

## **ANALYSIS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN IRAN: EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND GENDER IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

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### **Abstract**

This paper addresses existing gender parities and gaps in Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan in terms of human development. Human development by enlarging people's freedoms and potentials draws the attention to "ends" and insists on intrinsic significance of development. The main components of human development are: capabilities, free agency and achievements. Health, education and economic resources are essential indicators of Human Development Index (HDI) which share the same ratio in HDI value estimation. Gender inequality as a global phenomenon, increasingly focuses on women's deprivation of education, health, income and social developments. This paper discusses Iran's educational developments in gender equality and compares female-to-male progresses in HDI indicators of Iran with Turkey and Azerbaijan. The main goal of human development and capability approach is equal distribution of capabilities and functionings among people. The exceptional status of education in having both intrinsic and instrumental values multiplies the significances of equal education in a global context. In addition to direct impact of education on total health and income rates, parity in education has the capacity to empower women and make them qualified for well-paid vocations.

Iran from 1990 to 2015 has had a sustainable progress in health, education and per capita income. Iran has almost succeeded to close the gender gap in education, while it remains in achievements so far. In comparison to Turkey and Azerbaijan, raising women's capabilities has led to their more achievements in terms of economic resources, labour force and politics. According to human development reports, Turkey in capability distribution has experienced more gender disparity than Iran. By filtering the health indicator, Azerbaijan has the best status in gender parity rather than Turkey and Iran. Turkish women's high life expectancy at birth is the best among the analyzed countries. Unlike Iran, educated women in Azerbaijan and Turkey have lower unemployment rates than Iranian women. That is probably why women in Iran recently have less interest to continue their education in tertiary level and this disappointment has reproduced the gender gap.

**Keywords:** Azerbaijan, education, employment, equality, gender, Human Development Index, human development, Iran, inequality, Turkey.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the terminology of Aristotle "a good political arrangement" or a successful development policy from social and political perspectives has to contain "human good", that means people's well-being (an improvement in

health, education, income and freedom) (Sen, 1999, 2013, UNDP 2016a). This is why human development is not considered as a novel idea. Since ancient times, the pillar of people and social policies had been centralized as the first strategy among politics (UNDP, 1990). Gender inequality as a global concept, focuses on women's deprivation of human development. In case of education, Iran has proceeded remarkably in women's access to schools. This paper discusses first, Iran's gender-based educational development and then compares Iran's female-to-male progresses in HDI indicators (health, education and economic resources) with Turkey and Azerbaijan to highlight which sector in each case includes the largest gender gap.

## **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

Human development concentrates on people's freedoms, hence, connects directly to the concept of human rights. It is mainly a framework which provides an empowering environment for "individuals" to expand their choices (Sen 1999, Walker 2005). Capabilities, free agency and achievements are the key components of capability approach and human development. Unlike mere instrumental notion of human capital, people are both the "means and the ends" of development in human development. Health, education and economic resources are the essential indicators to evaluate human development that each of them share the same ratio in its estimation which reflects its plural nature. The quality and equality of human life contains many components that are neither same nor commensurable by any single metric or words like GDP (Gross domestic product) or GNI (Gross national income) (Sen 1999, 2005, Nussbaum 2011). The analysis of human development becomes possible through Human Development Index which is based on this formula:  $HDI = [H + E + Y]/3$ , in which H indicates the life expectancy, E represent the educational accomplishments and Y indicates (GNI), Gross National Income per capita. In fact, HDI is the mean of these variables.

## **GENDER INEQUALITY**

Ensuring men and women's equal shares in both, capabilities and functioning is one of the fundamental aspects in human development framework (UNDP 1995). To attain a functional equality, there is a need for transparency in recognition of women and men's status in the society; due to their biological differences and women's socially founded disadvantages, women are more potential to be marginalized within the communities. To make the gender inequality phenomenon usable in policy-making process, GDI (Gender Development Index) and GII (Gender Inequality Index) disaggregate HDI values, based on sex, to show each country's gender gap precisely. Women are entitled to have access to education, and economic resources as any other individual in societies. The most important result of putting development plans on the individual-based grand is the increase of government's accountability and trust among people.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology used in this paper is the secondary data analysis of human development through available data and reports represented by the United Nations Development Program, World Bank, UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and UN (United Nations). Examining the existing literature, research and conducts gives an excellent opportunity to compare and contrast different points of view with each other to approve or criticize them.

