Economic Rights and Opportunities for Women in the Republic of Uzbekistan

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Abstract: *Economic rights and opportunities for women are essential components of gender equality, social justice, and sustainable economic development. In the Republic of Uzbekistan, women's economic empowerment has become an important area of legal and social reform. The Constitution of Uzbekistan guarantees the right to property, decent work, fair remuneration, and equal rights and opportunities for women and men. National legislation and government programmes also aim to promote women's employment, entrepreneurship, vocational education, and financial independence. In recent years, various initiatives have expanded opportunities for women to establish businesses, acquire professional skills, and participate in economic activities. According to the United Nations Development Programme, approximately 2.1 million women entrepreneurs were operating in Uzbekistan in 2024, demonstrating significant growth in women's business participation.*

Keywords: *women's economic rights, Uzbekistan, gender equality, women's employment, entrepreneurship, equal pay, financial independence, economic empowerment.*

Economic rights are fundamental human rights that enable individuals to obtain employment, own property, establish businesses, receive fair remuneration, and achieve financial independence. For women, the effective realization of these rights is particularly important because economic independence strengthens their position within families and communities, reduces vulnerability to poverty, and increases their participation in public life. Women's economic empowerment also contributes to national development by expanding the labour force, encouraging entrepreneurship, and improving household welfare. Therefore, creating equal economic opportunities for women and men is an important objective of contemporary social and economic policy. In the Republic of Uzbekistan, the protection of women's economic rights has developed through constitutional reforms, national legislation, and government initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality. The Constitution, in its revised version adopted by referendum on 30 April 2023, establishes important guarantees relating to property ownership, employment, fair remuneration, and equality between women and men. Article 41 protects the right to own property, Article 42 guarantees decent work and remuneration without discrimination, and Article 58 establishes equality between women and men. Article 42 also explicitly prohibits refusing to employ women, dismissing them, or reducing their wages because of pregnancy or having a child.

Uzbekistan has also introduced legislative and policy measures to promote women's participation in employment, entrepreneurship, and professional development. These initiatives seek to improve access to financial resources, vocational training, business support, and employment opportunities. The expansion of women's entrepreneurship demonstrates the growing importance of women in the country's economic transformation. However, legal guarantees do not automatically eliminate economic inequality. Women may continue to experience wage differences, limited access to higher-paying occupations, unequal domestic responsibilities, and difficulties obtaining business finance. These challenges require coordinated action by government institutions, employers, financial organizations, and educational institutions. The purpose of this paper is to examine the economic rights and opportunities available to women in Uzbekistan, analyze the relevant constitutional and legislative framework, identify the principal barriers to economic participation, and propose measures to improve women's economic independence and contribution to sustainable national development.

Constitutional and Legislative Foundations of Women's Economic Rights

The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan provides the principal legal foundation for protecting women's economic rights. Article 19 establishes equality before the law without discrimination based on sex, while Article 41 guarantees the right to own property. These provisions are important because property ownership and legal equality enable women to manage assets, inherit property, make financial decisions, and participate independently in economic activities. Article 42 guarantees the right to decent work, free choice of profession and occupation, safe working conditions, and fair remuneration without discrimination. It also protects women against employment decisions based on pregnancy or having a child. Article 43 requires the state to take measures to promote employment, protect citizens against unemployment, reduce poverty, and support vocational education and retraining. In addition, Article 58 establishes equal rights and opportunities for women and men in different spheres of social and public life. [1] These constitutional provisions are supported by the Law on Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men, adopted in 2019. This legislation provides a framework for preventing gender discrimination and promoting equal opportunities in employment and other areas. Together, these legal instruments establish that women should be able to participate in economic activities on equal terms with men. Nevertheless, effective protection depends on implementation. Accessible complaint procedures, legal assistance, workplace accountability, and public awareness are necessary to ensure that constitutional and statutory guarantees are respected in practice.

Women's Employment and Labour Market Participation

Employment is one of the principal means through which women achieve economic independence. Women in Uzbekistan contribute to agriculture, education, healthcare,

manufacturing, public administration, retail, tourism, and other service sectors. Access to stable employment enables women to support their families, develop professional skills, and participate more actively in social and economic life.[2] Despite this contribution, women continue to face barriers in the labour market. The World Bank's 2024 Country Gender Assessment reported that women in Uzbekistan earned approximately 34% less than men, based on the data examined in that assessment. It also identified substantial differences in youth employment outcomes and highlighted the high proportion of young women who were not in employment, education, or training. Several factors contribute to these challenges. Women may have less access to professional networks, advanced technical training, and senior management positions. Employers' assumptions about family responsibilities can also influence recruitment and promotion decisions. In addition, limited childcare services may make full-time employment difficult for mothers of young children. Improving women's labour market participation requires effective enforcement of equal-pay legislation, transparent recruitment procedures, access to vocational and digital skills training, and support for women returning to work after periods of caregiving. Expanding opportunities in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and information technology could also help women enter occupations with stronger career prospects.

