

# **AZERBAIJAN**

## **R E P O R T**

**of the State Committee on Women's Problems of the Republic of Azerbaijan in response to a questionnaire for governments, relating to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the outcome documents of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations (2000)**

**Baku – 2004**

**Part one: Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and expanding the opportunities of women**

The development of a gender policy in Azerbaijan coincides with the period of independence of the Republic. During preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), state and non-governmental women's organizations were mobilized for solving women's problems. In this regard, in 1994, by a decree of the President of the country, a National Preparatory Committee was formed, which included women who occupied leading positions in state bodies as well as leaders of women's non-governmental organizations. In the run-up to the World Conference in Beijing, the Committee carried out large-scale preparatory efforts (conferences, seminars, exhibitions, discussions). The Azerbaijani delegation played an active part in the work of the Beijing conference. At the conference, Azerbaijani women were represented in the governmental delegation (25 persons) and among the representatives of women's non-governmental organizations (70 persons).

In 1995, Azerbaijan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and in 2001 it ratified the optional protocol attached to it. In 1998, a report of the Azerbaijani representative was received at a session of the CEDAW Committee. Taking into account the concluding commentaries of the CEDAW Committee regarding the report from Azerbaijan, reforms in that country directed at achieving gender equality have been implemented.

In 1998, by decree of the President of the Republic, a State Committee on Women's Problems was created and the decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "On measures for strengthening the role of women in Azerbaijan," was published, which signified the recognition that the gender policy is one of the most important strategies of the state.

The necessity of solving the problems of women was noted at the first Congress of Women of Azerbaijan held 25 September 1998, which was the first women's forum to take place in the newly independent republic.

In 1997-2000, joint activity was begun by the Government and by the United Nations Development Program in accordance with the project, "Development of Gender in Azerbaijan." In the context of this project, information was made available regarding the organizational work of institutionalization regarding gender, and technical assistance was provided to the newly created State Committee on Women's Problems and to women's non-governmental organizations.

For the purpose of practically promoting the equality of men and women, more specifically their representation in the system of state administration at the relevant level, the President on 6 March 2000 signed a decree, "On implementing state policy regarding women in the Republic of Azerbaijan." This decree laid the foundations for creating a state strategy with respect to gender equality and the expansion of opportunities for women. The decree prescribes achieving equal representation of women in comparison to men in all state structures of the Republic, and it also prescribes conducting expert reviews of legislation from the point of view of gender. For the purpose of monitoring its implementation, the State Committee on Women's Problems annually

presents a report to the Cabinet of Ministers, based on information received from the relevant ministries and departments regarding the progress achieved in implementing the present decree.

On 6 March 2000, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan approved a National Plan of Action to address women's problems for 2000-2005. This plan was drawn up on the basis of the strategies of the Beijing Platform for Action, taking into account the existing situation and the priorities of the Republic. The National Plan of Action is a state document drafted with the participation of ministries, committees, and non-governmental organizations, and aiming at achieving the equality of women in all problem areas.

This document provides for the preparation of state programs and for carrying out concrete, urgent measures relating to women's problems.

For realizing the National Plan and for implementing gender mainstreaming, the Committee created the Interministerial Council, consisting of representatives of state departments (focal points) and women's NGOs, and it performs a coordinating function. Members of the Interministerial Council have periodic meetings at which the progress is discussed that has been achieved in the implementation of the National Plan, and obstacles in the way of its implementation are identified.

For the purpose of promoting gender equality and expanding the opportunities of women, the State Committee on Women's Problems and Parliament have conducted seminars, discussions and roundtable discussions with the participation of experts from the Council of Europe, at which international agreements and the obligations of Azerbaijan have been discussed. A group of experts was created which has drafted a law on equal opportunities for men and women, which at the present time is being examined in Parliament.

Another problem has been the object of widespread discussion on the part of the representatives of Government, Parliament, international organizations, and local NGOs, and that is the problem of the traffic in persons, especially women and children, as a result of which the Parliament ratified the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime as well as the Protocol attached to it. In addition, a National Plan of Action for combating traffic in persons was adopted.

As a country which has been involved in armed conflict for more than 10 years, Azerbaijan strives to resolve conflicts by peaceful means. In this connection, the role of women in promoting peace has received special attention.

The excellent cooperation between state structures, NGOs, and international organizations is demonstrated by the regional project, "Women for Conflict Prevention and Peace Building the Southern Caucasus," initiated by UNIFEM with the support of the Government from 2001 to the present time. Participants in this project proposed the creation of "Coalition 1325," uniting women from various parties as well as social, scientific, and academic institutions, and directed at propagating ideas that are reflected in Resolution 1325 (2000) of the Security Council of the United Nations.

The Republic of Azerbaijan is also carrying out a series of reforms directed at realizing the goals of the Millennium Declaration. The integration of the gender policy in the general strategy of development of the country serves to increase the rationality of this strategy, as it fosters an equal distribution of benefits from programs that are directed at economic growth and the well-being of the general population.

Several state programs have been adopted in which gender aspects and the problems of women have been taken into account. Among them are the State Program on Poverty Reduction and Economic Development.

Considering that Azerbaijan is the country that has the greatest number of refugees as a percentage of the general population, the Government of the Republic adopted the State Program, "On resolving the problems of refugees and forced migrants," one of whose sections is devoted to the problems of women and to the expansion of their opportunities.

Significant success has been achieved in the area of public health, specifically in the area of reproductive health. A National Program for Reproductive Health and Family Planning is in operation in Azerbaijan. The gender problem occupies an important place in the National Strategic Plan for combating and preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS on the territory of Azerbaijan.

In this country, much attention is directed to questions of the influence of globalization on the prospects for gender equality. An informational-analytic center "Globalization" has been created, one of whose purposes is to research the problems of gender relationships in the context of globalization and to create conditions for enhancing the positive aspects of the participation of women in processes of liberalizing markets and of information and communications technologies.

Alongside the progress that has been made in many areas, it must be said that there are factors in the country that stand in the way of development. A negative effect on women, most of all, was exerted by the occupation of 20% of the territory of Azerbaijan as a result of Armenian aggression, as well as by the presence of more than one million refugees and forced migrants, not to mention the difficulties of a transitional period.

**Part two: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action, and further initiatives and actions identified by the 23rd special session of the General Assembly**

**Women, poverty, and the economy**

At the present time, the reduction of poverty is one of the universal human problems faced by the world community. Reducing poverty signifies the use by the general population of the productive resources, including land and water reserves, the availability of jobs, the expansion of educational opportunities, the use of medical services, the assurance of legal equality between men and women at all levels, the satisfaction of existing demands for infrastructure and social services, and the improvement of sanitary and hygienic conditions and of the environment.

In Azerbaijan, as in the majority of the countries of the world, solving the problem of poverty stands out as one of the most important challenges.

Beginning in 1995, three state programs began to be put into practice directed at establishing macro-economic stability, carrying out structural changes, and laying the foundation for economic growth.

With the support of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, a large-scale program of stabilization has been implemented. As a result of these programs, a series of the successes has been achieved.

However, the construction of the state in the country was begun based on the principles of peace and democracy. Significant successes were achieved in this area. In this way, the political and macro-economic stability that was gained made it possible to elevate the reduction of poverty to the level of a central goal of the social and economic policy of the Azerbaijani state.

Reforms of a social and economic character which have been carried out in Azerbaijan have significantly altered the level of economic activity of women.

The goals and targets set in the Beijing Platform and in the outcome document of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, as well as the goals of the Millennium Declaration have found their reflection in the National Program on Poverty Reduction and Economic Development (2003-2005) and in the National Plan of Action to address the problems of women (2000-2005).

