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Breaking Barriers to Women's Employment in Azerbaijan

September 2024



Photo credit: The State Agency for Vocational Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. A young woman trains for a license to operate rail transport in a program by Azerbaijan Railways.

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Contents

Abbreviations	4
Acknowledgments	5
Executive Summary	6
Key findings	7
Recommendations	10
1. Introduction	15
1.1. Context	17
1.2. Structure of the report	18
1.3. Methodology	20
2. Women’s employment in Azerbaijan	22
2.1. National policy and legislative commitments to gender equality	24
2.2. Women’s participation in the labor market	26
2.3. Key challenges to women’s employment in male-dominated technical sectors	28
3. Increasing women’s participation in the transport sector: Azerbaijan Railways and Port of Baku	33
3.1. Workforce profile	34
3.2. Attraction: Encouraging more women to pursue careers in the transport sector	34
3.3. Recruitment: Increasing the number of women joining the company	36
3.4. Inclusion at work: Building a respectful and safe work environment for all employees	38
3.5. Progression: Supporting women’s professional development and advancement to leadership roles	39
4. Examples of best practices on equal opportunity and women’s empowerment in Azerbaijan	43
4.1. Technical skills training, mentoring, and scholarships for female engineering students: Sumgait Technologies Park (STP) Group of Companies	44
4.2. Building respectful and inclusive workplaces: Coca-Cola İçecek	45
4.3. Supporting women’s access to education through scholarships: AGA Group of Companies	46
4.4. Professional development program for women: Nobel Energy	46
4.5. Organizational diversity and inclusion strategy and flexible working arrangements: Azerconnect	47
5. Recommendations	48
5.1. Recommendations for policymakers	50
5.2. Recommendations for companies	53
6. References	57

Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADY	Azerbaijan Railways
AZTAF	Azerbaijan Rapid Technical Assistance Facility
CCI	Coca Cola İçecek (CCI)
DEIB	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging
GDP	Gross domestic product
HR	Human resources
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NEWEP	The Nobel Energy Women's Empowerment Program
PoB	International Trade and Sea Port of Baku
SCFWCA	The State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs
SOE	State-owned enterprise
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and math
STP	Sumgait Technologies Park
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WEPs	UN Women's Empowerment Principles

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Executive Summary

Women remain underrepresented in several sectors of national strategic importance in Azerbaijan despite recent government efforts to lift legislative restrictions on women's employment in male-dominated fields. While sizeable gender gaps exist in the labor market, with 62 percent of women and 75 percent of men participating in the labor force and 58 percent of women and 71 percent of men being employed, the starkest gender divide occurs by sector of employment. Women account for only 16.5 percent of the workforce in the transport and storage sector, 10.7 percent in the energy sector, and 7.8 percent in construction. The persistence of this pattern of gender-based occupational segregation indicates that further action is needed to enable women's participation into these and other sectors.

Broadening the scope of economic opportunities for women can drive higher economic growth and diversification in line with the ambitious national development priorities set out in Azerbaijan's Strategy for Socio-Economic Development 2022-26. Occupational segregation leads to inefficiencies and misallocation of talent that can stifle productivity and innovation, whereas increases in women's labor market participation are associated with substantial gains to gross domestic product (GDP). At the enterprise level, companies that prioritize gender equality are more likely to attract and retain top talent, as well as benefit from stronger decision-making, team performance, innovation, and improved financial performance.

This report aims to review women's participation in traditionally male-dominated sectors in Azerbaijan and to provide practical recommendations to policymakers and employers on how to increase and support women's employment and leadership in these sectors. One of the major contributions of this report is to offer new insights into women's employment in Azerbaijan's transport sector, drawing on findings from gender assessments of two major state-owned enterprises (SOEs): Azerbaijan Railways (ADY) and International Trade and Sea Port of Baku (PoB). These assessments were conducted as part of the World Bank's Advisory and Analytics (ASA) program Strengthening women's human capital for their better labor market outcomes 2023-2024, within the European Union (EU)-funded and the World Bank-managed Azerbaijan Rapid Technical Assistance Facility (AZTAF). The two SOEs were selected considering multiple factors, such as gender gaps in their respective workforces, their potential to contribute to the country's economic diversification, and their willingness to improve their respective human resources policies and practices and to increase the share of women employed in their workforces.

While the challenges to attracting, recruiting, and retaining women vary by company, employers in male-dominated sectors globally face some common challenges. These include low numbers of women pursuing technical education relevant to these sectors; social norms and gender stereotypes that influence women's educational and career choices and that hinder equal opportunity in recruitment and progression; lower retention among female staff due to a lack of policies to support parents in balancing work with family

responsibilities; concerns about workplace sexual harassment; and a lack of targeted efforts to support women's progression into higher-paying and leadership roles.

Therefore, although the recommendations made in this report draw primarily on the experiences of the two SOEs and global insights, they are applicable to public and private sector companies in Azerbaijan and beyond. They are particularly relevant for stakeholders committed to promoting equal opportunity in Azerbaijan, including policy-makers and companies in transport and other male-dominated sectors. They may also interest actors in other economies exploring pathways for strengthening women's participation in historically male-dominated sectors.

The research for this report is based on (i) desk review of national legal and policy frameworks relevant to gender equality in employment, existing literature on barriers to women's economic participation in Azerbaijan, and international best practices to address barriers to women's employment in the transport sector, (ii) analysis of national statistical data on women's participation in education and the labor market, and (iii) findings from gender assessments of two major SOEs in Azerbaijan, comprising desk review of company policies and procedures, focus group discussions with employees, in-depth interviews with senior staff, and workplace audits.

Key findings

Legislative and policy frameworks

Azerbaijan's legislative and policy frameworks support equal opportunities for women and men, particularly following recent legal reforms to remove restrictions on women's employment. Relevant policies include the forthcoming National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2024-2027), the Employment Strategy (2019-2030), and the accompanying draft Action Plan on Women's Employment in Azerbaijan. The 2022-2026 Socio-Economic Development Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in particular, envisions an enhanced focus on women's access to economic opportunities in highly paid sectors through initiatives such as career guidance, counseling, and robust employment strategies, as well as setting aims to narrow the gender wage gap.

In 2022, Azerbaijan's government repealed restrictions on women's employment in 674 occupations across sectors, including agriculture, construction, transport, energy, and manufacturing. Working with the World Bank, the government demonstrated that employment in these sectors posed no specific threat to women's health. Instead of across-the-board restrictions, the new rules adopt a health risk-based approach to specific jobs for pregnant and nursing women.

Furthermore, with the 2023 Labor Code amendments, the government lifted legal restrictions on night work for pregnant women, women with children under the age of 14, and women with children with disabilities, allowing them to work night shifts and go on business trips with their written consent.

Nevertheless, there are further opportunities to strengthen Azerbaijan's statutory frameworks to advance equal opportunities in the workplace. These could include legal reforms to mandate equal pay for work of equal value, the introduction of employer responsibility for preventing and addressing gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace, alongside the creation of an administrative offence for perpetrators. The introduction of paid paternity leave, accompanied by efforts to encourage fathers to take advantage of it, could further support women's advancement to leadership roles and their participation in the workforce, particularly after maternity leave.

Legal reforms must go hand in hand with wider initiatives to dismantle barriers to women's participation in the workforce, particularly in relation to higher-paid, male-dominated sectors. Gender bias and stereotypes about the suitability of women and men for specific roles and occupations present a key challenge to women's education and employment in higher-paid technical sectors. The lack of flexible working arrangements and insufficient support for employees' care re-

sponsibilities further deter women's employment in technical roles in male-dominated sectors across Azerbaijan, particularly as women tend to bear primary responsibility for caregiving and household duties within families.