## **EDUCATION**

The exceptional status of education in having both intrinsic and instrumental values has multiplied the importance of equal distribution of knowledge. Besides, education has the capacity to empower women as much as men who make them qualified for professional vocations within the society. Exercising the agenda of human development in Iran in an effective way necessitates analyzing it through a certain historical path. Due to a country's high human development indicators imply its important growth in past two decades (Sen 1988). Since 1989 and in particular after ending the war with the invasion of Iraq, Iran has achieved a considerable progress in HDI indicators, such as education and health and almost a constant growth in per capita income. Hence, such a positive process propagates the idea that reforms in the both political and social state areas can speed up this proceeding development chains (UN 1999).

Indeed, according to the "Fig.1", Iran's value in human development Index from 0.572 in 1990 has soared to 0.774 in 2015 which means its ranking improved from 94 in 1990 to 68 in 2015 (UNDP 2016). However, Iran still is a country with middle income level and around 80 million population densities and has a long way ahead to achieve the preferable well-being (UNDP 2011). Looking at the HDI assessment of Iran, through the years 1990 to 2015 facilitates pursuing its progress path in each indicator. Through that Iran in past 25 years has improved the average life expectancy of every individual at birth by 11.8 years, expected years of

education has developed by 5.6 years a long with 4 years extension in mean years of schooling and an increment in average gross national income per capita by almost 60.6 %.

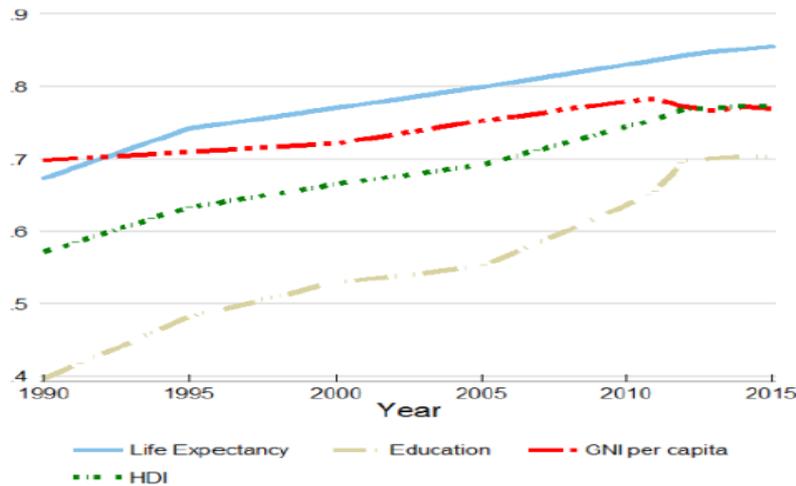


Fig. 1. Human Development Indicator's Path in Iran between Years 1990-2015  
Source: (UNDP 2016b)

## WOMEN AND MEN'S ATTAINMENT IN THE UNIVERSITIES IN IRAN

Regarding to ascending number of universities in Iran the chance of people to be accepted from tertiary education become to some extent high (WES 2001).

Iranian women after the Islamic Revolution have an increasing participation in tertiary education, since 1990 (Zahedifar 2012). Regarding "Fig.2". At the level of Tertiary degree attainment, Iran experiences often equal male and female students between years 2002 till 2012. However the gender gap in the linear scatter plot has been closed obviously by time passing in 2015. Despite the "Fig.2" that illustrates slightly high number of men in the universities than women in years of 2014 and 2015, women's growing interest to be literate has nearly closed the gender gap in Iran. Therefore, this can be understood that in higher educational levels, women's educational attainment become highlighted and no one can deny that currently Iran has achieved 65% women's attainment in the universities which means more literate and skillful women and girls, mothers and generation ready to transforming their capabilities in terms of a compatible paid employment and achieve their desired well-being.

