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United Nations

NATIONAL GENDER PROFILE OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS

The Republic of Azerbaijan



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Republic of Azerbaijan

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NATIONAL GENDER PROFILE OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS

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The Republic of Azerbaijan

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Foreword



Women are at the centre of all aspects of community life, and this is particularly the case in rural areas, where women's role in keeping communities alive and thriving is indispensable. Women constitute a major source of labour in agricultural production, and this *National Gender Profile of Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods* (Country Gender Assessment) report for Azerbaijan highlights their essential functions in horticulture, livestock breeding, food processing, fisheries, foraging and other diverse spheres of the rural economy. In addition, rural women are key to ensuring the possibility of carrying out all of the economic and social activities in rural communities.

Yet often, women's contributions and hard work are not given the full recognition they deserve. As a specialized agency of the United Nations with a mandate to improve agricultural production, food security and nutrition, reduce rural poverty, and enhance the sustainable management of natural resources, FAO acknowledges that all of these goals can only be achieved if the importance of women's role is recognized, and additional means and opportunities are provided to empower them to reach their full potential. Strengthening women's position within rural social relations and enabling greater access to information, credit, markets and many other resources will contribute to catalysing enhanced rural development, thereby benefiting all members of the community, especially the newer generations.

This Country Gender Assessment (CGA) for Azerbaijan is an important resource in shaping efforts to achieve the common goal of a more prosperous rural society with greater opportunities for all to realize their social and economic potential. It represents the first structured and all-encompassing collection of data and analysis, including development indicators for the agricultural and rural sectors of the country, with the application of a gender perspective.

Gender equality is essential to achieve FAO's mandate of a world free from hunger, malnutrition and poverty. The Organization recognizes that persisting inequalities between women and men limit the dynamic development of agriculture and rural

development and that eliminating these disparities is essential to building sustainable and inclusive food systems and resilient and peaceful societies.

While remarkable progress has been made in advancing gender equality, significant gaps still remain. This CGA provides an overview of and basic country-level information and data on rural women's needs and priorities, as well as identifying the enduring gaps and challenges for gender analysis of agriculture and the rural sector. Moreover, it includes a set of recommendations for national partners on how to strengthen gender equality and women's economic empowerment within rural areas. The CGA provides an essential framework for all stakeholders in rural development, including governing and policymaking organs, agencies and organizations working to support development projects, civil society organizations, researchers and the rural community members themselves. It can play a key role in coordinating efforts, generating knowledge, and promoting innovative solutions to address the gender-based obstacles that continue to hold back rural women and girls.

It is my great hope that this Assessment will promote further discussion and inform many other actions and steps to address the current identified issues, particularly because it offers a crucial evidence base for gender-sensitive and gender-responsive policymaking and programming in agriculture and rural development. Concentrated action to address the recognized gaps will support the realization of the goals that the Government of Azerbaijan has identified for the improvement of society, including the globally agreed Sustainable Development Goals. Let us join together to build upon the findings of this Assessment to overcome the gender-based obstacles preventing us from reaching these shared ambitions.

Ms Melek Cakmak,

Head of Partnership and Liaison Office/
FAO Representative



In Azerbaijan, the agrarian sector has been identified as one of the main priority areas for the development of the economy. Agriculture is not only key to ensuring food security and healthy nutrition for the population of the republic: it also provides a major source of employment and income for a significant proportion of families who struggle to access other economic activities. Women are the backbone of this sector, and are often major, yet unrecognized, contributors to the development of agriculture and agricultural production.

In this context, the Country Gender Assessment (CGA) represents a very important document, bringing together overarching assessment, valuable information and in-depth analysis of the gender dimensions of agriculture and rural development in Azerbaijan. In accordance with the overall objective of the Government of Azerbaijan to empower women and ensure the constitutional principle of equality between women and men, the Ministry of Agriculture has been supporting the “Women’s Economic Empowerment” project, funded under the FAO–Azerbaijan Partnership Programme. This CGA is one of the most significant outputs of the project: it will guide not only the work of the Ministry and its partnering organizations, but also other development stakeholders who are engaged in initiatives to support rural development in the country.

As acknowledged in this CGA, achieving gender equality is one of Azerbaijan’s highest priorities and it is considered a necessary precondition for the full achievement of human development. The formation of a national approach to the empowerment of

women and girls and gender equality began soon after Azerbaijan gained independence. Gender equality recognizes the individual, regardless of sex, as the central figure of societal progress, who plays a key role in the path to democratization and sustainable development. In this respect, the legal framework and strategies pursued by the Government of Azerbaijan enable women to exercise their rights and advance their position in society; and since independence, Azerbaijan has ratified almost all essential international documents on the protection of women’s rights.

Nevertheless, there is significant potential for the further development of women’s contribution to the agricultural sector. One of the main targets of agrarian reform in Azerbaijan is to develop the skills of farmers to enable them to grow into successful entrepreneurs. There are more than eighty thousand registered women farmers in the country. With additional opportunities for the provision of information, training, and access to inputs, including credit, many women have the potential to become productive agrarian or rural entrepreneurs, creating economic value for their families and communities.

I am certain that the CGA will serve as an important guide in continuing these efforts and delivering the support needed to achieve these common goals. It provides a consultative knowledge framework for better informed, targeted and gender-sensitive actions in agriculture and rural development; and enables the identification of key areas for future developments to improve both the agrarian sector and rural livelihoods by advancing women’s role within their communities.

Ms Ilhama Gadimova,

Deputy Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Azerbaijan

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Government ministries and agencies

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2. Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Azerbaijan
3. Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan
4. Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan
5. Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsperson) of the Republic of Azerbaijan
6. Regional Offices of Executive Committees (Agdam, Ismayilli and Qazakh regions)
7. State Committee for Family, Women and Children’s Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan
8. State Examination Centre of the Republic of Azerbaijan
9. State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan

International organizations

10. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Azerbaijan Country Office
11. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
12. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Azerbaijan Country Office
13. World Bank, Baku office

Civil society organizations

14. Azerbaijan Association of Development of Women’s Entrepreneurship (AQSIA)
15. Azerbaijan Rural Women’s Association (ARWA)
16. Association of Women Entrepreneurs in Azerbaijan
17. Disability Organizations Union
18. “Public Control” newspaper

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ABAD	Easy Support to Family Business centers	ICT	information and communication technology
AQSIA	Azerbaijan Association of Development of Women's Entrepreneurship	IDP	internally displaced person
ARWA	Azerbaijan Rural Women's Association	MHH	male-headed household
AZN	Azerbaijani manat	NGO	non-governmental organization
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
CGA	Country Gender Assessment	SCFWCA	State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan
CPF	Country Programming Framework	SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
CSO	civil society organization	SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
DAIM	State Agricultural Development centers	STEM	science, technology, engineering, mathematics
EAIS	Electronic Agricultural Information System	TVET	technical and vocational education and training
EDGE	Evidence and Data for Gender Equality	UN	United Nations
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
FAO REU	FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia	UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
FAPP	FAO–Azerbaijan Partnership Programme	UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
FHH	female-headed household	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
GBV	gender-based violence	USD	United States dollar
GDI	Gender Development Index	WEP	"Improved food security and rural livelihoods through women's economic empowerment" project
GDP	gross domestic product	WUA	water users' association
GII	Gender Inequality Index		
HDI	Human Development Index		

Currency equivalents

As of 1 April 2022

Currency units

– Azerbaijani manat (AZN)

– United States dollar (USD)

AZN 1.00 – USD 0.59

USD 1.00 – AZN 1.70

Executive summary

Without addressing gender gaps and inequalities in agriculture, goals of ending hunger and extreme poverty will not be achieved. Because the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) recognizes that rural women are the “backbone of rural economies”, making up a large proportion of the rural workforce and serving as managers of natural resources (FAO, 2020b, p. 3), FAO is committed to investing in and empowering rural women and girls.

This Country Gender Assessment (CGA) for the Republic of Azerbaijan was undertaken as part of FAO and national commitments to promote gender equality, while integrating a gender perspective into its operations. The resulting CGA report focuses on the intersections of gender, agriculture and rural development, and presents a snapshot of critical gender-based inequalities and their consequences for agricultural production and rural livelihoods in Azerbaijan. The assessment includes recommendations on enhancing agriculture and developing rural communities with a gender-sensitive perspective, taking into consideration gender roles and differences between women and men in access to productive resources, inputs and information.

The process of completing this CGA was complicated by limited official data that, if available, would have provided a clearer picture of gender and spatial disparities in Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, the CGA revealed significant gender gaps in terms of the access that the rural population has to educational and employment opportunities, political participation and social services. In the area of agricultural production, women have much more limited access to and control over vital resources, including land, extension and advisory services, and irrigation.

Current challenges – the COVID-19 pandemic and the return of people displaced by conflict concerning the Karabagh economic region to their former lands – have raised important questions about how to ensure that health, humanitarian and recovery efforts are gender-sensitive. The identification of sustainable

solutions to these emerging issues requires approaches that maximize stability and prosperity while also addressing longstanding inequalities. Ensuring that no one is left behind means considering the perspectives of women and girls, especially those who live in rural areas, while also taking steps to empower them.

National law and policy: Azerbaijan has a well-developed legal base supportive of gender equality, but gender mainstreaming across state policy, especially in the agriculture sector, is incomplete. A long-term national strategic plan on the promotion of gender equality was in development at the time this CGA was conducted, but the absence of an official road map for more than a decade is reflected in the lack of a comprehensive approach. Broad national socioeconomic strategies reiterate priorities for women’s access to economic opportunities, including in the context of agriculture and rural development, but tend to treat gender considerations as a separate and narrow topic. A gender perspective is missing from sector-specific agriculture policy, and there is limited attention to enhancing opportunities for women’s empowerment in agriculture.

The State Committee for Family, Women and Children’s Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan is the public institution for the advancement of women and promotion of gender equality. It has several functions, including the development and implementation of state programmes and coordination with other executive bodies. Coordination across state structures is facilitated by a system of gender focal points who support gender mainstreaming and form an expert network across agencies. In practice, coordination around the implementation of gender equality policy is still insufficient and has not been fully embedded into government processes in a systematic way. There are several government initiatives in support of rural women, such as those of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children’s Affairs and others dedicated to women’s entrepreneurship, but this work is not framed by an overall strategic vision. Furthermore, there is no comprehensive policy that would address

other facets of the lives of women in rural areas. Lack of evaluation of such initiatives also means that it is difficult to assess the extent to which they have contributed to enhancing gender equality for rural women.

Demographic trends: Just under half of the population of Azerbaijan lives in rural areas, but the movement of people from rural areas has had an impact on the country's demographics. Migration, both from rural areas to cities and also abroad, is driven by limited economic opportunities. The picture of female and male migration is not entirely clear in terms of the numbers who migrate formally and permanently and those who do so informally or temporarily. Labour migration is said to be increasing among women, but because it is still a less socially acceptable option for them, they tend to migrate after a divorce or in exceptional circumstances. Many migrant men, in contrast, are married and support their families through remittances. Migration has consequences for women who are "left behind" and depend on income sent from abroad. For such women living in rural households that depend on agricultural labour, the physical burdens can be very heavy when men are away. An overall consequence of migration is a depletion of the labour force that poses risks for agricultural production. At present, plans are underway for the return and resettlement of the population that has been displaced by conflict to their former towns and villages in the Karabagh economic region of Azerbaijan. Due to years of abandonment and ruin, the infrastructure in these settlements requires significant rehabilitation. The national strategic vision for developing "smart villages" and "smart agriculture" has the potential to create new models for varied and sustainable rural livelihoods in Azerbaijan. A key consideration, however, is ensuring the involvement of women in the planning and design of such initiatives and addressing longstanding inequalities.

Rural poverty: Poverty rates have declined in Azerbaijan, but within the overall positive trend, poverty rates are higher for the rural population as a whole and for women compared with men. Self-employment is the primary source of income for rural households, followed by agriculture and employment in equal measure. Rural households rely on benefits and social transfers to a greater extent than urban households. Households headed by women (mainly single older women or single mothers with dependent children) derive a considerable proportion of their income from social transfers or sources other than employment (such as remittances), putting them at greater risk of poverty. Women's poverty is also linked to their shorter working histories, a result of taking time out of work for child care or the care of other family members, and the

prevalence of informal and unpaid work on family farms or in family businesses. Women's lower average salaries also contribute to their smaller retirement pensions that they rely on for a longer time, given differences in the life expectancies of women and men.

Access to health care and specialized services: There are some distinct disparities between rural and urban areas in relation to women's health, namely the higher maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates among the rural population. More limited access to specialized services in rural areas may be a contributing factor. The COVID-19 pandemic shed light on the urgent need to ensure that the rural population can access essential health services. The introduction of mobile clinics to several remote villages during the pandemic is expected to be scaled up to provide quality primary care to the rural population. A second critical area in which services are lacking for rural areas is in the prevention of and response to gender-based violence. An estimated quarter of women and girls, in rural and urban areas, has experienced either physical, sexual or emotional violence in their lifetimes. Some services, such as a national telephone hotline established in 2020, are accessible throughout the country. However, critical specialized services, including temporary shelters for victims of violence, remain insufficient and lacking in rural communities. All of the eight non-governmental organizations accredited by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population to provide specialized services to victims of domestic violence are located in cities (mostly in Baku). The COVID-19 pandemic also created challenges for service providers operating remotely (state-run Family and Children Support Centres were able to provide psychological assistance during the quarantine period) and has raised the question of how to maintain or increase budgets for much-needed services for victims of gender-based violence in light of slowing economic growth resulting from the global pandemic.

Educational opportunities: The education system in Azerbaijan exhibits gender parity in enrolment and completion levels for compulsory and higher education. At the same time, there are distinct gender asymmetries in educational opportunities for girls and boys, and women and men, that reflect prevailing gender stereotypes. Girls tend to stay in general education after Grade 9 and represent a minority of students in technical and vocational education and training. Vocational training that prepares students for skilled manual labour is seen as mainly a "male" training context. There are also clear gendered patterns in educational choices after compulsory education. Young women are encouraged to study a very narrow range of subjects and trades that are expected to lead

to “female” professions, such as teaching, health care and social services. These subjects prepare students for public sector work that tends towards low pay but also to greater social protections that help women to reconcile work with family duties. The range of training specialities available to young men is much more diverse and corresponds to technology-related professions that are in demand in today’s labour market. Women represent a relatively high proportion of higher education graduates in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), but they also encounter barriers to advancing their careers in these fields.

Information about education in agriculture-related subjects is very limited, but the most recent agricultural census indicates that only a very small fraction of smallholders has employees with higher education as agronomists, or in related subjects such as veterinary sciences. When holdings headed by women are considered as a separate group, the picture is even more stark, with almost no engagement of specialized workers. Generally, agriculture attracts few students compared with other fields, but the representation of female students in this field is only about 25 percent. Along with initiatives to promote education in STEM subjects and in technical training, especially for young people in rural areas, there is a need to attract women to the study of agricultural subjects. This would increase their capacity as farmers and thus improve their agricultural production.

The rural labour market and employment: Economic activity rates are lowest for women in rural areas, compared with those for men and for the urban population. To some degree this gender gap reflects the fact that women take time out of the workforce when raising children. In Azerbaijan, women represent nearly all of those who are out of the workforce due to their housekeeping or care roles. For rural women, this situation is typical because of the absence of a care infrastructure that would allow them to combine work with their domestic roles. In addition, spatial disparities indicate the scarcity of employment opportunities in rural areas, more so for women. The labour market of Azerbaijan exhibits both horizontal (occupational) and vertical segregation. Women are concentrated in public sector work (such as education, health care and social services) that offer stability but are among the lowest paid. Men represent the majority of employees in public administration and defence, energy supply and distribution, mining, construction, transportation and storage – fields that are associated with higher pay and greater mobility. Of note, a number of professions, including some in agriculture, are reserved for men, based on a concept of positive discrimination. A list

of specific jobs that are deemed to be dangerous for women is part of the overall labour legislation that otherwise makes few distinctions between women and men. These job restrictions also reinforce “soft” barriers to women accessing the labour market, by perpetuating gender stereotypes about the types of work that are considered suitable and unsuitable for women, and which jobs are “male-only occupations”. Forms of labour market segregation contribute to a large gender-based pay gap. On average, men earn 37 percent more, when their median monthly salaries are compared with those of women.

Agricultural labour: For the rural population, agriculture is the main income source, mainly a form of self-employment and not wage employment. Most people working in agriculture do so on smallholdings or family farms; few are employed in agricultural enterprises. Women’s agricultural labour is typically on smallholder farms, most often family farms, and they are very rarely hired as workers, either permanently or seasonally. Agriculture is also one of the largest informal employers in Azerbaijan. Informal employment, by virtue of the fact that it is unregulated, does not grant rights to pension insurance, unemployment protection, paid sick leave or leave for pregnancy and maternity. While men appear to represent a large share of those in informal employment in numbers, given the more limited job opportunities for women, they constitute a sizeable proportion of informal agricultural labourers. Informal work also encompasses unpaid work performed by family members, which in rural areas includes work on family farms or other enterprises. Women represent almost two-thirds of all contributing family workers, as compared with other categories of workers, across all sectors. According to the agricultural census, women as family members performed close to half of the worked person days on privately owned farms, peasant farms and family farms. When working in this way, as opposed to as hired labour, women receive little remuneration and do not accrue work histories, leaving them dependent economically on male relatives. The share of women working in agriculture is high, but their contributions are largely unrecognized as forms of work due to their informal nature.

Ownership of land and farming practices: The absence of sex-disaggregated records on landownership poses problems for determining women’s representation as agricultural landowners. The World Bank estimates that women make up 42 percent of all registered landowners in Azerbaijan (World Bank Group, 2016). According to the most recent household budget survey, less than half of female-headed households are landowners compared with almost two-thirds of male-headed households (State Statistical Committee

of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households, Distribution of households by access to land, average size of land and type of land). Households with women heads tend to have smaller plots of land by about one acre. Most of these land parcels are backyard plots or gardens, but male-headed households are slightly more likely to have land that is used for family farming. Although there are no legal barriers to women's landownership in Azerbaijan, in practice it is generally accepted that male family members inherit and manage land. Women often consent to land being granted to a male relative or parents sell land shares and pass the income to their daughters. While rural women often use agricultural land for which they are not the legal owners, it is important to focus not only on women's access to land but also their control over it (for example, in terms of generating income from sale or rent). The common situation, in which women are less likely than men to own land, impinges on their economic empowerment and complicates the process of investing in farming and entrepreneurial activities, for instance, when land cannot be used as collateral for loans.

Farming in Azerbaijan is dominated by small-scale farmers. At the time of the last agricultural census, more than 900 000 family farms were operating and over 400 000 households engaged in agriculture. Concurrently, women were recorded as the holder of a quarter of all smallholdings, most of these being farming households or family farms. Farming is not attracting young people and especially not young women. Women who head smallholdings are older on average than men. Close to a third are aged 65 and over, past the official age of retirement. In contrast, around half of men identified as smallholders are between the ages of 34 and 54. Women who head households have limited engagement with commercial farming but greater involvement in subsistence farming on backyard plots and gardens. Men smallholders are equally likely to farm their land for personal consumption and for a combination of personal consumption and the market. Generally, women are viewed as helpers of men and not "productive" farmers in their own right, which then renders them invisible to and undervalued by policymakers.

Considering women's role in crop production and horticulture, as well as in the raising of livestock, a clear division of labour along gender lines is apparent. Women mainly perform manual labour and help men with activities such as sowing seeds, weeding, hoeing, harvesting and storing produce. Women represent between 70 and 100 percent of harvesters of some types of crops. On farms with livestock, women are responsible for daily management activities, such as

caring for poultry, sheep and cattle, dealing with animal hygiene, and milking cows. They also play a key role in processing agricultural products, such as cheese, which they sell from their homes or to intermediaries. Men, on the other hand, perform labour that is seen as more physically demanding or dangerous, such as irrigating farmland, spraying pesticides and pruning. They also exercise decision-making over which crops to plant and transportation of products and are said to prefer to take sole responsibility for negotiating with other producers, water user association members and service providers. Because men also usually manage sales, they more often make independent decisions on allocating income to improve production, such as for equipment repair. In contrast, women on family farms are perceived as advisors and thus not the final decision-makers.

Distinct roles and the gendered division of labour mean that women are concentrated in low value segments of agricultural value chains and face challenges in upgrading to higher values. Some subsectors – such as apiculture – are said to be male-dominated while others – such as sericulture – offer more opportunities for women throughout the value chain. However, studies conducted in Azerbaijan suggest that women are very active in initiating changes in approach and are interested in gaining knowledge that would improve agricultural production when they are empowered to do so. Thus, women have the potential to thrive in any value chain if key barriers, such as gender stereotypes and discrimination and access to critical resources, are mitigated.

Access to agricultural resources and inputs: Difficulties that farmers in general face, such as an underdeveloped system for the provision of agricultural extension and rural advisory services, and inability to afford machinery and equipment, are compounded for women farmers. For example, women are viewed as auxiliary workers, and so are overlooked as potential recipients of extension services. Furthermore, it is expected that men are the target of information about new technologies, practices and skills, and that they will share their knowledge with family members and farm employees. Women in rural areas also face mobility and time constraints that impede their ability to attend training activities unless they have been developed with consideration of women's particular circumstances. Further efforts are needed to develop not only extension services but gender-sensitive services that address the needs of women as farmers. Likewise, women's formal involvement in irrigation management, operation and maintenance, as measured by their representation in water users' associations (WUAs), is minimal. Both structural barriers and gender norms mean that women

do not participate in WUAs to the same extent that they are water users for irrigating household plots or other farming activities. Nevertheless, initiatives to improve access to water in rural communities and build the capacities of WUAs have shown that when gender is mainstreamed into irrigation management, women's engagement can improve.

Finance is another critical resource for farmers and entrepreneurs who wish to invest in their own production. As is the case with farms, women represent just under a third of the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises (with no breakdown by urban and rural location). Women also represent a smaller proportion of individual entrepreneurs, but of these, a sizeable number (just over a third) conduct entrepreneurial activities in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. The absence of qualitative studies on women's entrepreneurship, specifically for women in rural areas, makes it difficult to interpret this finding. However, the engagement of women as entrepreneurs in agriculture seems to reflect both the decline in men entering agriculture, leaving opportunities for women, and a growth in self-employment generally. Moreover, a number of programmes on small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) development have not only focused on rural areas but also have special initiatives for women, including privileged loans and soft credit lines. Yet women entrepreneurs represent only a small share of loan recipients from the Entrepreneurship Development Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan and received less than ten percent of the value of loans allocated over a five-year period. The situation is similar for loans available to entrepreneurs to improve their agriculture-based businesses. Women represented under eight percent of total recipients of privileged agricultural loans from 2015 to 2018. It could not be determined for this CGA what barriers women encounter in accessing finance, but this type of qualitative information is greatly needed, along with knowledge about whether women who receive credit also exercise decision-making over how the funds will be invested. One of the most significant hurdles to improving access to agricultural resources is overcoming perceptions that these are gender neutral topics.

Rural infrastructure: Improving rural infrastructure, both physical and social infrastructure, is a precondition for the development of farming and agribusinesses, as well as increasing opportunities to generate off-farm jobs and income-earning activities. Inadequate improvement to infrastructure affects entire households but has a particular impact on women due to typical gender roles.

In Azerbaijan, rural households have fewer labour-saving devices, such as dishwashers and washing machines, mainly used by women for domestic tasks. Most rural households use natural gas for cooking, and the reliance on solid fuels for this purpose is declining. Nevertheless, when rural households do not have access to a gas supply, they use fuelwood, coal or agricultural waste for this purpose. If unclean solid fuels are used, the harmful impact on women's health may be greater than for other family members, because they have the main responsibility for cooking and spend more time inside the home. Rural households tend to rely on gas or interior stoves/fireplaces for heating the home, and many also heat water for domestic use. Because women have the main responsibility for washing dishes, doing laundry and bathing children, their domestic workload increases when there is not a ready supply of hot water.

Most rural households have water piped into the premises, but the water supply may not be available on a constant basis, or the water might be of poor quality. Around a quarter of rural households collect water from an outside source, usually from a well in the yard. When water is needed for household use, it is women's task to collect it. Although all household members feel the impact of scarce water supply, women are acutely affected by having to collect, store and ration water. Increasingly, climate change has had an impact on the availability of freshwater, requiring women to travel longer distances to fetch it.

The quality of rural road and transportation infrastructure also has differential impacts on women and men. In rural areas, men typically take responsibility for driving cars, tractors and animal-drawn vehicles. Women are less likely to have independent access to cars and so rely more heavily on public transportation. The lack of transport options has important consequences for rural women's mobility and subsequently for their opportunities to earn a living, pursue education or access health and other services that are not available locally. Women who engage in farming face barriers to selling their products at markets, due to the lack of large buses from their villages. Therefore, women mainly sell agricultural products from their yards, while men transport produce, such as grapes and fruit, to regional markets. Infrastructure improvements that enhance women's mobility and access to wholesalers would be particularly beneficial in enabling women to reach higher value activities along value chains.

In contrast to other forms of infrastructure, the digital divide between urban and rural settlements is not

pronounced. The rural population has access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), mainly using mobile devices as opposed to home computers. Rural and urban residents use home internet with the same frequency and for similar purposes. The primary difference in usage is that the rural population is less likely to interact with public services or to sell goods and services online. Of note, the gender digital divide appears to be narrow in Azerbaijan, especially when compared with women's more limited access to other resources. The fact that rural women are well-connected digitally and have access to social networks is a key entry point for the further development of accessible e-services. As ICTs are increasingly vital to agriculture and agribusiness, developments around smart agriculture could be used to overcome longstanding gender-based barriers in access to agricultural inputs, such as extension and advisory services.

Finally, women experience the impacts of the underdeveloped care infrastructure in rural areas. Women take on a larger responsibility for child care, care of older people and care of family members who have disabilities or chronic illnesses. Looking specifically at child care and preschool educational institutions in Azerbaijan, around a third are located in rural areas. Almost every other urban child aged one to five is enrolled in preschool education compared with only one in every five rural children. When support services are unavailable to women, this restricts the time and opportunities they have to engage in paid employment outside the home, to take part in training or other development projects, and to participate in local decision-making.

Food security and climate change: Azerbaijan has reduced the prevalence of undernourishment, virtually eradicated severe food insecurity and is on course to meet targets relating to maternal, infant and young child nutrition. However, progress in addressing poor nutrition in the forms of increasing rates of childhood and adult overweight and obesity is less apparent. Micronutrient deficiencies are also prevalent among women in Azerbaijan; the rate of anaemia among pregnant women has increased since 2000 to 40 percent. Small farms play a key

role in increasing food security because they supply almost half of all agricultural production in Azerbaijan. Among smallholders, women must have secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment if food productivity is to be increased.

Climate change in Azerbaijan poses a threat to food security, as it is expected to place particular stresses on water resources. This, in turn, would reduce agricultural harvests and yields, and lead to decreases in the locally available food supply that is already insufficient to meet the demands of the population. Environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change and climate vulnerability affect women and men differently. For example, women's role as providers of food, energy and water makes them more dependent on natural ecosystems and more vulnerable to environmental degradation than men. When climate change affects the sectors where women are best represented as farmers and labourers, in horticulture or dairy production for example, they will disproportionately feel the impacts of poor agricultural outcomes. Extreme climate events exacerbate pre-existing gender disparities, such as the risks of poverty, unequal access to resources and limited mobility, that put women in especially vulnerable positions. In terms of national climate policy, gender has only been minimally mainstreamed. The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources has supported capacity building on gender-sensitive climate change adaptation strategies for national and local government stakeholders, technical specialists and the private sector, but there is still a need to improve the understanding of women's vulnerabilities to climate change, and also how women can contribute their knowledge and skills to climate change adaptation.

This CGA concludes with recommendations that are addressed to FAO, institutions of government and non-governmental organizations. The recommendations include suggested actions to address longstanding gender inequalities in the agriculture sector and to take advantage of opportunities to adopt gender-responsive approaches to emerging challenges.

1. Introduction

1.1. Why is gender relevant to sustainable agriculture and rural development?

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) recognizes that without addressing gender gaps and inequalities, goals such as ending hunger and extreme poverty will not be achieved. FAO's commitment to promoting gender equality stems from fundamental human rights instruments on eliminating discrimination against women and girls and ensuring the protection of the rights of women and girls in rural areas. FAO aligns its work with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which itself reflects global commitments to reduce intersecting inequalities and to meet gender-specific targets.

Rural women represent a quarter of the world's population and are vital contributors to rural communities and the household economies of their families. Yet all too often, their rights and needs "remain insufficiently addressed or ignored in laws, national and local policies, budgets, and investment strategies at all levels" (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2016, p. 3).

Although their contributions are often invisible in national policy formulation, rural women are the "backbone of rural economies", representing a large proportion of the rural workforce and serving as managers of natural resources (FAO, 2020b, p. 3). Women shoulder most of the burden of unpaid domestic and care work and, in doing so, contribute significantly to food security and nutrition. However, around the world, "rural women still face major gender-based constraints that limit their potential as economic agents and their capacity to reap the full benefits of their work" (ibid.).

The disadvantages that rural women and girls face in accessing essential assets, resources, services and opportunities, combined with gender discrimination, prevent them from reaching their full potential. The impacts are far-ranging, for individual households,

communities and national economies. Identifying and addressing gender gaps in agriculture requires investing in and empowering rural women and girls. These approaches, in turn, are a catalyst to "accelerate progress in agriculture, rural development and, ultimately, food security and nutrition" (FAO, 2020b, p. 4). FAO is committed to integrating gender equality into all its work and aims to transform discriminatory norms and tackle the root causes of persistent inequalities. Likewise, governments must not only consider and acknowledge the specific problems faced by rural women but also take proactive measures to "accelerate the achievement of substantive equality for rural women in all areas in which they are underrepresented or disadvantaged" (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2016, p. 7).

1.2. FAO in the Republic of Azerbaijan

Before establishing a Partnership and Liaison Office in Baku in 2016, FAO worked closely with the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The first Country Programming Framework (CPF) for 2016–2020 set out key areas for cooperation in line with the United Nations–Azerbaijan Partnership Framework and the national development programme Azerbaijan 2020. This CPF was ambitious and included 6 priority areas, 14 outcomes and 40 outputs. Notably among the priority areas, priority 4 on strengthening the policy and institutional framework for agriculture and rural development had a gender dimension in its inclusion of projects to empower women. Several outputs on the capacity development of national institutions and service providers included tasks to increase outreach to and services for women among rural smallholders and entrepreneurs.

The current Country Programming Framework for 2021–2025 is derived from Azerbaijan's and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for 2021–2025. It also takes into account the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on increasing poverty levels, especially among rural

Table 1. Priorities and areas of cooperation for FAO and the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Priority area	Main areas of cooperation
(1) Inclusive growth that reduces vulnerability and builds resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increasing competitiveness of producers in agriculture and food processing, including women-owned businesses, focusing on business initiatives in rural areas » Supporting skills development training to improve the rural population's access to labour markets and farmers' production capacity » Supporting efficient and sustainable use of agricultural areas, possibly through land consolidation and alternative uses (for example, agritourism and off-farm activities) to improve rural livelihoods
(2) Stronger institutions for better public and social services delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Modernizing educational programmes and developing the capacity of experts working in the field of education in agriculture-related fields » Increasing the capacities and strengthening institutional structures dedicated to food safety and improving the availability and accessibility of healthy and nutritious food » Supporting efficient extension and agricultural advisory services in rural areas, including phytosanitary and veterinary services, by improving the skills and capacity of service providers
(3) Protecting the environment and addressing climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Strengthening institutional capacities to plan, track and report on climate change, and to access climate finance and technologies » Establishing adaptive policies on land use, integration to the tourism value chain and water management to enhance the resilience of vulnerable communities » Adopting evidence-based policies, mechanisms and practices to reduce environmental hazards and pollution in urban and rural areas » Developing gender-responsive reports/plans to track climate change and assess climate solution technologies with a focus on the most vulnerable
(4) A gender-equitable society that empowers women and girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Enhancing skills and knowledge of women and girls in rural areas (including in conflict-affected territories) to enable them to actively participate in the business life and sustainable development of rural communities

Source: FAO, no date. *Country Programming Framework for Azerbaijan 2021 to 2025* (unpublished internal report).

communities and small-scale farmers. In recognizing that gender inequality poses a significant challenge to realizing the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals in Azerbaijan, the current CPF demonstrates FAO's commitment to gender mainstreaming. Gender equality is a cross-cutting theme for the implementation of the CPF, and priority 4 will be addressed through outputs that are oriented towards women and girls specifically. The CPF for 2021–2025 reiterates the four areas of support outlined in the Azerbaijan–United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, with organization-specific outcomes for FAO (see Table 1).

The Country Programming Framework for 2021–2025 is also supported by FAO policy outlined in the FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030 (FAO, 2020b) and the FAO Regional Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan for Europe and Central Asia 2019–2022 (FAO, 2019). The regional strategy sets forth more detailed priorities for regional, subregional and country offices in gender mainstreaming and outlines three core areas of work for Europe and Central Asia. These core areas offer additional guidance for fully incorporating gender considerations into FAO work in Azerbaijan and are as follows:

1. Develop capacity and raise awareness about issues related to gender equality, social protection and rural

development. The aim of knowledge generation is to improve the evidence base for policymaking.

2. Economically empower rural women through the development of inclusive and gender-sensitive value chains, diversify income, and create employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for improved food security and rural livelihoods of smallholders in areas affected by land degradation and climate change.
3. Mainstream gender into FAO technical assistance, and in particular, provide technical guidance and support for collecting and using sex-disaggregated data to monitor progress in closing the gender gaps in key areas of FAO's mandates, and enhance national and regional capacities for better integration of gender concerns in formulating, implementing, monitoring, reporting and evaluating development and humanitarian interventions.

The Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan has acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs). A crisis response package of economic and social support was introduced in 2020, and it is anticipated that further actions will be taken in 2022 to assist in economic recovery. FAO, as an

international partner, will support the implementation of planned actions.

1.3. Scope and purpose of the Country Gender Assessment

FAO policy on gender mainstreaming requires that country offices periodically carry out a Country Gender Assessment (CGA) to inform planning (FAO, 2020b). A CGA is often prepared in parallel with the development of a new Country Programming Framework.

This Country Gender Assessment focuses on the intersections of gender, agriculture and rural development, and presents a snapshot of critical gender inequalities that affect agricultural production and rural livelihoods in Azerbaijan. The report complements other national gender profiles that have a wider scope. It includes recommendations on enhancing agriculture and developing rural communities with a gender-sensitive perspective, taking into consideration gender roles and differences between women and men in access to productive resources, inputs and information.

Gender analysis is a key tool of gender mainstreaming to be used in programme design and implementation, as well as in monitoring and evaluation. An additional objective of the CGA is to support the integration of a gender perspective into FAO operations. While the CGA should not replicate programme-specific gender analysis, it provides a framework and background information that can be used to develop targeted analytical activities.

This assessment also serves as resource material for FAO's assistance to national partners, as well as in cooperative work with the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and donor organizations. The report may be of use to other United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and researchers, alongside diverse professionals in the fields of agriculture and rural development.

In addition to complying with FAO policy, the Country Gender Assessment supports Azerbaijan's commitments to gender equality as a member state of the Council of Europe¹ and under the European Union–Azerbaijan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. Within their general strategies to promote gender equality, both the Council of Europe

and the European Union recognize the multiple barriers that prevent rural women from realizing their rights, such as poverty, unemployment, the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, isolation from basic services and limited participation in decision-making (see for example, Parliamentary Assembly, 2011, p. 1 and European Commission, 2020, p. 2). The findings included in this CGA can inform gender mainstreaming of the relevant policy and measures recommended by the Council of Europe and the European Union.

This Country Gender Assessment is the first that FAO has produced for Azerbaijan, and it is among several CGAs for the Europe and Central Asia region that FAO has conducted since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The assessment is not intended to be a full analysis of the impacts of COVID-19 on rural livelihoods and agriculture in Azerbaijan. However, the CGA draws upon specific COVID-19 impact analyses that provide information about the risks that pre-existing gender inequalities have widened as a result of the pandemic. These findings should be incorporated into relief and recovery planning to ensure that rural populations, especially women and girls, are not further disadvantaged. In developing strategies to “build back better” after the COVID-19 crisis, efforts can also be made to “build back equal”.

1.4. Methodology

The methodology used to conduct this CGA is recommended by FAO's internal guidance on preparing a Country Gender Assessment (FAO, 2017). This assessment was conducted through a review and analysis of quantitative data and qualitative information found in statistical compilations and current research, respectively. Several expert interviews and focus group discussions with key informants were conducted from April 2021 to June 2021 in order to obtain further information about the situation in rural areas.

1.4.1. Data sources and gender statistics

Gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data are necessary for inclusive policymaking on rural development and agriculture. Because they reveal critical disparities that would otherwise be overlooked, gender statistics are the starting point for a Country Gender Assessment.

Data collection and the production of statistics have improved in Azerbaijan, but the limited data disaggregated by sex, as well as by place of residence (rural/urban), have been a key challenge for this assessment. The lack of disaggregation means that the CGA is based on only the few agri-gender statistics

¹ Azerbaijan joined the Council of Europe in 2001 and ratified the core treaties that guarantee gender equality and freedom from discrimination (the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter).

Box 1. The “head of household/holding” concept

In statistics, the head of the household (or the holding) is used to capture information about who owns key assets and who makes decisions for the household/holding. The method of identifying a single “head” in surveys and censuses is problematic because it assumes that there is a single decision-maker for the whole household/holding. Historically, the primary decision-maker has been assumed to be an adult male, unless this person is not present in the household. This concept reinforces gender hierarchies and can obscure the fact that there may be various decision-makers within a household or multiple economic providers of a holding.

Source: Duban, E. & FAO REU. 2016. *Agri-Gender Statistics Toolkit for Turkey and Central Asia*. Ankara, FAO. <https://www.fao.org/3/i5769e/i5769e.pdf>, p. 12

that were available, and the picture of how the lives of rural women and men differ from those of their urban counterparts remains unclear.

Whenever possible, this assessment refers to official statistics from the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The two main sources of sex-disaggregated data used in this CGA are gender statistics (for example, compiled in the publication *Women and Men in Azerbaijan*) and data derived from surveys on agriculture or among rural households. One of the shortcomings in the survey data is that it is disaggregated not by sex, but by the sex of the head of the household (or the head of the holding, in the case of the agricultural census). The “head of household” concept has long been used as a statistical unit in surveys, but it is not one that FAO endorses. Rather, FAO recommends using indicators that measure the intra-household distribution of managerial decisions and ownership of assets and resources.

This CGA refers to national data that are disaggregated for female-headed and male-headed households, but it should be noted that the definitions of these types of households, as used in official statistics, could not be verified. FAO defines a female-headed household (FHH) as one in which adult males are either not present or do not contribute to the household income (FAO, 2011). Differences in farming practices between female-headed and male-headed households should not be attributed to the sex of the household head, but the data can nevertheless be useful to suggest where

further analysis of underlining disparities in access to agricultural resources is needed.

Since 2019, the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Azerbaijan has managed data through a comprehensive database – the Electronic Agricultural Information System (EAIS),² which includes a farm registry in addition to information about the recipients of agricultural subsidies. The Ministry of Agriculture reports that the database can be used “to obtain data on the distribution of farmers according to gender and age, [and] the level of use of fertilizers and pesticides, fertilizer and seed suppliers” (Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Azerbaijan Agricultural Economics Research Center, 2021, p. 7). All data are accessible to the Agrarian Research Centre, and some statistics about agriculture are available through an online portal.³ When reviewed for this assessment, however, the data included in the portal were not disaggregated by sex. Nevertheless, the EAIS may be a potential source of gender-sensitive information if the records are both disaggregated by sex and also analysed.

Several sources of agri-gender data that were consulted for this CGA are listed in Table 2, along with a summary of their limitations.

In order to improve the collection and analysis of gender-sensitive data in agriculture and rural areas, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia has developed a suggested core set of gender indicators that can be integrated into the official agricultural statistical system.⁴ When conducting this CGA, a preliminary assessment was made of available national data that correspond to FAO’s set of indicators. Based on the evaluation of gender experts, it was determined that data are fully or partially available for 6 of the 18 indicators (derived primarily from the most recent agricultural census). Data gaps are present in areas such as access to rural advisory and extension services, participation in farmer organizations and cooperatives, and access to machinery and equipment. These shortcomings greatly complicate the development of a gender profile of agricultural holdings in Azerbaijan. An annex to this CGA provides a full list of core set of gender indicators in agriculture and an assessment of which are available for Azerbaijan.

When no official data were available, the assessment refers to surveys or studies carried out by international or civil society organizations, some of which are small

² In Azerbaijani, the Elektron Kənd Təsərrüfatı İnformasiya Sistemi (EKTİS).

³ See <https://agrodata.az/az/>.

⁴ See <http://www.fao.org/3/bb179e/bb179e.pdf>.

Table 2. Data sources

Data source	Description
State Statistical Committee:	
Gender statistics (<i>Women and Men in Azerbaijan</i> , most recently published in 2021)	The publication compiles sex-disaggregated data for socioeconomic indicators (for example, on demographics, health, education, employment, welfare and political participation). It includes a section on agriculture, forestry and fishing that is limited to two indicators on employment.
Data for the SDGs published through a national online portal ⁵	Several national indicators for the SDGs include disaggregation by sex, for instance targets for Goal 1 on poverty and social protection and for Goal 5 on ownership rights to agricultural land. However, sex-disaggregated data have not yet been made available for national targets. In some cases, data collection processes are being planned.
Agricultural statistics	Data are not disaggregated by sex.
Agricultural censuses (2005, 2015 and potentially in 2025)	The censuses produced gender statistics on employment in agriculture, with some data on number and type of farms, by sex of the head of the holding.
Household budget survey (most recently conducted in 2019)	The survey provides data on the distribution of land and agricultural production, disaggregated by the sex of the head of household. The data are not limited to officially registered farms.
Ministry of Agriculture:	
Registry of agricultural holders: Electronic Agricultural Information System (EAIS)	Registration is voluntary for those receiving subsidies and does not cover all farms. The records can be disaggregated by sex and the Agrarian Research Centre has access to the data. However, sex-disaggregated records are not publicly available.

in scale. Nevertheless, the information is presented to give a picture of general trends.

Regarding qualitative research, no studies were found assessing the status of rural residents in Azerbaijan from a gender perspective. While considerable research on women's economic empowerment has been conducted, there has been no particular focus on women as farmers, agricultural producers or rural entrepreneurs.

Finally, FAO is committed to "leaving no one behind" in implementing its projects, including this CGA. Gender intersects with other social identities (such as age, marital status, disability status, race, ethnicity,

socioeconomic status, residence and sexual orientation) and this intersection can "create and reinforce inequalities, not only between women and men but also among women and among men" (FAO, 2020b, p. 11). FAO approaches gender analysis with an intersectional perspective, and policy development and programming should also consider gender differences within and between various groups. Azerbaijan has a diverse population, but official statistical databases have generally "not been disaggregated by gender, age group, place of residence (rural/urban) and region/administrative district" (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021, p. 17). Thus, only limited intersectional gender analysis could be included in this report.

⁵ See <http://sdg.azstat.org:8484/en/home>.

2. Country overview

2.1. Administrative and territorial divisions

Azerbaijan is made up of 14 approved economic regions,⁶ which contain 78 towns, 14 urban districts, 261 settlements, 1 726 rural administrative divisions and 4 248 rural settlements. The country also includes the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021d). Note that in July 2021, by presidential decree, the country's economic regions were reconfigured to enhance the economic development of the whole country.

This Country Gender Assessment is structured around assessing the situation in rural areas, comparing differences between rural and urban livelihoods, and identifying the gender-based gaps that affect the rural population. No standard international definition of a "rural" area has been established due to differences between countries. FAO recommends that the definition of a rural area be based on "factors relevant in determining or explaining outcomes of interest ... as opposed to referencing outcomes themselves" (FAO, 2018a, p. 15). Most definitions of rural areas address one or more of three dimensions: scarcity of population in a settlement; land cover and land use; and remoteness of the settlement (ibid., p. 18). In the context of gender analysis, the particular dimensions that are included or excluded in the classification of an area as 'rural' may not adequately capture the realities of women's and men's lives. For instance, considering areas as "rural" based only on their remoteness might be helpful to understand access to some services, especially when issues of mobility are also taken into consideration. However, if analysing how women and men are engaged in agricultural production, the remoteness classification might overlook people who engage in farming in peri-urban areas.

⁶ The economic regions are: (1) Baku city; (2) Nakhchivan; (3) Absheron-Khyzinsky; (4) Gorno-Shirvansky; (5) Ganja-Dashkesan; (6) Karabakh; (7) Gazakh-Tovuz; (8) Guba-Khachmaz; (9) Lankaran-Astara; (10) Central-Aran; (11) Mil-Mugan; (12) Sheki-Zagatala; (13) East-Zangezur; and (14) Shirvan-Salyan.

Box 2. Classification of "rural" areas in Azerbaijan

The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan disaggregates data for some indicators by "urban" and "rural" area. The only metadata, or explanation, for what comprises a "rural area" that could be found in English from the State Statistical Committee suggests that towns and some forms of settlements are considered "urban", and all others that do not fit this category are deemed to be "rural areas". Thus, the urban population is that which lives in large cities (for example, Baku, Ganja, Sumqait and Mingachevir) or in the capital cities (towns or settlements) of the administrative regions. The rural population is that which lives in rural settlements (*kend yayashayish mentegeleri* i.e., villages) outside of cities and towns. This is a commonly used typology in which all settlements that are not urban are classified as rural.

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2021d. *Demographic Indicators of Azerbaijan*. Baku, p. 39.

Increasingly, international organizations, including FAO and the UN Statistical Division, advocate for classifications that consider the degree of urbanization (which would differentiate between cities, towns, suburban or peri-urban areas, villages, remote rural areas and mostly uninhabited areas, for instance). FAO has proposed a harmonized urban-rural definition that is people-based and uses "a continuum that characterizes settlements based on population size and density" (FAO, 2018a, p. 25). This type of classification is effective for policymaking on improving the well-being of households and communities and would also help to capture gender differences across a spectrum of settlement types.

It appears that a settlement approach is used in Azerbaijan (meaning, settlements are classified as “urban” or “rural”, regardless of whether they are located near municipal centres or in remote locations). This Country Gender Assessment uses the term “rural” in its broadest sense and in line with FAO guidance. Therefore, rural settlements are those that are characterized by the majority of the population being engaged in activities related to agriculture, forestry and/or aquaculture.

Note that qualitative studies, referenced in this report, that use the term “rural” may apply its commonly-accepted meaning, without specifying a particular definition. Furthermore, it does not appear that the national statistical system classifies peri-urban areas, although the agricultural census does include two categories of “farms” that could be considered peri-urban (homesteads, which can be located in urban areas, and farms that are part of a country house, usually in suburban areas. Neither of these are commercial farms). It may be useful to devote attention to defining such spaces that do not fit the rural-urban dichotomy, especially when considering issues such as time devoted to unpaid work, access to services or the changing use of land for agricultural purposes in areas close to cities and towns.

2.2. Macro-level view of gender equality

Several indices that measure progress towards gender equality from a macro perspective indicate that while Azerbaijan is a country of generally high human development, serious inequalities persist in terms of access to key resources.

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a measure used by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that considers a long and healthy life, average years in education and a decent standard of living (income per capita). The HDI value for Azerbaijan of 0.756 places it 88 out of 189 countries.⁷ From 1990 to 2019, the HDI value for Azerbaijan increased by 25.2 percent (UNDP, 2020d).

In order to review how gender inequality reduces a country’s level of human development, UNDP uses the Gender Development Index (GDI) which compares the HDI calculated separately for women and men in three dimensions: health, education and economic empowerment (command over economic resources).⁸

The female HDI value for Azerbaijan is 0.730 in contrast to the male value of 0.774, and this results in a GDI value of 0.943. The value for Azerbaijan is just below the average value for countries of Europe and Central Asia combined – 0.953 (UNDP, 2020d). Within the dimensions that comprise the GDI, the most notable disparities are in the level of access to economic resources (where women face significant barriers) and in average life expectancy (where men are disadvantaged).

The Gender Inequality Index (GII) is a measure of the loss in potential human development that can be attributed to disparities between female and male achievements in three dimensions (reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity, calculated as a composite of five indicators).⁹ The 2019 GII value for Azerbaijan was 0.323, representing a 30 percent loss in human development due to gender inequality (and corresponding to a rank of 73 out of 162 countries). Since 2010, when the GII was introduced, this measure of the status of gender equality has remained relatively stable, but with some negative tendencies (in 2010, the GII value was 0.313¹⁰). As Table 3 indicates, Azerbaijan has positive achievements in the areas of education (measured by near gender parity in literacy rates) and women’s labour force participation rates, yet the maternal mortality rate and the adolescent birth rate are higher than the regional averages for Europe and Central Asia and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries combined. Most significantly, women’s political participation (measured by seats occupied by women in parliament) is considerably lower than in other countries in the region.

The Global Gender Gap, developed by the World Economic Forum, measures gender parity in four dimensions (economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment), allowing for a more detailed assessment of progress towards gender equality. In 2021, Azerbaijan received a score of 0.688¹¹ which corresponds to a rank of 100 out of 156 countries (World Economic Forum, 2021). Of the four dimensions, Azerbaijan is the farthest from parity in the area of political empowerment, but the country also scores lower than the global average for economic participation. For the country as a whole, there is close to gender parity in educational attainment and health (see Figure 1).

⁷ In simple terms, HDI scores range from 1.00 (the highest possible level of human development) to 0 (the lowest level of human development).

⁸ The GDI uses the same scale as the HDI.

⁹ For the GII, a value of 0 indicates full equality and a value of 1.00 represents the highest level of inequality.

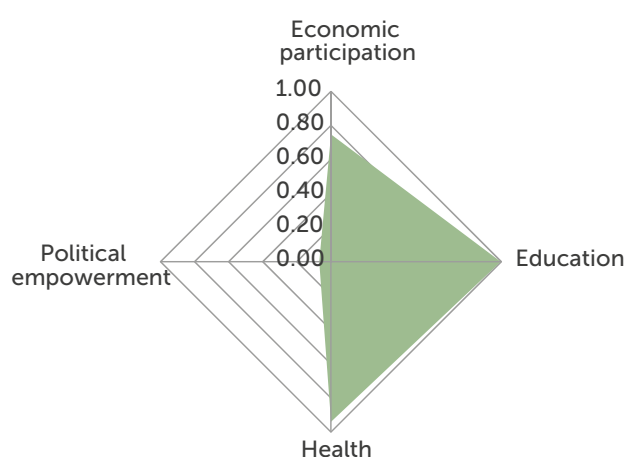
¹⁰ See UNDP Gender Inequality Index data (1995–2019), available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/data>.

¹¹ A score of 1.00 represents gender parity and a score of 0 represents complete imparity.

Table 3. Gender Inequality Index values for Azerbaijan, compared with regional values, 2019

	2019 GII value	Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100 000 live births)	Adolescent birth rate (births per 1 000 women aged 15–19 years)	Share of seats in parliament (% held by women)	Population with some secondary education (% aged 25 years and over)		Labour force participation rate (% aged 15 years and over)	
					Women	Men	Women	Men
Azerbaijan	0.323	26.0	55.8	16.8	93.9	97.5	63.4	69.7
Europe and Central Asia Region	0.256	19.9	27.8	23.1	79.9	88.1	45.0	70.0
OECD countries	0.205	18.0	22.9	30.8	84.1	87.0	52.1	69.1

Source: Adapted from UNDP. 2020c. *Human Development Report 2020. The next frontier: Human development and the Anthropocene*. New York, USA, p. 362, p. 364.

Figure 1. Global Gender Gap scores for Azerbaijan, by dimension, 2021

Source: World Economic Forum. 2021. *The Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. Geneva, Switzerland, p. 107.

Looking at Global Gender Gap scores over time, and comparing scores from 2007¹² to those of 2021, there has been almost no change for more than a decade. This means that while indicators for health and education remained positive, there was also little progress in the dimensions of women's political empowerment and economic participation (World Economic Forum, 2007).

2.3. Policy and institutional profile

The formation of a national approach to the empowerment of women and girls and gender equality began soon after Azerbaijan became independent from

the Soviet Union. Key milestones include participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women (held in Beijing in 1994), joining the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (in 1995) and implementing the wide-ranging Gender and Development project (1997–2000)¹³ that covered areas such as women's political participation and economic development, gender-based violence and gender statistics. During this period, the national legislative base for equality between women and men was also strengthened considerably.

2.3.1. Key international commitments on gender equality

Azerbaijan is a party to the UN **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** (CEDAW) and has submitted six periodic reports on implementation of the treaty, most recently in 2019. The convention draws attention to the significant roles that rural women play "in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy", and requires States to ensure that rural women and men participate in and benefit equally from rural development (Article 14). The CEDAW Committee's general recommendations (for example, general recommendations number 16 [1991] on unpaid family workers and number 34 [2016] on the rights of rural women) provide further details on States parties' commitments.

¹² This is the first year that Azerbaijan was included in the Global Gender Gap Report.

¹³ The project was implemented by UNDP, the Cabinet of Ministers and the State Committee for Women's Issues, and also included women's non-governmental organizations.

In 2015, in its concluding observations on Azerbaijan's fifth periodic report under the treaty, the CEDAW Committee recommended that measures be adopted to "ensure that rural women have adequate access to land and related resources, social, health and other basic services, economic opportunities and new technologies, as well as equal opportunities to participate in political and public life, in particular in decision-making processes at the community level" (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2015, para. 37). In preparing to review Azerbaijan's sixth periodic report, the CEDAW Committee requested specific information pertaining to its recommendations on rural women, including on measures to promote their participation "in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of policies and legislation affecting their rights", as well as national programmes on rural development (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2020, para. 20). The CEDAW Committee request suggests that issues pertaining to the rights of rural women to be free from discrimination will be an important agenda item for the forthcoming review.

Azerbaijan has undertaken commitments to advance the agenda of the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**. In its strategic objectives, the Beijing Platform for Action includes a number of references to women in rural areas and in particular their risks for poverty and social marginalization. The Beijing Platform for Action calls on governments to formulate and implement policies that enhance the access of women agricultural and fisheries producers to a range of productive resources.

The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** is a global commitment to improve prosperity for all through many actions, including combating inequalities, promoting inclusivity and protecting human rights. Many of the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) have particular relevance for rural populations, such as those on ending poverty (Goal 1), achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture (Goal 2) and providing universal access to clean water and sanitation (Goal 6). Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls includes one explicit target related to agriculture and rural livelihoods: target 5.a on undertaking reforms to grant women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources. Additionally, other Goal 5 targets, such as ending discrimination against women and girls, recognizing unpaid care work and ensuring full and effective participation in all levels of decision-making, have a cross-cutting nature and are particularly relevant

to improving the lives of women and girls in rural areas. The pledge to "leave no one behind" represents an obligation to consider the situation of women and girls in rural settlements throughout the 2030 Agenda.

The Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan has committed to implement the 2030 Agenda and has established national priorities and indicators for the SDGs. Rapid assessments and evaluation by the Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) mission found that state programmes, strategies and policy documents are fully aligned with SDG 5 on gender equality (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2019).

Although Azerbaijan is expected to make considerable progress in achieving the SDGs, the UN has also noted that serious development challenges remain, including "ongoing gender, socioeconomic and spatial disparities between regions and urban and rural communities; challenges to [accessing] quality services in agriculture, education, health and justice; demographic and labour market challenges; and environmental and conservation threats" (United Nations and the Government of Azerbaijan, 2021 p. 1). The goal of "leaving no one behind" that underpins Agenda 2030 is based on human rights principles, including gender equality, and this means that the well-being of women and girls should be given consideration under each SDG, not just Goal 5. Gender equality is a critical accelerator for the other SDGs and thus gender equality should be approached as a cross-cutting consideration.

Assessing progress towards the SDGs that are most relevant to this Country Gender Assessment was complicated by the limited data and analysis, especially relating to Goal 5. Of the national indicators for Goal 5, data are available for half of these and there are plans to collect data for another 36 percent.¹⁴ However, not all available data have been posted to a publicly available portal. Only the first of the three Voluntary National Reviews completed for Azerbaijan has a section dedicated to SDG 5, describing progress in eliminating inequalities in employment, education, political participation and decision-making generally, the decreasing early marriage rate, and about women as landowners. The second (2019) and third (2021) Voluntary National Review reports reiterate strategic goals on gender equality in the context of employment, education, health, gender-based violence, access to resources and data collection but do not report on progress towards Goal 5 national targets.

¹⁴ See the National Information Portal for Sustainable Development Goals of the Republic of Azerbaijan at <http://sdg.azstat.org:8484/az/reportingstatus>.

2.3.2. National law and policy

The legal base for equality between women and men is established in the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan (1995). Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees equality of rights and freedoms to everyone regardless of sex (in addition to a number of other characteristics; Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Article 25, part iii).

In 1998 and 2000, the constitutional provisions were strengthened through various legal acts. Presidential decrees¹⁵ and a Cabinet of Ministers resolution outline specific commitments, for example on the equal representation of women and men in state structures and the development of gender statistics. The Cabinet of Ministers resolution¹⁶ calls for the “appointment of persons dealing with women’s issues ... within the internal resources of ministries, committees, companies, concerns and other state enterprises and organizations” (“Solidarity Among Women” Public Union, 2020, p. 5).

Later, such measures were codified in the **Law on Guarantees of Gender (Men and Women) Equality** (2006)¹⁷ that applies to all areas of public and private life. The law sets forth state policy and responsibilities for ensuring gender equality (for example, the development of normative acts, gender analysis of draft laws and the implementation of state programmes). It assigns responsibility for gender equality monitoring to the State Committee for Family, Women and Children’s Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The State Committee submitted its first monitoring report to the national parliament in 2020.

A draft amendment to the 2006 gender equality law has been submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers for review. Potential changes to the law include clarification and regulation of processes for gender mainstreaming, specifically on conducting gender expertise, and the addition of a dedicated article on gender statistics (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2020, para. 56). It has also been reported that a draft decree “On the Adoption of Rules for Overseeing the Provision of Gender Equality”, which sets forth the concrete duties of public authorities to submit legislation and state programmes to gender expertise, has been submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers for consideration (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2015).

Equal rights between women and men are reinforced in other legal acts, for example the Family Code (establishing equal personal and property rights in family relations and the concept of joint marital property and equal marital age). Special protections for pregnant employees and women with young children under the Labour Code are not considered discriminatory under the gender equality law but are special benefits afforded to women. The Labour Code includes a provision granting women who are engaged in agricultural production a longer pregnancy and maternity leave than other women workers (Labour Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Article 125). See Section 5.6. for further details on this provision.

Taken together, the Law on Guarantees of Gender (Men and Women) Equality, legal codes and subsequent resolutions establish a solid legislative base for gender equality, women’s advancement and empowerment. However, these legal acts have only been partially implemented, as is discussed in further detail in the section on institutional mechanisms responsible for gender equality.

Policy documents that directly address women’s empowerment or gender equality

To implement principles expressed in legislation, several national action plans that aim to improve the lives of women and girls have been developed. Nevertheless, only one national plan has been formally adopted, suggesting that there is inadequate political will to address gender equality comprehensively at the state level and across all sectors.

The first National Plan of Action on Women’s Issues for 2000–2005 was adopted in 2000 by the Cabinet of Ministers in order to fulfil commitments under the Beijing Platform for Action and respond to issues raised by the CEDAW Committee. The plan supported the preparation of state programmes and the implementation of urgent measures relating to women’s issues, with a special section dedicated to violence against women. At the time, an interdepartmental council to oversee implementation of the plan was created, with representatives of state agencies and women’s non-governmental organizations (NGOs; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2005).

A second National Action Plan on Family and Women’s Issues for the period of 2008–2012 was drafted to address critical areas of inequality: women’s lower participation in decision-making processes and in political, economic and social life. The plan was not formally approved.

¹⁵ Decree No. 727, “On measures to increase the role of women in Azerbaijan”, 14 January 1998 and Decree No. 289, “On the implementation of the state policy regarding women in Azerbaijan”, 6 March 2000.

¹⁶ Resolution No. 176, “On the execution of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated March 6, 2000, No. 289”, 26 September 2000.

¹⁷ No. 150-IIIQ of 10 October 2006.

Even in the absence of a national action plan after 2005, the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan expressed its commitment to allocating sufficient funds “to ensure a steady increase in the gender mainstreaming process and all state programs and services committed to ensure gender equality at all levels and all spheres” during a 2015 Global Leaders’ Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (held in conjunction with Beijing +20 events; Commitment Statement on behalf of Azerbaijan Government Global Leaders “Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Commitment to Action”, 2015).

The comprehensive national development concept “**Azerbaijan 2020: Look into the Future**”, which is organized around several priorities, dedicates special attention to the promotion of gender equality and the development of the family within priorities on human capital and social security systems. State policy focuses on “measures to prevent gender violence, [creating] equal opportunities for women and men on the labour market, [promoting] women at work and [expanding] their opportunities to occupy leading positions” (Azerbaijan 2020: Look into the Future, 2015, p. 27). The dedicated section of Azerbaijan 2020 takes a broad approach to gender equality in several spheres, but it also treats gender equality as separate from other national priorities. Gender is not mainstreamed throughout the concept. For instance, priorities on environmental protection and ecological issues do not draw attention to the differential impacts of environmental degradation or poor infrastructure on women and men. Azerbaijan 2020 is, however, meant to be implemented through a national plan on gender equality.

A National Action Plan of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Gender Equality for the years of 2022–2025

is currently being developed. The draft plan will strengthen national policy and it also fulfils commitments under CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the SDGs, the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy and the International Labour Organization Convention 156 on the equal treatment of workers with family responsibilities (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2019, paras. 33–34). At the time of writing this Country Gender Assessment, the national action plan had been submitted for review and circulated among ministries, state committees and NGOs. The plan had not yet been sent to the Cabinet of Ministers for approval.

Based on this assessment’s review of a 2019 draft of the national action plan (the only version available), the plan appears to take a comprehensive view of the various manifestations of inequality. It also seems to require the inclusion of a gender perspective across all policy

sectors, implying that gender mainstreaming would form part of the development of sectoral plans and programmes of the Ministry of Agriculture, as it would do for other ministries. The draft plan also envisages re-working the system of gender focal points – people in the administration that are responsible for promoting gender equality – and the creation of a Special Coordination Council with representation of gender focal points from both the public and private sectors (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2019, para. 35). If adopted, the national action plan will increase gender expertise and gender sensitivity within ministries, and it should also be instrumental in drawing attention to gender inequalities affecting the rural population, through needs assessments as well as special measures. It should be noted, however, that the draft national action plan has also undergone several revisions.

Other sector-specific laws and national policies, on violence against women and support for women’s entrepreneurship, for example, are discussed in later thematic sections of this report.

Policy documents that include provisions on women

Some strategic documents that are relevant to this assessment mention gender-sensitive approaches. For example, the State Program on socio-economic development of regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2014–2018¹⁸ includes measures on increasing women’s employment as part of the state’s employment policy.

Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for

Socio-Economic Development, is a new strategic framework that addresses the “post-pandemic and post-conflict” period (Azerbaijan State News Agency, 2021). Among overall priorities for sustainable and high economic growth, Azerbaijan 2030 aims for inclusive growth and balanced development so that the regions benefit from an increased share of national income. The Azerbaijan 2030 vision foresees increased income for all segments of the population and reiterates that economic growth will improve women’s access to economic opportunities. It is expected that the Cabinet of Ministers will prepare a draft socioeconomic strategy for the period 2021–2025. This strategy will likely include measures for realizing the goal of decreasing women’s economic dependence.

The **Strategic Roadmap for the Development of Agriculture** grants special attention to women under

¹⁸ Approved by Presidential Decree No. 118, 17 February 2014.

priorities on the development of alternative activities in rural areas and supporting community initiatives for rural development. Under the first priority, measures are planned to increase rural women's employment through a special programme and improved vocational training. "Particular attention" is to be given to "the employment of women in traditional areas that serve rural tourism (carpet weaving, souvenir production, etc.)" with a target of a 20 percent increase in women employed in non-agricultural sectors (Decree of the President, 2016, para. 9.2.4¹⁹). Under the second priority, programmes will be implemented that ensure the active participation of women and young people in the social life of rural communities, with an expected overall increase in rural-based jobs by 30 percent and a threefold increase in programmes aimed at women and youth (ibid.). While the Strategic Roadmap focuses on an important issue – increasing rural women's participation in the economy – it is mainly oriented towards traditional occupations. The strategy does not, for instance, include explicit measures that would address women's role as farmers or their limited access to important resources, such as machinery, irrigation and extension services.

Government programmes that support family-based businesses, as a means of improving economic conditions in the regions, are discussed in Section 4.8. of this report.

Policy documents in which gender has not been mainstreamed

National policy concerning family, health and employment are the most likely to include provisions on women, more so than on gender equality generally. There are a large number of policy documents specific to agricultural production and its subsectors, as well as related topics such as food safety, forestry and biodiversity (for example, the State Program on the Development of Agricultural Cooperation in the Republic of Azerbaijan between 2017–2022; the State Program on the Development of Tea Growing in the Republic of Azerbaijan 2018–2027; and the State Program on Citrus Fruit Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2018–2025, to name a few). Within the small number of policies, programmes and action plans that were accessible online, gender had not been mainstreamed and analysis of any potential differential impacts on women and men was omitted. For instance, the National Forest Program for 2015–2030 describes the use of timber and non-wood forest products in a general way, referring to diversification of income sources for "local communities" overall.

¹⁹ Approved by Presidential Decree, 6 December 2016.

In the opinion of a gender expert interviewed for this assessment, a consolidated strategy for the promotion of gender equality in the agriculture sector is needed. At present, the overall Strategic Roadmap does not address with specificity women's role in agriculture. Likewise, because sector-specific policies are not gender-sensitive, they do not indicate areas of inequality or where there are opportunities for women's empowerment in agriculture.

2.3.3. National gender equality mechanisms

A national mechanism for the advancement of women and promotion of gender equality is the central policy-coordinating body within the government. In Azerbaijan, the **State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan** (SCFWCA)²⁰ is the institution within the executive that is mandated to implement and regulate state policy on family, women and children's issues (Charter of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2006²¹). The chairperson of the SCFWCA has the equivalent rank of minister.

In 1998, the then State Committee for Women's Issues was established, as part of the national mechanism.²² The present-day SCFWCA has a broader mandate, covering gender equality and issues of children's rights and protection, and the family. There appears to have been a move away from addressing women's rights as a standalone topic but to include it within efforts to strengthen the family (this was a central theme of the drafted second National Action Plan on Family and Women's Issues for the period of 2008–2012). Viewing gender equality through the narrow prism of family life can be problematic as it may inadvertently reinforce gender stereotypes that women's rights are primarily connected to their roles as wives and mothers. Furthermore, while issues of women's rights overlap with principles of gender equality, they are not the same. Important issues concerning men as well as women's role outside of the family may not fall under the scope of the present-day State Committee.

