



Coverage of Gender Equality Issues in Uzbekistan

Nurullayeva Durdona

Tashkent state university of oriental studies, Master degree student 1-
course, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article talks about the reforms aimed at gender equality in the Republic of Uzbekistan and its effect. In particular, the problems and needs of women living in the country are studied and the decisions and changes made in recent years to eliminate these problems are discussed.

Keywords: Gender equality, human rights, employment, family issues, education, Role of Women in Society, United Nations Development Programme, economic transformations, female judges.

Introduction: In recent years, attention to women and their rights has been increasing in our country. But if we look at the years of independence, we can witness that gender reforms were implemented in our country even in those times. Since it gained independence in 1991, the Republic of Uzbekistan has made gender equality a fundamental democratic principle, enshrined in the Constitution. The country has acceded to over 60 international human rights agreements and joined some international organizations and covenants that promote gender equality and protection of women's rights. Uzbekistan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995. Since then, it has regularly endorsed and implemented CEDAW national action plans. Gender equality in Uzbekistan has seen both progress and regression since independence in 1991. The principles of nondiscrimination and equal rights for women and men are enshrined in the Constitution. The Women's Committee of Uzbekistan (WCU) is the national machinery for women's issues and the key player in promoting gender equality. Chaired by the deputy prime minister, the WCU has a wide network of branches in every administrative-territorial body—with a mandatory position of a deputy head on women's

issues. The latest decree of the President of February 2018 creates conditions for further encouraging the activities of the WCU, and allows for more creative yet systematic approaches to gender mainstreaming. For urban women, the WCU identified the priority issues of “employment, creation of new jobs, development of business and entrepreneurship skills”. For rural women, the key issues are insufficient social and municipal infrastructure, and the need for family- and home-based business development. Since early 2017, a Virtual Reception office, through which each citizen can send inquiries directly to the government, have been established in each administrative locality, to facilitate citizens’ interactions with government. The WCU performs regular assessments and addresses women’s appeals to the Virtual Reception offices. The main issues are requests for legal, social, and housing assistance and financial aid, and questions and proposals related to cultural behavior, dress codes, weddings, and rituals.

If we look at the data of the last four years, large-scale reforms aimed at achieving equal rights and opportunities for women and men, ensuring their equal participation in the management of society and state affairs, social and legal support of women, and protection of women from oppression and violence have been implemented. The issue of gender equality has been raised to the level of state policy, and 25 legislative documents have been adopted. A republican commission on increasing the role of women in society, gender equality and family issues, a committee on women and gender equality issues was established in the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan. For the first time in the history of Uzbekistan, the number of women in the parliament has reached a level consistent with the recommendations set by the UN, the number of women in the parliament has reached 32% and has risen to the 37th place among 190 parliaments in the world. The share of women in management positions reached 27%, in parties 44%, in higher education 40%, in entrepreneurship 35%. In order to provide social and economic support to women and work with them, the "Women's Register" system was introduced, and 300 billion soums were allocated annually from the state budget. The system of covering the tuition fees of needy girls who have lost their parents or one of them, single women without a breadwinner was introduced, and the number of grants for girls from needy families for admission to higher education institutions was doubled. In order to develop women's entrepreneurship, preferential loans in the amount of 6.9 trillion soums were allocated to more than 224 thousand women. The reforms carried out in the field

have a positive effect on the place of our country in international rankings. In the Women, Business and Law Index of the World Bank, Uzbekistan was included in the list of 27 countries that implemented significant reforms in terms of women's rights and gender equality in 2020, and rose by 5 places and took 134th place among 190 countries. Uzbekistan has always shown that it is committed to the goals and principles of the UN Charter and other universally recognized norms of international law. At the UN General Assembly Summit on Sustainable Development held in September 2015, Resolution No. 70 was adopted, and 125 target tasks and 206 indicators were developed to achieve 16 national goals considered urgent for our country. In particular, the 5th goal in the field of sustainable development — Ensuring gender equality and expanding the rights and opportunities of all women is in sync with the reforms aimed at ensuring equal rights and opportunities of women and men in our country.

If we dwell more precisely on the numbers, the share of women working in ministerial (equivalent to minister) positions in the Ministry and State Committees was 7.7% as of April 1, 2024. The percentage of women among judges was 14.0% in 2023 and 11.9% in 2018. In addition, international meetings were organized in our country on the expansion of the opportunities of women in politics: the formation of leadership for gender equality in Uzbekistan.

The Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in collaboration with the Republican Commission for Increasing the Role of Women in Society, Gender Equality, and Family Issues, the United Nations Development Programme and with the financial support of the UK government, commenced a five-day training programme on 15 April 2024. The initiative aims to enhance the leadership potential of female representatives from various political parties. In recent years, Uzbekistan has enacted over 50 laws aimed at safeguarding the rights, freedoms, and legal interests of women. Article 58 of the new version of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan stipulates equal rights of women and men, the state provides equal rights and opportunities to women and men in the management of society and state affairs, as well as in other areas of society and state life. In particular, the Law signed by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on 18 December 2023 (LRU-883) stipulated that the participation of women in the elections should be at least 40 percent of the number of candidates for deputy from a political party. Uzbekistan has always demonstrated its commitment to the goals and principles of the UN Charter and other universally recognized norms of international law. Our country ranked 45th among 190 national parliaments in the

world ranking of the Inter-Parliamentary Union "Women in Politics" published on 1 January 2023. Uzbekistan entered the top 20 countries in the world with a score of 69.7 in the open gender data index published in September. According to the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network Uzbekistan improved by 8 positions ranking 69th among 166 countries (in 2022, it was ranked 77th).

However, the problems related to women are not limited to domestic violence, but also cause economic difficulties. The most important of them is the high level of unemployment among women in this country. Sima Sami Bahous, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN-Women, praised Uzbekistan's commitment to gender equality during her address at the opening of the Asian Women's Forum on May 13. However, she highlighted a startling reality: the unemployment rate among women in Uzbekistan stands at a staggering 50%, while among men it's 30%.

"Women in Uzbekistan earn on average 20% less than men. They often work in insecure jobs, are not protected by labor laws, and have no pension or health insurance. 60% of women are employed in the informal sector of the economy. In low-income countries, this figure exceeds 90%. Every tenth woman still lives in extreme poverty," Bahous remarked.

Looking ahead, Bahous highlighted the upcoming 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2025, urging nations to reaffirm their commitment to gender equality during the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. She emphasized the forthcoming global summit as an opportunity to rebuild trust and forge a new international consensus on securing a shared future, with a specific focus on ensuring financial systems work inclusively for women.

Closing the gender gap is critical to the success of inclusive transformation of Uzbekistan: Uzbekistan's national income would be about 29% higher if women would participate in its creation on an equal basis with men. If working women received wages on an equal basis with men, then an increase in income would lift more people out of poverty 700,000 people. What prevents Uzbekistan from realizing such enormous potential? In the present report highlights the strengths and remaining barriers to greater equality in within the framework of ongoing social and economic transformations in Uzbekistan. Report brings together the analytical work of the government, the World Bank, development partners, academia and other organizations. This paper proposes a set of priority

goals to reduce the gap between Uzbekistan's current performance and its potential for more inclusive prosperity. Despite achieving gender parity in some areas, harmful gender norms contribute to extreme inequality of economic opportunity between men and women. Due to differences in employment and wages in 2017, gross national income (GNI) per capita per woman was more than 45% lower GNI per man.¹ This trend has also worsened in recent years. Women's participation in workforce has fallen from 50% in 2010 to 45% in 2021, according to the International labor organization (ILO). Proportion of young men who did not work or receive education or vocational training (NEET), was 8.8% of those aged 15 to 25 years compared with 42% among women in this age group . Entrepreneurial activity demonstrates similar imbalance: the share of men with access to loans for business or farming, more than twice the share of women according to data state statistics portal. Low labor force participation rate, lower wages and occupational segregation together have led to significant gender pay gap. According to government statistics, women in 2022 on average earned 34% less than men, which is much more than the global average the rate is 20%.

In addition, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence in our country was adopted on August 17, 2019 and approved by the Senate on August 23, 2019. It is worth noting that the Center for Rehabilitation and Adaptation of Women and Girls in the republic planned to establish a temporary shelter for women and girls who were subjected to pressure and violence as part of its regional centers.

The president has signed the decree "On Additional Measures to Improve Social Services for Persons Affected by Pressure and Violence." The document institutes a comprehensive system of social services based on the principle of "family – community – district and region" for those affected by pressure and violence. Starting from June 1, 2024:

- The "Inson" social service centers will provide social and legal services to women and girls who have experienced or are at risk of violence without the need for a protection order;
- Incidents of pressure and violence against women and girls are registered by law enforcement based on calls received at the 102 emergency numbers of the internal affairs departments. Within 24 hours of identifying an incident or risk of violence, the following actions will be undertaken: - A conversation with the perpetrator is conducted in the presence of a women's activist and the neighborhood prevention inspector;

- A protection order is issued by the prevention inspector; shelters-to-be-created-for-women-facing-domestic-violence
- Women and girls affected by violence and their minor children are placed in the emergency departments of central district (city) hospitals;
- Information on issued protection orders and affected individuals is sent in real-time to the "Inson" centers via the "Unified National Social Protection" information system.

Temporary shelters will be put into operation at the regional centers of the Republican Center for the Rehabilitation and Adaptation of Women to provide rehabilitation services to women and girls who have suffered from pressure and violence. As part of this process, 14 exemplary inter-district centers under the regional centers will be dissolved, transferring their staff units and material-technical bases completely to the regional centers.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it should be said that opportunities for women in our country are being formed and developed step by step by international organizations. Measures to increase the share of women in the labor market, reduce poverty in the country, and prevent unemployment should not remain on paper in the form of a poor concept. Improving the conditions of women living in remote areas, attracting them to quality education and interesting educational programs of international organizations should be the main goal of today's reforms.

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