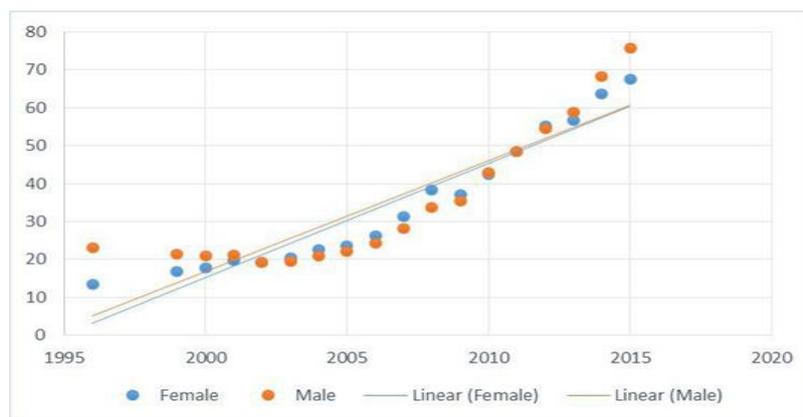


Fig. 2. Women and Men Educational Attainment at Tertiary Level in Iran  
Source: (World Bank 2017a)

Although women's education in higher levels has increased dramatically through the statistics, it never refers to their equal benefits and results of being a literate individual. This claim reflects more tangibly in women's unequal wages in comparison with men's salary and exclusion from practical vocations and professional jobs as the qualified and skilled individuals by the labor markets. Thus, in order to foster a society's culture based on equal values for women and men, in one hand, and remove the gender inequality from functionings and capabilities, on the other hand, there is a need to fulfill it through certain development policies. These

policies can consist of an increment in women's proportion at the parliament and the decision making institutions including both public and private sectors (UNMDG 2015).

In fact, as we can see in "Fig. 2", after closing the gender gap between women and men's attainment in the universities in 2010, the gap started to be enlarged again in 2013 till 2015 through dropping women's attainment in tertiary education. This can be interpreted as a signal of women's less motivation to continue their education in higher levels and even their disappointment due to the lack of preferable vocational opportunities for women in Iran.

## GENDER INEQUALITY IN HEALTH INDICATOR OF HDI IN AZERBAIJAN, IRAN AND TURKEY

Healthy and long life is the first and most important parameter of every society. "Fig. 3" analyzes the average of expected life ages at birth in a time-series from 1990 to 2015 for men and women separately in Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey. Through these data, we can understand that the development process of the mentioned countries has a sustainable growth in increasing the life expectancy of both genders during past 25 years. Accordingly, among women the average life expectancy has been improved in Iran from 66.3 years old in 1990 to 76.7 years in 2015. That growth for women in Azerbaijan and Turkey consists of an increase from age 69.1 and 68 years old respectively in 1990 to 74.1 and 78.7 years old in 2015.

This is virtually the same pattern in every country that men have a poorer longevity than women. It can be rooted in both biology and gender or health policies and systems (Payne 2012). In average, men in 2015 live 12 years more than 1990 in Iran and Turkey. The health indicator, despite the other components of HDI in Azerbaijan, has a slow motion and men have an average of 6 years less life expectancy than women in 2015.

In fact, Turkish women have the best life expectancy compared to both men and women in Iran and Azerbaijan. However men in Turkey on average have 6.5 years less life expectancy than women. Iranian women have two years less and Iranian men two years more life expectancy compared to Turkish women and men, respectively. Azerbaijan has the lowest life expectancy at birth for both men and women compared to Turkey and Iran. It may be possible to suggest that the lower ranking of Azerbaijan compared to Turkey and Iran, in terms of life expectancy at birth is due to its weaker healthcare system, unlike its educational system and the availability of economic resources.

The other fact that can be understood from "Fig. 3" in Iran, there is no gender inequality in health. To reach an accurate vision on every context, there is a need to disaggregate the data. Indeed, reducing the health indicator to mere life expectancy seems not to be so reliable.

Nonetheless, based on the findings of some researchers (Backhans, Lundberg & Mañsdotter 2007), progressive outcomes in health and life expectancy of men and women have a weak correlation with gender equality.