Women in the transport sector: Key findings from Azerbaijan Railways and Port of Baku

Gender assessments carried out in ADY and PoB provide important practical insights into women's participation in male-dominated sectors in Azerbaijan. Key findings include the following:

- Women are underrepresented in the workforce at both ADY and PoB. Women accounted for just 17 percent of all staff at ADY and only 8 percent of the workforce at PoB in 2020-2022.¹
- Women at both SOEs are concentrated in office-based roles and significantly underrepresented in leadership and technical roles. Women held 7.6 percent of leadership roles in ADY and 5 percent at PoB between 2020 and 2022. Similarly, women accounted for 10.7 percent of technical engineering positions at ADY and only 2.5 percent of such positions at PoB.
- Given current recruitment trends, it may take time for ADY and PoB to increase

¹ Figures represent workforce data between 2020-2022 (average of three years) and the latest company workforce statistics might show the ongoing achievements by these SOEs in closing gender gaps. For example, as of June 2023, female representation in PoB reached 10%, reflecting PoB's ongoing efforts to prioritize gender equality in recruitment practices, with the aim to achieve 20% by 2030.

the proportion of women represented in their workforces. Women comprise only 16 percent of new recruits at ADY and 11 percent at PoB. Women are significantly more likely to be recruited in administrative and office-based roles than in technical positions at both companies.

- ADY and POB are committed to increasing women's representation in the workforce. PoB has set a corporate target to achieve a 20 percent female workforce share by 2030. Meanwhile, both companies are strengthening their human resources (HR) policies and procedures to incorporate provisions for diversity, inclusion, non-discrimination, and prevention of gender-based violence and harassment, as well as to ensure equal opportunity in all aspects of employment.
- ADY and POB have taken concrete steps to recognize the achievements of women in transport and to reach out to potential female job candidates. For example, they have organized events to highlight women's contributions to the transport sector. They continue encouraging young people to pursue technical education by hosting information sessions and site tours for partner academic institutions and high schools.
- There is scope to strengthen company policies to ensure equal opportunity in recruitment. Both ADY and PoB collaborate with educational institutions and offer in-

ternships for students to support recruitment efforts, but the proportion of female interns is low, particularly those with vocational education, and there are no targeted internships reserved for women.

- Women's turnover rate is higher than that of men at ADY and PoB, with many women not returning to work after having children. ADY and PoB offer a range of family-friendly benefits for their employees, but there is scope to widen these to strengthen retention among women by increasing the availability of flexible or part-time working arrangements, offering childcare support for working parents, introducing paid paternity leave, and 'return to work' schemes to facilitate women's transition back into employment after maternity leave.
- Many newer workplaces provide appropriate facilities for women and men, such as separate changing rooms and bathrooms for female staff, but there is scope to improve workplace infrastructure at older sites to accommodate women's needs and encourage women's participation in technical roles.

Recommendations

The findings of this report indicate significant gender gaps in key strategic sectors of Azerbaijan's economy, particularly in relation to leadership and technical positions. Strengthening women's representation in historically male-dominated sectors requires concerted and coordinated efforts from policymakers and companies across multiple fronts. The following recommendations outline concrete actions for policymakers and companies to support women's employment and

leadership in male-dominated sectors such as transport. They include measures to attract more women to take up technical studies and careers, promote equal opportunity in recruitment, build inclusive workplaces, and support women's career progression.



Attraction

Encouraging more women to pursue careers in the transport sector



Recruitment

Increasing the number of women joining the company



Inclusion at work

Building a respectful and safe work environment that meets the needs of all employees



Progression

Supporting women's professional development and advancement to leadership roles

Recommendations for policymakers

1. Promote women's increased participation in technical and vocational training and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields of study by partnering with educational institutions and employers on scholarship schemes, apprenticeship programs, mentoring schemes, and public awareness-raising campaigns.



2. Collaborate with companies and business membership associations to establish or support industry coalitions to promote women's employment and leadership in male-dominated sectors.



3. Strengthen legislation to mandate equal pay for work of equal value and adopt measures to close the gender pay gap through statutory reporting requirements and regular pay surveys.



4. Strengthen legislation on workplace sexual harassment by introducing employer responsibility for preventing and addressing gender-based violence and harassment at work.



5. Introduce paid paternity and parental leave to promote a more equal distribution of care responsibilities among women and men.



Recommendations for companies

6. Demonstrate organizational commitment by establishing a formal company strategy on gender equality, signing up to the UN's Women's Empowerment Principles, and ensuring senior leaders speak out in support of gender equality and provide personal support for women's increased participation.



7. Implement initiatives to attract young women and girls to technical education and careers by partnering with educational institutions to offer scholarships for women in technical studies, highlighting successful women in technical roles at the company, and ensuring that awareness-raising activities emphasize a diverse range of roles open to women.



8. Strengthen women's recruitment into technical roles by introducing targeted internship and job-preparation training for women, ensuring company recruitment policies explicitly prohibit discrimination and training hiring staff to combat gender bias, and incorporating equal opportunity elements into recruitment materials.



9. Foster a respectful and inclusive work environment by reviewing HR policies and practices to strengthen family-friendly working arrangements, strengthening policies to prevent and address workplace sexual harassment, reviewing basic infrastructure to ensure it corresponds to the needs of female employees, ensuring equal access to skills development opportunities, and identifying further areas of improvement through regular staff surveys.



10. Invest in leadership development initiatives that specifically target women's advancement, such as mentoring programs and women's networks, and consider targets or quotas for female representation in leadership roles.







1. Introduction



This report explores the key issues relating to women's employment in Azerbaijan and offers recommendations to policymakers and companies for tackling gender-based occupational segregation in the labor market and increasing women's participation in sectors where they are underrepresented. The report specifically examines gender gaps within the transport sector, presenting the findings of gender assessments conducted for state-owned enterprises (SOEs) Azerbaijan Railways (ADY) and International Trade and Sea Port of Baku (PoB) as part of the World Bank's Strengthening women's human capital for their better labor market outcomes 2023-2024 initiative within the European Union (EU)-funded Azerbaijan Rapid Technical Assistance Facility (AZTAF).

The insights and recommendations presented in this report are relevant to a broad range of stakeholders committed to fostering equal opportunity in the workplace and strengthening women's human capital in Azerbaijan and beyond, including policymakers and companies in transport and other male-dominated sectors. They are particularly pertinent to large male-dominated organizations in the early stages of formulating their gender strategies and undergoing significant modernization efforts within transport and related fields.

1.1. Context

In 2022, 62 percent of women and 75 percent of men participated in the labor force, and 58 percent of women and 71 percent of men were employed in Azerbaijan. The starkest gender divide occurred by sector of employment: for instance, women accounted for only 16.5 percent of workers in the transportation and storage sector, 10.7 percent in electricity, gas, and steam production, 7.5 percent in construction, and 12.2 percent in mining, respectively (State Statistical Committee, 2023a).

Azerbaijan's recent legal reforms to remove restrictions on both women's employment in traditionally male-dominated fields and on women's night work are commendable, but further action is needed to address persistent occupational segregation. Despite a strong policy and legislative framework on gender equality, several barriers continue to hinder women's equal participation in key sectors of the economy. These barriers include gender bias and stereotypes that affect women's education and career choices, lack of female role models, and unequal distribution of household and care responsibilities.

Overcoming these challenges is crucial for advancing the 2022-2026 Socio-Economic Development Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which seeks to bolster the economy and cultivate competitive human capital. Women represent a significant portion of the nation's talent pool, and harnessing their full potential can drive economic growth. Research by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) shows that countries

achieve significant macroeconomic gains when women are able to develop their full labor market potential (Elborgh-Woytek et al. 2013). Furthermore, a McKinsey Global Institute report estimates that women's full participation in the labor market alongside men would add as much as USD 28 trillion, or 26 percent, to global annual GDP by 2025 (Woetzel et al. 2015).

For companies in male-dominated sectors, there is a compelling business case for promoting gender equality and empowering women in the workplace. Companies that prioritize gender equality and foster an inclusive environment are more likely to attract and retain top talent, and a diverse workforce is better equipped to understand and meet the diverse needs of a global market. Indeed, attracting the best people at all levels is essential for the development of the sector, and women represent a major source of untapped talent and skills in Azerbaijan, particularly in technical and management roles. A company that values and supports its female employees is also likely to enhance its reputation, creating a positive brand image that resonates with both customers and investors. International research consistently shows that companies with diverse leadership outperform their peers in profitability, and higher levels of gender diversity are linked to better team performance and innovation. By investing in the professional development and empowerment of women, businesses are not only fostering an inclusive workplace culture built on principles of equal opportunity but also securing a resilient and competitive future.

