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Women's Employment in Line with Sustainable Development Goals: The Example of Azerbaijan

Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma Hedefleri Doğrultusunda Kadın İstihdamı: Azerbaycan Örneği

Gamze Yıldız Şeren^{a,*}, Jale Aliyeva Rehman^b

^a Assoc. Prof. Dr., Tekirdağ Namık Kemal University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Public Finance, 59000, Tekirdağ / Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0002-5063-1172

^b Azerbaijan University, Department of Economics and Business Administration, 1005, Bakü / Azerbaijan
ORCID: 0000-0003-4469-6399

ANAHTAR KELİMELER

Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma Hedefleri
Kadın İstihdamı
Azerbaycan

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı Azerbaycan'da kadınların istihdam düzeyinin mevcut durumunun Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma Hedefleri (SDGs) kapsamında analiz edilmesidir. Bu doğrultuda kadın istihdamına ilişkin mevcut istatistikler incelenmiş, Azerbaycan'da kadınların istihdama ilişkin karşılaştıkları sorunlar araştırılmıştır. Çalışmada stratejik ve hukuki belgeler, uluslararası kuruluşların raporları/istatistikleri ve Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Devlet İstatistik Komitesi (SSCRA) bilgileri kullanılmıştır. İstatistikler ve uluslararası raporlar doğrultusunda, tüm dünyada olduğu gibi Azerbaycan'da da kadınların ücretli aylık ortalama maaşları, erkeklerinkinden daha düşük, kadınların işsizlik oranları fazla, ayrıca kadının işgücündeki payı da erkekler nazaran geri planda kalmıştır. Azerbaycan, politika belgelerinde kadın haklarına yönelik taahhütlerde bulunmuş, yasal metinlerinde kadınlara yönelik hakları tanımlamış, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine yönelik belirli bir ilerleme kaydetmiştir. Fakat SDG (5-8) hedefleri kapsamında çalışmaların artırılarak sürdürülebilir bir yapıya kavuşturulması gerekmektedir.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable Development Goals
Women's Employment
Azerbaijan

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyze the current situation of women's employment level in Azerbaijan within the scope of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this regard, existing statistics on women's employment were examined and the problems faced by women regarding employment in Azerbaijan were investigated. Strategic and legal documents, reports/statistics of international organizations and information of the State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SSCRA) were used in the study. In line with statistics and international reports, in Azerbaijan, as in the rest of the world, women's average monthly salaries are lower than men's, women's unemployment rates are higher, and women's share in the labor force remains behind compared to men. Azerbaijan has made commitments to women's rights in its policy documents, defined rights for women in its legal texts, and certain progress has been made towards gender equality. However, within the scope of SDG (5-8) targets, studies need to be increased and a sustainable structure should be achieved.

1. Introduction

A key component of ensuring social welfare is employment. One of the primary goals of the Sustainable Development Agenda has been identified as ensuring full, productive employment and decent labor. Women must participate fully in the workforce on an equal basis with men to maintain sustainable economic development. In other words,

women's engagement in the labor force benefits not only their well-being and the well-being of their families but also the economy. To ensure gender equality, it is crucial to utilize men and women's talents at the same level in the workplace. In the report of the International Labor Organization (ILO), *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women*; it was emphasized that women spend less time in paid work and more time in unpaid work. Accordingly, women spend

* Sorumlu yazar/Corresponding author.

e-posta: gyseren@nku.edu.tr

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approximately 2.5 times more time on unpaid housework and family care than men. This situation also reduces women's access to social protection (ILO, 2017). Although unemployment is a concern for both men and women, but it affects women more because of the physiological demands of childbearing, social expectations, and domestic responsibilities.

Azerbaijan has a legal framework that ensures gender equality in the field of employment. Azerbaijan has ratified the relevant conventions of the International Labor Organization on the elimination of discrimination against women. Although there has been progress in gender equality since 1991, there are still issues that need to be carefully emphasized within the scope of the SDGs, including eradicating data gaps, ensuring women's representation, eradicating gaps in decision-making positions, and promoting women's employment.

The aim of the study is to analyze the current situation of women's employment in Azerbaijan, to reveal the problems they face in the labor market and to evaluate these issues within the scope of SDGs. Comparative economic-statistical analysis, generalization and systematic analysis methods were used in the research. Accordingly, strategic and legal-normative documents, reports/statistics of international organizations, and SSCRA information were used.

2. SDGs and Women's Employment

Women experience discrimination in the workplace, in politics, in the home, and at society. In this aspect, women perform three times as much unpaid work as men do, although 50% of women over the age of 15 are employed, compared to 75% of men. In the workplace, women are more likely to experience unfavorable conditions, and they get less money for doing the same professions as men. Women's career advancement is significantly impacted by such circumstances. Women are underrepresented in politics and business at the highest levels, and they are also underrepresented among business owners. Given that women make up roughly 50% of the world's population, these unfavorable conditions do not point to a sustainable process. Inclusive growth and development requires the involvement of women and girls in this process (Roy and Xiaoling, 2022: 930-931). By boosting the economy, gender equality advances that goal. The trend of female labor force participation is U-shaped. As a result, even while women's employment involvement initially declines during the process of economic development, it eventually rises in the years that follow. To build this process, the business world, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and governments need to create an environment where women can access different areas and participate in decision-making processes with an inclusive approach (Mehdiyeva, 2023). According to research, the elimination of gender inequalities (especially in the fields of education and employment) leads to a process that contributes to economic growth and increases the real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita

in the long term (Esen ve Şeren, 2022).

SDGs were issued by the United Nations (UN) in 2015 as a universal call for action with goals such as peace, prosperity, and protection of the world. To achieve these goals, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda has been determined. The SDGs, often known as the global goals, has 17 targets (see Figure 1). The objectives set forth here are all interconnected. In this situation, a target's results may be impacted by a target's actions. To accomplish its objectives, the SDGs, which were developed with the ideology of eradicating hunger, poverty, AIDS, and discrimination against women and girls, need financial resources, knowledge, and technology (UNDP, 2023).

Ensuring gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but also an issue that needs to be carefully considered for a sustainable future. However, women are more affected by situations such as climate change, lack of health services, economic crises and violence. Women play a significant role in all 17 of the targets (Figure 1). Additionally, these objectives are crucial to guaranteeing the rights of women and girls, achieving justice, and ensuring sustainability for future generations (UNWomen, 2023a). In this context, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda points to the universal consensus of societies on the international platform in ensuring gender equality. Economic empowerment of women is only possible by providing more employment to women and reducing the burden of unpaid care. Steps taken in line with this philosophy lead to the formation of a transformative vision (Ameratunga Kring, 2017: 3).

