

# Context Overview of Empowering Women's in Uzbekistan

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**Abstract:** The article investigates the women's context in Uzbekistan focusing on academic and professional support along with obstacles they meet during their careers. It discusses the government support women receive and the cultural as well as social barriers they encounter on their journey. The authors present governmental regulations and their implication in the real life. The authors state that Uzbekistan has made commendable advances in the pursuit of gender equality in higher education though the journey is far from complete.

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Women in Academia, Education

## Introduction

Similar to many other countries, Uzbekistan is currently attempting to enhance its higher education system to align with international standards, with successful integration into the global academic landscape serving as a primary policy objective (Mamadaminova, 2024; Uralov, 2020). The increasing number of higher education institutions, which is indicative of a substantial expansion in both national and private universities, serves as evidence of this dedication. In addition to these initiatives to improve the quality and accessibility of higher education, the promotion of gender equality has become a critical priority. Recognizing that investing in education for girls and women is not only a matter of equity but also a generator of economic growth and social development (Obidov, 2023), the Uzbek government has implemented a variety of initiatives to enhance women's access to and participation in higher education.

In spite of these developments, disparities continue to exist. Although women account for approximately 49.56% of the population in Uzbekistan (World Bank, 2025), their participation in the labor force is significantly lower, with only 35.48% of women being actively employed in 2023 (World Bank, 2025). Although data from 2023-2024 suggests that approximately 14,000 women account for 60% of the total number of Master's students. It is

posited that the culture of academia and higher education are being feminized (Leathwood & Read, 2009). This discrepancy underscores the intricate interplay of factors that affect the educational and professional aspirations of women in Uzbekistan. Furthermore, the necessity of targeted interventions to promote women's involvement in these critical fields is underscored by the underrepresentation of women in STEM-related disciplines, as Shokirova (2024) has demonstrated.

The impact of profoundly entrenched socio-cultural norms on women's opportunities in higher education and beyond is revealed through a more detailed examination of the Uzbek context. The experiences of women in science instruction are significantly influenced by socio-cultural components, as noted by Davronova (2018). Social barriers, such as religion, local beliefs, societal attitudes, and politics, have a detrimental effect on women's careers (Peus et al., 2015). The Uzbek government has implemented a variety of policies and programs to address these challenges, with the objective of empowering women in higher education and promoting gender equality. These include the National Action Plan for Women's Development (Obidov, 2023), Presidential Decrees that provide benefits for women from disadvantaged origins (Presidential Decree, Uzbekistan No. UP-5847 dated October, 8 2019), and the establishment of Women's Entrepreneurship Centers to support women's economic empowerment.

This paper investigates the multifarious endeavors to advance gender equality in Uzbekistan's higher education system, taking into account the substantial advancements that have been achieved and the ongoing obstacles that persist. This overview endeavors to offer insights into the ongoing transformation of women's roles in Uzbek society and to identify strategies for promoting greater gender equality in higher education and beyond by examining the interplay of government policies, socio-cultural influences, and individual success stories. To do this, this study looks at what Uzbekistan has done to make higher education more fair for men and women.

## Methodology

Like many countries, Uzbekistan has intensified its efforts to elevate the activities of higher education institutions to meet international standards. A successful integration into the global higher education landscape has become a key focus of Uzbekistan's higher education policy (Uralov, 2020). In recent years, Uzbekistan has placed significant emphases on enhancing the international prestige of its higher education institutions (Mamadaminova, 2024).

In 2019, 114 higher educational institutions were counted in the Republic. Of these, 93 were national institutions, and 21 were foreign universities and their branches (Presidential Decree No. UP-5847, 2019). By 2023, the number of national higher educational institutions increased to 116, private universities to 67, and foreign universities to 30, resulting in a total of 213 (Mentalaba.uz, n.d.).

Education is one of the critical areas for promoting gender equality in Uzbekistan. Investing in education for girls and women is not only a matter of fairness but also a driver

of economic growth and social development (Obidov, 2023). Osiobe (2020) stated that, as we aspire to a dignified future, educating the female population is a necessity.

