

Legal Strategies for Increasing Women's Political and Social Involvement in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article scrutinises the legal and normative structures designed to enhance the social and political engagement of women in Uzbekistan. It explores the historical backdrop, legislative progress, and institutional frameworks, highlighting significant advancements towards gender equality and women's empowerment. A detailed examination of relevant statutes, policies, and initiatives sheds light on the developments, obstacles, and future directions for promoting women's rights and participation within Uzbek society. This research accentuates the pivotal role that legal and normative frameworks play in advancing gender equality and elevating the voices of women in social and political arenas, thereby contributing to more inclusive and democratic governance. This scholarly analysis is indispensable for understanding the dynamics of women's evolving roles in Uzbekistan.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Uzbekistan has witnessed a remarkable transformation in its approach towards gender equality, underpinned by a robust legal framework designed to elevate the status of women within its socio-political sphere. The nation's Constitution vehemently supports the principles of gender parity, offering a foundational bedrock from which various legislative initiatives have sprung. Noteworthy among these is the Law on Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men, a pivotal piece of legislation that actively combats gender-based discrimination and underscores the necessity of gender mainstreaming across all sectors (Ballington 2012). This legal architecture not only reinforces women's rights but also ensures that these rights are woven into the fabric of everyday governance and public policy-making, facilitating a more inclusive and equitable society. This legal and normative groundwork has catalysed a palpable shift in societal attitudes towards traditional gender roles, particularly over the last few decades. Influences such as rapid urbanisation, educational reforms, and Uzbekistan's engagement with global women's rights movements have played significant roles in reshaping public perceptions and expectations. As a result, there

has been a marked increase in women's participation in areas traditionally dominated by men, including politics and higher education, signalling a progressive dismantling of the patriarchal structures that have historically dictated social norms in Uzbekistan. This evolution not only highlights the ongoing commitment to gender equality but also underscores the essential role of women in the sustainable development and democratic governance of the country.

2 ANALYSIS

In recent years, Uzbekistan has made commendable progress in enhancing the role of women in political spheres. The introduction of gender quotas within electoral bodies, including the Oliy Majlis (parliament) and local councils, has significantly boosted female representation in legislative frameworks. The formation of the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan, coupled with the implementation of the National Action Strategy for Gender Equality, reflects a robust governmental drive to promote female participation and leadership in politics. Furthermore, the government has enacted approximately 20 regulatory and legal documents

aimed at protecting women's rights and fostering gender equality. This initiative forms part of a broader strategy planned to extend through 2030, focusing on elevating the presence of women in public administration and enhancing their roles in public decision-making processes.

Political Parity: Globally, however, challenges remain in the realm of gender equality, particularly in education and scientific fields. Despite advances, over 17 million girls worldwide are deprived of school education, as highlighted by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics. This educational deficit contributes to a disproportionate representation of women in literacy statistics, with women constituting more than two-thirds of the global adult illiterate population. In the scientific community, although women are active participants and often at the forefront of ground-breaking research, they still represent only a third of researchers globally. Recognition of their work remains significantly low, evidenced by the fact that less than 4% of Nobel Prizes in sciences have been awarded to women, and only a meagre 11% of senior research positions in Europe are occupied by women. This highlights a persistent global challenge in achieving gender parity in critical areas of education and professional recognition in science.

Inclusive Policies: Uzbekistan has intensified its commitment to enhancing women's social engagement and economic empowerment, marking a significant shift in governmental priorities. Various initiatives, meticulously designed to augment women's entrepreneurship, widen their access to education and healthcare, and fortify protections against gender-based violence, have been spearheaded by both governmental and non-governmental entities. The National Commission on Gender Equality has been particularly pivotal, playing a crucial role in both the implementation and oversight of these initiatives. Through these concerted efforts, a foundation is being laid to foster an environment that not only nurtures women's empowerment but also ensures their inclusive participation across all societal sectors. However, the journey towards gender equality and the empowerment of women in Uzbekistan encounters persistent obstacles. Deep-rooted gender stereotypes continue to impinge on women's access to equal opportunities, presenting a significant challenge to the realisation of their full potential. Moreover, discrepancies between the formulation of gender equality laws and their practical enforcement further exacerbate these challenges. Despite these hurdles, such challenges offer fertile ground for innovation and collaboration. There is a burgeoning opportunity to engage various sectors in collective action, aiming

to dismantle systemic barriers and champion a transformative agenda that will facilitate substantial and enduring change in the societal fabric of Uzbekistan.