Despite the fact that all goals contain a component connected to women, SDG 5 can be viewed as the main framework because it is the major goal and specifically addresses the issue. Even if there have been improvements and efforts taken in the direction of women's and girls' empowerment, there are still disparities in areas including the labor market, education, violence, and unpaid care work. In order to prevent these inequalities, SDG 5 has set the following targets (UNDP, 2023):

- Ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls
- Elimination of violence against women in public and private spaces
- Providing equal opportunities for women in decision-making processes
- Increasing the technological knowledge of women
- Creating applicable legislation
- Ensuring universal access to health services
- Ensuring property rights
- Ensuring free care and equality in household obligations

Figure1: SDGs

Previously, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) included gender equality and women's empowerment with a focus on education to raise the percentage of girls enrolled in school in developing countries. The 2030 SDG 5 then broadened its focus to include the empowerment of women and girls in recognition of the significance of women's economic independence in attaining gender equality. Accordingly; It is diversified in the dimensions of women's access to employment, safe and decent work environment, financial services, information technology, social security, public policies, and political participation. Countries strive to minimize inequalities to achieve SDGs (Roy and Xiaoling, 2022: 931).

Although there are seven years left until the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, 23.1% of SDG 5 indicators are far from the targets, and 61.5% are at medium level. Due to the slow pace of change in many areas, it is anticipated that it will take 286 years to end legal discrimination and 140 years to attain equal representation for women. Comprehensive policy changes, financial commitments, and political leadership are required to overcome the barriers to SDG 5. Furthermore, achieving gender equality ought to be the shared objective of national policies, institutions, and finances (UN, 2023a: 22).

When women's employment is considered within the scope of SDGs, it can be considered as the main framework of SDG 5. But other SDGs cover more specific targets for women's employment. In this context, the connection between SDGs and women's employment can be observed as follows (UNStats, 2023a):

- *SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth*
- *SDG 8.5: Ensuring full and productive employment, decent work and equal pay for work of equal value for all women and men*
- *SDG 8.8: Protecting labor rights and promoting safe working environments for all workers, including female migrants and those in precarious employment*

- *SDG 1.3: Implementation of social protection systems for all*
- *SDG 10.4: Equity in fiscal, wage, and social protection policies*
- *SDG10.3: Eliminate discriminatory laws, policies, and practices and reduce inequalities*

It is aimed to ensure full and productive employment of all women and men, equal pay for equal work, and decent work by 2030. In particular, to achieve inclusive growth, men and women must be given decent jobs equally. But today, women's participation in the workforce is low and they are more likely to accept insecure and low-paid jobs in the workforce. This situation also poses an obstacle to inclusive growth (UnWomen, 2023d). Globally, 63 percent of women in the 25-54 age group and 94 percent of men in the same age group are in the workforce. This rate dropped to 37 percent in Central and South Asia. It is estimated that the 23 percent gender gap in the world will not close until 2086 in view of current advancements (UnWomen, 2023d). After the Covid-19 pandemic, the global unemployment rate decreased from 6.6 percent in 2020 to 5.4 percent in 2022. This rate remains below the pre-pandemic level (5.5 percent). According to projections, although it is predicted that the labor market will recover stronger than expected in high-income countries, the same positive picture is not foreseen for low-income countries. The pandemic has especially negatively affected women and young people in the labor market (UN, 2023a:29).

Globally, women's equal participation in the economy has not yet been fully realized. In 2022, 61.4 percent of women of working age (25-64 years old) globally will be in the workforce, while this rate for men is 90.6 percent. In 2019, women's share in total labor income was 34 percent. On the basis of workforce inequalities between genders; There are factors such as occupational discrimination, women's household care obligations, women's greater likelihood of working part-time jobs and taking a break from their careers. This situation causes inequalities to deepen even further. In order to prevent the problem; paid parental leave, increased inspections to support wage transparency, paid paternity leave, and child care should be accessible and appropriate (UNStats, 2023b: 18).

3. Literature Review

There is a developed literature in the context of women's employment. Accordingly, the issue of women's employment has been discussed in countries at various development levels and solutions have been suggested by examining the inequalities in women's employment. Diallo et al (2023) investigated the impact of non-agricultural diversification strategies by gender in Senegal. The study drew attention to the increase in the role of women in non-agricultural sectors and found that non-agricultural diversification increased the welfare of women living in rural areas. Gadi (2022) examined women's employment in

the field of digital technology in Saudi Arabia. In the study, where a qualitative research technique was used, it was concluded that equal opportunities should be provided for women to find job opportunities in the field of digital technology. Adeosun & Owolabi (2021) examined the reasons for gender inequalities in their study on Nigeria. According to the findings of the study; gender inequalities are more common in some employment sectors, and women with higher education earn higher wages. Jayachandran (2021) examined the barriers to women's participation in the labor market in developing countries. Accordingly, existing gender norms are one of the factors that prevent women from participating in the labor market. It is necessary to implement policies designed according to social norms, to ensure gender equality through government policies, and to reconsider and change the norms regarding women's household responsibilities. Nisak & Sugiharti (2020) examined women's poverty in their study specifically in Indonesia. According to the study, women's unequal position in the labor market and education affects women's poverty. Arib (2020) examined the factors that hinder the employment of educated women in Afghanistan. Survey method was used in the study. According to the study findings, the biggest obstacle to the employment of educated women is personal social factors. In addition, the number of income earners in the family and faulty government policies are other obstacles to the employment of educated women. Sarkar, Sahoo & Klasen (2019) investigated female employment transitions for India. According to the study, which examines the reasons for women's employment and leaving their jobs, the increase in the income of household members has an impact on women's entry and exit from work. As a result of cultural and economic factors as well as religious factors, women's labor force participation remains low in India.

Recently, there are also studies in the literature addressing the situation of women's employment in the post-Covid-19 period. Uddin (2021) investigated the difficulties and supporting factors experienced by working women in Bangladesh. Qualitative research method was used in the study. Accordingly, factors such as family support, institutional support and flexibility during Covid-19 facilitate women's work-life balance. Factors such as gender norms, social norms and lack of time are the difficulties women face in their business lives. Landivar et al (2020) examined the effects of Covid-19 on unemployment, labor force, and working hours in gender discrimination in the USA. Accordingly, women's employment has been more affected than men's under Covid-19 conditions. During the pandemic, mothers have reduced their working hours and are more likely to be unemployed than fathers. According to the study findings, Covid-19 has deepened gender inequalities and had negative effects on women's employment. Alon et al (2022) found that during the pandemic, women spent more time due to household responsibilities and their productivity decreased more than men.

There are studies on women's employment in Azerbaijan, which is the country sample of this study. Abdi et al (2023) examined the factors affecting the optimal employment of women in rural handicrafts in the West Azerbaijan province. Survey method was used in the study. It has been found that organizational, individual and cultural factors affect optimal women's employment in rural handicrafts. Jabbarova, & Dunyamaliyeva (2021) analyzed statistical data in the context of employment and gender in Azerbaijan. According to the study findings, women generally work in unpaid work such as domestic care and do not have the same opportunities as men in employment. Additionally, women start their working lives later but retire earlier. Aliyev et al (2020) found an inverted U relationship between married men's income and female employment probability in Azerbaijan. Accordingly, governments should raise public awareness of women's employment through communication tools. Heyat (2020) examined the entrepreneurial activities of Azeri women. According to the study, women's close relationships with home life make it easier for them to participate in informal trade. In addition, the lack of development of the insurance sector is an obstacle to the development of small and medium-sized enterprises. Torrens (2019) examined the cultural factors that enable unmarried women to participate in the workforce, specifically in Turkish cultures. According to the study findings, there is a negative relationship between married women's labor force participation and conservatism in Azerbaijan.