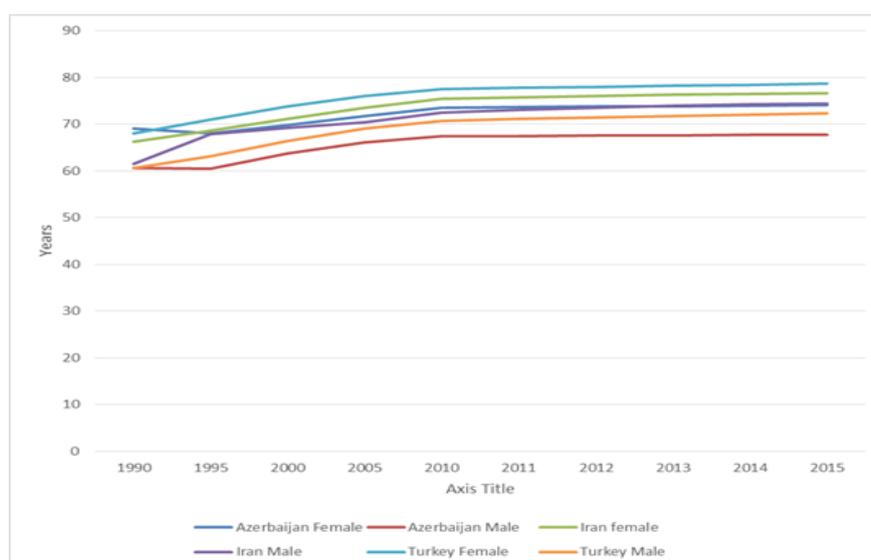


Fig.3. Life Expectancy at Birth (Years), Female and Male (Health Indicator)

Source: UNDP 2015a

There are different disaggregated studies in health component of the human development such as infant mortality, maternal rate, fertility rate and suicide mortality (Kiadaliri et al. 2014). One of the good examples to imply the above-mentioned claim is Ferretti and Mariani's recent research about "gender inequality in obesity and human development" (2017). This research demonstrates that exogenous shifts, such as men and women's biometric factors and body volumes negatively reflect the ratio of human development index, women's empowerment and gender inequality rates in the country scale. By considering to these kinds of surveys, relying on only life expectancy as the ultimate proxy for health indicator and gender equality is not enough and underestimating the other indicators which are extremely effective on gender discrimination rates in health is not logical.

## **GENDER INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT**

Education and employment beyond home are two major areas which have a high tendency towards emerging gender disparity within the modern societies. Traditionally, Middle Eastern countries especially Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan had a disadvantageous situation in women's education and employment. Whereas, before the 1990s almost universally women were under-represented in many aspects of the active life instead of household, motherhood and wifehood tasks. Hence, Iran, Turkey or Azerbaijan are not exceptions to the global trend of gender discrimination. In previous decades, Islamic countries were considered amongst the world regions that have the lowest years of schooling for women, the minimum participation in schools and the least number of women involved in paid employment. However, in recent decades the gap between men and women's education index in some of Islamic countries such as Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan approximately has closed (Irvani 2010).

Turkey as a developing country is spending lots of effort to improve its HDI ranking. These efforts establish the appropriate ground for comparing Turkey with high rank European countries such as Norway which has the highest HDI rank worldwide. In fact, most of the responsibility in elimination of gender disparity is on the shoulders of government that in recent years, Justice and Development Party (AKP) has done a large scale of activities in this regard.

One of the major criticisms for Turkey's educational system points out that the expenditure on tertiary education has unequally devoted more than resources invested in primary education (CNA 2015). With regard to EFA (Education for All) report, in 2007 Turkey has experienced deprivation of above 360,000 girls aged 4 -14, from enrolment in primary schools (UNESCO 2010). Even in 21st century, attaining school and education for girls is a problematic issue in some deprived provinces in Turkey (Güçlü, Gumus & Gumus 2010).

However, by mutual efforts of UNICEF campaigns and Ministry of National Education in Turkey, since 2003 in the regions with highest level of gender inequality in education, they achieve an efficient improvement in wiping out the gender discrimination. Hence, during four years of campaign's activity, 350,000 children have attained to the school and primary education (UNESCO 2015, World Bank 2017b).

Back to Iran, there are different factors that make the comparison of these countries a bit more arduous. For instance, Iran has not such a persuasive encouragement to achieve the highest HDI values in short-term. Azerbaijan and Turkey, due to reaching the essential criteria to EU (European Union)'s membership and other international organizations, have always attempt to cooperate with international organizations and that is one of the reasons behind their more development. Such an international coordination contributes to use other countries' experiences and development keys.

