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COUNTRY GENDER PROFILE AZERBAIJAN

EU4GENDEREQUALITY
REFORM HELPDESK

DECEMBER 2023



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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AZN	Azerbaijani manat
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CGP	Country Gender Profile
CLIP	Country Level Implementation Plan
CSO	civil society organisation
EU	European Union
GAP III	EU Gender Action Plan III
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDP	gross domestic product
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GRB	gender-responsive budgeting
HDI	Human Development Index
ICT	information and communications technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States dollar

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This updated Country Gender Profile of Azerbaijan (CGP) provides information on gender equality issues and gaps in the country, their impact on society, social norms and stereotypes, and identifies where gender mainstreaming is missing and how to integrate a gender perspective in policies, programmes and projects. It offers the EU Delegation recommendations for decision-making and the development of the Country Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) of the European Union (EU) Gender Action Plan III 2021–2025 (GAP III). In terms of its methodology, this profile is based on qualitative desk research covering existing publications, statistics, state programmes and reports.

According to the State Statistical Committee, Azerbaijan had an estimated population of 10.175 million in 2022¹ (estimated at 10.42 million in 2023 by Worldometer calculations based on United Nations data), 50.1% of whom are women. More than half of the population (52.8%) live in urban areas, while just under half (47.2%) live in rural areas. Azerbaijan's Human Development Index (HDI) value increased from 0.65 in 2002 to 0.75 in 2021, reflecting an average annual growth rate of 0.72%.

Recent decades have witnessed efforts to promote gender equality in Azerbaijan. The Constitution enshrines men's and women's equal rights, and the country has ratified a number of international agreements on the human rights and freedoms, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Laws exist to promote gender equality and combat domestic violence. Men's and women's equal of rights and freedoms, and the prohibition of discrimination based on gender, are included in the Labour Code, the Family Code, the Criminal Code and other legislative acts. Article 154 of the Criminal Code defines the violation of the right to equality.

In 2019, a draft National Action Plan on Gender Equality in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2020–2024 was prepared and submitted to the Government, but this has not yet been approved.² The National Action Plan for Combatting Domestic Violence in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2020–2023 was approved by presidential decree on 27 November 2020. Its main goal is to prevent domestic violence in line with international standards on prevention measures, in addition to strengthening families, providing comprehensive assistance in the fight against domestic violence, implementing measures included in normative legal acts and increasing their efficiency.

¹ AZSTAT, 2021, <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/demoqraphy/>

² Asian Development Bank, *Rapid Response Support for Strategic Reforms*, 2020, https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-documents/51355/51355-001-tacr-en_0.pdf

The State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs is the central executive body responsible for implementing and regulating state policy on the family, women's and children's issues, under the Cabinet of Ministers. The State Committee is a member of the National Coordination Council (also under the Cabinet of Minister) for the nationalisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its duties also include implementing measures to protect women's rights, implementing state programmes on poverty reduction (during 2006–2015) and the employment strategy, advancing women's empowerment, contributing to the implementation of "Azerbaijan 2020: Vision for the future", and making the protection of human rights more effective.

Key findings

- Policies and programmes tend to be gender-neutral policies. Neither the Constitution nor the Law on Gender Equality cover both direct and indirect discrimination against women in the private and public spheres.
- Azerbaijan lacks criminal law provisions that specifically criminalise all forms of gender-based violence.
- Consent is not mentioned in existing legislation. The current wording of legislation means that sexual intercourse without consent does not amount to a crime unless it is established that a non-consensual act is accompanied by violence, the threat of violence or the "helpless condition" of the victim.
- Although the provision of legal aid for survivors of violence against women and domestic violence is included in legislation, free legal aid is not easily available in practice. This is due to the lack of specific rules to regulate its provision.
- The Council of Europe and other international entities recommend reviewing Article 3.2 of the new Family Mediation Law, regarding the mandatory nature of the first mediation session in cases of violence against women and domestic violence.
- The State Programme on the Great Return to the Liberated Territories of Azerbaijan does not address gender inequalities or the differences between women and men in terms of access to and control over resources, including opportunities for development.
- The Action Plan for the Implementation of the Children's Strategy for 2020–2025 does not address or take into account existing gender norms that shape society from childhood.
- Gender equality is included at the duty level of the Youth Programme and its Action Plan includes some gender-related measures. However, their coverage is limited to a few areas, such as violence, early marriage, and reproductive health and family planning. Gender equality is not integrated in important activity lines, such as "supporting youth employment and entrepreneurship", "supporting the activities of youth organisations and the participation of youth in public life", "youth and information technologies", and "supporting the intellectual activity of young people and encouraging science". Addressing gender bias and ensuring equal opportunities in these areas is also extremely important.
- More men hold more positions in the civil service than women in Azerbaijan. Women are underrepresented in jobs in the transport and construction sectors, and well as in the civil service.

- Women's overall unemployment rate is higher than the unemployment rate of men. The unemployment rate of women in urban areas is higher than the rate for women in rural areas.
- The majority of employed women in Azerbaijan (82%) work in five sectors, which contribute 27% of economy's gross domestic product (GDP).
- Women are underrepresented as entrepreneurs and business owners.
- Gender differences in time allocation for unpaid work economically disadvantages women. Due to job scarcity and the lack of childcare facilities, women tend to be disproportionately involved in household, domestic and care work.
- The structure of pension system rates – based on years of service and earnings – creates some inequalities that disadvantage women. Women's average earnings are lower than men's, which leads to lower pension rates for women. Women's pension rates are also lower because they perform fewer years of service in paid labour, on average, due to their disproportionate burden of care work and family responsibilities.
- According to the most recent household budget survey, fewer than half of women-headed households are landowners.
- Prenatal sex selection (favouring boys) is a major challenge in Azerbaijan.
- Women face various constraints to accessing health services, including challenges related to the affordability of services, a lack of available medical staff, distances, the quality of services, and family situations. Healthcare facilities, such as clinics, are either insufficient or do not exist in rural areas.
- The lack of childcare facilities in rural areas obliges women to stay home and care for children. This contributes to women's exclusion from the formal job market.
- Women's decisions about employment are strongly influenced by cultural norms on the types of labour and places of work considered suitable or appropriate for men and women. Factors that impact women's educational and employment choices include working hours, the nature of responsibilities, the presence of male colleagues and proximity to male customers. Women tend to gravitate towards specialties related to education, culture, the arts and natural sciences.
- Women account for almost 100% of teachers at the level of pre-primary education. The proportion of male teachers at the primary education level is under 10%. Although men's representation as teachers is relatively higher at the levels of lower secondary and upper secondary education, it remains significantly lower than the representation of women.
- The higher the position in the education sector, the more men outnumber women.
- The number of shelters for survivors of domestic violence is limited. Most existing shelters are mainly operated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs).
- The World Bank's 2022 issue note, "Towards Green Growth", finds that there is strong mitigation potential in Azerbaijan's largest sectors beyond oil and gas – including mining, trade, construction and agriculture. There is considerable potential for job creation in less carbon-intensive sectors of the economy. This highlights the importance of the human capital aspects of green growth, and the need for a comprehensive analysis of this topic, including of skills development and impacts on labour markets, health and education. The issue note does not address gender equality or take gender into account in its recommendations for further analysis or the development of interventions.

- Climate-smart agriculture is of significant importance for Azerbaijan. The expectation is that this can increase productivity, expand access to key export markets, protect agriculture workers, and boost human capital development through new skills. However, the World Bank's issue note does not address the need to ensure equal access and opportunities for women and men in the sphere of climate-smart agriculture.
- There is a critical lack of data on women's needs and the constraints they face in Azerbaijan's renewable energy sector, as well as in the energy sector in general.
- Data on gender differences in transport use, purposes and perceptions of its use is not available in Azerbaijan. Access to public transport is an especially important issue of concern for women living in rural communities, which lack sufficient transport options. Rural women's lack of mobility hampers their access and use of available services. It also poses barriers to women participating in income generating activities, learning and development opportunities. For young girls in rural areas, the lack of public transport hampers their education.
- The information and communication technologies (ICT) sector has the potential to contribute to reducing environmental challenges and offer new market opportunities for green businesses. Gender analysis is needed to assess gender-specific needs that can be addressed by ICT innovations and intelligent transport systems (ITS), as well as research of their impact on mobility behaviour.
- The Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy (LT-LEDS) recommends collecting gender-disaggregated data by sub-sector to shed light on participation patterns. It also recommends gender analysis of women's positions along the waste management value chain, as well as identifying challenges and potential intervention opportunities for women, and/or looking at gender differences in attitudes and behaviour related to waste disposal. The expected results of the National Strategy for Improving Solid Waste Management in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2018–2022 highlights the sector's potential to boost employment, creating new jobs in the field of utilities, and increase efficiency. However, it does not address gender equality in employment.
- Men predominate in high-level positions in the ICT sector. More access to ICT is important for women's entrepreneurship development.
- With the transition to the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), Azerbaijan's agro-processing industry faces challenges, including a lack of quality training providers and their impact on women. Targeted programmes are needed to ensure that trainers and teachers in the country can support the agro-processing workforce to meet the need for new skills by the 4IR. As roles in the agro-processing industry shift toward more technical occupations dominated by men, active interventions are also needed to ensure that women workers benefit from Industry 4.0.



1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a core value of the European Union (EU) and a universally recognised human right. To address gender-related issues and inequality, the EU's Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 – the Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) – aims to accelerate progress on empowering women and girls, and safeguard gains made on gender equality during the 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action.³ Gender analysis including gender country profiles are a cornerstone of the GAP III's implementation and also support the preparation of Country Level Implementation Plans (CLIPs), which set priorities, key objectives and actions for the GAP III's implementation at the country level.

1.1. Context and justification

This Country Gender Profile (CGP) is part of the gender analysis which is a key element to guide EU support for the promotion of gender equality by the EU Delegation (EUD) to Azerbaijan and EU Member States. This profile reviews and analyses the current situation in Azerbaijan regarding the gender equality, and provides data and recommendations to integrate a gender perspective into policies, programmes and projects.

This Country Gender Profile of Azerbaijan, updated to reflect developments in 2022–2023, sheds light on gender equality issues and gaps in the country, their impact on society, social norms and stereotypes, and identifies where gender mainstreaming is missing and how to enhance it in state policies and programmes.

1.2. Goals and objectives

The goals of this document are to provide the EU Delegation to Azerbaijan with comprehensive information and recommendations to guide decision-making and the development of the updated Country Level Implementation Plan of the EU Gender Action Plan III 2021–2025.

To reach GAP III targets, EU Delegations must ensure that at least 85% of all new actions have gender equality as a significant (Gender Marker 1) or principal objective (Gender Marker 2) in each priority area/sector of the Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP).⁴

³ Gender Action Plan III, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2184

⁴ GAP III Brief n. 1 Gender country profile and gender sector analysis, February 2021.

The GAP III's key thematic areas of engagement are freedom from all forms of gender-based violence, promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, strengthening the economic and social rights and empowerment of women and girls, advancing equal participation and leadership, integrating the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, and harnessing the challenges and opportunities of the green transition and digital transformations.

This Country Gender Profiles objectives are to:

1. assess and document Azerbaijan's legal and political context related to gender equality;
2. identify and document key gender discrepancies, barriers and challenges;
3. present a comparative analysis of the current situation of women and men, in all their diversity, with regard to national policies, laws, social norms and practices, as well as institutional and sectoral practice;
4. collect available gender statistics and gender-disaggregated data in all areas covered by the profile;
5. provide an overview of positive or negative effects on gender equality;
6. map key actors operating on gender equality at the national, regional and international levels, such as national gender equality mechanisms, women's organisations, academia, the private sector and international cooperation partners; and
7. propose conclusions and recommendations for EU support for gender mainstreaming.

1.3. Methodology

In terms of its methodology, this Country Gender Profile is based on qualitative desk research, involving a review of:

- relevant academic literature and studies, official reports, and country reports by United Nations (UN) agencies, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, other international and national institutions, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs);
- relevant national policies, strategies and the legislative framework; and
- relevant statistical data, particularly from the AZSTAT, EUROSTAT and World Bank databases.

In terms of data limitations, it is important to note that no primary research was carried out to develop this Country Gender Profile. Moreover, there is limited data and gender-responsive analysis available on some sectors in Azerbaijan.

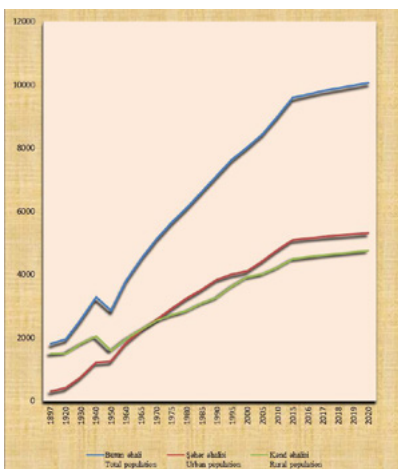
2. NATIONAL CONTEXT

This chapter describes Azerbaijan's national context, including gender aspects of the demographic situation, gender-related aspect of poverty, and the country's rankings on international gender indices and ratings.

2.1. Gender aspects of the demographic situation

Azerbaijan has a population of 10.42 million as of September 2023, according to the Worldometer calculations based on the latest UN data,⁵ roughly half of whom (50.1%) are women. In 2022, the State Statistical Committee estimated the size of the population as 10.175 million.⁶ The ethnic composition of the population includes Azerbaijanis (92%), with the remaining 8% comprised of ethnic minority groups such as the Lezgi (2%), Russians (1.5%), Armenians (15%), and others (Talysh, Avar, Tat and Georgian, among others). Most of the population (95%) are Muslim, and more residents live in urban areas (52.8%) than in rural areas (47.2%).

Figure 1. Population change as of 1 January 2021 (number of persons)



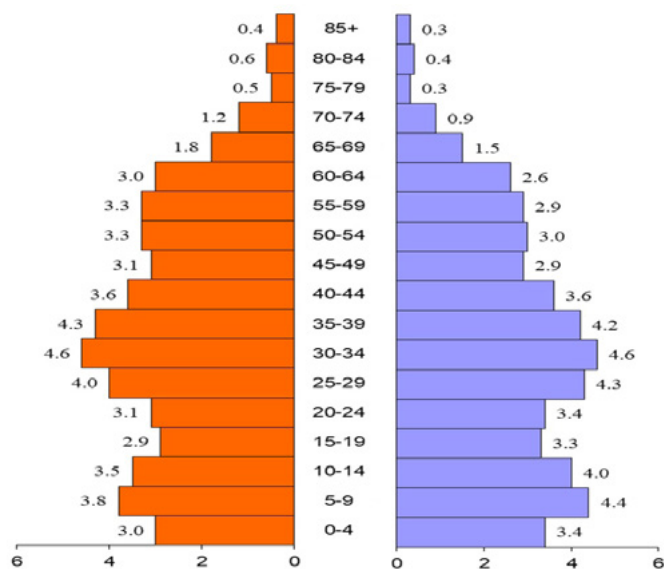
Source: AZSTAT.

⁵ <https://www.worldometers.info/demographics/azerbaijan-demographics/#tfr>; AZSTAT, 2021 <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/demography/>

⁶ AZSTAT, 2021, <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/demography/>

There are more young men in the 19–29-year-old age group than young women due to the high rate of boys born at the beginning of the 1990s. Ultrasound machines, which can detect the sex of a child, have been popularly used in Azerbaijan from the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 onwards. As their use has spread, the rate of sex-selective abortions has increased. However, a high rate of death among men who are over 20 years old leads to a high number of women in all other age groups. Sex ratio at birth (male births per female births) in Azerbaijan was 1.123 in 2019, according to the World Bank’s development indicators, compiled from officially recognised sources.⁷

Figure 2. Population of Azerbaijan by age group and urban/rural location as of 1 January 2022



Source: AZSTAT.