Women's Entrepreneurship and Business Opportunities

Entrepreneurship is an important avenue for women's economic empowerment in Uzbekistan. Women establish and operate businesses in textiles, handicrafts, agriculture, retail, catering, tourism, education, and digital services. Small businesses can provide income, create employment, and allow women to use their professional skills in flexible and independent ways. According to the United Nations Development Programme's 2025 assessment, approximately 2.1 million women entrepreneurs were operating in Uzbekistan in 2024, representing a sevenfold increase compared with 2020. The assessment also identifies continuing challenges involving access to finance, business skills, and unpaid care responsibilities. Women entrepreneurs may encounter difficulties obtaining loans because they lack collateral, have limited credit histories, or operate small businesses with irregular income. Some also need additional training in financial management, marketing, taxation, digital commerce, and business planning.[5] To address these barriers, Uzbekistan can expand affordable financing, business incubators, mentoring programmes, and entrepreneurship training. Special attention should be given to rural women and women from low-income households, who may have fewer opportunities to access financial institutions and professional networks. Digital technologies also offer opportunities for women to sell products online, provide remote services, reach customers beyond their local communities, and develop businesses with lower initial operating costs. Supporting digital literacy and access to reliable internet services can therefore contribute to broader economic inclusion.

Education is closely connected to women's economic opportunities. Quality education and vocational training improve employability, increase productivity, and help women access skilled occupations. Women's participation in higher education, technical training, and lifelong learning can also reduce occupational segregation and support career advancement.[6] Professional development should respond to labour market demand. Programmes in information technology, engineering, accounting, financial services, logistics, and business management can help women develop skills relevant to expanding sectors of the economy. Cooperation between educational institutions and employers can improve the connection between training and employment. Financial literacy is equally important. Understanding budgeting, savings, loans, taxation, insurance, and investment enables women to make informed financial decisions. Such knowledge is particularly valuable for women managing household finances or establishing small businesses. Economic independence also depends on women's ability to own and control property, access banking services, and make decisions about income. Ensuring that women can exercise these rights freely can strengthen their bargaining position within households and improve their long-term financial security.

Although legislation establishes formal equality, social and economic conditions may prevent women from fully exercising their rights. One important challenge is the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic work, including childcare, cooking, cleaning, and care for older relatives. When these responsibilities fall disproportionately on women, they may have less time for paid employment, education, and entrepreneurship. The World Bank's 2024 gender assessment identifies traditional gender expectations and caregiving responsibilities among the factors restricting women's economic participation in Uzbekistan. Other obstacles include limited employment opportunities in some rural areas, inadequate access to childcare, occupational segregation, and difficulties combining professional responsibilities with family life. Women experiencing poverty or disability may encounter additional barriers. Addressing these challenges requires affordable childcare, accessible transport, effective social protection, flexible employment arrangements, and fair parental leave policies. Employers should be encouraged to establish nondiscriminatory workplace practices, while public institutions should monitor employment and wage data to identify persistent inequalities.

Economic rights and opportunities for women in the Republic of Uzbekistan are essential to achieving gender equality, reducing poverty, and promoting sustainable economic development. The Constitution establishes important guarantees relating to property ownership, employment, fair remuneration, and equal opportunities for women and men. National legislation further supports these principles by providing a framework for combating discrimination and improving women's participation in economic activities. Significant opportunities have emerged through the development

of women's entrepreneurship, vocational training, financial assistance programmes, and employment initiatives. The growth in the number of women entrepreneurs demonstrates the increasing role of women in the country's economy. Women's participation in business and professional life can generate household income, create employment, encourage innovation, and strengthen local communities. Nevertheless, several challenges continue to limit the full realization of women's economic rights. Wage disparities, unequal unpaid care responsibilities, limited access to finance, and barriers to career advancement may prevent women from benefiting equally from economic development. These difficulties demonstrate that legal equality must be accompanied by effective implementation, institutional accountability, and supportive social policies.

In conclusion, women's economic empowerment should be understood not only as a matter of individual opportunity but also as an important factor in national prosperity. When women can obtain decent employment, own property, establish businesses, access financial resources, and develop their professional abilities without discrimination, the entire society benefits. Continued cooperation between government institutions, employers, financial organizations, educational establishments, and civil society will be essential to ensuring that women's economic rights in Uzbekistan are effectively protected and translated into equal opportunities in everyday life.

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