

11

Fecha de presentación: junio, 2023
Fecha de aceptación: agosto, 2023
Fecha de publicación: septiembre, 2023

GENDER ASPECTS

OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIO-HUMANITARIAN SPHERES IN
THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

ASPECTOS DE GÉNERO DEL DESARROLLO DE LAS ESFERAS SOCIO-HUMANITARIAS EN LA REPÚBLICA DE AZERBAIYÁN

Aliyeva Sevda Agamirza gizi¹
E-mail: sevdaaliyeva12.06.23@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-4876-9694>
¹Azerbaijan University of Languages. Azerbaijan.

Suggested citation (APA, seventh ed.)

Aliyeva, S. (2023). Gender aspects of the development of socio-humanitarian spheres in the republic of Azerbaijan. *Universidad y Sociedad*, 15(5), 104-112

ABSTRACT

Gender equality is understood as equal access to the same opportunities, rights, responsibilities and resources by people regardless of their gender. Due to the fundamental role that women and girls play in the economy and in society as a whole, gender equality is essential for sustainable development and poverty eradication. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyze the gender aspects of the development of the social and humanitarian spheres of the Republic of Azerbaijan, highlighting the positive and negative trends in this area. The paper discusses the main problems that lead to gender inequality in Azerbaijan in the spheres of culture, education, and science, and on this basis recommendations and proposals are formulated to reduce gender inequality. Knowledge of the real situation of gender equality in socio-cultural spheres allows us to affirm that, despite a certain disproportion in these spheres, as well as cases of vertical segregation by gender, positive dynamics have been observed in recent years. The reforms carried out in Azerbaijan in the health sector and the improvement of a number of medical indicators also have a positive impact on gender relations. An analysis of these indicators confirms that the general index of health and quality of life of the population in the country is low compared to European countries, but it is high compared to most countries in the region. The most notorious problem in Azerbaijan is the political empowerment of women, and although progress has been made in this area, much remains to be done.

Keywords: The Republic of Azerbaijan; socio-cultural spheres; gender structure; gender equality

RESUMEN

La igualdad de género se entiende como la igualdad de acceso a las mismas oportunidades, derechos, responsabilidades y recursos por parte de las personas independientemente de su género. Debido al papel fundamental que desempeñan las mujeres y las niñas en la economía y en la sociedad en su conjunto, la igualdad de género es imprescindible para el desarrollo sostenible y la erradicación de la pobreza. Por ello, el objetivo de este trabajo es analizar los aspectos de género del desarrollo de las esferas social y humanitaria de la República de Azerbaiyán, destacando las tendencias positivas y negativas en esta área. En el trabajo se debaten los principales problemas que conducen a la desigualdad de género en Azerbaijan en los ámbitos de la cultura, la educación, y la ciencia, y sobre esta base se formulan recomendaciones y propuestas para reducir la desigualdad de género. El conocimiento de la situación real de la igualdad de género en los ámbitos socioculturales permite afirmar que, a pesar de cierta desproporción en estos ámbitos, así como casos de segregación vertical por género, se observan dinámicas positivas en los últimos años. Las reformas llevadas a cabo en Azerbaiyán en el sector de la salud y la mejora de una serie de indicadores médicos también tienen un impacto positivo en las relaciones de género. Un análisis de estos indicadores confirma que el índice general de salud y calidad de vida de la población en el país es bajo en comparación con países europeos, pero es alto en comparación con la mayoría de los países de la región. El problema más notorio en Azerbaijan es el empoderamiento político de la mujer, y aunque se ha avanzado en este ámbito todavía queda mucho por hacer.

Palabras clave: República de Azerbaiyán; esferas socioculturales; estructura de género; igualdad de género

INTRODUCTION

The achievement of gender equality in the modern world is considered as one of the main political strategies of states for sustainable development (Agarwal, 2018). Due to the measures to eliminate gender inequality, the Republic of Azerbaijan has reached the level of leading countries in many respects (Babayeva, 2022). Nevertheless, there are still problems to be solved in relation to ensuring gender inequality in our country, which requires comprehensive analysis of the situation of gender relations in the country, as well as the comparative study of the respective situation in Azerbaijan and other world countries.

