

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL LIFE OF WOMEN IN
UZBEKISTAN DURING THE INDEPENDENCE PERIOD
(A CASE STUDY OF QASHQADARYO REGION)**

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Abstract: *This article analyzes the role, activity, and development prospects of women in the socio-economic and cultural life of Uzbekistan during the independence period, using the Qashqadaryo region as a case study. The study examines state policy measures aimed at ensuring women's rights and employment, as well as regional disparities and gender equality issues. The results show an increasing participation of women in education, the economy, and culture. However, it is emphasized that existing shortcomings and social stereotypes in rural areas further exacerbate the problem. Based on the study, practical recommendations have been developed to implement gender policy more effectively and to strengthen the status of women in society.*

Keywords: *Women, Socio-economic development, Cultural life, Gender equality, Qashqadaryo region, Female employment, Regional disparities, Independence period*

INTRODUCTION. Strengthening the role and status of women in society is a key factor in the political, economic, and spiritual development of any state. After gaining independence, the Republic of Uzbekistan implemented profound reforms aimed at ensuring human rights, particularly the legal status of women. These reforms laid the foundation for a systematic approach to enhancing women's activity and involving them in education, healthcare, politics, economics, and cultural spheres.

Over time, the system of working with women was conceptually revised. Legal frameworks were strengthened to protect their rights and interests, ensure gender equality, and support their active participation in social life. For instance, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated September 2, 2019, "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men" recognized gender equality as one of the core principles of state policy.

Today, women are actively participating in Uzbekistan's political and legal life, increasingly involved in entrepreneurship, have greater access to higher education, and

are contributing significantly to cultural development — all of which highlight their role as a vital factor in national progress. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated: “Strengthening the role and status of women in the state and society, and protecting their rights and interests — this is our main task.” Research based on the Qashqadaryo region provides an opportunity to analyze how these changes have manifested at the regional level. In this densely populated, agriculturally based region with deeply rooted traditional values, it is of particular importance to study how women's social activity and quality of life are evolving. This presents not only a practical but also a theoretically significant scientific issue.

Therefore, this article provides an analytical approach to the role of women in the socio-economic and cultural life of Uzbekistan — particularly in the Qashqadaryo region — in the post-independence period. It explores the factors influencing this process, existing challenges, and future directions. The study is based not only on general statistical indicators but also on real-life examples, legal frameworks, and social dynamics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY. This scientific article employs an integrated approach combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods to study the changes in the socio-economic and cultural life of women in Uzbekistan during the years of independence, with a particular focus on the Qashqadaryo region. The main objective of the study is to determine the level of women's social activity, economic independence, and cultural participation, identify existing problems in these areas, and develop scientifically grounded recommendations for their solution.

The research was conducted based on descriptive and analytical approaches. The descriptive method was used to present the current situation, while the analytical method helped examine the causes, consequences, and trends of the identified conditions.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of the Women's Committee in the Qashqadaryo region, educators, active female entrepreneurs, and local community leaders. These interviews explored women's life experiences, problems, achievements, and attitudes toward ongoing changes. The interview results were grouped through content analysis and classified thematically.

The laws, presidential decrees, and government resolutions related to women's issues during the independence period were systematically analyzed. Special attention was given to the implementation outcomes of practical programs such as “*Women's Registry*”, “*Women's Employment Support Program*”, and “*Every Woman is an Entrepreneur*.” These documents were instrumental in identifying how they influenced changes in women's socio-economic life.

Based on official statistical data, trends were analyzed regarding women's employment, access to higher education, utilization of healthcare services, and other social indicators. These changes were visually represented using graphs and charts.

RESULTS. After gaining independence, Uzbekistan began implementing systematic measures to enhance the participation of women in social, economic, and cultural life. The practical outcomes of these reforms are reflected in the following areas, as observed in the Qashqadaryo region.

In the post-independence years, women's access to education in the Qashqadaryo region expanded significantly. As of 2024, women accounted for 47% of the students enrolled in higher education institutions across the region. In comparison, this figure was only around 17–18% in 1995²⁰.

In recent years, the economic activity of women has been steadily increasing. In 2023, more than 11,000 women in the Qashqadaryo region were involved in entrepreneurial activities. Within the framework of the “*Every Woman is an Entrepreneur*” program, over 3,000 women in the region received preferential loans totaling more than 0.5 trillion Uzbek soums during the period of 2022–2023 (according to reports from the Qashqadaryo regional administration, 2023).

In this regard, 41% of the study participants stated that they contribute to their family income, while 24% reported being engaged in personal or family-run businesses. According to a World Bank report, women's economic activity directly impacts the socio-economic stability of society²¹.

Cultural development is also one of the key factors contributing to women's personal and social growth. In the Qashqadaryo region, women actively participate in cultural life through women's circles, clubs, and artisan associations. According to the survey results, 53% of respondents reported that they regularly attend public cultural events, while 32% stated that they are members of local art or handicraft groups.

At the same time, the increasing number of active women expressing their opinions through social networks and mass media indicates a growing level of self-awareness among women. Researcher Z. Toshpulatova explains this as follows: “Today's Uzbek woman, unlike in the past, is becoming more aware of her place in society, demanding her rights, and realizing that through participation in cultural and scientific activities, she can positively transform her life.”