Within its mandate, the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs elaborates state programmes and ensures their implementation, coordinates with executive bodies, conducts research and analysis, and carries out training and seminars. Several special responsibilities of the SCFWCA are mentioned in its charter, such as providing advice to

²⁰ See <http://scfwca.gov.az/en>.

²¹ Approved by Presidential Decree, 9 August 2006.

²² Decree No. 668 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On the Establishment of the State Committee for Women's Issues", 14 January 1998.

relevant state bodies on the market economy which covers women's entrepreneurship and support for family farming (see Article 8.9).

The SCFWCA conducts activities in support of rural women. For instance, since 2011, the SCFWCA has implemented a project jointly with UNDP to support a network of women in rural areas and district settlements who are economically and socially active. Within the Economic and Social Participation of Women in Rural Areas project, 11 Women's Resource Centres and 3 Community Resource Centres have been established in the regions. The centres are hubs for support for vulnerable groups, awareness-raising, training and capacity building, and their key emphasis is on empowering rural women and providing them with entrepreneurial skills to improve their competitiveness in the labour market. Because FAO also implements projects on the economic empowerment of rural women, focusing on increasing women's capacity as agricultural producers, there may be natural synergies between these projects and opportunities for exchange and cooperation between the SCFWCA and FAO.

Civil society organizations have expressed concerns that the organizational and financial resources of the SCFWCA are insufficient to cover the range of tasks and activities under its mandate that are to be implemented throughout the country ("Solidarity Among Women" Public Union, 2020). Perceived shortcomings include the fact that there are only 77 staff in the central apparatus of the SCFWCA, all of whom are located in Baku because there are no field offices. Funding levels have increased each year since 2017 yet are still considered inadequate to finance the number of activities that are envisaged. In 2020, the budget was AZN 2 142 058 (roughly equivalent to USD 3.6 million). Many SCFWCA activities are implemented in cooperation with local and international organizations, but the range of such work is assessed as "not very wide" or effective (ibid., p. 5). As a result of limited capacity, activities such as data collection and analysis, advocacy around programme development and implementation across all sectors, and monitoring the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming in public policy, are not undertaken on a regular basis. Limited resources may also have an impact on the ability of the SCFWCA to effectively coordinate with line ministries, in particular the Ministry of Agriculture, in such areas as awareness-raising on issues facing rural women or when reporting to the Working Group that drafts periodic reports to the CEDAW Committee. How the SCFWCA and line ministries coordinate around policymaking and programming that impacts rural women is a separate issue that could be developed through further analysis.

Coordination across state structures is to be facilitated by a system of **gender focal points** – key staff members within line ministries and state agencies who support gender mainstreaming in their offices and form a network of experts across agencies that coordinate gender equality policy. Azerbaijani legislation, specifically the 2000 Presidential decree on implementing state policy on women's issues, followed by a Cabinet of Ministers resolution on implementing the decree,²³ requires every government structure to appoint focal points to monitor the implementation of gender policy. It does not appear that the system of gender focal points extends to executive offices at the regional level, however. Ministries and executive departments are required to report annually on progress in implementation. On the basis of these reports, as well as a separate one compiled by the State Statistical Committee, the SCFWCA prepares an overarching report of annual achievements (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2005). Of relevance to this CGA, the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and the Food Safety Agency all have gender focal points. The SCFWCA and independent gender experts have developed guidance materials for gender focal points as well as other civil servants to increase their knowledge of gender equality concepts and to facilitate gender mainstreaming in practice.²⁴

This CGA does not include an in-depth analysis of the system of gender focal points, but interviews conducted with several such staff in ministries with mandates covering agriculture or rural development suggest that they face particular challenges. The responsibilities of gender focal points are additional to their other work, and the staff in these positions change frequently. Coordination between the gender focal points and the SCFWCA varies by ministry. Some have very limited interaction with the SCFWCA. Gender focal points who provided information for this assessment reported issues including the lack of internal gender training and limited use of gender indicators in ministerial work that stem from a lack of support from senior management. At the same time, some civil society groups are not aware of the work of the gender focal points. They contend that information about the gender focal point system has not been clearly communicated to those outside of the government

²³ Decree No. 289, "On the implementation of the state policy regarding women in Azerbaijan", 6 March 2000 and Resolution No. 176, "On the execution of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated March 6, 2000, No. 289", 26 September 2000.

²⁴ Examples include Women's Association for Rational Development. 2018. Azərbaycanca Gender üzrə Məsul Şəxslər. Resurs Dəsti [Resource Pack for Gender Focal Points]; and SCFWCA and GIZ. 2021. Dövlət qulluğunda gender bərabərliyi üzrə Kurikulum [Curriculum on Gender Equality in the Civil Service].

Table 4. Population of Azerbaijan, by sex and location, 2021

Total		Rural areas		Urban areas	
Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
5 065 300	5 053 800	2 359 000	2 401 600	2 706 300	2 652 200

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2021i. *Women and Men in Azerbaijan*. Baku, p. 20.

structure and so they are unaware of “the appointment of these people in government agencies or their activities”. As a consequence, the “lack of any normative document regulating [the focal points’] activities also creates certain difficulties in determining their legal status and organizing their activities” (“Solidarity Among Women” Public Union, 2020, p. 5).

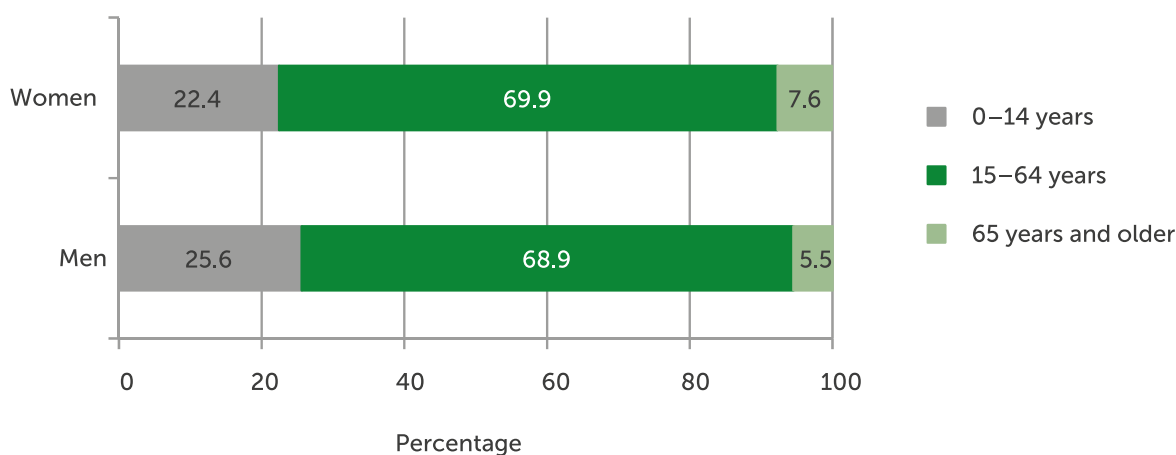
In addition to the SCFWCA, the **Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsperson)**²⁵ addresses women’s rights and gender equality as a special topic. The Ombudsperson is not only tasked with receiving direct complaints from citizens, but she also prepares recommendations for legislation and state programmes (these have covered a range of topics from leadership to employment opportunities and violence against women), carries out monitoring, and conducts training, awareness-raising and advocacy events. Because the Human Rights Commissioner has four regional offices, staff carry out regular visits and conduct seminars and other events for women in rural and remote areas, including in settlements of internally displaced persons (IDPs; Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, 2020).

Finally, within the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan (the national parliament), the **Committee for Family and Women’s and Children’s Affairs** is the legislative body that both develops draft laws related to women’s rights and gender equality and also provides expert opinions on such issues addressed in other draft laws and when requested by the parliament. At present, of the 11 committee members, 8 are women, including the chair and deputy chair.²⁶

2.4. Demographic profile

2.4.1. Population, sex ratios and household composition

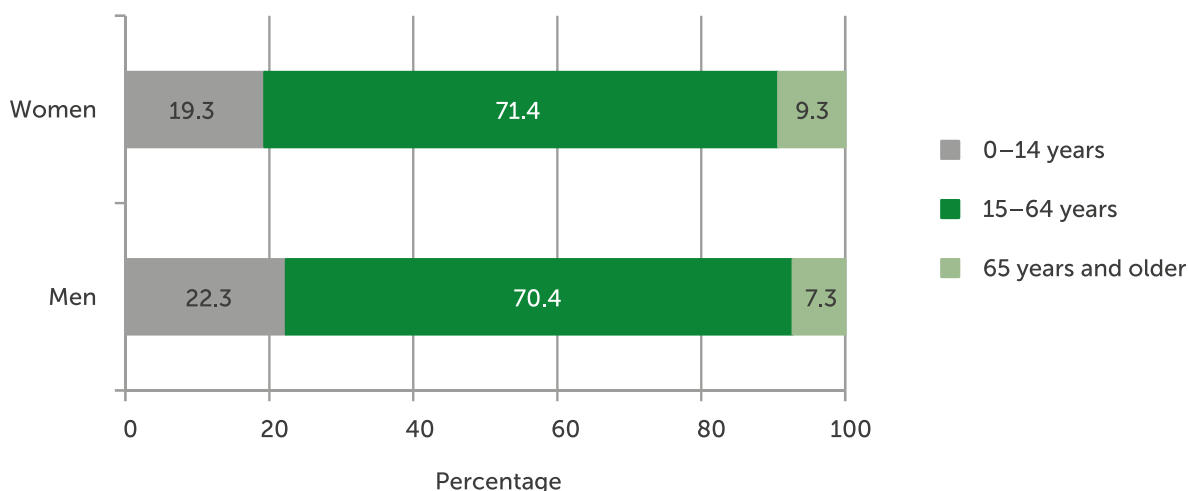
In 2021, the population of Azerbaijan was 10 119 100 people. Just under half of the population (47 percent) lives in rural areas. A breakdown of the population by both sex and geographic area indicates that women represent marginally more than half of the country’s total population (50.1 percent) and very slightly less than half of the rural population (49.6 percent), as shown in Table 4.

Figure 2. Population in rural areas, by age group, 2021

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2021i. *Women and Men in Azerbaijan*. Baku, p. 20.

²⁵ See <https://ombudsman.az/en/view/allnews/4>.

²⁶ See <https://meclis.gov.az/news-comit.php?id=12&lang=en&cat=55>.

Figure 3. Population in urban areas, by age group, 2021

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2021i. *Women and Men in Azerbaijan*. Baku, p. 20.

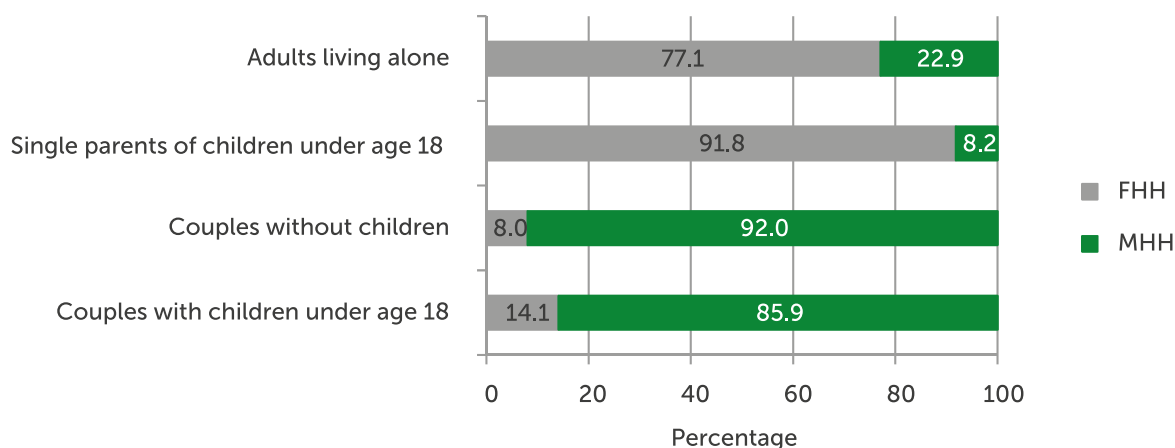
Comparing the rural and urban populations by both sex and age, the rural population is slightly younger than the urban one (see Figures 2 and 3). This is most likely to be a reflection of the fact that working age people migrate to cities for education and employment. For both the rural and urban populations, women of pension age are more prevalent than men because women's average life expectancy is longer than men's.

The composition of rural households differs considerably depending on whether they are headed by women or men. A household survey conducted in 2020 indicates that the large majority of single adult households and single parents with young children are female-headed households (FHHs). This pattern is similar to, but more pronounced than, the pattern observed in urban areas. Male-headed households (MHHs) are those in which there is an adult couple either living with or without children (see Figure 4). When considering all FHHs in Azerbaijan, the

proportion of single women as well as single mothers is slightly higher in urban than in rural areas.

The majority of households, both rural and urban, have two children under the age of 18. However, of families with three or more children, a larger proportion are located in rural areas (and single child families are rarer; State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021i).

The total fertility rate for women aged 15 to 49 years has remained stable in Azerbaijan since 2000, and it is higher for women in rural areas than in urban ones (1.8 compared with 1.6 in 2020; State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021i, p. 49). A related issue is the greater prevalence of newborn boys that results in an unbalanced sex ratio at birth. At present in Azerbaijan, 112 boys are born for every 100 girls in urban areas and 115 boys for every 100 girls in rural areas, compared with the expected biological norm of 105–107 boys for every 100 girls (ibid.). The sex imbalance is a reflection

Figure 4. Structure of rural households, by sex of the head of household, 2020

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan: data provided by request, from the 2020 Household Budget Survey.

of son preference, low fertility rates and gender-biased sex selection. Analysis indicates that the sex imbalance is more pronounced in low-income households and “mainly observed in rural territories of the country” (UNFPA, 2020, no page number). Other variables, such as educational level, also have a bearing on the preference for sons over daughters. Notions that sons are viewed as future contributors to and supporters of the family, and therefore “assets”, while daughters are accepted as “liabilities” and “transitory members of the family” run deep and are influential in different socioeconomic groups and regions of the country (UNFPA, 2018, p. 3). In 2020, the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan approved an Action Plan on the prevention of gender-biased sex selection for 2020–2025.

2.4.2. Labour migration

The movement of people from rural areas is driving urbanization and changing the country’s demographics. According to national research, the pace of internal migration for labour is increasing, and this includes migration between regions, within regions and from rural to urban areas (Social Research Center, 2020). The average age of labour migrants is 23, indicating that the movement away from villages is mainly a trend among young jobseekers. The influx of people to urban areas has wide-ranging impacts, not only placing a strain on cities in terms of housing, infrastructure and services, but also leading to a population drain in the rural labour force. A recent survey indicated that limited human resources could pose a threat to agricultural production, as seen in the fact that despite the provision of subsidies to farmers, interest in farming as a career is not increasing (*ibid.*). The continued migration to urban areas suggests the need for greater diversity in rural livelihoods, both on- and off-farm, as well as improving the rural infrastructure that is needed for job creation.

Developing a comprehensive profile of women and men labour migrants, both those who migrate internally and those who go abroad, is made more complicated by data limitations. Among people leaving Azerbaijan to work in other countries on a permanent basis, women made up 65.7 percent of labour migrants in 2019 (a total of 1 086 women, of which 908 were from rural areas). Note that in 2020, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were clear: of a total of only 568 people who left Azerbaijan, 375 were women, and of these, 56 percent were women from rural areas (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021d). These data should not be interpreted to mean that a significantly larger number of women make up the migrant population. Rather it represents the fact that women are more likely than men to emigrate permanently. The data do not reflect seasonal or temporary labour migration, or irregular migration,

both areas where there may be a greater representation of men. For example, information from receiving countries, such as Germany, show a higher proportion of male migrants. Moreover, in households in Azerbaijan with members working abroad, men make up the majority of remittance-sending migrants (Allahveranov, Aliyeva and Sadigov, 2012).

Migrants who leave Azerbaijan to work abroad are mainly employed in the Russian Federation, followed by other post-Soviet states (Ukraine and Kazakhstan, for example), Türkiye and European Union countries, such as Germany; they are usually self-employed in wholesale/retail trade or construction. Women often work in housekeeping or child care. Most emigrants from Azerbaijan had previously worked in agriculture (more than half according to one estimate), followed by trade (Allahveranov, Aliyeva and Sadigov, 2012). Even less information has been collected about internal migrants, but limited studies suggest that around a third are single or married men who move to Baku for employment, with another large share of migrant families (married couples with children) who move to suburban areas.

Women are affected by migration in two different ways: either they are migrants or they are members of migrant households that depend on remittances. Experts note that labour migration is increasing among women, with a large number going to Türkiye and the Russian Federation. For women, as for men, unemployment is a key driver, but women are more likely to migrate after a divorce or when the family faces exceptional economic difficulties (in contrast, many migrant men are married and supporting their families through remittances). These factors place women at risk of labour or sexual exploitation through trafficking (Allahveranov, Aliyeva and Sadigov, 2012).

Focus group participants who took part in this assessment, as well as previous research, note that migration is considered an acceptable option for men, but is believed to have negative impacts on women. For women, migration is often perceived as a threat to the family structure, because it may make it difficult for women to marry or it could expose them to risks of violence or other crimes (UNDP, 2007). One exception, however, is the widespread perception that migration for the purpose of obtaining education has positive consequences for women.

A specific population of women is considered “left behind” when husbands or other male family members migrate. According to a 2007 study, at the time, approximately nine percent of adults received remittances on a regular basis; of these, 52 percent were women (around a third received support from

their husbands and 40 percent for longer than five years; Allahveranov, Aliyeva and Sadigov, 2012). Other research indicates that some spouses receive no financial support from the migrant family member or remittances are small in value or sent irregularly, putting families at risk of poverty. In one study of 56 families, only 22 received remittances from the husbands who were working abroad (IOM, 2013). Overall, remittances have been in decline since the early 2000s, but decreased sharply as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As many as 70 000 households of international migrants were assessed to have experienced the loss of remittance income during the pandemic, and it is most likely that a sizeable proportion of these are in rural areas (UNDP, 2020b). Furthermore, while women and men both reported the loss of income from remittances in April and May 2020, this particular source of income is especially significant for women; 41 percent of surveyed women reported a loss of remittance income compared with 32 percent of men. Men were more likely to have lost income during the pandemic from other sources, such as paid work and farming (UN Women, 2020).

Labour migration can lead to changes in family dynamics and loss of connections between family members that can put strains on households. For women in rural areas in particular, households depend on agricultural labour, and the physical burden on women can be very heavy when men are away due to migration. Rural women who are employed also have to cope with the absence of child care infrastructure, and migrant fathers are not able to be involved in their children's upbringing. While some experts highlight the positive impacts on women left behind, such as increasing their role in household or community decision-making, research has not always borne out this hypothesis (IOM, 2013). Some experts in women's rights maintain that often the wives of labour migrants "are left behind under the care of their husband's relatives, who control all their actions, including household expenditures and everyday duties. Very often, the wives of migrant workers are barred from continuing their education (or obtaining any professional qualification), getting a job, earning a living or living an independent life" (Allahveranov, Aliyeva and Sadigov, 2012, p. 24).

2.4.3. Internal displacement and resettlement

Decades-long conflict concerning the Karabagh economic region²⁷ resulted in the displacement of a large proportion of the population from their homes.

In 2020, an estimated 651 458 people were classified as internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Azerbaijan, primarily former residents of Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven surrounding territories. Moreover, around 250 000 Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia were granted citizenship in Azerbaijan. The IDPs and refugees were temporarily settled in 62 cities and districts, in more than 1 600 populated settlements (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2020). While no official sex-disaggregated data were found for this assessment on the current number of women and men among the IDP population, dedicated research has pinpointed some of the challenges and concerns that women IDPs express that are distinct from those of men IDPs and the non-displaced population (UNIFEM, 2005). The government recognizes IDPs as a vulnerable group under its commitments to "leave no one behind" in implementing the 2030 Agenda, but also acknowledges the need for better data that would include disaggregation not only by sex but also by refugee and IDP status (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2019).

The IDP population mainly lives in cities, such as Baku, Sumgayit and Mingechevir. At the same time, most of the populations living in the conflict-affected regions of the country are rural (for example, in the Barda, Goranboy and Tartar regions, more than 70 percent of the population lives in rural areas; State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021d). The situation changed and new challenges arose in late 2020, following 44 days of intensive military operations. The negotiation of an end to the conflict included the development of plans to resettle the displaced population and facilitate their return to villages in the Karabakh region that are in need of extensive rehabilitation and reconstruction. There are very important intersections between rural development and gender-sensitive approaches to the needs of the IDP population. This complex subject merits its own dedicated study, but for the purposes of this CGA, some key information is summarized here and included in later thematic sections where relevant.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, after an official visit to Azerbaijan in 2014, noted that there had been an effective humanitarian response to internal displacement and that over the two previous decades, the government dedicated approximately USD 5.5 billion for assistance to IDPs (Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, 2015). The government has allocated special benefits to IDPs, including temporary housing, subsidized utilities, educational support, employment support, assistance

²⁷ All references to the territories in and around the Karabakh region used in this report should be understood to be in full compliance with General Assembly resolution 62/243 of 14 March 2008.

to access medical treatment, tax exemptions and fee waivers for certain administrative procedures.

The special rapporteur noted that IDPs are a diverse group in terms of their income levels, social mobility and the degree to which they have been able to integrate into the community in which they are living, while also highlighting that conditions are especially difficult for IDPs in rural areas (Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, 2015). Smaller IDP communities in remote villages are highly dependent on seasonal agriculture as one of the few available forms of employment. One benefit that may be granted to people with IDP status is the use of a plot of land, but IDPs do not own the property allocated to them by the state. Such IDP communities fare worse than the local host communities in terms of housing and infrastructure conditions, access to health care and more limited social connections. Yet, these IDP communities are said to be generally “off the radar” of both the government (national and local authorities) and relief agencies (Gureyeva-Aliyeva and Huseynov, 2011, p. 1).

Women among rural IDP communities tend to be more isolated from economic and social life and gender roles are said to have been “re-traditionalized”. Men are seen as the primary breadwinners, while women often become more limited to unpaid domestic and care work than they were before they were displaced (World Bank, 2011). Female-headed households among the IDP population have higher poverty rates than male-headed households. Women IDPs have raised issues related not only to their unemployment but also to their inadequate access to public services and the poor condition of infrastructure (especially gas and water connections) where they have been settled (Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2019, p. 20). Women’s special needs, such as reproductive health care and protection from gender-based violence, are not being fully met, in part due to their geographical remoteness from specialized services. Additionally, the system of benefits for IDPs is itself “gendered” in that benefits conferred by the government are registered in the name of the husband. A woman does not retain her IDP status and the associated benefits if she marries a man who is not an IDP, but this is not the case for a man, who would confer the IDP status to his non-IDP wife (ibid., p. 21).

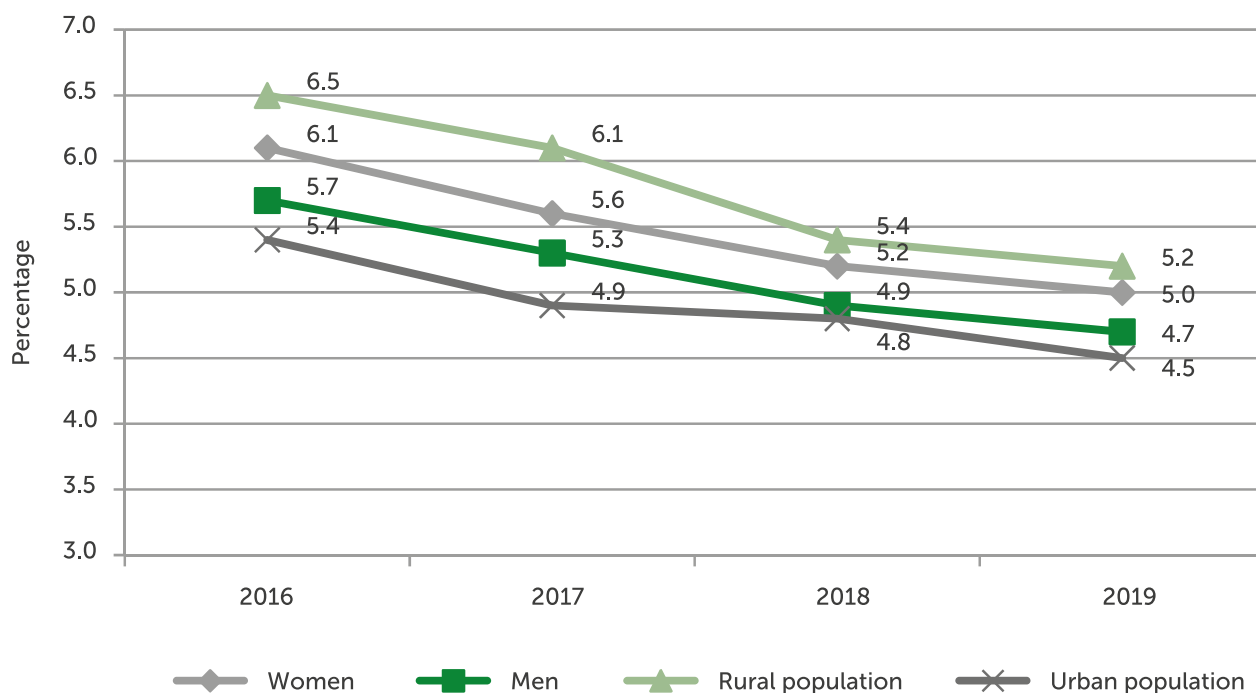
Internally displaced women have limited engagement with public life or decision-making (Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, 2015). At the time of her report, the Special Rapporteur recommended that the government expands its consultations with IDPs, with particular attention to women, to ensure that information is conveyed and

that IDPs are themselves involved in the development and implementation of resettlement plans (ibid.). The topic of gender-sensitive resettlement is highly relevant in the context of facilitating the return of the displaced population to the Karabagh economic region of Azerbaijan. The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan has announced plans for the development of smart cities and smart villages to address the challenge of returning a large population of IDPs to their homes (the majority of whom have expressed a desire to return) that are located in areas that have been extensively damaged and not benefited from infrastructure repair for decades.

The “smart village” concept uses innovation, knowledge and technology for rural development. In Azerbaijan, smart villages include several components – housing, manufacturing, social services, and green and alternative energy – with “smart agriculture” being a particularly important feature. Agriculture, livestock raising and fisheries were the main livelihoods of the displaced population. A spokesperson for the Ministry of Agriculture explained that in smart villages, agriculture will be based on “modern technologies and joint management and control” (Eurasianet, 2021). In parallel, there are plans to develop the country’s agroparks (agribusiness enterprises) in the Karabagh economic region of Azerbaijan.

Currently, smart villages are only in the pilot stage, but some returnees have raised concerns over opportunities for livelihoods, especially in the agriculture sector, related to issues such as the size of allocated land plots and the need to provide returnees with support to take up farming (RFE/RL’s Azerbaijani Service, 2021). International experience has shown that successful implementation of smart villages for rural development has been “user-centric”, meaning that citizens are directly involved in identifying needs and “designing, testing, and delivering solutions” (World Bank, 2021, p. 26). The involvement of “smart villagers”, women and men, in the planning of their own communities is thus a crucial part of ensuring that they are sustainable.

What appears to be missing from discussions of the development of smart villages and smart agriculture in the context of IDP resettlement, however, is how gender equality will be ensured while addressing longstanding gender gaps such as those that have been highlighted over the past decade. In particular, it is not clear to what extent women IDPs are directly involved in shaping smart villages and in voicing their priorities and demands. Furthermore, given that current agricultural policy incorporates gender concerns only minimally, there is no obvious mechanism to ensure that smart

Figure 5. Proportion of the population living below the national poverty line, by sex and in rural and urban areas, 2016–2019

Note: In 2020, the national poverty line was AZN 194.9 per capita per month (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households, Poverty line and poverty level).

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2020. *Sustainable Development Goals*. Baku, p. 12.

agriculture is taking account of persistent inequalities in the sector. If smart villages are developed without sensitivity to gender, women are not likely to have equal access to agricultural technologies and innovation, and without support they will not benefit from anticipated job creation, not only along agricultural value chains but in other sectors, such as tourism or renewable energy.

2.5. Socioeconomic profile

Comparing economic activities, agriculture accounts for 6.9 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Azerbaijan. Industry and mining (mainly crude oil and natural gas extraction) together make up 60 percent of the GDP (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021b). While agriculture makes a relatively small contribution to the overall economy, it nevertheless plays a very significant role in terms of employment, with 36.3 percent of the total employed population working in this sector (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021g). Agriculture has also seen economic growth in recent years.

This growth has contributed to an overall decline in the poverty rate in Azerbaijan, and targeted investment in social insurance and social assistance is credited with reducing poverty (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2019). However, within this overall positive trend, poverty rates remain higher for the rural

population as a whole, and for women, compared with men (see Figure 5). It must also be acknowledged that the poverty rate among IDPs remains high, at 12 percent, yet has also been greatly reduced over the last decade (SCFWCA, 2019).

The validity of official statistics on poverty has been called into question. A 2019 World Bank report estimated the poverty rates in Azerbaijan to range from a low of 16 percent in Baku to 33 percent in the Ganja-Gazakh economic region, with an aggregate poverty rate of approximately 25 percent (World Bank Group, 2019). Data on consumption and income patterns suggest that the poverty rate is significantly higher than that which is reported in official statistics (United Nations Country Team in Azerbaijan, 2020).

Considering monetary poverty, in 2020 the average income per capita per month was AZN 280.10 for rural households compared with AZN 301.38 for urban ones. Income levels are higher for FHHs (AZN 301.8) than for MHHs (AZN 288.9). This reflects the larger sizes of households headed by men (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households, Income by living place in 2020 and Income by sex of household head in 2020). In rural households, self-employment is the primary source of income (almost half of all income), followed by agriculture and employment in equal measure. Rural households

Table 5. Life expectancy at birth, by sex and location, 2020

Life expectancy at birth (years)					
Rural population		Urban population		Total population	
Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
77.0	70.1	76.2	70.1	76.5	70.1

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2021i. *Women and Men in Azerbaijan*. Baku, p. 44.

also rely on benefits and social transfers to a greater extent than urban households.

The gender dimensions of poverty are a separate question. When comparing the income sources of households headed by women and men, it is clear that FHHs are more dependent than MHHs on income that is not derived from employment. Whereas for FHHs, 23.7 percent of household income is derived from social transfers (pensions, benefits and social contributions), the same is true for only 19.0 percent of MHHs. Women-led households also receive a larger proportion of income from other sources, from other households or transfers from abroad in the form of remittances – 14.3 percent of their total, compared with 9.3 percent for MHHs (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households, Income by sex of household head in 2020). Given women's average longer life expectancies, a considerable number of FHHs consist of older widows living alone, who receive income support from family members in addition to their pensions. For such women living in rural areas, the risks of poverty are higher due to a lack of employment opportunities and greater dependency on other sources of income.

Experts point out that official poverty rates for particular vulnerable groups (IDPs, refugees, ethnic minorities, older people, single parents, children and people with disabilities) are not available publicly in Azerbaijan, which complicates assessments of poverty risks for these segments of society. Each of these groups is especially vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion, and vulnerabilities are compounded for households in rural areas or households in which the head has a low education level (European Commission, 2011). Women are overly represented in several of these groups, such as older persons living alone, single parents with one or more dependent children and IDPs.

2.6. Health

In line with SDG 3 on ensuring health and well-being, the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan increased public spending on health care, from AZN 429.2 million in 2010 to AZN 702.5 million in 2016 (Government

of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2017). Several of the national SDG targets have a gender dimension, such as those concerning maternal mortality, the incidence of HIV infections and tuberculosis, mortality from non-communicable diseases, suicide and road accidents. Data about health inequalities are available for women and men separately but are very limited for the rural population as a particular group.

In terms of general lifetime health, the average life expectancy at birth in Azerbaijan is 73.0 years, slightly lower than the average for the Europe and Central Asia region combined and seven years less than the average for the OECD countries (UNDP, 2020c). Women's average life expectancy is longer than men's, with a difference of six years. In Azerbaijan, there is virtually no difference in the life expectancies of rural and urban residents, for both women and men (see Table 5).

Still, for some particular health issues, indicators differ for the rural population. In 2020, maternal mortality rates were 20.0 per 100 000 live births in rural areas compared with 11.4 for urban areas (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021i). The overall dynamic in maternal mortality has been uneven, with the lowest rates in the last decade seen in urban areas in 2015 (4.9) coinciding with the highest for rural areas in that same year (23.5; *ibid.*). Under the State Program on the Improvement of Maternal and Child Health 2014–2020, efforts were made to increase early registration of pregnant women with doctors, among other interventions. The programme did not have any particular focus on rural areas, however.

The adolescent birth rate (women aged 15 to 19 years) is higher than that of 20 years ago, but is also distinctly different depending on spatial location. In 2020, the adolescent birth rate in rural areas was 57.6 live births for every 1 000 women but 25.7 live births for women in urban areas (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021i). This pattern has remained consistent for the last decade. The high level of adolescent pregnancy is attributed to the "low use of contraception due to societal norms and lack of availability" – factors that are likely to be more intense in rural areas (UNICEF, no date, no page number).

