

GENDER STRATEGIES IN CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THEIR IMPACT ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL STABILITY

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ANNOTATION: This article provides a comparative analysis of gender strategies in Central Asian countries (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) and their impact on economic development and political stability. It examines key aspects such as women's participation in the labor market, access to economic resources, and their role in political processes and legislation. Based on the analysis of national strategies and international rankings, the study identifies similarities and differences in the region's approaches to achieving gender equality. Special attention is given to the influence of gender policies on economic efficiency and the strengthening of political stability. The article concludes with recommendations for improving gender strategies and fostering regional cooperation.

Key words: gender equality, Central Asia, economic development, political stability, national strategies, women's participation, legislation.

АННОТАЦИЯ: Статья посвящена сравнительному анализу гендерных стратегий в странах Центральной Азии (Узбекистан, Казахстан, Кыргызстан, Таджикистан и Туркменистан) и их влиянию на экономическое развитие и политическую стабильность. Рассматриваются ключевые аспекты, такие как участие женщин в рынке труда, доступ к экономическим ресурсам, а также их роль в политических процессах и законодательстве. На основе анализа национальных стратегий и международных рейтингов выявляются сходства и различия в подходах стран региона к достижению гендерного равенства. Особое внимание уделяется влиянию гендерных политик на экономическую эффективность и укрепление политической стабильности. В заключение предлагаются рекомендации по совершенствованию гендерных стратегий и регионального сотрудничества.

Ключевые слова: гендерное равенство, Центральная Азия, экономическое развитие, политическая стабильность, национальные стратегии, участие женщин, законодательство.

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality has emerged as a cornerstone of sustainable development and political stability worldwide, with its significance underscored by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5). In the context of Central Asia—comprising Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan—gender equality is a critical yet underexplored factor influencing economic progress and political cohesion. These countries, each with distinct historical, cultural, and socioeconomic trajectories, have undertaken various strategies to address gender disparities. However, the interplay between gender policies, economic development, and political stability remains complex and multifaceted. This article aims to provide a comparative analysis of gender

strategies in Central Asian countries, examining their impact on economic growth and political stability, while highlighting regional trends and disparities.

Central Asia's transition from Soviet governance to independent statehood has shaped its approach to gender equality. During the Soviet era, policies promoted women's participation in education and the workforce, yet traditional gender roles persisted, particularly in rural areas. Post-independence, these countries have pursued national development strategies, often incorporating gender equality to align with global norms and secure international support. However, the implementation of these strategies varies significantly due to differences in economic resources, political systems, and cultural attitudes. For instance, Kazakhstan's economic diversification and Kyrgyzstan's democratic reforms contrast with Turkmenistan's centralized governance and Tajikistan's economic challenges, creating diverse contexts for gender policy outcomes.

Economically, gender equality is pivotal for maximizing human capital and fostering inclusive growth. Women's participation in the labor market, access to education, and entrepreneurial opportunities directly contribute to economic productivity. In Central Asia, where economies range from resource-driven (Kazakhstan) to agrarian (Tajikistan), gender policies influence workforce dynamics and economic resilience. For example, increasing women's access to financial resources and leadership roles can enhance economic efficiency, yet barriers such as wage gaps and occupational segregation persist. This study analyzes how national gender strategies address these challenges and their measurable impacts on economic indicators, such as GDP growth and labor force participation rates.

Politically, gender equality strengthens governance by ensuring diverse representation in decision-making processes. Central Asian countries exhibit varying levels of women's political participation, from Kyrgyzstan's relatively high parliamentary representation to Turkmenistan's limited female leadership. Gender-focused legislation, such as laws on domestic violence or quotas for women in politics, reflects each country's commitment to inclusivity. However, cultural norms and political structures often limit the effectiveness of these policies. This article explores how gender strategies influence political stability, including their role in fostering social cohesion and mitigating conflict risks.

By comparing national policies, legislative frameworks, and international gender equality rankings (e.g., the World Bank's Women, Business, and the Law index), this study identifies common trends and unique challenges across Central Asia. It seeks to answer how gender strategies shape economic and political outcomes and proposes recommendations for enhancing regional cooperation. Through this analysis, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of gender equality's transformative potential in Central Asia's development trajectory.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The comparative analysis of gender strategies in Central Asian countries reveals significant variations in their approaches to gender equality and their subsequent impacts on economic development and political stability. This section examines the implementation of gender policies in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, drawing on national legislation, international indices, and empirical data. The discussion is structured around two primary dimensions: economic outcomes, focusing on women's labor market participation, access to resources, and entrepreneurial opportunities, and political outcomes, emphasizing women's representation in governance and legislative reforms. The results highlight both regional commonalities and country-specific challenges, providing insights into the transformative potential of gender equality in Central Asia.

Economic Impacts of Gender Strategies. Gender equality is a critical driver of economic development, as it enhances human capital utilization and fosters inclusive growth¹. In Central

¹ World Bank. Women, Business, and the Law 2023. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2023. – P. 190.

Asia, where economies range from resource-driven (Kazakhstan) to agrarian (Tajikistan), gender strategies significantly influence labor market dynamics and economic resilience. The World Bank's Women, Business, and the Law (WBL) index provides a framework for assessing economic opportunities for women, evaluating areas such as workplace rights, pay equity, and entrepreneurship. In 2023, Kazakhstan scored 75.6 out of 100 on the WBL index, reflecting progressive reforms in labor laws, while Tajikistan scored 63.8, indicating persistent barriers to women's economic participation².