There are also studies in the literature examining women's employment within the scope of SDG. Osundina (2020) examined the effects of positive developments in health and education on women's employment in Nigeria between 1990-2016. According to the study findings, women's education level and health status positively affect the labor force participation rate. Peña-Sánchez et al (2020) conducted a study on SDG (Goal 8 and 5) in EU-28 countries in the period 2009-2018. According to the study findings, the values of EU-28 countries are good within the scope of SDG (Goal 8 and 5). However, the gender wage gap needs to be reduced. Castro Núñez, Bandeira, & Santero-Sánchez (2020) pointed out the importance of social economy organizations in the success of SDG (Goal 5,8,10) in their study for the 2008-2017 period in Spain. It has also been found that women's participation in employment will lead to a low glass ceiling phenomenon and stable jobs.

4. Evaluation of Women's Employment in Azerbaijan within the Scope of SDGs

4.1. Women and SDGs in Azerbaijan

From a historical perspective, Azerbaijan was the first in the East to give women the right to vote in 1918. In addition to this development, which can be seen as an important step towards ensuring gender equality, the protection of women's rights in Azerbaijan is seen as an integral part of the state policy, and national legislation is developed within this

scope. In this context, regulations for women have been made in many laws and decrees, participation in international organizations has been achieved, and contracts and protocols have been signed. Some steps taken towards women's rights can be listed as follows (State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2023):

- Becoming a party to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1995)
- (ILO) Approval of the Law on Women's Labor in Underground Works and Equal Rights of Men and Women in Equal Work
- Adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)
- Signing of the Decree on Increasing the Role of Women in Azerbaijan (1998)
- Establishment of the State Committee on Women's Issues
- Organizing women's congresses every five years (since 1998)
- Signing of the Decree on the Implementation of the State Women's Policy in the Republic (2000)

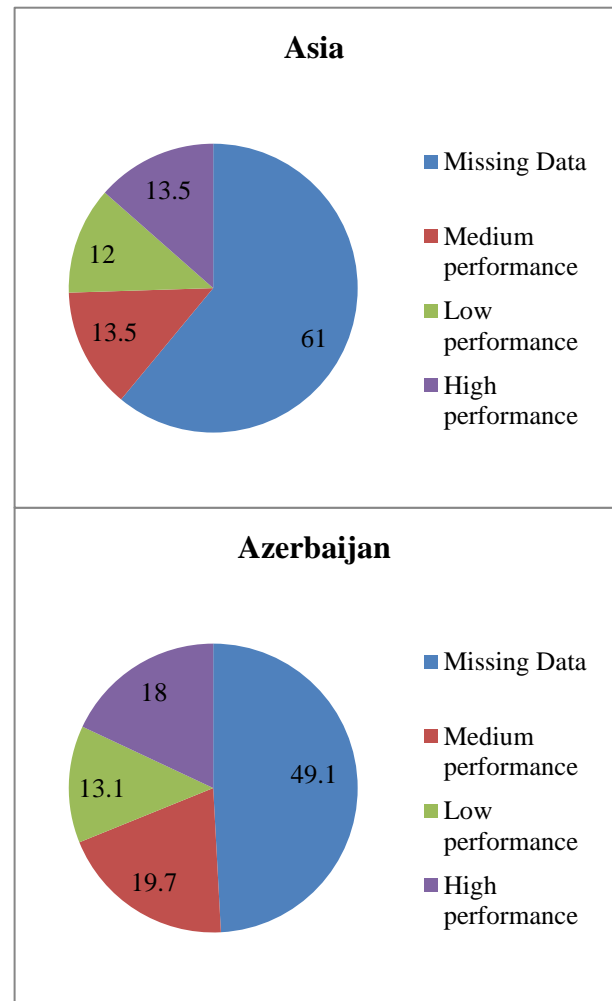
In Azerbaijan, measures are taken to ensure the equal participation of women and men in both public and social life. Accordingly, special budget allocations have been provided for the integration of gender equality into state programs and services. Studies are carried out to include more girls, especially in science, engineering, mathematics and technology fields. Azerbaijan is committed to the implementation of international conventions on women's rights, as well as legal regulations on accessible child care and flexible working (UnWomen, 2023b). Although progress has been made in Azerbaijan towards women's rights on a global scale, efforts must continue to ensure gender equality. According to this (UnWomen, 2023c):

- 18.2 percent of seats in parliament belong to women (2021)
- 5.2 percent of women (15-49 years old) have been exposed to physical/sexual violence
- While men spend 8.9 percent of their time on household chores, this rate is 25.4 percent for women
- Women aged 15-49 face barriers to reproductive and sexual health

In Azerbaijan, 50.8 percent of the indicators required to monitor gender targets from the SDG perspective are available as of December 2020. There are gaps in key labor market indicators such as wage inequality between genders, and there are no methodologies that will allow comparable and regular monitoring of other data. These data; It consists

of issues such as poverty, access to assets, environment, and harassment, broken down by gender. In this context, it is very important for Azerbaijan to eliminate its deficiencies with gender data to monitor the SDGs on a gender basis (Un Women, 2023c).

Graph 1: Gender Data Gaps Azerbaijan and Region (Asia) Score



Source: (UnWomen, 2023c)

In order to identify data deficiencies for member states, the UN sets a benchmark using 73 gender-specific SDG indicators in 193 member UN states. Accordingly, it evaluates countries according to their performance in terms of data by calculating the 33rd and 66th percentiles according to indicator distributions. Performances are divided into three categories: high, medium and low performance. In this regard, Graph 1 shows the gender data gap in Azerbaijan and the Asian region. Accordingly, 49.1% of the gender data required to monitor the SDGs is missing in Azerbaijan. The same rate is much higher in the region, at 61 percent. This situation, which we can generally interpret as a regional problem, makes it difficult to make an assessment of whether the SDGs have been achieved or not, specifically for the country and region in question. In

addition, availability of data and elimination of gender data gaps will facilitate the detection of gender inequalities and lead to the development of more accurate policy recommendations. It is very important for the public to be informed about public policies in order to monitor how much the SDG has been achieved. The lack of gender-related data makes it difficult to persuade decision makers to make a change. In this context, only 39 percent of the gender data required to monitor the SDGs is generally available (UNWomen, 2021).

Finally, according to the gender inequality index, Eurasia and Central Asia rank fourth in eight regions. Armenia, Moldova and Belarus are among the top countries in terms of recovery, while Tajikistan, Turkey and Azerbaijan are at the bottom. Considering current progress, it is estimated that it will take 167 years to achieve gender equality in the Eurasia and Central Asia region (World Economic Forum, 2023: 6).