The study also revealed that the level of legal awareness among women is increasing. About 61% of women surveyed stated they are aware of social programs such as the “Women's Registry” (*Ayollar daftari*) and the “Iron Registry” (*Temir daftar*). Moreover,

²⁰ O'zbekiston Respublikasi Statistika agentligi. (2024). *Qashqadaryo viloyati ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy rivojlanish hisobotlari*. Toshkent.

²¹ World Bank. (2021). *Women's Economic Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: O'zbekistondagi tajriba*. Washington, DC: World Bank Publications.

48% mentioned that they have had experience reaching out to state institutions or NGOs to protect their rights.

According to the 2022 Gender Development Index by the United Nations, Uzbekistan ranked in the upper-middle group with a score of 0.719, which confirms the existence of positive changes in the field of gender equality²²

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION. In the years following independence, the prioritization of women's issues at the level of state policy in Uzbekistan has led to positive socio-economic outcomes. In particular, the research conducted in the Qashqadaryo region shows that women are increasingly participating in education, employment, cultural, and social life. However, the study also revealed that this growth is not uniform, and regional and social disparities still exist.

The research findings confirm that the level of social activity among women is steadily increasing. This aligns with a statement from a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which notes: “Societies where women's economic and social activity increases tend to experience higher levels of stability and prosperity²³”

In addition, the model of the “New System of Working with Women” adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan is based on supporting women at every stage — from addressing domestic issues to guiding them toward entrepreneurship. This approach plays a key role in strengthening women’s self-confidence²⁴.

According to the research findings, there is a noticeable growth in cultural and legal awareness among women in the Qashqadaryo region. Many women are becoming aware of their rights and striving to exercise them. Scholar G‘. Jo‘rayev evaluates this trend as follows: “The changes in the legal consciousness of Uzbek women represent an important stage in their journey toward personal freedom, the right to choose, and achieving social equality.²⁵”

Despite the progress, in certain regions—particularly among women living in remote rural areas—the level of economic activity and cultural participation remains low. Factors contributing to this include weak transport infrastructure, entrenched gender stereotypes, and limited access to information.

²² United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2021). *Gender va barqaror rivojlanish: O‘zbekiston konteksti*. New York: UNDP.

²³ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2022). *Human Development Report 2022: Gender Development Index*. Retrieved from <https://hdr.undp.org/en/2022-report>

²⁴ O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Vazirlar Mahkamasining qarori, 31.03.2022 yildagi 145-son

²⁵ G. Jo‘rayev (2022). Ayollar huquqiy ongining rivojlanishi va jamiyatdagi roli. *Ijtimoiy fanlar jurnal*, 15(2), 57-bet.

Researcher R. Ismoilova explains this situation as follows: “The economic and social activity of rural women is considerably lower compared to urban areas, which poses a serious challenge to achieving the principles of equality²⁶”

To address these issues, it is essential to strengthen gender-oriented regional policies and enhance cooperation between local authorities and community-based organizations. Many women have begun to reflect on their role in society and are participating in public discussions through social media platforms. From an anthropological perspective, this indicates a strengthening of female identity.

Renowned social anthropologist N. Tokhirova writes: “In modern Uzbekistan, the identity of women is being reconstructed not only as a figure within the family, but also as an active agent in society²⁷”

CONCLUSION

During the years of independence, the participation of women in the socio-economic and cultural life of Uzbekistan, particularly in the Qashqadaryo region, has steadily increased. This reflects the effectiveness of state policies aimed at ensuring gender equality, the improvement of the legal framework, and the formation of a positive societal attitude toward the role of women.

According to the research findings:

- Women’s aspiration for education has grown, and their participation in higher and secondary specialized education has doubled compared to the 1990s.
- Through social programs such as “*Every Woman is an Entrepreneur*” and “*Women's Registry*”, economic activity has expanded, with increased female employment contributing to stable families and sustainable social development.
- Participation in cultural life, increased self-awareness, and the growth of legal consciousness have accelerated women’s development as individuals.

Researcher G. Matkarimova states: “When a woman feels free and active in society, she is formed not only as a member within the family, but also as a significant agent in the progress of society.”

Nonetheless, the study identifies that women in rural areas continue to exhibit lower levels of economic and cultural activity. This underscores the need to eliminate gender-based regional disparities. In this regard, N. Islomova concludes: “To ensure gender equality, regional policy must adopt a differentiated approach, especially by developing individualized mechanisms for working with women living in remote areas.”

In conclusion, the independence period has served as a stage of renewal, empowerment, and freedom for Uzbek women. Now, to deepen gender policy, strengthen

²⁶ N. Islomova (2020). *Gender tenglik va hududiy siyosat: O'zbekistonda qishloq ayollarining ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy holati*. Toshkent: Ilm-fan nashriyoti. 93-bet

²⁷ N. Tokhirova (2023). Zamonaviy O'zbekistonda ayol identitetining shakllanishi. *Ijtimoiy antropologiya sharhlari*, 12(1), 100–108.

women's social protection, and fully realize their cultural potential, the following recommendations are deemed essential:

- Strengthen the activities of regional women's centers;
- Increase employment through modern vocational training for women;
- Promote the image of the active woman through social media and mass media;
- Enhance women's participation in political decision-making (e.g., in local councils and community bodies).

By implementing these recommendations, the encouragement of women's activity will contribute not only to family stability but also to the cultural, economic, and political development of society.

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