The fact that the Azerbaijani territories had been under occupation by Soviet Union, as well as objective and subjective factors of the transition period affected all the spheres in the country. However, despite the current difficulties, Azerbaijan has gained successful development, and the economic growth has tripled over the last twenty years, thereby paving the way to the revival of socio-humanitarian spheres (Habibov et al., 2017). Socio-economic crisis arising from COV D-19 pandemic that started in 2020 and the consequences of which are still felt, has adversely affected socio-humanitarian and cultural spheres in which women are most involved in Azerbaijan. However, large-scale measures taken by the government of Azerbaijan allowed to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic. Particularly, the liberation of Karabakh from occupation and ensuring the integrity of Azerbaijani territories build confidence in the successful solution of problems related to gender equality in Azerbaijan.

Today, Azerbaijani woman is actively involved in all the spheres of life - social, socio-economic, scientific spheres, including healthcare, art, culture, education and etc., and worthily represents Azerbaijan in the world (Babayeva, 2022; Habibov et al., 2017). According to the data of State Statistics Committee, women currently make up 51 percent of the population in Azerbaijan. The average age is 71 years old, which is 5.4 years more than the average age of men. Today, 49,5 percent of Azerbaijani women are engaged in employment activity.

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, the Republic of Azerbaijan ranks 101st in the global gender gap index, the 36th in the economic participation and opportunity subindex (sub-indicator), 55th in education, 144th in health and survival opportunities, and 135th in political empowerment. Azerbaijan ranks 8th among 10 countries of the "Central Asia" region with a score of 0.687 in the Global Gender Gap Index rankings by region in 2022 (WEF, 2022).

As for the level of education, the gender inequality in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region has almost been eradicated (99 percent), and in 23 out of 26 countries it even constitutes 99.6 percent. The report of 2020 reveals that Eastern Europe and Central Asia managed to significantly reduce gender inequality according to the health and survival subindex, and it makes up 97.7 percent on average. The index of most countries is above 95 percent. Azerbaijan with the lowest indicator has seen progress in 2020, and gender inequality in this sphere has reached 93.9 percent in the country. Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan occupy the highest place among the CIS countries in the global ranking, while Russia ranks one of the lowest places among post-Soviet countries. Although the gender equality index in the sphere of education in the CIS countries is high, the exclusion of women from the labor market under the influence of the market economy has a negative impact on their gender inequality ratings. Eventually, gender differentiation in the sphere of employment marginalizes the situation in the sphere of education.

The forecasts of the WEF regarding the eradication of gender inequality are also of interest. According to the report of 2020, gender inequality will only be achieved in about 99.5 years though it was forecasted that this period could reach 257 years in case of failure to achieve progress in reducing inequality in economic participation and career opportunity (WEF, 2020). For this reason, promoting gender equality continues to be an important aspect from the academy, which is why the objective of this paper is to analyze gender factors of socio-humanitarian spheres in the Republic of Azerbaijan, highlighting positive and negative trends, and showing up the main problems that lead to gender inequality in the spheres of culture, education, science, and healthcare. Hoping to overcome this issue we put forward recommendations and proposals for reducing gender inequality.

DEVELOPMENT

In the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022, the first 5 places are taken by Northern European countries (Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden (the 5th place) and New Zealand (the 4th place) (Index 0.822 – 0.908) (WEF, 2022, p. 10). Iceland maintains the leadership in reducing inequality between men and women for 12 years. This country has increased the overall gender inequality surpassing the results of previous years. As it was mentioned, Azerbaijan (Index 0.687) ranked 101st in this list. It should be noted that in 2014, Azerbaijan ranked 94th out of 143 countries in the WEF Gender Inequality Index (WEF, 2014) with a score of 0.6753, and in 2020, it again ranked 94th with a score of 0.687 (WEF, 2020). It has to be

admitted that the high level of gender equality in humanitarian spheres (education, healthcare, culture) in Azerbaijan (even in some cases in favor of women, for example, they dominate in the spheres of culture and preschool education) was due to the widespread involvement of women in public life during the Soviet era. The gender factor in the sphere of education in the Republic of Azerbaijan differs in a number of specific features.

Referring to the information developed by International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), it can be noted that the situation in the Republic of Azerbaijan corresponds to the world standards according to the figures of gender distribution of pupils and students by educational levels. Thus, 47 percent of those who studied the first level (primary education) of ISCED 2011 were women, 53 percent were men; the second and the third levels (secondary education) 46 percent and 54 percent; the fifth and the eighth levels (3rd level education, higher and secondary vocational education) 49 percent and 51 percent, respectively (State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan, 2023). As it is seen, although women (51 percent) dominate in the gender structure of the population, this balance changes in favor of men at all levels of education. For comparison, the figures for the last educational level in Turkey are completely different: women make up 63 percent, and men are 37 percent, while the percentage of men and women in the lower levels generally corresponds to the overall gender distribution of the country.