The process of privatization has begun, and at the present time the private sector accounts for more than 70% of the gross domestic product. A new concept has arisen -- woman entrepreneur. Land reform has been put into practice, as a result of which more than one million women have become landowners.

Despite the successful implementation of all these reforms, problems exist that stand in the way of implementing a policy of equal rights and equal opportunities:

- the existence of "mentality" barriers in the choice of specialties and in employment, with the result that areas in which large numbers of women work have lower status and lower wages and salaries than areas in which men predominate. Existing stereotypes also hamper the development of entrepreneurship among women: of the 69% of women who are engaged in private business, only 3% own their own business. The main obstacles are the absence of start-up capital, limited access to micro- and macro-credits, and an insufficiency of information and knowledge relating to business. Women entrepreneurs are still regarded as exceptional and not typical, and all the more so if for some of them there are difficulties in the personal and family areas;
- more family responsibilities are placed on women and they have more limited opportunities for making alternative choices of jobs in comparison to men, and they are required to prefer a place of work that is closer to their home;
- women are characterized by less mobility than men, and a less flexible supply of labor is characteristic of women;
- an employer who seeks to minimize costs divides the labor market into women's and men's sectors and offers different levels of pay to these two categories of workers;
- women teachers, medical workers, and engineers are drawn into the commercial sector because of the low salaries in their specialties.

In the future, it will be necessary to solve such problems as the role of women in the processes of economic reform, the rights of women in processes of privatization, the legal and social guarantees for the protection of women's entrepreneurship, the provision of consulting services for women entrepreneurs, networking among women entrepreneurs, etc.

1. In connection with the transition of the Republic to a market economy, there is great demand for attracting women into this area, most importantly in rural or urban regions among women of different professions, to start a small business, to transfer land to agricultural workers, and to carry out privatization.
2. For attracting women to agriculture in rural areas, to foster the availability of microcredits so that women can operate a business in their home.
3. The development of small entrepreneurship among women of various professions in urban areas, to promote the issuing of microcredits to them.
4. To foster the development of private initiative among women.
5. Among women who have never worked (disabled women, mothers with many children) to create opportunities for "home-based work."
6. For implementing the above, to instruct women in various areas of legal knowledge and to create legal services for them. To conduct this work both in urban as well as in rural areas, especially in outlying areas.
7. To inform women regarding the new conditions in the economy.

## **Women and health**

Social protection and the health care of the general population are among the current problems facing Azerbaijan. These problems stand alongside such problems as eliminating poverty and achieving the welfare of the general population. The post-Soviet period in Azerbaijan has been

characterized by a significant worsening of the welfare of the general population, in particular in the area of health care.

In this connection, the Government has adopted measures aimed at providing access to high-quality services in the area of public health and carrying out preventive measures directed at strengthening the health of women.

In 1997, the Health Care Act was adopted, in which men and women are seen as having equal rights to health care. At the same time, several articles of this law for women prescribe specific conditions related to the reproductive functions. National programs were adopted for preventive measures for combating tuberculosis and malaria, for strengthening the immune system, for preventing and combating HIV/AIDS, and for reproductive health and family planning.

Since 1996, the Ministry of Public Health together with the Population Division of the United Nations have been carrying out specific activities in the country directed at expanding the access of women to high-quality services in the area of public health. The United Nations program for family planning has been in operation in the country since then. In accordance with this program, training sessions have been conducted for doctors with regard to family planning, and technical assistance has been provided to newly created centers of family planning. Since 2000, a program for reproductive health has been in operation, in the context of which 27 centers of family planning have been opened, where information is being distributed, and high-quality services for women who are in their childbearing years have been made available.

In 2000, the United Nations Children's Fund conducted a survey designed to investigate the conditions of health, education, and general welfare of children and women. This detailed survey was directed at elucidating the connection between various aspects of the welfare of women and children. One of the results generated by the survey was that children of mothers who have education at a minimum of the level of junior college or professional technical schools, in comparison with the children of mothers having no education, have fewer difficulties connected with the weight of the child and with disturbances in growth. The results of the survey also showed a reduction in the level of maternal mortality over the last 10 years.

For a more successful solution of the problems of the strategy, "Women and Health," it will be necessary to take the following steps:

- to organize efforts for reproductive rights;
- to work with the male population on problems of reproductive health;
- to strengthen measures for the detection and prevention of inferior education among women;
- to advocate a healthy lifestyle with respect to questions of the health of the general population;
- to conduct periodic research into the problems of women's health;
- to monitor the influence of ecological factors on women;
- to develop medical and genetic services inasmuch as, without them, problems arise in giving birth to healthy children;
- to strengthen the preventive measures against HIV/AIDS (outreach work).

## **Women and education**

Education is one of the most important means of achieving gender equality and the expansion of women's opportunities. The system of education in Azerbaijan is regulated by the Constitution, the law on education, the program of reforms in the area of education, and other normative legal acts.

Article 42 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan sets out the right of each citizen to education.

Article 3 of the Education Act of the Republic of Azerbaijan stipulates the right to education for all citizens regardless of sex.

Secondary general education schools represent the foundation of education. Secondary education in Azerbaijan is 11-years, free, and mandatory.

A quality education is one of the most important factors making it possible to protect the general population from vulnerability to poverty. This in part is explained by the fact that on the labor market those who have education are more competitive.

Azerbaijan has traditionally had a high level of education. According to information of the State Committee on Statistics, in 1999 the level of literacy among the general population 15 years and older was 98% among women and 100% among men.

Great attention is paid to teaching questions relating to the equal rights of men and women, and to not permitting discrimination in the preparation of textbooks and learning materials at all levels of the system education. Since 2003, in secondary general education schools, an elective course has been introduced under the name, "Human Development," and its main part is, "Gender in the development of the human being." In addition, in some institutions of higher learning, educational programs on gender have been introduced. For example, in the Western University, a Center of Gender Research is in operation, in Baku State University, a Department of Gender Studies has been created, etc.

Teaching was always one of the traditional professions of women. In secondary general education schools, 69% of the employees are women, in secondary specialized schools, it is 60%, and in institutions of higher learning, it is 42%. Despite all of this, at the level of decision-making in education, men are in the majority.

In the scientific research institutions of the Republic, women engaged in active creative activity are on an equal basis with men. Although there is a difference in the numbers of men and women working in the area of science, this difference is not great. On the whole, among those who work in the field of science, women account for 43%, and this is close to the percentages of many developed countries. The number of women engaged in the area of technical and agricultural sciences is comparatively small. Among those engaged in the humanities, the number of men slightly exceeds the number of women. Only in the area of medical sciences do women make up the majority. It must be said that the above divisions according to gender relate to the overall

number of those working in scientific institutions. In analyzing the gender ratios among those having scientific degrees, it becomes clear that the difference observed is actually greater. In other words, among candidates and doctors of science, men make up the majority.

Despite the generally positive indicators in the area of education, there are questions that have not been addressed relating to the quality of education and to a series of existing problems which, over an extended period of time, will have a negative impact on education. The problems in the area of education can be grouped in the following way:

- at all levels of education, especially in primary and secondary levels of education, the quality of education has declined. One of the causes of this is the fact that as a result of Armenian aggression and the occupation of 20% of the territory of Azerbaijan, 616 schools were destroyed and more than 20,000 teachers, among them women, were deprived of their work;
- in all educational institutions, there are not enough instructional materials and supplies for teaching at a high level;
- a reduction in girls' attendance has been observed in connection with the social and economic conditions;
- over the past 10 years, the number of schools of professional education has decreased, and with it the number of their students;
- an incongruity exists between education and the labor market, and this necessitates the introduction of significant changes in curricula for coordinating them with the new demands of a market economy (in secondary, professional, and higher education);
- special attention must be paid to creating new opportunities for the development of gender education and gender research, to enhancing recognition of gender issues, to the quality of education, and to gender qualifications.