One noteworthy stride in this direction was the presidential decree issued on 12th June 2020, which significantly adjusted the state's approach to higher education admissions. This directive sanctioned an additional 4 percent of state grants specifically for women, equating to 940 places, thereby necessitating a recommendation letter from the Ministry of Neighbourhood and Family Support for eligibility. This initiative not only elevated the participation of women in higher education by 7.5 times but also focused on propelling women into predominantly male-dominated fields such as natural and technical sciences. To further bolster this endeavour, from the academic year 2022/2023, an additional 2,000 state grants are earmarked for women lacking higher education, provided they secure a recommendation from the State Committee for Family and Women. Notably, at least half of these grants are designated for studies in the exact sciences, engineering, and medicine, underlining a strategic push to integrate women into these critical sectors. This progressive educational framework exemplifies the dynamic shifts underway in Uzbekistan, highlighting a profound commitment to reshaping the educational landscape to be more inclusive and equitable for women. In the Republic of Uzbekistan, significant legislative strides have been made to bolster the participation of women in the realms of science and education, reflecting a national commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Electoral Code mandates that at least thirty percent of the candidates nominated by political parties for both the Legislative Chamber and local councils must be women, fostering increased female political representation. Additionally, the law ensures equal participation of men and women in civil service competitions, including for managerial roles. This is further supported by specific provisions for economically disadvantaged women, who receive preferential treatment in higher education admissions through state grants and recommended participation, aimed at diminishing the educational disparity and promoting inclusivity.

Legislative Supports: Further enhancing these measures, the Uzbek government has implemented financial support mechanisms to alleviate the economic barriers women face in pursuing education. Presidential and governmental decrees have allocated substantial funds to facilitate women's education at various levels. For example, interest-free loans funded by 1.8 trillion soums have been made available to women pursuing higher education on a part-time or evening basis, covering contract fees

entirely for those studying at the master's level in state institutions. Additionally, initiatives such as the allocation of 50 additional bachelor's and 10 master's scholarships annually through the "El-Yurt Umid" fund exemplify the targeted support aimed at fostering female academic advancement. The government has also dedicated resources to support 500 women with significant professional experience but no higher education, offering them the opportunity to study under a state higher education institution based on separate entrance examinations. Moreover, a minimum of 300 annual doctoral quotas for women in state scientific organisations underscores the commitment to advancing women's roles in higher academia and research, reinforcing Uzbekistan's agenda to create a robust framework for supporting women in achieving their full educational and professional potential.

Women's Leadership: In Uzbekistan, a concerted effort is underway to enhance the representation and empowerment of women in both public administration and scientific domains. The Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic has committed to a proactive agenda aimed at fostering female leadership. This includes dedicated training courses specifically for women, with an ambitious target to train at least 100 women leaders annually. Moreover, the academy plans to increase the proportion of women recommended for its master's programmes to 30 percent. An innovative approach involves the creation of a "Women's School of Leaders" educational programme, where women from the national personnel reserve are provided training and international internships funded by the "El-Yurt Umid" foundation. This initiative is complemented by the "Dialogue of Leading Women" platform, established to facilitate discussions and exchanges among women leaders across various regions. Additionally, the State Service Development Agency's portal, mo.argos.uz, will list women who have advanced their qualifications through these programmes, ensuring transparency and recognition of their professional development. Parallel to these developments in public administration, significant strides are being made in fostering the scientific and innovative capacities of women. Annually, the "Scientist Woman" contest is held every March, encouraging women to present practical innovative projects, thus boosting their visibility and integration into the scientific community. The training on "Innovative Management" is specifically tailored for women in science and education to prepare them for senior roles by enhancing their managerial competences. Those who excel in this course may benefit from targeted internships abroad, further enriching their expertise and professional networks.