The analysis of the gender distribution of students admitted to higher education institutions of the country in 2019 shows that the situation differs in different regions of the country. Thus, women make up 49.95 percent for the city of Baku, 56.1 percent for Ganja-Gazakh economic region, 54.7 percent for Sheki-Zagatala economic region, 43.6 percent for Lankaran economic region, 53.5 percent for Guba-Khachmaz economic region, 48.5 percent for Aran economic region, 49.6 percent for Yukhari Karabakh economic region, 46.7 percent for Kalbajar-Lachin economic region, 48.3 percent for Nagorno-Shirvan economic region, 48.6 percent for Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (49.9 percent for the Republic of Azerbaijan) (State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan, 2023).

Gender equality in education has been fully established by the legislation in the country. Azerbaijan is among the leading world countries in terms of the level of literacy, which is an important indicator of the gender situation (Babayeva, 2022). The illiteracy rate of the population aged 15 and above in the country is 0.3 percent among women, 0.1 percent among men; the illiteracy rate of young people is 0.1 percent among women, and 0.0 % among men (State Statistical Committee of the republic

of Azerbaijan, 2023). It is quite a high indicator when 10 percent of girls aged 15- 24 in the world are illiterate. For comparison, in Turkey these figures make up 6.5, 1.2 and 0.4, 0.1 percent. According to these indicators, Azerbaijan has surpassed important countries like Greece, a member of the European Union.

Gender ratio of pupils and students according to types of education at the beginning of the 2019/2020 academic year were as follows: 46, 7 percent women in general educational institutions, 45.5 percent in vocational schools, 64.1 percent in secondary vocational schools, and 48.8 percent in higher education institutions and in education for doctoral degree. At the beginning of the 2019/2020 academic year, female students in state higher education institutions were 48.5 percent, and men students were 51.5 percent. Women mainly prefer pedagogy, culture and arts, as well as natural sciences. In 2019, the index of gender equality in education was 0.878 in preschool education, 0.876 in general education, 1.783 in secondary vocational education, and 0.949 in higher education (State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan, 2023). Gender equality in Azerbaijan has almost been ensured due to the access of women and girls to education and professional training. However, the number of female students in higher technical institutes and in institutes of natural sciences is rather low in Azerbaijan, as in most other countries, while they constitute a majority among primary school teachers.

The predominance of women in the sphere of education during the Soviet period continued even during the period of independence. Women made up 99.8 percent of teachers employed in pre-school educational institutions, 93.4 percent of teachers in primary educational institutions, 76.4 percent of teachers in general secondary and full secondary educational institutions and 87.7 percent of employees in the sphere of education as a whole. Thus, women accounts for 65.4 percent of employees in the sphere of education worldwide. Currently, 81 percent of teachers in state full-time education institutions are women, and 19 percent are men (82 percent and 18 percent in non-state full-time education institutions, respectively), and 79 percent of teachers in secondary vocational schools are women, 21 percent are men. Women also prevail in higher education institutions (55 percent in state higher education institutions, 52 percent in non-state higher education institutions) (State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan, 2023).

The predominance of women in the education system is, on the one hand, related to the false stereotype that "teaching is not a male profession" formed in the Soviet era, and on the other hand, it refers to the fact that men do

not show interest to the field of education because of low salaries. Actually, the lack of male teachers in primary and secondary schools has a negative impact on the spiritual education of boys, the formation of their psychological outlook and ego. Even though female teachers mostly prevail in the sphere of education, gender inequality and "dominance of men" still continue in the management of educational institutions and in decision-making. In this sense it is important to work in order to change this stereotypes (Mollaeva, 2018).

For example, in 2019, women accounted for 38.1 percent of principals and 57 percent of deputy principals in general secondary schools in Azerbaijan. Currently, 90.2 percent of rectors, 81.1 percent of vice-rectors and branch directors, 73.5 percent of faculty deans, 73.3 percent of department chairs, 79.2 percent of professors and 51.7 percent of associate professors in state higher education institutions are men. However, as mentioned above, men make up only 19 percent of teachers in general education institutions, and only 45 percent of professors and teachers in higher schools. The situation is almost the same in non-state higher education institutions (State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan, 2023), in health-care and social services predominated by women, and in pension provision, which shows that men mainly take high-paying positions (Aghayeva, 2014, p. 206).