### **Violence against women**

This strategy, included in the National Plan of Action, reflects such problems as the social, economic, and psychological causes of violence, the protection of women from violence, traffic in women, and the study and application of international agreements in protecting women from violence.

In connection with this problem, an expert review of the criminal code was conducted from the point of view of gender, as a result of which changes were made in the criminal code.

Inasmuch as violence against women is an obstacle to achieving equality, progress, and peace, and inasmuch as it violates women's basic rights and freedoms and prevents women from enjoying them, many women's NGOs have carried out projects and programs aimed at eliminating violence against women.

For the first time, the problem of violence against women was widely discussed at a conference in 2000, which was conducted by the women's NGO "Symmetry" and the Office for the Development of Individual and Human Rights attached to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. At this conference, recommendations were developed to accelerate the preparation of a package of measures for discouraging and eliminating violence. Since 2001, a program for discouraging violence against women has been implemented for law-enforcement

bodies (police, prosecutors, judges). An elective course has been devised for the police academy for preventing violence and protecting women from it. Research studies and surveys have been carried out among policemen, prosecutors' employees, and judges, that have pointed to the relationship of law-enforcement bodies to this question, gaps with respect to information, and the participation of women at decision-making levels in law-enforcement bodies.

Since 2001, Azerbaijan has participated in the Regional Information Campaign of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, "Life without Violence."

Beginning in 2002, the State Committee on Women's Problems together with non-governmental women's organizations and the women's councils in political parties have joined together in the "Sixteen-day action against gender violence in the Caucasus," in the context of which seminars, conferences, and discussions in the media were held.

In 2003, the State Committee on Women's Problems translated into the Azerbaijani language the recommendations of the Council of Europe, "Protecting women against violence" and "Traffic in persons for purposes of sexual exploitation," and in this connection created a working group consisting of experts from governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as representatives of the mass media. This working group conducted an expert study of the conformity of national legislation to international agreements in this area and prepared recommendations and measures aimed at eliminating violence against women and at the successful carrying out by Azerbaijan of its obligations.

During recent years, the problem of traffic in persons, as one of the forms of violence, has been the subject of roundtable discussions, conferences with the participation of state bodies, NGOs, and international organizations. As a result, changes have been introduced in legislation, by Presidential decree a National Plan of Action was approved on preventing the traffic in persons, and a law on the traffic of persons is being discussed.

In 2003, the Parliament of the Republic ratified the Convention on Transnational Crime and the Protocol attached to it.

Women are the most vulnerable part of the general population; the violence that is carried out against them is an expression of the historically unequal relations between men and women.

One of the most widespread forms of violence against women is domestic violence, which in turn is an indicator of the tension existing within the relationships in a family. The feeling of fear and the constriction of the life opportunities of women, on the one hand, block their striving for equality and development, but on the other hand they represent an obstacle to the creation of normal conditions for raising children, and they present a negative stereotype of behavior. Only 7% of women who have been subjected to violence regard it as a factor that complicates their family life. This demonstrates the expressed tendency of turning violence into an everyday and permissible occurrence. Unfortunately, official statistics do not reflect the real picture of crimes against women in the home.

The ineffective work of law-enforcement bodies, a weak system of state statistics, the deficient work of social institutions charged with protecting victims of violence, and the disinclination to conduct a public discussion on the facts of violence, especially sexual violence, without negative consequences for its victims, women and girls, all pressure women and girls to withhold their participation from law-enforcement bodies. The aforesaid does not make for the possibility of evaluating the real situation or of providing appropriate assistance to the victims.

For successfully resolving the problem of violence against women, it is necessary to take the following measures:

- organizing crisis centers and training employees for crisis centers (social workers);
- organizing the work in medical institutions so as to identify domestic violence;
- organizing informational, educational, and monitoring centers for combating violence;
- organizing the cooperation of state sectors and NGOs with regard to the problem of violence.

### **Women and armed conflicts**

In the National Plan of Action, special prominence is given to the strategy, "Women and Armed Conflicts."

As a country which has been drawn into armed conflict over more than 10 years, 20% of whose territory has been occupied as a result of the actions of armed groups of the Republic of Armenia, and which has more than 10 million refugees and temporarily displaced persons expelled from the occupied territories, Azerbaijan on the basis of its own experience has known all horrors of this armed conflict, which has tragically influenced the life of each citizen of the country, in particular the lives of women.

In 1995, at the 39th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at the initiative of Azerbaijani women, a resolution was passed on the release of women and children taken hostage, including those who were subsequently imprisoned in a period of armed conflicts, which was continued into subsequent sessions.

In 2001, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted a Program of Action in connection with the United Nations declaration of an International Decade of a Culture of Peace.

Women, on whom fall all the burdens of wars and conflicts, are more devoted to the ideas of peace, security, and the struggle against wars and conflicts. Even in 1998, in the Baku Declaration, adopted at the sub-regional conference, "Women's Rights are Human Rights: Women and Armed Conflicts," special mention was made of the importance of the role of women in preventing and resolving conflicts in the region and in the post-conflict construction of peace, as well as the necessity to involve women in peace negotiations at all levels.

In our country, special attention is paid to the role of women in promoting peace. Women's organizations make an important contribution acting in the role of advocates for peace, in the family as well as in society.

To achieve a solid peace, outreach work has particular significance, advocating a culture of peace in which justice and tolerance are promoted in the relations of all nations and peoples, and it is necessary to carry out this work with children at an early age.

Close cooperation among state structures, NGOs, and international organizations is represented by the regional project, "Women for preventing conflicts and establishing peace in the Southern Caucasus," initiated by UNIFEM with the support of the Government. In the context of this project, 20 trainers completed a training course in the area of preventing and resolving conflicts and creating peace, and 60 seminar training sessions were held, involving all the regions of the Republic. Twelve hundred women occupying important positions participated in these training sessions.

In view of the special role of education in this area, academic programs have been developed and new disciplines have been introduced in academic institutions on the topic of preventing and resolving conflicts and establishing peace. In these programs, special weight is given to the role of women in the establishment of a culture of peace.

Women in our country are actively included in promoting peace at the national, regional, and international levels. In light of the provisions of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council and with the purpose of actively involving women in peace processes, in September 2002, National Coalition 1325 was founded. From the moment of its founding, the Coalition was invited to participate in various projects, fostering an increase in the information available to Azerbaijani society regarding the contents of Resolution 1325, emphasizing the importance of the active participation of women in decision-making processes, and supporting the role of women in actions designed to help build peace. Participants in the Coalition conducted twelve training sessions on the topic, "Promoting gender equality in the processes of building peace," which was conducted in various regions of Azerbaijan, and two roundtable discussions on the topic, "Participation of Azerbaijani women in decision-making processes at the national and international levels."

Equal access of women to the structures of power, the multi-faceted participation of women in their activities, and the full involvement of women in the process of implementing all possible efforts directed at preventing and resolving conflicts are necessary for supporting and promoting the achievement of peace and security. In order that women play an equal role with men in assuring and supporting peace, it is necessary to afford them political and economic rights and to assure their adequate representation at all levels of decision-making. The decree of the President of Azerbaijan of 6 March 2000, "The implementation of state policy regarding women in the Republic of Azerbaijan," is a precondition for enhancing the role of women in society at the level of decision-making.

