

# Gender Dimension in the Implementation of Social Service Policy

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**Abstract:** *Social service policy produces different outcomes when viewed through a gender lens. Women are more likely to work in informal and low-paid jobs and to bear the burden of unpaid care work, which limits their full access to social insurance mechanisms. Consequently, compared to men, they face a higher risk of poverty and encounter more barriers in accessing social protection measures. Effective implementation requires addressing gender-specific risks, such as unpaid care work, informal employment, and discrimination, to promote equality. Key aspects include ensuring women's access to benefits, enhancing their economic empowerment, and challenging traditional gender norms. Gender-sensitive social service policies are crucial for reducing inequalities, as women are disproportionately represented in informal employment, have lower labor market participation, and carry the majority of unpaid care responsibilities, all of which expose them to higher poverty risks.*

**Keywords:** *Gender inequality, unpaid care work, informal employment, social protection, poverty risk, sustainable social development*

## 1. Introduction

Social service policies play a central role in reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion, yet their impacts are not gender neutral. Structural differences in labor market participation, income levels, and caregiving responsibilities mean that women and men experience social protection systems in unequal ways (Rustamova et al., 2025). Women's overrepresentation in informal and low-paid employment, combined with their disproportionate share of unpaid care work, limits their access to contributory social insurance schemes and increases their vulnerability to poverty (Ulrichs, 2016). Therefore, integrating a gender perspective into social service policy design and implementation is essential to ensure equitable access, address gender-specific risks, and promote inclusive and sustainable social protection outcomes (Hassim & Razavi, 2006).

In this article, we conduct a gender-based analysis of social service policies, focusing on how structural inequalities in labor market participation, the prevalence of informal employment, and the unequal distribution of unpaid care work influence women's access to social protection mechanisms. The study further evaluates the extent to which existing policy frameworks address gender-specific risks and identifies key principles for the development and implementation of gender-sensitive social service policies aimed at reducing poverty and promoting social equity.

## 2. Integrating Gender in Social Service Policy Implementation

Effective policies should incorporate gender analysis, address structural inequalities, and promote equal social protection to ensure equal rights and access for all genders (Camilletti, 2021). One of the central gender dimensions in social service policy is the burden of unpaid care work. Women's disproportionate responsibility for caregiving tasks often leads to career interruptions and reduced contribution-based social benefits (Razavi & Staab, 2018; Goldblatt, 2016).

Another important aspect concerns labor market gaps. Women are frequently overrepresented in informal employment, which leaves them vulnerable and exposes them to wage gaps that reduce social insurance accumulation (Kabeer, 2014; Ulrichs, 2016). As of 2023–2024, the global labor force participation rate for women remains significantly lower than for men, with women's participation at approximately 47–49% compared to 72–73% for men (Heath et al, 2024).

Mathematical modelling can offer insights for forecasting and policy evaluation to address gender differences in social protection and labour force participation. It is possible to depict women's and men's labour force participation (LFP), employment, unemployment, and social security coverage as dynamic variables over time, impacted by structural elements including unpaid care work, informal employment, and educational attainment. Due to their disproportionate caregiving responsibilities, women frequently experience employment disruptions, lesser coverage of social security programs, and decreased contributions to social insurance (Razavi & Staab, 2018; Goldblatt, 2016; Kabeer, 2014; Ulrichs, 2016). Predictive models that anticipate future labour market outcomes and the possible impact of focused actions can incorporate these structural inequities.

One suitable approach is a system dynamics model, which simulates the flows of women and men between states of unpaid care, formal and informal employment, and social protection coverage. For example, the change in women's labor force participation ( $L_{w,t}$ ) over time can be modeled as a function of the reduction in care work burden and informal employment:

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{dL_w}{dt} &= \alpha(1 - L_w) - \beta C_w \\ \frac{dE_w}{dt} &= \gamma L_w - \delta I_w\end{aligned}$$

where  $C_w$  represents care work burden,  $I_w$  represents informal employment, and  $\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta$  are sensitivity parameters. These equations allow simulation of various policy scenarios, such as expanding childcare services, formalizing informal work, or improving educational access.