Given gender factor, serious quantitative changes have been taking place in the sphere of science in Azerbaijan over the last thirty years. Women are engaged in active scientific work on a par with men in the scientific research institutes of the country. Generally, women make up 53 percent of those engaged in the sphere of science, which is close to the level in some developing countries (Ahmadov et al., 2008, p. 22). According to the statistics of 2012, 5,521 out of 9,937 employees in the leading scientific institution - the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (ANAS), as well as 7 out of 33 institute rectors, 106 out of 545 Doctors of Science, and 2,342 out of 4,694 scientific researchers were women (Salahova, 2012, p. 36). In 1991 (the last year of the Soviet power), there were 2,339 female and 6,566 male Doctor of Philosophy (Candidates of sciences) in Azerbaijan. In 2020, this figure was 5,181 and 5,658, respectively (State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan, 2023), thereby reducing the remarkable differences in the number of female and male PhDs over 30 years.

At the beginning of year 2020, women accounted for 56 percent of those studying Doctor of Philosophy and 51.6 percent of those studying Doctor of Science. As per the sphere of science, 69 percent of researchers in humanities, 57.7 percent in medical sciences, 59.5 percent in

natural sciences, 37.2 percent in agricultural sciences, 49.6 percent in technical sciences, and 54.4 percent in social sciences were women. The number of men engaged in science is decreasing, as men are traditionally considered to be breadwinners of the family. However, the predominance of male Doctor of Science still continues. There were 120 female and 1066 male Doctor of Science in the country in 1991, while 2020, these numbers increased to 478 and 1981, respectively. The number of female academic and correspondent members is also in minority, thus, 8 out of 68 academics and 11 out of 94 correspondent members are women (State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan, 2023). The minority of female Doctor of Science, corresponding members, and academics compared to Doctor of Philosophy can be explained by the fact that after getting the PhD degree, they are more burdened with family issues and household chores, and stop engaging in science.

The collapse of the Soviet planned system in the early 1990s and the transition to a market economy led to the expansion of competition in the labor market, to low-paying positions for women, and ultimately to the deepening of gender inequality between socio-humanitarian and economic spheres, and the labor market in the country. Sociologists characterize it as the period of "patriarchal renaissance". Certainly, mental thoughts ("a man should earn bread, and a woman should take care of the house and children") on a par with socio-economic factors play a considerable role.

On the other hand, Healthy Life Expectancy is considered to be the main average index of life expectancy in the world countries. This index accurately characterizes the general state of health and quality of life of the population, the level of efficiency of the national health system and the level of social policy. The study carried out by the World Health Organization (WHO) to measure the level of healthy life expectancy in the countries of the world (World Health Organization, 2023) shows that Singapore (total life expectancy-76.2; men- 74.7; women- 77.6) and Japan (76.2, 74.7, 77.6, respectively) share the highest rating among the countries of the world. As per these indicators, Azerbaijan (64.9, 62.8, 66.9, respectively) takes the 92nd place, one step above neighboring Georgia (64.9, 61.5, 68.4). Armenia took the 71st place in that list (66.3, 63.6, 68.7). The longer life expectancy of women compared to men in Azerbaijan, as in the whole world, leads to a higher number of women pensioners. Thus, women made up 60.7 percent of the retired pensioners in the country at the beginning of 2020 when the average retirement income was 263.6 manats per month, and made up 41.5 percent

of the average monthly nominal salary (State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan, 2023).