The successful realization of the strategy, "Women and Armed Conflicts" is directly tied to resolving the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh, the legal resolution of which must be based on resolutions 822, 853, 874, 884 of the United Nations Security Council, as well as decisions of the Lisbon Summit of the OSCE.

In the future, it will be necessary to increase the cooperation with international organizations, to support programs directed at post-conflict rehabilitation on territories liberated from armed aggression, and to carry out work in this direction.

### **Refugees and forced migrants**

As a result of the military aggression conducted by the armed forces of Armenia against our country, 20% of Azerbaijani land – Nagorno-Karabakh and seven regions adjacent to it -- was occupied, and in connection with this occupation, Azerbaijan is the country that has the largest number of refugees and forced migrants as a percentage of the population. In our country, there are more than one million refugees and forced migrants, of whom 420,000 are women. The majority of forced migrants including women have hitherto lived in areas unsuitable for living with respect to the minimal conditions of life and sanitation -- tent cities, farms, and dugouts, railroad freight cars, construction sites, etc. Among the refugees and forced migrants, there are already many new families, which has become a serious problem in connection with their settlement. According to the latest information, in camps for refugees and forced migrants, 100,000 children have been born.

During the last 10 years, the President of the Republic has signed 26 decrees and orders, the Milli Mejlis has passed 13 laws, and the Cabinet of Ministers has signed 147 orders. All of these laws and agreements that have been adopted concern the questions of the social protection of refugees and forced migrants, including women.

There are several factors that increase the risk of violence against women refugees and forced migrants. These include social factors as well as economic problems, and the collapse of the mechanisms of traditional social protection.

Today, women refugees of Azerbaijan, living in tent cities in terrible conditions and bearing the entire burden of domestic problems, find themselves in a position to forfeit their previous achievements and hopes for development.

Demographic analysis has demonstrated the existing inequality between men and women refugees and forced migrants. At the present moment, gender inequality in various categories of refugees and forced migrants has significantly exceeded the average national indicator (51.1% women, 48.9% men). This tendency is troubling because according to official statistics there are more boys than girls 14 years of age and younger, and yet in the economically active and fertile age groups, there is an abundance of women. For more than 100,000 women there is no male spouse. To carry out seasonal work, the head of the family goes far from home, and this weakens the relations within the family and increases the number of households that are led by women. The weak protection of women refugees and forced migrants and the lack of punishment for persons who violate the laws and commit violence are factors that only increase the risk. Therefore, it is necessary to provide moral support for those people who come face-to-face with the bitter experiences of fate, and to restore hope to them.

In connection with implementing the resolutions approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of 26 September 2000, "Program of providing women refugees and forced migrants with appropriate

work," the State Committee on Women's Problems together with the Ministry of Labor and Social Assistance and the State Committee on the Affairs of Refugees and Forced Migrants are carrying out programs directed at improving the conditions of refugees and forced migrants, including women.

In the decree of the President of Republic of Azerbaijan, "On the realization of the state policy regarding women," among the tasks assigned to the leadership of the Cabinet of Ministers, a special point was made regarding the provision of employment to women refugees and forced migrants. In connection with this, the State Committee on Women's Problems turned to the agencies of Employment Service of the Ministry of Labor and Social Assistance, and as a result of this it became clear that 18,381 women were provided with appropriate work, 739 of whom were refugees. Paid public-sector work was found for 1,669 women, including 266 refugees, and unemployment benefits were issued to 7,998 persons, of whom 4,049 were refugees. The agencies of the Employment Service enrolled 694 women in preparatory courses and retraining courses for folk and modern professions, including 425 refugees and forced migrants, of whom 83% were provided with jobs after completing the courses. On the part of the agencies of the Employment Service, 3,701 women (including 3,027 refugees) were granted the status of unemployed, and 607 women (including 148 refugees) were provided with jobs in accordance with a quota.

### **Human rights of women**

The rights of women are an inalienable constituent and an indivisible part of general human rights. The Republic of Azerbaijan is a signatory to all international conventions in the area of human rights, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and on the Citizenship of Married Women, the IOL Convention on Equal Compensation for Men and Women for Work of the Same Value, on the Preservation of Maternity, etc. The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, adopted 12 November 1995 by popular referendum, strengthened the equal rights of women and men (Chapter 2, Article 25) and created the legal basis for their active participation in the processes of democratic state construction.

In 2002, a duly authorized official was elected for human rights (an Ombudsman).

In Azerbaijan, new criminal, criminal-procedure, civil, administrative, family, labor, and other legislation, responding to the requirements of the times, gaining official approval, and receiving a high evaluation by international experts and the Council of Europe, has been adopted and is already functioning, regulating to a greater or lesser degree the interests and defending the rights of women, protecting them from all forms of discrimination, from libel and violence both in the family as well as in life and in society. In the latter legislation, the equality of citizens has been reaffirmed regardless of gender and responsibility for all crimes against women and children has been provided for, as the legal levers of action against those who violate the law and those who have selected as the object of their illegal activities women and children.

The significance of the plan for protecting women's rights lies in the new criminal, criminal-procedure, and sentencing codes, which went into effect on 1 September 2000, and in other laws of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In the aforementioned codes, along with general conditions for the application of punishments by law, specific circumstances are outlined which mandate the application of punishment for crimes against women.

The changes and amendments beginning with 2001 which have occurred in the legislative basis of the Republic regarding the status of women should be noted. Specifically, a law was adopted on the shortening of the working day for various categories of state employees (06/22/2001), where a work week of not more than 36 hours per week was stipulated for pregnant women and women with young children (up to 1.5 years of age).

The Employment Act was passed (7/2/2001), in which Article 6 lays down state policy in the area of employment -- equal rights for men and women in the choice of a profession.

Article 9.1 provides for supplemental assistance for citizens who have experienced difficulties in finding employment and who require social protection -- young parents, parents with minor children, and women who are raising children with disabilities.

Article 9.2 provides for hiring quotas for categories of citizens identified above in Article 9.1. The size of the quota is not to be more than 5% of the average number of workers in the company.

An amendment to the Family Code was adopted regarding the procedure for suing for alimony.

An amendment has been adopted in Article 108 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, providing for responsibility of 10 to 15 years for compelling a woman to become pregnant for the purpose of altering the ethnic constitution of the general population.

In the order of the Cabinet of Ministers of 9/15/2001, "On the procedure for paying salaries to prisoners serving a life sentence as well as to those serving a limited sentence," Clause 2.7 provides for a shortened working day amounting to not more than 36 hours per week for women prisoners who have children and who are serving a sentence under the authority of a penal institution.

The order of the Cabinet of Ministers of 6/09/2001, "On narcotics-related assistance and narcotics-related control," a category of citizens is described requiring special attention, and among them are pregnant women and women with children.

At the present moment, in our country there are more than 50 women's non-governmental organizations, whose activity is directed at protecting the rights of women, involving women in social and political life, and providing assistance to refugees, orphanages, and disabled persons.

An informational campaign has been conducted to raise the level of public awareness regarding the problem of violence and to expand knowledge of the law so as to inform women of their legal rights.

Despite the fact that the legislative basis has been laid down providing for the protection of women's rights, it is necessary to develop mechanisms to reduce the gap between legislation and its realization; and also to systematically conduct expert reviews of legislation from the point of view of gender.