1.2. Structure of the report

This report is structured around four key entry points for supporting women's employment, which correspond to milestones in the employment lifecycle where women are likely to encounter barriers to participation and advancement (see figure 1). Some of these relate to women's entry into the sector: encouraging women to take up relevant studies and pursue career opportunities in these sectors (Attraction), and strengthening women's recruitment, particularly into technical roles (Recruitment).

Others relate to women's experience of the workplace: ensuring that working environments are inclusive and correspond to the needs of women and men alike (Inclusion), and supporting women's career progression, including into leadership roles (Progression).

Figure 1: Key Entry Points for Strengthening Women's Participation in Traditionally Male-Dominated Sectors



Attraction

- Encouraging women to take up technical education and relevant studies.
- Raising public awareness of opportunities for women in the sector.
- Shifting gender stereotypes and norms.



Recruitment

- Introducing recruitment processes that strengthen equal opportunity outcomes.
- Incentivizing the recruitment of women.



Inclusion at work

- Introducing HR policies and procedures that support women and men alike.
- Supporting care responsibilities.
- Ensuring zero tolerance for sexual harassment.
- Ensuring basic infrastructure corresponding to women's needs.



Progression

- Supporting professional and skills development for women, particularly in technical roles and management.
- Building the pipeline of female talent and increasing the share of women in senior leadership.
- Expressing support for women's employment and leadership at senior management level.

The report comprises five principal sections:

Section 1	Outlines the context and objectives of the report and provides an overview of the methodology applied.
Section 2	Provides an overview of Azerbaijan’s national legal and policy framework on gender equality and current levels of women’s participation in education and the labor market, while highlighting the barriers Azerbaijani women face in the workplace.
Section 3	Presents the findings from company-level research conducted with two SOEs in Azerbaijan’s transport sector, including quantitative workforce data and qualitative insights based on key informant interviews and focus group discussions with employees.
Section 4	Features a selection of examples of best practices on gender equality and equal opportunity from various companies operating in Azerbaijan.
Section 5	Presents practical recommendations for policymakers and companies on how to remove barriers to women’s participation and strengthen women’s human capital in Azerbaijan’s transport sector and beyond.

1.3. Methodology

This report is based on three main elements:

- Desk review of national legal and policy frameworks relevant to gender equality in employment, existing literature on barriers to women’s economic participation in Azerbaijan, and international best practices to address barriers to women’s employment in the transport sector;
- Analysis of national statistical data on women’s participation in education and the labor market in Azerbaijan;
- Findings from in-depth gender assessments of two major transport SOEs in Azerbaijan, comprising desk review of company policies and procedures, focus group discussions with employees, in-depth interviews with senior staff, and workplace audits. Further details on the methodology of the gender assessments are set out in the section 1.3.1 below.

1.3.1 Company gender assessments

In-depth gender assessments were conducted with ADY and PoB, two state-owned enterprises in Azerbaijan's transport sector, in 2023. The two SOEs were selected based on multiple factors, such as sizeable gender gaps in their respective workforces, their potential to contribute to the country's economic diversification, and their willingness to improve their respective human resources policies and practices and to increase the share of women employed in their workforces.

The assessments involved a desk review of the two companies' policies and procedures, including relevant human resources policies, collective bargaining agreements, training protocols, grievance procedures, and other documents to understand the extent to which these provide for equal opportunity in employment. To gather qualitative insights into challenges to greater women's participation in the SOEs' workforces, 12 focus group discussions were conducted with male and female employees across different roles, levels of expe-

rience, and seniority (6 groups per SOE). In addition, 20 key informant interviews were held with female and male senior staff from different departments to understand each SOE's operational context and business requirements as well as to identify opportunities to strengthen women's participation within each organization. Visual assessments of workplace infrastructure and company facilities informed an assessment of the availability and suitability of basic infrastructure to meet the needs of male and female employees.

Following the gender assessments, the World Bank supported ADY and PoB in developing and implementing gender action plans to support women's employment and narrow the gender gaps within their workforces.



2. Women's employment in Azerbaijan





2.1. National policy and legislative commitments to gender equality

Azerbaijan's legislative framework supports equal opportunities for women and men. Women's labor rights are safeguarded by the Constitution and the Labor Code. The Constitution explicitly prohibits gender-based discrimination, asserting equal rights and liberties for men and women, and emphasizes the right to freely choose one's profession and to work in safe conditions and receive remuneration for one's work without any discrimination. Similarly, the Labor Code prohibits all forms of discrimination in labor relations, including on the basis of gender.

In 2022, the government of Azerbaijan repealed restrictions on women's employment in certain roles in a number of key industries. Previously, article 241 of the Labor Code and resolution N170 of the Cabinet of Ministers, prohibited the employment of women in 674 occupations across sectors including agriculture, construction, transport, energy, and manufacturing. These restrictions barred women from working as conductors of freight wagons, locomotive engineers, drivers of buses with more than 14 seats, as well as in jobs in asphalt laying, carpentry, and certain positions in the energy sector. However, following review supported by the World Bank, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population proposed amendments to the Labor Code, which were adopted in November 2022 (World Bank 2020).

These amendments abolished all 674 job restrictions for non-pregnant and non-nursing women, replacing them with a list of 204 jobs where the employment of pregnant women and mothers of children under one is restricted and adopting a list of hazardous substances, agents, and lifestyle factors that could negatively affect maternal-fetal health for employers' attention. The government made additional amendments in 2023 that lifted legal restrictions on night work for pregnant women, women with children under the age of 14, as well as women with children with disabilities, allowing them to work night shifts and go on business trips with their written consent. Azerbaijan's support for women's employment is also prioritized in various national policy documents. These include:

- The forthcoming National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2024-2027), which aims to strengthen the legal framework for women's rights in society. The plan prioritizes women's economic empowerment through support for the development of women's labor market skills and equitable economic participation.

- The Employment Strategy (2019-2030), which aims to create equal and inclusive employment opportunities, including by reducing unemployment among women and young people to achieve productive employment and decent work for all groups of the population by 2030. The Action Plan on Women's Employment in Azerbaijan, drafted by the State Committee for Family, Women, and Children under the Employment Strategy and currently under government review, aims to improve women's labor market access, address gender-based barriers to successful careers, promote women's involvement in the private sector, and encourage women's entrepreneurship. This document also includes provisions for vocational training and education for unemployed women.
- The 2022-2026 Socio-Economic Development Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which envisions an enhanced focus on women's access to economic opportunities, particularly in male-dominated sectors. Initiatives such as career guidance, counselling, and robust employment strategies will be promoted to facilitate women's employment. The strategy also aims to increase women's average monthly salary, closing the gender wage gap by increasing the ratio of women's pay from 64.8 percent of that of their male counterparts in 2021 to 80 percent.

While these initiatives constitute an important step towards facilitating women's participation in Azerbaijan's workforce, a broader approach is needed to address the socio-cultural barriers impeding women's employment. These include, for example, gender stereotypes that steer individuals towards traditionally "gendered" career paths, as well as workplace health and safety issues, including inadequate infrastructure (such as separate changing rooms for women and men) and sexual harassment in the workplace.