Gender aspects of healthcare indicators in Azerbaijan occupy an important place from the point of view of the analysis of gender equality. Azerbaijan falls behind most European countries in terms of life expectancy at birth, which is one of the significant indicators of gender status. This figure was 76.5 years for women and 70.1 years for men for the year 2020. However, these figures reach 86 among women and 79 among men in most European countries, as well as 78 and 70 in Turkey, and 79 and 72 in Armenia. Maternal mortality is accepted as one of the key indicators of gender policy. Maternal mortality rate was 28.6 deaths per 100,000 live births in Azerbaijan for 1989, 9.3 (the lowest) for 1990, 44.1 (the highest) for 1995, 15.7 for 2010, and 14.9 for 2019. Compared to the previous year, the level of maternal mortality in 2019 increased by 1,1 times in urban and 1,4 times in rural areas. In general, maternal mortality in 2019 increased by 2.1 percent compared to 2018 (State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan, 2023). Thus, maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births in the Republic of Azerbaijan is rather high in comparison with developed countries. This figure is 2-5 in Western European countries. However, Azerbaijan has achieved significant progress compared to the CIS countries. Actually, Belarus even surpasses Western European countries according to this indicator. Nevertheless, the infant mortality rate in other CIS countries (33.3 in Armenia, 25 in Kyrgyzstan, 20.2 in Uzbekistan, 17 in Ukraine) is much higher. The government of Azerbaijan regularly implements projects aimed at reducing maternal mortality in cooperation with UNICEF and UNFPA. In this regard we can highlight the "Second National Strategy on Reproductive Health (2009-2015)" approved by the Cabinet of Ministers covers the criteria for the development of maternal health standards, prevention of HIV/AIDS and promotion of reproductive health of young people as well. The Republic of Azerbaijan has made remarkable achievements compared with developing countries in regard to infant mortality rate, but it significantly lags far behind European countries in terms of this coefficient.

In spite of substantial achievements in the sphere of infant mortality in Azerbaijan over the last 50 years, the situation still leaves much to be desired. The infant mortality rate was 41.7 female and 42.7 male deaths in 1960; 6 female and 25.1 male deaths in 1990; 15.5 female and 17.2 male deaths in 2015 per 1,000 live births. Although this indicator has improved significantly over the last 10 years (in 2010, these figures were 11 and 11.5, and in 2019, 9.1 and 12.7, respectively), it falls far behind the global

average indicators. Overall male infant mortality rate is higher than female mortality. This also refers to the number of child deaths under the age of 5. The rate of the child death under the age of 5 was 37.2 among male and 43.5 among female babies in 1990; 29.1 and 31.7 in 2000; 13.7 and 14.6 in 2010; and 10.9 and 14.8 in 2019. In 2020, 8.6 female and 10.9 male babies per every 1,000 live births were stillborn in Azerbaijan, which is much lower than in Belarus (2.1 and 2.7, respectively), the leader among the CIS countries. This figure was 5.3 and 6.8 in Armenia, and 8.5 and 9.6 in Turkey in 2019.

As it was mentioned above, the high rate of maternal and infant mortality in Azerbaijan indicates that the level of the quality of medical care leaves much to be desired. By the end of 2019, there were 31,829 doctors in the country, which left us with the ratio of 32 doctors per 10,000 people. The number of female doctors was 20,980 (65.9 percent of all doctors), and the number of male doctors was 10,849 (34.1 percent) (State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan, 2023).

Protection of women's reproductive health is one of the main goals of social policy in the country. In 2006, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan approved "The Plan of Action on the Maternal and Child Health" in order to achieve the 4th (reduction of infant mortality) and 5th (protection of maternal health) development goals of the millennium, to organize the protection of the reproductive health of the population and to ensure safe motherhood. "The State Program for Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2008-2015" by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated September 15th, 2008, approval of the laws "On Amendments to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Protection of Public Health" dated October 28th, 2013 and "On Compulsory Medical Examination of Children" contributed to significant changes in the protection of the health of mothers and children in the republic. Another fact is the decrease in the number of women's clinics from 213 to 131 during the 2010s. However, 99.9 percent of births were attended by skilled health personnel, which significantly reduces the risk of maternal and infant mortality.

The violation of the gender ratio among born babies also causes concern. The high rate of male birth in the Republic of Azerbaijan (53.2 percent of those born until August 1, 2021) indicates the increasing number of selective births in the country. The statistics of 2020 prove that there were 7.8 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-49 in Azerbaijan in 2000; 9.9 in 2010; and 14.2 in 2019. Even though women's access to abortion is a positive factor in terms of gender inequality, the termination of pregnancy is

explained by parents' preference for male children rather than medical factors. Thus, boys began to predominate in the gender ratio of the children born, namely 106 male births in 1991, 117 male births in 2001, and 114 male births in 2019 per 100 female births (State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan, 2023). In case this tendency continues, it may lead to serious demographic, social and economic consequences in the future.