When "Fig.4" is analyzed, mean years of schooling in each country has an ascending growth path during the past 25 years. Azerbaijan has the highest years of schooling for both men and women. Azerbaijan, by getting rid of gender inequality in most of indicators, has had a dramatic progress in HDI. In addition, the gender gap is closed partially in Azerbaijan, so that women in average spend only 0.7 years less than men in educational institutions. In Iran that gap decreases to 0.6 years and this is a great achievement to close the gender gap from 2 years and 2 months in average, less school attainment for women in 1990 to only 6 months in 2015.

Turkey's gender parity in mean years of schooling has the largest gap among the mentioned countries. Hence, women in Turkey on average, have experienced 1 year and 8 months less education than men in schools. Although women in Turkey have entitled to equal educational rights with men by the "Law of Unification of Education" passed in 1924 practically, women's deprivation of education is still negotiable. Correlated to the previous subject, the positive and long-term correlation between education and health in

Turkey has been proved through a case study in 2006, on Turkey. Indeed, gender discrimination in education reflects strongly health rates, particularly a decline in child mortality rates (Erdoğan, Yildirim & Tosuner 2012).

To figure out the interdependence between women's education and development in health indicator, particularly child and infant mortality, I would like to refer to the results of a research on Malawi's Demographic and Health Surveys conducted on 2010. According to the achieved results, there is a positive correlation between mother's education with child and infant mortality rate. Therefore, one year increase in mean years of schooling leads directly, to drop the infant and child mortality rate 3.22 per cent. Furthermore, by spending one more year at school, in case of the young mothers under the 19 years old, the infant and child –under age 5 years old- mortality will decrease 5.95% which demonstrates how women's education can play a vital role in family's health and survival (Makate & Makate 2016).

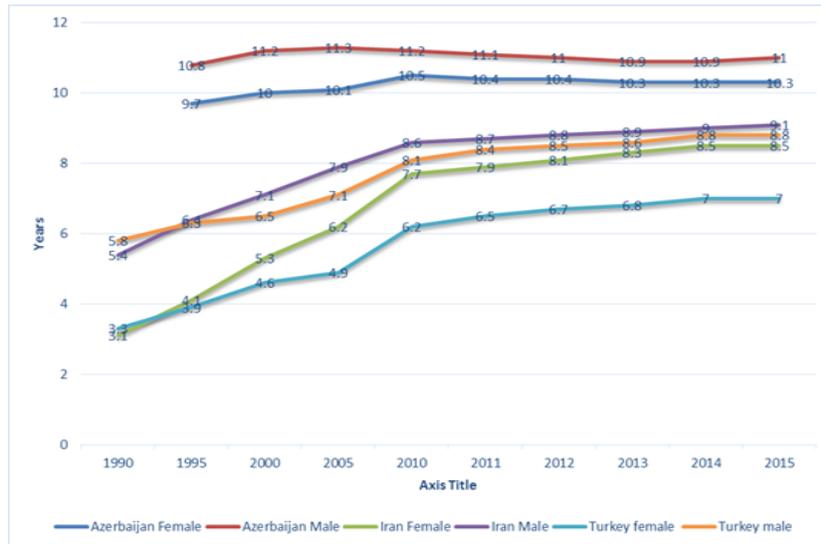


Fig.4. Mean Years of Schooling, Female and Male in Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey

Source: UNDP 2015b

Through comparing men and women's employment rates we can achieve a more clear perspective to the gender inequality in three developing countries. Azerbaijan again, with more gender equality and high mean years of schooling has a leading status in "Fig.4" Iran in terms of men and women's mean years of schooling has the same gender gap with Azerbaijan, however its total mean years of schooling is 3 years less than Azerbaijan. Turkey by having less years of schooling in average for both men and women in addition to more gender gap (1.8 year) has less progress in this indicator of education.

Unemployment rate defined by International Labor Organization (ILO) releases the percentage of labor force to represent unemployed people through countries. Accordingly, unemployed proportions are those who, unlike their capabilities and willing to work for payment, they do not have a job yet and are trying to find available working positions (Teorell et al. 2017).