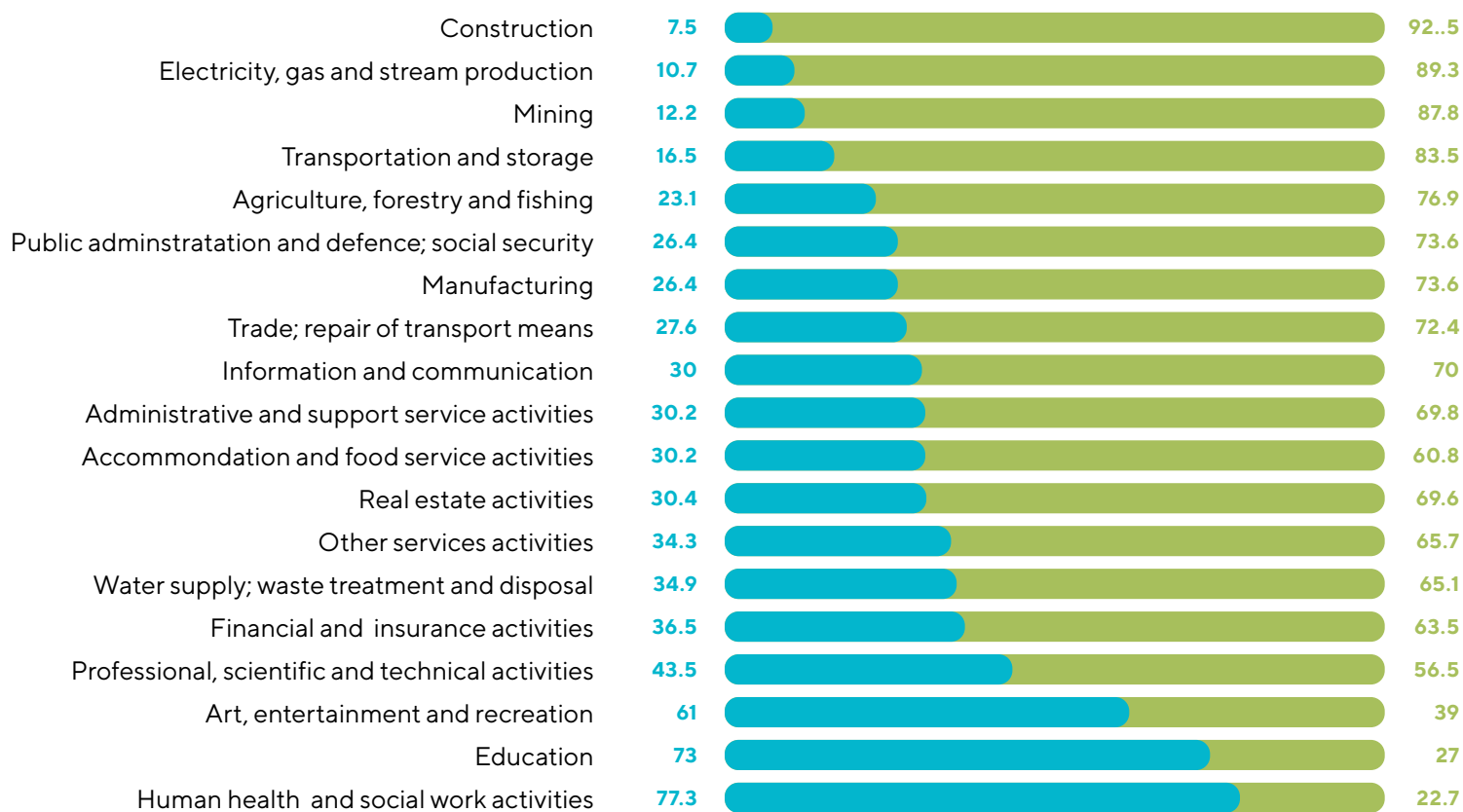
2.2. Women's participation in the labor market

Significant gender disparities exist in Azerbaijan's labor market, with 62 percent of women and 75 percent of men participating in the labor force and 58 percent of women and 71 percent of men employed (State Statistical Committee 2023a). The starkest gender divide occurs by sector and occupation: women are disproportionately concentrated in lower-paying sectors and occupations. For example, women comprise a large share of employees in education, health, social work, and other services sectors, which are often associated with comparatively lower pay. In contrast, women are underrepre-

sented in nationally important sectors that offer opportunities for higher pay, including transport and storage (16.5 percent), energy (10.7 percent), mining (10.4 percent), and construction (7.5 percent) (see figure 2). The gender divide is also evident in occupational roles within sectors, with women often serving administrative positions such as human resource management and accounting, while men predominate in technical and managerial roles.



Figure 2. Share of Women and Men among Employees Aged 15+ by Economic Sector, as of 1 January 2023



Source: State Statistical Committee 2023b.

● women ● men

These structural labor market dynamics contribute to a notable gender pay gap at the national level. On average, in 2022, women's monthly nominal wages were 33 percent lower than those of men across Azerbaijan (State Statistical Committee 2023b), reflecting women's disproportionate concentration in lower-paying sectors and occupations, as

well as their underrepresentation in management roles (State Statistical Committee 2017; Pastore et al. 2016)². Longer periods of time away from employment among women, such as career breaks for maternity leave, also contribute to the gender pay gap (Guluzade 2015).

² It is noteworthy that the gender pay gap is broadly comparable for employees in public and private sectors, indicating that horizontal (occupational) and vertical gender-based segregation is not restricted to private sector enterprises.

2.3. Key challenges to women’s employment in male-dominated technical sectors

2.3.1. Technical education and skills

The low share of women among employees in technical and industrial sectors, including transport, is linked to their low representation among students in STEM education. In 2023/2024, young women accounted for just 30.1 percent of graduates from tertiary education in STEM fields at the undergraduate level. Similarly, women represent only 19.1 percent of graduates from technical fields within vocational education (see table 1). The lack of STEM and vocational education and skills is a significant barrier for women to access employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in technical sectors such as transport. It may also hinder employed women from progressing to higher-paying technical and managerial roles.

Note [1] STEM disciplines in specialized secondary education include technical and technological specializations;

Note [2] STEM disciplines in tertiary education include technical and technological specializations and specializations in natural sciences;

Note [3] Technical fields within vocational education include power engineering, electrical engineering, device manufacturing and optical engineering, radio engineering, communication and information technology, metallurgy, mechanical engineering and metal processing, aviation, space rocketry, marine equipment and vehicles, chemical and biochemical technology, primary demand and food technology, construction and architecture.

Table 1: Share of Enrolled Female Students and Graduates from STEM Disciplines in Specialized Secondary and Tertiary Education and in Technical Fields within Vocational Education, 2022-2023 Academic Year

Education levels and disciplines	Share of enrolled female students (%)	Share of female graduates (%)
Specialized secondary education in STEM	35.5	39.6
Vocational education in technical fields	21.4	19.1
Tertiary education in STEM (undergraduate)	32.4	30.1
Tertiary education in STEM (graduate)	38.5	46.5

2.3.2. Gender bias and stereotypes

Gender bias and stereotypes about the suitability of women and men for specific roles and occupations present a key challenge to women’s employment in higher-paid male-dominated sectors. Societal perceptions of certain industries and technical roles as inappropriate for women significantly impact educational and career choices, contributing to fewer women choosing to pursue education

Note [4] The category ‘enrolled’ includes all the students studying for this level (e.g., four years of bachelor’s degree).

Source: The figures in table 1 were calculated by the research team based on the data of the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2023c. Education.

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

in STEM fields. Family support also plays a particularly important role in influencing women's employment choices in Azerbaijan: many families often do not support women working in traditionally male-dominated fields, and instead encourage them to pursue careers in line with established gender norms, for example, in positions with family-friendly working hours (ADB 2019). Additionally, there is a persisting perception of traditionally male-dominated sectors such as transport as being too physically demanding and unsafe for women, despite technological advancements that have reduced physical demands in these industries. Concerns about safety and well-being, including issues of physical, psychological, and sexual harassment, both real and perceived, add to the challenges women face in accessing these workplaces.

Outdated views on gender roles also impact progression in the workplace, with traditional notions of masculinity closely tied to decision-making authority, technical expertise, and breadwinner status within the family, while women are primarily perceived as caregivers, impacting hiring and promotion decisions made by managers (Halim et al. 2023; Boudet et al. 2023). In the highly competitive labor market of Azerbaijan, gender norms that position men as financial providers contribute to women's employment and incomes being seen as secondary, resulting in men being given priority for promotions and raises (UNFPA and SCFWCA 2018). There is no national strategy to combat these views, and the problem is compounded by biased portrayals in media and educational materials, as well as women's underrepresentation in decision-making roles in the government, academia, judiciary, and public service. Low

numbers of women in senior and managerial positions are also attributed to insufficient talent pipelines, limited mentorship opportunities, and workplace cultures that perpetuate biases favoring traditional gender norms.

Germany's national railway company Deutsche Bahn has adopted numerous measures to attract and retain more women. Its recruitment strategy and job advertisements specifically target women for technical positions, including in engineering, IT, and maintenance. The company partners with schools and academic institutions to raise awareness of railway sector jobs among young women and girls. Deutsche Bahn has also implemented flexible working arrangements, mentoring programs for women returning to work after maternity leave, as well as operating a crèche and reserving places for employees' children in other childcare institutions. These measures have enabled Deutsche Bahn to continuously increase women's share in the workforce (reported at 24 percent in 2023) and win numerous awards as the country's 'most female-friendly company.'