### **The participation of women in executive bodies and in decision-making processes**

Women in Azerbaijan constitute more than half of the general population and the electorate, but they continue to be insufficiently represented in positions associated with decision-making in politics and public life. Despite the existing equality of rights, the distribution of power and responsibility between women and men and their access to economic, social, and cultural resources remain unequal. The main reason for this is the current and persisting traditional ideas concerning the allocation of roles between the sexes. Equal participation of men and women in politics and public life is an inalienable part of human rights and an element of social justice, and it is also a necessary condition for the more effective functioning of a democratic society.

Azerbaijan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights, and the European Social Charter.

For the purpose of implementing a gender policy in the Republic, by decree of the President of 14 January 1998, the State Committee on Women's Problems (SCWP) was created to foster the enhancement of the role of women in the political, social, economic, and cultural life of the country. In March 2000, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan signed the decree, "On implementing state policy regarding women in the Republic of Azerbaijan," in which fundamental directions were laid down for the role of women in state and social administration. On 6 March 2000, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted the order regarding the National Plan of Action on the problems of women in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The necessity of promoting women to decision-making positions was noted in the documents of the first and second Congress of Women (1998-2003).

Beginning in 1998, in the Republic, the tendency has been noted of strengthening the role of women in society. As a result of this policy, at the most recent elections to the National Academy of Sciences, several women were granted the status of academic. Of three Deputy Presidents of Parliament, one was a woman. In the Parliament of Azerbaijan -- Milli Mejlis -- there are 13 women deputies (10.4%), who actively participate in the work of drawing up legislation, creating the legal conditions for real equality between the sexes, and securing the individual freedoms of women. In the context of judicial-legal reforms in the country, elections for judges have been held and according to statistical data, 14% of the judges are women. The chiefs of the supreme and appeal courts, as well as of a series of general and specialized courts are women. The Committee created a database of women working in leadership positions in the regions and in ministries and departments, as well as a database of women who head institutions of higher learning as well as those who work in them.

On 2 July 2000, a duly authorized official for human rights was elected (an Ombudsman). From three candidates put forward by the President, the Milli Mejlis (Parliament) by a majority vote elected a woman for this high position.

Since 2000, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has been implementing a project on women's leadership and their participation in decision-making, and, in this project, workers of the SCWP have actively participated.

A group of specialists consisting of experts of Parliament, SCWP, and NGOs has drafted a bill on equal rights and equal opportunities, which is currently being discussed in the Commission of Parliament. The bill provides for the adoption of positive measures in order to foster a more balanced participation of women and men in decision-making processes in the area of politics and public life.

Despite the fact that significant successes have been achieved in realizing this strategy, it is necessary to adopt additional measures aimed at assuring a gender-balanced representation of women and men in leading positions, because equal participation of men and women in decision-making processes in political and public life is a necessary condition for building a democratic society that is based on the principles of equality, social cohesion, and the observance of human rights.

It is necessary to initiate work aimed at creating a parliamentary commission on human rights and equal opportunities and to adopt a multifaceted approach to the problem of equality between men and women in their work, to realize programs aimed at training leaders among women, and to promote the participation of girls in the activities of social organizations, with the goal of their obtaining experience, knowledge, and skills which they will be able to use in their work in institutions and in politics.

### **Women and the mass media**

The topic "Women and Mass Media" implies such problems as the mass media and overcoming gender stereotypes, the level of enlightenment of society, the discussions regarding the status of women in society, a specialized women's mass media, contemporary informational and communications technologies and women, etc.

In solving the problems of gender equality and overcoming various forms of discrimination against women, great significance is attached to the public discussion of these problems.

Precisely for this reason, gender and mass media, including national and regional newspapers as well as national and regional television, have prime significance in two respects: to be educational, in order to logically explain to people various aspects of the present problem, and to be supportive of the necessary social climate, in order that various types of people become aware of the present problem.

In recent years, especially beginning in 2000, gender problems and the problems of women one way or another have become the subject of publications in the mass media in Azerbaijan.

In the post-Beijing period, new magazines have appeared whose editors are women as well as magazines devoted to women's problems.

On all television channels and on the radio, there are broadcasts devoted to women's problems. With the assistance of the United Nations Development Program, regular broadcasts on the problems of gender have begun on the radio, and since 1999, the program "Woman and Man" has been broadcast monthly.

Unfortunately, it must be admitted that, although Azerbaijani journalism today has mainly a "woman's face", these women are generally under the leadership of men.

The greatest defect of Azerbaijani mass media from the point of view of gender (as is the case, by the way, in a majority of post-Soviet countries) is open and veiled forms of sexism. This is a very serious and profound defect, which is sometimes not suspected even by many journalists who work in the mass media, most of all in television. Here is one example, which is so banal that it is repeated often. If a woman journalist is conducting an interview with a man, especially with a male politician, she will generally not mention his personal life, but if she is interviewing a woman, especially a female politician, then the question regarding personal life and the family is posed almost automatically. In this case, the woman journalist, as a representative of the existing Azerbaijani society, is persuaded almost unconsciously that no woman can be happy or consider her life successful if this is not in some way connected with personal life.

We frequently do not allow ourselves to become aware of the fact that a woman's sexuality and capacity for reproducing unconsciously become defining cultural (and not biological) characteristics of women. Precisely for this reason, a woman turns out to be vulnerable to being differentiated from men and becomes a victim of patriarchal attitudes. If a man identifies himself with his work, his social status, his financial situation, etc., with women it is a different story. In one or another form, similar expressions of "sexism" permeate all broadcasts of all channels of Azerbaijani television that are connected with show business, the fashion industry, health, etc. Of course, in overcoming sexism the danger is to throw the baby out with the bath water, i.e., to move to a "proletarian" style of clothing and behavior of women. The point is always to recognize a woman's dignity, which does not necessarily accommodate a man's glancing at her body.

Overcoming the phenomena known as "sexism" is not a matter for one day or one training session. Nevertheless, it is extraordinarily important to be constantly pointing to this danger, since, due to its extraordinary conservatism and rootedness in various typologies of cultures, this danger reproduces itself through culture again and again, and we with unfeigned surprise discover these atavisms in boys and girls beginning even at 10 years of age. In this connection, it would be extremely important and interesting to combine gender-related training sessions for schoolchildren with corresponding talk shows on television.

It is necessary to adopt measures directed at:

- increasing the amount of time on television and radio devoted to discussing the problems of gender and women;
- publishing specialized newspapers;
- promoting women journalists to supervisory positions in the media.

## **Girls**

After obtaining state independence, the policy towards youth in the Republic of Azerbaijan, including the strategy regarding girls, was recognized to be among the priority directions of state activity.

The Parliament of the Republic ratified the Convention on the Rights of Children.

From the efforts of the Ministry of Youth, Sport, and Tourism, and also of the SCWP, specific efforts have been made to coordinate the activity of state bodies and non-governmental organizations in the area of a national youth policy for assuring the well-rounded development of children and young people, including protecting the rights and interests of girls. Close relationships were formed with children's and young people's organizations in the Republic. Normative-legal acts have been adopted for protecting the rights and solving the problems of young people, including girls, three all-Republic forums have been held, projects of social organizations have been privately financed, and the participation of representatives of young people's organizations has been promoted in the most significant international events. In the Republic, the Children's Rights Act was adopted, in which all basic rights and freedoms of children are strengthened, i.e., the freedom of conscience and of speech, the right to education, the right to vacations and health care, the right to work, etc., and the Social Protection of Children without Parents or Parental Care Act was also passed. In 2000, the Cabinet of Ministers affirmed the state program, "On the protection of rights and the strengthening of educational work among children and adolescents." The Government adopted the program, "On supporting young families," in accordance with which the network of consultative services was expanded for young families, and also for the premarital training of young women regarding family life, centers for social and psychological assistance have been created, support has been given to the development of family-style sports, and work has been carried out for the protection of reproductive health, the social orientation of the family, and the fostering of good child-rearing.