However, it should also be emphasized that despite the predominance of male births, the probability of female babies' survival is higher, which allows maintaining the balance between women and men in the gender structure of the population. Life expectancy at birth in Azerbaijan is 78.7 years for women and 74 years for men, and healthy life expectancy is 68.5 years and 63.6 years respectively (State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan, 2023). The lack of information on the use of contraceptives and the lack of sexual education in the country have a negative impact on women's reproductive health, which consequently prevents Azerbaijan from having high indicators in international rating reports. On the other hand, Azerbaijan has seen a gradual decline in the fertility rate for many years. This figure decreased from 3.7 (in 1975) to 1.8 in 2002, but slightly increased to 1.9 in 2003 compared to the previous year, then significantly rose to 2.4, 2.3 in 2004-2012, and again decreased to 2.0 in 2019.

Acquaintance with the current situation of gender equality in the sphere of education and science suggests that despite certain disproportionality in these spheres, as well as vertical gender segregation, positive dynamics have been observed in recent years. The reforms carried out in Azerbaijan in the sphere of healthcare in recent years and the improvement of a number of medical indicators also have a positive impact on gender relations. The analysis of these indicators confirms that the general index of the population's health and quality of life in the country falls behind European countries thereof but is high compared to most regional countries. Women's access to health care have improved in Azerbaijan, however, our country lags far behind European countries in terms of a number of indicators, which are covered in international reports. The fact that most of public health indicators in Azerbaijan are lower than the world thereof implies that the level of quality of medical care is not satisfactory. Therefore, protection of public health should be one of the main goals of social reforms implemented in the country.

Positive results related to the implementation of gender policy in the Republic of Azerbaijan have been reflected in various international documents and reports, among which the reports submitted by Azerbaijan to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against

Women and the final notes of the CEDAW Committee. The report shows that the Azerbaijani government pays due attention to the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee, and actively helps to spread information about the Convention and to explain its provisions in the sense of true equality. It has to be noted that the national legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan comprehensively expresses the ideas of gender equality in all the spheres of life. In 1995, the Republic of Azerbaijan adopted and joined the "Convention on the Elimination of All Types of Discrimination against Women", as well as the main international documents on human rights. All these steps pave the way to the elimination of gender inequality in the country and to the development of a gender-balanced policy. The UN Convention "On the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women" (CEDAW) is of particular importance among these documents.

About 150 documents on ensuring women's rights and gender equality have been signed in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Guarantees of Gender (Men and Women) Equality" adopted on October 10th, 2006 (Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2006) is considered to be an important step towards promoting gender equality at the level of supreme state legislation in the country. The law is an important step towards improving the legislative basis for gender policy in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and concludes the normative legal act concerning gender equality. The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Prevention of Domestic Violence" was adopted in 2010 (Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2010b). The law provides legal and social preventive measures against domestic violence. Besides, a number of normative legal acts were also adopted in connection with its application (Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2010a). A number of amendments were introduced to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Prevention of Domestic Violence" by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated November 24th, 2011. The adoption of the law made the fight against violence more systematic. A number of acts were amended following the adoption of the law. These amendments are of particular importance in preventing early marriages.

Rising divorce rate and the decrease of official marriages in the country in the years of independence is another disappointing fact. It should be noted that the highest divorce rate per 1000 people was recorded in 1990 (2.0). In the 2000s the average number was 0.7-0.9, while in the 2010s, it started to increase again (from 1.0 in 2000 to 1.7 in 2019). In 2010, there were 79,172 marriages in the country (9,061 divorces were registered). In 2019, the number

of marriages was only 63,869, and the number of divorces, on the contrary, doubled (17,148). In 2019, there were 6.4 marriages and 1.7 divorces per 1000 people in Azerbaijan. Although the percentage of marriages and divorces is lower in Azerbaijan than in other countries, the sharp increase in the number of divorces in recent times cannot but cause concern. Given the sharp decrease in the number of marriages due to the pandemic in 2020-2021, it is not difficult to imagine negative demographic consequences this trend could lead to in the future. The average age of both women and men who got married during this period increased (from 23.4 to 24.7 among women, from 27.9 to 29.4 among men) (State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan, 2023). In general, over the last 30 years the highest average age of marriage for women and men was recorded in 2019.