4.2. Women's Employment Laws in Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan, the rights of men and women are officially equal. Women's labor law is regulated by the Labor Code. Women are granted concessions, rights, and additional assurances under the labor law. These benefits include the right to additional holiday for women with babies in their care, reduced working time in connection with pregnancy and baby care, etc. is included. According to the Labor Law, women should have the same opportunities as men when hiring and the same criteria should be applied to them when hiring. It should also be noted that it contains certain restrictions in order to protect women's physiological characteristics and reproductive health. The decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan was signed on March 6, 2000 on the implementation of the state women's policy to ensure legal equality between men and women. The document aims to ensure equal representation of women with men in management positions, taking into account the

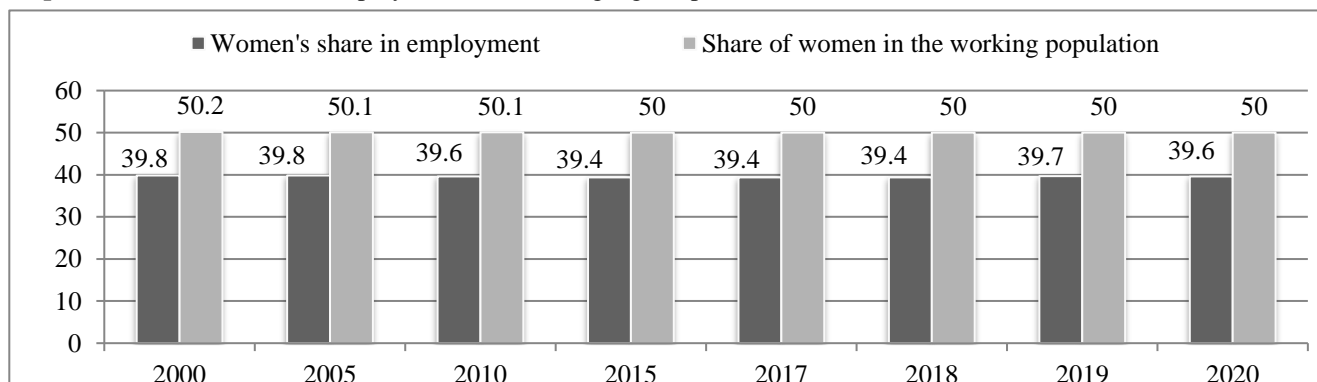
type of activity in all state institutions, and to ensure equal opportunities for men and women in the work carried out within the framework of economic reforms in the country (E-Kanun, 2000).

According to the "Law on the Guarantee of Gender (Men-Women) Equality" adopted in 2006, entrepreneurs must ensure equality between men and women in working activities, create the same working conditions for workers doing the same job regardless of gender, and create equal opportunities for women and men to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Equal pay must also be ensured (E-Kanun, 2006). In the *Socio-Economic Development Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2022-2026)*, the importance of increasing women's economic activity in society is stated. The document envisages an increase in women's employment in high-income areas, an increase in the ratio of women's average monthly wages to men's monthly average wages by up to 80%, and the dissemination of vocational training, career counseling and other active employment measures for successful activities as the main target indicators (E-Kanun, 2023).

4.3. Women's Participation in the Labor Market

According to research conducted by organizations such as the ILO and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), women's employment remains low compared to men around the world, women work in worse jobs than men and also receive lower wages. Accordingly, finding a job is becoming a more difficult journey for women, and the situation is not expected to improve anytime soon (ILO, 2023b). According to Graph 2, which shows the share of women in employment and the working age population in the world, women's share in employment did not exceed 40% between 2000 and 2020.

Graph 2. Share of Women in Employment and Working Age Population in the World (2000-2020, %)



Source: (ILO, 2023a)

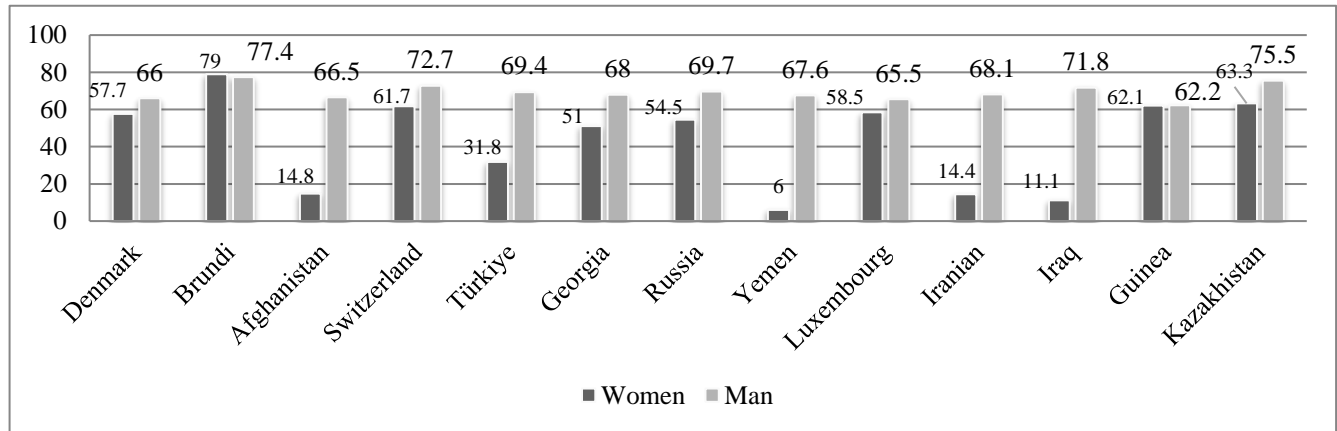
The rate of women in employment varies greatly between regions and countries. Low participation of women in the labor market is also related to the country's laws, religious views and stereotypes in society. In Arab countries and

North African countries where social norms do not allow women to have paid jobs, the unemployment rate among women is twice as high as that of men. The unemployment rate among women in these regions is over 20%. The

country with the largest gap in the employment of men and women in the world is Iraq (60.7 points), and the country with the smallest gap is Guinea (0.1 points) (Graph 3). In developed countries such as Australia, Switzerland, Denmark and Luxembourg, the difference between the employment of women and men is not large. In countries such as Iran, Yemen, and Afghanistan, women's share in

employment is much lower than men in Burindi, located in the east of Africa and one of the poorest countries in the world, women's share of employment exceeds men. The gap between the employment of men and women in Azerbaijan's neighboring countries was 12.2 points in Kazakhstan, 15.2 points in Russia, 17 points in Georgia and 37.6 points in Turkey.

Graph 3: Share of Women and Men in Employment in Selected Countries (2023, %)



Source: (ILO, 2023a).

The most important reason for the low share of women in employment in the world is; providing services such as child care, cleaning at home and cooking is seen as the duty of women. This understanding built by gender norms creates a significant obstacle to women's participation in employment by increasing their household care responsibilities.

4.4. Women's Participation in the Labor Market in Azerbaijan

Women's participation in the labor market has expanded as a result of more employment options for labor resources

within the scope of the socioeconomic policy that Azerbaijan has implemented in recent years. Based on statistical data analysis, the proportion of women in the economically active population of the nation increased by 185.7 thousand between 2015 and 2021, from 2404.5 thousand to 2590.2 thousand (Table 1). The proportion of women in the working population rose from 2263.4 thousand to 2408.1 thousand, a change of 144.7 thousand. Women made up 48.8% of the 4988.2 thousand people who were actively residing in the nation in 2021.