Regarding the 1990's gender data of Iran, women have had a very trivial portion in country's labor market (Moghadam 1991). Nonetheless, today's after 26 years women still are accounted as minorities in most of the managerial, administrative and well-paid vocations. While, according to the ascending scatter plot of women's enrolment in tertiary education in "Fig.2" the number of educated women entered to universities have increased dramatically and they are almost equal to men's number (Rahbari 2016). The critical situation of women's employment in Iran would be much clear-cut with looking at "Fig.5" that demonstrates only 16.24% of women in Iran are involved in labor force, whereas the labor rate for men in Iran is 72.99%. Despite the fact "Fig.2" illustrates more than 65% of women in Iran have attained tertiary education, their low participation rate in the labor force and low employment rate might be interpreted in terms of a disappointment to continue education in universities. Thus, there is need for some transformations in social and educational aspects of society to wipe out the gender discrimination in women's functionings in employment sphere (Sen 2003).

Azerbaijan has the better situation in employment rate of men and women and with 61.98% women's participation in labor force and 68.59% male's employment has succeeded to close the gender gap

considerably. Gender disparity in labor force of Turkey is a bit smaller than Iran. Women’s participation in employment is 30.36% versus male’s share of labor force is 71.39%.

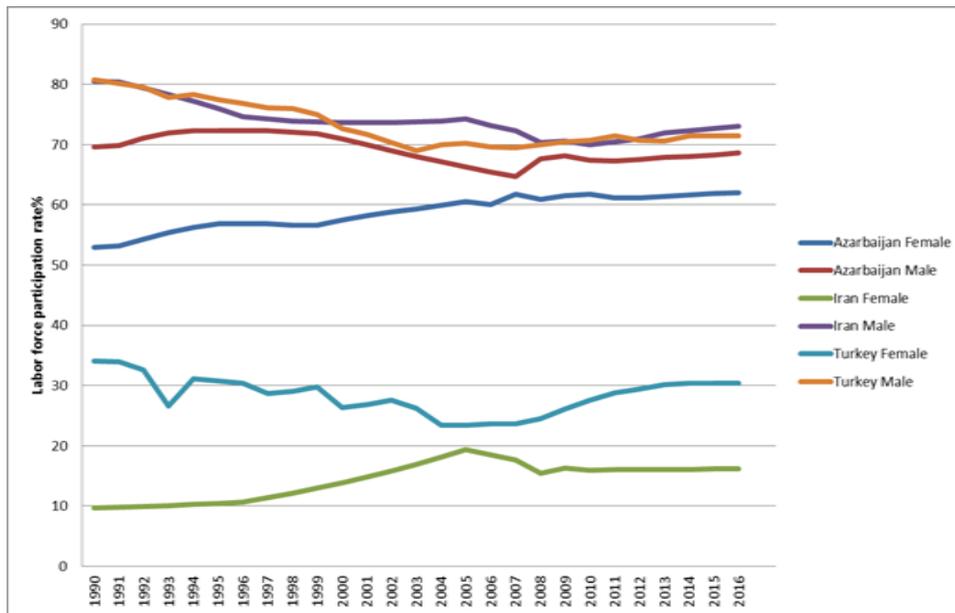


Fig.5. Female and Male Labor Force Participation Rate (% Ages 15+) in Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey (Modeled ILO Estimate)  
Source: World Bank 2016

In fact, women in Iran and Turkey are still the most underemployed and unemployed segment of the societies. It can refer to the women’s low level of education to unfit with the most of formal vocational requirements and also, allocation of low wages for women’s activities. According to “Fig.2” and the semi-equal men and women’s attendance in higher education do not apply for Iran’s high employment rate and rejects this statement, however in case of Turkey this hypothesis can be true.

Considering the smaller disparity between men and women’s employment rates in Azerbaijan indicates that it might have better policies for labor force participation. In fact, the close employment rates of Azerbaijani women and men might originate from the Soviet period. It might argued that the full employment policies for both men and women during the Soviet era has had a significant impact on Azerbaijan’s current labor force participation rates.

### WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND GENDER CRISES

Women’s participation in political arena in most of the developing societies is limited to the formal participation in elections. Though women’s involvement in political procedure as the half of countries’ population is essential to reinforce democracy, they have an insufficient role in political life and activities. This is a common phenomenon that in every socio-political context of the world, women are placed as the highly under-represented strata at political decision-making process (Joyce. J 2015).

