1. Background and Development Context

Azerbaijan exhibits near gender parity in some spheres (education and literacy rates) but shows distinctive inequalities in terms of women’s empowerment overall, especially in women’s participation in public and political spheres, and in decision making. Azerbaijan has a Gender Inequality Index value of 0.314, ranking it 50 out of 146 countries in the 2011 index. In Azerbaijan, 16% of parliamentary seats are held by women. About 65% of women have reached secondary or higher level of education compared with nearly 62% of their male counterparts. Female participation in the labor market is nearly 60% compared with 67% for men—higher than other countries of the former Soviet Union.

2. Gender relations in Azerbaijan are influenced by many factors, but three dominate: (i) the legacy of the Soviet policy on gender equality, where gender equality existed to some extent through quotas in political and economic representation; (ii) social and economic difficulties of the transition period, exacerbated by the occupation of Azerbaijani territories; and (iii) traditional Azeri values and culture. The Soviet approach to gender equality provided men and women with formal equality in terms of access to education, health care, and employment and, to a great extent, political office. However, during this period, women were never fully emancipated from their traditional responsibilities for unpaid work, mainly childcare and other household duties.

2. Policies and Institutional Mechanisms to Promote Gender Equality in Azerbaijan

3. Since the transition period, the government has shown strong commitment to gender equality in national legislation, including the constitution, and in the government’s support for the Beijing Platform for Action and ratification (1995) of the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. A broad-based gender equality law—the Law of Azerbaijan on Gender (Men and Women) Equity Assurances, passed in 2006—prohibits gender discrimination in all forms and provides guarantees of gender equality in a broad range of spheres, including employment and remuneration. The Labor Code includes provisions on gender equality in some key aspects of employment relations although not on pay. Other key legislation includes the law on domestic violence adopted in May 2010. Furthermore, a national action plan for gender equity is planned to be developed under Azerbaijan 2020: Look into the Future.

4. The State Program on Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development, 2008–2015 (SPPRSD) has been praised by the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women for fully incorporating a gender perspective. The promotion and protection of gender equality is one of nine strategic goals of the SPPRSD, and gender issues are prioritized in the labor market and employment, education, health, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees sections. The SPPRSD targets an increase in the representation of women in decision-making bodies by 2015. The State Committee on Family, Women and Children’s Affairs is the executive body charged with implementation of gender equality policies. Ministries and government agencies have assigned staff to be in charge of gender issues.

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1 This summary is based on various Asian Development Bank (ADB) technical assistance reports and consultations with relevant government agencies and other stakeholders.
2 Azerbaijan 2020: Look into the Future (accessible from the list of linked documents in Appendix 2).
3. Selected Key Issues

5. **Women in employment.** Women made up 48.4% of the labor force as of 2012. There is a large gender pay gap. In 2012 the average monthly wage for women was AZN243.6, or only 46.9% of the men’s average monthly wage (AZN519.8). Women are also heavily concentrated in lower-paid, public sector activities such as education (71.7% female in 2012) and health and social services (78.1% female in 2012). Women own only 10.8% of registered enterprises, which is low compared with a neighboring country such as Georgia (40.8%).

6. **Gender gaps in access to health and education.** Attendance of skilled personnel during childbirth and the provision of high quality antenatal care are low (88%) in comparison to other countries in the South Caucasus. Maternal mortality has improved but remains comparatively high within the region. Contraceptive use is low and the majority of women continue to use traditional methods. Primary and secondary enrolment rates, and youth and adult literacy rates are all high and at, or close to, parity.

7. **Women in civil society organizations.** According to a United Nations Development Programme report on gender attitudes, 2,200 nongovernment organizations (NGOs) are officially registered in the country, of which 67 are women’s organizations. In 2010 the number of women’s NGOs was estimated at 105, operating in fields such as human rights, environment, peace and safety, and humanitarian aid. One of the biggest problems for women’s NGOs is that they cannot work in coalitions, associations, or teams, which inhibits their coalescing around a common goal. They also demonstrate low capacity on how to lobby for certain laws, decisions, and programs, or how to use mass media effectively to promote their ideas or inform the public about persistent inequalities.