Some particular illnesses and health issues have a “male face”, meaning that men are disproportionately affected. For instance, the rate of new HIV infections for men is almost twice that for women. Likewise, the incidence of tuberculosis is considerably higher among men. Non-disease causes of death, namely from suicide and road accidents, are much more prevalent among the male population (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2020). In addition to biological factors, these discrepancies in health outcomes point to differences in behaviour and lifestyle that require gender-specific approaches to prevention.

With reform of the health care system, and the transfer to partially fee-based services, many changes have taken place in how the population accesses primary and specialist care. People from socially vulnerable groups, such as the unemployed, pensioners, disabled people, and many IDPs and refugees face difficulties accessing health care. In some cases, women are a disadvantaged group in terms of access to specialized health services.

The overall availability of medical professionals has decreased, as measured by the density of health care workers for the population. Between 2010 and 2019, the total number of health workers per 10 000 people decreased from 103.6 to 87.9, the number of doctors decreased from 36.8 to 32.0, and the number of midwives declined from 66.8 to 55.9 (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2020). This shortage of health care workers is more pronounced outside of Baku and urban centres. Rural populations have access to primary health care through rural health centres and outpatient clinics. The former are small centres with basic medical equipment, staffed by a medical assistant, midwife, and/or nurse, that provide first aid and conduct simple procedures, basic preventive medicine and prenatal and postnatal care. Rural outpatient clinics provide primary health care services, such as the management of common health conditions, prenatal and postnatal care, and preventive services such as immunizations and health promotion. They are staffed by a physician, a paediatrician and midwives/nurses (Bonilla-Chacin, Afandiyeva and Suaya, 2018). In rural areas, inpatient care is provided through a network of rural hospitals and specialized facilities, but such health care facilities are not located in every district.

The utilization of health care services differs greatly depending on the location – rural or urban – and by region. In 2015, the use of outpatient services was greater in urban areas. One explanation for non-utilization of services is the inability to pay (Bonilla-Chacin, Afandiyeva and Suaya, 2018). On average, the rural population is poorer than the urban population, and women also have more limited

access to financial resources. As of 2021, the system of compulsory health insurance was expanded to the entire population, and this should alleviate the burden of out-of-pocket expenses.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 13 modular hospitals were built to treat people who contracted the coronavirus, and special measures were taken to address the interruption in essential health services, especially for vulnerable populations. One initiative introduced mobile clinics that provide services, such as diagnosis and control of diseases and mother and child health care, to remote villages of the Shamakhi District.²⁸ The State Health Agency (TABIB) has taken over the management of the mobile clinics, and it is expected that the model will be scaled up for the whole country, thus greatly improving the rural population’s access to quality primary care (United Nations Azerbaijan, 2021).

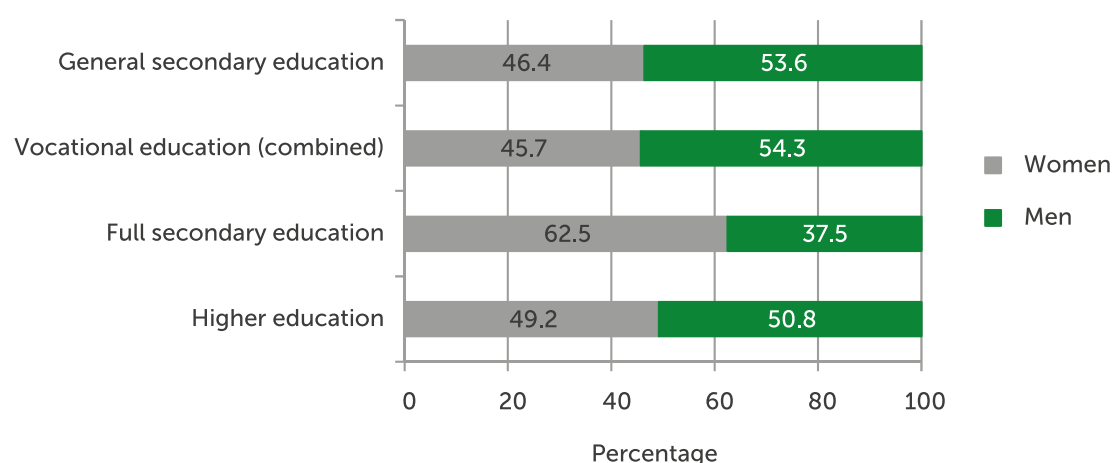
2.7. Education

The compulsory education system of Azerbaijan consists of primary school (Grades 1–4), general (lower) secondary school (Grades 5–9) and full (upper) secondary school (Grades 10–11). The technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system (vocational schools, vocational lyceums and vocational training centres) is an important part of the secondary educational system. Students may enter primary vocational education after having completed general secondary education, and these courses usually last three to four years. Alternatively, after completing this type of initial vocational education, or after finishing full secondary education, a student can enrol in specialized vocational education (usually a two-year course). After completing full secondary education, or vocational education, students may enter a degree course in a higher educational institution. The education system in Azerbaijan includes both state and private educational institutions. Early childhood and preschool education are discussed in a separate section of this report.

Patterns of educational enrolment and attendance

In terms of gender parity in access to education, important improvements have taken place in Azerbaijan in terms of the number of girls completing compulsory education and continuing to higher education. In the 2020/2021 academic year, male and female enrolment levels were close to equal in compulsory and higher education (see Figure 6). Although there are limited data available about enrolment rates for girls from rural

²⁸ The PROACT-Care project is implemented by the World Health Organization Country Office, Azerbaijan, which partners with the national and local government as well as UN and international development organizations.

Figure 6. Enrolment in the 2020/2021 academic year, by type of educational institution and sex

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2021i. *Women and Men in Azerbaijan*. Baku, p. 108.

areas particularly, there appear to be no significant differences in the proportion of girls in compulsory education in rural and urban locations. The general patterns of female and male enrolment, in specialized secondary and higher education, differ only marginally between state and non-state institutions.

However, there is a distinct asymmetry in the types of education that young women and men pursue after compulsory education, with girls less likely to take up technical study. Figure 6 indicates that girls represent just under half of all TVET students, but these data appear to refer to initial vocational education and specialized vocational education combined. When primary vocational education is considered on its own, young women represent only 25.4 percent of enrolled students (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021i). Primary vocational training prepares students for skilled manual labour and is “predominantly a ‘male’ training context”; the proportion of women has remained close to 30 percent for a number of years (Baskakova, 2012, p. 17). Girls are more likely to remain in general education after Grade 9 and to continue in full secondary education or to enrol in specialized vocational education. Thus, secondary education is the most common “female” educational route in Azerbaijan.

School attendance is a separate question from enrolment. National data cover the number of out-of-school children, as opposed to the proportion of those attending and not attending classes. In 2019, out of a total of 57 966 children, adolescents and young people who were classified as not attending primary or secondary school, 60.2 percent were boys (UNESCO Institute for Statistics database²⁹). Generally,

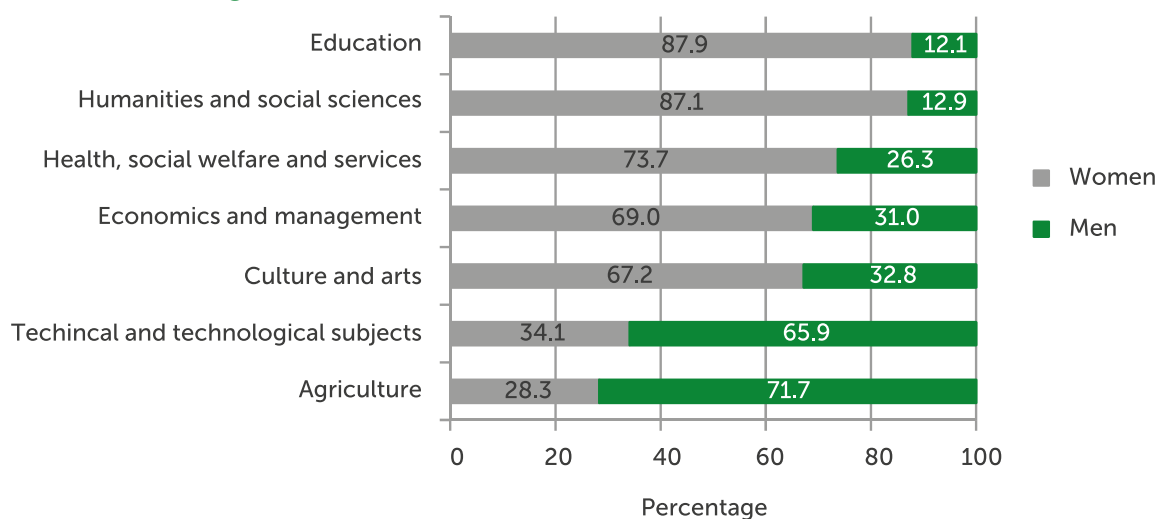
primary-school-age children, especially boys, are the largest group to be out of school. However, among out-of-school adolescents and young people, girls represent 80.3 percent of students not in lower secondary and 72.5 percent of students not in upper secondary schools (ibid.). The overrepresentation of girls among those who drop out of school at the age of adolescence is linked to several factors: the need for older girls to help with household chores; financial constraints and priorities placed on boys’ education; concerns over girls’ safety when travelling to or while in school; or the practice of early marriage. These factors are more characteristic for rural families, compounded by issues such as the lack of child care services and the distances that children must travel to school.

Regarding early marriage in Azerbaijan, in one study, 86 percent of respondents confirmed that girls do not continue their education after marriage (UNFPA, 2014). In addition to equalizing the marriage age for women and men at 18 (through amendments to the Family Code), the SCFWCA and NGOs have launched public awareness and prevention programmes about the negative consequences of early marriage. Projects such as “Say NO to Early Marriages” from 2015 to 2016 covered both cities and remote rural areas (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2019).

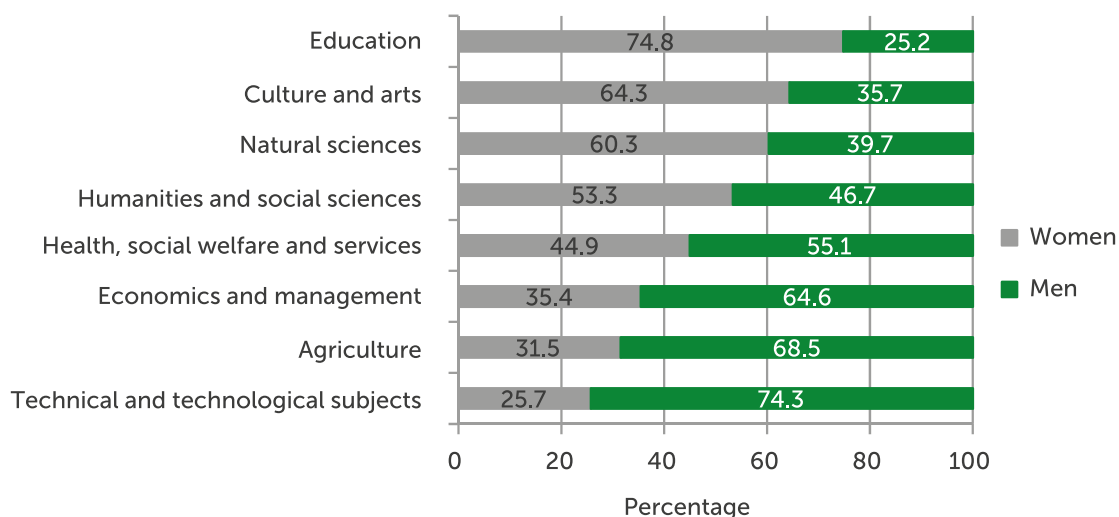
Gender asymmetries in educational choices

Gender differences are apparent in the areas of study that young women and young men select after compulsory education. There are clear gendered patterns of streaming of women and men towards particular subjects. Young women are encouraged to study a very narrow range of subjects and trades that are expected to lead to “female” professions, such

²⁹ See <http://data.uis.unesco.org/#>.

Figure 7. Students in state specialized secondary education in the 2020/2021 academic year, by sex and selected field of training

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2021i. *Women and Men in Azerbaijan*. Baku, p. 110.

Figure 8. Students in state higher education in the 2020/2021 academic year, by sex and selected field of training

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2021i. *Women and Men in Azerbaijan*. Baku, p. 112.

as teaching, health care and social services. These trades are associated with public sector work, which is generally low paying compared with other sectors of the economy, but which also provides women the flexibility to reconcile work with family duties. On the one hand, these jobs have a "relatively low remuneration level (which puts off many men) and, on the other, [they provide] a relatively high level of social protection for an employee (which is appreciated very much by women)" (Baskakova, 2012, p. 22).

The pervasiveness of such streaming in educational choices is apparent from the fact that in the state system of specialized secondary education, young women represent almost 90 percent of students enrolled in the humanities and education, yet only

around a third of students in technical fields. The patterns are very similar for the state system of higher education (see Figures 7 and 8). Put another way, during the 2020/2021 academic year, of all women studying in specialized secondary education, a combined 55 percent were either studying education or a health-related field. In higher education, 39 percent of all female students were studying education – the most popular subject – compared with less than two percent who were studying agriculture.

A small proportion of students overall, either at the secondary or higher educational levels, study agriculture when compared with other subjects. However, in this particular field, young men outnumber young women by more than three to one.

The range of professional and training specialities available to young men is much more diverse and includes “new and cutting-edge professions and specialities for which there is demand in the modern labour market (for example, informatics, electronics, radio engineering, telecommunications, energy, machine building, construction, geology, etc.)” (Baskakova, 2012, p. 22). Gender segregation in subjects of study is impactful as it “makes it much more difficult for young women to get new, highly paid jobs”, especially in the private sector (ibid.). Of particular relevance to this CGA, the gender-based discrimination that results in very few women pursuing specialities in agriculture has a detrimental effect on the development of the sector as a whole, because women’s academic and professional contributions are missing.

A long-range view of educational choices indicates that socioeconomic changes in the country have been followed by increasing interest among female students to pursue technical and business-related fields of study. Thus, from the early 2000s until 2016, the number of young women studying economics and management, as well as engineering and technology, increased more than eight and six times, respectively (UNDP, 2018b). This is a positive development as it may mean that there is a growing number of young women with the skills needed to enter technological fields. However, it is not clear whether women living in rural areas have the same opportunities to enter specialized education in these fields as their counterparts in urban areas.

Role of gender stereotypes in educational choices

Gender stereotypes influence the educational opportunities and choices for girls and boys, and women and men. In general, education is highly valued and viewed as equally important for girls and boys, with most people considering higher education to be the sufficient educational level for either sex. However, in situations in which it is not possible for families to provide education to all children, due to limited household finances for example, people more often express a preference for boys to be educated, as verified by survey respondents (UNDP, 2007). This preference is linked to the notion that boys will go on to be breadwinners, supporting their parents in older age, and that education will offer them greater opportunities. Such attitudes differ very little between rural and urban areas. However, women respondents are slightly more likely to favour investing in girls’ education. In focus groups, participants mentioned the following reasons that families invest in girls’ education:

Box 3. Promotion of science, technology, engineering and maths education in Azerbaijan

The Ministry of Education and international development organizations (such as UNDP and USAID) have been promoting education in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) for young people. Several programmes specifically target girls, as well as children in rural areas, to expose them to STEM education and to introduce them to potential mentors in the field.

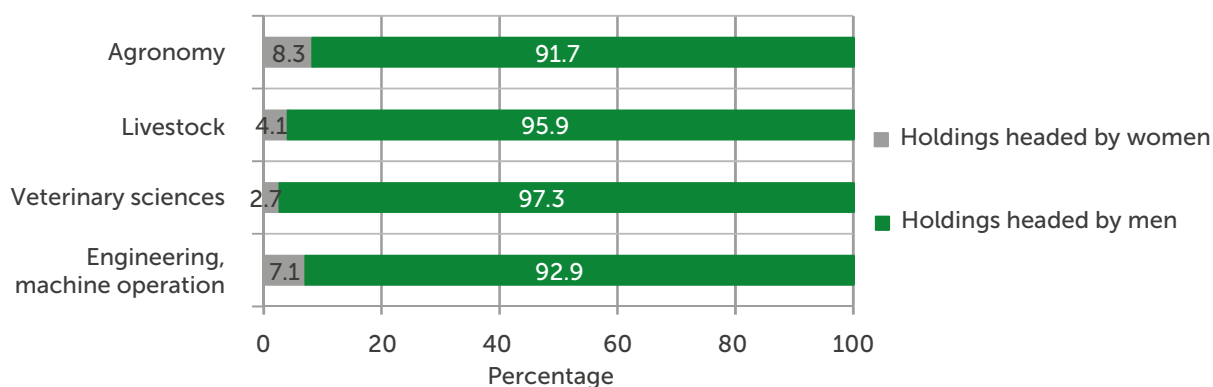
In Azerbaijan, women comprise 40 percent of graduates in STEM fields, a figure that is higher than world averages. However, despite their high performance in university entrance exams in all subjects, their acceptance rate to STEM subjects in universities is considerably lower than it is for boys. Women graduates also encounter a “glass ceiling” in terms of private sector STEM-related jobs; women are paid less and do not advance as far in their careers as men (UNDP, 2020a).

Programmes that dispel stereotypes around STEM education and careers for girls are a very important tool for bringing gender balance to the field. It may also be possible that some of the lessons learned from the promotion of STEM subjects could be applied to increasing interest among girls and women to pursue studies in other non-traditional fields, most specifically those related to agriculture.

the importance of a diploma so that girls will have a good marriage (as part of a dowry); to provide girls with skills so that they can avoid professions that require hard physical labour; and to ensure that girls will be economically independent (ibid.).

Where there are differences between the attitudes of rural and urban residents towards the educational opportunities of girls and boys, the preferences are also related to the fact that there are few educational institutions locally. For most rural inhabitants, obtaining specialized or higher education requires moving to a city and living apart from the family. Thus, parents in rural areas express more reluctance about higher education for girls due to concerns over their safety when living independently, but this is not based on the idea that education is less important for girls. In fact, “the prestige of higher education and the corresponding social and material benefits were more important for rural inhabitants than the family’s

Figure 9. Proportion of employees on smallholdings with higher education in selected specialities, by sex of the head of the holding, 2015



Note: The term “employees” refers to both family members and outside employees.

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2016. *Agriculture census 2015*. Baku, p. 17.

fear of losing direct control over an unmarried daughter” (UNDP, 2007, p. 39).

Gender stereotypes do, however, play a role in the educational subjects accessible to girls and boys. In one survey, a third of respondents did not see any prospects for girls in technical fields that are traditionally viewed as “male” and did not consider that there would be jobs for women. If those who only partly agreed with this idea are included, the figure is more than half of respondents at 57.7 percent (UNDP, 2007, p. 40). This particular survey was conducted in 2007, and attitudes may have changed as greater numbers of women enter non-traditional professions in Azerbaijan, as suggested by the increase in women studying engineering and technology, mentioned above. Still, parents can play a decisive role in a girl’s choice of vocational or higher education. Parents may strongly encourage girls to choose an area of study based on considerations about “a ‘suitable’ job which, first, is ‘appropriate for women’ ... and, second, allows women to perform a full workload of family responsibilities” (European Training Foundation, 2020, p. 41).

Educational backgrounds of farmers

The 2015 agriculture census included questions about smallholders and whether family members or outside employees had specialized education in several relevant subjects. As a general rule, when considering the very large number of family member workers and outside employees who work on smallholdings (numbering over 3.4 million persons in total), only a very small fraction have higher education as agronomists or in related subjects such as veterinary sciences (less than 3 000 persons in any of the subjects that were assessed in the last census). When considering holdings headed by women and

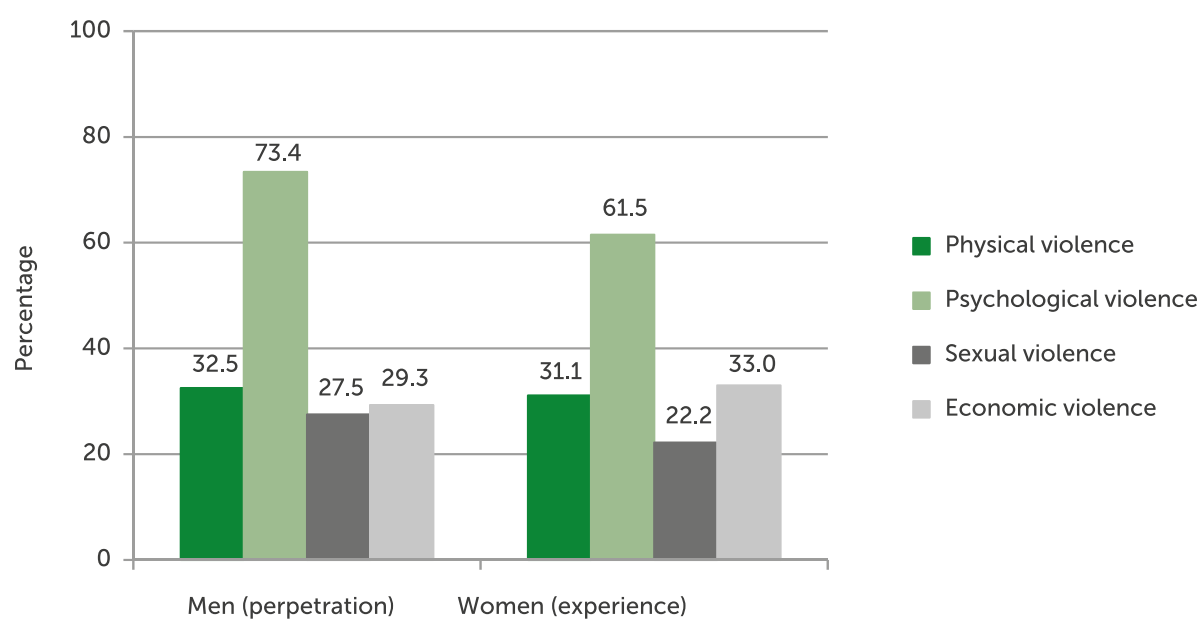
by men separately, however, the disparities in the engagement of specialized workers or employees is very stark. Of the relatively few smallholders that have specialists working for them, virtually all are holdings headed by men (see Figure 9).

This pattern may reflect the fact that women who head smallholdings are less likely to engage in commercial farming (as discussed in a separate section of this report) and thus may have less need for highly trained employees. At the same time, lack of access to specialists among farm workers is also a compounding factor that means that farms managed by women are less likely to be commercially viable. The lack of employees with specialized education on farms headed by women is not an indication of the educational level of women farmers themselves. Yet, given the very small numbers of women that enter agricultural fields of study, it can be assumed that few of the women who engage in agricultural production in Azerbaijan would be considered professional farmers by virtue of having formal education in the subject. Attracting women, especially those who live in rural areas, into these fields of study is an important step in increasing women’s capacity to move from subsistence farming to managing commercial farms.

2.8. Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence is at once a human rights violation and a threat to gender equality. It compromises the ability of women and girls, the main victims of gender-based violence (GBV), to be productive workers, earners and caregivers, thus perpetuating poverty and jeopardizing agricultural productivity and food security.

Figure 10. Proportion of men ever perpetrating and women ever experiencing intimate partner violence over their lifetimes



Source: UNFPA and SCFWCA. 2018. *Gender equality and gender relations in Azerbaijan: current trends and opportunities. Findings from the Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)*. Baku, p. 49.

The legal and policy base to address one of the most prevalent forms of GBV – domestic violence – consists of national law, ministerial orders and a national action plan. The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence (2010)³⁰ requires the state to carry out awareness-raising to foster behavioural change and to create protective and rehabilitative services for victims. Orders of the Cabinet of Ministers cover: the operation of assistance centres for survivors of domestic violence; establishing a referral system; creating a unified database of domestic violence crimes; and conducting preventive work with perpetrators of domestic violence (UNFPA, 2015). The National Action Plan on Eliminating and Combating Domestic Violence in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2020–2023 frames domestic violence as an issue of gender equality and addresses the prevention of domestic violence, early identification of cases, and protection of victims through social assistance and legal measures.

Data about the scale of gender-based violence, or of domestic violence specifically, are limited. The only national prevalence survey (a joint project between the State Statistical Committee and UNFPA in 2008) indicated that 24 percent of women aged 15 to 59 have experienced either physical, sexual or emotional violence in their lifetimes, committed by their partner or another person (Special Rapporteur on violence

against women, its causes and consequences, 2014). Psychological violence is the most common form of domestic violence (for example, 81 percent of respondents mentioned controlling behaviour). Forced intercourse (marital rape) was mentioned as the most common act of sexual violence. The survey also revealed that IDP and refugee women are at greater risk of intimate partner violence (reported rates were seven percent higher) compared with respondents who had not been displaced (ibid.).

A smaller-scale but more recent study of gender relations in Azerbaijan revealed a similar prevalence in the various forms of domestic violence (UNFPA and SCFWCA, 2018). Around a third of men have used physical violence against an intimate partner during their lifetimes; and almost three-quarters have used psychological violence specifically (see Figure 10).

Administrative data on criminal cases registered with state-managed centres for the support of victims (accredited by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population), law enforcement, prosecutors' offices, judicial bodies and local authorities suggest that reported cases are considerably lower than the prevalence rate. In 2020, 1 260 crimes of domestic violence were registered in the database, and out of the total number of victims, 75.9 percent were women or girls (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021c). The main perpetrators of domestic violence are current spouses (68.4 percent), followed by former spouses (12.1 percent) and non-married

³⁰ No. 1058-IIIQ of 22 June 2010.

partners (11.9 percent; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2019).

Domestic violence is a latent crime, and non-reporting is a common phenomenon. Nationwide, around 61 percent of women who had experienced abuse from their partners did not report the violence to anyone; and less than one percent ever sought help from a public institution, including the police or courts (UNFPA and SCWFCA, 2020). Because domestic violence is considered a taboo topic, many people believe it is best dealt with inside the family. For example, 47.5 percent of men and 33.6 percent of women survey participants stated that only relatives should be contacted for help regarding physical violence against women; and 34.2 percent of women, and almost half of men, believed no one should be contacted in such a situation (UNDP, 2007). The belief that a woman should tolerate violence in order to keep the family together is also quite widespread – 41 percent of men and 34.7 percent of women held this opinion (UNFPA and SCFWCA, 2018).

Data and research do not point conclusively to differences in the prevalence of domestic violence between urban and rural areas. Administrative data are disaggregated by region, but it could not be determined whether records are also disaggregated by settlement type. Among the factors that are associated with men perpetrating violence against an intimate partner (including childhood/previous experience of domestic violence; patriarchal attitudes towards gender roles and relations; economic stress; and lower levels of education; UNFPA and SCFWCA, 2018), only one – economic stressors – is more closely associated with the rural population, where rates of poverty and joblessness are higher.

The critical difference between rural and urban settlements concerns access to prevention resources and protection services. Since December 2020, a national hotline service on gender-based violence has provided information on available support services. The hotline, launched by the SCFWCA, UNFPA and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, operates from 09:00 to 18:00 and is accessible in Baku and all regions of the country (SCFWCA, no date). Analysis of the 359 callers who contacted the hotline between December 2020 and September 2021, shows that around two-thirds were from Baku (*ibid.*).

There are two types of state-funded support centres in Azerbaijan: social service centres that are overseen by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population, and Family and Children Support Centres

operating under the auspices of the SCWFCA. The first type provides support to various social groups considered vulnerable, but notably, adult victims of domestic violence do not fall within their mandate (UNFPA and SCWFCA, 2020). Child victims are eligible, however, and it appears that if children are experiencing domestic violence in the family, parents may receive “social rehabilitation, legal and psychological services” (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2019, para. 89). The centres operating under the SCWFCA (11 in total), while also family-oriented, provide a basic service package to women and girl victims of violence that includes psychological support, risk assessment, safety planning, information on obtaining protection orders and referrals (SCFWCA, 2019). There are no publicly funded temporary shelters for victims of domestic violence.

Specialized support services for victims of domestic violence are provided by NGOs, many of which receive a combination of donor and state funding. Eight NGOs have been accredited by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population to provide such services, and they are the only centres permitted to provide victims with shelter and temporary housing (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2022). Of these NGO centres, six are located in Baku, one in the city of Ganja and one in Sumgayit city. No such accredited NGOs are located in rural areas. When compared against Council of Europe standards for services for victims of gender-based violence,³¹ and using the current population (over 10 million people in Azerbaijan), it is recommended that there be approximately 100 non-residential centres, 1 000 spaces in women’s shelters and 50 specialized sexual violence centres available across the country. Furthermore, experts acknowledge that few of the NGO centres are fully operational due to scarce financial resources and inconsistent funding from donor organizations (UNFPA and SCWFCA, 2020). For rural women, isolation from health care and social services, NGO centres that assist survivors of violence, and legal services mean that they have few resources to help them to escape violent relationships.

A national referral mechanism that would facilitate early intervention in and response to gender-based

³¹ In brief, the standards require: one centre providing non-residential services to survivors of gender-based violence per 50 000 women and one family space in a women’s shelter per 10 000 inhabitants; and one specialized centre providing support to survivors of sexual violence for every 200 000 inhabitants (see Council of Europe. 2018. *Combating violence against women: minimum standards for support services*; Council of Europe. 2011. *Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*).

violence has not yet been established, although the SCWFCA is currently implementing a European Union-funded project to build the capacity of state bodies and local-level referral mechanisms to increase the safety of and support for victims. Within the project, launched in 2020, a number of training activities (including for local municipalities) and exchanges of international good practices have been carried out.

Societal attitudes towards gender-based violence compound the problem of missing victims' services. While most people in Azerbaijan disapprove of domestic violence and consider it a criminal act, both men and women agree that domestic violence may be justified in some cases, such as infidelity, refusal of sexual relations in marriage or for neglecting the care of children (UNFPA and SCFWCA, 2018, p. 46). Such attitudes appear to be stronger in rural settlements. While one in three rural people feel that there are times when "women deserve to be beaten", the figure for urban areas is closer to one in every six people (Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2015a). Such attitudes create very serious obstacles for women living in rural areas to protect their right to be free from violence.

An increase in incidents of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic was observed in many countries when lockdown measures were implemented and victims found themselves at home with abusers at

a time when many social services were suspended. Research conducted during the pandemic suggests that factors that exacerbated risks for domestic violence, similar to those seen in other countries, existed in Azerbaijan as well. Around a quarter of respondents to a survey, for example, stated that the quarantine had negatively affected family relationships (UNFPA and UN Women, 2020). Family and Children Support Centres continued to provide psychological assistance to victims during the quarantine period (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020). The government organized a number of online training events on topics pertaining to preventing GBV and protecting victims during the pandemic, implemented by the SCFWCA.

Civil society organizations have criticized the government, however, for not implementing a substantive programme for domestic violence victims during lockdown and for "downplaying the actual scope of the issue" (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, 2021, p. 2). Concern has also been expressed that the financial burden of the pandemic will reduce budgets for much needed services for victims of gender-based violence. In fact, the economic costs of violence against women are themselves high – an estimated aggregate cost that amounts to USD 764 million or 1.8 percent of Azerbaijan's GDP in a 2017 estimation (UNFPA and SCWFCA, 2020).

3. Gender issues in rural households and family farming

3.1. Characteristics of the labour market

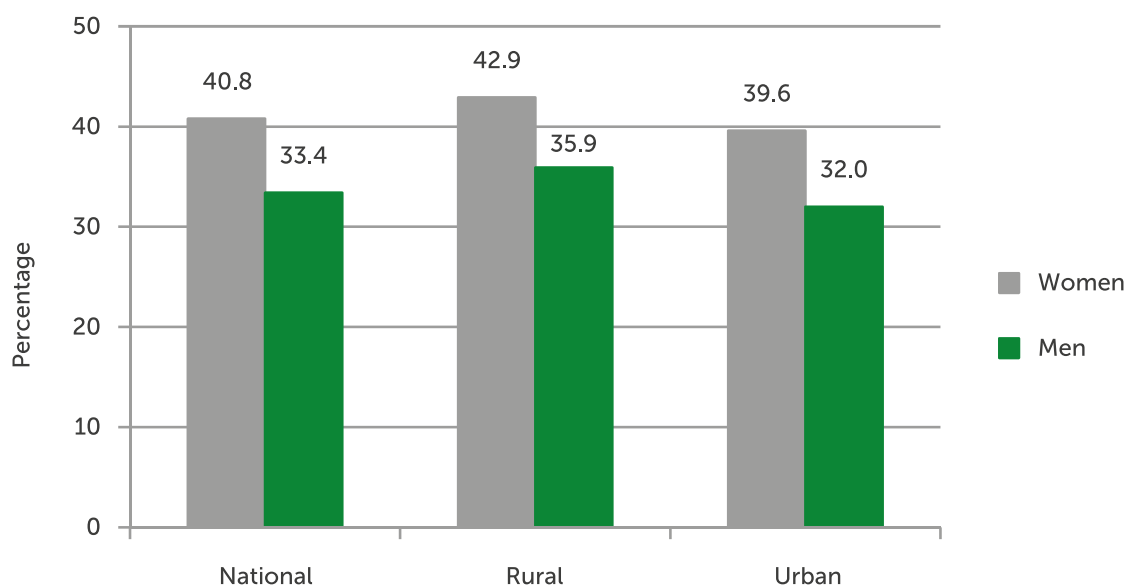
The labour force of Azerbaijan (the population aged 15 to 60.5 years for women and 15 to 63.5 years for men) is over five million people (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021g). According to the 2019 labour force survey, the female labour force participation rate was 63.3 percent, and the male labour force participation rate was 69.7 percent (ILO, 2022).