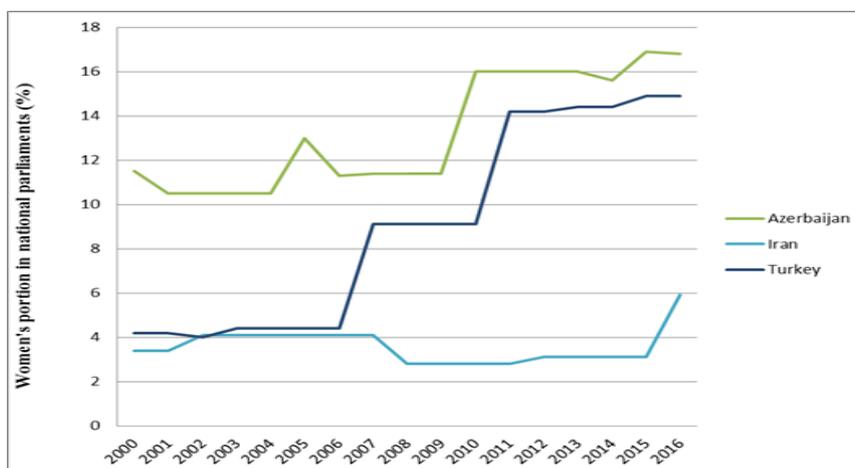


Fig.6. Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments of Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey (%)  
Source: World Bank 2016

Although there is no deterrent law to restrict women's active political involvement in Iran, it is still unaccustomed culture and vision among the majority of people to accept a woman as their representative in the national parliament or as a mayor in the municipality. Political participation of women in Iran during time-series have had a less-progressive path than Turkey and Azerbaijan. However, the new positive trend of Iran in "Fig.6" started from 2015 motivates the hope to more women participation in both national parliamentary and other active political bodies. In Azerbaijan women's representation in political spheres has progressed over recent years. From 2005 to 2016 in "Fig.6", in Azerbaijan national parliaments' women members have grown from 11 per cent to 17 per cent. Besides, such an improvement is remarkable in woman municipal councilors of Azerbaijan between years 2004 to 2009, though an increase from 4% to 26%. One of the most controversial debates in Azerbaijan today is enhancement of women's representation in political parties. To advance democracy in a country, women's presence as the representor of a half of people in elections as voters and candidates is an essential principle (OSCE 2012).

The fast growth of Turkey in women's political participation is considerable. By looking toward Turkey's recent elections the number of women's involved in national parliaments has enhanced almost from 4.5% in 2005 to 15% in 2016. Indeed, in every four years period, Turkey has surpassed a giant step towards more gender equality in politics than Iran.

One of the important reasons of gender development in countries such as Azerbaijan and Turkey is the efforts of European Union Commissioner to encourage governments to enlarge women's political participation. On the other hand, some soaring and moderate goals for women's political involvement by governments can be observed in municipal elections that the proper ground becomes provided for eligible and interested women candidates (CNA 2013).

## **CONCLUSION**

By considering to above-mentioned arguments, in Iran the gender-based gap in the achievements between men and women is more striking than the gender inequality in capabilities such as attainment to education and health. In fact, no matter how many literate women exist in the society; men's share in labor markets, economic resources and political active positions is remarkably more than women. From a positive perspective, removal of the gender inequality in capabilities such as educational indicators along with some of the health achievements such as life expectancy represents partially the progressive attitude of Iran in human development context. The reproduction of the gender gap in women's participation in tertiary education, after it was removed represents a kind of disappointment toward extending women's attainment in tertiary education. The apparent reduction in women's motivation to go to universities is probably a direct outcome of the low employment opportunities in professional and well-paid vocations in the country. Indeed, women in other countries such as Turkey, by experiencing lower mean years of schooling, achieve more economic resources, well-being and functionings than Iranian women. Indeed, gender discrimination in both capabilities and functionings has high costs on society which first of all, wastes country's half of educated and empowered labor force. Then, women's unemployment not only increases their dependent role in societies but also contributes to decreasing their motivation in attaining education.

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