The fertility rate slightly increased in 2003 and rose significantly between 2003 and 2012, with the average number of children per woman reaching 2.1 in urban areas and 2.3 in rural areas. Since 2012, the fertility rate has decreased. In 2019, the average number of children per woman was 1.7 in urban areas and 2 in rural areas.

Child mortality rates have also decreased, while life expectancy has increased in recent years. The child mortality rate was 13 in 2019, compared to 30.5 in 2000.⁸ The life expectancy of women living in rural areas (78.9 years) is slightly higher than of women living in urban areas (78.5 years). Similarly, the life expectancy of men in rural areas (73.6 years) is slightly higher than of men living in urban centres (73.5 years). Overall, women in Azerbaijan live longer (78.4 years) than men (73.6 years), on average.

⁷ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.BRTH.MF?locations=AZ>

⁸ Child mortality among children under 5 years old, per 1,000 live births.

In general, men are more at risk of death due to diseases of the circulatory system (361.3 cases of death among women vs 378.4 among men),⁹ diseases of the digestive system (26.5 cases of death among women vs 33.9 among men) and diseases of the respiratory system (15.4 cases among women vs 17.5 among men). However, women face challenges related to reproductive health. The highest rate of abortion is higher in Azerbaijan than in neighbouring countries, including Turkey and Central Asian states.¹⁰ This is largely due to the lack of information on contraceptive methods, as well as selective abortions to control the gender of a future child. While the use of any method of contraception increased between 2006 and 2011 to 54.9%, the use of modern contraceptives remained low (13.9%) in 2011.¹¹ The number of marriages decreased between 2006 (9.4 marriages) and 2019 (6.4 marriages), while the number of divorces increased (1.3 cases in 2019, vs 0.7 in 2000).¹² In 2021, the number of marriages in Azerbaijan increased by 59.3% and the number of divorces increased by 17.5%, according to State Statistical Committee (SSC).

The average age at marriage has increased since the 1990s. In 2022, the average age of marriage for women was 24.1 years old, compared to 28.5 years old for men.

Educational attainment among the population reached 99.8% in 2009. Most men and women in Azerbaijan have completed at least their secondary education.

2.2. Gender-sensitive country poverty profile

Poverty refers to the economic situation of an individual who is, or social group who are, unable to meet minimum consumption needs for food, non-food items and services necessary for survival, as well as the maintenance of working capacity. Poverty is a relative concept and depends on the general standards of living in a particular society. The poverty indicator in Azerbaijan is defined as per capita consumption expenditure. Annually, the amount of the subsistence minimum is established by law for key social and demographic groups of the population. The subsistence minimum is determined based on average market prices for products, goods and services included in the consumer basket.

For 2023, the subsistence minimum is set at AZN 246 (equivalent to USD 144) overall, AZN261 (USD 153) for the working population, AZN 199 (USD 117) for retired individuals, and AZN 220 (USD 129) for children.¹³ As of the beginning of 2023, the level of poverty in Azerbaijan was 5.5%, according to the State Statistical Committee.

As discussed below, Azerbaijan is committed to integrating gender equality goals into national action plans and programmes to ensure that women benefit from initiatives to diversify and grow the economy.

⁹ Per 100,000 people.

¹⁰ UNFPA, *Azerbaijan Country Profile*, 2018, https://azerbaijan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_Azerbaijan_country_Profile_ENG.pdf

¹¹ UNFPA, *UNFPA Country Programme Evaluation Report (Period Covered 2016–2018)*, 2019.

¹² Per 1,000 people.

¹³ <https://president.az/az/articles/view/58494>

The Government has taken steps to integrate gender equality into the State Programme for Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development for 2008–2015, the State Programme on Socio-Economic Development of the Regions of Azerbaijan for 2009–2013, and “Azerbaijan 2020: Vision for the future”. Azerbaijan endorsed the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 and initiated actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including promoting gender equality and ending poverty.

Azerbaijan’s Voluntary National Review 2021¹⁴ of its progress on the SDGs covers a range of SDGs. These include SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The review also highlights challenges regarding the lack of gender-disaggregated data. It notes that:

“While improvements have certainly been made to the statistical framework used [...] as compared to that used for the 2017 and 2019 reviews, challenges remain in some areas of the statistical database. Thus, the available data has not been disaggregated by gender, age group, place of residence (rural/urban) and region/administrative district, which partially constrains the scope of analysis, assessment and findings.”

Another policy document on integration of SDGs into National Agenda is the National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2021–2025. Promising initiatives undertaken in this regard include:

- research conducted on the basic needs of groups of women and men living in vulnerable or isolated situations, including rural women, persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and the elderly; and
- measures to increase employment opportunities for rural women, women with disabilities, internally displaced and refugee women through vocational courses and small business development, alongside other measures. This initiative supports the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 8 and 10.

The State Statistical Committee has begun publishing gender-disaggregated data on some sectors, including health, agriculture, employment and education. However, gender-disaggregated data is still missing on poverty levels. A report on social protection and social inclusion in Azerbaijan reveals that groups who are more vulnerable to poverty include people over the age of 65, single parent households, and internally displaced persons.¹⁵ These groups also include a higher proportion of women.

¹⁴ Government of Azerbaijan, *Third Voluntary National Review*. 2021, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279452021_VNR_Report_Azerbaijan.pdf

¹⁵ European Commission. *Social Protection and Social Inclusion in Azerbaijan*, 2011.

2.3. Country ranking in international gender indexes and ratings

On the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) 2021, Azerbaijan ranks 91st among 191 countries and has a value of 0.974 on the HDI's Gender Development Index (GDI).¹⁶ The Gender Development Index, based on gender-disaggregated in the Human Development Index, is calculated based on the ratio of the female HDI to the male HDI. The Gender Development Index measures gender inequalities in achievement in three basic dimensions of human development. These are health (measured by female and male life expectancy at birth), education (measured by female and male expected years of schooling for children, and mean years for adults aged 25 years and older) and command over economic resources (measured by female and male estimated gross national product (GNI) per capita). The GDI in 2021 was calculated for 167 countries.

On the Gender Inequality Index 2021,¹⁷ Azerbaijan ranks 70th of 191 countries with a value of 0.294.¹⁸ This assesses the share of parliamentary seats held by women (SDG target 5.5) which was 18.2%, the percentage of the population with at least with some secondary education (SDG target 4.4) which was 93.6% for women and girls and 97.6% for men and boys, and labour force participation rates for women (60.4%) and men (67.3%).¹⁹ In terms of the maternal mortality rate, 26 women die from pregnancy or child birth-related causes for every 100,000 live births. The adolescent birth rate is 40 births per 1,000 women of between 15 and 19 years old.

On the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2023,²⁰ Azerbaijan ranks 97th of 146 countries, with a value of 0.692. This marks an improvement of four places on the ranking compared to 2022. Among countries in Eurasia and Central Asia, Azerbaijan ranks 8th of 10 countries.

In terms of the sub-indices of the Global Gender Gap Index,²¹ Azerbaijan ranks as follows:

- Economic participation and opportunity: 27th place with a value of 0.766 (marking an improvement of nine places compared to 2022).
- Educational attainment: 54th place with a value of 0.996 (marking an improvement of one place compared to 2022).

¹⁶ <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/documentation-and-downloads>

¹⁷ GII reflects gender-based disadvantage in three dimensions— reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market—for as many countries as data of reasonable quality allow. It shows the loss in potential human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in these dimensions. For more information, see: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>

¹⁸ <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/documentation-and-downloads>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2023/in-full/benchmarking-gender-gaps-2023/>

²¹ Ibid.

- Health and survival: 146th place with a value of 0.936 (marking a fall of two places compared to 2022).
- Political empowerment: 134th place with a value of 0.071 (making an improvement of one place compared to 2022).

The health and survival sub-index is characterised by the highest level of gender parity globally (96%) as well as the most clustered distribution of country value. However, Azerbaijan and a few other countries fall below the 95% mark. Azerbaijan's relatively low overall ranking on the health and survival sub-index is due to skewed sex ratios at birth. The greatest gender gap globally exists for the political empowerment sub-index, with very few countries (22.1%) having closed this gap. Azerbaijan is one of the three countries assessed by the Global Gender Gap Index with no women ministers, and remains *“one of the handful of countries with a male-only cabinet.”*²² Compared to other regions, the lowest gender parity in terms of political empowerment is apparent in Eurasia and Central Asia on the index.

Regional gender parity on the economic participation and opportunity sub-index has been steadily increasing. The Global Gender Gap report notes that, *“Overall, 68.8% of the gender gap has closed, which is a 0.5 percentage-point improvement since the last edition. Six out of 10 countries, led by Moldova, Belarus and Azerbaijan, have at least 70% parity on this sub-index.”*

According to Azerbaijan's State Statistical Committee, performance on the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) Index improved until 2015, before declining in recent years. This index measures women's and men's ability to actively participate in economic and political life, and to take part in decision-making.

Table 1. Azerbaijan's performance on the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) Index

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
0.389	0.414	0.414	0.450	0.514	0.576	0.581	0.593	0.597	0.548	0.487	0.409	0.427	0.428	0.430

Source: Estimates based on data from the State Statistical Committee. See: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/>

²² Ibid.

3. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Azerbaijan supports gender equality and is committed to related international norms. Recent years are marked by a shift from “imbalanced perceptions” of gender roles to a new understanding of them as part of a broader human rights discourse. Both the Government (through legislation, reforms and its readiness to sustain its policy) and civil society support gender equality in the country.

3.1. International and regional commitments on gender equality and women’s empowerment

Azerbaijan is party to a number of international conventions that aim to promote gender equality. In 1995, Azerbaijan became party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and signed CEDAW’s Optional Protocol in 2000. On 16 June 2022, the CEDAW Committee considered Azerbaijan’s sixth periodic report at its 1885th and 1886th meetings. In addition to welcoming progress made, the CEDAW Committee noted key areas of concern and provided recommendations. These include:²³

- **Legislative framework:** The CEDAW Committee raises concerns about gender-neutral policies and programmes. It notes that neither Azerbaijan’s Constitution, nor the Law on Gender Equality, cover both direct and indirect discrimination against women in the private and public spheres.
- **Access to justice:** The Committee highlights persistent barriers to justice for women and girls, including limited knowledge of their rights and the remedies available to claim them, the limited capacity of the judiciary and law enforcement officials to apply the Convention, and persistent gender stereotypes among the judiciary.

²³ https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CEDAW%2FC%2FAZE%2FCO%2F6&Lang=en

- **Women, peace and security:** The Committee raises concerns about the status of internally displaced women and girls, as well the fact that the Action Plan on the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 has not yet been adopted. Women are not fully engaged in post-conflict restoration processes, and there is insufficient involvement of international organisations in post-conflict reconstruction.
- **Gender stereotypes and harmful practices:** Despite the adoption of an Action Plan on the Prevention of Prenatal Sex Selection for 2020–2025, the Committee notes that the practice of sex-selective abortion remains widespread. Patriarchal attitudes and discriminatory stereotypes about the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society remain persistent. Moreover, there is no comprehensive strategy to address discriminatory gender stereotypes.
- **Gender-based violence:** In this regard, the Committee raises concerns about the legal framework and law enforcement bodies. It highlights the **absence of criminal law provisions specifically criminalising all forms of gender-based violence**, in particular psychological violence, as well as the inadequate protection from gender-based violence of women and girls who face intersecting forms of discrimination. It notes the **limited and weak enforcement of protection orders**, despite the existing provisions of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence. The Committee also highlights the absence of expulsion orders, the **lack of victim support services, and barriers to women's and girls' access to justice** in cases of gender-based violence, including re-victimisation during criminal proceedings.
- **Education:** Concerns include persistent gender stereotypes in the education system and the absence of age-appropriate sexuality education. The Committee also notes the challenges that girls face to accessing schools in rural and remote areas, the lack of adequate school infrastructure, and the absence of human rights and peace-related education in school curricula.
- **Employment:** Concerns regard the lack of opportunities for balancing professional and family life, as well as women's concentration in the informal economy and in low-paid jobs, often in exploitative conditions and without access to labour and social protection. Moreover, the Code of Administrative Offences does not establish liability for sexual harassment in the workplace.
- **Economic and social benefits:** The Committee highlights a lack of measures to adopt a gender-responsive minimum social protection floor, in accordance with the standards set by the International Labour Organization (ILO). It also notes the lack of coordination and monitoring of social protection programmes, particularly with regard to women's social and economic empowerment.

Azerbaijan has signed the ILO's Convention on Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women Workers – the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) – the revised Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), the Underground Work (Women) Convention, 1935 (No. 45), the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). It is also party to the UN Convention on the Nationality of Married Women.

The Government of Azerbaijan has not yet signed or ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention). The EU and the Council of Europe are the leading international organisations lobbying for the Istanbul Convention in Azerbaijan. Between 2020 and 2023, the Council implemented the project, “Raising awareness of the Istanbul Convention and other gender equality standards in Azerbaijan”. This joint initiative under the Partnership for Good Governance II (PGG II) Programme raised awareness of the Istanbul Convention and other gender equality standards in Azerbaijan, with a view to strengthening domestic legislation and policies and enabling their alignment with European standards.

An important report produced in the framework of the project is the “Gap analysis of the legislative and policy framework in the field of violence against women and domestic violence in Azerbaijan in line with the Council of Europe and other international standards”.²⁴ It presents a substantive analysis of Azerbaijan’s domestic legislative framework and policies with regard to international standards on combatting violence against women and domestic violence. It highlights the **lack of criminalisation of all acts of physical violence against another person**. Specifically the gap analysis notes that:

- The **domestic law of Azerbaijan does not contain domestic violence as a specific offence**. Instead, it establishes a range of criminal and administrative offences which may be used to prosecute acts of physical violence. The analysis indicates that such a procedure “places an additional burden and pressure upon the victim of an administrative offence and lessens the chances of effective investigation and/or prosecution. This is particularly so in any culture that promotes reconciliation between the parties and prioritisation of the family unit above the protection of victims from harm.”
- Regarding **consent-based legislation**, the analysis finds that “Azerbaijani domestic law does not clearly criminalise all non-consensual acts of vaginal, anal, oral penetration of a sexual nature with any bodily part or object. Neither does it explicitly criminalise all other non-consensual acts of a sexual nature or causing another person to engage in non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a third person. There is no mention of consent within the legislation and indeed on current wording, sexual intercourse without consent would not amount to a crime unless it could be established that even a non-consensual act was accompanied by violence, threat of violence or the ‘helpless condition’ of the victim.”
- **Mechanisms to guarantee the safety of victims and children during visits with the non-custodial parent are very limited**, and “there is no official mechanism to supervise such visits.”²⁵ The analysis makes reference to the 2017 Council of Europe report, “Barriers, remedies and good practices for women’s access to justice in Azerbaijan” which indicates that **women survivors of domestic violence face numerous obstacles in accessing support and protection mechanisms**.

²⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/gap-analysis-of-the-legislative-and-policy-framework-in-the-field-of-v/1680a81636>

²⁵ Ibid.

