who informed me, I was able to attend.*

Older women had similar perceptions of employment promotion programs. Some answer the question as to what has to be improved to increase employment opportunities for older women by making a claim for special labor market programs designed for women between ages 40 and 50. Some also mention that some districts offer a public market space to women to sell hand-made goods and products, but this space is not seen as attractive to visitors, and few buyers are attending.

Asked about special programs run by the labor and social welfare offices, such as a program for providing senior experts' consultancy and advisory services, some of the discussants in our focus group just became angry. They stated that there is no information about special programs for older people and that labor and social welfare offices would only hire older people to clean the streets from snow or dirt.

From Focus Group 17: Females ages 50–60, who have mixed education, and are out of the labor force.

All participants: *There are no programs run by labor and social welfare offices targeted at older people.*

Speaker 4: *Only our local khoroos [offices] call us sometimes for cleaning streets, but there is nothing else besides that. If there were some programs implemented by labor and social welfare offices, I'd be glad to participate.*

<sup>14</sup> The "One-Window Service," designed to bring public service closer to the citizens and reduce bureaucracy, has been well received in many districts.

With regard to evidence from the expert interviews, heads of labor and social welfare offices and other local experts have different professional backgrounds and see different local challenges, so they emphasize a great variety of employment promotion programs as being of importance within the different *aimags*. Some experts focus on programs targeted at youth, while others focus on short-term trainings for adult unemployed people. A general catalog of measures targeting gender issues, however, does not seem to exist. While most of the experts have not developed their own solutions for encouraging women to apply for jobs, there are nevertheless a few who are implementing small programs. For example, there are some districts where women are encouraged to build up their own networks of female employers and employees to share job vacancies, discuss needed skills, and so on.

From Expert Interview: Head of district labor and social welfare office.

*International experience shows that there are women's employment networks that exist. So we are planning to set up the same kind of network in our district. Why we are doing this? Because the job openings are open mostly for men, but job seekers are mostly women because women are more active.*

Some experts are critical of the way training for women is currently concentrated on short-term training for unemployed women, especially older and less qualified women. This is seen as inefficient, lacking clear objectives and a clear sense of how the trainings help. According to the experts, other employment promotion programs, which provide public works or wage subsidies, are not really effective either, as they only result in temporary job opportunities that may keep people from total poverty but do not significantly increase their living standards or help them gain constant employment.

From Expert Interview: Head of *aimag* labor and social welfare office.

*We have unemployment, like any other province. We have a policy to create temporary and short-term jobs for the unemployed. For the unemployed, we create short jobs such as for 7 days, 2 hours, or for a one-month period, and they pay a wage. These types of short jobs help people with their living expenses. So we mainly support them through temporary job opportunities.*

It is noteworthy that interviewed experts with a deeper social understanding and professional knowledge of social inequality have a more critical view of recent labor market politics and employment promotion programs. Also, those experts who are situated in poorer districts or *aimags* with higher unemployment rates critique the current unemployment support more severely. For example, it is generally the latter experts who rate the short-term trainings for long-term unemployed people and older unemployed workers as insufficient.

Like the participants in our focus group discussions, the experts we interviewed generally regard support for self-employment as the most effective employment promotion activity, especially for disadvantaged groups. For instance, experts from the labor and social welfare offices acknowledge that older women suffer from a lack of specific labor demand. In response, some *aimags* have focused their employment programs to support older women. Some encourage older women to write proposals for small businesses that they can run at home, and then support each selected business plan with a small loan. In the experts eyes this is an effective way to encourage older women to think about starting their own businesses. As the focus group discussions with women showed, this kind of support is highly appreciated, but women in those discussions also said that the financial support available is not adequate for businesses that need to purchase machinery.

Other experts mentioned bank loans that older women would have to take out in order to invest enough in the new businesses. Such regular loans from commercial banks not supported by labor and social welfare offices, however, are offered with no special consideration for the circumstances of women who need them, and this means they are sometimes burdened with high interest rates. Some people cannot sell as many products as they had intended and find that they are unable to repay the loans; in such cases they sometimes lose their businesses within a short time.

From Expert Interview: Head of *aimag* labor and social welfare office.

*Bank loans are now a burden on people, because when the economy is not good, people cannot sell their products and their businesses close. We need to improve the way the banks operate. We need banks that offer low-interest loans and work for the people. Few commercial banks understand how people are living. They only think about profit.*

#### **4.5. Perceptions of single mothers**

The status of single mothers in society depends on the reasons why they live alone. According to the participants in focus group discussions, being a widow is judged differently by society from getting divorced, especially when the woman leaves her husband. In addition, it is illuminating to have a closer look at the different educational backgrounds of single mothers.

One single mother in our discussions graduated as a lawyer and worked successfully as a prosecutor in the countryside. When she became pregnant, she was told that there would be no possibility to go on with this profession. Although she returned to the workplace soon after the birth of her child, she was fired for inexplicable reasons. She then started working as a secretary with a temporary contract and, besides this, passed civil service tests. But until now she has not been offered a job. Her husband left her soon after the birth of her son, her savings are exhausted, and now she has to stay with her parents.

Another single mother in our discussions is a qualified agricultural specialist. She became married and started running her own business together with her husband. For her, this was the best way to reconcile work and family, and after a few years three children were born. The business was extremely successful and the family belonged to the Mongolian upper class with their own properties, high income, and people who worked for them. After six years, however, her husband was accused of committing tax evasion. He left his family, moved to another country, and never returned. His wife had to pay back all his debts. Now she is living in a *ger* area in Ulaanbaatar. She perceives that employers hesitate to employ her simply because of her address. According to her account, *ger* residents, especially single mothers, are not seen as reliable, and even possessing certificates and work experience does not count for them.

Of course, these are only two examples, but they highlight the problems single mothers, even with good educational backgrounds, are perceived to be facing and the problems that occur when they lose social status. The barriers for these women seem next to impossible to overcome. Besides the personal consequences, this results in economic problems when skilled professionals with work experience are excluded from labor market participation because of such a downward social spiral.

Asked what makes a job a good job, all our jobless single mothers answered that it has to be satisfying and enjoyable. Although this might be surprising—one would think that salary or permanent wages might have a higher priority for these women—on a second look it can be explained. Most of the single mothers spend each entire day at home. Going outside the home means taking the older children to school or visiting parents or other relatives, while at home the day is spent either looking after younger children and doing household tasks or doing homework with the older children. Conversations about interesting topics, going to the theatre or cinema, engaging in sports—all of these things are impossible because of the lack of money or appropriate child care facilities. Jobless discussants with higher education in particular talked about feeling that they are losing their educational and intellectual abilities with their ongoing unemployment. The single mothers also described how their attitudes toward jobs have changed since having children: now they would take nearly any job offer that enabled them to reconcile their child-rearing and work and give them a steady monthly income.

From Focus Group 14: Single mothers ages 30-35 who have mixed education, and are out of the labor force.

Speaker 7: *I feel totally alone. When you stay at home and look after children after being employed somewhere and having your co-worker friends, the first thing you think is you have become a housewife. You cannot leave home, because you cannot leave your child alone. When I worked in construction before, [...] it kept me busy, as I was busy dealing with people. Now when I'm staying at home all day long, there is no one to talk to, I feel empty and my life mainly revolves around my child's studies and homework.*

Speaker 6: *It's very challenging to stay at home when you are unemployed. You have no friends, no community. When I worked before, I was part of a good community. Then when I had a child, our co-workers visited me once or twice, and after that all connections stopped, because I wasn't working with them anymore. Now, I focus on my children.*

### **Social attitudes towards single-mothers**

Asked about their proactive behavior toward seeking a job, many of the jobless single mothers in our discussions were very restrained. Their negative experiences with their social environment have two dimensions. First, employers force them to stay at their jobs without flexible breaks or work hours and with no understanding of the needs of their children. Because it is assumed to be almost impossible for single mothers to be employed at bigger companies, they work in companies with very few employees or in the informal sector. If a child becomes ill, the women have to stay at work or else they are fired. The other negative social pressure emerges when women decide to stay at work and leave their children in kindergarten, or with friends or relatives even if they are ill. When this happens, they are accused of being uncaring mothers or feel that they are uncaring. The pressure on these women to try to be ideal mothers is arguably derived from the values and standards of society.

From Focus Group 14: Single mothers ages 30-35 who have mixed education, and are out of the labor force.

