

## THE ROLE OF GENDER EQUALITY IN UZBEKISTAN

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**Abstract:** Gender equality is one of the key issues in EU policy. EU actively promotes these values in many countries with which it has diplomatic relations. Uzbekistan is no exception, and the format of EU support for women has undergone significant changes in the country over the past five years. The European Union today supports the policy of gender equality in the republic and that can help increase the role of women in Uzbek society.

**Key words:** Gender equality, EU, human rights, support for women, equality.

Gender equality is a common value for EU countries, just like human rights. Fortunately, Uzbekistan fully shares EU position, and this is an excellent opportunity to promote the ideas of gender equality in the republic.

The presence of women in all spheres of society, particular in the economy, contributes to development and increase its sustainability. Women in Uzbekistan are a serious potential. According to a study by the International Labor Organization (ILO), if the presence of women in the labor market of Uzbekistan is increased by 25%, the country's GDP can grow by 5%. Of course, this is not the only reason to deal with this issue, but an excellent opportunity to promote the ideas of gender equality in the country.

Until 2016, the EU in Uzbekistan focused on family and health support projects. But since 2017, these have already been related to the empowerment of women. EU actively support local organizations that work in this direction, and as a result it is able to monitor the gender situation in the country.

However, EU do not want to limit the interaction to project initiatives only. The EU is constantly expanding the instruments of cooperation.

In April 2021, Uzbekistan became a beneficiary of the Generalized System of Preferences Plus (GSP+). The new status will allow Uzbek manufacturers to export 6,200 products to the EU without customs duties. In fact, this is another tool for interaction between the EU and Uzbekistan, including on gender issues. After all, for the implementation of GSP +, the republic must comply with 27 conventions, including the convention against discrimination against women. And this gives EU the opportunity to work together with the Uzbek authorities, local civil society and the private sector to jointly monitor and promote the fight against gender restrictions. It is very important to support gender-responsive budgeting so that men and women have equal access to finance. Equivalent budget spending, by the way, is reflected in the government strategy for the development of gender equality.

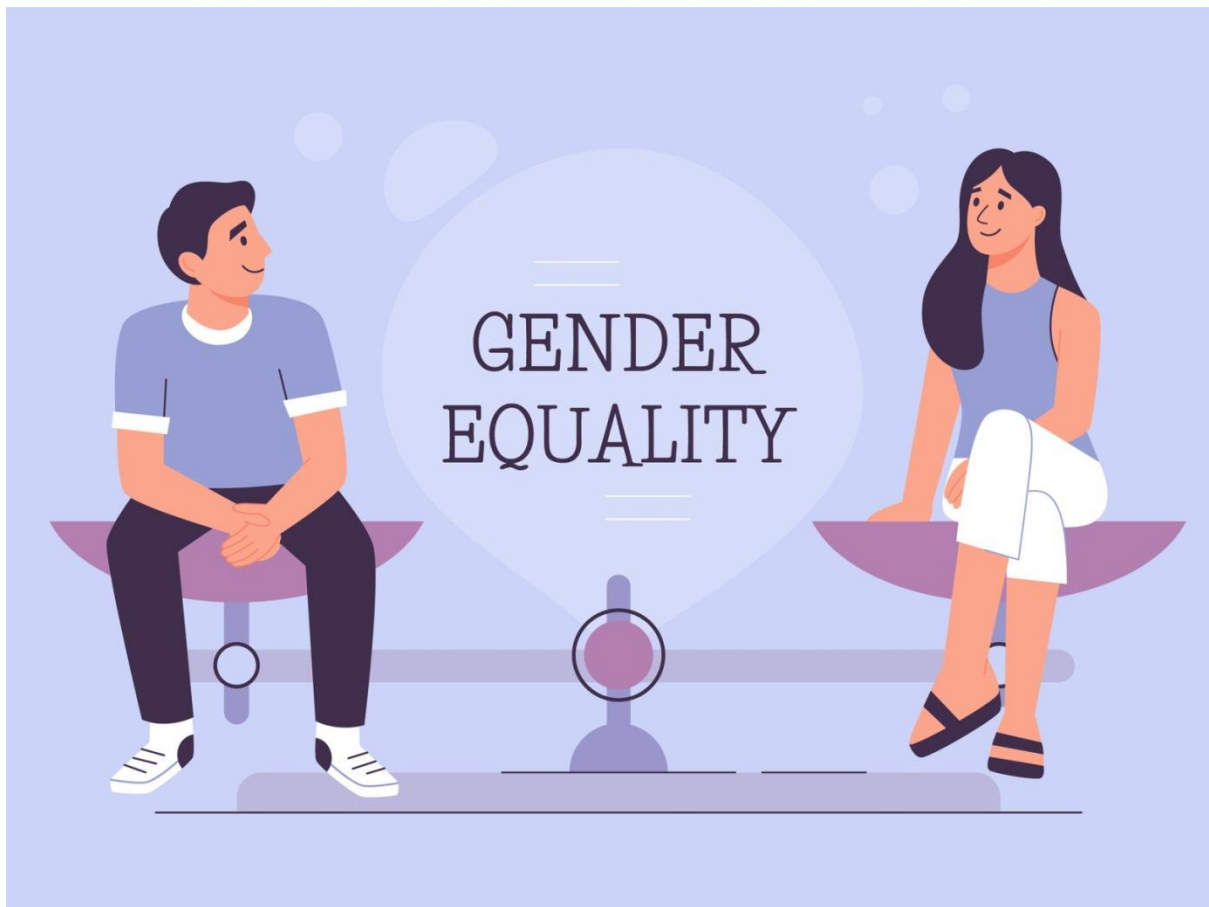
Changes are taking place at the highest level as well. In 2018, there were 16% of women in the parliament of Uzbekistan, and now they are already 32%. But there are still not enough women at the decision-making level – in government, the private sector, public organizations. To achieve this, political will is needed. Where there is a will, there is a way.

