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A NEW SYSTEM OF SOCIO-CULTURAL SUPPORT FOR WOMEN IN NEW UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This article examines the development and implementation of state policies aimed at strengthening women's social protection, expanding their economic opportunities, and enhancing their participation in the socio-political life of Uzbekistan. Particular attention is paid to the reforms introduced under the Action Strategy for 2017–2021 and the establishment of targeted social assistance mechanisms, including the “Women's Register” (Ayollar daftari) and the “Youth Register” (Yoshlar daftari). The article discusses institutional measures designed to address women's unemployment, promote entrepreneurship, improve access to education and financial resources, and provide legal, psychological, and material assistance to socially vulnerable groups.

Keywords: Women's empowerment, gender equality, social protection, Uzbekistan, Women's Register, women's entrepreneurship, state policy, employment opportunities, financial inclusion, vocational training, family welfare, domestic violence prevention, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the consistent reforms being implemented in our country – aimed at cherishing women, honoring them as the pillars of the family and the educators of the nation, protecting their rights and freedoms, fostering their intellectual and entrepreneurial potential, and encouraging their initiatives – are serving to further elevate the status of women in both the family and society.



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The Action Strategy for the Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017–2021, along with the state programs adopted within its framework, ushered in a new strategic approach to improving the living conditions of the population, particularly those of women.

A new vertical system has been established to ensure the effective implementation of state policy regarding systematic engagement with women and their comprehensive support. Over the past five years, providing comprehensive support and protection to women – particularly the unemployed, the socially inactive, and those facing difficult social and living conditions – has become a priority value in the life of our people. This includes providing targeted state assistance, vocational training, and employment opportunities, as well as offering social-legal, psychological, and material aid to women with disabilities.

At the initiative of the Head of State, "Women's Advisory Councils" were established across 9,251 *mahallas* (neighborhood communities) to listen to the concerns of women in need of social protection and assist in resolving their problems; dedicated spaces were also allocated for these councils within social facilities.

Leadership of the "Women's Advisory Council" was entrusted to the deputy chairpersons of citizens' assemblies responsible for family, women's, and social-spiritual affairs. To systematically address issues facing women, the Republican Public Council on Women's Affairs was established. It was determined that the Republican Council would be led by the Chairperson of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, while regional councils would be led by the advisors on women's affairs to the regional, city, and district *hokims* (governors/mayors). The Council's activities are further enhancing the status of women in society and creating new opportunities for them. In recent years, significant attention has also been paid to the future of girls raised in families



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facing difficult social circumstances. Notably, the number of grants for girls from needy families entering higher education institutions has been doubled to 2,000, and special scholarships have been introduced for girls from socially vulnerable backgrounds who excel in their studies.

To reap the economic benefits of the demographic dividend, it is essential to support key segments of the population – specifically youth and women – or, in other words, to invest heavily in human capital. Doing so will not only boost the economy in the future but also stabilize the social landscape, reduce poverty and the emigration of skilled talent, eliminate unemployment, and raise the population's standard of living.

The "Iron Register," "Women's Register," and "Youth Register" systems currently implemented in our country ensure that state social reforms – particularly those aimed at poverty prevention and employment – directly impact individual lives; these systems serve as a foundation for reforms that fundamentally transform the lives of every citizen.

Specifically, the primary objective of the "Women's Register" and "Youth Register" is to provide psychological, legal, medical, and financial support to young people and women in need, while fostering motivation and developing their vocational skills.

This new system is primarily focused on realizing the interests, needs, and aspirations of ordinary citizens. The "Women's Register" and "Youth Register" represent a modern, innovative approach within state policy aimed at elevating the social status of women and youth, realizing their potential, facilitating their integration and socialization into society, and boosting their civic engagement.

Since October 2020, working groups – comprising officials from the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan, the Ministry for Support of Mahalla and Family, and the Youth Affairs Agency, alongside representatives of local authorities –



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have conducted assessments in neighborhoods across 28 districts and cities of the country. Not a single household where women reside was overlooked.

Of those listed in the "Women's Register," 59 percent are unemployed, 8.5 percent have lost their breadwinner, and 6.7 percent are women with Group I or II disabilities who require social protection. Furthermore, it was noted that 5.4 percent require legal assistance, 1 percent need home repairs, 2.1 percent live in non-residential premises, and 1.9 percent are raising one or more children with disabilities as single mothers.