The 2017 report also finds that the number of support and referral centres is very limited. Most are run by NGOs reliant on donor funding.²⁶

- Regarding the **dissolution of forced marriages** the gap analysis indicates that this issue is not properly resolved in Azerbaijani legislation, since there is no provision in the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence, in the Civil Code or in the Civil Procedure Code that facilitates a quick or “express” procedure to expedite the annulment of a forced marriage. It also notes that in these cases, **compulsory free legal assistance for the survivor, or financial aid for legal assistance, is not established**. An additional concern is not having the necessary financial resources to face the legal procedure. The Council of Europe’s 2017 report on access to justice also indicates that, although criminal responsibility for forced or early marriages is defined in the Criminal Code, this provision is not applied in practice. Ten years after the inclusion of this provision into the Criminal Code, Article 176 in 2011, the first criminal investigation was initiated under this Article by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2021.
- In terms of **free legal aid**, the gap analysis finds that *“free legal aid is not easily available in practice due to the lack of specific rules to regulate its provision.”* Although the provision of legal aid for survivors of violence against women and domestic violence is enshrined in law, **in practice, legal aid is usually provided voluntarily by lawyers without any regulation of its provision**. The analysis further notes that, *“According to the Bar Association, as the Law on Free Legal Aid has not been adopted, members of the Bar Association can provide legal assistance at the expense of the state only where cases are specified by Article 20 of the Law on Lawyers and Advocacy. In practice this means that many victims of violence against women and domestic violence are not able to avail themselves of these provisions.”*
- Regarding **long-term protection orders that include civil measures**, the analysis indicates that the *“Azerbaijani State Tax Law imposes a state tax on civil cases, and long-term protection orders are not exempt from this tax. This makes legal procedures even more expensive and can prevent many women from applying for this type of protection order, because they might not have the financial resources to do so.”*

3.2. National legal framework on gender equality and women’s empowerment

The **Constitution** of the Republic of Azerbaijan guarantees equality of rights and freedoms to everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, language, sex, origin, property status, position, beliefs, or membership of political parties, trade unions and other public associations. The constitutional and legal status of women is further specified by the **Law “On Guarantees of Gender (Men and Women) Equality”**, adopted on 10 October 2006. The law’s purpose is to ensure gender equality by eliminating all forms of discrimination based on gender, and by creating equal opportunities for men and women in political, economic, social, cultural and other spheres of public life.

²⁶ <https://rm.coe.int/azerbaijan-barriers-remedies-and-good-practices/168075fd51>

Other laws also guarantee women's political, economic and social rights, such as the Election Code, the Labour Code, and the Family and Marriage Code. The **Labour Code** of 1 February 1999 stipulates that “discrimination among employees is not permitted on the basis of gender or other factors unrelated to the aptitude for work, professional skills and job performance of the employees, or in order to establish privileges and benefits or directly or indirectly limit rights on the basis of these factors.” The Employment Act of 2 July 2001 reaffirms this commitment in Article 6, indicating that one of the main aims of the state employment policy is to ensure that all citizens have equal opportunities to exercise the right to work and to freely choose their employment.

The **Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence** was approved by parliament and officially endorsed by the President in October 2010.²⁷ The law describes preventive actions (social, legal, and informative) that need to be taken to protect survivors of domestic violence. As discussed above, however, the law does not define domestic violence as a specific offence. Although certain provisions of the law may be used to prosecute physical, sexual and psychological violence within the context of domestic violence, there is little evidence that the current legislative framework captures the course of conduct, multiple forms or patterns of power of control by which offences of domestic violence are so often characterised.

In 2011, Azerbaijan's parliament made amendments to the “**Family Code**” and established the same minimum age for marriage (18 years old) for both women and men. Relevant changes have also been made in the Criminal Code to reflect the provisions of this law and introduce sanctions for violations.

Since 2006, low-income families, including women-headed households, are entitled to access targeted social assistance programmes. The **law “On the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings”** was adopted in 2005. A National Plan of Action for 2020–2024, approved by presidential decree,²⁸ contains several measures concerning survivors of human trafficking, which contributes to fulfilling obligations under CEDAW. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) provided a platform for mid-term review of the implementation of the fourth **National Action Plan on Combatting Trafficking in Persons 2020–2024**. Within the framework of the project, “Action on Combatting Human Trafficking”, implemented by IOM with financial support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), IOM organised a roundtable on 4 October 2022 to discuss the national action plan's implementation. This drew together representatives of state institutions, donors and local civil society organisations (CSOs) working to combat human trafficking. In 2020–2021, 311 cases of human trafficking were recorded in Azerbaijan, as were eight cases of forced labour and 83 crimes related to illegal actions with documents for the purposes of human trafficking. Of the 189 identified victims of human trafficking (184 female and five male, including two children), 188 were citizens of Azerbaijan, 179 of the victims were sexually exploited, and 10 were subjected to labour exploitation.²⁹

²⁷ UNFPA, *Combatting Gender Based Violence in the South Caucasus Project/Azerbaijan: United Nations Population Fund Project Evaluation Report*, 2011.

²⁸ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/45470>

²⁹ According to the Anti-Trafficking Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

A new **Law on Mediation** entered into force on 1 July 2021. Article 3.2 of this law states that, before going to court on issues related to family law, it is mandatory for the parties to participate at least in one mediation session. However, the Council of Europe's gap analysis recommends reviewing this article in terms of the mandatory nature of the first mediation session in cases of violence against women and domestic violence.³⁰

3.3. National gender policies

As discussed above, the National Action Plan for Combatting Domestic Violence for 2020–2023 was approved by presidential decree on 27 November 2020, in accordance with the Concluding Observations of the CEDAW Committee in the same year. The National Action Plan's main goal is to prevent domestic violence in Azerbaijan in line with international standards on prevention measures, strengthen families, provide comprehensive assistance for the fight against domestic violence, implement measures enshrined in normative legal acts and increase their efficiency.³¹ In this context, the National Action Plan can be regarded as a major development. At the request of the Azerbaijani authorities, the Council of Europe will further support the implementation of this document under its present Action Plan. This work will include introducing effective prevention and protection standards and mechanisms to address violence against women and domestic violence.³²

The Government has also approved a 10-year Children Strategy and a 5-year Action Plan on its implementation, as discussed below. On 3 March 2020, the Government approved an Action Plan on the Prevention of Gender-based Sex Selection for 2020–2025. This includes a series of important measures to be implemented to promote the value of girls³³ in light of persistent son preference, and to eliminate the gender stereotypes that are at the root of this preference.³⁴ The action plan aims to strengthen awareness raising efforts to prevent early marriages, strengthen accountability measures for girls in rural areas, and achieve practical implementation.³⁵ Measures to be implemented include *“ensuring accessible and reliable data on new-borns’ sex ratio and improving relevant legislative framework, enhancing support measures for women and girls to eliminate gender-based discrimination and inequality, strengthening advocacy and awareness-raising efforts to dismantle gender stereotypes as well as reinforcing inter-organizational cooperation to achieve the objectives set forth in the plan.”*³⁶

³⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/gap-analysis-of-the-legislative-and-policy-framework-in-the-field-of-v/1680a81636>

³¹ <https://static.president.az/media/W1siZiIsIjIwMjAvMTEvMjcvNmM3YmI0ajUzMF9NX0xMX0ZfQUxwVWVlFVF9QTEFOSS5wZGYiXV0?sha=5bfc481fe85dbbe7>

³² <https://rm.coe.int/action-plan-azerbaijan-2022-2025-eng/1680a59aa3>

³³ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/65/MS%20Inputs%20Review%20Theme/Azerbaijan.pdf>

³⁴ https://azertag.az/xeber/Usaqlarin_dogulanadek_cins_sechiminin_qarsisinin_alinmasina_dair_2020_2025_ci_ill_uchun_Tedbirler_Plani_tesdiq_edilib-1430655

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ <https://azerbaijan.unfpa.org/en/news/azerbaijan-adopts-action-plan-combat-gender-biased-sex-selection>

3.4. Gender dimensions of national development strategies

On 2 February 2021, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, signed a decree approving “Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development”. Under this framework, Azerbaijan will pursue five national priorities in the coming years:

1. steadily growing a competitive economy;
2. a society based on dynamic, inclusive and social justice;
3. competitive human capital and space for modern innovations;
4. the great return to the liberated territories; and
5. a clean environment and green growth.

These national priorities are of particular relevance to the fulfilment of Azerbaijan’s commitments to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Cabinet of Ministers is charged with preparing a draft Socio-economic Development Strategy for 2021–2025, and submitting it for presidential approval.³⁷ The second priority of the new strategy addresses the creation of greater economic opportunities, achieving effective employment and decent work for all population groups, and improving women’s access to economic opportunities in particular.

On 6 December 2016, President Ilham Aliyev signed a decree launching the Strategic Roadmaps on the National Economy Perspective and Main Sectors of the Economy (Strategic Roadmaps). The National Plan is comprised of 12 roadmaps: the Strategic Roadmap on the National Economy Perspective and 11 sectoral roadmaps.³⁸ The Strategic Roadmaps outline the government’s strategy for inclusive economic development for 2016–2020 (short-term) and proposed targets until 2025 (long-term) and beyond. The long-term objective of the Strategic Roadmap is to make the economy more diversified and advance economic development through new drivers of non-oil growth. The 11 sectoral roadmaps are:

1. Strategic Roadmap on the Oil and Gas Industry, including Chemical Products;
2. Strategic Roadmap on the Production and Processing of Agricultural Products;
3. Strategic Roadmap on the Production of Consumer Goods in Small and Medium Enterprises;
4. Strategic Roadmap on the Development of Heavy Industry and Machine-Building;
5. Strategic Roadmap on the Development of a Specialised Tourism Industry;
6. Strategic Roadmap on the Development of Logistics and Trade;
7. Strategic Roadmap on the Development of Affordable Housing;
8. Strategic Roadmap on Vocational Education and Training;
9. Strategic Roadmap on the Development of Financial Services;

³⁷ <https://president.az/articles/50474>

³⁸ https://mida.gov.az/documents/%C4%B0qtisadiyyat_Yol_%20xeritesi.pdf

10. Strategic Roadmap on the Development of Telecommunications and Information Technologies; and
11. Strategic Roadmap on the Development of Communal Services (Electricity and Heat Energy, Water and Gas).

These road maps are in line with the SDGs. However, only two of the 11 road maps, namely the Strategic Roadmap for Manufacturing and Processing of Agricultural Products and the Strategic Roadmap on the Production of Consumer Goods in Small and Medium Enterprises contain references to women and girls.³⁹ The latter contains activities for the development of women's entrepreneurship. It also proposes to (i) increase access to credit, taxation services and other benefits for women entrepreneurs, especially rural women, (ii) enhance women's access to information, (iii) create women's business incubators, and (iv) establish associations and professional organisations of women entrepreneurs. However, it does not allocate a specific budget to these activities. Instead, it states that these activities will be integrated into other projects listed in the roadmap. The Strategic Road Map on National Economy Perspective does not describe activities for addressing gender inequities in the civil service, which is one of the key sectors where women are underrepresented.

Other important development programmes include the State Programme for Socio-Economic Development of the Regions for 2019–2023.⁴⁰ Its main goal is to ensure the sustainable and balanced development of the country's regions, as well as to create a favourable environment based on the principles of sustainable development, social welfare that meets high standards, the efficient use of natural resources and environmental protection. The programme is not gender-sensitive, although some objectives and activities focus on increasing the roles of youth and women in regional development. Activities include developing associations of women entrepreneurs, continuing measures to increase women's employment and small businesses development, and strengthening vocational training. They also seek to increase financial literacy and information technology (IT) skills, support the sale and exhibition of women's handicrafts and consumer goods, and encourage the active participation of socially vulnerable groups in rural areas – especially of low-income families, women, youth and people with disabilities, taking into account potential opportunities.

3.4.1. State Programme on the Great Return to the Liberated Territories of Azerbaijan

This State Programme⁴¹ outlines reconstruction initiatives in the territories, goals and corresponding target indicators, priority directions, issues associated with the returnee population, expected results, risk management, funding sources and measures to be implemented. The programme's development took into account progressive international experience, strategic development trends, the socio-economic potential of the territories, and challenges in the world economy.

³⁹ Asian Development Bank, *Azerbaijan Country Gender Assessment*, 2019.

⁴⁰ <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/41320>

⁴¹ <https://president.az/az/articles/view/57884>

The State Programme has four target indicators: infrastructure, the reconstruction of the economy, social development, and balanced environmental development.

Although the State Programme covers several aspects related to returnees and makes reference to Azerbaijan 2030, direct references to gender equality are not included in the programme's 15 goals and its target indicators. References to gender equality are limited to the activity level in the programme's Action Plan. Although these references are few in number, activities that reference gender are framed as standalones activities. This is promising, but falls short of integrating gender within other relevant activities. Of the two activities in the Action Plan that mention gender, one reference is relatively specific while the other is generic:

- *“supporting the involvement of youth, women and persons with disabilities in entrepreneurial activities”* under action direction 5.3 on encouraging entrepreneurial activity that increases employment; and
- *“establishing community resource centres and family centres.”*

Among the State Programme's targets, the target on social development also includes a generic reference to population groups in vulnerable situations, specifically on *“Raising the standard of living of the population, including strengthening the social protection of vulnerable population groups.”*

Activities that are relevant for sustainability – such as action direction 5.2 which addresses the *“creation of [a] mechanism for entrepreneurial activity (market-oriented financing, consulting, logistics, agro service infrastructure, etc.)”* – do not address gender inequality and differences in women's and men's access to and control over resources, including opportunities for development.

3.4.2. Strategy on Children

The Strategy on Children for 2020–2030 was approved by the Order of the President on 2 July 2020, and on 27 November 2020, the Action Plan for its for 2020–2025⁴² was approved. Some of the activities in the Action Plan address gender-related issues. These include:

- The development of a “Healthy and Safe Pregnancy” mobile application for mothers-to-be and pregnant women to disseminate important information about pregnancy, including recommendations for antenatal and postnatal care.
- Comprehensive research to inform efforts to reduce, prevent and justify the risk of child mortality and home births.
- Strengthening the monitoring of compliance with labour legislation by employers regarding working mothers, in order to facilitate breastfeeding for children.
- The preparation of proposals for the establishment of family counselling centres for the organisation of social and psychological work within the family.

⁴² <https://e-qanun.az/framework/46359>

- Strengthening measures and organising awareness raising to prevent early marriage and marriage between relatives.

Other activities do not consider gender. These include activities for improving and promoting vocational education services at educational institutions, and supplying central libraries and library funds with children's literature. They also include activities on the effective organisation of children's free time, improved activities at recreation sites for children, as well as at sports and cultural centres. Other activities that are not gender-sensitive include measures to improve teaching on information and communication technologies, creating age-appropriate innovative habits in children, increasing children's technical creative potential and algorithmic thinking skills, coding, robotics and cyber sports, and conducting contests, Olympiads and other motivational events. If gender is not integrated during the implementation phase, such activities may be based on gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles, given that the Action Plan does not take into account existing gender norms that shape society from childhood onwards.

3.4.3. Youth Strategy

The Development Strategy of Azerbaijan Youth for 2015–2025,⁴³ approved by presidential decree, aims to ensure the intellectual, physical and spiritual development of youth, as well as their participation in socio-economic, public/political and cultural life.⁴⁴ Azerbaijan's main operational document related to youth is the State Programme on the Youth of Azerbaijan for 2017–2021,⁴⁵ approved by the Order of the President on 15 September 2017.

The State Programme's goals are to achieve the efficient implementation of youth policy, to create conditions for the active participation of young people in all areas of society, and support their creative and innovative potential. It also aims to protect their health, to increase attention towards youth education and employment, to use modern information and communication technologies effectively, and to develop the volunteer movement in the country.⁴⁶

One of the State Programme's activities refers to gender equality, while another refers to early marriages. These are:

- *“raising the level of awareness of young people about human rights and gender equality, as well as the fight against human trafficking and violence”;* and
- *“strengthening preventive education among young people about family values and against early marriages.”*

⁴³ <https://president.az/az/articles/view/14132>

⁴⁴ https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/114007071/Azerbaijan_YW_Ch1_Nov2021.pdf/7b29ed2f-99e3-b7f1-a3ba-915cf8d2f5ed#:~:text=The%20Action%20Plan%20of%20the,need%20of%20special%20care%3B%203.