Alternatively, a logistic growth model can project women's labor force participation under

different policy conditions:

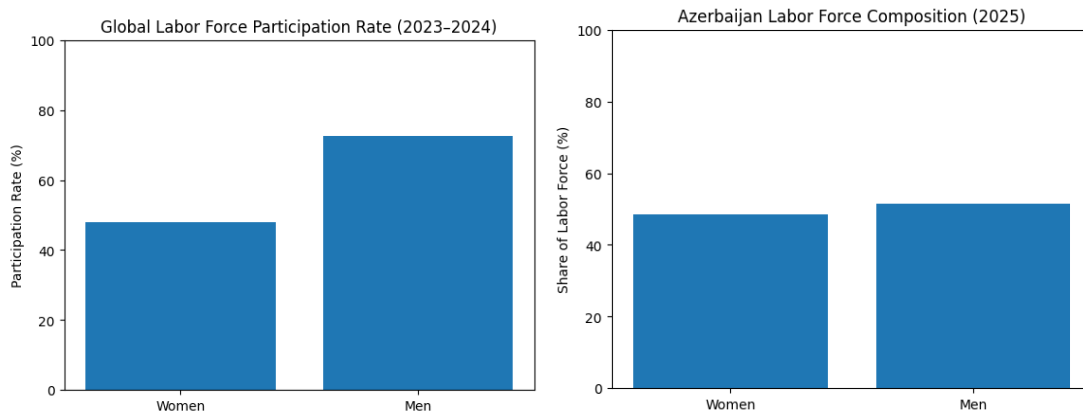
$$L_{w,t+1} = \frac{L_{\max}}{1 + e^{-k(t-t_0) + \theta P_t}}$$

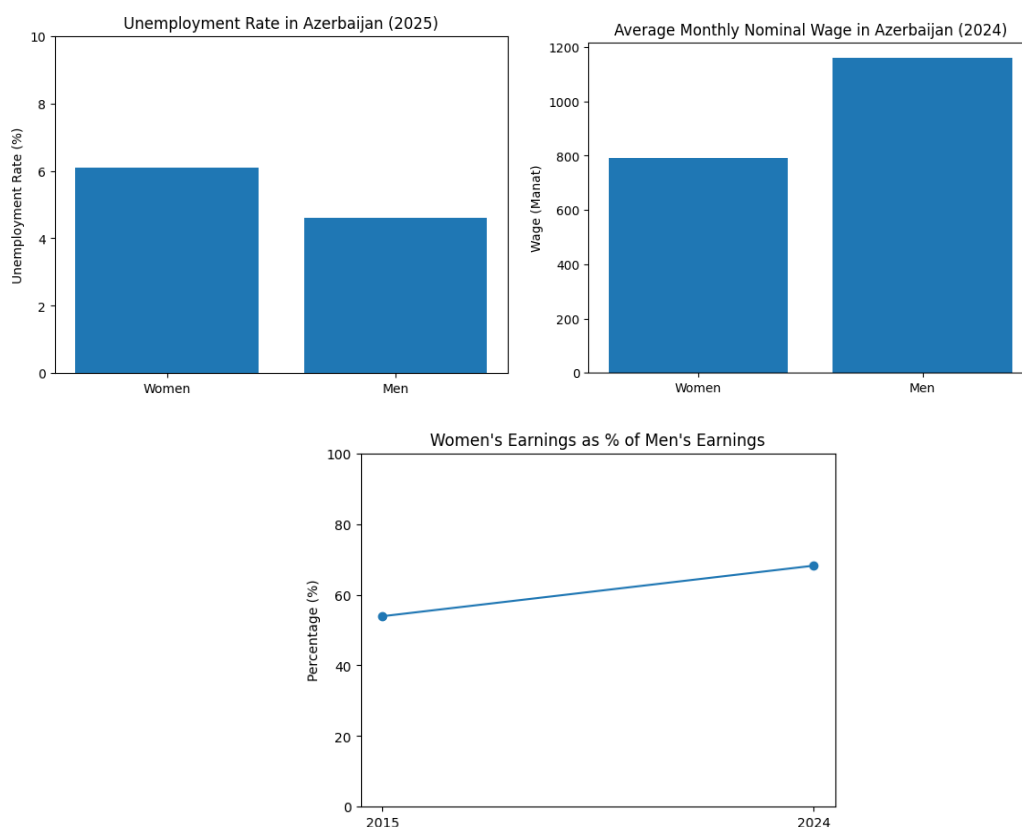
where  $L_{\max}$  is the maximum achievable participation,  $k$  is the natural growth rate, and  $P_t$  captures the intensity of policy interventions. Applying these models to Azerbaijan’s current data (women comprise 48.4% of the labor force in 2025) enables forecasting for 2026–2030 and evaluating the effectiveness of gender-sensitive policies. Scenario simulations indicate that combining reduced care burdens, formalization of informal work, and enhanced education could increase women’s labor force participation substantially, improving equity and social protection coverage over time.

As of January 1, 2025, men made up 51.6 percent of Azerbaijan's labour force, while women made up 48.4 percent (Figure 1). Women made up 48.0 percent of all employed people, while men made up 52.0 percent. 17.3 percent of women and 17.0 percent of men in the working population had a postsecondary education. Of the overall number of unemployed people, women made up 55.6%. According to the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2025), the national unemployment rate was 4.6% for males and 6.1% for women.

