

## Gender Policy in Uzbekistan

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**Abstract:** This article examines the growing focus on gender equality in the Republic of Uzbekistan in recent years, the implementation of bylaws adopted to support women in the country, and the conditions created to enable women to find a достойное place in society. The results show significant progress in the legislative framework and institutional mechanisms; however, challenges such as societal stereotypes and incomplete policy implementation persist. The article also analyzes the contribution of women to building a democratic state during the years of independence. Further efforts are needed to fully implement these policies.

**Key words:** women, reforms, decisions, gender equality, social development, President, Oliy Majlis, women leaders.

### Introduction

Since gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has faced significant challenges in achieving gender equality due to deeply rooted cultural norms. While some steps toward gender equality were taken under the leadership of the first President, I.A.Karimov, the process gained momentum with the rise to power of Shavkat Mirziyoyev in 2016. Since then, a wave of reforms aimed at modernizing the socio-political environment has prioritized gender equality. The Mirziyoyev administration has emphasized increasing the role of women in public and economic life, aligning with global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 on gender equality. This study examines the specifics of Uzbekistan's gender policy under Mirziyoyev, focusing on legislative changes, institutional mechanisms, and their societal impact. The research question is: How have Mirziyoyev's reforms transformed gender policy in Uzbekistan, and what are the key achievements and challenges?

### Methods

The study employs a qualitative approach based on document analysis and secondary data from government reports, assessments by international organizations, and academic literature. Primary sources include speeches by President Mirziyoyev, legislative acts such as the 2019 laws on gender equality and protection from harassment, as well as reports from the UN and the Senate of Uzbekistan. Secondary sources include analyses from organizations such as Human Rights Watch and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Data were collected from publicly available documents published between 2016 and 2025, with a focus on gender policy reforms. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes, including legislative achievements, institutional development, and societal barriers.

### Results

Over the years of independence, women in Uzbekistan have become an active segment of society, with growing numbers of women leaders in research, medical, and educational institutions, industrial enterprises, farming, small businesses, and other sectors. During the years of independent development, a legal framework has been established to ensure equal participation of women in

democratic reforms and the formation of civil society, with measures and national programs being progressively implemented in this direction.

Uzbekistan was the first Central Asian state to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (adopted in New York on December 18, 1979), the Convention on the Protection of Motherhood (June 18, 1952), the Vienna Declaration (June 25, 1993), the Beijing Declaration adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the Beijing Platform for Action (September 4–15, 1995), along with other international and national legal documents.

*Legislative Achievements.* With the rise to power of Sh.M. Mirziyoyev, a fundamentally new approach to women's issues emerged. Mirziyoyev's reforms have led to significant legislative measures in the area of gender equality. President Mirziyoyev's speech at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly is a clear testament to the elevation of gender equality to the level of state policy in Uzbekistan. The President's emphasis on gender equality and the protection of women's rights on the international stage holds historic significance for Uzbek women.

In his speeches, Shavkat Mirziyoyev highlighted that gender equality policy has become a priority in the country, with the role of women in governance increasing and the number of women deputies in the new parliament doubling. In recent years, gender equality has become a priority of state policy. The work being done in Uzbekistan to protect women's rights and interests fully aligns with ensuring their active participation in the socio-political sphere, as outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Programme.

In September 2019, two key laws were adopted: the Law "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men" and the Law "On Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence." These laws define the concept of gender equality, prohibit discrimination, and establish mechanisms to counter harassment and violence. Additionally, amendments to the Labor Code lifted restrictions on women's employment in certain sectors, expanding economic opportunities.

The updated Constitution of Uzbekistan (2023) enshrines equal access to public service, with Article 37 explicitly prohibiting discrimination based on gender.

*Institutional Mechanisms.* The establishment of the Committee on Women and Gender Equality in the Senate of the Oliy Majlis in 2019 marked a significant institutional reform. Chaired by Tanzila Narbaeva, the first female Speaker of the Senate, the Committee oversees compliance with international gender equality standards and monitors national legislation. Other institutions, such as the Republican Center for Rehabilitation and Adaptation of Victims of Violence and the "Oila" Research Center, support victims of gender-based violence and promote women's entrepreneurship. The National Commission on Gender Equality, established in 2020, coordinates efforts to align policies with SDG 5 goals.