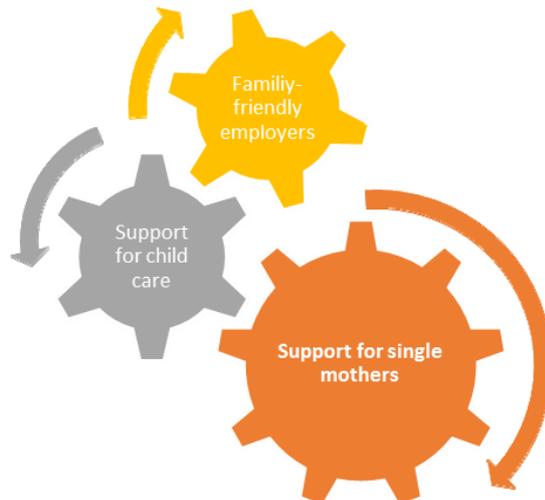
Speaker 1: *I got a shop assistant's job at [a shop] a month ago. The pay was 15,000 MNT per day and I worked there for three days. Although working hours were from 9am-6pm, I ended up working until 8 pm. I was doing all sorts of stuff besides my main duty, as this was a newly opened store. Then on the fourth day, my child became sick with a sore throat and had a temperature. I called my boss to inform him [about this], [...]. He said it is very hard to work with people with small children and fired me right away. After this, when I went to get my 3 days pay, he said I caused him inconvenience and that he has to decrease my pay for 50% and paid me for only 2 days. It is rather hard for people with small children to find a job in Mongolia.*

Speaker 2: *For a few days I worked at my sister's shop at the market. [...] But I have a house which needs to be heated [manually] during regular hours. When I told my sister that I have to go quickly to my home to heat it and come back, she answered harshly whether heating was important or working. She asked me to leave the job. So, you see, not only an outsider, but even a family member does this type of a thing.*

### **Summary**

As visualized in Figure 4.2, the focus group discussions show that support for single mothers would mean a combination of child-care facilities and family-friendly employers. Single mothers often run the risk of ending in poverty, that is, they not only have to endure bad living conditions and lack of financial options, but they also suffer from social withdrawal because they have no chance of getting in contact with others. Work therefore not only has a financial dimension for this group but also a socially integrative one. To get them permanent jobs will require employers who understand the different obligations single mothers have and the limited social networks they are part of. Affordable and good-quality childcare institutions, not only for smaller children but also for children attending schools, seems to be absolutely necessary to give those women the possibility of work full-time and satisfying employer demands.

Figure 4.2. Support for single mothers highlighted in focus group discussions



Source: Authors.

## 4.6. Perceptions of employers

### *Perceptions of gender roles*

Interestingly, “women’s solidarity” among employers (that is, both company owners and human resources managers represented in our focus group discussions) does not appear to exist, that is, one does not find female employers trying to improve working conditions for female workers in general or trying to raise the number of employed women. This is even though the prevalent view within the group of female employers (as within the group of male employers) is that men are viewed as weaker and less organized as compared to female workers.

From Focus Group 18: Female and male employers.

*Speaker 2: Since our company produces construction materials, the staff comprises only men. The type of job we do is making cement and working with mud, so it's not for women. The only female employee is our cook. I think that it's important to support women and give them opportunities to work. It's very difficult to work with young men. I've been working with men for two or three years now. They often skip work, drink, and disappear for two to three day after payday. They have very poor self-discipline. It seems that the main goal of our young men's life is to make some money and go spend it on partying or shopping for nice clothes. Compared to women, men have less motivation and lack a purpose in life. Our women are very responsible, and can handle a heavy workload. They take their responsibility as wife, mother and worker very seriously.*

Both female and male employers stated that female workers are more reliable, well organized, and strong, because they have the ability to manage family and work affairs. On the other hand, they are also seen as less flexible because they have to organize all the family care. Flexibility is seen as the main criteria in the Mongolian economy. According to the employers, since the financial crisis the demand for Mongolian goods has been seen as changing constantly, people have to be flexible enough to sometimes work less and sometimes do overtime work. Women who have to look after their children have difficulties showing this flexibility, a reason why many employers indicate that they prefer to rely on male workers and single mothers in particular are by many seen as people who cannot be employed full-time.

Most male but also female employers in our discussion stressed that gender-related differences do exist, which they believe are determined biologically. Therefore, they divide the Mongolian labor market into those fields that are possible only for men, such as the mining industry, herding, or working as a craftsman, and those fields that are suitable for women. The latter fields are especially seen to be in the social services and in other services involving

gastronomy and tourism, because women are familiar with the obligations of caring for others within the family. With regard to academic professions, this biological determination is partly being opened. Nevertheless, while professions like law and economics are seen as being open for both genders, technical professions are often seen as male and social professions are seen as female. This point of view is held independent of employers' gender, and it reflects the wider debate on Mongolian culture and the development of Mongolian society. In sum, the social construction of gender is related to a traditional role model, based on male physical strength and female ability to care.

From Focus Group 18: Female and male employers.

Speaker 5: *“There is likely no one perfect answer [to explain labor market differences between men and women]-it is a relative concept. But women and men have different abilities, intellectually and physically.”*

### ***Perceptions of government and private sector initiatives***

Perceptions about appropriate gender roles are a reason why some of the employers in our focus group think that mothers should stay at home and not be an active part of the labor market. At the same time, many employers concede that they might be potentially incentivized to hire and promote more women but see gender equality largely as the government's domain. According to the employers, if the government wants women to be an integral part of labor markets although they have children, it has to establish political structures and support and ensure that companies have no disadvantages from employing mothers.

From Focus Group 18: Female and male employers.

Speaker 2: *I don't think a company should be responsible in any way for accommodating their staff's personal life [...]. I'm not sure whether the company who hired me would be willing to work around my personal schedule. I think state intervention is needed for this to happen. It's [...] a puzzle why schools and kindergartens start [...] right at the time when most jobs start. Of course I do understand that we need to respect teachers' time and I'm not saying they should work for more hours. But I don't know of any company that accommodates to its women staff, by providing extra time for them to get their children to school. For any company that decides to allow mothers to come to work at 10, and leave at 4pm, it would be hard for them to do that for 200, 1000 or 6000 employees.*

There are only a few employers or human resource managers who take a more proactive approach themselves and have, for instance, already installed flexible work times or part-time work for mothers. These employers actually have usually had good experiences. Some managers even stress that when they established company kindergartens, the absenteeism of mothers was clearly reduced.

Another topic that has been discussed with employers is that of young university graduates who cannot find proper jobs because they have to prove that they have one to two years' work experience. Here many of the employers in our focus group discussions affirmed this development and explained their reasons. In their eyes, the educational system of Mongolia has changed in a negative direction. On the one hand, the entrance requirements for university have been made less sophisticated, and the quality of the bachelor's programs is seen as insufficient and efforts to link graduates to jobs missing. This has led to an increasing number of not qualified for the job market. On the other hand, the government is seen as paying insufficient attention to vocational training or real-world experience, so companies do not get skilled workers but “theoretically” educated applicants. Therefore, in addition to formal education work experience is seen as mandatory to be hired for jobs.

From Focus Group 18: Female and male employers.

Speaker 9: *I think it is necessary to decrease the number of low quality universities and colleges, and instead increase the number of vocational schools. [...] In practical terms, [vocational] training provides you with job skills that can be easily applied in real life. In contrast, the programs offered in colleges are rather theoretical and far from reality. Moreover, college graduates wouldn't be interested in hard manual work. Instead, they relish such dreams as taking over some important positions and becoming wealthy right after college.*

*Speaker 7: In the [socialist] system, [...] once you had graduated from college you were assigned somewhere to work. Now when you graduate, you get your diploma and you are free to go your way. It's all left in the hands of the new graduate.*

From the perspective of employers, vocational guidance that takes place in high schools is seen as a good way to give pupils and parents an impression of those jobs that are really needed. At the moment, parents or relatives influence their children concerning what profession to take, and they refer to criteria that are not important to the Mongolian labor market or Mongolian employers. Some professions have a high reputation, but the large number of graduates narrows the chances to get a job. To develop the Mongolian labor market, some of the employers advise that more workers need to be trained in new professions that are needed but are not taught in sufficient numbers, such as new information technology professions.

*From Focus Group 18: Female and male employers.*

*Speaker 9: You have to look at the demand before choosing your profession. Many young people a while ago were advised to become economists and lawyers. So we have oversupply [in these fields]. Instead of this, we should have followed the example of developed countries and focused more on technological [fields], and should have increased the number of this kind of training institutions.*

With regard to the work of public employment services and employment promotion programs, most employers say they are rarely involved, that is, there is little active cooperation between labor and social welfare offices and the companies located in the different *aimags*. The only interaction with labor and social welfare offices occurs when companies report job vacancies to the offices.

Many employers stress that they would be interested in taking part in programs that give participants the chance to get real working experience. They complain that training programs for unemployed people are held in special training centers, and only if participants pass complete them successfully can they apply to real companies. For some programs, like those for disabled persons or former prisoners, companies do get financial support if they employ beneficiaries. Nevertheless, most employers do not participate in those voluntary programs, because they have no idea how to integrate the people successfully into their workforce. More advanced labor market interventions, like mentorships or special strategies in human resource development for fostering the participation of women or other groups, are mostly unknown among employers participating in focus group discussions.

## **Section 5: Conclusions**

This study uses methods of qualitative social science research (mainly focus group discussions but also expert interviews and a small number of biographic interviews) to analyze the mechanisms underlying gender disparities in the Mongolian labor market. The qualitative research approach addresses three interrelated questions: (i) What gender disparities can be identified or confirmed through qualitative research? (ii) What are the structural or other reasons underlying the gender disparities? (iii) Are current government policies including labor market intermediation services and other active labor market policies effective in addressing gender disparities and if not how can their effectiveness be improved? In addition, this study also reviews the relevant economic, institutional, and legal environment, the available quantitative evidence on gender disparities in Mongolia's labor market, and the country's existing labor market policies and programs. Finally, it also makes a range of policy recommendations.