The economic inactivity rate – the number of people of working age who are not in the labour force because they are neither employed nor looking for work – is higher for women and highest for women in rural areas (see Figure 11). While a gender gap in the labour force participation rates is typical because it reflects the fact that women are more likely to take time out of the

workforce when raising children, the gender and spatial disparities combined indicate a scarcity of employment opportunities for women living in rural areas.

The burden of domestic and care work on women is a decisive factor in limiting their opportunities to take on formal employment. Gender stereotypes that depict men as breadwinners and women’s employment as secondary play a role here. In Azerbaijan, women represent the majority of all people who do not work due to family responsibilities, as depicted in Table 6. Although the data on reasons for economic inactivity are not disaggregated for rural locations, because rural communities lack the social infrastructure that facilitates women’s employment, such as child care, it is evident that unpaid care responsibilities are a critical constraint to rural women’s participation in the labour force.

Figure 11. Economic inactivity rates, by sex and location, 2020



Note: The data are for youth and adults, 15 years and older.

Source: ILOSTAT. 2021. ILO modelled estimates, Inactivity rate by sex, age, rural/urban areas, November 2021.

Table 6. Distribution of the economically inactive population, by category and sex, 2020

Reasons for economic inactivity	Women (%)	Men (%)
Studying in educational institutions	50.4	49.6
Pensioners, based on age or years of service	63.3	36.7
Pensioners, based on disability	39.5	60.5
Persons receiving income from property	29.8	70.2
Persons keeping house, caring for children and/or for other family members	95.3	4.7

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2021g. *Labour Market*. Baku, p. 148.

The labour market of Azerbaijan exhibits both horizontal (occupational) and vertical segregation, both of which reflect gender discrimination and notions that particular jobs are more appropriate for women or for men.

Women are concentrated in public sector work (such as education, health care and social services), where they represent around 75 percent of all employees in these fields (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of

Azerbaijan, 2021g). Men, on the other hand, represent between 80 percent and 90 percent of employees in public administration and defence, energy supply and distribution, mining, construction, transportation and storage (ibid.). These particular fields are associated with higher pay and greater mobility. Jobs in education and health care, while offering women stability and flexibility, are among the lowest paid and are based

Box 4. Legal barriers to women's employment

Occupational segregation is a direct reflection of the fact that under the Labour Code of Azerbaijan, in conjunction with a Cabinet of Ministers resolution on a list of harmful and dangerous professions, 678 professions, across 37 branches of the economy, are reserved for men.

The treatment of women as a special group of workers exceeds maternity protection but is a "long tradition" among post-Soviet states that "reflects widespread assumptions about women as inherently 'weaker' and in need of protection, as well as the assumption that only women assume caring responsibilities for children, and that virtually all women do so" (ILO, 2014, p. 21). These restrictions, while enacted to protect women's health, have not necessarily been based on evidence or assessments of current occupational risks.

Among the many jobs that are unavailable to women, several restrictions concern agricultural production, the processing of agricultural products, fisheries or forestry (such as tractor operating using chemical sprayers; some forms of meat processing; some forms of fishing; tree cutting). Others may have implications for the types of jobs that are available in rural areas.

The restrictions have adverse effects on women's economic choices and professional development, effectively limiting their participation in higher-paid professions and maintaining labour market segregation (ADC Memorial Brussels, 2020). The job restrictions reinforce "soft" barriers to women accessing the labour market by perpetuating gender stereotypes about the types of work considered suitable and unsuitable for women and what jobs are "male only occupations".

The CEDAW Committee has repeatedly called on countries to repeal discriminatory lists of banned professions, to ensure that women have equal access to professions and to create working conditions that are safe for women and men. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population is involved in efforts to remove such restrictions, in line with an approach that would assess current occupational hazards to health within industries and implement measures to protect female and male workers alike (World Bank, 2020).

on qualifications that are not easily transferrable to other fields. It is noteworthy that the share of women in low-paid, low-qualified work in sectors deemed “less competitive” (such as education, health care and agriculture) has increased over the past decade (Valiyev, 2020, p. 23). At the same time, the number of women working in science and technology has also changed in a positive direction, due to an increase in women pursuing non-traditional education as described in Section 2.7. of this assessment (UNDP, 2018b). This trend suggests that efforts to increase opportunities for professional education in non-traditional areas, such as STEM, can be beneficial in terms of women’s employment – a model that could be used to encourage more women to enter agriculture-related fields.

Occupational segregation contributes to a large gender-based pay gap. On average, men earn 37 percent more than women when their median monthly salaries are compared. In 2020, women’s average monthly nominal wage was AZN 525.60 compared with AZN 830.20 for men (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021i). Among formally employed workers in agriculture, forestry and fishing, men earn around 16 percent more than women. The smaller wage gap for this sector reflects both the fact that wages are comparatively low (AZN 379.80 per month for women and AZN 450.10 per month for men; *ibid.*) and that there is a relatively balanced proportion of women among skilled workers in this field (44.9 percent of skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers are women; ILOSTAT, using Labour Force Survey data for 2019). It should be kept in mind, however, that this category of paid and skilled employees represents only a small segment of the large population that undertakes agricultural work, including as self-employed, informal or unpaid workers.

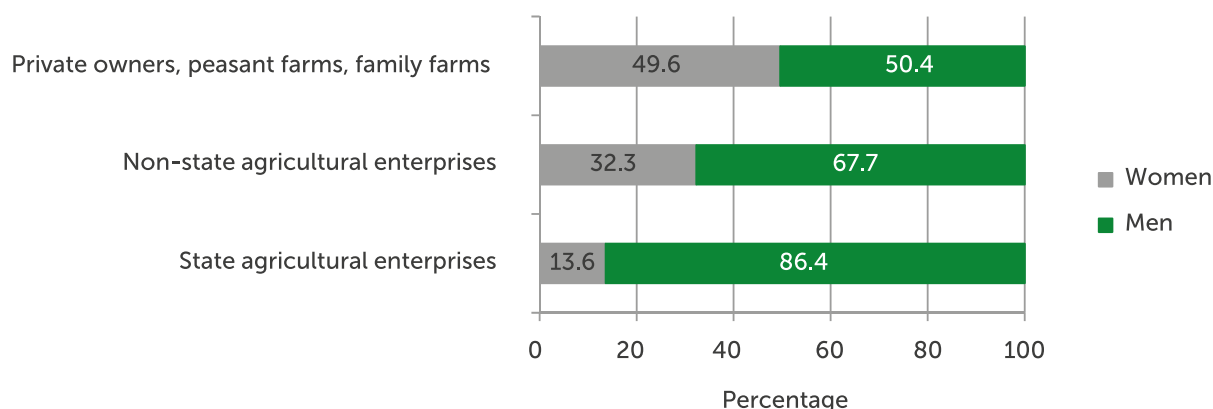
Agricultural work

More than half of the rural population, over the age of 15, is engaged in agriculture in some form. This pattern contributes to a “spatial divide in employment status”. In Baku and other cities, 60 percent of working people are paid employees (their income is from wages), while in rural areas, 57 percent earn income from self-employment or agriculture (World Bank Group, 2019, p. 18). Rural areas also have a greater percentage of non-paid workers compared with cities other than Baku.

Labour force survey data covers those who are in wage employment or are self-employed. In 2019, of the employed population in activities concerning agriculture, forestry and fisheries – a total of around 1.7 million people – 782 000 were men and 995 700 were women, or 44 and 56 percent, respectively (data from ILOSTAT). Comparing the share of wage employees in agriculture indicates that, in fact, most people earning income from agriculture are not wage employees. A total of only around 61 200 people are employees in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector, of which 14 604 are women, or approximately 24 percent of the total (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021g).

The agriculture census provides further information about working patterns and the engagement of women in particular. In 2015, almost 3.5 million people worked in agriculture (on all categories of farms combined, including family farms and farming households), divided almost equally between women and men (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2016). The representation of women, however, is the greatest as workers on peasant farms or family farms, as illustrated in Figure 12. A small number of people overall work for private enterprises, but most of them are men. Women mainly contribute to the agriculture

Figure 12. Proportion of women and men working in agriculture, by type of enterprise/farm, 2015



Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2016. *Agriculture census 2015*. Baku.

Table 7. Number of people in agricultural work, by sex, 2015

	Women	Men
Total employees working in agriculture	1 704 175	1 794 273
Of these:		
Children under age 14	55 998	66 098
People of working age	1 519 282	1 637 641
People over working age	128 895	90 534
Total outside hired employees	71 997	642 536
Of these:		
Permanent employees	8 000	22 756
Seasonal employees	63 997	619 780

Notes: The data refer to all categories of farms. "Working age" refers to age 15–59 for women and 15–62 for men. Additionally, "over working age" is 60 years and older for women and 63 years and older for men.

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2016. *Agriculture census 2015*. Baku.

sector in smallholder farming, very often on a farming household. Here, their engagement as workers is in equal proportion to that of men.

While women and men are equally represented among agricultural employees of working age, in older age, women make up close to 60 percent of agricultural workers. The predominance of older women reflects their earlier retirement age (by three years) and longer average life expectancies than men (see Table 7).

Most externally hired agricultural workers are men (89.9 percent of all hired labour in 2015). The dominance of men as hired workers indicates that agricultural work is atypical for women, due to the type of jobs for hire, logistical difficulties that women face in combining domestic responsibilities with wage employment, and gender stereotypes about types of labour that are considered inappropriate for women. The low representation of women as permanent and seasonal employees has historical roots, as described above in reference to legal restrictions on the jobs available to women.

While the overall share of women working in agriculture is high, it is important to remember that much of this "work" could be considered self-employment, informal or unpaid work.

Informal employment

The informal economy in Azerbaijan has been estimated to be as high as 66.1 percent of the GDP to as low as 9.1 percent (Valiyev, 2020). While informal employment is not limited to agriculture, national law

recognizes it as a form of work that is common for non-registered family farms. More than 35 percent of Azerbaijan's labour force works in the agriculture sector, but due to the informal nature of their work "most of these workers are not registered and do not pay income tax" (ibid., p. 1). Thus, agriculture is one of the largest informal employers in Azerbaijan.

Informal employment, by virtue of the fact that it is unregulated, does not grant rights to pension insurance, unemployment protection, paid sick leave or leave for pregnancy and maternity. It is notable that the Labour Code establishes additional maternity leave for mothers who work in agricultural production, but this provision applies only to women with labour contracts. Not only are the large number of people who work in agriculture as unregistered and self-employed workers at risk of poverty, with only a limited social safety net when they retire, but these workers do not contribute to the country's pension system (Valiyev, 2020).

Box 5. Definition: Informal employment

The Law on Employment of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2018) defines informal employment as activities that are done without signing a contract (either under the Labour Code or Civil Code). Activities can include entrepreneurial activities or using land for agriculture, without official registration in accordance with the Tax Code, as well as receiving income (profit) from family farms without having registered with local authorities.

No official data were found for this gender assessment about the scale of informal employment in the agriculture sector, or about how men and women are represented among rural informal workers. According to the State Program on Improvement of Official Statistics in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2018–2025, a special statistical survey on informal employment is planned that would allow for the collection of data on the “informally employed population by sex structure, age groups, level of education, etc.” (State Program on Improvement of Official Statistics in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2018–2025, Article 3.1.12.).³² It could not be verified if such a survey has been conducted. ILO modelled estimates on informal *non-agricultural* employment indicate that 62.0 percent of women, as a proportion of all female employment, are in vulnerable employment; for men the figure is 48.5 percent (Valiyev, 2020, p. 41). The data suggest that even though women may not make up the majority of informal workers in number, they are disproportionately more likely to be in informal work, as opposed to having a formal contract.

According to the Labour Code, “employment” on a family/household farm is either regulated by an employment contract (generally written but it can be verbal), and a worker’s employment status may be documented by the farmer/employer or can be entered into a “family record book” if it is a family farm (and the person has worked more than five days). Documentation of employment is issued by the municipal authorities (Labour Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Articles 87, 258). While this is the legal procedure, in reality, family workers and temporarily hired employees are rarely registered in this manner and so do not accrue formal work histories.

While measures have been taken to combat informal employment, through the approval of an action plan, increased labour market monitoring, tax penalties and supporting the transition from informal to formal employment, it could not be determined whether such initiatives target workers in the agriculture sector or have special activities aimed at formalizing work done by women. While broader programmes that support women entrepreneurs as a form of self-employment constitute one way to reduce women’s engagement in informal work, there is still a need for measures that address the particular issue of formalizing the work that both women and men perform in the agriculture sector as a distinct issue.

Unpaid work

Informal work encompasses unpaid work performed by family members, which in rural areas includes work on family farms or other enterprises. One of the most significant gender differences in terms of work patterns is the fact that women are far more likely to be unpaid workers who are classified as contributing family workers, meaning that they do not have a formal working agreement or fixed wages.

Women represent 66.6 percent of contributing family workers, compared with 44.4 percent of own-account workers (self-employed), but only 32.3 percent of employers (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Statistical database [online]: Labour Market, Distribution of employed population by status in 2020).

On privately owned farms, peasant farms and family farms, women as family members performed close to half of the worked person days when the 2015 agriculture census was conducted. This work, compared with that performed by outside hired help, is likely to have been unpaid. Considering the fact that women represent a very small percentage of farm holders (owners or managers) yet provide close to half of family-based farming labour, the enormity of their contribution to agriculture in Azerbaijan becomes apparent.

Notably, the work that women undertake as a contributing family worker is not the same as unpaid domestic and care work (for example, raising and

Box 6. Definition: Contributing family worker

The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan defines persons working in a family enterprise (i.e. assisting or contributing family members) as persons who live with the owner of the enterprise and permanently work in the enterprise, but who do not have an employment contract and do not receive a fixed wage for the work performed. The category of “persons who work in a family enterprise” refers only to people who are permanently employed in the family enterprise.

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Statistik Lüğət [Statistical Dictionary]. <https://www.azstat.org/luget/#>

³² Approved by Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, No. 3672 of 14 February 2018.

educating children, cleaning, cooking and so forth). The latter are considered to be women's responsibilities and their "natural" role, and are tasks that are done regardless of whether there is also agricultural work. Contributing family work implies that the labour is undertaken for a market-oriented purpose for an establishment that is owned by a family member (farms as well as family enterprises). The high share of women as contributing family workers illustrates the key, but supporting, role that women play. When working in this way, however, women receive little remuneration, leaving them dependent economically on male relatives.

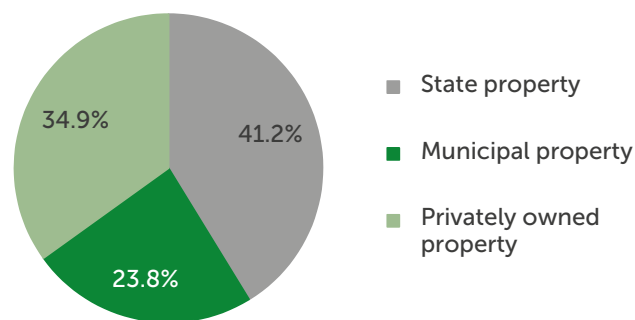
While this Country Gender Assessment was being prepared, a National Action Plan on Ensuring Employment for Women for 2021–2023 was in development. It has been reported that the draft plan addresses the issues of unpaid care work and women's underemployment (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, 2021). It could not be verified whether the draft plan covers unpaid work, referring to domestic and care work, or whether it also addresses unpaid work as a contributing family worker. Rural women would benefit greatly if the plan were to include actions to improve the recognition of unpaid work on family farms.

3.2. Land tenure and agricultural holdings

Gender equality in the ownership and control over land not only contributes to economic security, but it also has "positive multiplier effects for the achievement of a range of ... SDGs including poverty reduction (Goal 1), food security (Goal 2) and the welfare of households, communities and countries (Goals 3, 11 and 16, among others)" (FAO, 2018d, p. 2). Women's access to land, and other forms of property, is essential to their economic empowerment, which, in turn, can support business start-ups, facilitate political participation, increase food security and decrease dependency in cases of domestic violence. FAO is the UN "custodian" agency for indicators 5.a.1. and 5.a.2. of SDG 5 (on women's ownership of agricultural land and women's equal rights to landownership), and thus it plays a leading role in building capacity on national registries, indicators and statistics on women's landownership.

Over half of the territory of Azerbaijan is agricultural land (55 percent of the total or more than 4.8 million hectares), and much of it is arable land (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021b). Utilized agricultural land is divided between property owned by the state, by municipalities and by private owners, with a breakdown as illustrated in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Agricultural land, by type of ownership, 2021



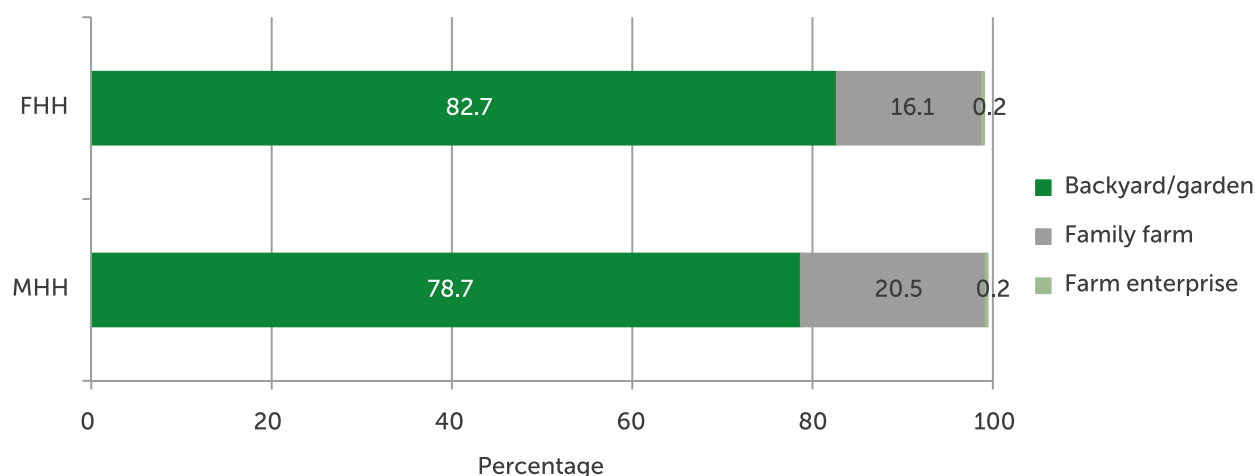
Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2021b. *Azerbaijan in Figures*. Baku, p. 124.

After independence, Azerbaijan embarked on land reforms in two phases, from 1995 to 2000 and from 2000 onwards, under which most of the arable land was distributed to rural residents, with only a very small percentage in reserve. The land privatization process is widely regarded as having been progressive and administered fairly. Under the 1996 Law on Land Reform,³³ private land titles were transferred for free and gave the title holder the right to freely sell, exchange, will, lease or mortgage their land. As of 2004, land reform was mainly complete, and 1.3 million hectares of arable land, former state and collective farms, had been distributed to rural households (FAO, 2022).

Two types of private land were distributed: land parcels (land that is not immediately adjacent to the house, created from former collective farms, that today function as smallholdings) and backyard plots or gardens (land that surrounds the house and is primarily used for personal consumption or a combination of personal consumption and marketing). Land was given to each household according to the number of members.

Women have equal rights to own and use land in Azerbaijan, and there is no evidence that the original land privatization processes were discriminatory in terms of land distribution. Of course, not all citizens who received shares of private property (issued as a "voucher") retained them. A 2005 survey indicated that a large number of people sold their vouchers, with a slightly greater share of women in this group (72.5 percent of women and 67.5 percent of surveyed men reported selling their shares). Fewer women invested their vouchers as actual shares in privatized property (2.7 percent compared with 4.2 percent of men), and a considerable proportion reported at the time that they were not sure how to use their vouchers

³³ Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Land Reform, No. 155-IQ of 16 July 1996.

Figure 14. Primary types of land owned by rural households, by sex of the head of the household, 2020

Note: Data for gardens at summer houses and other land, each accounting for one percent or less of land plots, are omitted.

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households. Distribution of households by access to land, average size of land and type of land by sex of household head in 2020. In: *State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan*. Baku. Cited 3 March 2022. https://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks

(22.2 percent of women and 26.4 percent of men; UNDP, 2007).

Over time, with land being freely transferable, some gender asymmetries have emerged in the ownership of land and the size of land plots. While no sex-disaggregated cadastre records on real estate ownership were found for this assessment, in 2014 the World Bank estimated that 42.1 percent of all registered landowners in Azerbaijan were women (World Bank Group, 2016). Note that this figure covers all landowners and not only owners of farmland. Another measure – the proportion of people who receive income from property – suggests that women are much less likely to have control over land or real estate assets. In 2020, of the people in this category, less than a third were women (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021g).

The absence of publicly available official data on female and male landownership is problematic. One of Azerbaijan's national priorities under SDG 5 are targets on increasing women's ownership of agricultural land, with an indicator for the percentage of the population that own or have the right to use agricultural land (indicator 5.a.1). According to the SDG portal of the State Statistical Committee, these data are available, based on records of the State Committee for Property Affairs collected annually.³⁴ The data had not been posted, however, at the time of writing this CGA.

³⁴ See the National Information Portal on Sustainable Development Goals of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Indicator 5.a.1, at <http://sdg.azstat.org:8484/az/indicators/344/a-kend-teserrufati-torpaqlarina-mulkiyyet-huququ-ve-ya-hemin-torpaqlar-uzerinde-qorunan-huquqlar-i-ol>.

The most recent household budget survey provides some information about access to and types of land plots. According to the survey, less than half of female-headed households are landowners. Among FHHs, 47.4 percent have access to a plot of land, compared with 63.7 percent of MHHs (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households, Distribution of households by access to land, average size of land and type of land by sex of household head in 2020).

Households with women heads tend to have smaller plots of land. The average size of land plots for FHHs is 33.2 *sot* and for MHHs it is 40.6 *sot*.³⁵ In other words, women's land plots are on average around three hectares, and plots owned by men are around four hectares. Most land parcels owned by women and men are backyard plots/gardens, followed by land parcels that could be characterized as family farms. In contrast, less than one percent of rural households use their land for large-scale agricultural enterprises (see Figure 14). Still, male-headed households are slightly more likely to own land that is used for family farming, which is in keeping with the fact that on average they have access to a greater area of land.

The reasons for gender asymmetries in property ownership (referring not only to real estate but all forms of private property) can be attributed to traditional gender roles. In the early 2000s, the majority of women gave their vouchers (property shares) and the right to use the property to men in their families (UNDP, 2007). A 2005 survey indicated that just over half of women

³⁵ Note that a *sot* is equivalent to 100 m² or 0.01 hectare.

(52 percent) left their property shares to their parents or their former husbands after entering into marriage or after divorcing, respectively. Women who were allotted a plot of land based on their parental household did not necessarily gain any land when entering into a new family through marriage. Experts conclude that “women were divested of the chance to benefit fully from privatization and economic liberalization” (ibid., p. 29). Furthermore, even today women who are in unofficial marriages (including early-age marriages) do not automatically gain legal rights to marital property such as land.

Land and property that are transferred through inheritance are traditionally either divided among sons (or other men in the family) or willed to the youngest son who is expected to care for his parents. In the above-mentioned 2005 study, only 0.1 percent of men and 1.1 percent of women respondents intended to will their property to their daughters, whereas 36.9 percent of men and 41.9 percent of women felt that the youngest male sibling should be the inheritor (UNDP, 2007). Focus group discussions conducted for this Country Gender Assessment confirmed that daughters often consent to land and property being granted to their male relatives. Rather than transferring property itself, parents may invest in girls’ education or their dowry, using money from the sale of property. Parents sell shares of land, transferring the money, or if they are earning income from the land, they give the daughter a proportion of this income (this often happens when individual land plots cannot be separated from the rest of the family property). Parents-in-law may buy shares of land from a woman marrying into the family and pay her compensation. It is very uncommon for women to contest such arrangements or to make claims for their own property.

Women from three villages who participated in these focus group discussions confirmed that it is assumed that male family members (husband, father-in-law, father, brother) are the legal owners, inheritors and managers of land; one participant noted that this arrangement is considered “fair and typical”. In practice, women may use agricultural land, even if they are not the registered owner, and in contrast, even if a woman is the registered landowner, control over the land is often designated to a man in the household. This finding highlights the need for sex-disaggregated data and analysis of both ownership and control over land assets.

The issue of ownership of and access to agricultural land is especially relevant in the context of IDP resettlement. During the original land reform process, IDPs and refugees did not receive land or other

agricultural assets. However, FAO estimates that around 57 percent of IDP and refugee households have access to some land. After 2000, IDPs that were temporarily settled in rural areas were able to rent land from the municipality (FAO, 2022). The process of IDPs returning to rural areas has the potential to change the distribution of landownership. In a survey conducted among IDP women, those who intend to return to rural areas and engage in agriculture expressed concern over the insufficient size of homestead land parcels and the risk that they will not be able to escape the “subsistence farming trap” (Women’s Empowerment for Sustainable Development Public Union, 2021, p. 28). It is crucial that agricultural land in resettled areas, as in other parts of the country, be distributed equitably among women and men for the development of competitive farms and other agribusinesses.

3.2.1. Farm ownership and management

Farming in Azerbaijan is dominated by small-scale farmers on privatized individual plots. Smallholders, as opposed to agricultural enterprises, are responsible for 90 percent of the country’s agricultural production (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021b). Some categories of crops – tobacco, fruits and berries, and potatoes, for example – are virtually all grown and harvested on smallholder farms.

Several types of smallholders are recognized in Azerbaijan, not all of which are legally registered entities. When conducting agriculture censuses, farming was considered broadly, and thus informal family-based farms as well as the temporary use of land for growing fruits and vegetables and raising livestock were counted. Box 7 provides more detailed definitions of the types of “farms” that were included in the censuses.

Out of more than 1.3 million holdings in 2015, less than one percent were classified as agricultural enterprises. Among the large number of smallholders, two-thirds (67.8 percent) were non-registered family farms. The second largest group, accounting for just under a third, were households that undertake farming (see Table 8). A comparison over a ten-year period suggests that the number of smallholders increased in every category, both legally registered farms and those that are informally engaged in farming.

In 2015, more than 900 000 family farms were operating and over 400 000 households were engaged in agriculture – both indications of the central role that home production plays for a large number of families, mainly rural and some urban. Smallholders operate on land areas ranging from one to three hectares, but

Box 7. Definitions: Agricultural producers and farmers

In Azerbaijan, agriculture censuses were conducted in 2004/2005 and 2015 which surveyed two main groups of farms: agricultural enterprises and farms based on family labour that could be considered smallholders. These smallholders, even though classified under the census as “farms” are often not commercially oriented and may only be used for personal consumption. The following definitions were used in the census:

1. Agricultural enterprises – legally registered organizations. For the purpose of the census, this category included collective farms, joint-stock companies, farm societies, agricultural producers’ cooperatives and state farms.

2. Smallholders

Peasant farmer/farm – a farm engaged in agricultural production and sales on land owned or leased. It is based on family labour and is an *officially registered legal entity*. A peasant farmer can be a single person or a family/household.

Family farm – a type of peasant farm that is engaged in agricultural production and sales on land owned or leased. It is based on family labour, but *without the formation of a legal entity*. These farms are based on households that received land during agrarian reform. The head of the household is also the registered head of the farm (the holding).

Farming households/homestead – farms, of both urban and rural residents, that did not receive land shares as a result of agrarian reform but have only homesteads or livestock. These are sometimes known informally as “backyard farms”.

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. *Azerbaijan – Agricultural Census 2004/05 – Explanatory Notes*. http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/ess/ess_test_folder/World_Census_Agriculture/Country_info_2000/Metadata/Azerbaijan_Metadata.pdf

Table 8. Number of agricultural holdings and average area per holding, by legal status of the holding, 2005 and 2015

	2005		2015	
	Number of holdings	Area (hectares)	Number of holdings	Area (hectares)
Total	1 287 385	2 341 000	1 352 121	2 362 024
Agricultural enterprises	2 027	402 800	1 385	314 455
Smallholders (total)	1 285 358	1 938 200	1 350 736	2 047 569
Peasant farmers/farms	2 709	n/a	3 290	n/a
Family farms	807 427	n/a	916 340	n/a
Farming households	396 574	n/a	431 106	n/a

Note: “n/a” indicates data not available.

Sources: FAO. 2005. *2005 agriculture census in Azerbaijan Republic*. http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/ess/ess_test_folder/World_Census_Agriculture/Country_info_2000/Reports_2/AZE_ENG_REP_2005.pdf; State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2016. *Agriculture census 2015*. Baku, p. 125.

even this land is usually fragmented. Despite the central role they play in the country’s agricultural production, “[s]mallholder farmers generally have scarce financial means and make limited profits from farming activities” (IFAD, 2018).

The 2015 census provides data about the division of smallholdings by the sex of the holder (in the census, described as “female-headed” and “male-headed”). Of the over one million smallholdings, women were recorded as the holder of 337 669 “farms” (or 25 percent of the total). Women are the least likely to

Table 9. Smallholder farms, by sex of the head of the holding, 2015

Structure	Number headed by women	Percentage headed by women	Number headed by men	Percentage headed by men
Smallholders (total)	337 669	25.0	1 013 067	75.0
Peasant farmers/farms	377	11.5	2 913	88.5
Family farms	220 919	24.1	695 421	75.9
Farming households	116 373	27.0	314 733	73.0

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2016. *Agriculture census 2015*. Baku, p. 125.

head registered peasant farms (only 11.5 percent of the total) and most likely to be the heads of households that engage in farming (27 percent of the total; see Table 9).

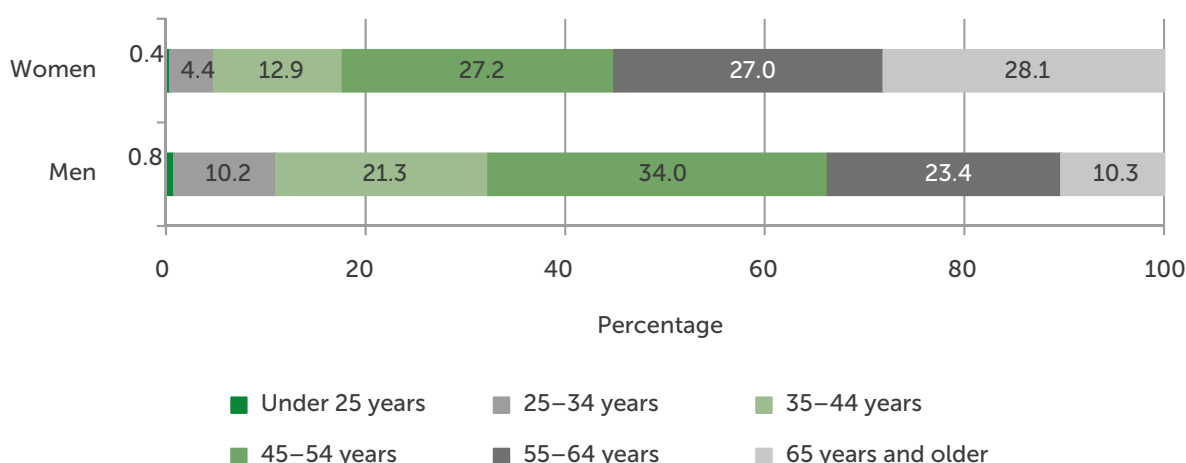
As a point of comparison, at the time of conducting this assessment, 600 049 farmers and 1 205 legal entities had been registered in the Electronic Agricultural Information System (EAIS) database. Of the individual registered farmers, 444 740 are men and 155 309 are women (information provided by the Agrarian Research Centre for this assessment). Women represent 25.9 percent of the individual farmers in the EAIS; a proportion that is consistent with the share of women smallholders recorded in the last census.

Further information that adds to the profile of a women farmer, such as average age, suggests that women are rarely engaged in farming for commercial purposes. More than half of women heading smallholdings are over age 55, and close to a third are aged 65 and over, past the official age of retirement (see Figure 15). Farming is not an occupation that attracts either young men or young women. Nevertheless, just over half of men who identified as smallholders in the last census

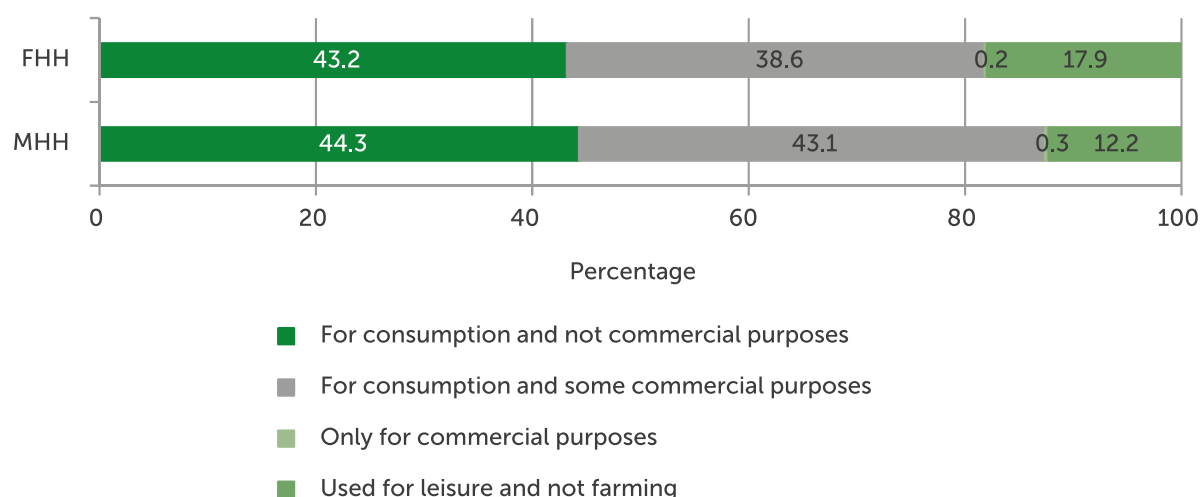
were between the ages of 34 and 54, corresponding to prime working years.