⁴⁵ <https://e-qanun.az/framework/36474>

⁴⁶ <https://president.az/az/articles/view/25237>

Two areas of the State Programme's Action Plan refer to gender-related issues – namely *“protecting the health of young people and supporting young people who need special care”* and *“improving the knowledge and behaviour of young people about reproductive health and family planning.”*

Other gender-related measures are listed under the activity on *“raising the level of awareness of young people about human rights and gender equality”*. These include:

- raising youth awareness about human rights and gender equality;
- strengthening youth awareness of human trafficking and violence;
- strengthening the fight against early marriage among young people; and
- providing psychological support to young families and raising awareness about family values.

Notably, gender equality is included at the “duty level” of the Youth Programme and some measures are included in the Action Plan. However, gender-sensitivity focuses only on a few areas, such as violence, early marriage, reproductive health and family planning. These areas are of serious concern and the integration of gender within them is important. However, gender in state programmes is regarded as a standalone subject and is not integrated across other areas in state programmes and their action plans. For example, the measures envisaged under the following activity lines in the Action Plan of the Youth Programme fall short of integrating gender, despite the importance ensuring equal opportunities in these areas:

- supporting youth employment and entrepreneurship;
- supporting the activities of youth organisations and the participation of youth in public life;
- youth and information technologies; and
- supporting the intellectual activity of young people and encouraging science.

3.5. Institutional framework/machinery

In 1996, the Government established the State Committee on Women's Issues (SCWI). Its purpose was to protect women's rights and empower women. In February 2006, the body was transformed into the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs (SCFWCA). The State Committee is the central executive body responsible for implementing and regulating state policy on family, women's and children's issues.⁴⁷ Its work is guided by the Constitution, national laws, the decrees and orders of the President, the decisions and orders of the Cabinet of Ministers and international treaties to which Azerbaijan is committed.

Gender focal points (GFPs) within all ministries and executive committees (ExComs) represent another important channel through which gender mainstreaming is encouraged.

⁴⁷ <http://scfwca.gov.az/en/page/komitenin-tarixi>

Based on Decision No. 176 of the Cabinet of Ministers, gender focal points began to be appointed in 2000, in line with the National Plan of Action on Women's Issues for 2000–2005. Gender focal points are appointed from among the staff members of the ministries and committees, and are responsible for the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies within their respective institutions.

In 2015, the heads of the executive power authorities in all districts signed decrees to establish monitoring groups for gender-based violence and violence against children. These comprise representatives of relevant executive authorities in the districts.⁴⁸ As a reliable monitoring mechanism for gender-based violence and violence against children, local monitoring groups perform coordination functions in terms of assessing the situation, checking the effectiveness of measures undertaken, identifying vulnerable families and providing them with relevant support, studying and analysing the causes of violence, ensuring the protection of victims and providing them with relevant assistance. Each executive committee is headed by a governor directly appointed by the President, alongside between one and four deputies. The first deputy is traditionally responsible for the economy, while the second deputy, who tends to be responsible for “soft issues” (such as health and social issues), is always a woman. This is due to a presidential decree in 2013, which requires that the head of the Department for Public and Humanitarian Affairs of each district administration must be a woman. This official also automatically holds the position of gender focal point in the executive committee.

In June 2020, the State Social Services Agency was established under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. It includes a Prevention of Domestic Violence Unit.

In 2022, following a recommendation by the State Committee for Family, Women and Child Affairs, gender commissions were established in 30 municipalities. These are tasked with conducting “systematic work” on gender issues in municipalities, and coordinating activities with the State Committee.

Another institution with jurisdiction over gender equality issues is the Commissioner for Human Rights (or Ombudsperson), who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of human rights provisions. Women who suffer rights violations may bring complaints to the Ombudsperson, who can receive and investigate complaints lodged by individuals and legal entities.⁴⁹ The Ombudsperson also drafts recommendations for legislation and state programmes related to leadership, employment opportunities and gender-based violence, in addition to carrying out monitoring, and organising awareness raising and advocacy events.

⁴⁸ Sixth periodic report submitted by Azerbaijan under article 18 of the Convention, 2019.

⁴⁹ Asian Development Bank, *Azerbaijan Country Gender Assessment*, 2019.

3.6. Accountability framework of gender policies and national machinery

Azerbaijan regularly develops national reports on its international obligations. In 2019, the country prepared its sixth periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The report was elaborated by the Working Group established through Decree No. 504 of the President in 2018, “On Increasing the Effectiveness of Cooperation with the UN Human Rights Mechanisms on the basis of data provided by relevant ministries and committees.” Periodic reports on the implementation of CEDAW and the CEDAW Committee’s Concluding Observations are usually discussed within local communities among representatives of NGOs and women’s groups at the municipal level, as well as being sent to public agencies. The State Committee for Family, Women and Children Issues also prepares and publishes annual reports on relevant activities.⁵⁰

3.7. Financing for gender equality: Gender-responsive budgeting

Despite a range of measures and programmes undertaken to advance gender equality in Azerbaijan, gaps remain between legislation and implementation. Gender mainstreaming is not being regularly or fully aligned with projects and programmes carried out in the country. There are no specific budget resources allocated to achieve gender equality-related goals.

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is an approach that can assist in bridging the gap between commitments to gender equality outcomes and the real implementation of the measures required on a multi-year basis.⁵¹

The Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) 2019 Country Gender Assessment of Azerbaijan identifies gender-responsive budgeting as a key entry point for more effective gender mainstreaming in government operations. The organisation’s efforts in this regard include preparing a discussion paper on the “gender-responsiveness of the country’s public financial management system”,⁵² developing a handbook on gender-responsive budgeting for the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population, and planning a series of capacity building events for relevant ministries.

Supporting gender-responsive budgeting in key ministries is one of the priority areas of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Azerbaijan 2021–2025.⁵³

⁵⁰ <http://scfwca.gov.az/page/illik-hesabatlar>

⁵¹ Asian Development Bank, *Azerbaijan Country Gender Assessment*, 2019.

⁵² https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-documents/51355/51355-001-tacr-en_0.pdf

⁵³ https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/Azerbaijan-UNSDCF-2021-2025_1.pdf

3.8. Non-state actors working for gender equality and women's empowerment

An assessment conducted by UNDP in 2016 finds that only 6.7% of registered NGOs work on women's issues, and most are based in Baku. The assessment also notes that women in regional centres and villages rarely engage in community activities and other types of social activism.⁵⁴ In 2021, of the 3,582 NGOs operating in Azerbaijan, 424 had women chairpersons.

There are only 10 operational shelters⁵⁵ run by civil society groups/NGOs in Azerbaijan, some of which also serve as shelters for victims of trafficking. In 2015, the CEDAW Committee recommended improving the implementation of Azerbaijan's 2014 Law on Public Participation, which stipulates the participation of civil society organisations in public councils to monitor the work of central and local state administrations. The Public Committee under the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs, established in 2017, is regarded as *"an important step in boosting the participation of women and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) in law formulation, implementation, and monitoring."*⁵⁶

⁵⁴ UNDP, *Promoting Rural Women Participation in the Economic and Social Life: Project Document of the Technical Assistance Project*, 2016.

⁵⁵ According to other sources there are only six shelters.

⁵⁶ Asian Development Bank, *Azerbaijan Country Gender Assessment*, 2019.



4. GENDER ANALYSIS BY SECTORS

This chapter presents gender analysis by sector, highlighting differences in women's and men's access to resources and power, their needs, and the opportunities and constraints they face. These sectors follow the key priority areas outlined by the EU Gender Action Plan III.

4.1. Women in decision-making and leadership

Women's representation in government agencies and decision-making is low. Since 1919, women have had equal rights to vote in political elections. However, only one of the heads of 39 state ministries and is a woman – the head of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children. Among 121 Members of Parliament, 22 are women (18.2%).⁵⁷

Within parliament, the Committee for Family, Women's and Children's Affairs is the legislative body that develops draft laws related to women's rights and gender equality, in addition to providing expert opinions on draft laws. At the present, eight of the committee's 11 members are women, including the chair and deputy chair.

The table below demonstrates that women's representation in Azerbaijan's parliament was extremely low in 1990 (4.3%), before rising and remaining relatively unchanging until 2010 (11% on average). Women came to account for 16% of parliamentarians after elections in 2010, 16.8% in 2015 and 18.2% after the last parliamentary elections in 2020.

⁵⁷ AZSTAT, 2020, <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

Table 2. Number of parliamentarians by gender, 1990–2023

Years	Number of persons		Gender distribution (%)	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
1990	15	335	4.3	95.7
1995	15	109	12.1	87.9
2000	13	109	10.7	89.3
2005 ⁽¹⁾	14	111	11.2	88.8
2010 ⁽¹⁾	20	105	16.0	84.0
2015 ⁽¹⁾	21	104	16.8	83.2
2020 ⁽¹⁾	22	99	18.2	81.8
2021 ⁽²⁾	22	98	18.3	81.7
2022 ⁽²⁾	22	97	18.5	81.5
2023 ⁽²⁾	22	96	18.6	81.4

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

Notes: (1) Data was indicated for the state of 6 November 2005, for the state of 7 November 2010, for the state of 1 November 2015, and for the state of 9 February 2020. (2) Data was indicated for the state of 1 January.

More men hold civil servant positions than women in Azerbaijan. The overall share of women in civil service management positions is low (9.8%). Gender-related projects and awareness raising campaigns have contributed to women's increased representation at the municipal level, which rose from 4% in 1999 to 39% in 2019. Eight women are deputy ministers, two are chairpersons of state committees, and 72 are deputy heads of local executive authorities (compared to 178 men).

Among employees in bodies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 3,938 are women (10%) and 72 hold management positions. In 2020, the Ministry of Internal Affairs had 2,658 staff members, compared to 3,938 in 2021 – reflecting an increase of 48.2%.

Fewer women work in the Ministry of Justice, both in general justice positions and in leadership positions, than men. Together with 21 women special notaries (of 144 special notaries in total), the total number of women in judicial bodies is 1,363, of whom 108 are managers.

Women comprise 31.23% of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' employees, 8.3% of whom hold managerial positions. Once again, women's representation in the institution is lower than the representation of men.

Table 3. Number of women in senior government positions, 2016–2021

Position	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Vice-president	-	1	1	1	1	1
Minister ⁽¹⁾	1	1	1	1	1	1
Deputy Minister	3	3	6	8	8	9
Chair of State Committee ⁽²⁾	2	2	2	2	2	2
Deputy of Chair of State Committee	2	3	3	3	3	3
Head of Local Executive Authority ⁽³⁾	1	1	1	1	1	2
Deputy Head of Local Executive Authority	79	77	79	76	72	72
Ombudsperson ⁽⁴⁾	2	2	2	2	2	2

Source: State Committee on Family, Women and Children, 2021 (on guarantees of gender (men and women) equality).

Notes: (1) Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. (2) The State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. (3) Head of the local Executive Authority of Absheron region. (4) Ombudsperson of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

4.2. Gender and economic and social rights

As discussed above, equal rights for women and men are enshrined in Azerbaijan's Constitution of 1995 (Article 25). They also have equal right to engage in free enterprise or other types of economic activities not prohibited by law, alone or jointly with others, through the free use of their abilities and property in the manner prescribed by law (Article 59). Equality in terms of economic and social rights are a feature of several international conventions that Azerbaijan has committed to. The Law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights for Women and Men of 2006 establishes the legal foundation for gender equality and aims *"to guarantee the equal rights status for women and men in the political, economic, social, cultural and other spheres, to ensure equal opportunities in enjoyment of the above listed rights and to prevent gender-based discrimination."*⁵⁸ This law bans all forms of gender discrimination. It also defines women's equal rights in relation to property, education, state services and the labour market, as well as their equal rights as entrepreneurs and consumers.

Every person having attained the legally established age has the right to social insurance in case of illness, disability, unemployment and in other cases established by law (Article 38 of the Constitution).⁵⁹ The State guarantees women and men equal opportunities to exercise their right to social insurance and to receiving targeted social assistance and other social benefits, through Article 15.2 of the Law on Guarantees of Gender (Men and Women) Equality of 2006.

⁵⁸ <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=14452>

⁵⁹ UNDP, *Social and Economic rights of women in Azerbaijan*, 2012, https://www.az.undp.org/content/azerbaijan/en/home/library/womens_empowerment/gender_publications2.html

Employers are obliged to guarantee equality for men and women in labour activities. As per Article 16 of the Labour Code of 1999, concessions, privileges and additional guarantees in labour relations are not considered discrimination.

Article 66 of the Labour Code states that pregnant women on maternity leave until their child is 3 years old, and who return to the same job (profession) within a year of the end of their maternity leave, are free from job attestation. Article 91 stipulates that the working time of pregnant women and women with children under 3.5 years old must not exceed 36 hours.

Article 34 of the Constitution, on the right to marriage, defines the basics of the legal status of women in marriage and family relations. Accordingly, marriage must be based on the voluntary consent of both parties, forced marriage is prohibited, and the equal rights of husband and wife in family relations are established. The protection of marriage and family by the State implies the protection of motherhood, fatherhood and childhood by law. Property purchased by spouses during their marriage is considered their joint property.

The Azerbaijani authorities pay particular attention to the rights of persons with disabilities, including accessible and affordable social services for children with special needs, as well as to **gender equality and women's employment, equal opportunities for and the equal treatment of women and men in employment with a view to eliminating the gender pay gap**, and the rights of trade unions, including for members of the Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation (ATUC). The Council of Europe and Azerbaijani authorities aim to address these issues within the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Azerbaijan 2022–2025, in addition to placing particular emphasis on raising awareness of the need to promote social rights. Relevant gender equality outcomes of the Action Plan include reducing the pay gap between women and men, protecting women in employment, and raising awareness of the need to promote social rights among the general public and public officials.

Women are constrained by a lack of awareness of their rights. Most are not aware of relevant administrative bodies or courts where they can go in cases of violation of their rights. One research paper finds that the majority of rural women believe that men have more rights due to custom and tradition, and that systems in place to defend rights favour men.⁶⁰ The CEDAW Committee notes that the small number of cases related to gender-based discrimination is indicative of women's lack of knowledge of their rights and how to claim them.

⁶⁰ Gasimova, E, *Gender Mainstreaming: The Role of Civil Society Monitoring of the National Gender Mechanism*, 2010.