As emphasized in Osborne (2017), gender disparities in the labor market and in particular those that lead to worse outcomes for women are problematic for at least three reasons. First, the use of women's full potential in the labor market is likely to result in greater macroeconomic efficiency, everything else equal. Second, jobs can themselves be an important instrument of women's development and empowerment. Third, expanding women's labor market opportunities has potentially large positive spillover effects on their overall agency, control, and power. In turn, agency, control and power are central to achieving individual well-being and overall development success.

Given the importance of the issue of gender disparities in the labor market, some effort has previously been made to quantify the problem, most prominently in the policy note, “Mongolia: Gender Disparities in Labor Markets and Policy Suggestions” (World Bank 2013). A review of the available quantitative evidence shows that in Mongolia women on average are better equipped than men both with income-generating characteristics in general and with a high level of education in particular. This is irrespective of whether the level of education is measured by enrolment in primary or secondary school, graduation from higher education, the education level among adults, or other indicators. At the same time, women are comparatively less likely to make use of their educational attainment by actively participating in the labor market. With the exception of a short period of time around the year 2006, labor force participation rates in Mongolia have generally been significantly higher among men than among women. Between 1996 and 2015, the gender gap in labor force participation rates more than doubled from 4.8 percentage points to 12.6 percentage points. In addition, employed women have consistently had lower average earnings than employed men. In 2015, men on average earned 856,000 MNT per month and women 760,700 MNT. As a result, the relative gender earnings gap stood at 12.5 percent. Besides, marked differences also exist in the jobs typically pursued by men and women. A relatively large share of women – particularly in rural areas – is employed in precarious informal work and unpaid family work, women’s participation in entrepreneurial work is far lower than that of men, and the prevalence of different sectors of activity also differs between men and women.

The study’s qualitative approach confirms the range of gender disparities on Mongolia’s labor market identified by existing, largely quantitative research. More specifically, in focus group discussions women of various age groups and levels of education speak of pronounced gender-specific difficulties in terms of accessing jobs and career opportunities. Again, according to the perceptions of participants in focus group discussions, many women that hold jobs frequently feel trapped in precarious employment situations. Many employees perceive their workplaces as dependent on norms and values that could be characterized as traditional, hierarchical, and at times even authoritarian. Open mistrust and even fear of managers and employers is widespread, as is a lack of long-term job security, an absence of secure wage payments, and insufficient access to health insurance and pension systems. These issues are perceived as particularly acute in the private sector.

As also documented in World Bank (2016c), especially in the construction sector, but also in the informal sector more generally, wage arrears are seen as common, as is the lack of labor contracts and unpaid obligations for overtime. Many participants in focus group discussions, especially those in the informal or semiformal sectors, characterize employment relationships by stating that employer have a “hire and fire” mentality.

While in general both male and female workers are affected by precarious working conditions, some perceptions are gender-specific. Importantly, among female workers there is a widespread perception that working hours are insufficiently flexible. This is regarded as an obstacle for women to participate in the labor market and is also perceived as a sign of employers’ disregard for the concerns of female workers.

It is also noteworthy that nomadic herders maintain a life model that is based on permanent but differentiated work by both genders. Based on a widespread belief in biological determination male herders do physically demanding work whereas women do less physically strenuous work like producing certain goods and selling them. Moreover, while female herders say that they are usually willing to do nearly every work, independent if it is seen as men’s work or women’s work, they argue that many male herders hesitate to assume female obligations. Still, the nomadic system is seen as dependent on both husband and wife fulfilling their respective duties, so both partners are important and have to rely on each other.

In general, it appears fair to describe gender roles in Mongolia from the perspective of gender as a social construct. In other words, it appears that Mongolia’s society and culture create gender roles, and that these roles are prescribed as ideal or appropriate behavior for a person of that specific gender independent of biological factors. From this perspective, gender is not a natural or naturally given individual variable but one that is acquired through socialization and education. In the context of our focus group discussions, many female discussants indeed demonstrate that they would be able to do work and managing lives beyond all physical or biological boundaries; but in reality

many tend to live “women’s lives” and to do “women’s jobs”. The related concept of “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987) can also be helpful in understanding constraints underlying gender differences on Mongolia’s labor market. The concept describes how society perpetually reproduces gender roles because typical female and male role models are not only revealed in private but also influence a society’s public sphere. From this perspective, because of overwhelming pressures from society at large, isolated bottom-up initiatives are unlikely to change people’s attitudes towards gender role models. Instead, one has to think about systemic and public measures that can influence traditional gender role models. In the case of Mongolia, this implies thinking about possible interventions that can act as stabilizers and support measures to support women during the different life periods and build on existing strengths (for instance, the fact that many women are well-educated, manage their family affairs and want to be employed) and address challenges (such as oftentimes overwhelming child care duties).

Findings from focus group discussions indicate that both norms (such as prevailing views on men’s and women’s roles with respect to marriage, household and care duties, and suitable career choices and jobs) and deficiencies in the political environment and available government support services and programs are important reasons underlying the gender disparities in Mongolia’s labor market. Mongolia’s society apparently expects women to devote the majority of their adult lives to supporting their husbands and raising their children. While some women manage to combine fulfilling these expectations with a successful career, others struggle due to inadequacies in the quality and quantity of available childcare facilities. Besides, some differential legal treatments of men and women are seen as cementing traditional gender roles. In addition to that, incomplete information is widespread. In particular, there is large uncertainty among students, graduates from higher education, and jobseekers (especially young and female ones) about the skills demanded in the labor market. These groups also overwhelmingly rely on informal, personal networks for securing work. While such networks can be quite effective in matching labor supply and demand, they usually work best for jobseekers who are already well established in the labor market and thus endowed with a large, tight network. In contrast, informal, personal networks tend to be less useful for groups with little attachment to the labor market.

With regard to policies that could address some of the constraints underlying gender disparities in Mongolia’s labor market, the overall legal environment is of course important. In addition to that, more targeted interventions could address specific constraints. Internationally, it is best practice to address job-search constraints related to incomplete information through the provision of information and the establishment of labor market intermediation services (public or private employment services that ideally work in partnership with employers). These services can be particularly effective for women and other groups with relatively little attachment to the labor market.

In Mongolia, a central, integrated Employment Registry and Information Database holds records of job vacancies, registered jobseekers, and beneficiaries of active labor market policies and also is the basis of Mongolia’s labor market information system. In addition, the MLSP has a comprehensive network of local offices that provide public employment services. However, the information that is available is scattered across different agencies, not systematically analyzed, and not presented and disseminated in a way that is user-friendly or targeted to specific segments of the labor market. The lack of knowledge about career opportunities among younger participants of focus group discussions also indicates that these offices seem comparatively difficult to access for some specific groups, such as secondary school and university students. In addition, a number specific barriers limit the labor and social welfare offices effectiveness to address job-search constraints related to incomplete information: According to the participants in the focus group discussions, their experiences with labor and social welfare offices were often largely negative. Registration forms are seen more as an administrative burden than as a useful tool to match labor supply and demand. The number of job vacancies that are publicly listed is perceived to be insufficient, in particular for jobseekers with somewhat higher education levels. Job councilors are frequently regarded as overwhelmed, uninterested, or unable to find suitable vacancies or facilitate placement of jobseekers into active labor market policies.

In addition to public employment services, many countries rely on other active labor market policies, such as training programs, wage subsidies, or support for entrepreneurship. Mongolia’s MLSP also implements a range of such

programs, locally called employment promotion programs. Focus group discussions with job seekers document that awareness of and experience with employment promotion programs is often relatively limited. Moreover, according to the perception of most participants in the focus group discussions who had experience with these programs, they are often ineffective at addressing gender disparities in the labor market. This is partly because they lack a focus on gender-specific constraints (such as the need to provide child care for beneficiaries of employment training) but also because they are generally seen as not sufficiently client-focused and demand-driven.

Today, the employment training programs are perceived to be neither aligned with actual employer demands nor aligned with beneficiaries' aims for starting their own enterprises. Nevertheless, employment training programs are generally over-subscribed, especially in Ulaanbaatar. Even more popular among potential beneficiaries are MLSP's programs that offer grants and microloans for herders, the disabled, and micro-entrepreneurs more generally. However, many participants in the focus group discussions complained about these programs' opaque selection criteria and procedures (which open the door for accusations of cronyism). In addition, many of those participants who have been able to secure grants or loans claimed that the approved amounts were insufficient to meet their minimum needs.

The findings of this study improve our understanding of constraints underlying gender disparities in Mongolia's labor market and how current active labor market policies such as labor market intermediation services can be improved to better address the constraints. They are also generally very robust and consistent with findings from existing, largely quantitative analyses, and make it possible to draw several direct policy implications. Recommendations derived from this study's findings include (i) reforming Mongolia's legal environment and the implementation and enforcement of anti-discrimination policies; (ii) strengthening the client-orientation of labor market intermediation services; (iii) fostering employment promotion programs and improving their responsiveness to gender-specific constraints; (iv) strengthening micro-entrepreneurship support so as to realize the full potential of women as micro-entrepreneurs; (v) expanding the quality and quantity of available childcare services to assure the continuous and productive labor market participation of a larger number of women; and (vi) addressing gender norms and attitudes among employers' and the wider population.