In 2024, the average monthly nominal wage for women amounted to 791.1 manat, compared to 1159.9 manat for men. In 2015, women’s average monthly nominal earnings represented 53.9 percent of those of men, whereas by 2024 this ratio had increased to 68.2 percent (State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2024).

Ensuring gender equality in the implementation of social service policy requires strategic measures such as the expansion of childcare facilities and daycare centers. This issue is particularly significant from both a social justice and an economic development perspective (Shaver, 2018).





**Figure 1.** Azerbaijan's Labor Market Dynamics (2015–2025): A gender-disaggregated view of employment and earnings.

**Source:** State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2025

Accessible childcare and daycare systems facilitate women's return to work, reduce career interruptions, strengthen women's economic independence, and contribute to narrowing gender-based wage disparities. Expanding these systems is not merely a social service intervention but also a key mechanism for institutionalizing gender equality (Cookson & Barrantes, 2024). Measures in this direction enhance women's economic participation, improve family well-being, and support sustainable social development (Kuss & Cookson, 2026).

Experiences from numerous countries demonstrate that the expansion of early childhood care services significantly increases women's employment. A broader childcare network also improves access to early education for children from low-income families and provides support to single-parent households (Bennett, 2008). This, in turn, promotes social equity and ensures a fair distribution of opportunities.

### 3. Accessibility of Childcare Services and Gender Equality in Azerbaijan

The accessibility of childcare services positively influences fertility rates, addresses demographic challenges, and enhances the social security of young families. To ensure effective gender equality:

1. Partnerships between the public and private sectors should be expanded;
2. The network of childcare facilities, particularly in rural areas, should be increased;

3. Quality standards for daycare centers should be established.

In Azerbaijan, early childhood care and social support services are provided by both public and non-governmental sectors in various forms to ensure children's health, development, well-being, and strong support within the family environment (Gurbanova, 2025). These services primarily focus on supporting early development during the 0–6 age period. The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Social Services (2011) establishes the legal foundations for social services in the country.

The Social-Economic Development Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2022–2026 (2022) aims to improve the quality of social services. Its key priorities include:

- Establishing and networking social service institutions, including daycare centers and care facilities;
- Expanding social services for children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups;
- Organizing social and psychological support for at-risk families and applying innovative social work methods, as outlined in the State Program on the Development of Social Services in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2023–2026.

The Strategy on Children of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2020–2030 serves as a long-term plan for state child policy. Additionally, the National Action Plan on Gender Equality (Men and Women) for 2026–2028, approved on December 29, 2025, represents the next three-year strategic document to ensure gender equality in the country.

In addition, as an institutional mechanism, the Child and Family Support Centers under the State Committee for Family, Women, and Children's Issues implement social support programs aimed at addressing children's developmental challenges (Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2006).

#### **4. The Beijing Platform for Action and Early Childhood Care**

For comparison, in Turkey, early childhood care and social support services are primarily provided by the Ministry of Family and Social Services, the Ministry of National Education, and local municipalities. The ministries develop social support and early education policies, while municipalities establish affordable or free daycare centers, particularly for low-income families.

Given the historically low levels of women's labor market participation, workplace childcare facilities are encouraged, and there are legal obligations for large enterprises to provide onsite childcare. In particular, the number of municipal kindergartens has increased in major cities.

Daycare centers provide services under special programs for single-parent households, low-income families, refugee and migrant families, and children with disabilities. According to Turkish labor legislation, enterprises with a certain number of female employees are required to organize childcare services.

In Western Europe (France, Germany, the Netherlands), the model is characterized by:

- Joint provision of services by the public and private sectors;
- Early childhood education and childcare may be organized as separate services;
- State subsidies are provided based on family income.

## 5. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Childcare Services

Early childhood care and social support services constitute a structural nexus linking women's poverty, economic development, and early socialization processes. International normative frameworks, particularly the *Beijing Platform for Action* (United Nations, 1995) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW; United Nations, 1979), explicitly situate childcare within broader strategies for gender equality and socio-economic transformation. When analyzed comparatively between Turkey and Western Europe, differences in welfare regime design reveal how childcare policy shapes women's economic autonomy and long-term social equity.

The *Beijing Platform for Action*, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (United Nations, 1995), identifies women's poverty as structurally linked to limited access to employment and the unequal distribution of unpaid care work. In its strategic objectives under "Women and Poverty" and "Women and the Economy," the Platform calls for strengthening social infrastructure including childcare services to expand women's labor market participation and reduce economic dependency (United Nations, 1995). The document makes clear that gender equality cannot be achieved without policies that reconcile work and family life. Thus, childcare is framed not as social assistance but as enabling economic infrastructure.