The "Women's Register" initiative is not merely a formality. At the core of this system lies a desire not to conceal problems, but rather to openly acknowledge and resolve existing shortcomings. The Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan and the Ministry for Support of Mahalla and Family – in cooperation with relevant ministries, agencies, and local authorities – have carried out a series of measures to systematically address women's issues, provide social support, and implement the "Women's Register" system.

Positions dedicated to women's affairs have been established within the Xalq Bank system at the national, regional, and district/city levels. In collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, specific responsibilities were assigned to these officials, such as training women to develop business projects tailored to local conditions and assisting them in obtaining loans.

Mechanisms and training programs were developed to support the more than 6,500 women seeking to launch businesses and obtain loans; specific tasks were also outlined to assist them in formulating business plans and securing preferential loans. To date, Xalq Bank has presented over 70 business projects for women listed in the "Women's Register" who wish to start their own businesses. Loans totaling 839 billion 309 million soums have been allocated to 68,281 women included in the "Women's Register."



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"Legal and Psychological Counseling Centers for Women" have been established under district (and city) employment assistance centers. Psychologists at these centers work to help unemployed women adapt to the labor market; they conduct individual consultations, assess each woman's vocational interests and aptitudes, prepare them for interviews with employers, and teach them workplace interaction skills.

Regarding the 4,252 women with Group I disabilities listed in the "Women's Register" who required home repairs, the homes of 4,164 have been renovated; additionally, practical assistance to improve housing conditions was provided to 8,834 of the 9,223 women who were living in non-residential premises. A targeted list of 812 women – who have lost their fathers and are in the care of single mothers – was compiled, and a procedure was developed to cover the down payments required to provide them with housing.

Housing rental compensation totaling 1 billion 669 million 815 thousand soums was paid to 899 women living in non-residential premises, while down payments for affordable housing were covered for 854 women. Developing entrepreneurship among women, ensuring their employment, and improving their working and living conditions have become top priorities in the country today. The conditions, opportunities, and incentives being created for women's entrepreneurship serve to further develop women's potential, expand their economic opportunities, and ensure family well-being; they also facilitate greater female participation in the socio-political, economic, informational, and ideological reforms currently underway in the country. As a result of the focus placed on developing the entrepreneurship sector, women in our country currently manage 129,534 business entities. Furthermore, 106,966 women are registered and operating as individual entrepreneurs.



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By its very nature, violence is a negative social phenomenon, and its victims are predominantly women. Domestic violence is a widespread global issue affecting people across all nationalities, social classes, and educational backgrounds; our republic is no exception. In response to this, a legal framework has been established in our country to protect women from harassment and violence.

Legal and psychological assistance was provided to 4,205 citizens who sought help from rehabilitation and adaptation centers; support was given regarding the restoration of documents, representation in courts and other agencies, obtaining protection orders, administering first aid, referrals to medical facilities, and other matters. To facilitate easy access to assistance, a 24-hour "hotline" service was launched.

"Social contracts" and "protection orders" have been introduced for women and girls who have suffered from pressure and violence; to date, 17,377 such women and girls have been issued protection orders. Twenty-six women who had committed crimes or offenses were released from punishment early based on guarantees of surety.

One of the primary tasks assigned to the Ministry for Support of Mahalla and Family – established on the initiative of our Head of State – is to ensure the stability of families in our country, highlight the historical roots of the institution of the family, and foster family values. In this regard, the state has recently been paying special attention to the stability of families – particularly young families just embarking on their life journeys – and to their independent development as integral parts of society.

Regarding statistics on young families, the number of divorces among them in Uzbekistan fell by 528 in 2020 compared to 2019, with 8,174 divorces recorded. Consequently, meetings themed "Counsel from Mothers" have been held to help prevent divorce among young families.



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CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the reforms implemented in Uzbekistan to strengthen women's social protection, promote gender equality, and expand economic opportunities represent an important direction of the country's socio-economic development. The introduction of targeted support mechanisms, particularly the “Women's Register” and the “Youth Register,” has contributed to the development of a more systematic approach to identifying and addressing the needs of socially vulnerable groups. These initiatives emphasize the importance of providing employment opportunities, vocational training, financial assistance, legal protection, and psychological support to women facing difficult living conditions. Furthermore, the development of women's entrepreneurship, the expansion of access to education and financial resources, and the improvement of housing conditions demonstrate the increasing attention given to women's economic independence and social well-being. Cooperation among government institutions, local communities, financial organizations, and civil society plays an essential role in implementing these measures.

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