In 2002, a law became effective regarding youth policy. One of the fundamental principles of the law is based on observing equal rights in the implementation of state youth policy. The Ministry of Youth, Sport, and Tourism together with the SCWP carries out activities and events directed at eliminating violence and discrimination against women, including girls. A National Youth Council of Azerbaijan has been created, which unites 49 young-persons' non-governmental organizations. Young women are the leaders of 21 organizations. In the period 1996 to 2003, the National Youth Council of Azerbaijan carried out tens of international and national projects directed at implementing the strategies of the Beijing Platform for Action, and the outcome document of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations

Alongside the work that has been done, there are a series of problems.

As is well-known, girls are subject to discrimination at a very young age, during childhood, and until they reach their majority. The reason for this is an inadequate relationship to girls, for example, preferring sons, which results in such serious social problems as the choice of the sex of a child before birth, female infanticide, early marriages including childhood marriages, marriages between relatives, violence against girls, sexual exploitation, and sexual intimidation. All of this has an influence on the health and well-being of girls.

These kinds of problems arise due to the fact that girls are taught that they should be in last place, which naturally is injurious to their self-respect. One fundamentally vulnerable group that is subjected to discrimination are girls from underprivileged families and girls from families having strict rules, refugee girls, and girls with disabilities. It is necessary to promote initiatives for training girls for active, effective, and equal participation in social, political, and cultural life, and to develop programs aimed at forming character, a correct approach to life, self-respect, the unfolding of their potential, and the realization of their opportunities.

It is vital:

- to create a mechanism for monitoring the school attendance of girls;
- to strengthen the system of statistical record keeping;
- to distribute information regarding the dangers of early marriages and their anti-rights character;
- to develop school courses on human rights, children's rights, and women's rights as human rights.

### **Women and information and communications technologies (ICT)**

The development of information technologies and the relationships that arise through the use of the information superhighway are regulated by the Information, Access to Information, and Protection of Information Act of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which was approved by the President of the country in June 1998. The necessity of introducing ICT into the Azerbaijani economy and society has become a condition for entry into the World Trade Organization and for integration into Europe. Azerbaijan has put in place a world-class fiber-optic communications infrastructure, which will be able to technically support the exchange of information among all regions of the country.

This encourages the expansion of the existing Azerbaijani Internet and cyberspace. On 1 January 2004, the number of Internet hosts was 346, the number of Internet subscribers was 55,000, and 1.2% of the general population were users. In February 2004, the Ministry for Communications and Information was formed, which is responsible for the development of the technical components of the information superhighway and for the realization of the on-line strategies of the Government, and a National ICT Development Strategy in Azerbaijan was confirmed as a joint project of United Nations Development Program and the Azerbaijani Government in 2001, and it envisions by 2011 increasing the number of Internet servers to 15,000. This means, at the very least, one Internet server and one website for each of the 1,600 villages in Azerbaijan and for each organization, including NGOs.

The level of preparedness for electronic commerce in Azerbaijan is among the lowest – a rating of 2.72 out of 10 puts Azerbaijan in 59th place out of 60 countries surveyed. At the present time, a free national market exists for providing Internet services, and more than 5 Internet providers presently operate in this market. None of the providers dominates through monopoly or through control of access to the Internet mainline due to the very high rates for use of the international lines allocated to the Internet.

Azerbaijan occupies a strategic corridor for the transit of oil and gas from the Caspian Sea to Turkey, the Black Sea, and the world market, and for this reason it will soon have direct access to the Internet mainline via TAE fiber-optic cable, connecting Frankfurt and Shanghai and passing through the territory of Azerbaijan.

Great and positive experience has been accumulated in using ICT in the work of the Student Admission Committee (headed by a woman), the Elections Commission, and the State Customs Committee. All three projects are supported by the United Nations Development Program.

In the National ICT Strategy, special importance is seen in the necessity of attracting greater numbers of NGOs, including women's. However, in whole country there exist a total of three websites of women's NGOs. Among the international community of donors, a program of women's development through ICT has been supported since 2001 by the Open Society Institute (OSI). With its support, the Azerbaijan Gender Information Center was created, the first in the country, and it has joined the European network, REWIND. Based in the Center, the National Women's Portal is an operation with the capacity of more than 50 MB, [www.gender-az.org](http://www.gender-az.org). In the portal, all forms of women's activities are represented: the gender policy of the state, gender education, the leadership of women's NGOs of Azerbaijan, the promotion of peace, etc. Over the course of two years, with the assistance of USAID and the Manacash Center, 22 training sessions were conducted on ICT for women's NGOs in the regions. The Azerbaijan Gender Information Center has become a vital support to the development of ICT in the women's area. The Center posts on the Internet all materials of the periodical press in the country having to do with women. At the present time, with the support of European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Open Society Institute, and USAID, a program has been begun for creating an informational consulting database for women's entrepreneurship. In 2004, the IREX Foundation began to conduct lessons for women's NGOs in HTML, Photoshop, and Flash.

## **Women and migration**

In the Republic of Azerbaijan, significant attention is devoted to the work of regulating migration processes, which are among the most pressing problems of globalization.

The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan created the Commission on State Migration Program Training, made up of those in leading positions in state bodies who participate in the regulation of migration processes in the country.

Considering the changes in the form and direction of migration processes and the necessity of adopting a flexible state policy in this area, this commission prepared a project, "Conception of state policy for managing migration," with the participation of representatives of International

Organization on Migration in Baku, which has been presented for confirmation to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The fundamental goal of this Conception is to promote the national security of the Republic of Azerbaijan and stable social and economic demographic development, the rational use of labor resources, the rational distribution of the general population on the territory of the country, the peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict, the safe return of refugees and forced migrants to their places of origin, the creation of a national system of education for refugees in accordance with international standards, the use of the intellectual and labor potential of migrants, the elimination of the negative influence of uncontrolled migration processes and the traffic in persons, specifically the prevention of traffic in women and children and illegal migration, the study of the factors that could become the cause of unexpected mass migrations, and the preparation of a timely package of measures for the optimal solution of these problems.

In addition, a state program was prepared in the area of the development of democracy in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and several questions relating to the solution of women's problems are reflected in this program.

The program envisions:

- the creation in individual regions of the Republic of appropriate institutions that provide perinatal services in the hospitalization of any women who are at a high risk of maternal and children's pathologies;
- research into women having children with birth defects, the organization of a predictive medical-genetic conference at the time of the birth of a child, the examination of families with birth and inherited pathologies;
- the use of modern methods of perinatal diagnostics at early stages of a pregnancy;
- the organization of mobile teams of neonatal experts attached to the public health aviation service of the city of Baku;
- the creation and development of departments for intensive therapy and intensive care for newborns in appropriate medical institutions in the regions and the cities of the Republic;
- the provision of the broadcasts, "Manual for Handling your Child," and "Passport for Healthy Child" to mothers in maternity institutions;
- the provision of free children's food to children from poor families at the ages of one year and two years at the place of residence;
- the explanation of their rights and obligations to persons applying to the Civil Registry and local organs of self-government for the purpose of recording a marriage;
- the application of the system of continuous professional growth of women employees in accordance with the demands of scientific and technical progress, and the improvement of methods for their professional training;
- the prevention of traffic in persons, including conducting educational campaigns among the general population, adolescents, and young people. In the context of this campaign, providing instruction to governmental and non-governmental organizations involved with the problems of women, young people, and children;
- the study of the development of trends in marriage and family relationships and other questions.