Source: Dailey 2024.

2.3.3. Care responsibilities and lack of flexible working arrangements

One of the key barriers to women's employment in technical roles in male-dominated sectors across Azerbaijan is a lack of flexible working arrangements and insufficient availability of support for employees' care responsibilities. Technical jobs such as crane operators and mechanical technicians often require work in shifts, night work, overtime and substantial work travel, which are difficult to balance with family responsibilities, particularly for women who typically bear primary responsibility for caregiving and household duties within families (ADB 2019; UNDP 2018). Yet, few employers offer flexible working hours or workplace childcare facilities to enable women to access employment in technical roles, contributing to women's greater concentration in administrative, office-based positions which are deemed more family-friendly.

Moreover, women often find it difficult to return to work after maternity leave. Despite Azerbaijan's law providing for 126 days of paid leave during and after pregnancy and up to 3 years of semi-paid maternity leave, organizing leave can be difficult in practice due to a lack of flexible timetables and a lack of clarity regarding possibilities and procedures for returning to work after leave. Many women thus choose not to re-enter paid employment after having children. The absence of paid paternity leave further limits women's participation in the workforce: Azerbaijan's labor law only entitles fathers to up to

14 days of paternity leave following the birth of a child, or they can apply for 7 days unpaid leave to settle family, domestic, and other social issues (Labor Code Articles 128 and 130). However, paternity leave is rarely used in practice due to persistent gender stereotypes that assign care work to women, and the unpaid nature of paternity leave negatively impacts household budgets.

To support women's economic participation, the United Arab Emirates adopted legal reforms in 2020 that introduced paid parental leave for male and female employees in the private sector and a mandate for equal pay for work of equal value.

Source: World Bank 2022.

2.3.4. Gender-based violence and harassment

Gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace is a significant barrier to women's employment, particularly in male-dominated industries in Azerbaijan. More than one in five workers worldwide are said to have experienced violence and harassment in the workplace, with women particularly likely to be affected by sexual violence and sexual harassment at work (Maruo et al. 2023). Although recent data on violence against women in Azerbaijan is not available, estimates from 2017 indicate that as many as 211,800 women (or about 4 percent of Azerbaijan's female population) may have experienced gender-based violence in that year (UNFPA and SCFWCA 2020), with the economic cost of violence against women amounting to USD 764 million, or 1.8 percent of the country's GDP. Concerns about workplace harassment are reported to deter women from pursuing jobs in Azerbaijan's private sector in particular, as well as contributing to family members' reluctance to support women's employment in male-dominated teams and customer-facing roles (UNDP 2018; ADB 2019). There is scope to strengthen the legislative framework on gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace. Although workplace sexual harassment is prohibited by the Law on Gender Equality (2006), it is not effectively addressed in the Code of Administrative Offences.

India's 2013 Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act is a landmark example of policymakers taking decisive action to combat gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace. This legislation requires employers to establish mechanisms for the prevention, prohibition, and redressal of sexual harassment at work. By providing a clear framework for addressing grievances and ensuring a safer working environment, the Act aims to create a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere for women's employment.

Source: Ministry of Women and Child Development



Photo credit: Vusala Asadova/World Bank



3. Increasing women's participation in the transport sector: Azerbaijan Railways and Port of Baku



This section presents an overview of efforts on equal opportunity and women’s workforce participation in two state-owned organizations in Azerbaijan’s transport sector: ADY, which manages and operates Azerbaijan’s national railway infrastructure and employs approximately 15,000 staff, and PoB, which employs around 600 workers.

3.1. Workforce profile³

Women in workforce:

- ADY – 17% of all employees
- PoB – 8% of all employees

Head office versus other business units

- ADY – women account 35% of employees at head office, and 13% in supporting business units
- PoB – women account for 36% of employees at head office but less than 5% of employees in other business units

Women in technical engineering (male-dominated) roles:

- ADY – 10.7% of all employees
- PoB – 2.5% of all employees

Leadership roles

- ADY – 7.6% of leadership roles
- PoB – 5% of leadership roles.

Both ADY and PoB have demonstrated a commitment to increasing women’s representation in the workforce. For example, PoB has set a corporate target to achieve a 20 percent female workforce share by 2030. As part of ongoing cooperation with the World Bank, both companies have adopted gender action plans outlining concrete steps and timelines to strengthen organizational policies and procedures to ensure gender equality in all aspects of employment.



3.2. Attraction: Encouraging more women to pursue careers in the transport sector

THE CHALLENGE

Existing societal perceptions about work in the transport sector discourage women from pursuing technical careers with ADY and PoB. Focus group discussions with staff at the two transport companies indicate that there are significant sociocultural barriers discouraging young women from pursuing technical careers at ADY and PoB. For example, many families

³ Figures represent workforce data between 2020-2022 (average of three years).

reportedly discourage their daughters from pursuing vocational education and technical jobs deemed more appropriate for men. Additionally, respondents state that many people perceive technical jobs as requiring physical strength and male-dominated industries as not safe for women.

THE RESPONSE

Since 2023, ADY and PoB have taken active steps to highlight women's contributions to the sector. For example, PoB held a historical photo exhibition on "Unsung Heroes" to showcase the critical role of women in the development of Azerbaijan's transportation and logistics system, with the photos now on display in PoB's main building. Similarly, ADY's exhibition on "Women in Railways" highlighted the key role women have played within the railway industry. PoB hosted a "Women in STEM" event to recognize the importance of women's representation in STEM, with more than 5,000 visitors attending. The company also tries to present a positive image of the workplace for women in all external communications, such as booklets, flyers, calendars, and notebooks, as well as by featuring female employees as part of the company's "Faces of the Port" campaign

Both ADY and PoB staff highlight the strategic importance of their companies for Azerbaijan's development. They also present their work as interesting and dynamic, with opportunities for employees to gain specialized experience to advance their careers. To raise awareness of career opportunities in transport and encourage students to pursue railway and port specializations, ADY and PoB offer information sessions and site tours for partner academic institutions and high schools. To date, these initiatives have not specifically targeted female students, but the companies are working to develop more targeted outreach and enhanced external communications to engage and encourage girls and young women to pursue careers at the companies.

The UN Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs): In the context of their ongoing cooperation with the World Bank and building on their existing membership in the UN Global Compact, both ADY and PoB are considering signing the CEO statement of support for the UN Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs). The WEPs are a joint initiative of the UN Global Compact and UN Women and set out seven principles to guide companies on how to empower women in the workplace and beyond. The signature of the WEPs sends a strong public signal of the companies' commitment to equal opportunities and gender equality that can help dispel misconceptions about the 'suitability' of careers in the sector for women.

3.3. Recruitment: Increasing the number of women joining the company



THE CHALLENGE

Companies face challenges to recruit more women, particularly in technical roles. Data reveal a lower recruitment rate for younger women (aged 18–30) at both ADY (16 percent) and PoB (11 percent). Women with university degrees account for a slightly higher proportion of all recruits (22 percent in ADY, 31 percent in PoB) than those with vocational degrees (18 percent in ADY, 12 percent in PoB). At both companies, women are significantly more likely to be recruited in administrative and office-based roles compared to technical positions.

THE RESPONSE

PoB has already committed to increasing the representation of women in its labor force by 20 percent by 2030. Setting specific and measurable targets to increase the recruitment of women across all levels of organizations is a best practice that should be embraced by other male-dominated industries. These targets should align with broader diversity and inclusion objectives and reflect the proportion of women in the available talent pool.

HR departments of ADY and PoB display high awareness of gender gaps in the organization. Both companies are working to strengthen equal opportunity in recruitment as part of ongoing efforts to improve HR policies and practices to ensure gender equality and support women's employment. These include the introduction of explicit provisions prohibiting discrimination based on gender and marital status in recruitment.

To support recruitment efforts, ADY and PoB collaborate with educational institutions, including universities and vocational schools, to offer internships for current students. In 2020–2022, women represented 16 percent of university students who participated in ADY's internship program (with 65 percent subsequently hired for permanent employment) and 4 percent of interns from vocational schools. At PoB, the female share of internships totaled 14 percent in 2022. To further expand the female talent pool for recruitment into technical roles, companies could consider introducing internship placements specifically reserved for female students in technical fields, particularly in vocational education, where the numbers of female interns and recruits are especially low.