Presidential Decree No. PP-5020 of March 5, 2021, "On Measures to Further Improve the System of Support and Ensure Active Participation of Women in Public Life" and Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. PCM-2 of January 8, 2021, "On Additional Measures for Social Support of Women", introduce a system of comprehensive social support and protection for women facing difficult socio-economic conditions, unemployed, and socially inactive women, as well as targeted state assistance for their support.

Based on these documents, the People's Bank of Uzbekistan, in collaboration with the Entrepreneurship Development Agency, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the "Tadbirkor Ayol" Business Women's Association, and the "Khunarmand" Association, conducts training for women on developing business projects, assists in drafting standard business plans, facilitates access to loans, and provides practical support for women's entrepreneurship. Programs for providing loans to support women's entrepreneurship are being actively implemented.

Not only in the field of entrepreneurship but also in public administration, the activity of women in Uzbekistan, who currently number 17 million, is increasing. To ensure broad participation of women in elections, in 2003, a 30% quota for nominating female candidates from political parties was introduced in Part 4 of Article 22 of the revised Law “On Elections to the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan” (as amended by Law No. 671-II of August 27, 2004). According to Articles 70 and 91 of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, adopted in June 2019, the number of women candidates for deputies nominated by political parties in single-mandate constituencies, as well as on party lists, and candidates for local Kengashes, must constitute at least 40% of the total number of candidates.

According to the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in the elections held on October 27, 2024, 38% of the 44.7% women candidates nominated for the Legislative Chamber were elected as deputies. This figure was 32.6% for local Kengashes. In terms of women’s representation in parliament, Uzbekistan ranks 17th globally. Over the years, 15 women have been awarded the country’s highest honor, “Hero of Uzbekistan”, reflecting the importance the state attaches to women.

On March 8, 2021, during a roundtable discussion in the Senate of the Oliy Majlis on “Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic”, Tanzila Narbaeva noted that women have been entrusted with leadership roles in various fields in recent years. She highlighted that women currently serve as khokims (governors) of six districts, achieving positive results in their respective regions. The Senate Speaker also noted with satisfaction that active women lead the Anti-Corruption Agency and Presidential Schools.

Women’s representation in public administration has significantly increased: by 2023, women held 35% of leadership positions, a notable improvement over previous decades. In the textile industry, a key employer, 44% of the workforce consists of women, with targeted support for female employment. Public discourse on gender-based violence, once a taboo topic, has become more open with the establishment of approximately 200 shelters nationwide, although their effectiveness is limited by funding and staffing challenges.

Mirziyoyev’s gender policy reforms mark a significant departure from the Karimov era, bringing Uzbekistan closer to international human rights standards. The legislative framework, particularly the 2019 laws, provides a strong foundation for combating gender inequality, while institutional mechanisms, such as the Senate Committee, enhance oversight and accountability. Increased representation of women in public and economic spheres reflects progress toward SDG 5 goals. However, challenges remain, including entrenched societal stereotypes that view women primarily as homemakers, limiting their socio-political activity. Insufficient funding for shelters indicates gaps in implementation. Future reforms should focus on public awareness campaigns, increased funding for support systems, and broader democratic transformations for sustainable progress in gender equality.

## Conclusion

Mirziyoyev’s reforms have significantly advanced Uzbekistan’s gender policy through legislative and institutional measures, increasing women’s participation in public and economic life. However, achieving sustainable gender equality requires addressing societal stereotypes, strengthening institutional capacities, and reinforcing reforms with democratic principles. Continued international cooperation, particularly with UN representatives, is essential to support Uzbekistan’s gender agenda and ensure sustainable progress toward SDG 5. In recent years, Uzbekistan has seen a growing trend of women in leadership roles, particularly in education and healthcare. The Academy of Public and Social Administration and regional training programs for women leaders have been organized to prepare women for leadership roles. However, these measures remain insufficient. The issue of achieving gender equality remains relevant today.

The role of women in implementing democratic reforms in Uzbekistan is invaluable. It is essential to fully utilize women's intellectual potential, accurately assessing their role and place in building families, society, and a democratic rule-of-law state.

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