One of the serious socio-demographic problems in the Azerbaijani society is the early marriage of girls in some regions. Marriage of girls and boys under the age of 18 had traditionally been frequent in Azerbaijan. Researches show that early marriages of girls take place with the consent of their parents. The cases of early marriage of girls were frequent at the age of 16 voluntarily and at the age of 15 due to pregnancy. The cases of abduction occurred in the age group 15 and 17 years (Early marriages weaken, 2013, p.11). Statistics show that over the last 30 years, the number of girls and boys under the age of 18, whose marriages were officially registered was as follows: 471 girls (21 men) in 1990, 4742 girls (7 men) in 2010, 366 (only 1 man) in 2019 (0.57 percent only) (State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan, 2023). The remarkable decrease in the number of marriages at an early age is connected with the fact that the legal minimum age of marriage is 18 years for both men and women in Azerbaijan. However, cases of early marriage of girls still continue to occur. Their marriages are not registered, and they enter into an official marriage once they reach the age of 18.

The national legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan pursues the aim of ensuring gender equality and prohibiting gender discrimination. Furthermore, the national statistics of the country and international gender reports confirm that Azerbaijan has certain problems in the sphere of economic opportunities and political representation (Figure 1). This factor consistently includes Azerbaijan in the two thirds of bottom ranked countries in the world ranking. The best cases where female employees access decision-making positions are the Ministries of Health, Education, Labor and Social Protection where women in managerial positions make up 37 percent, 41.3 percent and 24.8 percent, respectively.

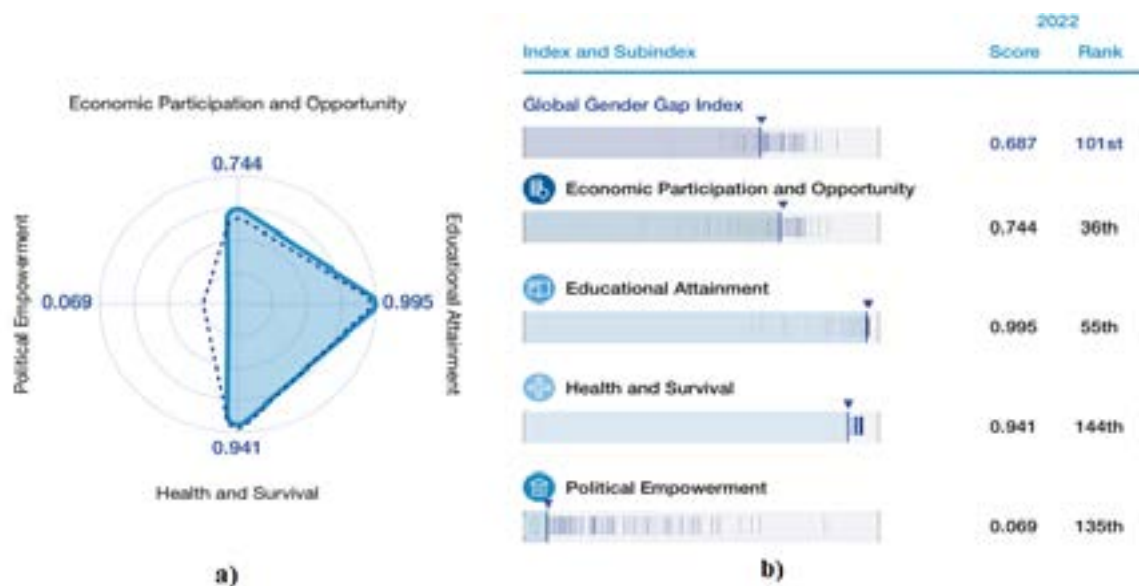


Figure 1. Performance of Azerbaijan in the Global Gender Gap Index indicators. **Source:** (WEF, 2022).

Then, in spite of significant achievements in the sphere of involvement of women in management, it should be noted that women, who make up approximately 51 percent of the country's population, are still not represented proportionally in government bodies and management positions. Therefore, the solution of the problem depends on the change of people's mental thinking rather than on the adoption of special laws. In this regard Hasanova and Aliyeva (2021) point out that it is important that more women occupy such positions, as women leaders tend to maintain equity in society and put more emphasis on education, health, and social welfare while observing economic sustainability principles,

instead of focusing on defense spending, a most common preference among their male counterparts.

Taking the above into account the main goals and tasks in ensuring gender equality in Azerbaijan are as follows:

- protecting and strengthening the rights of women and men.
- taking appropriate measures to enjoy these rights.
- creating conditions for their equal participation in management and decision-making.
- improvement and development of democratic representation.
- ensuring equal participation of women and men in the labor market, business and financial sphere, and economic independence as well.
- increasing the life expectancy of women and men.
- reducing child and maternal mortality.
- improving the reproductive health of women and men.
- protection of low-income population.
- creating conditions for equal participation of women and men in the education system.
- increasing equal educational opportunities.