4.2.1. Gender and employment

Women's labour force participation rate is lower than men's (estimated at 47.8% vs 52.2%, respectively, in 2022 by the State Statistical Committee, and estimated at 60.4% vs 67.3%, respectively, by the UNDP Gender Inequality Index in 2021),⁶¹ and a higher proportion of women are unemployed (55.9%) than men (44.1%).⁶² Women's overall unemployment rate for women is 6.5%, compared to a rate of 4.8% among men. Similar gender disparities exist in unemployment rates in urban and rural areas. The unemployment rate for women in urban areas (7.9%) is higher than the unemployment rate of women in rural areas (5.2%).⁶³

Table 4. Unemployment rate by location of residence, sex and age group (%)

Age group	Total		Urban areas		Rural areas	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
15–19 years old	15.3	12.3	15.3	29.3	16.5	7.8
20–24 years old	15.2	12.1	14.8	21.2	15.5	4.0
25–29 years old	7.7	6.1	12.1	6.9	3.5	5.2
30–34 years old	5.2	3.7	9.9	4.0	1.0	3.4
35–39 years old	4.5	3.6	6.8	4.7	2.4	2.2
40–44 years old	4.3	3.6	4.0	4.3	4.6	2.7
45–49 years old	5.6	3.5	6.6	2.0	4.3	5.2
50–54 years old	5.8	3.0	4.6	1.9	7.2	4.2
55–59 years old	7.2	2.7	6.6	2.5	7.8	3.0
60–64 years old	0.6	4.0	0.9	3.5	0.4	4.6
Total	6.5	4.8	7.9	5.7	5.2	3.9

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/labour/?lang=en>

Women's status in the labour market is significantly inferior compared to the status of men. Men hold the majority of management positions in both the public and private sectors, while women are concentrated in low level positions. Deeply rooted stereotypes about women's social roles and responsibilities, stereotypical attitudes towards women in different spheres of life, a lack of opportunities in the labour market, and the lack of possibilities to balance work and family life make it especially difficult for women to be active in the formal labour force and other spheres of life. Women also lack access to social rights because so many of them supply "cheap labour" in unfavourable conditions in the informal economy.

Approximately 82% of employed women work in five sectors of Azerbaijan's economy, which generate 27% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

⁶¹ <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/labour/?lang=en>

⁶² <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/labour/?lang=en>

⁶³ <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/labour/?lang=en>

These sectors are agriculture (which employs 42.1% of employed women), trade (18.2%), education (11.7%), health and social services (6.1%) and the processing industry (3.5%). Current statistical classifications reveal 19 spheres of economic activity, with women represented in eight sectors, while men dominate the sectors of construction, transport, public administration, mining and others.

The total percentage distribution of employees by economic activity reveals a major gap between women (39.8%) and men (60.2%), as shown in the table below.

Table 5. Distribution of employees by economic activity by gender as of 1 January 2023 (%)

Economic activity	Gender distribution (%)	
	Women	Men
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	23.1	76.9
Mining	12.2	87.8
Manufacturing	26.4	73.6
Electricity, gas and steam production, distribution and supply	10.7	89.3
Water supply, waste treatment and disposal	34.9	65.1
Construction	7.5	92.5
Trade and the repair of modes of transport	27.6	72.4
Transportation and storage	16.5	83.5
Accommodation and food service activities	30.2	69.8
Information and communication	30.0	70.0
Financial and insurance activities	36.5	63.5
Real estate activities	30.4	69.6
Professional, scientific and technical activities	43.5	56.5
Administrative and support service activities	30.2	69.8
Public administration, defence, and social security	26.4	73.6
Education	73.0	27.0
Human health and social work activities	77.3	22.7
Art, entertainment and recreation	61.0	39.0
Other service activities	34.3	65.7
Total	39.8	60.2

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/labour/?lang=en>

In 2022, women's average monthly nominal wage was AZN 649.10 compared with AZN 967.5 for men.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2023.

Until the Labour Code was amended on 5 November 2022, women's employment was prohibited in workplaces with harsh and harmful working conditions, as well as in underground tunnels, mines and other underground works, particularly the involvement of pregnant women and women with children under 3 years old. The amendments reduced the number of prohibited professions for women from 674 professions to 204. This is in line with the observations of the CEDAW Committee, which repeatedly calls on countries to repeal discriminatory lists of banned professions, in order to ensure that women have equal access to professions and to create working conditions that are safe for both women and men.

Article 16 of the Labour Code strictly forbids discrimination against employees based on their gender, as well as forbidding the determination of direct and indirect privileges and concessions, or the limitation of rights, based on gender. The decision has been made to eliminate differences in the average monthly salary levels of women and men across the country.

While more men hold civil service positions than women, as noted above, according to statistics provided by the State Examination Centre, representation in civil service positions moving closer to equality as of 1 January 2021. The majority of civil servants are between 25 and 44 years old. Among candidates who successfully passed civil service exams, more women candidates are between 20 and 24 years old (55.2%), while more men are 25 to 29 years old (52.2%).

Table 6. Number of employees by age group and gender (in thousands of people), 2016–2022

Age groups	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total	1,514.3	1,525.0	1,551.7	1,646.6	1,698.7	1,709.1	1,738.7
15–19 years old	3.2	2.9	2.8	4.8	3.4	5.4	4.3
20–24 years old	124.7	123.6	130.9	127.8	130.4	134.1	141.1
25–29 years old	218.5	221.0	234.9	243.2	245.9	244.6	249.8
30–34 years old	238.8	243.5	251.6	277.6	285.3	287.8	290.7
35–39 years old	217.2	222.6	228.1	259.5	267.0	271.5	275.5
40–44 years old	178.1	184.6	185.6	199.3	211.7	216.3	219.7
45–49 years old	164.5	161.8	155.6	163.1	166.9	166.4	170.6
50–54 years old	158.6	154.7	147.6	147.2	149.4	144.8	141.0
55–59 years old	132.1	131.1	130.3	129.5	132.2	126.2	126.2
60–64 years old	59.5	60.6	64.7	72.7	82.4	87.0	94.6
65+ years old	19.1	18.6	19.6	21.9	24.1	25.0	25.2
Men	888.5	898.0	919.1	986.9	1,028.2	1,033.5	1,046.1
15–19 years old	2.0	1.3	1.5	2.9	2.0	3.4	2.7
20–24 years old	75.7	75.3	81.7	77.2	78.3	80.5	83.7
25–29 years old	133.3	139.1	148.8	153.2	154.9	153.8	155.6
30–34 years old	146.4	149.4	154.6	174.3	180.9	181.5	183.1

Age groups	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
35–39 years old	129.8	133.3	138.8	159.5	169.3	172.2	174.0
40–44 years old	99.2	104.7	106.8	119.0	128.7	130.1	132.6
45–49 years old	88.8	87.2	82.2	88.9	92.2	92.7	94.8
50–54 years old	85.9	83.0	78.3	79.2	80.3	78.1	76.1
55–59 years old	75.7	72.8	70.9	71.9	72.5	69.3	68.9
60–64 years old	38.5	39.3	42.0	46.0	52.8	54.8	57.0
65+ years old	13.2	12.6	13.5	14.8	16.3	17.1	17.6
Women	625.8	627.0	632.6	659.7	670.5	675.6	692.6
15–19 years old	1.2	1.6	1.3	1.9	1.4	2.0	1.6
20–24 years old	49.0	48.3	49.2	50.6	52.1	53.6	57.4
25–29 years old	85.2	81.9	86.1	90.0	91.0	90.8	94.2
30–34 years old	92.4	94.1	97.0	103.3	104.4	106.3	107.6
35–39 years old	87.4	89.3	89.3	100.0	97.7	99.3	101.5
40–44 years old	78.9	79.9	78.8	80.3	83.0	86.2	87.1
45–49 years old	75.7	74.6	73.4	74.2	74.7	73.7	75.8
50–54 years old	72.7	71.7	69.3	68.0	69.1	66.7	64.9
55–59 years old	56.4	58.3	59.4	57.6	59.7	56.9	57.3
60–64 years old	21.0	21.3	22.7	26.7	29.6	32.2	37.6
65+ years old	5.9	6.0	6.1	7.1	7.8	7.9	7.6

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/labour/?lang=en>

AZSTAT data reveals some similar trends in employment among age groups. Both for women and men, employment tends to be highest among people aged 30–34, 35–39, 25–29 and 40–44 years old. However major gender disparities in employment within these age groups. For example, among 25–29-year-olds, 155,600 young men were employed in 2022, compared to 94,200 young women of this age group.

4.2.2. Women's entrepreneurship

Women are underrepresented as entrepreneurs and business owners in Azerbaijan. Only 25% of registered businesses are owned by women, and only 21% of small enterprise owners are women. According to data published on the national statistics website, 21% of private entrepreneurs were women as of January 2023, while 79% were men. Women entrepreneurs are concentrated in certain economic areas, most notably agriculture and fishing, trade and other service activities. At the beginning of 2020, women had set up 198,305 enterprises, largely in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector (31.5%) and trade and the repair of modes of transport sector (23.1%).

The Asian Development Bank's Country Gender Assessment 2019 highlights a number of constraints that prevent women from developing farm-related enterprises and starting their own businesses.

These are (i) a lack of financial support, (ii) women's lack of knowledge of rules on trade and commercialisation, (iii) limited training opportunities to acquire these skills, (iv) a lack of family support for their decisions, (v) a lack of access to capital, and (vi) a lack of information about the steps involved in developing a business plan and operating a business. Women also find it difficult to start businesses on their own because they may not have registered property, or only have properties registered under the name of another family member.

Government and NGO efforts within the scope of social development programmes focus on promoting rural women's entrepreneurship. The National Fund on Assistance to Entrepreneurship Programme provided women entrepreneurs with business skills trainings and credit, helping them to create additional workplaces and generate an income. As of 2020, the Azerbaijani Agrarian Credit and Development Agency had provided 448 women entrepreneurs with loans worth AZN 4.4 million (equivalent to USD 2.6 million) and benefits worth AZN 2.3 million (USD 1.3 million). In early 2021, around 143 women entrepreneurs used loans allocated by the agency, totalling AZN 1.7 million (USD 1 million). The share of women entrepreneurs receiving microloans in Azerbaijan has increased to 36% in 2022, up from 4% in 1996.⁶⁵

In 2022 and 2023, 29 companies signed up to the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), an important vehicle that supports corporate entities to advance gender equality. The UN provided technical assistance for the preparation of gender gap analyses and WEPs Action Plans to ensure the successful integration of the principles in company policies and operations.

4.2.3. Gender and the care economy, unpaid care and domestic work

In 2020, women represented 66.6% of contributing family workers, 44.4% of own-account workers (self-employed) and 32.3% of employers.⁶⁶ On average, women allocate 6 hours per day to unpaid work, while men allocate 2 hours, leading to greater differences for women in terms of increased workloads.⁶⁷ Gender disparities in time allocation for unpaid work economically disadvantages women. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, rural women's employment has switched from formal, permanent employment to more informal, temporary (seasonal) employment. Due to job scarcity and a lack of childcare facilities, women tend to perform the bulk of domestic work at the household level. Of all childcare and pre-school educational institutions in Azerbaijan (both state and private kindergartens), around one-third are in rural areas – 726 institutions out of a total of 1,825.⁶⁸ There are almost no private kindergartens in rural areas. These institutions tend to be expensive and unaffordable for many families.

⁶⁵ According to Jale Hajiyeva, the Executive Director of the Azerbaijan Micro-finance Association, who made this statement during a training session on the Women's Empowerment Principles held in Baku.

⁶⁶ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Statistical database, Labour Market, Distribution of employed population by status in 2020.

⁶⁷ Asian Development Bank, *Azerbaijan Country Gender Assessment*, 2019.

⁶⁸ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021.

Far more urban children between 1 and 5 years old attend preschool (44.8%) than children in rural areas (20.1%), with no significant difference in attendance between boys and girls.⁶⁹

4.2.4. Gender and social protection

Azerbaijan has developed social assistance programmes to ensure social protection for the population. As noted above, since 2006, low-income families, including women-headed households, are entitled to access targeted social assistance programmes. In 2011, Azerbaijan ratified the ILO's revised Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) and the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156). According to the Maternity Protection Convention, women are eligible for paid maternity leave of 126 calendar days. The Labour Code includes a provision granting women who are engaged in agricultural production a longer pregnancy and maternity leave than other women workers (Article 125). Women working in agriculture are entitled to maternity leave for 140 calendar days or 156 days in cases of birth complications. Men are entitled to 14 days of unpaid paternity leave.

The draft law containing a proposal to amend Article 125 of the Labour Code by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population seeks to grant men paid leave for 14 calendar days upon the birth of their child, with a reference from a medical institution certifying the birth. The law has been submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Although the proposed period is not within the proposed 14 days, the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs supported the draft as one of the first attempts to advance the implementation of Convention No. 156. The Convention involves guarantees of gender equality in economic and social relations, covering equal opportunities for men and women in terms of property rights, entrepreneurial activities, the administration of agricultural entities, and land tenure.

Women are eligible for pensions from the age of 63.5 years old, and men from the age of 65. The retirement age for women increase will by six months every year until July 2026.

Between January and September 2023, the average monthly pension increased by 17.3% to reach AZN 436.3 (equivalent to USD 256.6), equivalent to 47.4% of the average national monthly salary. This increase covers 1.1 million pensioners (10.8% of the country's population).

Pension amounts are the same for men and women. However, the structure of pension system rates – based on years of service and earnings – leads to inequalities that disadvantage women.⁷⁰ As women's average earnings are lower than men's during their working lives, this affects pension rates for women. Women's pension rates are also lower because they spend fewer years engaged in paid labour, due to their disproportionate burden of care work and family responsibilities.

⁶⁹ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021.

⁷⁰ Asian Development Bank, *Azerbaijan Country Gender Assessment*, 2019.

4.3. Gender and agriculture

As noted above, 46% of Azerbaijan's population live in rural areas, with an almost equal distribution of men and women. In rural areas, women traditionally carry out domestic duties (childcare and household work) and small-scale agricultural work.

The agricultural sector is a key part of Azerbaijan's non-oil economy. It is the second largest economic sector in Azerbaijan, employing about 36% of the labour force in 2019.⁷¹ In 2019, of the 1.7 million people engaged in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, 782,000 were men (44%) and 995,700 (56%).⁷² However, most people who earn income from agriculture are not wage employees. Of the 61,200 official employees in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector, 14,604 are women (24%).⁷³

Over time, as land is freely transferable, some gender asymmetries have emerged in the ownership of land and the size of land plots. While no sex-disaggregated cadastre records on real estate ownership appear available, the World Bank estimates that 42.1% of all registered landowners in Azerbaijan were women in 2014.⁷⁴ This figure covers all landowners, not just the owners of farmland. Another measure – the proportion of people who receive income from property – suggests that women are much less likely to have control over land or real estate assets. In 2020, fewer than one-third of people in this category were women.⁷⁵ The absence of publicly available official data on female and male land ownership is problematic. One of Azerbaijan's national priorities under SDG 5 are targets on increasing women's ownership of agricultural land, with an indicator on the percentage of the population that own or have the right to use agricultural land (indicator 5.a.1).

The most recent household budget survey available provides some information about access to and types of land plots. The survey reveals that fewer than half of women-headed households are landowners. Among women-headed households, 47.4% have access to a plot of land, compared to 63.7% of households headed by men.⁷⁶

4.4. Gender, infrastructure and public transport

Women are underrepresented in jobs in the transport sector, in construction, and in the civil service. Azerbaijan's transport sector employed about 4.6 % of the labour force, according to data from 2019.⁷⁷

⁷¹ AZSTAT, 2019, <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/labour/?lang=en>

⁷² ILOSTAT data.

⁷³ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021.

⁷⁴ World Bank Group, 2016.

⁷⁵ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021.

⁷⁶ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Statistical database: Budgets of households, Distribution of households by access to land, average size of land and type of land by sex of household head in 2020.

⁷⁷ AZSTAT, 2017.

Women account for 16.3% of the labour force in transport sector, while men account for 83.7%. The average monthly wage of women in sector in was AZN 585.7 compared to AZN for 909.6.⁷⁸ This pay gap is attributed to high levels of vertical segregation in the labour market.

According to the State Statistical Committee, 7,006 employees worked in railway transport in 2017, down from 12,997 persons in 2010. Based on data provided by the Azerbaijan Railway Company (ADY), in February 2019, the company had 19,819 employees, 15,241 of whom are men and 4,578 are women (23%). Most of these women are not in decision-making positions or managerial roles. According to an Order in September 2018,⁷⁹ the Azerbaijan Railway Company is taking measures to ensure that women account for at least 30% of its employees through a capacity development programme within the company.