A sizeable proportion of both women and men only use their land for subsistence farming (personal consumption) – around 44 percent of both FHHs and MHHs. Households headed by men are slightly more likely to engage in a combination of farming for personal consumption and commercial purposes than are women-led households. Only 0.2 percent of women and 0.3 percent of men use their household plots entirely for commercial purposes (see Figure 16). Female-headed households are slightly more likely not to farm their land at all. Yet the overall picture of household land use in Azerbaijan is one in which subsistence farming is of critical importance for the average rural family, regardless of whether the household head is a woman or a man.

Women have limited engagement with commercial farming but greater involvement in farming backyard plots and gardens. Farming in the sense of either a profession or a commercial venture is not an activity associated with women. However, as described in

Figure 15. Distribution of smallholders, by sex and age group of the head of the holding, 2015

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2016. *Agriculture census 2015*. Baku.

Figure 16. Primary use of land by rural households, by sex of the head of the household, 2020

Note: Data for other non-specified uses, accounting for less than one percent, are omitted.

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households. Distribution of households by access to land, average size of land and type of land by sex of household head in 2020. In: *State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan*. Baku. Cited 3 March 2022. https://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks

Section 3.1, food production depends heavily on women's labour, both paid and unpaid. In many countries, not only in Azerbaijan, women's role as farmers is also invisible to and undervalued by policymakers. Women are seen merely as helpers and not "productive" farmers, and their contributions are not considered "work". Women face multiple constraints as smallholders, ranging from gender bias and exclusion from decision-making to a lack of access to key resources such as equipment, machinery, irrigation and advisory services. These constraints are explored in greater detail in Section 4 of this CGA.

3.3. Gender roles, leadership and empowerment

Many barriers confronting rural women stem from underlying attitudes and notions about what women and men are expected to do, including in their engagement in decision-making. The voices of women living in rural areas are often overlooked due to these expectations and norms, as well as discrimination. Gender stereotypes have far-reaching consequences for individual women's opportunities for self-realization in a number of spheres, including in agriculture, business and political leadership. If it is to be sustainable, rural and agricultural development should also take into consideration the extent to which rural women are empowered to take part in decision-making, in the household, as members of family farms and in the wider community. Women in rural areas are important agents of change, including in the agriculture sector, but in Azerbaijan this role must be enhanced.

The CEDAW Committee has expressed concern about the fact that "patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes

regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society remain deeply rooted", and such stereotypes and the notion that men hold a dominant position in Azerbaijani society "undermine women's social status, their equal participation in public life and their representation in paid employment" (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2015, para. 20). Traditional perceptions of gender roles are prevalent throughout the country, but gender experts point out that rural women and girls in Azerbaijan face particular structural constraints because they live in small communities with strong family control. There are limited opportunities for them to participate in public life or social activities locally, and they have less mobility to take advantage of events or activities in towns and cities. Stereotypes and strict views about "appropriate" jobs limit women's access to work in rural areas. For instance, according to one expert, families in rural areas typically do not permit young women to work in local shops or other businesses where they could communicate with men. This situation contrasts sharply to the situation in urban areas where young women do not face such restrictions.

Women and men are seen to have quite distinct roles, with women having key responsibilities in management of the domestic sphere, even if they are also employed outside the home or work on family farms. Men, on the other hand, dominate in the public sphere, and they are expected to financially provide for the family and participate in public life. When considering how women and men spend their time, women perform a great deal more unpaid work than men; and men are engaged in paid employment for more time than women. If it can be assumed that 9 hours are devoted to sleep, in a

Table 10. Average time spent on daily activities, by sex, in hours and minutes, 2008

Activity	Women	Men
Paid work and study	1:44	4:40
Unpaid work	6:06	2:08
Sleep and personal needs	9:25	9:40
Meals	2:16	2:10
Free time	2:32	3:15
Watching television	1:43	1:54
Other activities	0:13	0:13
Total	24:00	24:00

Note: Data for week days and weekend days are combined.

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2021i. *Women and Men in Azerbaijan*. Baku, p. 187.

15-hour day, women spend approximately 40 percent of their waking time on unpaid activities (around six hours per day), compared with around 14 percent of the time that men spend (around two hours per day). In contrast, men spend just over a quarter of their waking time (four hours) working or studying, but women only manage to devote less than two hours to such activities (only about 11 percent of their total time per day; see Table 10).

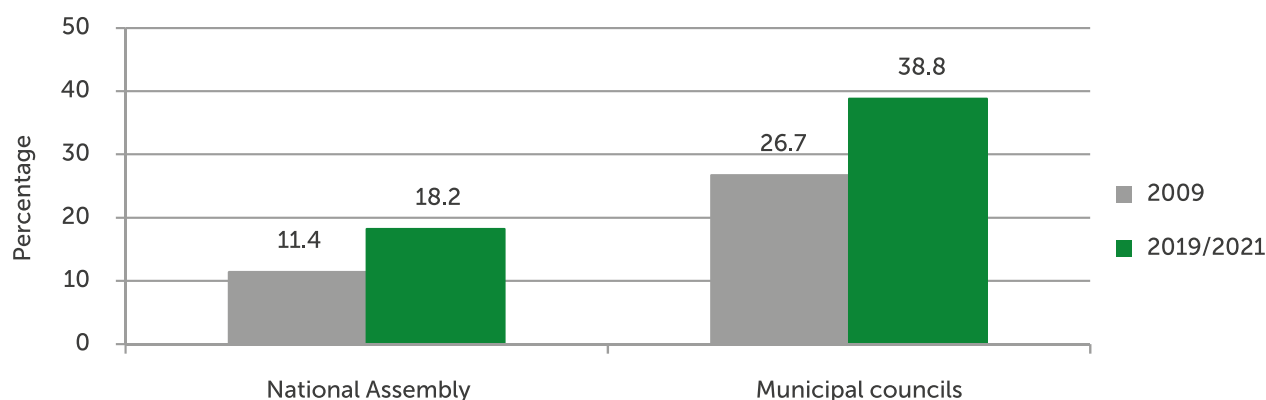
It is worth noting that time use data are not disaggregated for rural and urban residents. Typically, the rural population has longer working hours, when agricultural labour is considered, and less leisure time. For women living in rural areas, the absence of labour-saving devices in the home also extends the time spent on domestic chores. Moreover, for rural residents, time use also varies by season. Among villagers in the Aghdash and Gakh regions, for example, March–October/November are the most labour-intensive times of the year when both men and women are engaged in agricultural production from four to eight hours per day (FAO Azerbaijan, 2018). Because their primary responsibilities are caring for the household, women do less field work than men. Nevertheless, women from several villages who participated in the focus groups explained that during the most active season, they typically work in the field for around four hours per day in addition to carrying out household chores, daily cooking and baking, preserving foods for the winter, and caring for children and other family members. Moreover, they also said that in the growing season, their day usually begins at 05:00 or 06:00 and ends anywhere from 21:00 to 00:00, leaving them with only an hour or two of free time each day (ibid.).

One result of the COVID-19 pandemic was a significant increase in the burden of unpaid domestic work when preventive measures meant that people were confined to their homes. While both women and men reported that their domestic chores increased, the burden was greater for women in terms of time spent on household chores (62.9 percent of women and 55.8 percent of men reported an increase in time spent on chores) and the number of tasks (UNFPA and UN Women, 2020). Women reported the greatest increase in time spent on cleaning (the house and clothes), cooking meals, caring for and instructing children, and caring for older, disabled or ill family members. Men spent more time on household management (for instance, paying bills), shopping and cleaning the house (ibid.).

Serious consequences of women's lack of free time include the fact that they are "side-lined in community decision-making" and have great difficulty engaging in economic activities, education and training opportunities and other forms of self-expression (ibid., p. 34).

3.3.1. Rural women's role in leadership and decision-making

If rural women are not represented in decision-making of all types, from political leadership at the national and local levels, to professional organizations and even decisions within households, their voices will not be heard on issues that have a direct influence on their lives. Increasing the participation of rural women in decision-making is not only a means to improve their participation in policymaking – it is also an essential component of gender equality.

Figure 17. Representation of women in legislative office, 2009 and 2019/2021

Note: Data for the national parliament are for 2021; data for municipal councils are for 2019.

Sources: IPU. 2021. Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments. In: *IPU Parline*. Geneva, Switzerland. Cited 03 March 2022. <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=4&year=2021>; SCFWCA. 2019. Municipal elections were held in Azerbaijan on Dec. 23. In: *The State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan*. Baku. Cited 03 March 2022. <http://www.scfwca.gov.az/en/post/1879/belediyye-uzvu-secilen-qadinlarin-sayi-artib>

Although the increasing proportion of women in legislative offices in Azerbaijan is a positive trend, women's representation in public office overall is low when compared with the European and Central Asian region as a whole. In 2001, women held only 10 percent of seats in the Milli Majlis, the National Assembly of the Republic of Azerbaijan, but today they represent 18 percent of parliamentarians. Since 2020, a woman has chaired the parliament. Nevertheless, the National Assembly is far from gender-balanced, and women's representation is below the target set for 1995 of a minimum of 30 percent³⁶ – the threshold level at which the under-represented group is able to influence decision-making processes. It is not known how many, if any, women representing rural constituencies number among parliamentarians, or whether any of the parties promote the participation of rural women. There are currently no women on the Agrarian Policy Committee of the Milli Majlis.

The situation in municipal councils is more encouraging. After the 2019 elections, women obtained 38.8 percent of seats, reaching the "critical minority" and advancing considerably from 2004 when women held only 4 percent of seats (see Figure 17). Women's gains at the municipal level speak to their increased skills and capacities for political leadership as well as greater access to resources. The SCFWCA, international development organizations (particularly the United States Agency for International Development [USAID]) and NGOs have devoted particular attention to supporting women to enter politics and promoting the benefits of gender balance in governance.

The increased representation of women on municipal councils is a very important avenue through which women participate in decision-making on issues linked to their day-to-day lives and in priority-setting for rural development projects. Women have distinct priorities, concerning issues such as water supply infrastructure, kindergartens and school renovation. However, even women in local decision-making positions are often unable to effectively assert their positions due to their small number, lack of influence at higher levels and more limited access to resources to advocate for gender-sensitive policies broadly. Greater representation on municipal councils is an important step for women to further hone their leadership skills. Because political power remains concentrated in high-level offices in Azerbaijan, it is still crucial that rural women gain representation at every level.

There were no female ministers in the executive office at the time of completing this CGA (IPU, 2019). The Chair of the SCFWCA is the only woman member of the Cabinet of Ministers. Among the 88 local executive authorities (district and city level), only one is headed by a woman. Following a presidential decree³⁷ that recommended a woman be appointed to the position of deputy head of executive committees in order to address gender imbalance at the regional level, the number of women in local executive offices has increased. As of 2021, there were 80 women in deputy posts in these offices (ABC.az, 2021). While this is an encouraging trend, the appointment of women to deputy positions does not "strengthen the mandates of female politicians", but merely grants them access to the power that has long been controlled by men (Aliyeva, 2020, no page number).

³⁶ See United Nations. 1995. *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, 27 October 1995, para. 182.

³⁷ Decree No. 289, "On the implementation of the state policy regarding women in Azerbaijan", 6 March 2000.

Membership in agricultural unions, producers' associations or in civil society organizations (CSOs) are additional outlets for women in rural areas to exercise leadership. While there are no legal barriers in Azerbaijan to their formation, the lack of supporting policy means that agricultural "associations have barely developed" over the past decade (FAO, 2018e, p. 15). Agricultural associations that operate in Azerbaijan are mainly supported under donor-led programmes; many are small and only work in the geographical areas in which the donors are active (ibid.). There are several umbrella associations operating in Azerbaijan, including the Azerbaijan Farmers Association and the Ganja Agribusiness Association.³⁸ No information was found during this assessment about the number of members of these organizations or membership breakdown by sex.

In Azerbaijan, producers' associations range from large (for example, the Beekeepers' Association of Azerbaijan has 2 000 members) to relatively small: for example, the Association of producers and exporters of fruits and vegetables has 60 members; the Azerbaijan Hazelnut Producers and Exporters Association has 52 members; and the Association of producers and exporters of pomegranate has 20 members (Wrobel, 2018). No information was found concerning women's membership in any producers' associations. Considering women's low representation as farm owners as well as women's auxiliary or supporting role in agricultural production generally, it can be assumed that women are not active in these associations.

The interests of women in agriculture are not met through these mainstream associations. The creation of an organization dedicated to rural women, the Azerbaijan Rural Women's Association, however, speaks to the fact that rural women do have a distinct agenda, and also that the approach tends towards creating separate structures to represent women's interests, rather than mainstreaming a gender perspective into pre-existing organizations.

The **Azerbaijan Rural Women's Association** (ARWA), an NGO, was established by the Ministry of Agriculture and the World Bank in 2018, under the second Azerbaijan Rural Investment Project (AzRIP-2) to support the social and economic development of rural women.³⁹ Its mission is to transform rural women's lives through entrepreneurship and leadership in their communities.

ARWA serves as the national hub for a network of Women Development and Enterprise self-help groups (further information about the technical support provided by ARWA and the self-help group model is included in Sections 4.7 and 4.8, respectively).

ARWA unites a network of 48 Women Development and Enterprise Groups covering 750 rural women farmers and entrepreneurs in 22 regions; the groups collectively own and manage 130 small businesses. Each group has on average 8 to 12 women members that are engaged in diverse activities such as fruit and vegetable production, fruit drying, cattle and poultry farming, and non-farm activities (USAID, 2020). ARWA is not a producer organization, and yet it does serve some of these functions, such as improving members' access to information. In addition to the Women Development and Enterprise Groups, ARWA works with local executive authorities when implementing business and community engagement activities. As the umbrella structure, ARWA also engages with international donors and the private sector in order to secure external support for women's initiatives. In this capacity, the association also plays an advocacy role in highlighting the needs of rural women at the national level. It may be worth exploring whether there could be an expanded role for ARWA or its members to participate in formal policy dialogue as well. There is a need for a platform that would increase the bargaining power of rural women and support them to advocate for their needs as agricultural producers and business owners.

A number of women's NGOs exist in Azerbaijan that engage in a range of activities, but women-led NGOs make up only 6.7 percent of the total number of registered organizations (UNDP, 2018a). On the whole, women in rural areas are far less active in civil society than their urban counterparts. Women living in regional centres and villages are "rarely engaged in community activities, interest groups, discussions and other types of social activism" (ibid., p. 14). One reason for this is the simple fact that most NGOs that engage in women's empowerment or gender equality work are located in Baku (around 89 percent of NGOs with these missions). At the same time, patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes also play a role. Rural women's domestic responsibilities leave them little time for community work. Furthermore, in some rural communities, participation in public forums is not seen as an acceptable role for women. It is important not to interpret rural women's low engagement in civil society as a lack of interest. Initiatives on women's empowerment that have included both targets for women's membership in community development groups and worked to change attitudes have shown

³⁸ The latter was established with the assistance of USAID and implements USAID's Smart Azerbaijani Farm (SAF) project.

³⁹ Information from World Bank project documents at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2020/08/18/second-rural-investment-project>, and AzerNews at <https://www.azernews.az/nation/146832.html>.

positive results in that a substantial number of women became more vocal in expressing their views (results concerning an increase in community respect for women's leadership were less evident, however; ME&A Inc., 2020).

Women's engagement in intra-household decision-making is no less important than participation in public affairs. Although rural women play important roles by contributing to the livelihoods of their households, they tend to have little control over income from family farms or other family-based activities. Limited research in Azerbaijan complicates the understanding of women's agency in making decisions related to agriculture. However, some studies suggest that women participate in household decision-making fairly equitably with men despite the fact that men are traditionally considered the head of the household. In one survey, covering rural and urban areas, more than half of women and men respondents stated that family decisions concerning household expenses, work and free time are made jointly (UNFPA and SCWFCA, 2018). The only clear exception concerned decisions about whether a woman will work outside the home, where a larger proportion of men believed it was their decision alone. Very few respondents stated that men have the

final say in decision-making, but 73 percent of men and 63 percent of women identified at least one area in which men are the sole decision-makers (ibid.).

Among the rural population, women are the main decision-makers concerning issues about children's education and care. On the other hand, men are the primary decision-makers over household expenses, with women only taking on this role when a male family member is absent (FAO Azerbaijan, 2018). This means that women are often excluded from giving inputs into how household income, to which they also contribute, is used.

Women's agency and leadership, beginning in households but extending to agricultural and rural institutions as well as government office, are essential preconditions for effective interventions concerning agriculture. Women form a large proportion of the agricultural workforce, and empowering them is a first step towards addressing the constraints they face as smallholders. FAO considers women's active participation in decision-making processes to be a long-term investment that ultimately contributes to sustainable agricultural production.

4. Gender and agriculture, fisheries and forestry

Analysing the roles of women and men in agricultural production, fisheries and forestry is greatly complicated by the lack of sex-disaggregated data and qualitative research. Nevertheless, it is clear that disparities in access to assets, resources and inputs lead to differences in farming practices which themselves have negative consequences for agricultural productivity. Assessing gender gaps in various subsectors of agriculture, such as horticulture, livestock raising, sericulture, fisheries and forestry, provide important information about the constraints that women face due to existing biases and discrimination. Information about these gender gaps is needed to inform policy formulation and planning so that interventions are not only inclusive but also targeted and effective.

4.1. Crop production and horticulture

Most of the privately owned agricultural land in Azerbaijan is arable land – 82.3 percent (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021b). A variety of crops are grown, including cereals and grains (wheat, rice, barley, corn), industrial crops (cotton, tobacco, tea) and fodder crops. Additionally, there is a rich variety of horticulture, both open field and in greenhouses (for example, potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, melons, berries and fruits – apples, cherries, plums, apricots, peaches, citrus fruits, persimmons, pomegranates, grapes and kiwi). Azerbaijan also has well-established production of hazelnuts and other nuts (pistachio, almonds).

A large proportion of the rural population depends on crop growing and horticulture, practising mixed farming (that is, growing major grain crops in successive years, with other crops introduced on rotation). Not only is vegetable growing one of the primary sources of income for rural households, but smallholders produce almost 90 percent of all plant products in Azerbaijan (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021a). The transition from the Soviet era

approach to agricultural production, one of “high-input monocultures of often non-adapted crops”, meant that the majority of small private farmers had little to no prior experience of “private farming in a market-driven economy” (FAO REU, 2012, p. 12). In recent years investments into agriculture have quadrupled, and the increasing market demand for local food supply means that there is high growth potential in horticulture products (Wrobel, 2018).

When preparing this assessment, no official data were found comparing farming practices or about crop and horticulture harvests and yields separately for women and men farmers. In terms of commercial farming, the horticulture value chain presents “relatively high cultural barriers for women entrepreneurs” because the subsector is male-dominated (Wrobel, 2018, p. 11). In sharp contrast to their absence as commercial producers or as owners of related enterprises (such as processing plants), a very large share of women is employed at the low-value end of horticultural value chains. Women mainly perform manual labour (for example, sowing seeds, tending seedlings, trimming grape branches and harvesting). On family farms, women help men with activities such as sowing seeds, weeding, hoeing, harvesting and storing produce.

Because women rarely undertake mechanized work, they represent the majority of workers in some forms of crop production; for instance, 90 to 100 percent of grape harvesters are women. Women constitute around half of hazelnut and apple harvesters, but almost all planters are men. For vegetables (tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers), women represent 70 to 80 percent of harvesters and those who tend seedlings, but only half of planters. Women do not work in the production of corn, grain or seeds as the labour is considered to be more physically demanding, requires technical equipment, and is on larger land areas farther from the home, and thus, it is done by men (Wrobel, 2018, p. 19). Men exclusively perform types of work such harvesting

with combines, irrigating farmland, spraying pesticides and pruning.

The distinct differences in the work performed by women and men is termed the gender division of labour. This division is based on norms about gender roles. Typically, it is men who are the main decision-makers around land use (including which crops to grow and what income-generating activities to engage in) because they are the ones who undertake planting (FAO, 2021b). Men consider themselves to be the decision-makers on diversification or value added opportunities, but it is worth noting that they accept suggestions from women in this area, for instance, on processing vegetables for sale (Wrobel, 2018). Men usually manage sales and, therefore, make decisions on allocating income to improve production, such as for equipment repair. Men farmers are also said to prefer to take sole responsibility for handling transportation of products and negotiations with other producers, water user association members or service providers, for example (ibid.). In contrast, women on family farms are widely perceived as assistants or advisors but not "farmers" and therefore not the final decision-makers.

Because women's engagement in crop production and horticulture is primarily as workers concentrated in the downstream activities of value chains, they are overlooked when there are opportunities to gain skills and knowledge that could improve agricultural production. For instance, women are often excluded from advisory services or training opportunities because organizers view them as contributing manual labour, and thus, consider that men, as the recognized farmers, would benefit from the sessions (FAO, 2021b). If women were to have equal access to skills, knowledge, technologies, networks and other resources, new opportunities would be created for them to move into upstream and more profitable activities in horticultural value chains.

4.2. Livestock and livestock products

Historically, the value of Azerbaijan's plant-growing products has exceeded that of livestock products, but in recent years, this trend has reversed. In 2020, livestock accounted for AZN 4.4 million, compared with plant growing which was AZN 4.0 million (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021b). The productivity of livestock has also increased, here referring to greater outputs of meat, milk, eggs and wool. As is the case with crop production and

Table 11. Rural households owning livestock and average number of livestock, by species and sex of the head of household, 2020

	FHHs		MHHs	
	Percentage owning	Average number of livestock per household	Percentage owning	Average number of livestock per household
Cows	14.5	2.4	25.6	2.7
Bulls	1.6	1.4	3.2	1.7
Calves	10.3	1.9	21.0	2.3
Buffalo	0.8	2.1	1.6	2.0
Sheep	5.6	17.4	10.8	23.4
Goats	1.8	6.2	3.4	8.1
Horses	1.0	1.3	1.8	1.1
Donkeys	0.6	1.2	0.9	1.1
Chickens	34.7	19.1	52.5	21.5
Turkeys	10.9	7.3	19.0	7.9
Geese/ducks	10.1	8.8	17.7	9.8
Bee colonies	0.7	12.5	2.1	11.2

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households. Households having poultry, livestock or bees by sex of household head in 2020. In: *State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan*. Baku. Cited 3 March 2022. https://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks

horticulture, family farms and rural households are the vast majority of livestock and animal products producers: smallholders produce 91.0 percent of all livestock products in Azerbaijan (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021a).

Sex-disaggregated data on livestock ownership has been calculated for female-headed and male-headed households but was not included in the previous agricultural censuses. Female-headed households are less likely than male-headed households to own livestock of any kind, and for some species the difference is significant. For instance, while more than half of MHHs own chickens, the same is true for only 34.7 percent of FHHs. Likewise, MHHs are around twice as likely to own cows, calves and sheep than are FHHs (see Table 11). When households, both those headed by women and men, do own livestock, the actual average number of livestock varies little. Only in the case of sheep do MHHs own considerably more animals on average.

As in other agricultural sectors, the division of labour concerning livestock is gendered. Men's work entails using machinery, the purchase of feed, medicines and equipment, grazing, herding and transport (of feed and livestock), and upstream processes in the value chain, such as negotiating with buyers. Women, on the other hand, perform work that is seen to require less physical strength or equipment. One research project found that women represent around 70 to 80 percent of employees in poultry breeding but only 50 percent in cattle breeding (Wrobel, 2018). Women perform key labour in the daily management of livestock, such as caring for poultry, sheep and cattle, dealing with animal hygiene, and milking cows. On family farms, women are responsible for raising livestock in backyards, caring for calves and young cattle, milking and cleaning barns. However, because this labour is "in the informal domain, it is not recorded or recognized *per se*" (FAO, 2020a, p. 34).

Women have a more substantial role in processing animal products, most notably in cheese-making, washing and cleaning sheep wool, and preparing hides. Most often, women sell products such as cheese directly from their homes, and not in markets, or sometimes to intermediaries such as traders and retailers (FAO, 2020a). Specific handicrafts that rely on animal products, such as carpet weaving, are considered to be "women's activities" that they do at home. Formalizing the processing of animal products, by small-scale enterprises and farmers associations, would be a means of increasing women's engagement and also including them in various value chains.

Box 8. Apiculture

Apiculture is an ancient form of farming in Azerbaijan, and recent investment and subsidies for beekeepers has led to growth in this subsector. From 2018 to 2019, the number of beekeeping farms in Azerbaijan doubled, to the current total of 501 000 farms (AzerNews, 2020). While the value chain is considered promising, one of the most significant challenges is the lack of vocational training to prepare specialized personnel and lack of knowledge of modern means of production. Most beekeeping farms rely on a workforce of family members or close relatives and use little external labour.

From a gender perspective, the apiculture value chain is male-dominated. Women are estimated to represent between 5 and 10 percent of those engaged in the sector, most of whom are family members of beekeepers, in auxiliary or supportive roles (World Bank Group, 2018). Women's work mainly involves cleaning combs, and filtering and cleaning honey. Participants of focus groups state that transporting hives to locations far from the home to mountains or forests is not suitable work for women as it is physically difficult and dangerous (*ibid.*). For the most part, beekeepers are men who thus control decisions over equipment, income and assets.

The main opportunities for women in the sector are as business owners (but with the proviso that they would have to invest their own funds and hire male workers), in management of enterprises, marketing of bee products and in beekeeping tourism. Investments in training that targets women could dispel traditional notions about beekeeping as a man's profession, introduce women to new technologies and expand their income-earning opportunities at higher ends of the value chain.

Of note, respondents in specific studies expressed the opinion that if less physical strength was required, opportunities for women in animal husbandry and livestock production would open. Women are said to be especially active in initiating changes to the production approach and interested in gaining knowledge that could improve expenditure and income if they were

able to attend training programmes in this field (Wrobel, 2018).

An interviewee for this CGA noted that the availability of veterinary services is also central to the development of animal husbandry because veterinarians not only treat animals but are also involved in selecting and increasing the productivity of livestock. The topic of access to veterinary services is addressed in Section 4.6 of this report on agricultural extension and rural advisory services.

4.3. Sericulture

Silkworm farming, or sericulture, involves both agriculture and industry. The Ministry of Agriculture is the governmental body with responsibility for the development of sericulture under its division on livestock. Sericulture is also considered a protected form of “applied arts and folk art” under the law On the Legal Protection of Expressions of Azerbaijani Folklore.⁴⁰

Azerbaijan has a centuries-long tradition of silk production, and during the Soviet period, sericulture was a strategic part of the economy. However, with the transition to a market economy, large-scale silk weaving factories were closed, the raw materials (namely mulberry plantations) were lost and key specialists and workers left the industry (FAO, 2016a). In recent years, efforts have been made to restore sericulture. One specific project, carried out by the NGO “Inkishaf” Research Centre from 2001 to 2002, has been recognized as best practice in the field. Working from the perspective of women’s economic empowerment, the project revived the art of kelagayi production (a kelagayi is a traditional handicraft – a printed silk scarf worn by women). Making a kelagayi involves several craftspersons: producers of raw silk, weavers, dyers and printers. The successes of the project included not only the reintroduction of a traditional handicraft but also the provision of jobs to rural women from more than 100 households.

Sericulture is concentrated in the mulberry-growing regions of Azerbaijan, namely Aran (Zardab, Kurdamir, Fizuli, Zagatala, Agjabadi and Agdam Barda) and the foothill regions (Balakan, Zagatala, Gakh, Shaki and Ismayilli). Under the State Program for the Development of Silkworm Breeding and Sericulture in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2018–2025,⁴¹ AZN 4.5 million has been allocated from the budget for reconstructing and equipping sericulture facilities in Gakh, where a large

station for the cultivation of cocoons was opened in 2018. The programme has a core objective of creating jobs and increasing employment in rural areas, without specifying particular types of work that could be carried out by men or women.

Sericulture has many characteristics that provide opportunities for women at the lower- and higher-value ends of the value chain. Silkworm farming can be done on a small scale in households and “as such, can be closely linked to rural crafts – an essential element of the rural economy, in which women play a key role” (FAO, 2016a). Sericulture is also one of the few areas of agriculture in which men and women undertake joint activities in order to produce the final product – silk fabric. Historically, women participated along with men in various processes of silk production, such as unwinding yarn, spinning and weaving. During the Soviet period, when silk production was industrialized, the majority of workers in silk weaving factories were women. Designing and manufacturing silk products, as well as marketing and sales, all offer opportunities for women.

In households engaged in sericulture, there are fewer rigid divisions of labour between women and men than those seen in other subsectors. It is typical for all family members – adults and children – to collect mulberry leaves, feed silkworms and collect cocoons. Generally, women are engaged in unwinding cocoons and twisting silk filaments, while men mostly cultivate mulberry trees and dye the kelagayi. Both women and men are involved in weaving and decorating silk fabrics, but this also depends on the particular circumstances, for example, if family members are absent due to migration (FAO, 2016a). When considering the silk production and sericulture value chain in its entirety, experts note that women are engaged in all stages of production, with estimates ranging from 50 percent to 80 percent of those involved at a particular stage (ibid.).

While the sector offers many opportunities for women, several shortcomings have also been identified.

There are no statistics or indicators about women’s and men’s engagement in sericulture which should inform gender-responsive policymaking. People who are engaged in sericulture note a lack of professional education in the field. This relates to both training of specialists as well as support through rural advisory services. There is also a need to increase expertise in marketing and sales of silk products at the upstream end of the value chain. Gender-sensitive policy and national programmes could also help women and men to expand their cottage industries into larger business ventures.

⁴⁰ No. 460-IIQ of 16 May 2003.

⁴¹ Approved by Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, No. 3406 of 27 November 2017.

4.4. Fisheries and aquaculture

Azerbaijan has low reserves of freshwater compared with neighbouring countries, but more than 800 kilometres of the coastline of the Caspian Sea are located in the country's territory. Azerbaijan has a rich culture of fisheries and fish consumption, but both have been in decline. Before independence from the Soviet Union, the fisheries sector consisted of capture fisheries (mainly sturgeon fishing on the Caspian Sea) and aquaculture (both lake- and land-based fish farms). Complex factors have led to a loss of efficiency in the fishing industry as well as a decline in commercially valuable fish species. As a result, the total volume of the fisheries shrank to less than a tenth of their size from 1990 to 2005 (FAO, 2013).

The sector has attracted investment more recently, leading mainly to the development of small-scale fish farms and single household farms. There are also privately owned large enterprises that breed sturgeon and other species of fish. According to one official at the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, it will be of strategic importance to develop fish farming in Azerbaijan, as opposed to fish capture (Report News Agency, 2020). Aquaculture is thus a promising area of economic development that could be an important source of employment and food products for the Azerbaijani population. However, the sector at present exhibits very clear gender asymmetries, which means that there is a risk that women will not benefit to the same extent as men if improvements are made.

Women were once well-represented in fish farming in Azerbaijan, and during the Soviet period they worked on an equal basis with men in many stages of production. After state-owned enterprises were disbanded and the sector was privatized, however, women lost jobs in the industry. Official statistics include sex-disaggregated data for two indicators: people who received a fishing quota and people who engaged in fish farming (pond or lake fishing). In 2020, out of 1 977 people formally engaged in fishing, only 31 were women, equal to 1.6 percent of the total (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021i). Most men operate with a catch quota, which indicates that men are involved with fishing fleets or companies to a far greater extent than women (1 776 men but only 6 women had a fishing quota in 2020). Fewer people engage in lake or pond fishing (170 men and 25 women; *ibid.*). According to a representative from the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources who was interviewed for this assessment, women make up only 10 to 12 percent of the total workforce in the fisheries sector.

In much of the world, fish capture is typically considered a "male occupation" (FAO, 2016b), and in Azerbaijan, where fishing is associated with marine capture fishing that entails physically demanding work, this is also likely to be the case. In addition, this type of fishing is associated with the sale of especially valuable products – sturgeon and caviar – and therefore it attracts more interest from men as investors and employees (notably, fish poaching, which has been widespread for decades, is also mainly a pursuit of men; Ibrahimbeyova, 2016). Nevertheless, there are many aspects of fisheries and aquaculture that could be developed to increase employment opportunities for women, such as post-harvest fish processing as well as entrepreneurship in fish farming, fish hatcheries and in services related to tourism and recreational fishing. In this case, special measures are needed to support women to enter these fields.

Support to farmers and entrepreneurs in Azerbaijan has so far not included activities specifically on fisheries and aquaculture. Two women who participated in focus group discussions for this assessment, from Ismayilli, expressed their interest in establishing fish farms but said they have not been able to receive bank loans and donor-led projects have not allocated funding for this particular activity.

4.5. Forestry

Around 12 percent (over one million hectares) of the territory of Azerbaijan is covered by forest (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021b). Most forestland is located on steep mountain slopes of the Greater and Lesser Caucasus and the Talish Mountains. The mountain forests contain a broad range of tree species, mainly beech, oak and hornbeam, but also linden, pine, acacia, chestnut, maple and others. All forests are publicly owned and managed by the Department of Forest Development of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources. Forestland can be transferred for use by state and private forestry enterprises, institutions and other organizations in accordance with national law. In practice, however, all forestland is managed by the Department of Forest Development, which operates forest protection and rehabilitation enterprises, forest nurseries and regional afforestation enterprises in the field (FAO and UNECE, 2019).

Gender issues in the forestry sector concern opportunities for women's employment in forestry, their access to forest products, as a source of food and income, and also their role in the management of forest resources.