According to statistics, only 37% of female students in Uzbekistan receive higher education (UNICEF, 2021). However, data from 2023-2024 highlights that approximately 14,000 women, comprise 60% of the total number of Master's students. (UN Women, 2024).

From the 2022/2023 academic year, 1,000 grant places have been allocated in foreign Universities and their branches, as well as non-state Universities in the Republic. Additionally, that academic year, 2,000 state grants were allocated for women with higher education who received recommendations from the Family and Women's Committee, in addition to the general parameters (Rasulov, 2023). Moreover, in 1914 girls from needy families were accepted to the Universities on the additional grant base, and approximately 181,500 girls got Preferential educational loans (UN Women, 2024).

The government has recognized this and has implemented a range of initiatives including programs to encourage girls to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, where women are underrepresented, in addition, from 2022 the state has been paying for tuition fees of girls in the master's degree.

Over the past few years, the increased access to and achievement by women in higher education has been used to suggest that gender inequality in higher education is no longer an issue (Mamadaminova & Cytlak, 2024). Rather, it is believed that there is a feminization of higher education and that of the culture of academia (Leathwood & Read, 2009).

Education and other accomplishments by women are crucial not only for national production but also for women's mental health and well-being (Mamadaminova & Cytlak, 2024). This in turn helped young women who were given the opportunity to get higher education without interrupting their families and family responsibilities. Lower tuition fees in tertiary education also contribute to a significant increase in female students.

In order to promote gender equality and improve social conditions for women, the Presidential Decree of June 12, 2020, "On the parameters of the state order for admission to higher education institutions of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the academic year 2020/2021" provided for a number of benefits for women's study at higher education institutions (Presidential Decree, 2020). Low-income women, widows, single mothers raising two or more children under the age of 14, daughters of women living apart from their other relatives, and homeless women renting a flat can benefit from this privilege by acquiring knowledge at state universities free of charge.

One of the key initiatives aimed at increasing gender equality in Uzbekistan is the National Action Plan for Women's Development. The plan outlines the government's commitment to promoting gender equality and includes specific goals and targets for improving the status of women in Uzbekistan. The plan focuses on improving gender equality in education and increasing access to healthcare services for women and girls (Obidov, 2023). Another important initiative with the same targets at promoting gender equality in Uzbekistan is the "Gender and Development" program, which is implemented by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

(Mamadaminova, 2024) notes that Uzbekistan has undergone various reforms since 2017, resulting in significant changes across all spheres of life. These transformations have brought about substantial cultural, economic, political, and social shifts, infusing Uzbekistan with fresh energy and dynamism while maintaining a strong connection to tradition.

According to the President's initiative, the views of not only the expert community but also the general public and international organizations (Uzbekistan Embassy, n.d.). Rahmonova (2022) argues that progressing women's part in science instruction isn't merely a matter of value but also a catalyst for development, financial growth, and scientific advancement.

## Result and Discussion

Traditionally, the commitment of women to their homeland and their families has been elevated to a level of spirituality. Accordingly, the role of women in the national mentality system plays an important role (Crook, 1996; Elverskog, 2010; Pratt, 2015). Nowadays, numerous brave and successful women in Uzbekistan are open examples of the possibility of achieving personal goals in their career development. For example, Gulchekhira Rikhshieva, the rector of Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies and the only female rector in Uzbekistan, explained the "special aspects" of being a female leader in Uzbekistan in an interview. She mentioned that as an Uzbek woman, she experienced all the obstacles as other women in Uzbekistan in marriage. Also, she highlighted that as a mother of two rising children she was in her doctoral period, and with the family duty and child care, only her mother-in-law decided to support her. She also pointed out that during her PhD program, she met many female students with young children who were doing independent research and worked at a distance with their supervisors despite their young age (Rakhmatova, 2020).