In terms of Mongolia's legal environment and the implementation and enforcement of existing laws, there remains some room for improvement. For instance, Mongolia's laws do not mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value, do not mandate nondiscrimination based on gender in hiring (even though a planned revision to the Labor Law will likely introduce this principle), and do not entitle parents to flexible or part-time schedules (cf. World Bank Group 2016). Moreover, while women can retire and receive full pension benefits at age 55, the corresponding age for men is 60. Overall, World Bank Group (2016) places Mongolia in the ninth position out of 18 countries in the East Asia and Pacific Region in terms of the number of legal differences between men and women. Moreover, even though the Law on Gender Equality and the Labor Law set out various parameters with regard to nondiscrimination in the labor market and in spite of the existence of a relatively elaborate structure for monitoring the implementation of these laws, implementation and enforcement on the ground are often relatively weak. As a consequence, it is recommended to invest more in monitoring and enforcing the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality and other nondiscrimination laws. Further investments in the technical and professional capacity of relevant actors such as the subcommittees, subcouncils, and focal points of the National Committee on Gender Equality are also warranted, as are measures that facilitate flexible forms of work such as part-time or home-based work and jobs with flexible working hours and a legal mandate of equal remuneration for work of equal value. Though complex to enforce in practice such a mandate would send a strong signal about the importance placed on gender equality and nondiscrimination.

In the areas of labor market monitoring and analysis and labor market intermediation services, it is recommended to enhance the scope, quality, and availability of labor market information for institutional and individual users, to allow them to make informed decisions. In addition, it is recommended to improve the profiling of job seekers and the matching of job seekers and vacancies. Also recommended are more systematic procedures for placing

job seekers into employment promotion programs. The implementation of these recommendations would require strengthening training of placement officers and other staff of public employment services and the MLSP's system for staff learning and development. Training activities could include mandatory on-line training courses for all staff and voluntary courses for those willing to expand their knowledge and approaches. The system for staff learning and development could be expanded to include platforms to share experiences in a systematic way. Focused training sessions to strengthen counseling capacity need to ensure a greater linkage of training content with operational and practical issues. The recommendations' implementation would also require the development, piloting, and implementation of appropriate procedures, including the development of handbooks and guidelines that support the implementation of operational protocols.

Based on findings from the focus group discussions with employers, it is also recommended that the MLSP develop operational protocols and necessary tools for its staff for improving the efficiency and impact of its services for employers. This recommendation was also highlighted in Mongolmaa (2016). Finally, it is recommended to strengthen career guidance activities such as through consultation sessions in secondary schools targeted at both students and their parents. Ideally based on better data on labor demand and supply, these consultation sessions could also be used to raise awareness of returns to education and skills mismatches across different occupations or sectors. Even if labor market intermediation is strengthened in a way that is generally gender-neutral, the expectation is that the impact will be particularly significant for women. This is because compared to men women on average have less access to informal networks that can be used for finding jobs and are therefore relatively more likely to benefit from a strengthening of formal channels.

As also detailed in Gassmann, Francois and Zardo Trindade (2015), Mongolia's employment promotion programs have an immense potential for improving labor market outcomes across the country. Women's participation in most of the programs is also relatively high, which means they also have the potential to address gender disparities in the labor market and successfully strengthen women's opportunities and outcomes. However, to realize the programs' full potential a number of significant reforms are recommended. Generally speaking, it is recommended to make the programs more client-focused and demand-driven (also see Mongolmaa 2016). With regard to more specifically addressing constraints underlying gender disparities, recommended reforms include increased outreach to hard-to-reach women as well as to other groups with relatively poor labor market outcomes such as youth, residents of *aimag* centers, and internal migrants.<sup>15</sup> In addition, it is recommended to increase the transparency of the selection of beneficiaries of employment promotion programs and to move from an approach that is largely based on the first-come-first-serve principle to a conscious selection of the most qualified or neediest beneficiaries (or a combination thereof). This would be expected to have a particularly beneficial effect on female job seekers, many of whom are not as flexible as their male counterparts in terms of appearing at the labor and social welfare offices to register for programs at fixed times and in terms of queuing for long hours. Finally, it is worthwhile to consider strengthened investments in job-relevant skill building opportunities for female youth that reduce gender sorting in the labor market and create pathways to stable careers.

Given the large proportion of women in the labor market who are active in micro-entrepreneurship, the strengthening of female micro-enterprises is recommended as a critical avenue through which to support women's economic empowerment and agency as well as inclusive growth. Best-practice policy recommendations in the field of gender and micro-entrepreneurship collected from the literature are summarized in Osborne (2017) and Box 1. Osborne (2017) addresses three interrelated areas: addressing outdated norms, reforming the policy framework, and improving access to factors of production and markets. In the area of norms, her recommendations focus on addressing issues of time poverty and the inequitable distribution of household or family responsibilities. Policy action is central to creating an enabling policy, legal and regulatory framework for female micro-enterprise access and performance. Improving access to factors of production and markets can make the labor market more conducive to advancing women's prospects in micro-entrepreneurship; a combination of financial support for micro-entrepreneurs with nonfinancial interventions such as business skills and development training, mentoring and facilitation of market linkages has a particularly positive impact on women.

For Mongolia’s situation, a number of specific recommendations appear particularly crucial. In light of the findings from the focus group discussions, these include the importance of addressing unpaid care and domestic work burdens, adopting a gender-sensitive approach to entrepreneurship support programs (for instance by taking into account that a relatively large share of female beneficiaries of these programs aim to work from home), and expanding financial and nonfinancial support, including facilitation of access to markets for women-owned and -operated businesses.<sup>16</sup>

**Box 1 - Recommendations for expanding opportunities for women in micro-entrepreneurship**

**Addressing outdated norms:**

- Addressing unpaid care and domestic work burdens, including innovating to increase men’s fathering roles and participation in domestic responsibilities;
- Promoting context-relevant childcare models, learning from effective practices, such as in New Zealand or Estonia;
- Investing in time-saving technology and infrastructure projects, such as clean cook stoves, clean water supplies and roads;
- Tackling occupational segregation with targeted information provided at relevant enterprise training or through other active labor market programs;
- Reforming the policy, legal, and regulatory framework;
- Removing legal restrictions and discriminatory practices to women’s employment and ability to establish and develop formal enterprises;
- Securing legal recognition of informal workers; extending proportionate labor regulation to the informal sector especially those dominated by women, such as domestic work;
- Considering mandatory joint titling to increase women’s land ownership;
- Adopting a gender-sensitive “whole systems approach” across public revenue generation and spending that maximizes the gains for women and girls of expenditure and ensures that fiscal policy approaches do not contradict wider women’s economic empowerment objectives; and
- While equitable frameworks are critical, they are only as good as their implementation, including awareness-raising among target populations and access to justice.

**Improving access to factors of production:**

- Correcting biases in service delivery, for example through small incentives;
- Improving the functioning of credit markets;
- Expanding finance for women-owned businesses, including to progress from micro to medium-size, and through partnering with the private sector;
- Developing alternatives to physical collateral, for example co-signature loans or using savings or remittances behaviors;
  - Increasing job-relevant skill building opportunities for female youth that reduce gender sorting in the labor market and create pathways to decent work; and
  - Providing the infrastructure including safe space for collective action and leadership by women, in particular female micro-entrepreneur.

Source: Authors based on Osborne (2017)

<sup>15</sup> Appendix C provides more detailed findings from focus group discussions with women with internal migration experience.

<sup>16</sup> Interventions that facilitate market linkages can for instance consist of offline or online platforms and events for business sales to consumers organized by business incubators. They can also consist of support to helping micro, small and medium-sized enterprises to operate within a larger firm’s supply or distribution chain.

To assure the continuous and productive labor market participation of a larger percentage of women in Mongolia, it is further recommended to improve the quality and quantity of available child care and early childhood education services (as well as of elderly care services). Following World Bank (2016b), a number of policy actions are recommended in the area of early childhood education. First, insufficient access to early childhood education services should be addressed through an approach targeted to areas most underserved, in particular rural parts of Mongolia. To foster the inclusion of hard-to-reach populations such as nomadic herders, community- or home-based modalities targeting the household environment should be explored and the costs and benefits of *ger* kindergartens should be evaluated. Second, in urban areas – especially Ulaanbaatar – investments to expand fixed kindergarten services in the public or private sectors could improve access. Third, in order to improve the equity and effectiveness of current public investments in early childhood education, efforts to improve quality should be paramount. It is recommended that quality improvement efforts target rural areas where issues are again most acute. Fourth, further efforts should be made to improve the education and training of the staff of childcare providers. Fifth, further analytical work on early childhood education is needed, including to better understand gender differences in certain dimensions of early childhood development and whether there is a need for an expansion of childcare services for children ages 6 to 12.

Finally, it is recommended to foster a public discussion in Mongolia's society about the norms and values underlying the widespread gender disparities in the labor market, including through more intensive dialogue on gender issues between the government, labor unions, employers' associations and other stakeholders. In the process of this public discussion, the awareness of the importance of gender equality in the labor market might improve and modern female role models that show that it is possible to have both a family and a career could be showcased. In the context of influencing norms and values, addressing employers' concerns with respect to hiring and supporting female staff would also be crucial. Not all of these concerns are based on direct discrimination, but often due to perceived disadvantages of female workers that could in fact be addressed by employers themselves if they relied on more modern strategies of human resource development, starting with simple changes like granting more flexible working hours or allowing work from home. Thus, it is recommended to implement awareness campaigns, discussions and trainings for employers and human resource managers on modern strategies of human resource development and gender-sensitive and age-related work planning.

