

Women's Rights in Azerbaijan

There are no legal restrictions on women's participation in politics; however, they are underrepresented in elective offices, since traditional social norms restrict women's roles in politics. The practice known of family voting, where men often cast the votes of their wives and other female members of their families exists but is declining in the country. There are 11 female Members of Parliament and 2 women with ministerial rank ([Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Azerbaijan](#)). The chief justice of Azerbaijan's supreme court is a woman.

Women's activist Novella Jafarova comments that most women enter public life through nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs because some women deemed politics is too dangerous for women in this country. In NGOs, women are more welcome. In Baku alone, dozens of women's NGOs have sprung up, and they are making an effort to enforce government policy.

Jafarova added, "We have all the laws in the world protecting women's rights, mostly passed by the Soviets. But that doesn't mean all Azeri women live in good conditions."

Women nominally enjoy the same legal rights as men, including the right to participate in all aspects of economic and social life; however, societal discrimination is a problem. In general women have extensive opportunities for education and work. However, traditional social norms continue to restrict women's roles in the economy. Representation of women is sharply lower in higher levels of the work force. There are few women in executive positions in leading economic enterprises.

Twenty-four women's NGO's are registered, compared with 18 in 1999. The Society for the Defense of Women's Rights (SDWR) spends most of its time fighting unique post-Soviet problems. It has helped divorced women, widows, and wives whose husbands are in prison, all of whom have become socially and legally vulnerable since the fall of the Soviet Union. It assisted widows whose landlords privatized their apartments and then evicted them. The SDWR also worked with divorced women who feel that they have been treated unfairly by divorce courts. Several of the 24 women's NGO's deal with the problems of prostitution and trafficking in women.

Discussion of violence against women is a taboo subject in Azerbaijan's patriarchal society, but it remains a problem. In rural areas, women have no real recourse against violence by their husbands, regardless of the law. Rape is severely punished, but, especially in rural areas, only a small fraction of offenses against women are reported or prosecuted. According to official statistics, there were 44 reported rapes during the year; the Society for the Defense of Women's Rights (SDWR) claims that rape is on the increase and that the official number is underreported, especially from conservative rural areas. There are no government sponsored or funded programs for victims of violence. There are no specific laws concerning spousal abuse or spousal rape.

Prostitution is a significant problem, particularly in the capital city of Baku. Most women become prostitutes in order to support their family members, and sometimes it even is encouraged by the family due to the large amount of money to be made. In February 1999, the Society for the Defense of Women's Rights (SDWR) held a conference to highlight concerns over the growing

incidents of prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases. At the conference, it was reported that there are more than 30 illegal houses of prostitution in Baku alone, the majority of which are allegedly run by high-ranking officials in government and frequented by members of the prosecutor's office and the police. Women engaged in prostitution are not liable to criminal charges since prostitution is considered a personal matter.

Pornography is prohibited, and the age of sexual consent is 16. Trafficking in women is a problem, and the country is a source and transit point for trafficked women.

Source:

[Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Azerbaijan \(2000\)](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/eur/index.cfm?docid=676)

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/eur/index.cfm?docid=676>

Women and Work

<http://www.worldpaper.com/2000/oct00/sovich.html>