

DEVELOPING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: STRATEGIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN UZBEKISTAN'S CIVIL SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the significant strides made by Uzbekistan in advancing women's leadership within public administration. By detailing the initiatives such as the Women's Leadership School and highlighting international cooperation, especially with Kazakhstan, it explores the impacts of these efforts on enhancing governance and promoting gender equality.

Keywords: *Women's Leadership, Public Administration, Uzbekistan, International Cooperation, Gender Equality, Governance.*

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving world, successful public administration is inconceivable without the active participation of women. Their involvement in decision-making processes not only enhances governance efficiency but also fosters the creation of a more inclusive society.

Women's socio-political activity and their engagement in decision-making within public administration play a key role in national development. This is supported by international research and the experience of developed nations.

Currently, the active inclusion of women in public administration has become a global priority. International experience demonstrates that gender-balanced governance positively impacts economic development, decision-making quality, and public trust in government institutions.

According to UNDP (2022), countries where women hold more than 30% of leadership positions tend to exhibit economic stability and social resilience. The World Bank (2024) also indicates that countries with higher gender equality experience significantly lower corruption levels, as women leaders tend to focus on long-term planning and greater social responsibility.

STRENGTHENING GENDER EQUALITY IN UZBEKISTAN'S GOVERNMENT WORKFORCE

In recent years, Uzbekistan has made significant strides in ensuring gender equality in public administration by strengthening its legislative framework. More than 40 legislative documents and important conceptual programs have been adopted to support women, protect their rights, and safeguard their legitimate interests (Avazbekova & Makhkamova, 2024).

Laws and state programs launched in 2022 guarantee equal rights and opportunities for women and men. Active programs aim to increase participation of women in public administration, and public financing to support low-income women with tertiary tuition are among many new initiatives to promote greater equality (Seitz et al., 2024).

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Over the last seven years, the share of women in Uzbekistan's public administration has risen from 27% to 35%. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, in his address at the 78th session of the UN General Assembly, highlighted (2023) these systematic efforts, emphasizing that women's representation in leadership roles has reached unprecedented levels.

The effectiveness of these reforms has been recognized by the international community and reflected in Uzbekistan's improved rankings in global gender equality indices.

For instance, in the World Bank index, Uzbekistan was listed among the 5 fastest developing countries in the world in the field of gender equality.

In addition, Uzbekistan ranked 18th out of 195 countries with a score of 69.7 in the "Open Data Watch" organization's Open Gender Data Index and was ranked among the "Top-20".

The Agency for the Development of Public Service, responsible for personnel policy in Uzbekistan's civil service, has been systematically working to promote gender equality. The introduction of open competitions has established uniform requirements for all candidates, minimizing human bias in hiring processes and significantly expanding opportunities for women in the civil service.

According to recent statistics, the percentage of women successfully entering public service has significantly increased. Previously, women accounted for only 5–8% of candidates. However, today, they constitute nearly 33% of the successful applicants. Out of 3.7 million applications submitted for open competitions, 20% came from women. Among the 78,900 individuals who secured government positions, 26,300 (33%) were women. These figures highlight substantial progress in gender-inclusive human resources policies (Avazbekova, 2025).

Moreover, over the past year, the proportion of women in the National Personnel Reserve, formed to fill leadership positions, has doubled compared to 2023, reinforcing the country's strategic commitment to gender equality in public administration.

FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND CAREER GROWTH

Ensuring flexibility in work arrangements is a crucial factor in promoting gender equality and increasing women's participation in the workforce. Flexible work schedules allow employees, particularly women, to balance professional responsibilities with family and personal commitments, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and productive working environment (Chung, 2020). Moreover, such arrangements contribute to greater job satisfaction, increased retention rates, and overall improvements in workplace efficiency.

A pilot flexible work regime was successfully implemented for 83 women across 29 national executive bodies and their seven territorial divisions in the Syrdarya region. Currently, measures are being actively introduced to improve working conditions, contributing to greater employee satisfaction and productivity.

A transparent personnel selection system, combined with reasonable work schedules, attracts highly qualified and promising professionals to the civil service. These efforts are directed at enhancing governance efficiency and achieving better overall administrative outcomes.

THE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL INITIATIVE

The active participation of women in governance is a key priority of the President's policies. In recent years, the head of state has initiated numerous programs to expand women's roles in public administration, one of the most notable being the *Women's Leadership School*.

In accordance with Presidential Decree No. PF-87 (2022), a comprehensive set of measures was developed to increase women's representation in government institutions. These initiatives are designed to systematically prepare the most qualified women for leadership roles.

To date, three cohorts of the *Women's Leadership School* have been conducted, training approximately 150 women. Upon completing the program, all participants were included in the National Personnel Reserve, and 44 of them have already secured high-level leadership positions.

From September to December of this year, the Agency, in collaboration with the Committee on Family and Women's Affairs, successfully selected candidates for the fourth season of the program. A total of 550 women were shortlisted, including 300 recommended by government bodies and organizations, as well as 250 outstanding school directors nominated by the Ministry of Preschool and School Education.