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## Appendix A: Details on Focus Group Discussions

For the purpose of this study, a professional survey research firm – MCDS – was hired that prepared, implemented and documented 22 distinct focus group discussions with a minimum of six participants and a maximum of nine participants each. Most focus group discussions lasted between two and three hours with a minimum duration of 76 minutes for group 18 and a maximum duration of 180 minutes for group 1. Thirteen focus group discussions were conducted in Ulaanbaatar, seven in *aimag* centers and two in *soum* centers. The focus group discussions were spread out over four out of nine different districts of Ulaanbaatar (Sukhbaatar, Bayangol, Songinokhairkhan, and Nalaikh) and three out of 21 *aimags* (Khovd, Dornod and Dundgobi). The districts and *aimags* were selected so as to ensure a wide variety in terms of socio-economic characteristics and regional structures.

Sukhbaatar district was selected to represent downtown Ulaanbaatar. The district is relatively developed with many large apartment buildings and residents from the middle or upper middle strata of society including many civil servants. Sukhbaatar district is also the district with the largest number of students and student dormitories as the majority of universities and colleges are located here. There is relatively good access to quality social services. Bayangol district is a rather typical district of Ulaanbaatar with mixed apartment and *ger* areas (peri-urban areas with semi-formal settlements mostly inhabited by rural-to-urban migrants). Most of the district's residents are from the lower and lower middle strata of society. It was selected to represent the typical economic and social characteristics of Ulaanbaatar. Songinokhairkhan district is one of largest districts of Ulaanbaatar with regard to number of residents. It also covers a large surface and has the most significant concentration of *ger* areas among all districts. Songinokhairkhan district was selected to represent districts with relatively high poverty and unemployment levels and limited access to economic opportunities and social services.<sup>17</sup> Nalaikh district is another of the nine districts of Ulaanbaatar. While administratively the district is part of Mongolia's capital, it is actually located approximately 50 kilometers from the city center. Nalaikh district was founded as a mining town but after a long period of decline today only small-scale mining activities remain. As a result of the decline in mining activities, there are very limited economic opportunities. Due to the distance to the city center access to quality social services is also limited, a problem that is also prevalent in other relatively remote districts such as Bagakhangai and Baganuur.

Khovd *aimag* was selected to represent Mongolia's Western region. It is one of the country's most remote *aimags*, located about 1,500 kilometers from Ulaanbaatar. While its infrastructure is generally less developed than of some other *aimags*, the economic and social characteristics of its *aimag* center are similar to those of the majority of *aimag* centers. There is also a large number of students from other western *aimags* who temporarily move to Khovd to study at Khovd University. Dornod *aimag* was selected to represent Mongolia's Eastern region. In addition, it was selected to represent the group of *aimags* with more urbanized, industrialized and populated *aimag* centers, which also includes as Darkhan and Erdenet. In these *aimag* centers, there are more economic opportunities and better infrastructure as compared to the more typical *aimag* centers. Dornod is also noteworthy for having two border crossings with China and Russia. As a consequence, many of its residents engage in informal cross-border trading. Finally, Dundgobi *aimag* was selected to represent the South/Gobi region. In addition, it was selected to represent other underdeveloped *aimags* with limited economic resources and a population mostly engaged in herding. Focus group discussions were conducted in the *aimag* centers of Khovd, Dornod and Dundgobi and also among herders in *soum* centers of Dundgobi and Khovd *aimags*.

Based on predefined criteria regarding the observable socio-demographic characteristics of prospective participants of focus group discussions, a multi-prolonged strategy for the acquisition of the participants was implemented. This strategy emphasized the cooperation with various different state institutions, private entities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to identify potential participants. More specifically, various key contact persons from the following types of institutions were involved in the acquisition of participants of focus group discussions: (i) governors of *khoroos* (sub districts in Ulaanbaatar) and *baghs* (villages outside of Ulaanbaatar); (ii) local labor

<sup>17</sup> These challenges tend to be particularly acute in *ger* areas and among rural-to-urban migrants.

and social welfare offices; (iii) local employer’s associations; (iv) the Mongolian association of disabled people; (v) local social workers; (vi) public and private universities; (vii) small, medium-sized and large enterprises, and (viii) local NGOs. Table A.1 lists key contact persons who supported the acquisition of participants of focus group discussions.<sup>18</sup>

Table A.1. Persons who supported the acquisition of participants of focus group discussions

Name	Position
Erdenechimeg	Head, Labor and Social Welfare Office, Nalaikh district
Sarnai	Officer, Labor and Social Welfare Office, Nalaikh district
Altantsooj	Senior Officer, Social Development Department, Songinokhairkhan district
Munkhbayar	Social worker, 24 <sup>th</sup> <i>khoro</i> , Songinokhairkhan district
Batchuluun	Governor, 25 <sup>th</sup> <i>khoro</i> , Songinokhairkhan district
Ganbayar	Governor, 25 <sup>th</sup> <i>khoro</i> , Songinokhairkhan district
Chuluun-Erdene	Staff, Songino Center, NGO working with people with disabilities
Ouynchimeg	Head, Social Development Department, Sukhbaatar district
Otgontuya	Head, Labor and Social Welfare Office, Sukhbaatar district
Zolzaya	Officer, Labor and Social Welfare Office, Sukhbaatar district
Munkhbat	Officer, Labor and Social Welfare Office, Sukhbaatar district
Enkhbaatar	Resident, Dornod <i>aimag</i>
Samvuu	Resident, Bayangol district
Dulguun	Resident, Sukhbaatar district
Munkhzolvoo	Officer, Statistical department of the Governor’s Office, Khovd <i>aimag</i>
Khishigjarjal	Social worker, Erdeneburen <i>soum</i>
Tuvshinjargal	Officer, Statistical department of the Governor’s Office, Dundgobi <i>aimag</i>
Linkhua	Staff, Mill House LLC
Myagmarsuren	Vice Director, MCS group
Badamdash	Executive Director, Eagle TV
Gankhuyag	Executive Director, Newcom Group
Sergelen	Director, Gazar Shim LLC
Bayanmunkh	Director, Gobikhangai LLC
Bolormaa	Social worker, 11 <sup>th</sup> <i>khoro</i> , Bayangol district
Batsuld	Director, Batsuld Co-operation
Sarantuya	Director, Sarantuya Co-operation
Orkhontamir	Director, Orkhontamir Co-operation
Ariunjargal	Director, Hunny Press LLC
Batnaran	Director, Batnaran Co-operation
Zoya	Director, Zoya Co-operation
Orshikh	Director, Uvgun Partizan Co-operation

<sup>18</sup> During the acquisition of participants of focus group discussions, it also appeared helpful to provide some incentives to participants to encourage their participation in the focus group discussions and to compensate them for denoting their time to the discussions. Incentives were provided in the form of calling cards with a value of MNT 5,000 per participant.

In terms of the flow of individual focus group discussions, all of them followed the four exact same steps. In the first step the moderator welcomed the participants, introduced himself/herself, explained the main objectives of the field work and encouraged discussants to openly share their honest and open thoughts. Participants were also assured that everything they said would only be analyzed in anonymized form. Next, the moderator began the actual focus group discussion with an ice-breaking question to stimulate the conversation. For instance, participants of some focus groups were asked: “Can you tell us about your life plans when you were a teenager, something about your dreams, plans and wishes and about your vocational and also private career and what influenced them?” Afterwards, the moderator used detailed compendiums that had been prepared for each focus group to stimulate a discussion of about three or four topics. Topics covered by the different focus groups discussions included perceptions about access to the labor market, living and working conditions, support for the unemployed or reconciliation of work and family. The moderators were instructed to only introduce new thematic blocs when they felt comfortable that the previously discussed topic had been exhausted, to be flexible about the order of topics to be discussed and to make sure at all times that the participants talked to each other and not to the moderator. Finally, at the end of each focus group discussion the moderator summarized the most important points raised during the discussion and asked the participants if there was anything they would like to add or clarify.

Before, during, and after the field work, data quality was the top priority. Quality assurance measures and procedures included the following: (i) all key staff involved in the field work were highly qualified professionals who possessed international and local experience in conducting qualitative social science research; (ii) before the start of the field work the survey research firm organized a training to make sure all staff involved in the field work were familiar with the specific objectives and approach of the study;<sup>19</sup> (iii) a “Field Survey Guidance Manual” was prepared by the survey research firm and used as a handbook during the training and the subsequent field work; (iv) the first two focus group discussions among students and graduates in Ulaanbaatar (group 1 and group 3) were organized for piloting purposes, following these focus group discussions procedures and transcripts were reviewed and discussed in detail; (v) all focus group discussions were documented through detailed protocols, audio recordings and photos; (vi) select focus group discussions were monitored on-site by the survey research firm’s project team leader and through visits by independent consultants hired by the World Bank; (vii) after each focus group discussion the moderator compared the secretary’s written notes with the audio transcripts and in case of inconsistencies checked the quality of the transcripts by listening to audio recordings; and (viii) the survey research firm’s project team leader reviewed the translations of almost all transcripts by checking both the quality of the translation itself and its consistency with the audio recording.