4. ADB Operations and Gender Issues in Country Partnership Strategy Priority Areas

8. Gender perspectives were integrated into ADB’s country program in 2008, mainly in the water and sanitation sector. Gender mainstreaming entry points in the transport and energy sectors have been limited. However, ADB’s regional technical assistance on promoting gender-inclusive growth in Central and West Asia developing member countries is providing opportunities to work with women NGOs and support capacity development of the national statistics system. Key gender issues in sectors prioritized in the country partnership strategy, 2014–2018 are described below. Recommendations on how to increase women’s participation and strengthen their empowerment in these sectors have been identified. The indicative assistance pipeline for Azerbaijan has a target of at least 40% of resources supporting gender equity and effective gender mainstreaming during 2014–2016.

a. Water Supply and Sanitation

9. Although incomes have significantly increased and poverty has declined greatly, access to clean water is still lacking. Because of insufficient urban and social services, women in the regions outside of Baku carry the burden of securing the family water supply, as well as the

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health and hygiene of the family. The participation of women needs to be increased in the water and sanitation sector. The share of women working at the municipal decision-making level is insufficient at 4%.

10. Opportunities for improving gender mainstreaming in ADB’s future investments in the sector include the following:
   (i) Decrease the amount of time women spend on securing water for household use and caring for the sick (as a result of waterborne diseases or inadequate sanitation services).
   (ii) Involve women as hygiene change makers through awareness raising campaigns.
   (iii) Increase women’s participation in decision making in sector agencies.

b. Transport (Roads)

11. In the transport sector, the main issues for women and girls are lack of public transportation, lack of quality secondary roads, lack of appropriate resting stations including toilet facilities, and long travel times caused by road conditions that impact negatively on access to social services and markets. Road safety is another concern for women and girls and may impact negatively on girls’ school attendance. Lack of lighting, bus stops, pedestrian crossings, and road signs all impede travel accessibility. Good quality road access will save women’s time for productive activities and facilitate their access to services and markets to sell their goods. Women are underrepresented in the management and operations of the transport sector.

12. Opportunities for improving gender mainstreaming of ADB’s future investments in the sector include the following:
   (i) Conduct social and gender analysis of transportation projects in populated regions to assess how women and men can fully benefit from improved road networks.
   (ii) Increase women’s employment and career development in the transport sector.
   (iii) Address the income-generating needs of women along transport corridors such as training on business development, financial literacy, and improved access to finance to maximize benefits from faster access to markets and improved trade.
   (iv) Plan and coordinate roadside infrastructure development such as sanitary facilities and facilities specifically for female travelers.
   (v) Address traffic and transport safety and the availability of public transport for women and girls.

c. Energy

13. Gender patterns are explicit in the energy sector in Azerbaijan. Men make decisions on sources and types of energy, even though women are the primary users of energy in the home and are therefore more vulnerable to risks related to energy supply and use. Women lack information on efficient energy use. Irregular power supply has a particularly negative impact on the elderly and women in rural or remote areas.

14. In 2012 women’s employment was only 15% in the energy sector of Azerbaijan, and only 12.6% in the mining sector. Despite the high income potential, the energy sector had no female private entrepreneurs in 2010.

15. Opportunities for improving gender integration in ADB’s investments in the sector are as follows:
(i) Develop public communication strategies in which women are trained and paid as change agents to promote energy efficiency (e.g., usage of energy saving appliances).

(ii) Develop consumer feedback mechanisms where women can voice their concerns and receive immediate responses.

(iii) Increase women’s employment and career opportunities in the energy sector.

(iv) Ensure quality and continuity of power supply to households, particularly in peri-urban and rural areas to support small business and access to information.

d. Finance

16. Gender is significantly related to access to and use of financial services. A significant relationship also exists between women’s ability to have a bank account, save, and borrow from a financial institution and the degree of legal discrimination against women at the country level. Barriers include lack of title to collateral (house and land are often in the husband’s name), lack of business experience or references, small size of loan (women’s enterprises are often home-based and smaller than those of men), and lack of financial literacy. A survey of the Azerbaijan Central Bank in 2009 found that women have less knowledge of the financial system and were less likely to answer basic financial literacy questions correctly (50%) compared with men (59%). Self-evaluation of financial literacy also showed less confidence among women (33.7% self-rated as low or very low) compared with men (23.5%).

17. In addition to credit and savings, women in Azerbaijan are also less likely than men to have social insurance (42.1% of those with social insurance are women; 57.9% are men). Access to all areas of finance is important because entrepreneurship is stifled without it. Self-employment through micro and small business development is often the most viable route to financial independence or empowerment for women, who need to juggle income earning activities with unpaid domestic work and family responsibilities. The formal financial sector is male dominated. In 2012 only 33.3% of workers in the financial sector, mostly banking and finance employees, were women.

18. Opportunities for gender mainstreaming into financial programs include (i) increasing the financial literacy of women; (ii) increasing women’s access to finance, including credit, savings, and insurance; (iii) supporting women’s entrepreneurship through business training and relevant financial services; and (iv) supporting the simplification of lending products, in particular for rural women to make effective use of credit facilities.

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7 Information provided by the State Social Protection Fund of Azerbaijan, April 2013.