To assess candidates' qualifications, 141 women who passed National Personnel Reserve testing underwent commission interviews with senior officials, including the Deputy Prime Minister. Based on the results, 100 women with the highest scores were recommended for participation in the upcoming season of the *Women's Leadership School*.

Building on these successful outcomes, "The Women's Leadership School was established at the initiative of our esteemed President with the aim of preparing talented, high-potential, and enterprising young women for leadership. I am confident that this program will cultivate women leaders capable of making an invaluable impact on the socio-political processes in our country," stated Saida Mirziyoyeva². This endorsement underscores the importance and effectiveness of the initiative in empowering women within the public sector.

ENHANCING LEADERSHIP TRAINING AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

In modern governance, successful leaders require a deep understanding of economic processes, the ability to stimulate entrepreneurship, increase public income levels, and effectively combat poverty.

This season, the *Women's Leadership School* curriculum has been enriched with modules on digital economy, entrepreneurial ecosystems, green economy development, and artificial intelligence fundamentals. The program involves experienced executives and experts from the Cabinet of Ministers, ministries, agencies, and commercial banks.

² Cherepanova, A. (2025) Saida Mirziyoyeva opens the 4th season of the "School of Women Leaders". *Empowering women for self-realization and active engagement in the country's development*. January 23, 2025. Available at: <https://elleuzbekistan.com/en/saida-mirziyoyeva-opens-the-4th-season-of-the-school-of-women-leaders/> [Accessed 13 Feb 2025].

Upon completion, top-performing graduates will have the opportunity to participate in internships at prestigious universities, research centers, and companies abroad. Steps have already been taken to facilitate internships in Turkey, Hungary, the UAE, and Latvia.

The exceptional discipline, work ethic, communication skills, and decision-making abilities of women highlight their invaluable role in public administration. As President Shavkat Mirziyoyev (2022) stated, *"Where women work and lead, order, justice, honesty, and culture prevail!"*

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

International experience sharing is an integral part of modern public administration development. The planned internships abroad for the most outstanding graduates of the *Women's Leadership School* align with this strategy, helping them gain professional expertise and build international connections.

Collaboration with neighboring countries, such as Kazakhstan, has also played a vital role. During the recent visit of Kazakhstan's President, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Uzbek and Kazakh Public Service Development Agencies, launching several joint initiatives focused on competency assessments and civil service recruitment.

One of the key events was a seminar on open competition procedures in public service, held jointly with Kazakh specialists. Uzbek officials also visited Kazakhstan to study its methods for assessing and training civil servants, thereby enhancing Uzbekistan's human resource management capabilities.

Additionally, participation in the international conference in Astana on the future of public administration allowed Uzbekistan to showcase its achievements and gain insights into new governance trends and innovations.

These collaborative efforts directly contribute to the implementation of key government policy objectives. Increasing the role of women in public administration and forming a corps of potential female leaders are among the most pressing issues on the agenda for the development of the civil service. Against this backdrop, our country is actively shaping a unique national model for preparing women for leadership roles, thereby strengthening public administration and fostering the development of socio-political life.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As Uzbekistan continues to implement systematic reforms and strategic initiatives like the *Women's Leadership School*, the country is solidifying its commitment to fostering gender equality in public administration. The development of a unique national model for preparing women for leadership roles is central to these efforts, aiming to strengthen both public administration and socio-political development.

Through these programs, Uzbekistan is crafting a corps of competent women leaders who are not only equipped with essential managerial expertise but also possess an innovative mindset. This transformation is crucial for enhancing the quality and efficiency of public administration and fostering progress across various socio-political spheres.

To build on this momentum, it is recommended that Uzbekistan continue to focus on the following areas:

1. **Breaking Stereotypes:** Efforts should be intensified to change societal attitudes towards women in leadership positions. This includes combating stereotypes and increasing public participation in initiatives aimed at elevating the social and political status of women.
2. **Education and Continuous Development:** Enhance the political and legal knowledge of women, continuously develop their professional skills, and systematically prepare them for leadership roles. This will not only equip them with the necessary tools to excel but also help in building trust in their leadership capacity among the broader community.
3. **Addressing Barriers to Advancement:** The problem of the "glass ceiling" and vertical gender segregation must be addressed decisively. Implementing effective career models and ensuring equal opportunities for women and men in state organizations is essential for enabling women to rise to higher positions without undue barriers.
4. **Promotion and Visibility:** Increase the visibility of women active in various branches of public administration through targeted media campaigns. This includes creating television programs, conducting roundtable discussions, producing social media content, and featuring positive images of women in national series, thus enhancing the public perception of women's contributions to governance.
5. **International Cooperation and Best Practices:** Continue to expand international cooperation, particularly with nations like Kazakhstan, to exchange best practices in public service reform and gender equality. Learning from and integrating international experiences can provide fresh insights and innovative approaches to advancing women's roles in governance.

By adhering to these recommendations, Uzbekistan can ensure that its efforts to promote women in leadership not only result in increased representation but also contribute significantly to the nation's overall governance and development objectives.

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