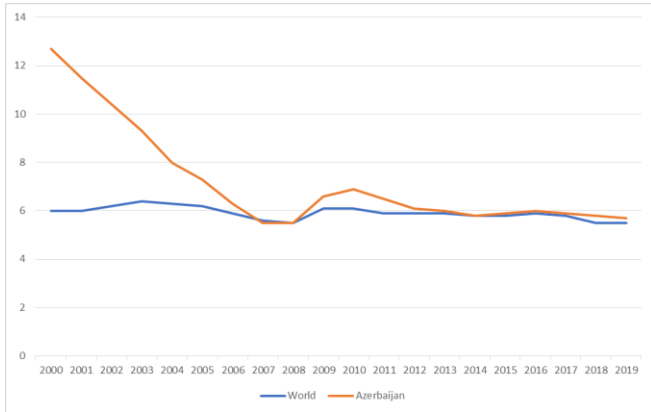
Table 1: Economically Active Population in Azerbaijan (thousand people)

	2015	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of Economically Active Population - Total	4915,3	5133,1	5190,1	5252,5	5303,9
Woman	2404,5	2495,7	2526,0	2567,5	2590,2
Number of Active Population - Total	4671,6	4879,3	4938,5	4876,6	4988,2
Woman	2263,4	2349,9	2381,7	2351,5	2408,1
Number of Unemployed Population - Total	243,7	253,8	251,6	375,9	315,7
Woman	141,1	145,8	144,3	216,0	182,1

Source: (SSCRA, 2023)

The share of women among the unemployed is high. According to the analysis of statistical data, 57.7% of the unemployed in 2021 were women and 42.3% were men.

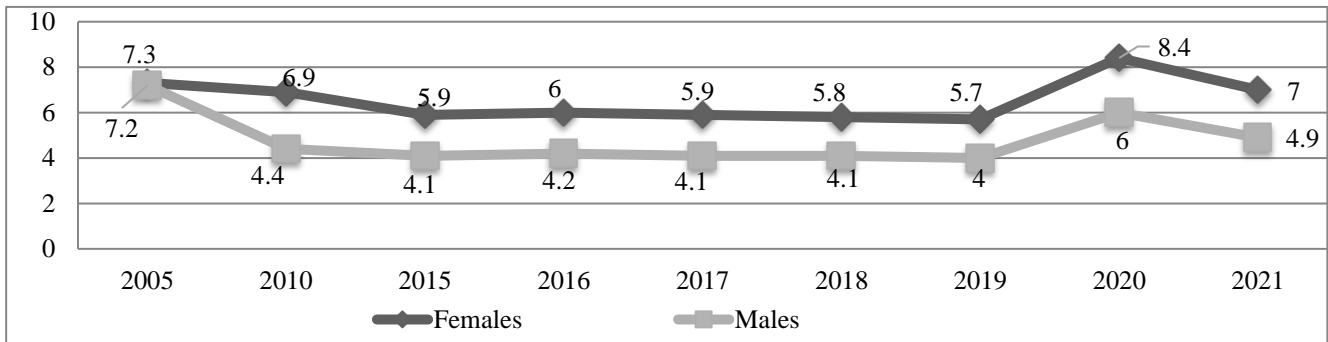
Graph 4: Unemployment rate in the world and Azerbaijan (by sex and age (%), Female)



Source: (UNWomen Data, 2023)

At the same time, although the unemployment rate among women was high, there was a positive development between 2000 and 2007, and the female unemployment rate decreased and reached a point close to the world average (Graph 4). Although there was a decrease in the unemployment level among women between the years 2005 and 2019, there was an increase in 2020. The same result can be said for men. Increased unemployment levels due to the Covid 19 pandemic were higher for women (Graph 5).

Graph 5. Unemployment Rate in Azerbaijan (2005-2021, %)

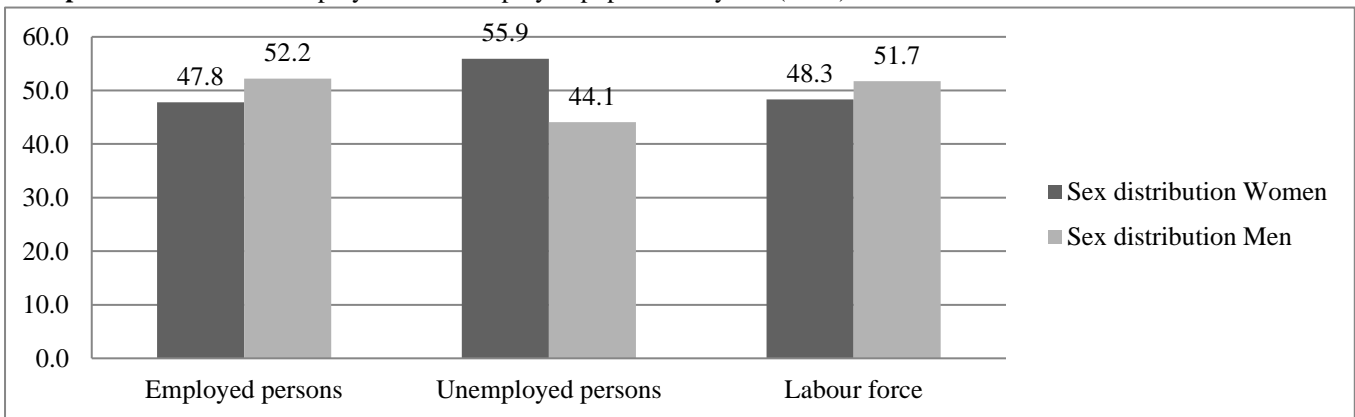


Source: (SSCRA, 2023)

Areas where the number of women working for wages is high in the types of economic activities are health and social services; education; rest, entertainment and art. In other words, in 2021, women constituted 78.3% of paid employees in the field of health and social services, 72.7% in the field of education, and 61.2% in the field of recreation, entertainment and arts. In terms of employment, the sectors

where male labor is dominant are construction (93%), electricity, gas and steam production (88.8%), mining industry (87.4%), transportation and storage (83.4%). Although there is not a big difference in terms of women's participation in the workforce, men's participation in the workforce is higher than women's (Graph 6).