In addition, within the scope of the Railway Sector Development Programme 2017–2022, the Azerbaijan Railway Company has conducted a gender study and, based on its findings, prepared a Gender Action Plan. The programme's outputs aim to have positive impact on women, by reducing travel time, making access to public and business facilities easier, providing employment opportunities, improving safety through the reconstruction of overpasses and bridges, installing safety fences and lighting, building rest areas with separate toilets for men and women, and undertaking a community safety awareness campaign.

Safety on public transport is an important gender-related in the sector. A study by the Asian Development Bank identifies incidents of women suffering in inappropriate behaviour from other passengers on public transport in Baku.⁸⁰

4.5. Gender and health

The State Statistical Committee's publication, *Women and Men in Azerbaijan*, includes sex-disaggregated data on reproductive health as well as on the main causes of morbidity for women and men. Information about women and men's specific health needs, access to services, and attitudes toward health services is not available.

Azerbaijan has made progress on improving maternal and child health. Infant and child mortality rates have decreased substantially – from 25.3 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 1991 to 7.8 in 2022, and from 40.1 deaths of children under 5 years old per 1,000 live births to 10.2 deaths during the same period.⁸¹ In 2021, 46,877 abortions were registered in Azerbaijan. Of these, 687 abortions (1.5%) were sought by women who were pregnant for first time. In 2021, the abortion rate was 18.0 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age. Compared to 2020, the number of abortions in the country increased from 34,719 to 46,877 in 2021.

⁷⁸ AZSTAT 2019, <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

⁷⁹ ADY Order N 98S, 2.21 article.

⁸⁰ Asian Development Bank, *Policy Brief: A Safe Public Transportation Environment for Women and Girls*, 2015.

⁸¹ <https://stat.gov.az/source/demography/?lang=en>

Most of these abortions are sought by women in the 30–34-year-old age group. The number of abortions among 15–19-year-olds has almost doubled in 2021 compared to the previous year.

Table 7. Abortions by age group per 1,000 women aged 15–49, 2021

Age group	Number of abortions	Number of abortions among women aged 15–49 years old per 1,000 women
15–17 years old	16	0.1
18–19 years old	2,412	20.3
20–24 years old	8,478	26.5
25–29 years old	13,514	32.7
30–34 years old	13,742	29.1
35+ years old	8,715	7.9
Total	4,6877	18.0

Source: State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs.

The Plan for 2020–2025 on “Preventing gender selection of children before birth” was approved by Decree No. 71s of the Cabinet of Ministers on 4 February 2020. The plan aims to expand reliable and accessible data and indicators on the gender ratio of children born without documents, improving legislation in this area, expanding support measures for girls and women to eliminate gender-based discrimination, undertaking awareness and educational measures to end gender stereotypes, and improving inter-institutional relations.

The average biological sex ratio of newborns is 105–107 boys for every 100 girls. In Azerbaijan, the ratio is 114 boys for every 100 girls, reflecting the prevalence of sex selection before birth. According to the State Statistical Committee's data, there were 112,284 live births in 2021 – 60,184 of boys and 52,100 of girls. The difference between the sexes is 8,084 people. In 2020, this figure was 8,243. Comparing statistical indicators reveals that the gender gap in live births has partially decreased (159 people).

Life expectancy is increasing year on year. Women in Azerbaijan have a higher average life expectancy (78.4 years) than men (73.6 years). Overall life expectancy at birth is 76.4 years.⁸² Cardiovascular diseases and cancer are frequent causes of death among men and women between 30 and 70 years old. Women are more at risk of obesity than men, while men's health is more at risk from tobacco use. Women confront various constraints to accessing health services, including issues of affordability, a lack of available medical staff, distances, the quality of services, and family situations. Health care facilities, such as clinics, are either insufficient or do not exist in rural areas.

⁸² AZSTAT, 2019, <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/demography/?lang=en>

4.6. Gender and education

Educational attainment among Azerbaijan's population reached 99.8% in 2022, as the majority of men and women have at least completed secondary education. More women work as teachers in state general educational institutions (76% of teaching staff), while more men work in non-state higher educational institutions (63% of teaching staff). There are 47 women and 53 men per 100 educated students in Azerbaijan.⁸³

Table 8. Enrolment in the 2020/2021 academic year, by type of educational institution and gender

Type of educational institution	Men	Women
General secondary education	53.6	46.4
Vocational education	54.3	45.7
Full secondary education	37.5	62.5
Higher education	50.8	49.2

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. *Women and Men in Azerbaijan, 2021*.

Table 9. Number of students by types of educational institutions at the beginning of the 2022/2023 academic year, by age and gender (%)

Types of educational institutions	Percentage distribution		Gender distribution	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
General educational institutions	80.8	81.5	46.6	53.4
Vocational education	3.3	5.8	33.7	66.3
Secondary specialised educational institutions	4.1	2.2	61.9	38.1
Higher education and doctoral studies	11.8	10.5	49.7	50.3
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	46.8	53.2
Total (number)	98,3511	111,7347	x	x

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

Regarding access to education, almost all settlements and villages have at least one school. Due to the lack of childcare facilities in rural areas, many women are obliged to remain at home and perform care work, excluding them from the formal job market.

⁸³ <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

At the beginning of 2022, 45.1% of girls and 54.9% of boys under 3 years old attended preschool institutions,⁸⁴ as did 46.8 % of girls and 53.2% of boys between 3 and 5 years old.⁸⁵

Women's decisions about employment are strongly influenced by cultural norms. These include norms about the types of labour and places of work considered suitable or appropriate for men and women. Working hours, the nature of responsibilities, the presence of male colleagues and proximity to make customers are other factors that can impact women's choices around education and employment. There is a tendency for women to pursue specialties related to education, culture, the arts and natural sciences. The share of women among students at state higher educational institutions at the beginning of the 2021/2022 academic year was slightly lower (48%) than the share of men (52%). These trends continued in the 2022/2023 academic year, as shown in the tables below.

Table 10. Distribution of students in state and non-state higher educational institutions by field of study at the beginning of the 2022/2023 academic year

Field of study	Percent to total		Gender distribution	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Education	35.1	7.9	81.7	18.3
Humanitarian and social	14.8	11.6	56.1	43.9
Culture and art	4.3	2.4	64.2	35.8
Economics and management	16.6	23.3	41.7	58.3
Natural sciences	5.8	3.7	61.2	38.8
Technical and technological	12.1	32.6	27.1	72.9
Agriculture	1.6	3.8	29.9	70.1
Health, welfare and services	9.7	14.7	39.8	60.2
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	50.1	49.9
Total (number)	111,583	111,226	x	x

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

⁸⁴ <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

⁸⁵ <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

Table 11. Distribution of students in state higher educational institutions by field of study at the beginning of the 2022/2023 academic year

Field of study	Percent to total		Gender distribution	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Education	36.9	8.3	80.9	19.1
Humanitarian and social	13.0	11.2	52.6	47.4
Culture and art	4.6	2.4	64.4	35.6
Economics and management	14.7	21.4	39.6	60.4
Natural sciences	6.1	3.7	61.1	38.9
Technical and technological	13.2	34.6	26.6	73.4
Agriculture	1.8	4.0	30.0	70.0
Health, welfare and services	9.7	14.4	39.1	60.9
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	48.8	51.2
Total (number)	96,074	100,849	x	x

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

Table 12. Distribution of students in non-state higher educational institutions by field of study at the beginning of the 2022/2023 academic year

Field of study	Percent to total		Gender distribution	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Education	23.8	4.0	89.8	10.2
Humanitarian and social	26.0	15.9	70.9	29.1
Culture and art	2.3	2.2	61.9	38.1
Economic and management	28.4	42.0	50.3	49.7
Natural sciences	4.0	3.7	61.7	38.3
Technical and technological	5.5	12.6	39.5	60.5
Agriculture	0.4	1.7	26.4	73.6
Health, welfare and services	9.6	17.9	44.6	55.4
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	59.9	40.1
Total (number)	15,509	10,377	-	-

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

The World Bank finds that girls' lower secondary school completion rate dropped from 90% in 2007 to 86% in 2015.⁸⁶ Early marriage may be a contributing factor, although this issue has not yet been comprehensively studied.

Women account for almost 100% of teachers at the pre-primary education level. The proportion of male teachers at the level of primary education is below 10%. Although the proportion of men who are teachers is but relatively higher at the levels of lower secondary and upper secondary education, it remains significantly lower than the proportion of women teachers.

Table 13. Proportion of teachers in pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary education at the beginning of the 2022/2023 academic year, by gender

Level of education	Percent to total		Gender distribution	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Pre-primary	12.2	0.1	99.8	0.2
General education institutions				
Primary	26.1	9.4	93.5	6.5
Lower secondary and upper secondary education	61.7	90.5	78.0	22.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	83.8	16.2
Total (number)	141,553	27,305	-	-

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

Relatively more women were enrolled as students of doctoral (PhD) programmes in fields of science at the beginning of 2022 (54.9%) than men (45.1%).⁸⁷ In many fields, (mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, history, philology and psychology, among others) the number of women PhD students is significantly higher than the number of men. A strong discrepancy in favour of men exists for certain subjects – earth science, political science, mechanical studies, technical studies, agriculture and law. An equal proportion of women and men among PhD students (50% each) only exists in the field of astronomy. There were more men than women enrolled in scientific degrees as post-graduate students at the beginning of 2023.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ World Bank, Data: Girls Lower Secondary Completion, 2007 and 2015, 2017.

⁸⁷ <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

⁸⁸ <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

Table 14. Distribution of doctors and candidates of science at the beginning of 2023, by gender

	Number		Gender distribution	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Doctors of science	205	749	21.5	78.5
Candidates of science	162	275	37.1	62.9

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

At the beginning of 2023, more women were involved in research (58.9%) than men (41.1%) in five fields (humanities, medical sciences, natural sciences, social sciences and by 1% in technical sciences). Only in agriculture and technical sciences are there more men than women (54.3% vs 45.7%, and 52.1% vs 47.9%, respectively).⁸⁹

Table 15. Distribution of fields of study at the beginning of 2023, by gender

Field of study	Percentage distribution		Gender distribution	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Humanities	24.9	13.9	72.0	28.0
Medical	11.9	12.9	56.9	43.1
Natural sciences	32.5	29.8	61.0	39.0
Agriculture	4.1	7.0	45.7	54.3
Technical	13.5	21.1	47.9	52.1
Social sciences	13.1	15.3	55.0	45.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	58.9	41.1
Total (number)	8,554	5,966	X	x

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

The higher the position in the education sector, the more men outnumber women. There are seven times more male academics than women academics, and eight times more male “corresponding members” than women.

⁸⁹ <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

Table 16. Number of academics and corresponding members at the beginning of 2023, by gender

	Women	Men
Academics	7	50
Corresponding members	9	78

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

The proportion of women among the directors and deputies of general educational schools increased by 1.5% between 2021 and 2022. Nevertheless, more men are directors than women.⁹⁰

Table 17. Distribution of directors and deputies of secondary educational institutions at the beginning of the 2022/2023 academic year, by gender

	Percent to total		Gender distribution	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Number of directors of general educational institutions				
General secondary	3.1	9.8	25.9	74.1
Full secondary	20.7	34.0	40.0	60.0
Number of deputy directors of general educational institutions				
General secondary	4.1	5.9	43.0	57.0
Full secondary	72.1	50.3	61.0	39.0
Number of directors and deputies of general educational institutions (total)				
Total (%)	100	100	52.2	47.8
Total (number)	5617	5143	-	-

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

4.7. Women, peace and security

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its partners, including Azerbaijan,⁹¹ recognise the disproportionate impact that conflict and post-conflict situations have on women and girls, as outlined in the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) adopted in October 2002.

⁹⁰ <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

⁹¹ https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_09/20180920_180920-WPS-Action-Plan-2018.pdf

In September 2018, NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller visited Baku, met with senior government officials and addressed a major international conference on women, peace and security.⁹² Azerbaijan's National Action Plan on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2019–2023) is pending the approval of the Cabinet of Ministries. Programmes within the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021–2025 aim to deepen UN capacity for engagement with the Government and civil society on conflict recovery normative frameworks, including women, peace and security, and youth, peace and security.⁹³

The State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs, in cooperation with UNDP, is implementing the project, "Early recovery and community resilience for the most vulnerable in Fuzuli-Horadiz, Aghjabadi and Tartar regions of Azerbaijan" to improve the well-being of women and girls, as well as to identify the needs of war-affected communities. Community Resource Hubs have been set up in three administrative districts targeted by the project. Community Resource Hubs provide socio-economic rehabilitation support, with a key focus on women, children and people with disabilities. In 2021, 275 people applied to Aghjabadi, Tartar and Fuzuli Community Resource Hubs for business support, 559 people applied for legal support and 370 people applied for psychological support. UNDP has implemented a project funded by the EU and the United States' State Department, "Supporting the Safe Return of Internally Displaced People through Capacity Building". This involved the creation of the first women's de-mining teams in Azerbaijan. Plans are afoot to create four de-mining groups, three of which will be composed entirely of women. The trainings are due to last for six weeks engaging 40 women participants selected from different regions of Azerbaijan.

4.8. Gender-based violence

In the context of the implementation of the National Action Plan for Combatting Domestic Violence for 2020–2023, in 2021, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population established a Department of Social Rehabilitation of Victims of Domestic Violence at the Shelter and Social Rehabilitation Institution for Persons from Vulnerable Population Groups of the Social Services Agency under the ministry. This will provide social services, social-legal and psychological support for survivors of domestic violence. The Care Call Centre (116 123) operated by the Social Services Agency under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population is intended to respond to requests related to cases of domestic violence and children in difficult conditions, as well as to provide online psychological support.

As part of the implementation of National Action Plan for Combatting Domestic Violence, a special "Domestic Violence" section has been created on the website of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs, and a hotline (860) added.

⁹² https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_158191.htm?selectedLocale=en

⁹³ <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/un-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-azerbaijan-2021-2025-draft>

Draft laws have been developed “On Amendments to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Prevention of Domestic Violence”, “On Amendments to the Criminal Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan”, and “On the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Republic of Azerbaijan”. Draft laws and other normative acts have been prepared, agreed with relevant institutions and submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers in line with the Constitutional Law “On Regulatory Legal Acts”.

The State Committee continues to implement the twinning project, “Strengthening the capabilities of state institutions and local level guidance mechanisms to ensure the safety and support of persons subjected to domestic violence in Azerbaijan.” The project has trained and provided certificates to 696 people, including representatives of state and non-governmental organisations, and prepared seven training materials. The project is funded by the EU, in partnership with relevant organisations in Lithuania and Austria.⁹⁴

Over one-fifth (21.4%) of crimes against women (1,196 out of 5,593) are driven by jealousy and other family conflicts. In 2021, there were 1,536 victims of domestic violence. In the same year, 46 women died as a result of domestic violence (compared to 41 women killed in 2020), 44 of whom were victims of the crime of intentional homicide (articles 120–122 of the Criminal Code), while two were victims of the crime of grievous bodily harm. Measuring the true extent of domestic violence is challenging, as survivors and witnesses do not always report cases. Survivors often fear stigma or reprisal from abusers, and women tend to be reluctant to report instances of violence to the criminal justice system.

In 2021, the number of protection orders issued to ensure the safety of victims of domestic violence increased. Thus, 69 short-term protection warrants (up from 38 in 2020) and four long-term protection warrants (up from two in 2020) were issued by local executive authorities. The Executive and Probation Departments of the Ministry of Justice monitored the execution of these orders.