Ethical considerations formed an integral part of the whole process of preparing, implementing and analyzing the various focus group discussions. Great care was taken to fully abide by the good practice principles, regulations, and policies for research involving human subjects and with all safeguards for research involving vulnerable groups such as economically- and educationally-disadvantaged persons. In addition, there was strict compliance with all relevant regulations regarding professional independence, confidentiality, and professional integrity. The compliance with confidentiality requirements meant that everything that was said during the focus group discussions is presented in this study and other publications only in anonymized form. Moreover, even though the focus group discussions were recorded, the recordings were transcribed afterwards and have since been deleted.

During the acquisition of participants for focus group discussions, information on the six relevant socio-demographic attributes of potential participants (gender, age, educational background, employment status, marital status and locality) was collected. These data were cross-checked during the focus group discussions to ensure that participants complied with the designated demographic characteristics. For some focus group discussions, participation was further restricted according to additional criteria. For instance, for some focus group discussions participation was

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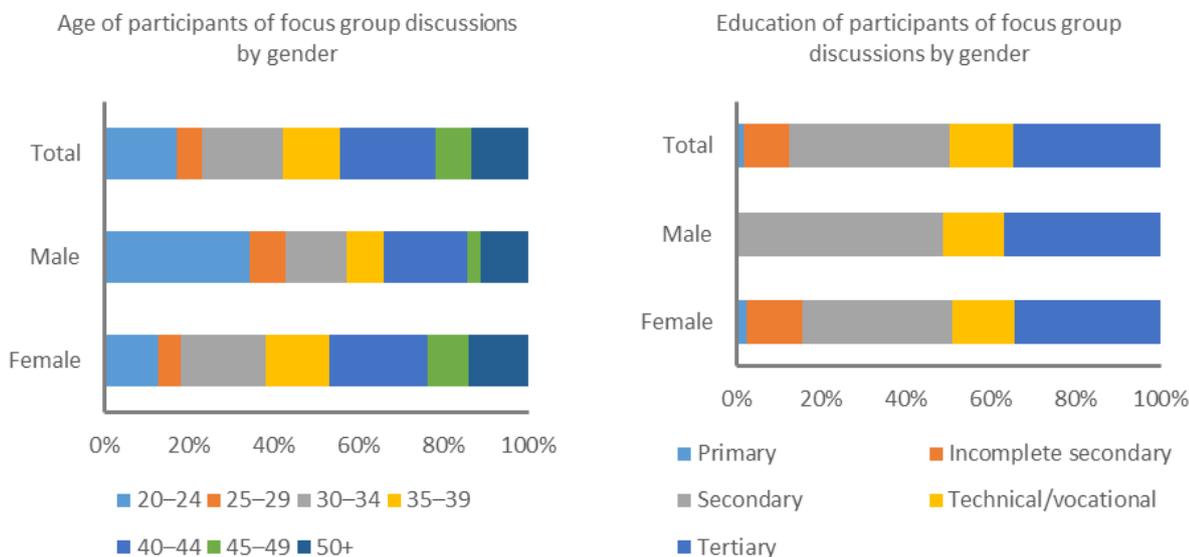
<sup>19</sup> The duration of the training was one day. The agenda encompassed the following points: (i) objectives of the study; (ii) how to organize a successful focus group discussion; (iii) the roles of the moderator and the secretary; (iv) the content of the field survey guidance manual; (v) tools and methods to be used for each focus group; and (vi) practical role plays of focus group discussions.

restricted to employers of either small and medium or larger firms, the disabled or individuals with internal migration experience. These additional criteria were again compiled during the acquisition of participants and verified during the actual focus group discussion. See Table 3.1 in the main text for the precise composition of the 22 focus group discussions according to participants’ observable characteristics.

A total of 169 individuals participated in the 22 distinct focus group discussions. Socio-demographic data elicited from focus group participants make it possible to describe the sample of focus group participants. Of course, one should not expect the sample of focus group participants to be representative of Mongolia’s population as a whole. Instead, its composition reflects a series of conscious choices with regard to the selection of participants according to observable socio-demographic characteristics during the acquisition of focus group participants.

The distribution of select demographic characteristics among the participants of focus group discussions is shown in Figure A.1. More specifically, the figure visualizes the age and education distributions among participants separately for the sample as a whole and by gender. Not displayed is the basic breakdown of the sample by gender. Because most focus group discussions focus on women as the group generally lacking in labor market outcomes, the sample comprises many more women than men. Out of a total of 169 participants, 134 were female and 35 male. With regard to female participants, great care was undertaken to have focus group discussions with women of different age groups (age 20 to 30, age 30 to 50, and age 50 to 60). As the left-hand panel of Figure A.1 shows, this procedure led to a relatively even distribution of women of different age groups in the sample, in spite of a certain emphasis on prime-age women. While 23 percent of women in the sample are age 20 to 30, 32.5 percent are age 30 to 40, 30.8 percent age 40 to 50 and 13.6 percent age 50 or older. In contrast, the decision to have two focus groups with male students or university graduates aged between 20 and 30 means that many of the men in the sample are relatively young. In fact, 42.9 percent are between age 20 and 30.

Figure A.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants of Focus Group Discussions

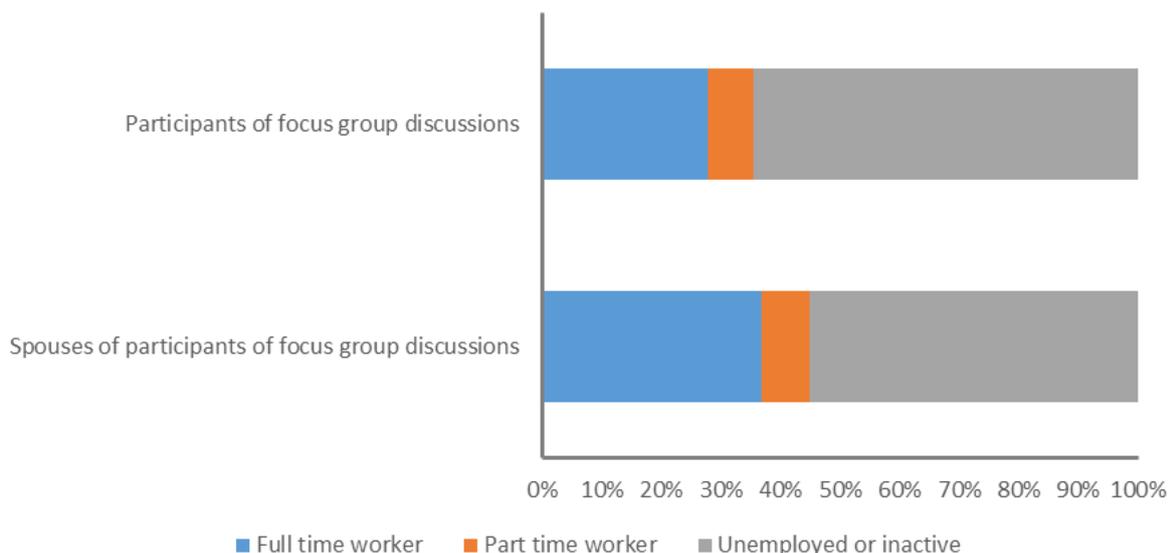


Source: Authors’ calculations.

The right-hand panel of Figure A.1 also shows some notable differences between men and women in the sample with regard to their educational attainment. Largely because men in the sample are for the most part in groups 3 and 4 (university students and graduates) or groups 18 and 19 (managers), there are no men in the sample who have not completed secondary education.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, 15.6 percent of women in the sample either have only primary or incomplete secondary education. In general, the right-hand panel of Figure A.1 shows relatively high levels of educational attainment. This is partly due to the approach for determining participation in the various groups. But it also reflects the generally high level of educational attainment in Mongolia also documented in the main text.

Figure A.2 summarizes the distributions of the employment status of both participants of focus group discussions and their spouses. As employment status was an explicit criterion for determining eligibility for the various groups, the distribution visualized in Figure A.2 is a direct outcome of this process. In line with the objective of the study to analyze constraints underlying gender disparities in the labor market, the majority of participants in focus group discussions are directly affected by such constraints due to their status as either unemployed or inactive. The same is the case for their spouses. Overall, 65 percent of participants in focus group discussions and 55 percent of their spouses are without a job. The lower percentage of joblessness among participants' spouses as compared to participants can at least partly be attributed to the fact that participation in groups 10 and 11 is explicitly restricted to individuals who are themselves unemployed but have a spouse that is employed.

Figure A.2. Employment status of participants in focus group discussions and their spouses



Source: Authors' calculations.

<sup>20</sup> Given that there are also two groups of unemployed men (groups 10 and 11) the observation that there are no men in the sample who have not completed secondary education is nevertheless noteworthy. It should be noted that participation in groups 10 and 11 is restricted to men who are themselves unemployed but have a spouse that is employed. One might speculate that this household constellation might be most common for men with at least a certain minimum level of education.