Socio-cultural components play a crucial part in shaping women's encounters in science instruction (Davronova, 2018). Social barriers, including religion, local beliefs, societal attitudes, politics, and other social factors, negatively impact women's careers across various countries and cultures (Peus et al., 2015). These preconceived notions of women's leadership abilities can hinder their advancement (Patrinos, 2016). As Husseinova (2019) notes, despite surprising accomplishments, ladies in Uzbekistan confronted various challenges in their interest in logical careers.

Social norms and conventional gender parties frequently direct ladies toward non-technical areas or residential duties, disheartening them from seeking careers in science and innovation (Mirzaeva, 2018). This can have an impact, which is that ladies remain underrepresented in STEM-related disciplines, contributing to a sex hole in logical investigation and development (Shokirova, 2024).

A significant issue lies in the perception among senior colleagues that women must choose between a career and family, a concept referred to as the 'motherhood myth' (Etkowitz et al., 2000). For example, Kuzabekova and Almukhambetova (2021) found in their study of women's advancement to leadership roles in Central Asia that, despite their

high qualifications and numerous achievements, many women prioritized their families over their careers.

Currently, universities have built up activities to support female students and staff individuals, by counting grants, cooperations, and administration preparing programs (Karimova & Ismailov), and give back administrations for ladies interested in STEM careers. These organizations moreover collaborate with schools, colleges, and government organizations to execute gender-sensitive educational modules and advance differences in STEM areas (Shokirova, 2024). Additionally, the British Council has support for Uzbek Women to pursue their Master's degrees in STEM in 2025 (British Council, 2025). Advancing women's administration and representation in STEM is fundamental for cultivating differences and development (Gulmira, 2017).

Many women and girls are regularly involved in various sports. In accordance with the decision of President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev "on measures to further improve the system of supporting women, ensuring their active participation in the life of society" PR 5020 March 5, 2021 (Presidential Decree, 2021). This includes assisting in the financing of activities related to the comprehensive support of women, the maintenance of health, the development of women's support, and the improvement of working and study conditions. To assist in the process, the population regularly engaged in physical education and sport needs to be released by 33% in 2026 and to popularize national sport among the youth of the Republic. Other action items were to support women and their participation and create an atmosphere of intolerance to harassment and violence against women. Also, to continue the policy of ensuring Gender equality, to increase the sociopolitical activity of women, to implement reforms in their support with Women's education and professional skills. This covered issues such as comprehensive assistance in finding a suitable job, supporting their entrepreneurship, identifying talented young women, and properly directing their abilities.

One of the female judokas, Diyora Keldiyorova, made history by winning the first gold medal for Uzbekistan at the Paris Olympics in 2024 is a result of provided work (Keldiyorova, 2024). Recently, she opened a judo club that has already attracted dozens of young girls, a shift in a country where combat sports were traditionally male-dominated (Euronews.com, 2025). As Keldiyorova's success is reshaping perceptions of women in sports, these highlights growing opportunities for female athletes in Uzbekistan (Euronews.com, 2025). Moreover, Diyora Keldiyorova has been appointed Social Commissioner of the National Agency for Social Protection under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan to combat gender inequality and violence against children (Yuz.uz).

### **Women Entrepreneurship**

On May 1, 2019, the Women's Entrepreneurship Centers were established, which have the status of non-governmental non-profit organization. The main tasks of the centers, in cooperation with the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations, are to retain, and support the employment of women on long-term parental leave and in difficult economic

support the employment of women on long-term parental leave and in difficult economic situations in the labor market.

## Conclusion

Therefore, it is appropriate to highlight the importance of education in this area. Lack of knowledge and ignorance among women are the main problems hindering the growth of female leaders. Increasing the number of women leaders in education can bring many benefits to society, considering that education is a key to success.

To conclude, Uzbekistan has made commendable advances in the pursuit of gender equality in higher education. However, the journey is far from complete. By adopting a comprehensive and complex strategy that addresses both systemic barriers and cultural attitudes, Uzbekistan may unlock the full potential of its female population and establish a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

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