Similarly, CEDAW establishes binding legal obligations for States Parties. Article 11 requires states to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination in employment and to develop social services that enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities (United Nations, 1979, Art. 11(2)(c)). Article 5 emphasizes the modification of stereotyped gender roles within the family, while Article 13 addresses equal participation in economic and social life. The CEDAW Committee has repeatedly stressed in its concluding observations that accessible and affordable childcare is essential to achieving substantive (de facto) equality (CEDAW Committee, various concluding observations). In this framework, the absence of childcare constitutes a form of indirect discrimination because it disproportionately constrains women's economic activity.

The relationship between childcare and women's poverty operates through labor market participation. Empirical welfare state research demonstrates that in countries with extensive public childcare systems, particularly in Nordic and Western European contexts female employment rates are significantly higher, and gender wage gaps are comparatively narrower (OECD, 2023; Esping-Andersen, 1999). These systems reduce women's dependency on family-based support by socializing care responsibilities. Ann Shola Orloff conceptualizes this dynamic through the notion of "defamilization," defined as the degree to which social policies allow individuals, especially women, to maintain a livelihood independent of familial relations (Orloff, 1993). In welfare states with high defamilization, childcare services function as institutional mechanisms that enable women's full citizenship and economic autonomy.

In contrast, more familialist welfare arrangements such as those historically characteristic of Turkey allocate primary responsibility for care to the household. Although Turkey has expanded preschool education in recent years, public childcare coverage for children under three remains comparatively limited, and informal care networks continue to play a central role (OECD, 2022). This structure constrains women's continuous labor market participation and contributes to higher rates of part-time or informal employment. As feminist social policy scholars argue, when

unpaid care work is insufficiently recognized in social protection systems, women face long-term economic disadvantages, including lower lifetime earnings and weaker pension entitlements (Bennett, 2013).

Fran Bennett emphasizes that social security and income maintenance systems, though formally gender-neutral, often fail to account adequately for unpaid care work and may reinforce economic dependency if benefits are structured around family-based entitlements rather than individual rights (Bennett, 2013). From this perspective, childcare expansion is not only a labor market policy but also a mechanism for restructuring gendered social rights.

Education plays a critical intergenerational role within this framework. Early childhood education contributes to children's cognitive and socio-emotional development, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, thereby reducing long-term inequality (Heckman, 2006). At the same time, early education institutions function as spaces of early socialization where gender norms and social expectations are shaped. The *Beijing Platform for Action* highlights equal access to education for girls and the expansion of early childhood opportunities as strategic priorities for building social equity from an early age (United Nations, 1995). Thus, investment in childcare simultaneously promotes women's immediate economic participation and long-term social development outcomes. From a macroeconomic perspective, increasing women's labor force participation through childcare provision contributes to national productivity growth and poverty reduction (OECD, 2023). Dual-earner households are less vulnerable to income shocks, and diversified labor market participation enhances economic resilience. Consequently, childcare services generate both micro-level empowerment effects and macro-level development dividends.

In comparative terms, Western European welfare states, particularly social-democratic regimes have more systematically integrated childcare into social investment strategies, recognizing its role in gender equality and economic sustainability. Turkey, despite formal commitments under CEDAW and adherence to the Beijing framework, continues to face structural challenges rooted in familialist policy traditions and uneven service provision. Bridging this gap requires not only quantitative expansion of childcare facilities but also qualitative transformation in policy design, including individualization of social rights and redistribution of unpaid care work.

In sum, early childhood care services constitute a critical institutional link between women's poverty reduction, economic development, and early socialization. International legal and policy frameworks establish childcare as both a gender equality obligation and a development strategy. Comparative evidence demonstrates that where childcare is institutionalized as public infrastructure, women's economic autonomy expands and intergenerational inequalities diminish. Without such structural investment, gender disparities persist, and sustainable socio-economic development remains constrained.

## **6. Conclusions**

Social service policies cannot be considered effective if they overlook the structural realities that shape women's economic lives. Although legal frameworks often guarantee equal rights, persistent differences in labor market participation, wage levels, and care responsibilities continue to produce unequal outcomes. Women's concentration in informal or lower-paid employment, together with their disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, restricts their

access to contributory social insurance and increases their exposure to poverty over the life course.

The findings highlight that childcare services are not simply supportive social measures but core components of gender-equitable development policy. Accessible and affordable early childhood care enables women to maintain continuous employment, strengthens their income security, and contributes to narrowing wage disparities. At the same time, quality early education enhances children's developmental outcomes and promotes more equal opportunities from an early age, thereby addressing intergenerational dimensions of inequality. For Azerbaijan, advancing gender-sensitive social protection requires sustained investment in childcare infrastructure, reduction of regional disparities, and integration of gender analysis into policy implementation. Without structural reforms that recognize and redistribute unpaid care work, poverty reduction strategies will remain incomplete. Strengthening early childhood care systems is therefore essential for achieving inclusive growth, social equity, and long-term socio-economic stability.

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