## Appendix B: Perceptions of Herdswomen

Mongolia is still to a large extent characterized by its nomadic culture. But nomadic life is getting harder due to the effects of severe climatic changes. *Dzuds* (severe winters in which large number of livestock die) cause many herds to die and threaten many herders. Because of the long nomadic tradition, we wanted to know how herders perceive their special labor and social supports and how herdswomen are dealing with everyday life.

Therefore, our sample included two focus groups with approximately nine herdswomen each, some of them with higher education, mostly working part-time in different businesses and earning an additional income, while others had not finished secondary education and were working as unpaid herdswomen for their own families' herds. Most are between ages 40 and 60. The higher educated women once left their nomadic families in order to study in Ulaanbaatar or an *aimag* center, but then married herdsmen and went back to the countryside with them. Most of the others never left their rural lives, although pretty much all of them dreamed of leaving it when they were young.

### *Division of labor among herders*

The discussion of possible gender disparities between male and female herders led to a specific distinction between the rigidity of gender roles and their perceived importance: according to discussants, while female herders are usually willing to do nearly every work, independent if it is seen as men's work or women's work, many male herders hesitate to assume female obligations and justify this with biological differences between men and women. Biological determination leads men to do physically demanding work whereas women do less physically strenuous work like producing certain goods and selling them. As a result, differences in the typical duties of male and female herders exist and also between their typical daily routines. The work of the herdswomen is described as very structured, starting earlier because of household duties, and covering up to 15 hours of work per day. Men are described as having longer working hours in the summer, but being able to rest in winter. In spite of the rather rigid differences in gender roles between male and female herders, when asked about the *importance* of men's and women's work, many female discussants stress that they do not feel disadvantaged or neglected. Instead, they explain that the nomadic system depends on both husband and wife fulfilling their respective duties, so both are seen as important and both have to rely on each other.

From Focus Group 20: Females of mixed ages and education, whose husbands/partners are engaged in nomadic herding.

Speaker 8: *Especially the older generation has a very strict view of traditional Mongolian roles of men and women. For example, men look after their horses and cattle, whereas women milk cows and prepare meals. But in my case, when my husband is away, I look after the cattle. When my husband travels elsewhere, or if he's sick, I look after the livestock, do milking, shearing and do all "manly" jobs. As a man is the head of the house, he needs to focus on providing for his home. Women focus more within the home itself. Probably this is the biggest difference between them. Herders' work has no timetables. As the dawn breaks, women have to get up early, heat the stove, get tea ready, bring cows out and milk goats. In the night, we go to bed around 9 or 10 pm.*

Speaker 7: *The heads of household, the men do all the outside work. Us, women prepare dairy, look after children and do lighter tasks around the household. But when needed, we can do all tasks. During busy seasons of calving or shearing, we work for 15 to 16 hours a day. It's very difficult to find time for rest. Even at nights, we can't forget our animals during our sleep and have to be alert for wolves. So in a way, my husband and I both do similar jobs.*

### *Perceptions of support to herders*

Most herders participating in our focus groups perceive that they do not receive sufficient government support and suffer from a lack of service delivery in areas like labor, education, and health. Knowledge of and experience with

the Herders' Employment Promotion Program is relatively limited, and focus group participants noted that other active labor market programs implemented by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection are not usually targeted at herders or implemented in rural areas.

With regard to the educational system, while some *soum* centers do have schools and more have kindergartens, they are often relatively far from herders' locations. Herders participating in focus group discussions would also want to see more special protection in the area of health care, as they argue that they are suffering with increasing age from various illnesses due to bad weather conditions and the hard work. Participants in focus group discussions also indicated that rural schools and hospitals are in bad condition, that the educational background of the staff is low and therefore there is a lack of quality. Herders hesitate to go to those hospitals and prefer to make long (sometimes one- or two-day) trips to hospitals in *aimag* centers. Since the government-provided services are often seen as inaccessible or of low quality, focus group participants described how help is mostly organized within the nomadic family, especially when someone gets ill or a herdsman dies.

From Focus Group 20: Females of mixed ages and education, whose husbands/partners are engaged in nomadic herding.

Speaker 2: *In soum centers, there are no public services except schools and hospitals. It may be said that the government has left us to our own devices. [...] Doctors in soum centers are very low skilled. When we go there for examinations we are directed to aimag center for diagnostics. And when I go to [a hospital in an] aimag center; first, it's very far; second, it's very bureaucratic. When you go to public hospital for tests, you have to stand in a line as early as five in the morning, and many a day you have to return and come back again if you couldn't get service that day. [...] Education services [in soum centers] are not that good either.*

Speaker 8: *When we call [an ambulance] because of an emergency, they come and prescribe us some simple medications and direct us to the hospital in the soum center. There is no systematic way of enrolling us in regular medical examinations.*

According to some of the participants in the focus group discussions, the best governmental support would be offered by establishment and expansion of *ger* kindergartens. They are considered very accessible and flexibly match the needs of herding families. This enables good reconciliation of family and work responsibilities.

From Focus Group 20: Females of mixed ages and education, whose husbands/partners are engaged in nomadic herding.

Speaker 3: *Ger kindergartens are very effective. [...] Our children are making friends and socializing; otherwise the only faces they see are our faces.*

Speaker 1: *As ger kindergartens have no rigid schedules, children can be playing outside when we come late to pick them up.*

### ***Herders' attitudes towards education***

Nomadic children do lead very different lives from those living in urban areas. From the very beginning they are involved in herding activities or producing times and have to help their parents as soon as they are able to do. In contrast with urban mothers, herdswomen do not have the time to take their children to activities or care a lot about homework. Nevertheless, the discussants stressed that education is important. The children have to attend the nearest primary schools, and only when they begin secondary education do they move to bigger towns. Because of the perceived bad quality of dormitories, many mothers decide to come with their children and spend the school months in the *gers*, often far away from their husband and herds. In contrast to the urban population, nomadic mothers often indicate that they support their daughters more than their sons, that is, they want their daughters to get a higher education and secure a professional job. Therefore, they encouraged the daughters to leave rural life and go to Ulaanbaatar or at least to one of the bigger cities. Sons are frequently kept at home, though, because every kind of physical help is needed and the family often depends on the sons when the father dies.

From Focus Group 20: Females of mixed ages and education, whose husbands/partners are engaged in nomadic herding.

Speaker 7: *As life in the countryside is very tough, [everybody] tries to send [their daughters] to school and get them educated. But we keep boys near ourselves.*

Speaker 2: *Everyone, including myself, thinks that boys can make it in life as a hard [manual] laborer [even] without much education.*

At the same time, more and more sons do not want to go on with herding, because doing so means that they will always have to suffer from hardships. Many herders also say that they can hardly manage to save.

### **Summary**

The focus group with herdswomen enlightens the different kinds of work that are based on the physical possibilities of men and women and nevertheless do not create a gender disparity. Appreciation for female duties appears high, which is different from the urban situation as described by the focus groups from urban populations. Herdswomen do not feel as bound to household duties as urban women, and they stress the importance of their work in nomadic life. Although the life plans of the discussants included learning a profession and leaving rural life, they do not seem as dissatisfied as other women were. In contrast with urban women, herdswomen show strong enthusiasm for creating additional income by producing a variety of products. Correspondingly, their desire for better public support tend in this direction: herdswomen wish to have more special training in skills such as how to produce and sell certain goods and operate shops where they can sell their products.

## **Appendix C: Perceptions of Women with Internal Migration Experience**

### ***Rural-to-urban migration and social disparities***

Mongolia is characterized by large scale rural-to urban migration, which is typical for countries with limited rural labor markets. While poverty in Mongolia is higher in rural areas than in urban places, in recent years this gap has been narrowing. From 2001 to 2011, the population in Ulaanbaatar rose from 0.5 million people to 1.2 million (World Bank 2016c). When one compares this to the socialist period, one sees that the proportion of the nation's population housed in the capital has nearly doubled (from 27 percent in 1989 to 42 percent in 2011). One reason for the large-scale rural-urban migration can be seen in the decline of the rural supply of social and other services after the end of the socialist period. Until then, rural *aimags* offered a relatively high standard of living by providing schools, kindergartens, hospitals, and workplaces. Afterwards, educational institutions were closed or run down, work options were lost, and in some *aimags* people suffered from the lack of electrical power (World Bank 2016c). Opportunities to enter the labor market therefore seemed to require migrating to Ulaanbaatar. As a consequence, more and more *ger* areas—that is, exurbs containing both *gers* (portable felt dwelling structures) and detached houses—have arisen around the capital city, and social disparities between the non-*ger* areas and *ger* areas of different *khooros* become more apparent. Non-*ger* areas and *ger* areas seem to be characterized by different populations with different educational backgrounds and different labor market access.

As noted in both the World Bank study, *Urban Poverty in Ulaanbaatar: Understanding its Dimensions and Addressing the Challenges* (World Bank 2016c) and our focus groups, the older rural people migrating to Ulaanbaatar often have relatively low educational attainment, do not find proper jobs, and have to remain living in the *ger* areas. Access to the labor market here is only provided by informal, temporary jobs, mostly in the private service sector. Wages are frequently very low, are not reliably paid, and do not meet the needs of families living there. Our focus group discussions also showed that older women and single mothers are often residents of those *ger* areas. They are special victims of the missing labor market access that disadvantaged population groups suffer. Here the vicious circle becomes very clear: the lack of job opportunities forces these women to search for jobs in other parts of the cities. Because they have no childcare options near their workplaces (and often not in the *ger* areas either), they

cannot keep jobs for long, because employers have no understanding of the needs of single mothers. Some of them are fired after a few weeks, and so the never-ending process of dealing with no money and searching for new jobs starts again.