CONCLUSIONS

Gender equality is a fundamental cornerstone for the progress and development of any society. Throughout history, gender inequalities have perpetuated deep social, economic and political gaps, depriving women of opportunities, yet it is accepted that achieving gender equality is not only a moral imperative, but also a key factor. to achieve

a more equitable, just and prosperous world. Gender equality promotes the active participation of all members of society, unleashing vast human potential and enriching the diversity of perspectives. By promoting an equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, eradicating discrimination and fostering inclusion, we move towards a future in which all people, regardless of gender, can reach their full potential and contribute fully to global progress.

The national legislation of Azerbaijan provides a full legal guarantee for gender equality; however, the achievement of this equality is a long-term process that requires the implementation of a number of comprehensive measures. In this regard, the deepening of gender inequality in the labor market, between socio-humanitarian and economic spheres, are caused to a certain extent by mental traditions on a par with socio-economic factors, so it is important to break up stereotypes. In addition, a number of demographic indicators in the country in recent years

(declining birth rate, increase in divorces and in abortions, sex imbalances at birth and etc.) lead to the deepening of gender inequality in the country, which in turn necessitates taking a number of political, legal and socio-economic steps.

Increasing women's political rights and opportunities is one of the main conditions for ensuring gender equality. Several international gender reports confirm that there are certain problems in the sphere of women's political representation in Azerbaijan, which in turn negatively affects the ranking of Azerbaijan among the countries of the world. Even though the national legislation provides equal opportunities for women and men in this sphere, traditional moral values create certain obstacles to the realization of these opportunities. The expansion of women's participation in decision-making and the promotion of their social activity are not of less importance. This will ultimately have a positive effect on the expansion of women's participation in the political life of the country.

REFERENCES

- Agarwal, B. (2018). Gender equality, food security and the sustainable development goals. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 34, 26–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2018.07.002>
- Aghayeva, K. (2014). *Gender issues in Azerbaijan*. Ministry of Education and Western University.
- Ahmadov, I., Mehtiyev, A., Bagyrzadeh, M., & Aslanli, K. (2008). *Analysis of the economic, political, social and institutional basis for the implementation of gender budget in Azerbaijan*. ACI-YF.
- Babayeva, G. (2022). Gender equality in the education system of Azerbaijan Republic. *Collection of Scientific Papers « ГО », July 8, 2022; Paris, France*, Article July 8, 2022; Paris, France. <https://doi.org/10.36074/logos-08.07.2022.074>
- Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2006). Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on guarantees of gender (men and women) equality. In *Legislative Collection of the Republic of Azerbaijan* (pp. 2315–2319).
- Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2010a). Collection of Legislation on Prevention of Domestic Violence in the Republic of Azerbaijan. In *Legislative Collection of the Republic of Azerbaijan* (Issue 11, pp. 61–83).

- Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2010b). Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Prevention of Domestic Violence. In *Legislative Collection of the Republic of Azerbaijan* (Issue 11, pp. 2097–2107).
- Habibov, N., Barrett, B. J., & Chernyak, E. (2017). Understanding women's empowerment and its determinants in post-communist countries: Results of Azerbaijan national survey. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 62, 125–135. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.05.002>
- Hasanova, I., & Aliyeva, S. (2021). Gender Equality in the High Positions of the Azerbaijani Government. *International Journal of Civil Service Reform and Practice*, 6(1), <https://www.astanahubjournal.org/index.php/ijcsrp/article/view/139>
- Mollaeva, E. A. (2018). Gender Stereotypes and the Role of Women in Higher Education (Azerbaijan Case Study). *Education and Urban Society*, 50(8), 747–763. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124517713613>
- Salahova, E. (2012). *Women conquer various fields of science. Materials of the round table on "Gender problems in Azerbaijan: Current situation and development of main directions."* Aspoligraf.
- State Statistical Committee of the republic of Azerbaijan. (2023). *Women and men in Azerbaijan*. <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>
- WEF. (2014). *Global Gender Gap Report 2014*. World Economic Forum.
- WEF. (2020). *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*. World Economic Forum. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf
- WEF. (2022). *Global Gender Gap Report 2022*. World Economic Forum. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf
- World Health Organization. (2023). *Ranking of countries in the world in terms of healthy life expectancy*. <https://gtmarket.ru/ratings/healthy-life-expectancy-index>