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The new multi-annual EU indicative program 2021-2027 stipulates that 85% of projects around the world will be gender-responsive. These are the guiding principles according to analyzing the impact of initiatives on women and improve the gender situation. And this applies to any project - whether it is access to finance, ecology, green technologies, agriculture or management. All of them should be carefully scrutinized to ensure they are gender-responsive.

Domestic violence, gender-based violence is a global phenomenon. During the pandemic, unfortunately, the level of domestic violence increased. That is why the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in her September address to the EU countries, noted that it is necessary to strengthen work to prevent gender-based violence.



This is a huge problem for quarantined women, for whom the economic situation has gone from bad to terrible. Women are the ones most affected by the corona crisis. They were the first to be laid off, they suffered from domestic violence, they worked in the sectors that the pandemic affected in the first place. At the same time, they did not have the opportunity to seek help from special centers or get legal advice, since the entire society was under quarantine.

The patriarchal view of society is what makes domestic violence “acceptable.” But this is happening not only in Uzbekistan. There must be support for victims of domestic violence. And EU’s main task is to increase the resilience of families so that the economic causes that contribute to domestic violence do not arise.

In Europe, domestic violence is also a big problem. But the main difference of the EU is that there is general awareness of this problem. And Uzbekistan is striving for this, which is very important.

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Violence against women, girls, and girls for any reason should not be tolerated. It is necessary to develop the belief that this is simply unacceptable.

During the pandemic, some of the measures that were taken in Europe either did not work or were not available due to the lockdown. EU has the European Institute for Gender Equality. It conducts research, makes reviews, and studies the experience of different countries. The Gender Equality Index 2021 was recently presented. And although the index has risen slightly, the situation is still fragile, primarily due to the pandemic, due to which EU have rolled back on some gender issues.

The institute presented three recommendations on how to counter this. First, in the process of economic recovery, it is necessary to ensure the participation of women, since they have great potential and should be part of the decision-making forces. They just have something to say. Secondly, the status of health workers must be raised. It is nurses and social workers who are at the forefront of the fight against coronavirus today. We just need to treat these people with more respect in order to make society more sustainable. And, thirdly, a system is needed to prevent gender-based violence, including through sanctions.

It would be useful for Uzbekistan to have such an institute, which is independent and is a source of research, as well as gives its recommendations in solving emerging problems.