Other measures include the development of educational programs that correspond to company skills needs. ADY's ongoing partnership with the Azerbaijan University of Technology has resulted in the creation of four new academic degrees in railway transport, helping the company fill anticipated skills gaps by equipping graduates with the skills and knowledge required for employment in the sector. ADY has also taken active steps to encourage women's recruitment into traditionally male-dominated fields, launching the program to train women to work as locomotive drivers.

Robust community engagement is crucial for broadening youth awareness of diverse career pathways. PoB has taken this approach in Alat, a small town within the Baku municipality. Initiatives include collaborating with local schools, participating in community events, and providing educational support for boys and girls. The establishment of the Alat EcoPark, featuring eco-friendly amenities, such as installing solar panels in the park, planting trees, and creating children's playground and a place for community members to come together, further demonstrates this commitment. Organizing school children's and university students' visits to the port, STEM festival for girls, and featuring women's historic contribution to the port by the "Faces of Port" exhibition are some of the examples showcasing varied career paths in the port industry to young people.

Following the removal of legislative restrictions on women's employment as locomotive drivers in 2022, ADY launched the program in late 2023 to train the country's first female locomotive drivers. The announcement, made on International Day of the Girl Child was widely praised.



Photo credit: Shutterstock

3.4. Inclusion at work: Building a respectful and safe work environment for all employees



THE CHALLENGE

Difficulty balancing work with family responsibilities negatively impacts retention among female staff. Women's turnover rate is higher than that of men at both ADY and PoB, with significant numbers of women not returning to work after having children. At ADY, women's turnover rate was 8 percent, compared to 6 percent among men, while women's turnover rate at PoB was 15.1 percent, versus 10 percent among men. In the period 2020-2022, an average of 23 percent of female employees left their jobs within a year of returning from maternity leave, with many citing family and household responsibilities as reasons for leaving.

Real or perceived concerns about workplace safety and insufficient basic infrastructure for female employees, such as separate changing rooms and bathrooms for women, can deter women's employment in traditionally male-dominated technical roles. Focus group discussions with ADY employees indicate that some of the company facilities would benefit from separate changing rooms and bathrooms for women. Discussions with employees of both companies also revealed concerns about workplace harassment and stereotypes about male-dominated being unsuitable for women that discourage women from engaging in fieldwork and gaining the technical experience necessary for career advancement.

THE RESPONSE

ADY and PoB have introduced family-friendly policies to address these barriers. For example, staff at both SOEs may take time off to attend to personal and family matters. PoB also offers financial assistance for employees starting a family and a one-time payment upon the birth of a child, while staff at ADY are provided with school supplies when their child starts school, as well as reduced rates for family holidays at the company's resort. The two companies recognize the need to further support working parents in balancing work with family responsibilities and strengthen the retention of female staff, including through measures such as, flexible or part-time working arrangements, childcare support, paid paternity leave, and 'return to work' schemes to facilitate women's transition back into employment after maternity leave.

The companies are also taking measures to ensure that workplace facilities meet the needs of female staff. For example, PoB provides separate changing rooms and bathrooms for women and men at all worksites. These facilities are new, well-lit, and secure. PoB territory is also under camera surveillance, which staff report helps them feel safe in the workplace. ADY's newer train stations provide women-only spaces to meet the needs of female cleaners and conductors, and the company is committed to improving older facilities to accommodate the diverse needs of men and women.



As part of ongoing cooperation with the World Bank, ADY and PoB have adopted gender action plans outlining concrete steps and timelines to strengthen company policies and procedures to ensure gender equality in all aspects of employment. These include specific provisions on diversity and inclusion, non-discrimination, prevention of gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace, and procedures for their implementation.

Both ADY and PoB are developing their Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) strategies. Gender equality, a fundamental aspect of ESG's social dimension, ensures fair pay, treatment, diversity, and inclusion. By embracing equality and empowering women across all levels, the companies aim to enhance innovation, improve corporate performance, and foster well-rounded decision-making essential for ESG success.

3.5. Progression: Supporting women's professional development and advancement to leadership roles

THE CHALLENGE

Companies are losing out on the benefits of gender diversity in leadership. Women account for only 7.6 percent of leadership roles in ADY and 5 percent at PoB. Many women lack sufficient technical and field experience, which are often required for progression to leadership positions. According to focus group discussions with employees, male colleagues tend to adopt a protective attitude towards female staff, resulting in women being discouraged or even barred from engaging in fieldwork even when it is part of their job responsibilities. This confines women to office-based roles, limiting their exposure to crucial emergency response experiences in the field and impeding career advancement. Biases and stereotypes that deem men to be better suited to decision-making roles, alongside a lack of female role models, career guidance, and professional connections required for advancement further hinder women's progression.

THE RESPONSE

Both PoB and ADY recognize the importance of ensuring that women and men have equal access to training opportunities and fieldwork experience that support career development. PoB's collective agreement requires that fairness is a fundamental aspect of employee career advancement, and both companies are committed to ensuring that gender bias does not impact opportunities available to women and men as part of the ongoing efforts to improve HR policies and practices to ensure gender equality.

In addition, ADY offers training on management and leadership to support staff progression into leadership roles; in the period 2020-2023, 64 women and 575 men completed this training. Although ADY and PoB do not currently offer any specific programs aimed at facilitating career advancement for women, both transport companies recognize the need for proactive action to increase women's representation in leadership—including through internal rotation, on-the-job training, and other leadership development programs specifically designed to streamline women's career paths towards leadership positions.

To support professional development among women employees, ADY established a women's network aimed at fostering peer support and providing valuable career guidance to female professionals within the organization.









4. Examples of best practices on equal opportunity and women's empowerment in Azerbaijan

Recognizing gender diversity as a source of competitive advantage, numerous companies in Azerbaijan are proactively implementing strategies to boost gender diversity, promote equal opportunity in employment, and support female staff in their career progression.

This chapter presents a selection of examples of best practices in gender equality and equal opportunity from various companies operating throughout Azerbaijan.



4.1. Technical skills training, mentoring, and scholarships for female engineering students: Sumgait Technologies Park (STP) Group of Companies



Sumgait Technologies Park (STP) Group of Companies is a key industrial player with large-scale production facilities in Azerbaijan, offering high-quality “Made in Azerbaijan” industrial products to consumers throughout the region, including Russia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Türkiye. STP employs up to 2,000 workers across its 12 plants and more than 30 production sites.

STP’s “Power of Tomorrow” is a first-of-its-kind initiative in Azerbaijan focused on training students specializing in industrial engineering. Since its inception in 2022, the program has benefited 300 students, 50 percent of whom are women. It fosters professional development by equipping students with the skills required by modern industry. It contributes to the country’s human capital strategy through various trainings to enhance technical knowledge, soft skills, and mentorship from experienced STP employees. This holistic approach prepares graduates for potential job opportunities within STP and other industrial companies in Azerbaijan.

STP’s “Fine Engineers” project is a targeted initiative that supports high-achieving female students from low-income families who are pursuing technical degrees. By providing academic scholarships alongside specialized training by STP experts, the program equips women with the skills and knowledge to excel as professional engineers. “Fine Engineers” also aims to break down stereotypes around gender roles in the industry empowering women to explore new avenues for personal and professional growth within technical fields.



4.2. Building respectful and inclusive workplaces: Coca-Cola İçecek



CCI is a multinational enterprise that produces, distributes, and sells beverages of The Coca-Cola Company across 12 countries, including Azerbaijan. CCI employs more than 10,000 people at its 31 bottling and three fruit processing plants in the region, serving about 600 million people through approximately 1.2 million sales points.

The CCI Human Rights Policy, which views equal opportunity and gender equality as fundamental human rights, serves as a foundation and guide for all employee-related processes. The policy is available in the language of each country and is complemented with online training/communication campaigns to enhance employees' self-awareness about their rights. It establishes an independent mechanism that supports a 'Speak Up' culture, where employees can comfortably raise grievances when needed.