First, in relation to employment, there are a lack of detailed sex-disaggregated forestry statistics, but a representative from the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, interviewed for this assessment, provided the following information: within the Department of Forest Development, women make up 40 percent of the total staff. They constitute 46 percent of forestry management centre employees but only 6 percent of employees in subordinate structures. Generally, women are best represented in administrative positions (as accountants or economists, for example), while there is also a preference for men in jobs that require field work, such as in forest protection and reforestation. Furthermore, under labour law, women are prohibited from working in some lumbering occupations (World Bank, 2020).

People who live near forests in Azerbaijan make use of several forest resources, primarily wood. Most wood is obtained not from permissible logging but through the illegal/unrecorded harvest of fuelwood by local residents. Wood is a source of energy for heating, cooking and baking bread during winter. The average rural household uses nearly 12–15 m² of wood (FAO and UNECE, 2019). Reliance on forest wood is diminishing as more villages are connected to a natural gas supply. But even when natural gas is available, some low-income households still rely on fuelwood for heating when they cannot afford to pay for gas – around 20 to 30 percent of people according to participants of focus groups in the Aghdash and Gakh regions (FAO Azerbaijan, 2018). Not all fuelwood is collected from forests as this must be purchased through “coupons” issued by the Forestry Office; people also make use of trees on their own property or wood from old fences and greenhouses (*ibid.*, p. 61).

In summer, forestland is used for grazing cattle, sheep, water buffalo, goats and horses. Forests also provide non-timber forest products, such as hay, grain, wild fruits, citrus fruits, honey, nuts, vegetables and pomegranates. Data exist on the volume of such products harvested by forestry enterprises, but there is very little information about forest goods in terms of local revenue, the volume collected or their use. While several enterprises have established pilot plantations for non-timber forest products (for hazelnuts, walnuts, chestnuts, sea buckthorn and others), such enterprises are said to be under-equipped and therefore have low harvests (National Forest Program, 2013).

An FAO assessment under the “Forest Resources Assessment and Monitoring to Strengthen Forest Knowledge Framework in Azerbaijan” project, conducted in the Aghdash and Gakh regions, found

that rural people depend little on non-timber forest products for their livelihoods. Generally, only a few people collect these products, mainly fruits and berries, to use for their own consumption. It is usually the poorest community members who sell non-timber forest products, with the revenue generated only meeting daily consumption needs. While participants in focus groups noted that both women and men collect non-timber forest products, it appears that women are more likely to collect berries or fruits which they sell in addition to their home-grown vegetables. In one village included in the research, a small number of women collected blackberries for sale based on advance orders (they spend an estimated 4 to 5 hours per day, twice a week, during a two-month period on this activity); their maximum profit is between AZN 200 and AZN 300. Other fruits, such as pomegranates that are mainly picked by men, are even less profitable as there are few production or processing facilities, and therefore sales are only made at local markets (FAO Azerbaijan, 2018). Nevertheless, an overall finding is that rural women and men depend little on forests and forest resources for their livelihoods, but levels of dependence also vary based on other factors, such as whether they have alternative income sources or use forests indirectly (i.e. for grazing livestock or planting).

Finally, the National Forest Program for 2015–2030 recognizes forests as a valuable resource and outlines priorities for forest protection and conservation. The accompanying national action plan, under an objective to improve awareness of the benefits of forests and to engage people in sustainable forest management, mentions a role for women’s organizations among NGOs. However, a brief review of women led NGOs working in Azerbaijan, conducted for this CGA, did not find any that currently have projects on forest resources. Furthermore, the National Forest Program itself does not include any specific measures on collaboration between State institutions and women led NGOs or on outreach to women living in forest dependent communities to engage them in activities related to forest protection.

4.6. Agricultural extension and rural advisory services

There is no law or national strategy on extension services in Azerbaijan, but drafts are said to be in progress. Capacity development, including agricultural education, research and extension services, is an area of cooperation between FAO and the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Training and agricultural extension services are provided by both public and private institutions. State Agricultural Development

Centres (DAIM), which are under the Agrarian Services Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, are the main providers of government-funded extension services. Azerbaijan State Agricultural University, as well as agricultural research institutes (including Agrarian Science and Innovation Centres of the Ministry of Agriculture), may also provide expertise and information and run demonstration plots; and commercial enterprises, as well as farmers' associations and NGOs, may supply education and advice to clients and members. In some cases, NGOs are contracted to work in villages. The Ganja Agribusiness Association, established in 1999, is one of the largest NGOs and an umbrella organization that offers training, extension services, business planning and credit/loans, and also serves as a research base. Separate from regular advisory services, projects led by international development organizations often include training activities for farmers to address gaps in their skills and specialized knowledge.

Gender issues in the context of extension and advisory services concern both the representation of women among extension workers as well as the accessibility of such services to women who engage in farming and agricultural production.

Data on women's employment in agricultural extension services and rural advisory services are incomplete; most institutions do not disaggregate information on employees by sex or position. FAO has assessed that very few women work as agricultural extension agents, although they are much better represented as researchers and scientists (FAO Azerbaijan, 2019). This finding has been confirmed by estimations provided by experts in the field. For instance, among service providers and agronomists, 30 percent are women (*ibid.*). Women currently make up between 20 and 25 percent of extension staff within the NGO Agro Information Center of Azerbaijan, which is an increase from 17.5 percent in 2009 (*ibid.*; GFRAS, 2013). In contrast, women are estimated to represent up to 70 percent of employees of agrarian research institutions, as scientists, researchers and lab workers, but not as heads of departments or managers.

Veterinary services are separate from extension services, but veterinarians also play an advisory role for livestock farmers. In general, animal husbandry as a field attracts fewer women scientists and researchers than horticulture. In Azerbaijan, there are 135 female veterinarians compared with around 1 500 male veterinarians, and it is estimated that around 10 to 12 percent of advisors in animal health

and veterinary services are women (FAO Azerbaijan, 2019). The situation differs by location and could also be improving, however. An interviewee for this CGA confirmed that out of 30 veterinarians currently working in the State Veterinary Administration in the Gazakh region, six are women, and also noted that in the past there were no female students studying veterinary sciences at the agricultural institute.

The main obstacles to women's greater representation as agricultural experts and advisors are attitudinal, including the ideas that women have less mobility to travel to the field, that the work may require physical strength that they do not possess, and that the target audience for advisory services is expected to be male farmers, therefore male advisors are the norm.

Assessing how women farmers access extension services is based on limited studies. No sex-disaggregated data on advisory service users were found for this assessment, and it is not clear whether such data are collected systematically. The Ministry of Agriculture, for instance, registers farmers who communicate with their call centre but does not disaggregate the records by sex or analyse any gender differences in the areas of advice they are seeking (FAO Azerbaijan, 2019). The State Agricultural Development Centers have access to client information through the EAIS database, and so it is theoretically possible that separate information about women and men as clients could be generated and analysed. Extension services providers, through DAIM or other public agencies, should also be collecting client data, but no such records were available for this CGA and so could not be verified. As an estimate of the possible share of women using extension services, the Ganja Agribusiness Association reports that between 1999 and 2017, only 10.4 percent of their beneficiaries were women (140 000 women in total; GABA, 2022). In training activities, women's participation can reach 30 to 40 percent, but this is generally due to the organizers' efforts to target women in this proportion.

Research indicates that male farmers tend to receive information from public service providers, through DAIM, Azerbaijan State Agricultural University, Agrarian Science and Innovation Centres, and sometimes through private veterinarians or printed materials distributed among farmers. Those who are unaware of the institutions mentioned above rely on information from "knowledgeable" people, such as retired agronomists, or neighbours. In contrast, female farmers receive information from male farmers as well as from social media and mass media (FAO Azerbaijan, 2019). The Association of Rural Women of Azerbaijan (ARWA) provides technical support to members of its Women Development and Enterprise Groups (for example,

Table 12. Stock of selected agricultural equipment and machinery, in units, 2020

	Owned equipment (units)
Tractors	34 954
Ploughs	4 519
Cultivators	1 277
Seeding machines	3 233
Mowers	1 312
Cereal harvesters	3 624
Grain-maize harvesters	7
Fodder harvesters	111
Cotton harvesters	485
Potato harvesters	49
Hard mineral fertilizer distributors	335
Sprayers and pollinators	1 299

Note: The total number of owned units includes working and non-working machinery that is registered in the electronic information system of the Head State Technical Supervision Inspectorate of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2021a. *The Agriculture of Azerbaijan*. Baku, p. 69.

training on topics such as tillage, storage and drying, as well as on-site business development services) and facilitates mentoring between groups. However, women rarely access extension services through traditional service delivery networks.

Differences in the sources of information are related to the fact that women are not perceived to be “farmers” or “producers”, but instead as auxiliary workers. Thus, they are often overlooked as potential recipients of extension services. Men are viewed as the decision-makers who are the target of information about new technologies, practices and skills. It is expected that men will be the recipients of advisory services and, if it is needed, they will share knowledge and skills with other family members and farm employees. The exception is for the few women who are heads of farms, as they have comparatively more independent access to advisory services. Rural women who participated in the focus groups for this assessment however, identified their needs for more professional knowledge and skills, in areas such as crop protection.

In addition to gender stereotypes about whether it is “appropriate” for women to join agricultural training, rural women face mobility and time constraints related to their domestic responsibilities that limit their opportunities to take part in education or training even when it is offered. Gender experts point out that while rural women very often do not receive information about extension or rural advisory services through mainstream channels, they are well-connected digitally. The use of digital and social media could

be an effective way to reach them. The topic of how information and communication technologies (ICTs) could increase women’s access to information and advisory services as part of developing e-agriculture, is explored in Section 5.5.

In Azerbaijan, there have been few efforts, from either public or private providers, to comprehensively assess the needs of women farmers, referring here to women engaged in agricultural production in any form, or to approach them as a particular target group for training and advisory services. At the same time, training and capacity-building components have been included when projects have a particular focus on supporting rural women as farmers and business-owners. The “Improved food security and rural livelihoods through women’s economic empowerment” (WEP) project,⁴² implemented in 12 regions, aims to strengthen gender responsive rural advisory services. Some of the important approaches used in the project include conducting a needs assessment of women farmers before developing the training programme, holding online and evening training sessions to accommodate women’s schedules, organizing a study tour to Türkiye for women farmers and representatives from service provision, government and NGOs, and building the capacities of providers in gender responsive service delivery. It is also noteworthy that the COVID-19

⁴² The project (UTF/AZE/015/AZE) is funded and implemented under the FAO–Azerbaijan Partnership Programme (FAPP); it runs from 2020 to 2022.

pandemic necessitated the use of online training (20 sessions were conducted, covering topics such as pest management, sanitation and hygiene, beekeeping, business development, marketing and agritourism). In fact, this format allowed sessions to be recorded and broadened the reach of the training to women who were unable to attend when live, because of issues such as poor internet coverage, interruptions to electricity supply, not having a mobile phone or being busy with field work or other activities. The use of varied service delivery, digital technology and social networks are all linked to improving women's access to agricultural extension and rural advisory services.

4.7. Productive resources and inputs

Agricultural resources include a wide variety of inputs that enhance production, such as irrigation, machinery, fertilizers, pesticides and seeds, among others. In Azerbaijan, small-scale farms experience yield and quality losses due to the very limited availability of specific inputs (FAO, 2018b). Affordability and availability are factors in the low use of inputs, as is the lack of incentives (there are government subsidies for fuel and chemical fertilizers but not for organic production, for example), and limited technical knowledge and skills. Comparing the total stock of selected agricultural equipment with the number of holdings, it becomes clear that many farms are underequipped in Azerbaijan. In 2015, there were over 1.3 million holdings in total, and in 2020 the total stock of machines such as cultivators and harvesters numbered not more than one thousand units (see Table 12). The data are not disaggregated by type of farm or sex of the head of the farm.

Leasing and sales records for agricultural machinery and equipment from the Ministry of Agriculture "Agroservice" company show both a small number of leased equipment and also a slightly decreasing trend over the last few years in the purchase of such machinery (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021a). It could not be determined for this assessment whether Agroservice maintains sex-disaggregated records of farmers who lease or purchase agricultural machinery.

Research into gender-based differences in access to key inputs is very limited in Azerbaijan, but the difficulties that farmers face generally are compounded for women farmers. In horticulture, for example, farmers tend to rent equipment because it is expensive to purchase, but because of low availability, this means that they often waste time waiting until the needed equipment becomes available (Wrobel, 2018). Similarly, it is uncommon for dairy producers to use milking or

feeding equipment or for poultry producers to have heating or illumination for incubation – inputs that would streamline production and improve efficiency while also reducing manual labour (ibid.). Given the cultural and social barriers and the division of labour in which men exercise control over machinery and equipment, as well as decisions about investing farm income into their rental or purchase, women have much more limited access to agricultural machinery. Strictly speaking, they may have "access" by virtue of the equipment being part of the family farm, but they do not exercise control over it. Women farm owners and managers, who have fewer financial resources, are unlikely to own or rent machinery.

Indicators in the 2015 agriculture census for the number of family members and external employees on smallholdings with licenses to drive tractors or lorries is an imperfect measure of the proportion of holdings with particular machinery. But the data do indicate that of the large number of people employed in agriculture, relatively few hold licenses to drive trucks or tractors. However, of those people who have such permits (family members and externally hired employees), virtually all of them work on holdings headed by men. For example, out of over 22 000 people with licenses to drive tractors, only 175 were working on farms headed by women; the situation is analogous for lorry drivers (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2016).

It should be noted that in various studies, when respondents are asked about the gender division of labour on farms, they often cite differences in men's and women's physical strength. At the same time, it is not acknowledged that prevailing social norms, as well as women's more limited financial resources, create barriers to women farmers to invest in and use agricultural machinery that would enable them to perform physically demanding tasks. There are different approaches to the alleviation of the burden of manual agricultural labour on women, such as the manufacture and distribution of equipment designed with women in mind and investing in new farming practices that reduce reliance on particular equipment.

Due to the natural features of the landscape, limited water resources, scarce rainfall and climate change, farmers in Azerbaijan depend greatly on irrigation, making it a critical resource. In 2020, 1.6 million hectares of land were sown with agricultural crops, and 1.5 million hectares were under irrigation (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Statistical database [online]: Agriculture, forestry and fishing, Sown area of agricultural crops, all categories of farms and Irrigated lands, end of the year).

The World Bank estimates that the total irrigated area is equivalent to around three-quarters of the total arable land that produces 85 percent of agricultural value added (Merkle *et al.*, 2012).

Access to irrigation has important gender dimensions because women are major irrigation users, for farms and household plots. A World Bank project to rehabilitate irrigation and drainage canal networks ultimately benefited over 300 000 female water users and more than 400 000 male water users, indicating that women are significant users of irrigation in Azerbaijan (World Bank, 2018).

Yet, women's role in irrigation management is typically minimal. Irrigation is considered "male" work, and therefore even when women are managing households alone, they generally hire men for irrigation work on their farmland (Merkle *et al.*, 2012). Men and women have differing views about who are the household decision-makers concerning irrigation. One survey suggested that men perceive themselves to make decisions about irrigation independently, "no matter on which land (household plots and farmland)", while women have a different perception. They reported that decisions are more often made jointly or that they take the decisions about irrigating household plots (*ibid.*, p. 29).

Women's formal involvement in irrigation management, operation and maintenance, as measured by their representation in water users' associations (WUAs), is low. Water users' associations were first established in Azerbaijan in 1997, and in 2004, WUAs became voluntary community associations that manage on-farm irrigation systems. In 2012, there were 547 registered WUAs; at this time, 4 WUAs had women chairpersons (Merkle *et al.*, 2012). More recent data were not available, although a 2021 assessment determined that there is "almost no female representation" on WUAs in rural areas (FAO, 2021a, p. 18). One explanation for this might be the fact that membership in WUAs is based on land title ownership, but, in practice WUA staff tend to use lists that include only household heads. Women are estimated to make up only 7 to 30 percent of those who are on such lists (Merkle *et al.*, 2012).

Even in the rare cases in which women are represented among WUA members, significant structural barriers hinder their participation. Their domestic obligations and time commitments, as well as social norms, mean that women do not participate in WUAs in proportion to their number as water users, on household plots or for farming activities. Under the above-mentioned World Bank project that supported the development of WUAs, only 13 percent of women met with WUA specialists compared

with 59 percent of male members. Similarly, only 3.4 percent of women water users attended capacity-building events (most of these were women representing FHHs) while the training reached 32 percent of men water users and 77 percent of WUA administrative staff (Merkle *et al.*, 2012). Due to their absence from managerial, technical and policymaking positions in WUAs, women have lower levels of knowledge about the functions of the associations or the potential to become more active decision-makers. Ultimately, the World Bank project concluded that although a training component was dedicated to enhancing the role of women in WUAs and some women became zone representatives, overall "women's participation in WUA decision making remains low" (World Bank, 2018, p. 25).

However, the project also demonstrated that when gender is mainstreamed into irrigation management, women's engagement in this area can improve. Lessons learned include the fact that women's participation increases when their attendance is an explicit objective. Furthermore, capacity-building for WUAs can have a positive impact on changing perceptions of women's role in irrigation management. Both women and men who participated in awareness-raising training under the above-mentioned project were more likely to view women as important to irrigation management than those who had not. Finally, the project helped to improve understanding that women bring specific and important skills to water management, such as in community mobilization, communication and conflict resolution (Merkle *et al.*, 2012).

As described in the section on land tenure, IDP women who intend to engage in agriculture when resettled raised the issue of insufficient land plots and also emphasized other resources that would support them to move beyond subsistence farming, namely unimpeded access to extension and advisory services, cold storage facilities and markets, as well as the construction and maintenance of irrigation systems (Women's Empowerment for Sustainable Development Public Union, 2021). Most important here is not only ensuring equitable access to key inputs when smart agriculture is piloted in resettled areas but also replicating such models throughout the country to improve conditions for all female farmers.

4.8. Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship overlaps with farming that is undertaken for commercial purposes. In this Country Gender Assessment, the topic is discussed in a separate section because a number of national policies and programmes in Azerbaijan focus specifically on the

Box 9. Support for women entrepreneurs in rural areas

The State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations (ASAN) created **Easy Support to Family Business centres** (ABAD) to stimulate SME growth in the areas of family-based agriculture and handicrafts. Working directly with the rural population, business advisors located in the regions staff marketing centres, assist with business planning, marketing and accounting, and provide consultations on accessing markets, obtaining loans and leasing machinery and equipment. The ABAD issue certifications and arrange transport and sale of products.

When the project began, the Shaki-Zagatala Economic Zone, for instance, accounted for only 6 percent of all registered small entrepreneurs (both individuals and enterprises). While women were responsible for 52 percent of the overall income generation, less than 1 percent of female entrepreneurs were contributing income, compared with 5.4 percent of male entrepreneurs (UNDP, 2022). Thus, within the broader scope, the ABAD has a focus on women entrepreneurs, especially those in vulnerable situations, such as single mothers, women with disabilities and IDPs (UNDP, 2018b). In Shaki-Zagatala, women represent more than half of all beneficiaries, and a significant number of the participants are women farmers. Women entrepreneurs are engaged in the production of sausages, jams, pickles and dairy products, as well as handicrafts, for example (SCFWCA, 2019).

The **Association for Development of Women's Entrepreneurship** (AQSIA)⁴³ implements a project, jointly with the European Union, to support entrepreneurial development in rural areas, with one component on the involvement of women in tourism development. A spokesperson from the Association reported that as a result of their work over three years, 4 200 women in the regions have received training and, subsequently, half have expanded their businesses, 20 percent launched start-ups, 15 percent founded joint businesses and 15 percent are in the process of creating a business (information provided in an interview for this CGA).

The Association of Rural Women of Azerbaijan supports **Women Development and Enterprise Groups** that have had a positive impact on increasing women's entrepreneurship in rural areas through a self-help group model. This model focuses on group entrepreneurship for low income and less skilled women who would find it difficult to develop and sustain a business on their own. Groups of 10 to 20 women pool their savings to start and expand businesses (farm, off-farm and non-farm businesses). By building on the strengths and solidarity of members, the model mitigates the risks of doing business and helps to increase the position of women in their communities (information provided in an interview for this CGA).

development of women's businesses, with several conducted in rural areas. The development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially family businesses, in rural areas is seen as a means to improve employment opportunities overall. The 1999 Law on State Support to Small Business⁴⁴ mentions measures on involving "socially vulnerable" populations in entrepreneurial activities, and women are one of the recognized groups.

As a whole, women represent 29 percent of entrepreneurs at the SME level (SCFWCA, 2019). A much smaller proportion of enterprises have *majority* female ownership (only 10.5 percent), while 15.3 percent of all firms in Azerbaijan have *some* female ownership (World Bank, 2022). Among *individual entrepreneurs*, there are 225 858 women and 836 679 men; in other words, women represent 21.2 percent of sole entrepreneurs (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021i).

By geographical breakdown, just under a third of all individual entrepreneurs operate in Baku (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021i). It does not appear that records are kept specifically for rural-based businesses. In terms of the sectors of the economy in which their activities are located, most individual entrepreneurs, whether

⁴³ The AQSIA was established in 2017 by the National Confederation of Entrepreneurs' Organizations of Azerbaijan and the State Committee for Family, Women and Children. The Association includes 25 000 members. Among its many activities, more than 70 have been conducted to develop entrepreneurship skills for women in rural areas.

⁴⁴ No. 673-IQ of 4 June 1999.

women or men, have businesses in quite narrow fields. For women, the largest share has entrepreneurial activities in agriculture, forestry and fisheries (36.3 percent of women entrepreneurs), followed by trade (21.1 percent) and undefined private services (15.3 percent). Less than 5 percent of individual women entrepreneurs are engaged in business in each of the following sectors: accommodation and food services, real estate, educational services and producing commodities for personal consumption (ibid.). The pattern is not dissimilar to that for individual men entrepreneurs, with the exception of their greater engagement in transportation and storage, and the likelihood of having businesses in hospitality and manufacturing.

There have been no dedicated studies of entrepreneurship among the rural population, or for rural women in particular. One explanation for the fact that over a third of women individual entrepreneurs operate in agriculture (compared with a quarter of men) is the overall decline in the number of men employed in agriculture (work that has been taken up by women) as well as growth in the number of people who are self-employed in all sectors. For women, self-employment in agricultural work is an “important route for participating in the private sector economy”, and it is likely to be an entry point that takes advantage of skills and knowledge that women already have (UNDP, 2018b, p. 21).

Additionally, a number of programmes on SME development have not only focused on rural areas but also have special initiatives for women. The prevalence of women’s businesses in agriculture speaks to the impacts of these programmes, which are implemented by state entities and civil society associations (see Box 9).

The outputs of various projects aimed at engaging the rural population in business demonstrate that investing in women yields significant benefits. However, civil society experts have made the point that while the government has launched many support programmes for women’s entrepreneurship, these efforts are “not systematic and are not based on a strategy or state program for the development of women’s entrepreneurship with comprehensive and measurable goals” (“Solidarity Among Women” Public Union, 2020, p. 9). Thus, each project has its own approaches, beneficiaries and results that have not all been evaluated or documented. If monitoring and evaluation were improved, the compiled information would serve as very useful lessons learned. There is a need to assess what has worked in terms of the sustainability of rural women’s entrepreneurship as well as what is needed

to further develop SME growth, especially into new markets.

It is important to note that the lockdown measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic had adverse impacts on small businesses. Many enterprises closed or were unable to pay employees. Tourism, travel, catering, cafes, restaurants and hotels were among the worst affected, while enterprises that provided essential services or manufacturing services were fully or partially operational. For Azerbaijan as a whole, women-led businesses experienced more severe impacts mainly because they operate in sectors such as arts, entertainment and recreation, human health and social work activities. One survey conducted from April to June 2020 showed that all women entrepreneurs in the sample had closed their businesses completely (UNDP, 2020b). Rural women who participated in focus group discussions for this CGA confirmed that their business activities and the sale of agricultural goods were stagnant due to lack of demand (for confectionery, eggs, fruit, vegetables and meat that would normally have been sold for wedding parties, for example) and the fact that their businesses could not be undertaken remotely. In the post-COVID recovery period, programmes that support women’s entrepreneurship will need adjustment so that they respond to the newly emerging needs of women who lost their businesses.

4.9. Access to finance and agricultural loans

The CEDAW Committee has expressed concern that women in Azerbaijan face difficulties accessing credit due to traditional views about their role as supplementary earners and institutional barriers that discourage women from applying for loans through banks. Thus, the CEDAW Committee recommended improving access to credit along with access to other resources and training in microenterprise development as a means of empowering women economically, especially rural women (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2015).

The gap in access to financial resources is not based on legal barriers, as women have equal rights to take out loans and receive credit. Instead, structural issues such as the time women devote to unpaid labour, their work in low-paying jobs, limited savings, lack of land and other property that could serve as collateral for bank loans are all factors that women mention as the most significant obstacles to launching or expanding a business (UNDP, 2018b). Women who live in rural areas face additional hurdles in terms of the difficulties visiting financial institutions that do not have local branches. A representative from the Association for Development of

Women's Entrepreneurship in Azerbaijan, interviewed for this assessment, confirmed that access to finance is one of the most significant problems facing its members. Notably, lack of equipment was also mentioned – a problem that could be addressed if access to credit was improved.

Various government programmes to develop women's entrepreneurship provide financial support through privileged loans. For example, the Entrepreneurship Development Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan under the Ministry of Economy has soft credit lines for women, with an annual interest rate of 5 percent. From 2013 to 2018, AZN 1 785 132 was allocated to a total of 26 192 entrepreneurs for their businesses. Among this group, 2 979 were women entrepreneurs (or 11.4 percent of the total), who received loans worth AZN 82 154 (the equivalent of 4.6 percent of the total value). It is estimated that loans to women entrepreneurs have created 6 723 jobs (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2019). The number of women receiving soft loans from the Entrepreneurship Development Fund has been decreasing (109 women received loans in 2018 compared with 74 women in 2020), but this trend is also consistent for the overall number of loan recipients (ibid.; Entrepreneurship Development Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021a). Nevertheless, because "concessional government funding" is the primary source of finance for women's businesses ("Solidarity Among Women" Public Union, 2020, p. 9), it seems

unlikely that women are applying to banks in place of the Entrepreneurship Development Fund. Without comparative information about loans taken from financial institutions, it is not clear whether women are accessing funds from alternative sources or are investing less in their businesses. Overall, the share of women entrepreneurs benefiting from the state financial fund is considered to be quite low (ibid.).

The proportion of loans from the Entrepreneurship Development Fund that directly benefit recipients with businesses in rural areas could not be determined for the purposes of this assessment. However, based on the intended use of financing, it seems that a sizeable proportion of the total portfolio is allocated to rural areas. In 2020, the fund reported that 58 percent of all soft loans were planned for the development of agriculture, and 79 percent of the total loan portfolio was allocated to the regions (Entrepreneurship Development Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021b). Furthermore, the Entrepreneurship Development Fund provides microfinance to IDPs (as does the IDP Social Development Fund). Privileged loans amounting to AZN 47.7 million were given to 2 116 IDP entrepreneurs, with a large part of the microloans apportioned to agricultural projects, such as plant cultivation, cattle breeding, soil cultivation and beekeeping (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2019). The number of rural women or women IDPs among microloan recipients could not be verified for this CGA.

Table 13. Recipients of agricultural loans, by sex, 2015–2018

	Number of recipients	Percentage of recipients	Value of loans (in AZN)	Percentage share of value
Total entrepreneurs	169		10 983 500	
Men	156	92.3	10 211 000	93.0
Women	13	7.7	772 500	7.0

Source: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. 2019. *Sixth periodic report submitted by Azerbaijan under article 18 of the Convention, due in 2019*, para. 199.

Table 14. Distribution of funds to women who received agricultural loans, 2015–2018

	Number of recipients	Value of loans (in AZN)
Total loan recipients	13	772 500
For investment in:		
garden areas	2	65 000
plant cultivation	2	210 000
cattle breeding	8	399 500
fruit cultivation	1	98 000

Source: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. 2019. *Sixth periodic report submitted by Azerbaijan under article 18 of the Convention, due in 2019*, para. 199.

The Ministry of Agriculture, through the Agrarian Credit and Development Agency, also provides privileged loans to entrepreneurs to improve their agriculture-based businesses. From 2015 to 2018, 169 entrepreneurs in 46 districts received loans, of which 13 were women (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2019). Women represented under 8 percent of the total recipients, and the value of their loans was in the same proportion (see Tables 13 and 14). Interestingly, most of the women used the loans to finance investment in cattle-breeding, a subsector that is not one in which women play a significant role. Conversely, while fewer women received loans for plant cultivation, the average value of their loans was greater.

Available information about women receiving loans from the Agricultural Loan and Development Agency is not detailed enough to assess why less than 10 percent of loans went to women, especially considering that almost a third of entrepreneurs are women, and of these a considerable share conduct their business activities in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Additionally, one assessment notes that of all

farmers receiving loans from banks, 25.8 percent are women (Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan, 2020). While this figure is quite low, it is still considerably greater than the proportion of women receiving agrarian credit. It is important to determine whether women are not applying for agricultural loans and the reasons why this is the case. Records of female loan and credit recipients are maintained by separate institutions and projects, making it difficult to understand the situation as a whole. Generally, a very small percentage of women is accessing credit, compared with the total number of borrowers and their representation as entrepreneurs, in agriculture and in other sectors. A parallel, but equally important, consideration is whether women who receive loans are the ones who also make decisions about how the funds are invested, especially in the context of family farms and businesses. As discussed earlier in this report, men are typically the primary decision-makers about how household income is spent and concerning investments into farming, and so there is no guarantee that women who receive credit ultimately have control over the funds. This type of assessment would require qualitative research into how women invest financial resources.

5. Rural infrastructure and gender impacts

Improving rural infrastructure, both physical and social infrastructure, is a precondition for the development of farming and agribusiness as well as increasing opportunities to generate jobs and income (for example, through the development of tourism). A primary benefit of this is improving the living conditions of rural families. The opposite case is also true. Lack of investment into the physical infrastructure limits the possibility for increasing local jobs and this, in turn, leads to people leaving rural areas for employment elsewhere.

National development strategies, such as Azerbaijan 2020, foresee investment into improving rural road infrastructure and transport links, access to information and communication technology and access to social services. Likewise, national goals for the SDGs emphasize the importance of investing in rural infrastructure in order to strengthen agricultural production capacity.

Deficiencies in rural infrastructure affect the whole population, but there are good reasons to consider infrastructure through a gender lens. Infrastructure inadequacies can have a disproportionate impact on women and girls. For instance, gender roles mean that women and girls use some basic services more frequently, such as household energy and water, and therefore experience their deficiencies especially acutely.

5.1. Housing conditions and durable goods

In rural areas, individual houses are the dominant form of housing stock, and virtually all rural families live in privately-owned houses (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households, Distribution of households by total and living place per household member in 2020). Rural houses are larger than urban ones in terms of the number of rooms and living space per person.

Table 15. Households in possession of selected durable goods, by location, 2020

Percentage of households with:	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Refrigerator	99.9	99.9
Dishwasher	1.3	2.8
Microwave	5.7	10.5
Food processor	28.4	34.2
Washing machine	73.4	88.1
Electric vacuum cleaner	90.4	94.3
Air conditioner	28.2	56.5
Sewing machine	22.7	18.2

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households. Distribution of households by possession of durable goods by living place in 2020. In: *State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan*. Baku. Cited 3 March 2022. https://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks

Spatial location is a key determinant of access to the kinds of amenities that contribute to well-being, such as durable goods, reliable sources of energy and clean water supply. Rural households are less likely to own amenities such as washing machines, food processors, dishwashers, microwaves and air conditioners (see Table 15). These particular goods are labour-saving devices, mainly used by women, or they provide comfort in the home, where women spend more time on average. With fewer such amenities, the burden of domestic work on women in rural areas is especially heavy in terms of time and physical labour.

5.2. Energy sources

Access to electricity is virtually universal in Azerbaijan, but it is not the main source of energy for cooking or home heating. Most rural households rely on natural gas for cooking, but just over 10 percent use solid fuels for this purpose. The majority of households that use solid fuels do so in a closed stove with a chimney.

As natural gas supply has been expanded to villages (as seen in the data for 2020 in Table 17), the reliance on fuelwood and coal has lessened, as has the purchase of gas cylinders. A sizeable proportion of rural households have an outdoor space for cooking and still make use of solid fuels (for cooking and heating), especially if they cannot afford to pay gas bills. Cooking is a domestic task carried out almost exclusively by women, and therefore if the household is not using clean sources of energy, this has a direct impact on women's health.

Rural households are unlikely to have central heating. Less than 20 percent have a combi boiler (used for central heating and hot water), which means that rural households rely on gas or interior stoves/fireplaces for heating.

Just over half of rural households have a ready source of hot water, and around a quarter have water heaters (see Tables 16 and 17). This means that many rural households heat their own water for domestic use.

Table 16. Access to energy sources in rural and urban households, 2011

Percentage of households with:	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Electricity	99.9	99.9
Water heater	24.4	54.3
Place for cooking:	75.9	92.6
in the house	8.6	4.2
in a separate building	15.6	2.9
Cooking fuel:		
Electricity	7.0	6.4
Natural gas	35.7	84.7
Compressed gas (gas cylinder)	44.5	8.4
Wood/straw	11.5	0.4
Solid fuel*	12.6	0.5
Type of fire/stove in households using solid fuel:		
Closed stove with chimney	72.3	78.2
Open fire/stove with chimney	16.4	17.9
Open fire/stove with hood	4.0	0.0
Open fire/stove without chimney or hood	7.3	3.9

Note: *Solid fuel includes coal/lignite, charcoal, wood/straw and animal dung.