## **HIV/AIDS**

As a result of targeted efforts since 1997, there has been a sharp increase in the number of cases of diagnosed HIV infection. In the Republic, 625 cases of infection with AIDS have been uncovered, of which 120 were women (19.9%). In the Republic, services have been created for preventing the spread of AIDS, at the head of which stands the Azerbaijan National AIDS Center, the only state executive institution, which, in its organizational structure, is a coordinating, monitoring, and practical institution attached to the Ministry of Public Health. Within the organization of the Center, there are 12 regional laboratories. In each therapeutic institution of the Republic, there is a designated person with responsibility for the prevention of AIDS.

At the state level, a series of legislative acts was adopted directed at preventing the spread of AIDS in the Republic. On 16 April 1996, a law was adopted in the Republic of Azerbaijan, "On preventing the spread of the disease caused by the immunodeficiency virus (AIDS)." The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan signed a decree regarding its implementation. On 20 October 1997, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan approved the National Program for the prevention of AIDS.

The state program reflects the fundamental directions and strategy of the Government in combating HIV/AIDS. This program includes both theoretical foundations as well as medical, integrative, and other aspects of the fight against AIDS. However, the opportunities for financing from the Government are limited. For the purpose of assuring the safety of donor blood and its derivatives in accordance with the orders of the Ministry of Public Health of the Republic of Azerbaijan, a system for certifying donor blood has been created.

The National AIDS Center devotes special attention to observing the rights of patients who are infected with HIV and AIDS. All patients infected with HIV and AIDS are treated as public-health patients in the Center, and they are afforded free medical assistance, treatment, and consultations with specialists. Social assistance is afforded in applying for and receiving disability benefits.

Unfortunately, the AIDS Center is not included in the numerous programs and projects designated for social and material support from international organizations. For the purpose of increasing awareness, reducing the risk of infection, and enabling prompt detection and forecasts of the spread of HIV infection among risk groups, screening research activities are being carried out. Since 1997, a 24-hour, anonymous consultation and testing service for AIDS and a hotline have been functioning. At the Center, the movement, "Youth Against AIDS," has been formed and is actively participating in the fight against AIDS.

In the Republic, at the initiative of the Center, among school students beginning with the sixth grade in all secondary and higher-education institutions, on 10 December an hour was devoted to the struggle against AIDS. Lessons were held according to the program, "Save Yourself from AIDS," prepared by the AIDS Center. In addition, booklets and leaflets were prepared for parents, which were brought home by children. These lessons were conducted under the special

supervision of the Ministry of Education. Thanks to these lessons, an increase in the awareness of children, adolescents, and young people has been noted, and the habits of safe behavior and a healthy lifestyle are being formed. National and international NGOs play an important role in assuring the rights of those infected with HIV/AIDS, and in developing various directions in the fight against this disease.

With the active support of the AIDS Center, in 1998, an association of patients infected with HIV and AIDS was formed called Imdad -- SOS. This association is the only social organization in the Republic that has a social base, and it was created to afford moral, material, social, psychological, and legal assistance to people who are living with HIV/AIDS. Among those active in the Imdad -- SOS Association are those who are HIV-positive and members of their families, as well as doctors, jurists, psychologists, sociologists, and other citizens. The National AIDS Center cooperates closely with the Imdad -- SOS Association.

According to the opinion of international experts, Azerbaijan as one of the group of countries of the Southern Caucasus, is in the initial stages of the AIDS epidemic. This means that all efforts and potential opportunities must be mobilized today, or all actions directed at preventing AIDS could turn out to be too little, too late.

In addition to the existing serious financial problems, it is important to note an insufficient level of awareness among the general population regarding the problem of HIV/AIDS and the means of infection. This problem demands the mobilization of public opinion in the fight against the social and economic problems that increase the risk of HIV infection.

It is also necessary to improve the coordination in the area of preventing and combating HIV/AIDS among all state, social, and international organizations.

### **Part three: Institutional development**

The process of involving women in the active participation in all areas of life of the Republic began in 1995 when Azerbaijan joined the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, as well as after the Beijing Conference on Women.

Institutional mechanisms for enhancing the role of women are one of the 12 areas included in the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Platform specifies a national mechanism, lists the conditions necessary for its effective functioning, and calls on governments to implement the actions specified.

Until the creation of an ongoing governmental body for assuring equality between the sexes, efforts directed at enhancing the role of women had been carried out by the National Training Committee. Among the tasks of this committee are:

- evaluating the role and status of women in the post-Soviet period;
- considering the evaluation of the role and status of women in the transitional period, and also determining the basic areas of interest and activity;
- developing existing information regarding women's questions, statistical data and other information, and preparing recommendations for the development and improvement of the system of data collection;
- actively involving women in public life through supporting the creation of women's organizations;
- developing action programs directed at improving the status of women in society and achieving equality between the sexes.

In January 1998, by decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, a State Committee on Women's Problems was created which is the national mechanism for assuring equality between the sexes. In accordance with the order, laying out the mandate of the Committee, the Committee is charged with being the central executive body in the Cabinet of Ministers which carries out an organizational policy regarding women in the Republic. Its fundamental task is to track and promote the application of the law and of the principles of nondiscrimination and equality between men and women.

In its activities, the State Committee on Women's Problems is based on the following strategies:

1. Strengthening the national mechanisms for assuring equality;
2. Including the question of equality between the sexes in legislation, social policy, and state programs and projects;
3. Preparing and making available gender-segregated statistics, data, and information.

Among the tasks of the Committee are:

- implementing measures together with organizations involved with solving the social problems of women, defending their rights and their ability to choose various professions, retraining and improving qualifications, and providing women with jobs;
- carrying out measures directed at protecting the rights of women as reflected in international legal agreements;

- coordinating the activity of women's organizations, women's federations, and women's associations;
- implementing measures for developing relationships between state bodies and women's non-governmental organizations as well as international women's organizations;
- studying the social problems of women refugees and forced migrants as well as of women from disadvantaged families, and appealing to the appropriate state bodies for their solution;
- developing proposals on the basic directions of state policy with regard to women.

The chairman of the State Committee on Women's Problems is appointed by the President and is a member of the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The Committee is financed from the state budget of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In 1998, through a project of the United Nations Development Program, "Gender and Development", the Committee was provided with one-time technical assistance for increasing its capacities.

Effective support for the functioning of the national mechanism for equality was provided by the decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, of 6 March 2000, "On implementing state policy regarding women," in which provision was made for securing representation of women at equal numbers with men at the leadership level of all government structures of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and also to create opportunities for women that are equal to those of men, being guided by the requirements of the gender policy. Together with this, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the National Plan of Action reflecting the strategy of the Beijing Platform.

The strategy of gender mainstreaming is being realized on two levels of executive power:

- at the level of ministries and departments that are a part of structure of the Cabinet of Ministers (Interministerial Council);
- at the level of regional executive bodies coordinated by the Office of the President.

Coordinators (focal points) that are responsible for carrying out the gender policy in the ministries are part of the Interministerial Council, which was created as part of the State Committee on Women's Problems. For purposes of increasing the awareness of the coordinators with regard to gender problems, the Committee carries out targeted educational efforts. The leadership team and employees of the Committee are constantly traveling to all regions of the Republic. Consultations, seminars, and training sessions are carried out periodically. The Committee furnishes them with the necessary literature, and in this context great effort is made in translating literature, international documents, and recommendations, and training materials are generated.