CCI Azerbaijan's Domestic Violence Policy seeks to foster a safe and supportive work environment by raising awareness about all forms of domestic violence. It empowers employees experiencing domestic violence by ensuring their careers are not adversely affected and by guaranteeing confidential support under company policies. CCI recognizes that a safe home life leads to a more productive and fulfilled workforce.

CCI Azerbaijan's Gender-Inclusive Language Guide was developed to support inclusion and respectful communication in the workplace. This guide empowers all employees to use inclusive language in everyday interactions, going beyond simply avoiding offensive terms to actively raise awareness of the importance of gender-sensitive communication and provide practical guidance.

CCI's Equal-Salary certification covers company employees in the region, including in Azerbaijan. The international certification is issued based on a statistical analysis of all the salaries and an independent on-site audit. The certification demonstrates CCI's commitment to equal pay and equal opportunity for women and men.



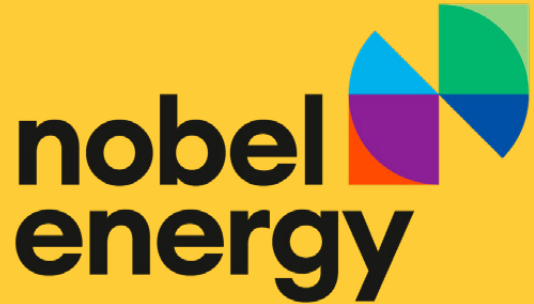
4.3. Supporting women's access to education through scholarships: AGA Group of Companies

AGA Group of Companies is a leader in Azerbaijan's non-residential construction sector. The group provides services to over 500 local and foreign companies and embassies.

AGA offers an 'Iron Scholarship' program for female students in their third and fourth year of university studies. The program is financed by AGA Group's Fuzzy Coffee & Wine restaurant. In 2024 100 percent of the restaurant's monthly revenue will be donated to fund the scholarships. The 'Iron Scholarship' program reflects AGA Group's commitment to fostering women's development.



4.4. Professional development program for women: Nobel Energy

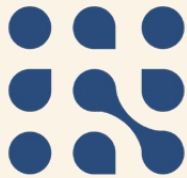


Nobel Energy, part of NEQSOL Holding, is an integrated energy production, development, and services company, with 18 years of experience. Nobel Energy focuses on people, technology, and sustainable resources to meet the evolving energy landscape.

The Nobel Energy Women's Empowerment Program (NEWEP) is designed to empower female employees to reach their full potential, forming part of the company's commitment to promote gender equality, foster an inclusive workplace environment, and invest in women leaders. This eight-week expert-led program provides participants with dedicated support to identify their career aspirations and professional development needs. Through targeted training and resources, NEWEP equips female employees with the tools and skills necessary to build successful and fulfilling careers at Nobel Energy.



4.5. Organizational diversity and inclusion strategy and flexible working arrangements: Azerconnect



azerconnect

Azerconnect is the first business-to-business provider of ICT and other technical services in Azerbaijan, offering solutions that enable an increase in quality metrics and cost optimization to businesses across the country. The company is one of the largest employers in the ICT sector.

Azerconnect's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) strategy represents the company's commitment to nurturing an inclusive working environment. As part of the DEIB strategy, Azerconnect's HR policies and procedures were revised and updated to ensure that principles of diversity and equal opportunity are incorporated at every stage of the employee lifecycle, from hiring to promotion. The company also implemented an internal communication campaign to raise staff awareness of the strategy and provided tailored training to enable managers to recognize and manage DEIB issues.

Azerconnect also introduced other programs to support women's employment, including gender-neutral job grading systems, amendment of job descriptions to eliminate gender bias, regular analyses to identify and rectify gender pay gaps, an anti-harassment policy, and targeted programs to support women's progression into leadership and attract women to technical roles. These initiatives are continuously evaluated to ensure their effectiveness, and the company has already seen positive business performance results: DEIB practices contributed to a reduction in voluntary turnover from 16 percent in 2021 to 12 percent in 2023, as well as a substantial increase in women's recruitment in technical roles.

Azerconnect's 'Flexcellence' program, introduced in 2021, offers employees flexible working arrangements that allow staff to work both from the office and remotely. The transition to hybrid work aims to support talent acquisition and employee wellbeing. The introduction of hybrid working arrangements resulted in an increase in employee engagement from 75 to 85 percent, higher levels of customer satisfaction, as well as substantial cost savings as a result of resource optimization and reduced office space requirements.



5. Recommendations







Photo credit: The State Agency for Vocational Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. A young woman trains for a license to operate rail transport in a program by Azerbaijan Railways.



Women play an important role in key strategic sectors of Azerbaijan’s economy, such as transport; however, there are significant and persistent gender gaps in their participation. These gaps are particularly evident in relation to leadership and technical positions. Strengthening women’s representation in historically male-dominated sectors is complex and will require concerted and coordinated efforts from policymakers and public and private sector companies across multiple fronts.

Although this report focuses on the gender assessments in two transport companies, the recommendations are also informed by international good practice and are relevant for other male-dominated companies in Azerbaijan and beyond. The recommendations below are accompanied by a menu of target indicators that can be adopted to measure progress.






5.1. Recommendations for policymakers

Action	Rationale	Target indicators	Thematic pillar
<p>Promote women’s increased participation in technical and vocational training and STEM fields of study.</p> <p>For example, the Ministry of Science and Education can partner with educational institutions and employers to promote women’s participation in technical and STEM fields of study, including through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scholarship schemes • apprenticeship programs • mentoring schemes • public awareness-raising campaigns to highlight career opportunities for women in non-traditional and STEM professions. 	<p>Women are underrepresented in many of the technical fields and STEM occupations that are most in-demand in sectors such as transport, logistics, and other traditionally male-dominated sectors.</p> <p>Skills gaps contribute to persistent patterns of gender-based occupational segregation, with low numbers of women employed in technical occupations that make up the majority of jobs in these sectors.</p>	<p>Number of female/male beneficiaries of STEM scholarships or apprenticeship schemes</p> <p>Number of employer / educational partners participating in scholarship or apprenticeship schemes</p> <p>Public awareness campaigns delivered to highlight career opportunities for women in TVET and STEM disciplines</p> <p>Increase in the share of women employed in STEM professions.</p>	 

<p>Collaborate with companies and business membership associations to establish or support industry coalitions to promote women's employment and leadership in male-dominated sectors</p> <p>The industry coalition can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide a platform to discuss existing challenges • develop strategies for coordinated action to support women's employment • serve as a forum for companies to exchange insights and share best practices • facilitate dissemination of guidance to employers on measures to support women's employment and leadership in different kinds of workplaces and industries. 	<p>Successfully increasing women's employment in strategic economic sectors necessitates cooperation between policymakers and companies. A collaborative coalition led by policymakers could bring together key stakeholders to foster dialogue and coordinate action to promote women's engagement in technical and leadership positions.</p>	<p>Number of companies that have joined the coalition (by sector)</p> <p>Number/description of outputs produced by the coalition (good practice guides, toolkits)</p> <p>Changes in company member policies and practices concerning gender equality</p> <p>Success stories of women benefiting from coalition measures or support</p> <p>Increased number / share of women in the workforce, leadership of member companies.</p>	   
<p>Strengthen legislation to mandate equal pay for work of equal value and adopt measures to close the gender pay gap through statutory reporting requirements and regular pay surveys.</p> <p>Policymakers can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduce legal provisions to mandate equal pay for work of equal value • require companies to report annually on the gender pay gap within each organization • ensure effective coordination among gender focal points across all ministries and government departments by clearly defining their mandates and responsibilities for implementation 	<p>Transparent accountability mechanisms such as public reporting frameworks can help drive organizational change by creating awareness of gender pay gaps in the workforce and creating concrete benchmarks for progress.</p>	<p>Revisions to legislation</p> <p>Definition of mandates and allocation of responsibilities for implementation among gender focal points within relevant ministries and government departments</p> <p>Number / share of companies complying with new requirements</p> <p>Completeness / quality / public availability of reported data</p> <p>Reduced gender pay gap over time.</p>	