Graph 6. Distribution of employed and unemployed population by sex (2022)



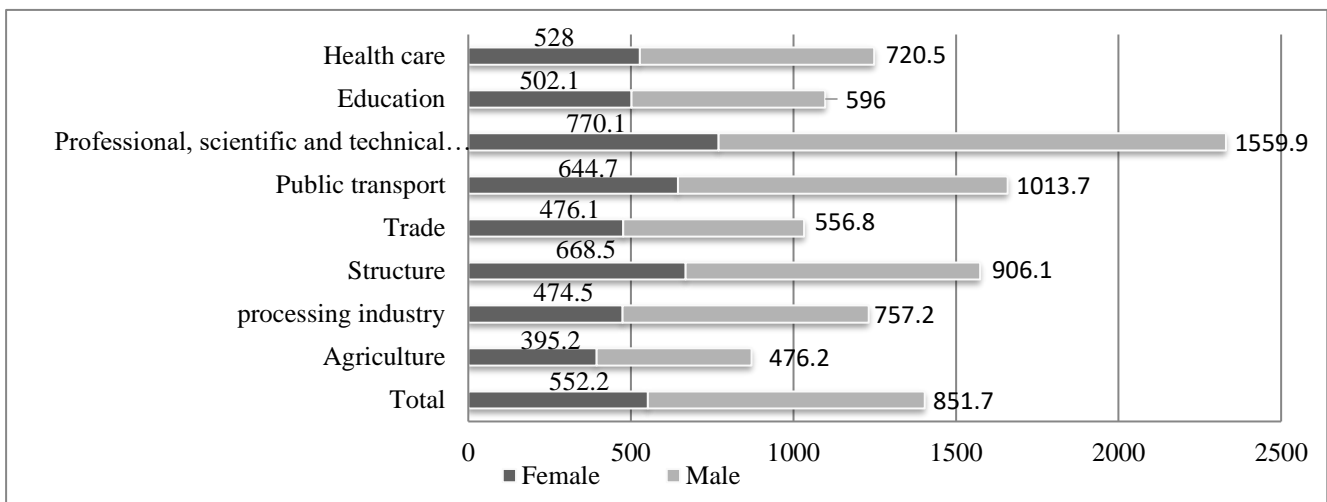
Source: (SSCRA, 2023)

The gender distribution of the employed and unemployed people in 2022 shows that there are more men in the

workforce, more women are unemployed, and more men are employed. In Azerbaijan, women who are paid have a lower average nominal pay per month than men. The average monthly pay for men and women in 2021 was 851.7 manat and 552.2 manat, respectively (Graph 7). The difference between the average nominal monthly pay of men and women is 64.8%. For all forms of economic activity, this is the same situation. The fields of professional, scientific, and technical activity showed the largest variation in the average monthly nominal pay of paid workers among kinds of economic activity. Men in this area make, on average, twice as much money nominally per month as women do. In the domain of professional, scientific, and technological

activity, the average nominal monthly wage for women was 770.1 manat, while for men it was 1559.9 manat. The area with the least difference was the commercial area. Women's 476.1 manat and men's 556.8 manat. However, workplace discrimination in Azerbaijan (prohibition of certain job lines for women) contributes to the gender wage gap. For example, female labor force is quite low in electricity, gas and steam production (10.9 percent), transportation and storage (17.2 percent) and construction sectors (7.1 percent), which are the sectors with the highest job restrictions. When looking at average monthly earnings, men earn 46 percent more than women, the highest wage gap in the Europe and Central Asia region (The World Bank, 2021).

Graph 7. Average Monthly Nominal Salary of Salaried Workers by Gender for Some Types of Economic Activities in Azerbaijan (2021, Manat)



Source: (SSCRA, 2023)

According to statistics, there is a pay gap in locations with higher female representation. This demonstrates that women make less money than males. The high percentage of part-time workers among women is one of the causes of their

poor income. As of 2021, 60.2% of women were employed part-time (Table 2). Compared to men, this is 20.4 percent more. The group working between 21 and 30 hours per week had the largest percentage of part-time employment.

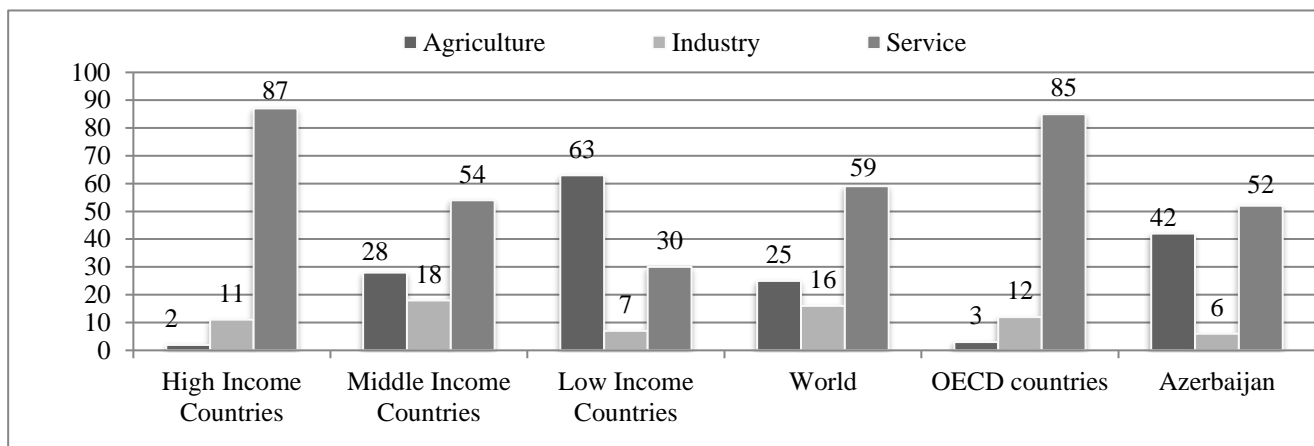
Table 2: Distribution of Part-Time Employees by Weekday Working Hours and Gender (According to result and gender, %)

Working hours	Based on results		Sex	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
Less than 9 hours	0,1	0,3	39,8	60,2
9-15 hours	14,6	6,0	78,6	21,4
16-20 hours	15,6	16,0	59,5	40,5
21-30 hours	69,7	77,7	57,6	42,4
Total	100,0	100,0	60,2	39,8

Source: (SSCRA, 2023)

42.2% of all active women in Azerbaijan work in agriculture (Graph 8). The share of men in this field is 30.7 percent. In high-income countries, the proportion of women working in agriculture does not exceed 2%. In low-income countries, the proportion of women working in this field is 63%. On

the contrary, in service areas, women's employment is higher in high-income countries and lower in low-income countries. The number of women working in this field in Azerbaijan corresponds to middle-income countries.

Graph 8. Employment of Women in Agriculture, Industry and Service Sectors (2019, %)

Source: (The World Bank, 2023)

When we look at the share of women in harmful working conditions in Azerbaijan, it is observed that it is quite low. Accordingly, a very high percentage of men work in heavy and harmful jobs that do not comply with hygienic conditions, are noisy, contain a lot of harmful chemicals and radiation (Table 3).