### ***Specific constraints for internal migrants***

Because of the local disparities in Mongolia and the huge concentration of population in Ulaanbaatar, it seemed worthwhile to try and understand why women are moving to Ulaanbaatar from other parts of the country. We therefore ran one focus group with women who have had internal migration experiences but who for the most part are still unemployed. The sample consisted of women ages 22 to 39 who have two to nine children and whose husbands are either employed or unemployed.

As reasons for internal migration, many discussants told that they wanted to go to university and therefore left their rural areas or that they wanted their children to get a good education. The quality of teaching is perceived to be higher in the cities than in rural areas. One herder woman said her family decided to go to the city after losing their cattle. As among other population groups, generally among the female migrants there is high interest in being employed by a public organization, because working conditions are judged to be better than in private companies. The “13<sup>th</sup> month salary” as well as good-quality health insurance and access to a pension were described as incentives primarily given by public agencies.

From Focus Group 22: Females of mixed ages, education and marital status with internal migration. Experience.

Speaker 5: *I'm very interested in working in public service. Although there are many private companies in Ulaanbaatar, they don't pay salaries on time and have long working hours. It discourages and prevents people from going there to work.*

Speaker 2: *There are many people out there who are interested in becoming public servants due to the security, pensions and social insurance benefits. In addition, there are some incentives provided for [public servants] who have worked for longer duration, but we don't see this in the private sector. For example, one friend of ours [...] went to work in the public sector whereas my husband and I remained in the private sector. Our living standards at that time were at similar level. However, when we met five years later, our friend's life had improved quite significantly. [...] Only now I've realized it'd have been better to pursue a career path in the public sector, rather than in the private sector.*

None of the participants in the focus group of internal migrants has been working exactly in their chosen profession since they migrated to the city. The majority of those who are employed have limited working contracts and stress that although both they and their husbands are working, the salaries are not enough to build any savings. Vacant jobs available to female migrants are seen to be in restricted to occupations such as cleaning, dish washing, or house building and wage arrears are seen as frequent.

From Focus Group 22: Females of mixed ages, education and marital status with internal migration. Experience.

Speaker 4: *When we moved from the countryside to Ulaanbaatar, [...] we came to the city almost homeless. We ended living in our in-laws' grounds. [...]. My husband worked outside of Ulaanbaatar in construction or road building. When I told my own dad about moving to the capital city, he approved of it saying that our kids need proper education. After moving here, my brother in law found out that at the local khoroo [office] they needed a cleaner because their cleaner was ill. I became a cleaner there, worked for three months but didn't receive any salary. It was a temporary job filling a gap for someone who was on sick leave. [...]. My in-laws said to me that it was better to work and be in the public sector even if it meant going without a salary.*

All the discussants left their home *aimags* without having an employment opportunity or a job offer lined up in the city. Leaving seemed relatively easy because the *gers* can be moved to the edge of the city easily. So as a first step, there is no need to rent an apartment. But few of the discussants had imagined that it would be so difficult to get a job in Ulaanbaatar. In their eyes, cronyism plays a central role in the Mongolian labor market. Without connections,

it is impossible to get a job in one's trained profession that pays full-time. And internal migrants rarely have valuable connections in Ulaanbaatar. As a consequence, they say that every job that is offered is accepted in order to make family ends meet.

In the female discussants' eyes, male internal migrants are also doing every job that is offered to them. They are not reluctant but will do every kind of work, even if it is physically exploiting them. They also have to suffer doing jobs that are not reliably paid. With regard to the traditional roles of men and women, the discussants stressed that their husbands are more willing to do housework than other men are, although they themselves must deal all the family issues.

From Focus Group 22: Females of mixed ages, education and marital status with internal migration. Experience.

Speaker 6: *There are men out there who would do assistant work in construction or even push carts in [a market]. As long as they can earn some living, [men] will take on any job. But for women it is not so, we can't take such [physically taxing] jobs.*

Speaker 2: *Yes, for me, I'll be selective on what kind of jobs to take. But men have to provide for their homes, so they are more willing to take on any job. My husband is no exception.*

Speaker 1: *Women look after children and take care of the household. Men cannot handle such tasks well, and most of them don't even like doing them. Thus, husbands work outside of the home and earn money, and women stay at home to take care of children and the home.*

The experience of going back home has been endured by some discussants who could not get a job in Ulaanbaatar and returned to their home *aimags*. There they mostly undertook farming, herding, and selling products. Although they could work, they described the living conditions as very bad, so they used the savings to return to Ulaanbaatar. Living in the city is ultimately seen as the better way to access services and finding a job – in spite of many difficulties and hurdles. Some specific difficulties are clear from the discussions about how employers judge people with a rural background. Discussants said that certificates from rural academies are worthless in the employers' eyes. The perceived gap in the quality of education between rural areas and Ulaanbaatar influences employers' choices. Others observed employers having individual, idiosyncratic preferences.

From Focus Group 22: Females of mixed ages, education and marital status with internal migration. Experience.

Speaker 2: *Mongolians in general have a strong tie to [people from their region of birth]. They are more likely to hire [people from their region of birth]. [...]*

Speaker 1: *In job interviews [employers] even ask which astrological sign you were born under. In one interview they asked me about this, and when I answered, they said my zodiac sign is in adversity with their boss' sign, so they cannot hire me. It brought me to the conclusion that if I wasn't born at the right place, under the right zodiac sign, my employment perspectives are already diminished at the very beginning of my birth.*

Speaker 5: *Yes, true, I was also asked my zodiac sign. This happens.*

Migrants' experiences with labor and social welfare offices and employment promotion programs were, as with the discussants, largely negative. Most of the discussants filled out the acquired application forms without getting any reply. One discussant attended a 45-day long felt-making training and completed it with certificate. Afterwards, however, she was not given financial support for her micro-business. Many discussants felt that short-term trainings without any prospects for placement or follow-up support are not useful. Furthermore, it was suggested that labor and social welfare offices should look at the profiles of unemployed people and decide which training might be helpful based on that. Relevant knowledge would be required of the staff working among the labor and social welfare offices.

From Focus Group 22: Females of mixed ages, education and marital status with internal migration. Experience.

Speaker 5: *Mostly [labor and social welfare offices] offer low skilled jobs, such as dishwashers, food preparers, waiters and construction assistants. There are very few high skill jobs on offer, and they require three to*

*five years of work experience. So every time an offer comes along, there is always some sort of mismatch or constraint that comes my way [...].*

Speaker 4: *One youth from our region was jobless for certain time after graduation. Then they got a job at [a bank], and when I asked how they got this job, they said they knew somebody there. This means people get jobs not because of their experience, but because they have connections.*

We can complete our findings here by summarizing how they are reflected in statements from the expert interviews with the heads of labor and social welfare offices. According to some experts, internal migration is seen as an essential supplier of labor to one of the most important employers: the mining industry. Officials in charge at the different *aimags* stress that the mining industry attracts people with different educational backgrounds, because it offers a wide spectrum of jobs. Some of these, such as cleaning and security services, are especially attractive to older people and those with less education. Nevertheless, experts argue that the skills demanded by the mining sector are substantial. For instance, English language skills or computer skills are said to be needed, even for relatively menial jobs. The experts stress that these requirements regarding language skills should ensure that expat workers from different countries working together at a multinational company are able to communicate with each other and with the Mongolian staff. Computer skills are seen as basic knowledge.

Some experts at the different labor and social welfare offices do criticize the specific requirements of multinational mining companies. In their opinion, jobs in those firms would be a good solution to prevent low-skilled Mongolian people from remaining unemployed, but instead those jobs go to immigrants. The mining industry is seen as the motor of the Mongolian economy, and its employers are described as the “mighty ones” who set the tone for the whole labor market. It is also seen as a field where gender segregation is still very common and age discrimination is seen as natural. Because nobody tries to improve these working conditions in the flagship sector, experts believe other employers hesitate to improve them as well.

From Expert Interview: Head of *aimag* labor and social welfare office.

*For example, why do [employers in the mining sector] require English language and computer skills for cleaning workers? Why would they need English and computer? They should know how to do cleaning work. But they require everyone to have English language proficiency.*

### **Summary**

Internal women migrants seem to have even more difficulties getting jobs than other women, including the fact that they lack the relevant local knowledge and networks. Among the discussants with internal migration experience, even those with high educational backgrounds hardly ever worked in the fields they studied. The jobs available to them are deemed unsuitable for skilled workers. With regard to this pattern, there seems to be no gender disparity. Male internal migrant workers seem to face the same problems. None of the husbands of the discussants is working in the exact profession he was trained for but instead they are mostly doing unskilled work. We can reiterate that Mongolian employers are perceived to rely not on general, objective skill backgrounds in their hiring strategies but to discriminate against people even based on birthplaces or zodiac signs.