Coordinators are part of the targeted groups of projects that are being carried out by the Committee as well as by international organizations.

In September 2003, in the Republic, the Second Congress of Women was held, which among other things furnished an evaluation of the work of the coordinators, defined the successes that had been achieved, exposed shortcomings, and noted the future prospects for ongoing development.

The aforementioned decree of the President of 2000 provides for reporting on the implementation of the decree itself. Coordinators present annual reports on the implementation of the gender policy in local areas. In accordance with the decree, the State Committee on Statistics prepares a publication, "Men and Women." On the basis of these data, the Committee prepares a report evaluating the progress in promoting gender equality and expanding the opportunities of women.

Analysis of the statistical data over the course of the last seven years demonstrates significant growth in the fundamental indicators reflecting the strategies of the Beijing Platform and ideas of the Millennium Declaration. Thus, in the 2003, the State Committee on Statistics published a statistical compendium, "Families in Azerbaijan," dedicated to the International Year of the Family. This collection includes gender-related statistics on such areas as the demographic characteristics of families, health care, employment, standard of living, household budgets, and crime. It should also be noted that there are areas in which it has become difficult to obtain statistical data. One example is domestic violence, inasmuch as the victims of domestic violence very often do not turn to law enforcement bodies.

Because the effective functioning of the mechanism depends in large part on the support that is afforded by the public, the Committee implements its activity together with women's non-governmental organizations, women's groups in political parties and labor unions, and women's associations in the mass media. The successful operation of the national mechanism was fostered by creating centers of gender research, implementing projects directed at solving the problems of women, and raising the awareness of the public in the area of gender.

With respect to the question of promoting gender equality and expanding the opportunities of women, the State Committee on Women's Problems works together with Parliament. Thus, in the event that gaps appear in legislation in the area of promoting gender equality, the Committee discusses them with Parliament.

Since the founding of the Committee, the conditions of gender mainstreaming have significantly changed from a strategy of gender education to the recognition of gender policy as one of the most important constituent parts of a democratic country.

The strategy of involving greater numbers of women in decision-making processes remains one of our priorities. But the fundamental goal will be achieved not only due to improvements in statistical data. The goals of the gender policy will be achieved through changes in public opinion and through overcoming traditional stereotypes. This is a long-term strategy and it will be focused on educational programs.

Despite the difficult transitional period through which our Republic is passing, we are seeking to involve the greatest possible number of women in the women's movement throughout the Republic. At the present time, in the Republic, approximately 50 women's non-governmental organizations are in operation, each of which deals with a specific area of activity.

#### **Part four: Main challenges and actions to address them**

The reforms that have been implemented in the Republic of Azerbaijan over the last ten years in the social and economic area as well as in the areas of education, public health, and institutionalization have fostered the establishment in the country of macro-economic stability, provided the impulse to dynamic development of the economy, and have exerted a positive influence on raising the standard of living of the general population, including women. These reforms made possible the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the decisions of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Nevertheless, it must be noted that there are areas in which it is necessary to undertake further measures with the purpose of completely implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, the decisions of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and the Millennium Declaration.

The fundamental problem for Azerbaijan is the unresolved conflict and the problems that arise from it, which have a negative effect on the situation of women. As a result of the conflict, 20% of the land of the Azerbaijan is under occupation, and more than one million persons are refugees and forced migrants. Azerbaijan is a country in which every eighth resident is a refugee, and which has the greatest number of refugees as a percentage of the population.

The period for the implementation of the National Action Plan for women's problems in the Republic of Azerbaijan comes to an end in 2005. Analysis of the achieved results showed the progress and the shortcomings achieved through this plan, in the context of which the decision was taken to institute a new plan for 2005-2008. The priority directions of the new plan will be the social and economic area, improving legislation, strengthening the national mechanism, improving the monitoring mechanism regarding gender policy and the protection of women's rights, creating a mechanism for promoting equal opportunities for men and women, education, violence against women, and the traffic in women.

The steps that have been taken by the Government for achieving sustainable development in the economy, increasing employment in the general population, and reducing the level of poverty are among the most fundamental priorities of the Republic. In 2004, by decree of the President of the Republic, the state program was approved for the social and economic development of the regions for 2004-2008. The Government plans to adopt a state program for employment and other programs. The state program for reducing poverty and fostering economic development is being successfully implemented. In all of these programs, the gender factor is being taken into account.

For the purpose of full implementation of the Beijing Platform and of the decisions of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, the Government will adopt specific measures in priority areas.

#### **Women, poverty, and the economy**

- Integration of gender points of view in the national budget and in macro-economic policy (gender-sensitive budgeting);
- Development of women's entrepreneurship through the provision of supplemental credits;

- Facilitating networking among women entrepreneurs with the goal of expanding their opportunities to obtain necessary information and knowledge for entrepreneurial activities;
- Improving the situation of women on the labor market and taking measures to combat unequal payment for work, supporting life-long learning, and combating the feminization of poverty;
- Recognition of the role of women in sustainable development, at decision-making levels, and in the administration of natural resources;

### **Women and education**

- Enabling "gender" to become a mandatory instead of an elective subject;
- Improving the work in the area of reconciling family and work obligations, with the goal of involving more women in science, politics, and public life;
- Continuing work directed at reducing the number of girls who will not complete their studies due to early marriages;
- Conducting public campaigns to involve girls in obtaining technical education;
- Creating conditions for women and girls to receive technical education;
- Providing access to information and communication technologies for women and girls;

### **Violence against women**

- Improving legislation in the area of violence against women, especially domestic violence against women;
- Conducting a coordinated policy directed at eliminating violence against women, including active work with law-enforcement bodies for preventing, uncovering, and assisting the victims of violence. Special attention will be paid to domestic violence and violence during a period of armed conflicts;
- Strengthening the work of law-enforcement bodies in the area of violence and the traffic in women through carrying out training sessions, and recruiting women to work in law-enforcement bodies;
- Improving the joint actions of governmental and non-governmental organizations in realizing the National Plan of Action in combating the traffic in persons;

### **Women and health**

- Continuing the work of realizing the strategy, "Preserving reproductive health";
- Preventing HIV/AIDS, through providing information and promoting safe sexual behavior;
- Improving the work of family planning centers;
- Achieving a reduction in maternal mortality and births occurring in the home;
- Eliminating cultural obstacles in the area of family planning that occur in specific regions of the Republic;
- Giving special attention to the sexual education of young people, free access to family planning, including abortions. Continuing to implement preventive programs, directed at strengthening the health of girls and preventing adolescent pregnancy, etc.;

### **Women, armed conflicts, and refugees**

- Including gender factors in a national policy regarding refugees, with the goal of assuring the protection of women's rights;
- Promoting the active participation of women in the realization of Resolution 1325 of the Security Council of the United Nations;
- Continuing to provide all means of support to Coalition 1325, which was created in Azerbaijan within the framework of the UNIFEM project, "Women for the prevention and resolution of conflicts and for building peace in the Southern Caucasus," the Coalition being a public movement of women in support of Resolution 1325 of the Security Council of the United Nations;

### **Women at decision-making levels**

- Adopting legislative and administrative positive measures for assuring the balanced participation of men and women at decision-making levels;
- Strengthening the work of the national mechanism directed at the balanced participation of men and women at decision-making levels;
- Implementing gender mainstreaming in the work of parliamentary committees, state bodies, and financial institutions;
- Strengthening the role of women in preventing and resolving conflicts;
- Increasing the number of women as international representatives and in international delegations;
- Strengthening the role of NGOs in promoting equality between men and women.