Source: Ministry of Health Azerbaijan Republic. 2013. *The Demographic and Health Survey, Azerbaijan, 2011*. Baku, p. 25.

Table 17. Access to energy sources in households, by location, 2020

Percentage of households with:	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Central heating	6.4	26.6
Combi boiler	17.6	29.5
Gas supply	97.6	99.3
Gas cylinder	48.6	12.5
Hot water	57.1	83.9

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households. Distribution of households according to amenities in 2020. In: *State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan*. Baku. Cited 3 March 2022. https://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks

Because women have the main responsibility for washing dishes, doing laundry and bathing children, the lack of hot water increases their domestic workload.

5.3. Water supply

Around three-quarters of rural households (76.3 percent) have a source of water piped into the premises, but the water supply may not be available on a constant basis or might be of poor quality.

Almost a quarter of rural households rely on water from sources outside of the house (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households, Distribution of households according to amenities in 2020). Rural households without water pipelines use water from wells in their yards (26.4 percent) or a source located outside including artesian or sub-artesian wells or a public tap (a combined 33.3 percent). Another 16 percent receives improved water delivered by tanker

Table 18. Source of water for households without water pipelines, by location, 2020

Percentage of households that use water from:	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Well in the yard	26.4	55.9
Artesian and sub-artesian source	19.4	35.2
Public tap	13.9	4.4
Modular water cleaner device	7.6	–
Bottled water	0.3	–
Lake, pond, canal	0.9	–
Spring water	15.1	1.9
Tanker truck	16.4	2.6
Distance to water source:		
Less than 50 m	44.4	62.7
50–100 m	31.6	10.5
101–200 m	8.7	10.6
201–500 m	7.7	14.9
more than 500 m	7.6	1.3

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households. Distribution of households according to amenities in 2020. In: *State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan*. Baku. Cited 3 March 2022. https://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks

truck and stored in barrels for household use (see Table 18). In IDP settlements, women report that local water is undrinkable, and so water is purchased from tanker trucks (Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2019).

For three-quarters of the rural population, a source of water is located 100 m or less from the home or is accessible within 30 minutes (WHO and UNICEF, 2021). It should still be kept in mind, however, that for around 15 percent of rural households, family members may travel for up to half a kilometre or further to collect water (see Table 18).

When water is needed for household use, it is women's task to collect it from water points. Increasingly, climate change has led to the decreased availability of freshwater, requiring women to travel longer distances to fetch it (Caspian Center for Energy and Environment, 2020). Although all household members are affected when water supplies are scarce, women are acutely so because they have to collect, store and ration water. When water is of poor quality (for example, it has a high mineral content) women report that they cannot use washing machines but must do laundry by hand. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women spent additional time on household cleaning and caring for ill family members; maintaining proper hygiene during the health crisis was considerably more challenging for rural women without regular access to clean water. Thus, women benefit in a number of ways from infrastructure projects to improve the domestic water supply.

In 2021, an Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on measures to improve both drinking water and irrigation water was approved. For this purpose, AZN 1.82 million was allocated to improve drinking water supplies in Ganja, Naftalan, Yevlakh, Goranboy, Goygol and Samukh.⁴⁵

5.4. Roads and rural transport

Road and transport infrastructure are vital lifelines for rural communities to connect people to important services that are not available locally (for example, banks, post offices, clinics, schools and social services). They are also important prerequisites for rural development and improving agricultural productivity because they link farms to markets in larger cities and towns and can also increase access to non-farm

businesses based in rural areas, such as tourist businesses.

Car ownership is slightly more common in rural areas (where 42.2 percent of households own cars, in contrast to only 34.8 percent of urban households). There are significant gender asymmetries, however. Only 19.6 percent of FHHs have cars, compared with 43.3 percent of MHHs (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households, Distribution of households by possession of durable goods by living place in 2020 and Distribution of households by possession of durable goods by sex of household head in 2020). Households headed by women are less likely to purchase cars because of their lower levels of income generally, but the ability to drive also reflects gender roles. Young men are likely to be taught to drive a car, but the practice of driving is unusual for women (for instance, one survey found that 67 percent of men are taught to drive as teenagers in contrast to 11 percent of women; Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2015b). Participants in focus group discussions conducted for this assessment pointed out that in rural areas, men typically are the ones in charge of three types of transport: cars, tractors and animal-drawn vehicles, indicating that gender stereotypes about women as drivers have an influence on women's mobility. If women do not have independent access to cars or other forms of transport, this can have secondary effects on their abilities to earn a living or to pursue educational and other opportunities.

Women, in general, rely on public transportation to a greater degree than men. In rural Azerbaijan, households are farther from public transport than urban ones, as illustrated in Table 19. However, most rural households are within 15 minutes of some form of public transport. A separate question concerns whether the transport routes, timetables and the cost of fares match the needs of women travellers, especially women who tend to make multiple short journeys (rather than simple daily journeys only to and from work) and often travel with their children.

Age and social norms are separate factors that affect women's mobility. In rural areas, older women and women who are the heads of households generally do not face social restrictions on travelling independently, but they often need permission from the family first. Young women, in contrast, are "always accompanied while travelling" (FAO Azerbaijan, 2018, p. 11, p. 79). By extension, this arrangement implies that young women need the agreement of family members for travel, which can limit their opportunities to participate in training or other activities for personal development.

⁴⁵ Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on additional measures to improve the supply of irrigation water to arable lands in a number of cities and regions and to meet the needs of the population for drinking water. 6 May 2021. <https://president.az/az/articles/view/51388>

Table 19. Distance from public transport for households, by location, 2020

Time to public transport:	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Less than 5 minutes	24.4	44.1
5–15 minutes	54.7	48.4
16–30 minutes	20.0	7.5
Over 30 minutes	0.9	0.0

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Statistical database [online]: Budgets of households. Distribution of households according to amenities in 2020. In: *State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan*. Baku. Cited 3 March 2022. https://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks

Focus group participants for this gender assessment provided information about patterns of women's mobility and its impacts on their access to agricultural markets and other channels to sell their goods. The participants stated that it is mainly men who take produce such as grapes and fruit to markets, while women are more likely to sell products from their own yards, but only if they live on busy roads. Women in the focus groups pointed out that the main barriers they face in selling their products relate to infrastructure, such as the lack of large buses from their villages to regional markets (the cost of taxis for this purpose is prohibitive) and the fact that there are no collection points in their particular region where they can sell their products locally to wholesalers. Improved infrastructure would benefit all farmers to reach points higher up on the value chain but would be especially helpful to women farmers whose mobility is more limited.

5.5. Information and communication technology

The information and communication technology (ICT) sector is a focus for national development, as demonstrated in the Azerbaijan 2020 concept and a state programme to implement the National Strategy on the Development of an Information Society for 2016–2020.⁴⁶ Planned developments include improving the ICT infrastructure, increasing the digital readiness of the population and reducing the digital divide that exists between various population groups and between urban and rural settlements.

The spatial divide in terms of ICTs mainly concerns the particular devices that are used. For instance, the rural population is less likely to own computers. According to national estimations in 2020, 60.5 percent of rural households, compared with 86.6 percent of urban ones, had a computer in the home (a desktop, portable

computer or tablet; State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021f). However, mobile phones are ubiquitous in rural areas; 97.9 percent of rural households have a mobile phone (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Statistical database [online]: Budget of households, Distribution of households by possession of durable goods by living place in 2020). Mobile-broadband coverage in Azerbaijan is above average for the region; most people in rural areas are connected to a 3G or 4G network, and generally "the prices for mobile and fixed telecommunication services are relatively low" (ITU and FAO, 2020, p. 14).

Rural and urban residents use home internet with the same frequency: most do so every day and for similar purposes. The primary difference between the two groups is that the rural population is less likely to interact with public services online or to sell goods and services, but uses the internet for education and training slightly more often (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021f). It is also notable that use of the internet at work is far less common for rural employees (only 7.9 percent of the rural population used the internet in the workplace in the three months prior to being surveyed, compared with 19.5 percent of the urban population; *ibid.*).

The term "gender digital divide" refers to the fact that women and girls tend to use digital technology less than their male peers and for different purposes. In Azerbaijan, women-led households are less likely than those headed by men to have personal computers in any form or to have internet access, although there have been positive developments in both of these indicators for women. From 2013 to 2019, the proportion of women owning mobile phones increased from 66.6 percent to 72.1 percent, but this is still less than the proportion of men owning mobiles (77.5 percent; State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2020). The overall proportion of individuals using the internet

⁴⁶ Adopted by Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, No. 2345 of 20 September 2016.

has also increased in the same period, with women representing just under half of users in 2019 at 47.8 percent (ibid.). Comparing women and men, the rate of internet use is almost equal: 83.4 percent of all women and 85.8 percent of all men are internet users (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021i). However, information about the distinct reasons that men and women use the internet, especially whether they have access to e-services or make use of ICTs in their businesses, as well as any difficulties in using ICTs, is needed.

Intersectional data disaggregated by age, sex and location (for rural areas) is also needed because ICTs are increasingly vital to agriculture and for rural development. ICTs have the potential to transform the ways in which farmers and entrepreneurs operate in rural areas, through improved access to innovation and knowledge as well as to financial services and markets, by increasing the reach of networking and advisory services, and also for monitoring and tracking (for example, in the context of disaster risk management, food safety and traceability standards, and pest/disease surveillance). In Azerbaijan, strategic planning around agriculture envisions several digital innovations, such as the use of an integrated electronic information portal (through EAIS), providing information to farmers via the internet, social media and mobile phones and establishing e-agriculture. The latter has several components, including the use of open data, “creating online public services for rural areas, incubating agri-tech start-ups, and encouraging digital literacy for farmers and rural e-commerce” (ITU and FAO, 2020, p. 15). Many of these initiatives, such as the creation of a rural business information system, are in the early phase, and so their accessibility to rural entrepreneurs and farmers cannot yet be assessed. Neither was it possible in this CGA to determine what steps have been taken to improve the digital literacy of women among farmers and small business owners so that they can take advantage of developments in e-agriculture.

FAO assessments suggest that ICTs could bring significant benefits to women in the context of smart agriculture, requiring targeted investment and support. For example, while women in rural areas are rarely informed about state-provided opportunities to join training for farmers or about existing extension services, they are well-connected digitally and have access to social networks. Thus, using ICTs to share information is a means to overcome persistent gender-based barriers. Indeed, the experience of FAO during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that online training sessions were accessible to women both when delivered live and in a recorded format. With the development of smart villages and smart agriculture, enhancing the digital literacy of the rural population to take full advantage of

new technologies will become increasingly important. In the coming years there will be key opportunities to ensure that rural women are not left behind but also that they are empowered ICT users, as citizens, farmers and business owners.

5.6. Social infrastructure

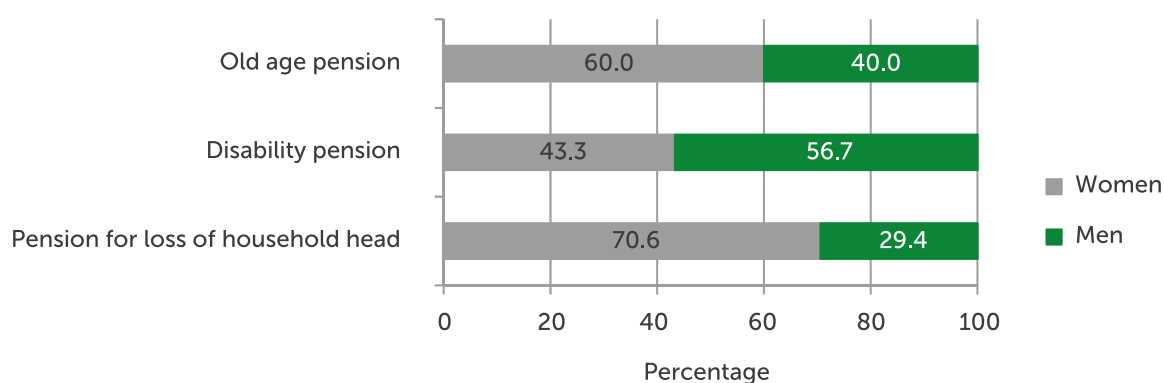
A large proportion of the population relies upon social payment. While this Country Gender Assessment does not review the system of social allowances in detail, the gender dimensions of social protection are discussed here. There are three types of pension payments in Azerbaijan: in old age, for disability and for the loss of the breadwinner. In 2021, around 12 percent of the country’s population received pension payments, of which 58.3 percent were old age pensions, 30.4 percent were for disability and the remaining 11.3 percent received pensions for loss of the main breadwinner (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021h). There is no disaggregation for rural and urban populations.

Women represent a larger share of pension recipients – 60 percent of those receiving old age pensions because of their earlier retirement age (62 for women and 67 for men⁴⁷) and longer life spans on average. They are also more likely to receive pensions due to the loss of a breadwinner. In contrast, a greater proportion of men receive disability pensions, which reflects the fact that they more often work in dangerous and hazardous conditions that expose them to risks for injury (see Figure 18).

Women are entitled to social allowances for pregnancy, birth and child care leave (for working parents), and there are additional benefits for low-income families, single mothers and mothers of five or more children. In Azerbaijan, maternity benefits are granted to all employees with a labour contract. Women who are contracted employees but perform jobs in their homes are entitled to maternity leave (ILO, 2014). During prenatal and postnatal leave, women receive a cash benefit equal to 100 percent of their actual earnings prior to taking leave. The law does not include paternity leave benefits.

Notably, women who work in agricultural production (such as in the production of grain, cotton, tobacco, tea, fruit, potatoes, fodder, cereals, horticulture, viticulture, vegetable growing, dairy production and in the breeding of pigs, sheep, poultry, horses, rabbits, cocoons

⁴⁷ The age for pension eligibility is lower for women and men who have raised three or more children or one child with special needs – age 57 years for women and 62 years for men, in the case of the mother’s death or deprivation of maternal rights, and if not remarried.

Figure 18. Proportion of pension recipients, by sex, 2021

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Statistical database [online]: Social security. Number of pensioners, by sex. In: *State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan*. Baku. Cited 3 March 2022. https://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks

[sericulture], beekeeping and fishing) are entitled to 140 calendar days for prenatal and postnatal leave (14 days more than the usual pregnancy and post-birth period), as well as additional days, above the usual amount, for difficult births or for multiple births (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2022b). This provision applies to women who are employed full-time in agriculture with a contract, and not those who work seasonally, part-time or who are unpaid workers on family farms. Thus, a large number of women who engage in agricultural production on family farms are not actually eligible for this benefit.

The government provides a single monthly allowance to IDPs that increased from AZN 40 to AZN 60 in 2019. Almost 500 000 IDPs are eligible for this allowance (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2019). However, a breakdown by sex or location of IDP recipients was not found for this assessment.

It is worth noting that, among a number of social protection measures implemented by the government to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Targeted State Social Assistance programme for low-income families was expanded in April 2020 to include an additional 12 000 families. The monthly payment amount was also increased.

Child care and preschool education

The care infrastructure, which encompasses affordable child care and other home- or community-based services, is underdeveloped in rural Azerbaijan. Women take on the larger responsibility for child care and the care of family members who are older, have disabilities or have chronic illnesses. When support services are unavailable, this restricts the time and opportunities that women have to engage in paid employment outside the home, to take part in training or other development projects, and to participate in local decision-making.

The only data available for this CGA with which to assess spatial disparities in the care infrastructure concerns child care and preschool facilities. The availability of early childhood education can be a deciding factor in whether women are able to return to or enter the workforce, and even more so for women living in rural areas. Women tend to leave employment when they have children, and young women face difficulties entering the labour market, given expectations that they will leave their jobs once they start a family.

Out of all child care and preschool educational institutions in Azerbaijan (both state and private nurseries and kindergartens), around a third are located in rural areas (726 institutions out of 1 825 in total; State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021e). There are virtually no private preschools in rural areas. In fact, private preschools are not accessible to many families, due to their high cost. The monthly payment for a private preschool is close to the average monthly wage, but most women's earnings are below this average (ILO, 2014). Almost every other urban child aged one to five is enrolled in preschool education (44.8 percent), compared with only one in every five rural children (20.1 percent), with no significant difference in attendance rates for boys and girls (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021e).

The government had deprioritized financing for preschool institutions, resulting in their closure. But as recently as 2018, it had invested public funds into the child care sector, for the construction of new preschool child care facilities in 15 locations across the country (UNDP, 2018b). Children in specific categories, including the children of student mothers and of single working parents, among others, are given preferential access to public child care facilities.

6. Food security and nutrition

The Food Security Program of the Republic of Azerbaijan is credited with increasing agricultural and food production and, consequently, reducing the prevalence of undernourishment to less than 2.5 percent of the total population. Severe food insecurity has been virtually eradicated in the country, although the prevalence of “moderate or severe” food insecurity in the total population has increased in the period from 2014 to 2016 (when it was 5.9 percent) to the period of 2018 to 2020 (when it was 8.9 percent; FAO *et al.*, 2021, p. 135).

Azerbaijan is on course to meet targets concerning maternal, infant and young child nutrition, but at the same time is showing a lack of progress in addressing poor nutritional outcomes at the other end of the spectrum, meaning increasing rates of childhood and adult overweight and obesity. As depicted in Table 20, overweight and obesity rates vary by age and by sex, but the overarching trend has been an increase since 2000. In parallel, rates of diabetes are rising among women and men (Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd., 2020).

Girls and boys, as well as women and men, have similar overweight rates, with risks increasing with age. Obesity

rates are quite high among adult women. Higher rates of overweight and obesity are correlated with income level. Among women, obesity prevalence tends to increase as income decreases. This pattern is different for men.

There is also evidence of micronutrient deficiencies among women in Azerbaijan. The prevalence of anaemia among pregnant women aged 15 to 49 has increased since 2000 (from 34.3 to 40.1 percent in 2016). Among non-pregnant women, rates of anaemia have fluctuated over this same period but remain at 2000 levels (38.4 percent for non-pregnant women; Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd., 2020). Target 2.2. for SDG 2 on ending all forms of malnutrition by 2025 pays particular attention to the nutritional needs of adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women.

Intra-household decisions about and responsibilities for food preparation and nutrition have a gender dimension. For instance, women’s role in food preparation begins from a young age. According to one survey, 81.9 percent of women helped prepare food at home starting before the age of 18 (compared to

Table 20. Nutritional status of children and adults, by sex, 2016

	Children and adolescents (aged 5–19)	
	Girls (%)	Boys (%)
Overweight	19.0	18.7
Obesity	4.4	5.3
	Adults	
	Women (%)	Men (%)
Overweight	54.1	52.9
Obesity	23.6	15.8

Source: Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2020. *Global nutrition report, Country Nutrition Profile for Azerbaijan*. In: *Global Nutrition Report*. Bristol, UK. Cited 3 March 2022. <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/asia/western-asia/azerbaijan>

44 percent of men), and this responsibility continues when they start their own families (UNFPA and SCWFCA, 2018). Nutritional education that targets women can address the preparation and over-consumption of calorie dense foods. Seen through a gender lens, improving food security requires thought about whether women have the purchasing power to afford the most nutritious foods for themselves and their families. At the same time, men's role in food shopping means that they too may need information about nutrition in order to select the optimal foods.

Small farms play a key role in increasing food security as they supply almost half of all agricultural production in Azerbaijan. Target 2.3 of SDG 2 notes that, among smallholders, women must have secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment if food productivity is to be increased. Thus, SDG 2 is mutually reinforcing with Goal 5 on gender equality (especially Target 5.A). Corresponding to SDG 2, the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan has set targets to "double the incomes of small food producers, especially women, family farms and farmers" (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021, p. 64). Increasing the status of women as farmers, as well as ensuring their equitable access to productive resources has far reaching consequences, not only for women's own economic empowerment but to enhance agricultural productivity and increase nutritious food stocks.

6.1. Climate change adaptation and management

Climate change is bringing about environmental challenges for Azerbaijan through slow-onset processes such as rising temperatures and fluctuations in sea level, soil degradation and salinization, drought and water scarcity. Natural disasters, including flooding, landslides and earthquakes have a particular impact on rural communities. An estimated 67 865 people were displaced by natural disasters between 2009 and 2014, with the Kura-Araz region the most affected (IOM, 2016).

Climate change is expected to place particular stresses on water resources. In 2009, for example, 1.5 million hectares of land were no longer suitable for agriculture due to salinization (IOM, 2016). For arid and semi-arid farming regions, where most of the country's agricultural areas are located, limited water resources increase farmers' dependency on irrigation. Climate change has the potential to reduce agricultural harvests

and yields, thus decreasing the locally available food supply that is already insufficient to meet the demands of the population.

Environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change and climate vulnerability all have gender dimensions. Not only are men and women affected differently, but they have different needs and capacities for adaptation. On the one hand, women's role as providers of food, energy and water makes them more dependent on natural ecosystems and hence more vulnerable to environmental degradation than men. Similarly, to the extent that climate change has an impact on some areas where women perform most of the labour, such as horticulture, cotton growing or dairy production, they will be disproportionately affected by poor agricultural outcomes. Extreme climate events exacerbate pre-existing gender disparities, such as the risks of poverty, unequal access to resources and limited mobility, that place women in especially vulnerable positions.

On the other hand, women are important agents for change and their contributions to climate change policy are needed for effective solutions. When a gender lens is applied to disaster risk reduction and women participate in disaster preparedness on an equal basis with men, they can contribute their knowledge and expertise to strategies to address the impacts of climate change.

Climatic changes have affected farmers in Azerbaijan, with particular consequences for women working in agriculture in terms of reducing their crop yields and income. Some women farmers have had to look for alternative employment, as seasonal workers on other farms or they have abandoned their land altogether (Caspian Center for Energy and Environment, 2020). Women farmers face difficulties adapting to climate change due to their limited knowledge of adaptation strategies and access to resources to adopt new practices. However, there are also promising examples of women who have returned to traditional farming methods and found additional resource streams, such as in agritourism, in the face of changing climate conditions (Abasli, 2020). There is a need for the documentation and dissemination of such practices.

At the policy level, an analysis of official documents presented to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change indicates that there is a "relatively low degree of gender mainstreaming in existing climate policies" of Azerbaijan (Caspian Center for Energy and Environment, 2020). This process is improving, however. The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, the governmental body tasked with developing and

implementing the National Adaptation Plan to improve climate change adaptation actions, has supported capacity-building on gender-sensitive climate change adaptation strategies for national and local government stakeholders, technical specialists and the private sector. The ministry will include information disaggregated by sex in the results framework and gender analysis as part of its monitoring and evaluation (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and UNDP, 2019).

Azerbaijan 2030 envisages green growth through, among other initiatives, the promotion of environmentally friendly green technologies and renewable energy sources. Environmental goals and goals on achieving gender equality are mutually reinforcing, and the development of green economic policies can also contribute to reducing gender gaps in several key areas. A representative from the Ministry

of Ecology and Natural Resources, interviewed for this assessment, noted the importance of women's involvement in environmental projects under the wider green economic strategy. There are several dimensions that should be considered through a gender lens, beginning with the drafting of gender-responsive green economic policy. In order to ensure that women benefit from green job creation, parallel measures must be taken to reduce gender segregation in education and in industry. Balanced representation of women in relevant "green" subjects in TVET and in higher education is needed so that women can meet the demands of the market. Similarly, new business opportunities will arise for green enterprises, in renewable energy for instance, but if programmes to support green SME development do not consider the specific nature of women entrepreneurs and their needs, there is a risk that they will be left behind.

7. Recommendations

The recommendations in the following section are generated from the findings of this Country Gender Assessment. The recommendations also reflect a consensus call for action that was a key outcome of a regional conference on Promoting socially inclusive rural development in Europe and Central Asia: Action for the 2030 Agenda, convened by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia with the support of the European Institute for Gender Equality, in Vilnius, Lithuania in 2017 (FAO, 2018c).

Many of the recommendations are directed to FAO in the context of implementing the Country Programming Framework for 2021–2025 that acknowledges and aims to address the most critical gender inequalities in agriculture and rural development. Additional recommendations are directed to policymakers, with a focus on the state structures with mandates concerning agriculture and rural development and on improving the status of women in Azerbaijan, as well as to civil society organizations.

7.1. For FAO

1. In implementing the CPF for 2021–2025:
 - » Ensure that gender is mainstreamed throughout the Country Programming Framework. Priority areas, targets, outcomes, outputs, activities and indicators of the CPF should take gender inequalities and gaps into consideration and address them as part of broader commitments made by the government towards achieving the SDGs and pro-people and pro-poor development.
 - » Include activities and related outputs in the CPF on assisting the government to: elaborate a national action plan for gender equality and rural development; conduct a national forum for rural women; and implement gender-sensitive agricultural and rural development policies. Special attention should be dedicated to supporting the government to conduct resettlement programmes and to create smart villages in a gender-sensitive manner.
2. In raising the visibility of rural women as well as women's role in agriculture:
 - » Promote and support gender-sensitive research (for example, by the Ministry of Agriculture and Baku State University) in order to improve the knowledge base about rural women and women in agriculture. Some areas for which analysis is lacking in Azerbaijan include: gender-based value chain analysis that examines barriers and opportunities for women; assessments of women's access to agricultural inputs, advisory services and agriculture associations; and analysis of women's businesses in rural areas and opportunities for their diversification (for example, rural tourism and handicrafts).
 - » Design and implement advocacy campaigns to raise the profile of rural women, dispel gender stereotypes and promote the benefits of gender equality for households, smallholders and the economic development of the country as a whole, working in cooperation with state agencies (including the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences).
3. In working with government and other stakeholders:
 - » Prioritize awareness-raising and capacity building of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, and other key institutions to meet international commitments on gender mainstreaming in the formulation of state policy on agriculture, rural development and food security.
 - » Provide capacity building to the State Statistics Committee on the production and dissemination of gender statistics, increasing the use of gender-specific indicators in data collections that are currently gender neutral, and adding indicators relevant to agriculture and rural development to existing collections of gender statistics. Promote the use of the FAO Core Set of Gender Indicators in Agriculture to generate and disseminate statistics about women's role in agriculture (see Annex for a

preliminary assessment of data availability for the gender indicators).

- » Provide capacity building to the Ministry of Agriculture and other relevant institutions to increase gender-sensitive record-keeping, to disaggregate registries of farmers by sex as well as other relevant characteristics, and to regularly conduct analysis based on the disaggregated data.
- » Promote the Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) methodology to measure asset ownership⁴⁸ in order to address information gaps concerning women's ownership of and control over land assets.
- » Support the government in the process of returning internally displaced persons to their former places of residence and ensuring their economic development and social reintegration, while taking a gender-responsive approach throughout. Provide assistance in pilot or demonstration sites for gender-responsive smart agriculture that can serve as models for other parts of the country.

7.2. For government and national institutions

1. For the Milli Majlis:

- » Conduct gender expertise of national legislation on agriculture, rural development and food security, taking into consideration commitments under CEDAW Article 14 and the SDGs. Likewise, prepare recommendations for amendments to existing and draft laws to increase their gender sensitivity. Relevant laws should ensure that women and men have equal rights, access to and control over natural and productive resources and that they contribute to and benefit from sustainable agriculture and rural development on an equal basis.

2. For the Cabinet of Ministers:

- » Approve gender-responsive policies and programmes for agriculture, food security and rural development (in areas such as smart agriculture and agoparks, for example) that reinforce women's equal rights and access to services, markets and decent work.

- » Develop policy and programmes in support of SMEs that aim to assist women and men in rural areas to expand from individual entrepreneurship and cottage industries into larger business ventures. Policy and programming should be holistic to create an entrepreneurship ecosystem for rural entrepreneurs that covers business development support, skill building and knowledge transfer services. Attention should be paid to ensuring that rural women have equal rights and access to such business development services, finance, markets and decent work.

3. For the Ministry of Agriculture:

- » Ensure that data collection and farm registries are disaggregated by sex and other relevant characteristics; regularly analyse these data and disseminate the results to key stakeholders and the public.
- » Conduct gender-sensitive assessments concerning the availability, provision and need for extension and rural advisory services, for farmers and others who engage in agricultural production, to inform the creation of gender-responsive and demand-driven services.
- » Increase women's access to extension and rural advisory services through gender-sensitive measures, such as training and employing female extension agents, developing extension materials based on the needs of women farmers, accommodating women's schedules (during the day and also seasonally) and establishing information portals that can be accessed digitally or through existing social networks.

- » Support research and value chain analysis (for example, of cotton growing, horticulture, viticulture, livestock breeding, sericulture and apiculture) with a gender perspective to identify areas for investment to eliminate barriers and increase women's engagement in these subsectors.

- » Develop pilot or demonstration sites for gender-responsive smart agriculture that can serve as models and be replicated throughout the country.

4. For the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population:

- » Develop policies on income diversification and off-farm employment for women and men and the formalization of the work performed by rural women on family farms and enterprises, in line with priorities under the Azerbaijan–United Nations

⁴⁸ See EDGE methodology at <https://unstats.un.org/edge/methodology/asset/>; and pilot projects by the Asian Development Bank in Georgia at <https://www.adb.org/publications/measuring-asset-ownership-entrepreneurship-gender-survey>.

Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for 2021–2025 on labour market transformation and increasing access to decent work.

- » Strengthen support for initiatives on diverse forms of women’s employment in rural areas, for example through the development of small businesses and self-employment opportunities for women and men. Particular attention should be given to adjusting programmes on women’s entrepreneurship to address the emerging needs of women who lost businesses, employees or revenue as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. For the Ministry of Education:

- » Amend and introduce new specialities in higher education that reflect emerging trends in smart agriculture and green and renewable energy in order to prepare new specialists.

6. For the State Statistical Committee:

- » Adopt the FAO Core Set of Gender Indicators in Agriculture, and generate and disseminate sex-disaggregated data for the agriculture sector.

7. For the State Committee for Family, Women and Children’s Affairs:

- » Working jointly with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population, organize special education and training programmes, with attention to particular groups of women, including women who head households, especially in the 65 years and older cohort (in line with SDG 4 on lifelong learning opportunities for all), young women (to increase their opportunities in STEM education and employment) and IDP women who are returning to rural areas.
- » Conduct inter community learning opportunities for women living and working in rural areas, in which diverse groups of women can share their experiences (for instance, intergenerational sessions).
- » Empower rural women in order to ensure their equal voice and participation in decision making within rural institutions and organizations, including those

that represent farmers and deal with agricultural extension and subsidies and the management of irrigation, water and forest resources, for example.

- » Promote the equitable distribution of responsibilities, including at the household level, to reduce rural women’s overall work burden.

8. For the State Committee for Refugees and IDPs:

- » In implementing resettlement programmes for IDPs, ensure that all interventions are gender-sensitive, taking into account differences in the needs of women and men IDPs, as well as women who are the heads of households.

9. For the National Agency on Tourism:

- » Draft a gender-sensitive concept for rural tourism in Azerbaijan that outlines potential income-earning and employment opportunities for women, based on both cultural traditions and in non-traditional sectors.

7.3. For civil society organizations

The following recommendations are directed to NGOs and CSOs broadly, including service-providing and advocacy groups, professional associations, academia and the media.

- » Undertake activities to increase knowledge about the issues facing rural women as well as their contributions to agriculture and their communities (for example, research, alternative reports and media reports).
- » For providers of extension and rural advisory services, including NGOs, identify the information and knowledge needs of rural women engaged in agricultural activities in order to devise gender sensitive services that meet these needs. Adopt proactive approaches to reaching and engaging with rural women for knowledge and technology transfer, learning and training activities.
- » For academic institutions, develop a curriculum on women in agriculture with a focus on implementing the SDGs and other international commitments.

Annex: Core Set of Gender Indicators in Agriculture

The following chart is a preliminary assessment of the data that are available in the Republic of Azerbaijan for the FAO suggested gender indicators developed by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. The assessment is based only on the most recent

agricultural census (2015) and was conducted by independent gender experts. A more detailed analysis requires inputs from the State Statistical Committee and Ministry of Agriculture to assess what data exist, what could be generated and where indicators are lacking.

Gender indicator for the holding*	Availability of data
1. Distribution of holdings by sex of the holder	✓
2. Average size of the holder's household by sex of the holder	
3. Average age of the holder and his/her household members by sex of the holder	✓
4. Percentage of holdings with hired labour by sex of the holder	✓
5. Percentage of holdings with the risk of food shortage by sex of the holder	
6. Percentage of holdings with holder's education level over a certain level by sex of the holder	✓**
7. Percentage of holdings receiving agricultural extension services by sources of agricultural extension services and sex of the holder	
8. Percentage of holdings participating in farmer organizations and cooperatives by sex of the holder	
9. Average area of holding by land use type and sex of the holder	
10. Average number of livestock by species and sex of the holder	
11. Average area of forest and other wooded land as primary land use by sex of the holder	
12. Average area of aquaculture by sex of the holder	
13. Percentage of holdings with irrigated land by land use type and sex of the holder	
14. Percentage of holdings using chemicals by type of chemicals and sex of holder	
15. Percentage of holdings with selected machinery and equipment by sex of the holder	
16. Percentage of holdings receiving credit for agricultural purposes by sex of the holder	
17. Percentage of holdings by type of farming (crop – temporary, permanent, livestock, aquaculture and forestry) and sex of the holder	
18. Percentage of holdings with other gainful activity in the household by type of activity and sex of the holder	

Notes:

* Or household when no data for holding is available. In that case, the holder should be substituted by the household head.

** The agriculture census includes data on the number of employees on smallholdings with specific educational specialities, by sex of the head of the holding.

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