According to World Bank data, the suicide mortality rate was 4.1 per 100,000 people in 2019, with a rate of 1.6 for women and 6.6 for men.⁹⁵ According to a 2017 study by the Women’s Association for Rational Development (WARD), 121 women committed suicide and 69 women attempted to commit suicide in 2016, significantly more than in 2010 (89 and 37 women, respectively). There is evidence that many instances of suicide and attempted suicide are the result of continuous subjection to violence.⁹⁶

In 2021, 1,650 children were born to mothers under the age of 18, compared to 1,917 children in 2020 – a decrease of 267. According to the State Statistical Committee, in 2021, 137 girls between 15 and 17 years old were married in Azerbaijan.

⁹⁴ Information of the State Committee on Family, Women and Children’s Problems of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2021 (On guarantees of gender (men and women) equality”. According to Article 20 of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan).

⁹⁵ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.STA.SUIC.P5?locations=AZ>

⁹⁶ Women’s Association for Rational Development (WARD), *Violence Scale: Femicide in Azerbaijan*, 2017.

The official marriage age in Azerbaijan is 18 years old, however, girls can be 17 years old in exceptional circumstances.⁹⁷ The Convention on the Rights of the Child also establishes that the minimum age for marriage should be 18, and child marriage is considered a human rights violation. News about early marriages and the forced marriages of underage girls appears from time to time on social networks and in official information.

There are a limited number of shelters for survivors of domestic violence, most of which are operated by NGOs. Interviews with the senior managers of the NGO Clear World shed light on the indicative operational costs of running a shelter. The shelter managed by Clear World is in Baku, and has the capacity to house 50 individuals at any one time. International organisations and charitable donations provide the shelter's core funding, with donations collected through fundraising campaigns. Survivors of domestic violence may remain in the shelter free of charge for up to three months and receive important support based on individual case management. The shelter has nine full-time staff members, including social workers, a psychologist and a lawyer. According to the shelter's administration, it is difficult to estimate its overall budget, as many costs are covered in kind by charitable foundations and philanthropists. Nevertheless, they calculate that the approximate annual budget of the shelter is AZN 100,000 (USD 58,000).⁹⁸

Following the Cabinet of Ministers' Decision No. 337 of 30 July 2019, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population opened a shelter and social rehabilitation facility for vulnerable groups within the State Social Services Agency. As noted above, the Department of Social Rehabilitation of Victims of Domestic Violence has been established within this shelter and agency.

4.9. Gender and the green transition

4.9.1. Gender, the climate and the environment

An issue note by the World Bank in 2022 notes that Azerbaijan's economy is exposed to the physical impact of climate change. It finds that green growth and climate action in several sectors have the potential to (i) advance mitigation and adaptation, (ii) contribute to addressing sector- and country-specific environmental challenges and goals, and (iii) address identified climate risks and vulnerabilities, as well as strengthening climate resilience.

Such sectors include integrated approaches to water management, agriculture, land use and forestry, as well as the broader context of developing the blue economy and coastal areas of the Caspian Sea.

⁹⁷ According to Article 9 of the Family Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, if there are valid reasons, the period of marriage can be reduced by the relevant executive authority or extended to a period of no more than 1 month: *"In special cases, pregnancy, birth of a child and other cases can be concluded on the day of the marriage application."*

⁹⁸ UNFPA and SCWFCA, *The Economic Cost of Violence Against Women in Azerbaijan*, 2020.

The issue note highlights that Azerbaijan's most recent strategic development plans take global low-carbon development trends into consideration, as well as the long-term challenges for oil economies.⁹⁹ It acknowledges that the Government *"is pursuing legislative and policy reforms in several areas. The Law on Rational Use of Energy Resources and Energy Efficiency was developed and adopted in 2021, along with the draft Action Plan on Energy Efficiency Prepared under the EU4Energy project which stipulates the respective mitigation measures."*¹⁰⁰

A clean environment and green growth are priorities of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this context, Azerbaijan aims to create *"new economic opportunities in the liberated territories not only for itself but also for the region. In this regard, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reintegration of the liberated and conflict-affected areas in a sustainable manner will be one of the country's main development priorities in the coming years."*¹⁰¹

The World Bank's issue note is important because it examines Azerbaijan's economic development and natural resources context with the aim of supporting the Government to pursue the national priority of a clean environment and green growth. It discusses key considerations and possible areas of interventions related to green diversification, highlighting topics that call for further analytical deep dives and separate targeted research. It identifies sectors with the potential for diversification, de-carbonisation, and for loosening the grip of oil and gas dependence, alongside possible policy avenues. The issue note states that, compared to other upper-middle-income countries, *"Azerbaijan suffers environmental losses, lower material and land productivity, water scarcity, and a higher intensity of emissions. As a first step, investing in systemic changes, adaptation measures to strengthen climate resilience and environmental improvements, protection of natural capital, asset diversification, and de-carbonisation will help Azerbaijan sustain its natural resource base."*¹⁰²

The issue note finds that Azerbaijan's largest sectors beyond oil and gas – mining, trade, construction and agriculture – have strong mitigation potential. There is potential for job creation and asset diversification in less carbon-intensive sectors of Azerbaijan's economy, particularly services, health, and education. This would contribute to human capital development, which is an explicit priority for the country. At present, Azerbaijan's labour market is dominated by employment in the agriculture and service sectors, while more jobs per USD 1 million of investments are created in brown sectors (electricity, gas, agriculture, water), and most GDP is produced in oil-dependent sectors. The World Bank highlights the human capital aspects of green growth – such as the need for skills development and labour market impacts – and calls for a comprehensive analysis of this topic. However, its issue note does not address gender equality or consider gender in its recommendations on further analysis or on developing interventions.

⁹⁹ World Bank, *Azerbaijan: Towards Green Growth. Issues Note*, September 2022.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

For example, it positions climate-smart agriculture as central to the green transition, as it promises to increase productivity, expand access to key export markets, better protect agricultural workers and boost human capital development by fostering new skills. However, even in this area the issue note does not mention equal access and opportunities for women and men.

Another document in this subject area is Azerbaijan's **Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy (LT-LEDS)**¹⁰³ to contribute to the global mitigation of the effects of climate change. Developed and submitted to the Government of Azerbaijan in 2021, the strategy provides strategic options for mitigation through the reduction of greenhouse gases. It includes a separate chapter on "Strategic Planning with [a] Gender Perspective" by sector (agriculture, energy, transport and waste management). The analysis reveals the critical lack of data and information on women's needs, and the constraints they face in the renewable energy sector in Azerbaijan, as well as in energy sector in general. It highlights the need for gender analysis to identify the needs of women and men in the energy and renewable energy sectors, alongside gender concerns in decision-making.

The strategy also highlights the lack of data available for **gender analysis of the transport sector**. As it notes, "*Data that illustrates gender differences in transport use, purpose of use, perceptions of use, etc. is not available for Azerbaijan. Furthermore, access to public transport is an even more critical issue of concern for women living in rural communities since public transport doesn't often serve internal routes. Lack of mobility for rural women affects them to access and use services available in the region, participate in income generating activities as well as learning and development opportunities. For young girls in rural areas, lack of public transport means interruption in their education.*"¹⁰⁴

The State Statistical Committee's 2023 data on the annual number of people employed in the transport does not include disaggregated data on women and men working in different parts of the transport sector. The only disaggregated data available is on the number of employees by types of economic activity, which indicates that the transport sector is dominated by men.

Table 18. Distribution of employees by economic activity (trade, and transport and storage) as of 1 January 2023, by gender

Economic activity	Women		Men		Gender distribution (%)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Women	Men
Trade and repair of modes of transport	89,416	12.9	234,364	22.4	27.6	72.4
Transportation and storage	12,124	1.8	61,358	5.9	16.5	83.5

Source: State Statistical Committee, 2023.

¹⁰³ The LT-LEDS was prepared by Sustainera Consulting Services LLC within EU4Climate Programme and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

According to AZSTAT, **information and communication technologies** “is a potential sector that can contribute to the reduction of environmental burden and offer new market opportunities for green businesses.”¹⁰⁵ However, gender analysis is necessary to assess gender-specific needs that can be met by innovative ICT and intelligent transport systems (ITS), as well as their impact on mobility behaviour. More women entrepreneurs, as well as women in the private sector, start-ups and tech platforms need to be involved in the ITS market and the development of innovative services to ensure that women benefit from opportunities. To attract women and girls to the transport sector, there is a need for proactive measures that challenge and change gender stereotypes.¹⁰⁶

Gender analysis of waste management also shows that men’s participation/employment in the sector is approximately twice as high as women’s.

Table 19. Distribution of employees by economic activity (water supply, and waste treatment and disposal) as of 1 January 2023, by gender

Economic activity	Women		Men		Gender distribution (%)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Women	Men
Water supply; waste treatment and disposal	11,725	1.7	21,916	2.1	34.9	65.1

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/labour/?lang=en>

The Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy recommends breaking down data by sub-sectors to yield clear data on participation disaggregated by gender. It also recommends conducting “gender analysis on the position of women along the waste management value chain, as well as identifying challenges and barriers for women along with potential intervention points and/or looking at gender differences in attitudes, behaviour towards waste disposal by identifying more space for intervention points.” Although the National Strategy for Improving Solid Waste Management for 2018–2022 sets out aims and priority directions, it does not target gender equality overtly, address public health, consider different impacts on women and men, or emphasise gender equality in job creation and employment.

Although nearly half of all economically active women live in rural areas, and most rural women are engaged in agriculture, their formal participation in the labour force of the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector is much lower than men.¹⁰⁷ In this sector too, only generic data is available which is not disaggregated by sub-types of activities.

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.stat.gov.az>

¹⁰⁶ UNDP and EU, *Long Term Low Emission Development Strategy (LT-LEDS) of Azerbaijan: Contributing to the Global Mitigation of Climate Change Effects*, 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Table 20. Distribution of employees by economic activity (agriculture, forestry and fishing) as of 1 January 2023, by gender

Economic activity	Women		Men		Gender distribution (%)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Women	Men
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	14,554	2.1	48,456	4.6	23.1	76.9

Source: State Statistical Committee, 2023.

The Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy acknowledges women's significant contribution to agriculture in developing countries, as well as their lack of access to productive resources such as assets, inputs, services, land, education, financial services, technologies and opportunities. Given the absence of recent disaggregated data on access to inputs, services and technologies, the strategy recommends:

- gender analysis on needs, risks, vulnerability and impact – for example, by incorporating the gender and climate change research tool into the mandatory duties of field workers;
- generating gender-disaggregated data, and developing gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation systems;
- budget allocations for gender-specific actions;
- empowering women and youth, and supporting education, training and capacity building;
- increasing women participation in decision-making in relevant state machinery that deal with environmental issues, and building their capacity on gender mainstreaming.

The strategy also refers to recommendations on extension services, including:

- switching traditional modes of agricultural advisory and information services to demand-driven services tailored to farmers' specific needs;
- applying gender-sensitive approaches and different participatory methodologies; and
- evaluating the impact of extension services on reducing gender disparities in access to and the use of information.

Azerbaijan's Voluntary National Review 2021 highlights the integration of the SDGs into the national development agenda, including through the Joint Action Plan to Support Green Agriculture 2020–2023. The Action Plan aims to contribute to the implementation of SDGs 2, 8, 13 and 15.

A key area of the Sector Strategic Plan on Agriculture is "Environmental protection, sustainable use of natural resources and climate change impact management on agriculture". Measures in this area include creating mechanisms to reduce the negative impact of climate change and other natural factors on agriculture and improving mechanisms to reduce agriculture's negative impact on the environment.

Other measures include improving mechanisms for the sustainable use of agricultural lands and water resources, and developing environmentally clean agricultural production. However, the strategic plan does not include gender equality at the objective or activity levels.

The plan also envisages the implementation of measures such as improving the system of human resources management and training, and improving the system of science, education and information and consulting services in agriculture between 2021 and 2024. These measures are likely to face challenges given existing gender inequalities in access to information and opportunities.

4.10. Gender and digital transformations

In recent years, information and communications technology coverage has expanded in Azerbaijan. As of 2020, 3G covers over 97.6% and 4G over 93% of the country's populated territory. Overall, 86.7% of Azerbaijan's population use the internet, as of 2021. Between 2013 and 2019, the proportion of women who own mobile phones increased from 66.6% to 72.1%, although this remains less than the proportion of men who own mobiles (77.5%).¹⁰⁸

Table 21. Distribution of internet users, by gender

Year	Total (%)	Gender distribution	
		Women	Men
2008	17.2	12.6	21.6
2009	27.4	23.0	32.0
2010	46.0	36.5	55.6
2011	65.0	55.9	75.8
2012	70.0	62.2	78.1
2013	73.0	67.2	78.8
2014	75.0	71.2	78.9
2015	77.0	72.0	78.0
2016	78.0	76.1	79.9
2017	79.0	76.8	81.2
2018	79.8	76.0	83.7
2019	81.1	78.4	83.9
2020	84.6	83.4	85.8
2021	86.7	85.5	87.9

Source: <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>

¹⁰⁸ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2020.

The biennial UN E-Government Survey 2020 ranks Azerbaijan 70th on the E-Government Development Index, and 73rd on the E-Participation Index among 193 countries.¹⁰⁹ Azerbaijan ranks 13th of 69 countries in the top group (in 2018, it ranked 30th among 70 countries) and among the top three landlocked developing countries. Compared to 2018, Azerbaijan has surpassed the world average by 11 points in the ranking by increasing its index from 66 points to 71 points. When a country reaches an index value of 0.75, it is considered to have reached the highest level of e-government development. Azerbaijan is a real candidate for this highest group.

The Global Innovation Index 2019 ranks Azerbaijan 84th among 129 countries, based on the development of its innovation ecosystem. The implementation of the Smart City pilot project in 2020–2021, as part of the National Action Plan on the Promotion of Open Government for 2020–2022, sought to accelerate high-tech solutions and the application of innovative solutions in regions across Azerbaijan. The Strategic Roadmap for Development of Telecommunications and Information Technologies outlines the country's strategic vision and Action Plan for 2020, a long-term vision for 2025 and a target vision post-2025.¹¹⁰ However, the roadmap is not gender-sensitive and does not contain references to women or girls.

Women in Azerbaijan are actively involved in the development of an “information society” and the digital economy. Women are active users of information technologies, but they are rarely producers. Men predominate in the highest positions in the ICT sector.¹¹¹ Greater access to ICT is important for women's entrepreneurship development. Increasing the number of women entrepreneurs will contribute to the goal of diversifying the economy through private sector development. According to a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “*Barriers to access, education and skills, as well as ingrained socio-cultural biases, are driving a digital gender divide that is holding back women's participation in the digital economy.*”¹¹² Women are also less likely to pursue, and have more limited access to, educational opportunities in ICT, limiting their options for careers in the sector.

The European Union's EU4Digital Initiative supports the digital reform agenda in Azerbaijan with a range of actions. These promote key areas of the digital economy and society, in line with EU norms and practices. The aim is to advance economic growth, generate more jobs, improve people's lives and help businesses.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ United Nations Azerbaijan, *United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021–2025*, 2021, https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/Azerbaijan-UNSDCF-2021-2025_1.pdf

¹¹⁰ <https://monitoring.az/assets/upload/files/6683729684f8895c1668803607932190.pdf>

¹¹¹ EU, Digital growth: working towards gender equality in IT in Azerbaijan, 2020, <https://eufordigital.eu/digital-growth-working-towards-gender-equality-in-it-in-azerbaijan/>

¹¹² OECD, *Bridging the Digital Gender Divide: Include, Upskill, Innovate*, 2018, <https://www.oecd.org/going-digital/bridging-the-digital-gender-divide.pdf>

¹¹³ <https://eufordigital.eu/countries/azerbaijan/>

The first “Gender Equality Hackathon”, organised jointly with international organisations – including the EU, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) – educated and encouraged young people on develop innovative solutions for gender equality.

