

Gender Equality and the Protection of Women's Rights in the Republic of Uzbekistan

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Abstract. *This article is dedicated to the importance of gender equality as a legal principle aimed at ensuring equal rights and freedoms for both men and women in all areas of public life. It examines both international documents and national laws and regulations focused on protection of women's rights and the promotion of gender equality. The article also provides relevant statistical data demonstrating positive outcomes in practice. Special attention is given to the improvement of national legislation and practical steps toward the effective implementation of gender equality.*

Key words: *gender equality, equal rights, CEDAW, discrimination, national legislation, social protection, women's participation, women's education, implementation of rights, government reforms.*

Gender equality, or equality between men and women, is a legal principle under which both sexes are granted equal rights, opportunities, and access to resources in all spheres of life: political, economic, social, cultural, and family-related. In the modern world, gender equality is essential for ensuring stability, economic prosperity, improved quality of life, and the protection of human rights.

International Legislation.

One of the most important international instruments to which the Republic of Uzbekistan has acceded is the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). On May 6, 1995, the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted Resolution No. 87-I on accession to the Convention, and it was ratified on August 18, 1995. The Convention itself was adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 18, 1979, and entered into force on September 3, 1981. CEDAW consists of 30 articles defining women's rights and is often referred to as the international bill of rights for women. [1]

The Convention has significant international importance. States that ratify CEDAW undertake the obligation to ensure both de jure and de facto equality between women and men. In accordance with the Convention, each State Party must incorporate the principle of equality of the sexes into its national legislation and ensure its effective implementation by adopting appropriate measures, including legal sanctions against discrimination. Uzbekistan, as a State Party, committed itself to fulfilling all provisions of the Convention and reporting to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. [2]

CEDAW guarantees the following rights, among others:

- equal political and public rights (Article 7)
- equality in matters of nationality (Article 9)
- equal rights in education (Article 10)

➤ equality in employment and labor (Article 11)

➤ equality in access to healthcare (Article 12)

Uzbekistan was one of the first countries in Central Asia to sign CEDAW and has submitted four periodic reports to the CEDAW Committee.

National Legislation.

Since the ratification of CEDAW, Uzbekistan has taken significant steps to harmonize its national legislation with the Convention's provisions. Women's rights in Uzbekistan are regulated by the following legal acts:

➤ Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men" (02.09.2019) [3]

➤ Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Protection of Women from Oppression and Violence" (02.09.2019) [4]

➤ Presidential Decree "On Additional Measures for the Rehabilitation of Women Affected by Violence" (19.05.2021) [5]

➤ Presidential Decree "On Additional Measures for Improving the Provision of Social Services to Persons Affected by Oppression and Violence" (10.05.2024) [6]

➤ Presidential Decree "On Measures to Further Strengthen Guarantees of Women's Labor Rights and Support Their Entrepreneurial Activities" (07.03.2019) [7]

➤ Presidential Decree "On Measures to Improve the System of Support and Ensure Active Participation of Women in Public Life" (05.03.2021) [8]

One of the key legal acts aimed at ensuring gender equality is the Law "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men" (2019). It establishes the fundamental principles of equality and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. The law provides for gender expertise of legal acts, mandates equal participation in decision-making, and requires state bodies to apply a gender-sensitive approach in all development programs.

Another important act is the Law "On the Protection of Women from Oppression and Violence" (2019), which defines the forms of violence — physical, psychological, sexual, and economic — and outlines state mechanisms for responding to such cases. It introduces protective orders, as well as psychological, medical, and legal assistance for survivors, and establishes specialized support centers for women.

As part of ongoing reforms, the President of Uzbekistan has adopted several laws and decrees to ensure effective protection of women's rights and freedoms, and has instructed the Cabinet of Ministers and responsible authorities to guarantee their practical implementation.

The National Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030, developed in accordance with international standards, including CEDAW, represents a major step toward achieving gender equality and reflects the country's commitment to building a fair society where women and men have equal rights and duties in all fields. [9]

Statistics.

According to the report "Gender Equality as a Principle of Building New Uzbekistan," the country has achieved significant progress:

➤ women now constitute 33% of parliament

➤ women in entrepreneurship doubled, reaching 25%

➤ women's representation in political parties is 44%

➤ women make up 40% of higher education students.

In 2023 alone, over 13 trillion UZS in loans were allocated to support more than 279,000 women's business projects, and nearly 57,000 women received 300 billion UZS in subsidies.

Through the "Women's Notebook" system, the problems of 994,000 women were addressed, with state support totaling 1.234 trillion UZS. Social assistance was provided to more than 690,000 families in need of protection.

In education, the country is strengthening gender equality by introducing gender-sensitive curricula and supporting STEM education, especially in rural areas. Out of 1.3 million university students, 653,000 are women, and in master's programs women make up 60% of students. The government fully covers the tuition fees of women studying in master's programs from the state budget. During 2023–2024, 1,914 women from low-income families were admitted based on additional state grants, while 181,500 women received preferential educational loans. Tuition fees for more than 2,000 socially vulnerable students were covered from local budgets. [10]

At the 20th plenary session of the Senate on June 21, 2019, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated:

"What worries me is the stereotype deeply rooted in the minds of our people. We respect a woman primarily as a mother, a guardian of the family hearth. This is certainly true. However, today every woman must not be a passive observer, but an active and initiative-driven participant in the democratic transformations taking place in our country." [11]
<https://strategy.uz/index.php?news=745&%20lang=uz&lang=ru>

Given the current situation, within the framework of New Uzbekistan reforms, ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women requires continued alignment of national legislation with international standards. Effective enforcement and regular monitoring of existing anti-discrimination laws are crucial. Measures must cover all regions and all categories of women, especially those vulnerable to discrimination: women in remote rural areas, women with disabilities, women living with HIV/AIDS, incarcerated women, stateless persons, and refugees.

It is equally important to expand women's access to education, healthcare, employment, and entrepreneurship. Increasing opportunities in these sectors contributes to economic resilience, poverty reduction, expanded labor markets, women's self-sufficiency, and social development.

The principle of gender equality allows the development of a fair society in which women and men enjoy equal rights and opportunities. Uzbekistan has implemented significant reforms and legal measures supporting gender equality, achieving noticeable progress in entrepreneurship, higher education, and social protection. The country continues to strengthen legal mechanisms and oversight to ensure the full protection of women's rights.

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