Financial support is also robust, with substantial funds allocated for initiatives like the "The First Step for Women's Business" competition, which supports female-led innovation financially. Complementarily, efforts are broadened to include legal and educational support mechanisms such as the "Gender-madad" electronic consultation platform and educational reforms aimed at increasing female participation in the sciences within secondary education. These multifaceted initiatives not only underscore a commitment to gender equality but also aim to harness the full potential of women in Uzbekistan, promoting their participation and leadership in fields traditionally dominated by men.

3 RECOMMENDATION

Enhancing Women's Political Participation: Initiate comprehensive training programs for women in leadership and governance, supported by targeted recruitment campaigns to increase women's representation in political management roles. Collaboration with local women's NGOs can amplify outreach and effectiveness.

Legal Rights and Job Opportunities: Develop legal frameworks that prioritize the protection of women's rights in the workplace. Implement initiatives to create new job opportunities, especially for women returning from childcare leave, which may include skill enhancement programs and access to flexible work arrangements.

Financial Inclusion and Support: Partner with international financial institutions to facilitate access to low-interest loans specifically designed for socially vulnerable women. Consider the establishment of a dedicated women's bank to manage these resources effectively and sustainably.

Addressing Social Challenges: Establish a monitoring system to proactively identify and address the problems faced by women in difficult social situations. This should integrate social, legal, psychological, and material support mechanisms to deliver timely and comprehensive aid.

Employment and Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas: Launch initiatives that specifically support rural women in securing employment and starting family businesses. Programs that provide technical training and financial literacy in crafts and agriculture can be particularly beneficial.

Reintegration of Formerly Incarcerated Women: Create programs that focus on the social rehabilitation and vocational training of women released from penal institutions, ensuring their successful reintegration into society through coordinated efforts with civil society.

Gender-Sensitive Migration Policies: Develop a gender-sensitive approach to migration policies that considers the unique challenges and needs of women migrants. This should include special provisions for the safety, legal protection, and economic empowerment of female migrants.

4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the pursuit of gender equality and the empowerment of women in Uzbekistan is not merely a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for sustainable development and societal advancement. The legal-normative frameworks established thus far provide a robust foundation from which to advance the cause of women's equality. However, the full realization of this vision requires continuous and concerted efforts across various sectors of society.

It is imperative that Uzbekistan intensifies its initiatives to dismantle the multifaceted barriers that hinder women's active participation in the socio-political life of the state. This involves addressing not only legal and policy deficiencies but also challenging the deep-seated socio-cultural norms and practices that perpetuate gender disparities. Ensuring the implementation of existing laws and the introduction of innovative policies that proactively support women's inclusion and rights can catalyse significant change.

Economic empowerment is also crucial. By enhancing women's access to education, employment opportunities, and financial resources, Uzbekistan can significantly amplify the economic independence and social status of women. Such measures will not only improve the quality of life for women but also contribute to the broader economic prosperity of the nation. Additionally, promoting women's participation in leadership roles across all levels of government and private sectors can serve as a powerful demonstration of gender parity and reshape public perceptions about women's capabilities.

Furthermore, it is essential to foster a participatory approach that involves women in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Empowering women to voice their needs and opinions can lead to more inclusive and effective governance. Support systems, such as childcare facilities, healthcare services, and legal assistance, must be strengthened to enable women to participate fully in both public and private spheres without disproportionate personal or familial sacrifice.

Finally, ongoing education and awareness-raising initiatives are vital. Educating both men and women about the benefits of gender equality and the detrimental impacts of gender-based discrimination

can cultivate a more supportive environment for the implementation of gender equality policies.

In sum, while Uzbekistan has made commendable strides towards gender equality, the path ahead remains challenging yet promising. Sustained effort, backed by strong legal frameworks, policies, and cultural change initiatives, is crucial. By embracing a holistic approach that addresses the legal, economic, and cultural dimensions of gender inequality, Uzbekistan can ensure that its journey towards gender equality results in a fair, just, and prosperous society for all citizens.

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