The Government of Azerbaijan recognises the potential of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR and) the need to strengthen the country’s human capital to enable technology adoption. The Centre for Analysis and Coordination of the Fourth Industrial Revolution under the Ministry of Economy was set up in 2021. This new public entity is tasked with coordinating Azerbaijan’s response to 4IR trends. According to the Asian Development Bank, “This marks a positive step in strengthening the local policy discourse on 4IR and coordinating programs related to innovation, technology adoption, and skills development across different government agencies to avoid a duplication of efforts and maximize the impact of these programs.”¹¹⁴

Azerbaijan’s National Plan acknowledges the importance of technology adoption for growth in key industries. However, there is no clearly articulated vision for the fourth industrial revolution and no concrete references to it, or to the application of 4IR technologies, in the national plan.¹¹⁵ The Asian Development Bank has conducted an analysis of the fourth industrial revolution in three countries, including Azerbaijan. It focuses on two sectors, **Agro-Processing Industry** and **Transportation and Storage Industry**. In terms of agro-processing, Azerbaijan plans to build its non-oil economic sectors and diversify its economy, considering that this is one of the fastest growing industries in terms of employment. In terms of transportation and storage, Azerbaijan’s location along key trade corridors between Asia and Europe and has significant potential to capture transit trade, as well as to boost import and export volumes, and increase employment. The analysis finds that **companies have a limited understanding of 4IR technologies and their application**. As the analysis notes,

“The research shows that in making the transition toward 4IR, the lack of quality training providers and impact on women will be particularly challenging for Azerbaijan’s agro-processing industry. Targeted programs would need to be adopted to ensure that trainers and teachers in the country are able to support the agro-processing workforce to meet the new skill needs created by 4IR. As roles in the agro-processing industry shift toward more technical occupations dominated by men, active intervention would also be needed to ensure that female workers can benefit from Industry 4.0.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Asian Development Bank, *Harnessing the Fourth Industrial Revolution through Skills Development in High-Growth Industries in Central and West Asia: Insights from Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan*, 2023, <https://www.adb.org/publications/fourth-industrial-revolution-skills-development-synthesis>

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Asian Development Bank, *Harnessing the Fourth Industrial Revolution through Skills Development in High-Growth Industries in Central and West Asia: Insights from Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan*, 2023, <https://www.adb.org/publications/fourth-industrial-revolution-skills-development-synthesis>

The Asian Development Bank's analysis recommends that policymakers support transportation and storage firms to transition toward 4IR by developing programmes and 4IR competency centres. These can build awareness of digital tools, focusing on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The analysis also includes a specific recommendation to develop targeted programmes to ensure that women benefit from 4IR. Other recommendations are relate to:

- developing sectoral 4IR adoption plans to coordinate technology adoption and skills development;
- strengthening the relevance of industry apprenticeships and workplace-based training;
- promoting the use of innovative technologies to strengthen training delivery;
- ensuring the responsiveness of education systems to changing skills needs.

In terms of the latter, the analysis notes that the adoption of 4IR technologies will essentially change the skills needed for employment. Creative thinking and/or design skills will be most valued by employers in the IT and construction industries by 2025. Digital and/or ICT skills will become the skills most valued by employers in the agro-processing, textile and garment manufacturing, and transportation and storage industries, based on surveys conducted with employers.¹¹⁷

4.11. Groups living in vulnerable conditions, and social inclusion

Despite recent declines in poverty, many households are part of groups living in vulnerable conditions.¹¹⁸ In 2012, they accounted for 65% of the population. No more recent data appears to be available.

Persons with disabilities are one group living in vulnerable conditions. Persons with disabilities in Azerbaijan are estimated to account for 6% of Azerbaijan's population (625,000 people of a total population of over 10 million). Official statistics do not indicate the number of women with disabilities, but the Union of Disabled People's Organisations estimates that there are 200,000 women with disabilities in the country (approximately one-third of all persons with disabilities). A total of 383,590 people receive a disability pension, 161,500 of whom are women.¹¹⁹ According to research on the situation of women with disabilities,¹²⁰ they face a number of constraints to accessing education, employment and services. Azerbaijan lacks an action plan that specifically addresses the needs of women with disabilities, or the challenges they face. These include a lack of vocational training programmes, the lack of adequate infrastructure, and additional barriers to mobility and physical security due to gender stereotypes and attitudes that limit opportunities for these women.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Such as internally displaced persons, refugees, women, minorities, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and low-income households.

¹¹⁹ Asian Development Bank, *Azerbaijan Country Gender Assessment*, 2019.

¹²⁰ Burchell, G., *Women with Disabilities in the E&E Region: Report on Research Findings: Azerbaijan*, USAID, Washington, DC, 2016.

Article 12.4.4 of the National Action Plan for Combatting Domestic Violence for 2020–2023 entrusts the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, with the preparation of special support programmes by. These programmes are meant to consider the needs of persons with disabilities and the elderly in terms of combatting domestic violence.

In 2022, the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs requested the EU4Gender Equality Reform Helpdesk project's expert support to develop a Guideline on Special Support Programmes for elderly people and people with disabilities who have been subjected to domestic violence. The guideline aims to assist to the implementation of Article 12.4.4 of the National Action Plan on the development of special support programme for women, people with disabilities and elderly people subject to domestic violence.

Azerbaijan presented this guideline to stakeholders at a conference on the "Protection of vulnerable people subject to domestic violence", held in Baku on 7 December 2022. The guideline¹²¹ outlines international standards, practices and models of support services for persons with disabilities and the elderly who are survivors of domestic violence. It also provides an assessment of the needs of persons with disabilities and elderly persons subjected to domestic violence in Azerbaijan. The guideline offers relevant recommendations for the development of an integrated social services model and for the creation of improved, inclusive services to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and elderly persons who are survivors of domestic violence.

Other groups in Azerbaijan who are at higher risk of poverty, and may be living in vulnerable conditions, include families in rural areas, large families with many children, single parent households, children between 1 and 15 years old, adults over 50 years old, persons with low levels of education, and women who have suffered economically in the transition period. Despite relatively high employment rates, many of these women have been pushed into low-paying sectors and informal work.¹²²

4.12. Gender and justice

Gender-sensitive criminal, civil, administrative and employment proceedings

The CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice, notes that discrimination against women – based on gender stereotypes, stigma, harmful and patriarchal cultural norms and gender-based violence, which particularly affects women – has an adverse impact on women's to access justice on an equal basis with men.

The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018–2023 highlights that, while accessing justice may be difficult for everyone, it is even more so for women.

¹²¹ TƏLİMAT Məişət zorakılığına məruz qalmış ahıllar və əlilliyi olan şəxslərə xüsusi dəstək proqramlarının həyata keçirilməsinə dair tövsiyələr, AI, 2022.

¹²² Asian Development Bank, *Poverty analysis (summary): Country Partnership Strategy Azerbaijan 2014–2018*, 2014.

This is due to gender inequality in society and in the justice system. Therefore, one of the strategy's objectives is to ensure women's equal access to justice.

The Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) notes that in the context of trafficking in persons, gender stereotypes, prejudices, cultural barriers, fear and shame impact women's access to justice. These barriers may persist during investigations and trials. This is particularly true for some groups of women, such as survivors of gender-based violence, women migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, women from ethnic minority groups, and women with disabilities. At the socio-economic level, obstacles to accessing justice include women's lack of awareness of their legal rights and legal procedures, of how to access legal aid – which may be due to gender differences in educational levels – and a lack of access to information.

A lack of financial resources poses another obstacle, including resources to pay for legal representation, legal fees, judicial taxes, transportation to courts or childcare. Such obstacles, and remedies to them, are listed in the Council of Europe's training manual for judges and prosecutors on ensuring women's access to justice, as well as in the publication, *Women's Access to Justice: Guide for Legal Professionals*. Azerbaijan's National Action Plan on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings foresees the inclusion of the gender aspects of human trafficking in training programmes. It also addresses strengthening the legal and social protection of vulnerable women, in order to mitigate the risk of them falling prey to trafficking. According to GRETA, the Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings organised a training session on the "Application of a gender approach in the field of combatting trafficking in human beings" for judges on 21 July 2022.

5. GENDER ASPECTS OF THE CONFLICT-RELATED HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

In November 2020, the conflict termed the second Nagorno-Karabakh war ended with Azerbaijan regaining control over areas which it considers to have been under occupation for the last 30 years. On 10 November, a tripartite statement was signed by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, and the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. In line with Article 7 of the statement, internally displaced persons and refugees will return to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent districts under the control of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).¹²³

In this regard, the Women's Empowerment for Sustainable Development Public Union conducted a study on internally displaced persons' expectations and needs, especially of women and girls, which offers recommendations for decisions and policymaking.¹²⁴ The study involved a survey of 590 internally displaced women and interviews with 30 more women to develop a tentative picture of their needs and expectations, including their fears and concerns for peace-building and returning home. The overwhelming majority of respondents highlighted safety as a driver of their decisions on relocation. As the study notes, the *“full scale clearance of landmines and deadly weapons to make the liberated land available for safe agriculture and development activities, to be supported by the guarantee for non-resumption of armed hostilities have been underscored as key factors for IDPs' return home. Almost two-thirds of respondents emphasized employment and improved financial standing as a preceding necessity, while one in two (52%) considered job creation as the biggest challenge to relocation. Two-fifths of the surveyed/interviewed IDP women and girls raised matters of better housing conditions and utility supply infrastructure.”*¹²⁵

The study highlights the importance of gender-sensitive planning and strategy-building based on identifying women's specific needs during the relocation process.

¹²³ Women's Empowerment for Sustainable Development Public Union, *IDP Women: Needs Assessment for Post-conflict Life, Including Expectations for Safe Return Home*, 2021.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Women's Empowerment for Sustainable Development Public Union, *IDP Women: Needs Assessment for Post-conflict Life, Including Expectations for Safe Return Home*, 2021.

The study includes the following recommendations¹²⁶ for government and non-governmental stakeholders in several areas, alongside general recommendations on policymaking and communication:

- developing and implementing policies/programmes with the active involvement of international organisations, development agencies, civil society and women's organisations to respond to returning women's specific needs and corresponding gender-sensitivity requirements, as well as to ensure that women and girls adapt to new living conditions in a smooth, productive and swift manner;
- engaging civil society, women's groups and gender experts in formulating development plans and strategies for the relocation of internally displaced women and girls in liberated areas; and
- launching a communication strategy for regular news updates on restoration work in the liberated areas, and enabling women and girls to express their views about the process.

In terms of safeguarding, security and safety, the study recommends:

- putting in place safeguards against violence and human rights violations, paired with and action to raise awareness of available services, including legal remedies, to protect returning women and girls;
- including gender-responsive and gender-sensitive services among the topics of regular training courses for law enforcement agencies and the judiciary operating in liberated areas; and
- providing free crisis and counselling services, including hotlines, for returning communities and ensuring these are accessible in all areas, especially remote locations.

In terms of social needs and housing, the study recommends:

- tailoring residential construction and infrastructure development activities to the needs of returning communities, particularly women and girls; and
- establishing recreational, sports and cultural facilities to give residents, particularly women and girls, an opportunity to live a healthy life and spend leisure time with their nearest and dearest.

Employment is the area for which the study provides both specific recommendations that address gender, and includes a general focus on equality by calling for gender equality to be the guiding principle underlying efforts to ensure access to available resources. In this regard, the study recommends:

- providing women with gender-sensitive access to finance and other resources (land, technology, equipment, training opportunities, etc.) to support them to engage in entrepreneurial activities upon relocation, with a special focus on the women aspiring to set up micro- or small businesses;

¹²⁶ Ibid.

- putting in place inclusive educational and vocational training programmes to align returning communities' level of professionalism with modern business requirements;
- taking appropriate action to improve women's skills and knowledge for their adaptation to, and employment, in the 'smart village' environment;
- allocating sufficient land, equitably distributed between women and men, for agriculture to allow returning families to develop competitive farms, including agroforestry businesses; and
- ensuring unimpeded access to extension (agricultural advisory) services irrigation systems, cooling chains and markets for women farmers willing to set up cooperatives.

In terms of fostering peace between Azerbaijani internally displaced persons and Armenians in Karabakh, as citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the general public in both countries for friendly co-existence, the study recommends:

- conducting public surveys in both countries to shape a comprehensive strategy that captures public views and opinions on peace and coexistence, applying a holistic approach responsive to the needs of women, girls and vulnerable populations;
- paying special attention to engaging women and youth in projects that offer flexible solutions to their needs; and
- involving women's organisations in social dialogue, since women leaders can play a crucial role as role models in mobilising women to foster a culture of peaceful and friendly coexistence.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Recommendations for the EU Delegation on thematic areas

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

- Support the Government's implementation of the Action Plan on the Prevention of Prenatal Sex Selection for 2020–2025 focusing on areas relevant to EU priorities and intersecting programmes exist. For example, the Action Plan's section on *"strengthening interagency relations and partnerships"* envisages government stakeholders cooperating on *"a social project on [the] elimination of sex selection together with various international and donor organisations"*, and tasks government agencies with *"activities to study international experience on gender issues and skewed sex ratio"*. These are potential areas for the EU Delegation's support.
- Support the legal framework on reproductive health.
- Assist the training of professors/teaching staff at educational institutions on a gender equality approach.
- Support awareness raising activities to eliminate gender stereotypes (at the community level to fight prenatal sex-selection, to prevent evasion of girls from education; representatives of mass media on gender equality and discrimination) and innovative activities that will to a broader consensus about equal value of the girls and boys.

Gender-based violence

- Support actions by governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to improve existing legislation and policies on domestic violence, and aligning these with international standards.
- Assist the knowledge and capacity building of state and non-state organisations that provide legal, social and psychological services for survivors of gender-based violence and domestic violence.
- Continue to support training programmes for law enforcement agencies.
- Support programmes that aim to raise awareness of gender-based violence, and to challenge and transform gender stereotypes.

Women, peace and security

Support, lobby for the adoption, and follow up on the implementation of the National Action Plan on the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Support women-led civil society organisations and women rights defenders on the peace-building process and agenda.

Women's economic empowerment

- Provide support in the form of gender analysis and expert advice on gender equality vis-à-vis a wide range of areas, including expertise on gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting, and assistance for the preparation and revision of policy documents.
- Support efforts to address women's disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and care work, and the gender pay gap.
- Continue supporting activities that address women's entrepreneurship and self-employment, increasing knowledge and skills in this area.
- Support programmes for women's economic empowerment.

Climate change and the green transition

- Support sustainable reconstruction in liberated areas by developing human capital in a manner that applies a gender perspective. This is important as a clean environment and green growth are among the priorities of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This can involve investing in programmes that addressing vocational and/or specialised training and skills building.
- Support gender-responsive, climate-smart agriculture through the EU Delegation's programmes on agriculture and rural development.

Digital transformation

- Support the Government to ensure education systems' responsiveness to changing skills needs.
- Assist programmes/initiatives on digital and ICT skills development, specifically taking gender dimensions into account.
- Support programmes to reduce gender skills gaps beyond coding.

6.2. Recommendations for the EU Delegation on supporting civil society organisations

- Support civil society organisations' participation in policymaking and programme development processes.
- Support civil society capacity in the policy evaluation phase to ensure that they can monitor and evaluate activities under the National Action Plans on Domestic Violence and SRHR.
- Support and strengthen civil society organisations through capacity building and technical expertise.





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