Table 3: Distribution of Working in Harmful Labour Condition in Transportation and Storage (2022)

	Share of working in harmful labour conditions by sex, in per cent	
	Women	Men
<i>Working in conditions not meeting sanitary-hygiene norms</i>	3,7	96,3
<i>Worked in conditions where noise is above the norm</i>	6,7	93,3
<i>Worked in conditions where vibration is above the norm</i>	13,7	86,3
<i>Worked in conditions where harmful chemical substances are above the norm</i>	5,2	94,8
<i>Worked in conditions where radiation is above the norm</i>	-	100,0
<i>Worked in conditions where occupational dust is above the norm</i>	0,3	99,7
<i>Worked in hard and harmful work and unfavourable climate conditions</i>	9,9	90,1

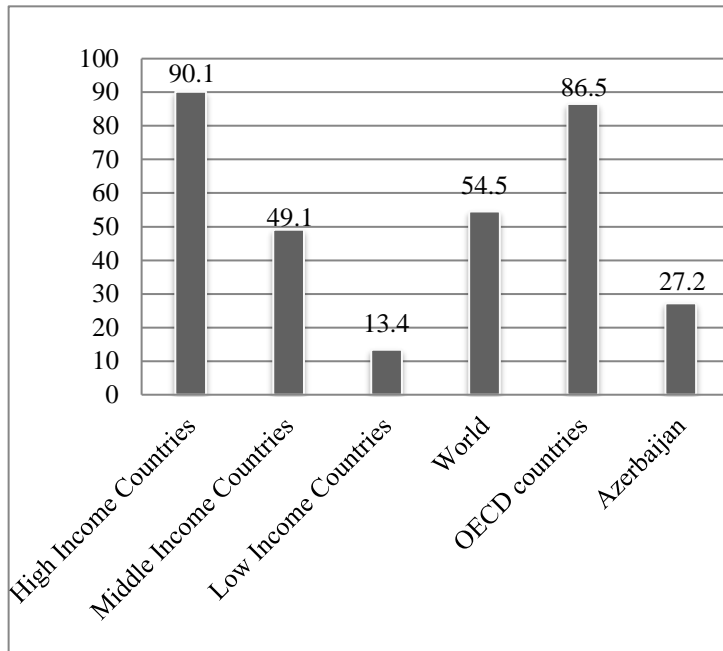
Source: (SSCRA, 2023)

4.5. Fighting Informal Employment in Azerbaijan

Informal employment, according to the Labor Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, is the performance of certain activities without concluding an employment contract (contract). Globally, it is estimated that two billion (61%) of the active population earn their living by working in the informal economy (ILO, 2018). This demonstrates that illegal work occurs everywhere in the world, regardless of socioeconomic advancement. In developing countries compared to developed countries, this type of work is more prevalent. Unregistered workers are forced to work largely because they cannot find a livelihood. Workers in the informal sector face risk and challenging circumstances (Bonnet, Vanek & Chen, 2019).

According to the UN, "In developing countries, the informal sector is the primary source of employment for women. Informal workers include street vendors, small traders of goods and services, those engaged in agriculture only for the family, and those working in industry under service contracts." (UN, 2023). In Azerbaijan, women who do jobs such as babysitting, patient care, home cleaning service, and teaching outside of school are largely not officially employed. According to the World Bank, only 54.5% of women worldwide are in paid work (Graph 9). In high-income countries, the share of women in paid work is much higher than in middle- and low-income countries.

Graph 9. Women Earning a Wage and Working in Paid Jobs (2019, %)



Source: (The World Bank, 2023)

One of the main problems with women's employment in Azerbaijan is the high rate of informal employment. Unfortunately, there are no official statistics on the size of the informal economy in Azerbaijan. However, according to some statistical indicators, it can be estimated. In 2018, 67.2% of the employed population was non were participants in the formal labor market. In 2021, 39.5% of women worked in salaried jobs. According to statistical indicators, it can be said that the rate of women working in the non-public sector is high in Azerbaijan. In comparison to men, women are more likely to be represented in informal employment. Women who work informally are denied social benefits like retirement, paid maternity leave, and unemployment insurance.

Various policies are implemented to prevent informal employment in Azerbaijan. This issue still constitutes the priority of social policy. In 2017, the Activity Plan on the prevention of non-public employment was approved. The document envisages *“the implementation of measures such as improving normative legal procedures, improving management, strengthening control measures to prevent informal employment, and establishing a monitoring and evaluation system.”* (E-Kanun, 2017).

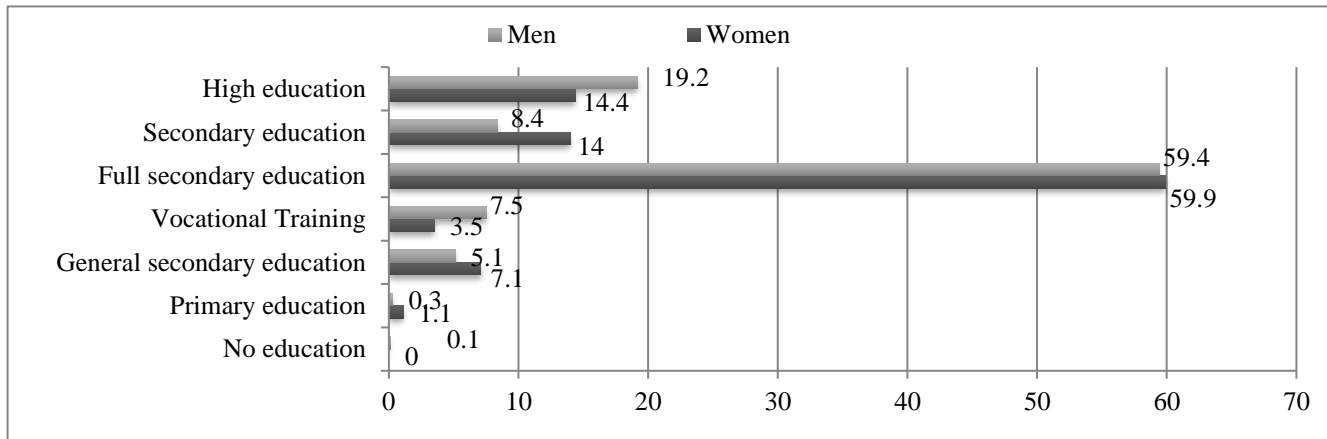
By the decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 2020, the procedure for carrying out and the coordination of control measures in the field of legalization of unregistered employment has been approved. The Republic of Azerbaijan's 2019–2030 Employment Strategy identified the high percentage of unemployed women as one of the key issues facing the labor market. One of the primary objectives of the paper is to achieve decent work and effective employment for all population groups,

including women, by 2025, with a focus on minimizing unemployment among women by 2030 (E-Kanun, 2018).

Conditions are established under the self-employment program run by the State Employment Agency, which is connected to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, in order to boost job options for women in Azerbaijan. Through the initiative, low-income families can become entrepreneurs, own their own private farms and generate additional money, and stop relying on government support. Every year, increasing numbers of women are taking part in the program. Women are encouraged to enroll in vocational training programs and launch small enterprises. Within the program's framework, financial assets were given to 2,000 jobless and job-seeking individuals as of the start of 2022. Of these, about 500 are female (Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2023). In Azerbaijan, the proportion of female self-employed workers and entrepreneurs is rising daily. In 2004, only 3% of women founded firms; by 2020, that percentage had risen to 35.3 percent. More women's businesses; It focuses on the real estate agency and retail sales sectors. The most important obstacles to women becoming self-employed are; Limited access to loans, lack of knowledge about business management, lack of capital, family responsibilities, and the fact that women entrepreneurs are seen as an unusual phenomenon by society can be listed (Gomólka, 2021: 186–187). In Azerbaijan, creating jobs and expanding existing ones is the primary strategy for preventing informal work. Encouraging, secure, and long-lasting work environments are essential, as are better working conditions, increased worker rights, higher living standards, and enhanced social protection. Combating informal employment in Azerbaijan will be crucial to safeguarding the population's labor rights, expanding access to social safety nets, maintaining family income stability, and providing dependable social security for the elderly.