<p>Strengthen legislation on workplace sexual harassment by introducing employer responsibility for preventing and addressing gender-based violence and harassment at work.</p> <p>Policymakers can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consider strengthening the legislative framework on the prevention of workplace sexual harassment, including with respect to employer obligations • raise awareness about the impact of violence and harassment, and relevant laws, and workplace policies that prevent and address these issues • ensure effective coordination among gender focal points across all ministries and government departments by clearly defining their mandates and responsibilities for implementation. 	<p>A supportive legislative environment is key to enabling women to access roles in some industrial and infrastructure sectors where workplace sexual harassment can be a barrier to women's employment.</p>	<p>Revisions to legislation</p> <p>Definition of mandates and allocation of responsibilities for implementation among gender focal points within relevant ministries and government departments</p> <p>Number of companies that have adopted dedicated policies / initiatives on sexual harassment</p> <p>Number of awareness-raising initiatives on the impact of violence and harassment, and relevant laws, and workplace policies that prevent and address these issues</p> <p>Decrease in reported incidence of workplace sexual harassment.</p>	 
<p>Introduce paid paternity and parental leave to promote a more equal distribution of care responsibilities among women and men.</p> <p>Policymakers can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduce provisions on paid paternity or parental leave into the legal framework • implement measures to encourage the uptake of paternity and parental leave among men • ensure effective coordination among gender focal points across all ministries and government departments by clearly defining their mandates and responsibilities for implementation. 	<p>Paid paternity leave can help increase women's workforce participation after maternity by promoting shared care responsibilities but must be accompanied by proactive efforts to encourage uptake among parents.</p>	<p>Revisions to legislation</p> <p>Definition of mandates and allocation of responsibilities for implementation among gender focal points within relevant ministries and government departments</p> <p>Number of companies that have adopted dedicated policies / initiatives on paternity leave</p> <p>Increased uptake of paid paternity leave</p> <p>Increased parity in share of unpaid care work between women and men.</p>	

5.2. Recommendations for companies

Action	Rationale	Target indicators	Thematic pillar
<p>Establish a gender strategy, with clear corporate commitment to equal opportunity and visible support from senior leadership.</p> <p>Companies can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a formal company strategy on gender equality and equal opportunity, with key performance indicators for senior leaders • issue a public statement of support for gender equality, for instance by signing up to the UN’s Women’s Empowerment Principles • ensure senior leaders speak out in support of gender equality and provide personal support for women’s increased participation. 	<p>To make real progress, companies need to treat gender equality as a strategic business objective and establish meaningful leadership accountability, targets, data measurement, and action plans with resource allocation. A corporate gender strategy, accompanied by a public statement of support, sends a clear message of commitment to internal and external stakeholders, and provides a framework for demonstrating and measuring change over time. Senior leaders play a key role in driving change throughout the organization and leveraging their public profile to speak out in support of equal opportunities.</p>	<p>Introduction of time-bound gender strategy, incorporating targets, indicators, senior leadership responsibilities, and resource allocation</p> <p>Introduction of other policies or programs to promote equal opportunities</p> <p>Increased number / share of women in the workforce / leadership / technical roles at the company</p> <p>Reduced gender pay gap at the company.</p>	   
<p>Implement targeted outreach initiatives to raise awareness of career opportunities for women, with a particular focus on attracting more women to technical roles.</p> <p>Companies can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduce outreach and communications initiatives that target young women specifically and encourage them to pursue technical education and careers at the company • ensure that awareness-raising activities (e.g., site tours for school students) emphasize a diverse range of roles open to women • highlight successful women in technical roles at the company through external communications, social media, and public events • partner with educational institutions to offer scholarships for women in technical studies. 	<p>Persistent stereotypes pose a significant barrier to women pursuing education and employment in technical fields, making it crucial for companies to actively counter these biases through targeted outreach efforts. Many companies already implement outreach activities and external communication initiatives with educational institutions (for example, by offering site tours to school students), which could be leveraged to specifically target girls and young women. By actively encouraging girls to consider careers within the company, companies can attract more women to technical roles, fostering a more diverse and innovative workforce while tapping into a broader talent pool.</p>	<p>Participation in career fairs, workshops, mentorship programs or similar initiatives</p> <p>Number of partnerships established with educational institutions to offer scholarships for women in technical studies</p> <p>Success stories of women in technical roles featured in company communications</p> <p>Increased number / share of women among job applicants, employees, technical roles.</p>	

Implement measures to ensure equal opportunities in recruitment.

Companies can:

- incorporate equal opportunity elements into recruitment materials (job ads, external communications)
- introduce targets for women's recruitment to ensure equal participation
- introduce targeted internship and job-preparation training for women, focusing on technical roles
- ensure that company recruitment processes and policies explicitly prohibit gender or marital status discrimination, and provide training to HR staff and recruiters to combat gender bias.

By incorporating equal opportunity elements into recruitment materials, companies can signal their commitment to gender equality and encourage women to apply. Explicitly prohibiting gender-based discrimination in recruitment processes and policies sends a clear message that such biases will not be tolerated, while providing training to combat gender bias ensures that hiring managers can recognize and mitigate bias throughout the recruitment process. Offering targeted internship and skills training programs for women could further support recruitment efforts, particularly in roles where women are typically underrepresented.

Number / share of job advertisements with wording to reflect company approach to equal opportunity

Number / share women among interns and apprentices at the company

Introduction and uptake of targeted skills training programs for women

Number / share of women among job applicants

Number / share of women among new recruits, especially in technical roles.



Foster a respectful and inclusive work environment in which all employees—including women—feel valued, safe, and able to carry out their work free from discrimination and harassment.

Companies can:

- review HR policies and practices to strengthen family-friendly working arrangements and introduce programs for those re-entering the workforce after a career break
- strengthen policies to prevent and address workplace sexual harassment, including the introduction of a gender-sensitive grievance mechanism
- review basic infrastructure to ensure it corresponds to the needs of male and female employees (e.g., separate changing rooms)
- ensure equal access to skills development opportunities, including fieldwork
- conduct regular staff satisfaction surveys to track the impact of gender equality initiatives and identify additional areas of improvement based on employee needs.

An inclusive work environment can help companies attract and retain top talent and reduce costly staff turnover. The availability of family-friendly policies is key to enabling women to balance their professional and family responsibilities effectively, especially given that women typically bear primary responsibility for unpaid care work within the family. Introducing return-to-work support through programs such as "returnships" can facilitate women's return to the workforce after career breaks. Ensuring access to appropriate facilities at work and tackling attitudes that hinder women's access to jobs requiring fieldwork can help address the underrepresentation of women in technical roles and support progression to leadership. Strengthening policies and grievance mechanisms to prevent and address gender-based violence and harassment, and ensuring that staff are aware of these through training and awareness-raising, is critical to ensuring that female staff feel safe at work. In addition, regular surveys and consultation with staff can help companies monitor the effectiveness of efforts to build inclusive workplaces and identify areas for improvement based on staff needs.

Relevant policies, programs introduced and uptake among staff (family-friendly policies, "returnship" programs, and others)

Number / attendance of staff trainings on relevant HR / sexual harassment policies

Number / outcome of complaints related to discrimination or harassment (by issue)

Improved employee satisfaction in relation to workplace environment, safety at work

Workplace infrastructure reviewed and upgraded to meet needs of female staff

Reduced staff turnover among women employees.



Invest in leadership development initiatives that specifically target women's advancement.

Companies can:

- introduce mentoring programs and succession planning efforts to cultivate a diverse leadership pipeline
- establish women's networks to support women's professional development in the organization and interest in the sector overall
- consider targets or quotas for female representation in leadership roles.

Investing in leadership development initiatives for women helps ensure a pipeline of skilled talent for future leadership roles within male-dominated sectors. Mentoring programs can provide guidance, support and the connections necessary for recruitment and advancement in the sector, while succession planning ensures there is a pipeline of qualified female candidates for leadership roles as opportunities arise. Women's professional networks can support career advancement by providing a platform for women to connect and share knowledge and experience, as well as raising awareness of the range of careers available to women in the sector overall. Meanwhile, setting clear targets for female representation in leadership can help create accountability within the company and ensure that efforts to promote gender diversity are prioritized.

Introduction of mentoring program and uptake

Number and share of women in internal high-potential pipeline for management roles

Number and share of women who participate in leadership training

Women's professional network established and number of participants

Increased number / share of women in leadership roles.