4.6. Education Level of Working Women in Azerbaijan

Education is one of the key components in creating jobs. A statistical analysis reveals that a very small percentage of working women in Azerbaijan possess a high level of education. This data shows that in 2021, the percentage of women was 14.4%. This indication is greater for men (19.2%) (Graph 10). A key component of raising living conditions and lowering unemployment is vocational education. Education is a matter that requires considerable thought, particularly when it comes to securing youth employment, building a competitive economy, and creating a developed community (Aliyeva, 2023).

Graph 10. Distribution of Education Level of the Population by Gender in Azerbaijan (2021)

Source: (SSCRA, 2023)

In Azerbaijan, 3.5% of women and 7.5% of men engaged in economic labor have vocational education. 59.9% of working women have completed secondary education. Higher education and having a certain professional qualification have an exceptional role in increasing women's employment, earning high income and developing the economy.

5. Problems and Policy Recommendations for Women's Employment in Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan, 50.1 percent of the population are women (2020). Free public education has led to an increasing proportion of the country's population completing secondary education, with university students increasing by 30 percent. Although the number of economically active women is increasing and more women are being employed, women's wages remain very low compared to men, women's unemployment is high and women's participation in the workforce lags behind men. In addition, policies for women have been developed and strategies for self-employment have been developed with initiatives such as the Women's Security National Action Plan, Poverty Reduction Program, Socio-Economic Development Program of the Regions, Food Security Program and "Azerbaijan 2020" development concept. However, missing data prevents the amount of funding provided by the Enterprise Development Fund until 2020 from being seen (Gomółka, 2021: 185-186). The absence of comparable data, which is very important for monitoring SDG 5, and the lack of an institutional structure of data measurement processes make it difficult to eliminate gender inequalities (Dhar, 2018: 67-68). In addition, Niftiyev (2017), in his study on women's labor in Azerbaijan, pointed out that raw material exports in oil-rich countries harm women's labor, and at this point, he emphasized the need to develop institutional mechanisms to increase the female workforce. Azerbaijan is one of 74 economies that legally prohibit women from working in certain sectors. Additionally, it is against the law in Azerbaijan to hire women in positions requiring strenuous

physical labor. Although there is no risk assessment or evidence-based justification, it is thought that these restrictions were introduced to protect women's health. Although there are sharp distinctions between the jobs performed by men and women, the difference in employment rates between men and women is relatively small. While men work in better-paid jobs, women mostly work in low-paying jobs such as education and healthcare. In addition, social norms in Azerbaijan still have a negative impact on students' education and career choices, disrupting the integration of women into the workforce (The World Bank, 2021)

Although progress has been made in terms of women's rights and women's labor in Azerbaijan, the policy measures that need to be taken towards problematic areas can be summarized as follows (Gomółka, 2021: 186-187; Niftiyev, 2017: 17-18; Şeren, 2018:104; The World Bank, 2021):

- Developing methodologies and classifications for the problem of data deficiencies (disaggregated data) in gender statistics and making them stable. In this context, it is important that a single framework for women's labor be presented.
- Integration of economically active women into the labor market should be included in projects and action plans as a strategic goal.
- Creating funds by removing obstacles to women's entrepreneurship (encouraging gender sensitivity of budgets)
- Availability of micro-loans should be increased in rural and urban areas
- Women's participation in the mining sector should be supported
- Women should take more part in public decision-making processes
- Improving gender perceptions

- Cooperation of NGOs, academia and international organizations
- Eliminating job restrictions and paving the way for women, who constitute half of the population, to undertake certain jobs, thus enabling the creation of a competitive economy and human capital.
- The labor law should be modernized and women's career choices should be supported instead of determining suitable jobs for women.
- Legal and supervisory processes must be tightened to prevent unregistered employment.

In order to achieve the SDG, first of all, it is necessary to establish accountable and transparent processes by ensuring that the conditions for needs and human rights comply with international standards. Determining the targets for SDG with clear dates and targets will also help the process to run efficiently. In addition, NGOs should be included in the processes and stakeholders from all sectors, the private sector and academics should cooperate (Scholz, 2017: 36). On a global scale, SDG 5 is not yet at a target level. Prejudices against women, inadequate access to health services, and unequal political representation and economic conditions are ongoing problems that hinder concrete progress. In this context, investments in gender equality should be increased on a global scale, discriminatory laws should be abolished and women's integration into decision/representation mechanisms should be ensured. Otherwise, any disruption in the SDG 5 process will also lead to a disruption in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Slow progress on gender inequalities could lead to a regression of existing gains. At this point, a policy proposal focused on employment creation alone will have difficulty in achieving the expected successful result without a gender focus. By eliminating the obstacles to women's participation in the workforce (social norms, household care obligations), the way for women to be included in the workforce can be further paved. However, not having clear targets for gender equality and not allocating the necessary budget may further deepen gender inequalities. In order to achieve the SDGs, policies and programs developed specifically for women and girls should be the priority and main target of governments (UNStats, 2023b: 12- 13).

6. Conclusion

Azerbaijan has a legal framework that ensures gender equality in employment. However, based on statistical data, women's employment rates are low in Azerbaijan and around the world (although there are no relatively large differences with men, except for harmful labor). In Azerbaijan, women are mostly represented in the fields of health and social services, education and recreation, entertainment and arts. The employment level in the agricultural sector (42%) is quite high compared to developed countries (2-3%). The average monthly salary of salaried women in Azerbaijan is lower than that of men. However, in areas where women are more represented,

wages and the proportion of women with higher education relative to the education level of the population are lower than men. The majority of women in the active population (59.9%) have full secondary education. The high percentage of informal employment among women in Azerbaijan is one of the key issues with their employment. In Azerbaijan, very few women work in paid jobs based on a formal employment contract. Organizing education campaigns among women is of great importance in the fight against informal employment. In addition, it is essential to raise the level of living for the populace, increase the number of permanent jobs, enhance working conditions, increase workers' labor rights, and enhance social protection.

There are also deficiencies in gender data, which is very important for monitoring the SDG in Azerbaijan. According to UN data, 49.1 percent of the gender data required to monitor gender inequalities is missing in Azerbaijan. Availability of gender data, which is very important in detecting deficiencies and inequalities, can encourage decision-makers and help in the production of accurate and effective policies. However, these data gaps need to be closed as much as possible to monitor progress within the scope of the SDG on a gender-specific basis. To achieve the SDGs, women must be integrated into social, political and economic life. At this point, governments should allocate resources to realize women's rights and ensure gender equality. With the active position of NGOs, academia and international organizations in the process, women's equal representation in all fields and their greater participation in employment must be ensured, and an accountable and transparent system must be built. Therefore, removing business restrictions for women, who constitute half of the population, encouraging women's entrepreneurship and increasing women's inclusion in the workforce will achieve SDG targets not only with gender equality but also with inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

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