Kazakhstan has integrated gender equality into its economic diversification strategy, outlined in the "Kazakhstan-2050" plan, which emphasizes women's roles in science, technology, and entrepreneurship³. Women constitute 51% of the labor force, with significant representation in education (70%) and healthcare (65%)⁴. However, occupational segregation remains a challenge, as women are underrepresented in high-paying STEM fields (25%). Government programs, such as microcredit initiatives for female entrepreneurs, have increased women's business ownership by 15% since 2015. These efforts have contributed to Kazakhstan's GDP growth, with studies estimating that closing the gender gap could add 1.5% to annual GDP.

Uzbekistan has prioritized gender equality in its post-2016 economic reforms, particularly through the "Strategy for the Development of Uzbekistan 2022–2026," which includes targets for women's employment and vocational training⁵. Women's labor force participation has risen to 45% in 2023, up from 38% in 2015, driven by state-supported programs in textiles and agriculture⁶. However, rural women face limited access to financial resources, with only 20% of bank loans issued to female entrepreneurs. The introduction of gender-sensitive budgeting in 2021 has allocated 5% of the national budget to women's economic empowerment, yielding a 10% increase in female-led businesses⁷. These reforms have bolstered Uzbekistan's economic resilience, particularly in labor-intensive sectors.

Kyrgyzstan exhibits a mixed record. The "National Strategy for Gender Equality until 2020" aimed to increase women's economic participation, but its successor strategy (2021–2030) lacks clear funding mechanisms⁸. Women represent 42% of the labor force, with significant involvement in informal sectors (60%). The absence of robust legal protections against

² Government of Kazakhstan. Strategy "Kazakhstan-2050". Astana: Government of Kazakhstan, 2012. – P. 45.

³ Kazakhstan Statistics Agency. Women and Men in Kazakhstan 2023. Astana: Kazakhstan Statistics Agency, 2023. – P. 120.

⁴ Asian Development Bank. Kazakhstan: Country Gender Assessment. Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2018. – P. 85.

⁵ Government of Uzbekistan. Strategy for the Development of Uzbekistan 2022–2026. Tashkent: Government of Uzbekistan, 2021. – P. 60.

⁶ Uzbekistan Statistics Agency. Labor Market Report 2023. Tashkent: Uzbekistan Statistics Agency, 2023. – P. 100.

⁷ International Finance Corporation. Gender and Finance in Uzbekistan. Washington, DC: IFC, 2020. – P. 40.

⁸ Ministry of Finance of Uzbekistan. Gender Budgeting Report 2022. Tashkent: Ministry of Finance, 2022. – P. 30.

workplace discrimination has led to a gender wage gap of 25%. Microfinance programs have supported female entrepreneurs, but high interest rates limit their scalability. Kyrgyzstan's economic growth remains constrained by these gaps, with estimates suggesting that gender equality could boost GDP by 2% annually⁹.

Tajikistan faces structural economic challenges that hinder gender equality. The "National Development Strategy 2030" includes gender goals, but implementation is limited by resource constraints. Women's labor force participation is the lowest in the region at 27%, with 80% employed in low-wage agricultural jobs. Remittances from male migrant workers reinforce traditional gender roles, reducing incentives for women's economic engagement. Microcredit access for women has improved, with 30% of loans issued to female borrowers in 2023, but high poverty rates (26%) restrict entrepreneurial growth. Tajikistan's economic potential remains untapped, as gender disparities cost an estimated 3% of GDP annually¹⁰.

Turkmenistan presents the least transparent data, complicating analysis. The "National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2021–2025" claims to promote women's economic roles, but public reporting is minimal. Women's labor force participation is estimated at 35%, primarily in state-controlled sectors. Restrictions on private entrepreneurship and limited access to credit stifle female-led businesses. The lack of gender-disaggregated data hinders precise economic impact assessments, but anecdotal evidence suggests that gender inequality limits economic diversification¹¹.

Comparatively, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan demonstrate stronger economic outcomes due to targeted gender policies and resource allocation. Kyrgyzstan's progress is hampered by inconsistent implementation, while Tajikistan and Turkmenistan lag due to structural and governance challenges. Across the region, occupational segregation and wage gaps persist, underscoring the need for comprehensive labor market reforms.

Political Impacts of Gender Strategies. Gender equality in political participation enhances governance by ensuring diverse representation and fostering social cohesion. Central Asian countries exhibit varied levels of women's political engagement, influenced by legislative frameworks and cultural norms. The Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) data on women in parliament provides a benchmark for assessing political representation¹².

Kyrgyzstan leads the region in political representation, with women holding 21% of parliamentary seats in 2023, supported by a 30% gender quota introduced in 2007. The "Law on Protection from Domestic Violence" (2017) reflects gender-sensitive legislation, though enforcement remains weak in rural areas. Women's participation in local governance has increased by 12% since 2015, contributing to social stability by addressing community-level issues. However, political volatility and patriarchal attitudes limit women's influence in high-level decision-making.

Uzbekistan has made strides in political representation, with women occupying 25% of seats in the Legislative Chamber in 2023, up from 16% in 2015. The "Law on Guarantees of Equal

⁹ Asian Development Bank. *Microfinance in Kyrgyzstan: Opportunities and Challenges*. Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2019. – P. 70.

¹⁰ Government of Tajikistan. *National Development Strategy 2030*. Dushanbe: Government of Tajikistan, 2016. – P. 80.

¹¹ Government of Turkmenistan. *National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2021–2025*. Ashgabat: Government of Turkmenistan, 2020. – P. 35.

¹² Asian Development Bank. *Uzbekistan: Gender Assessment 2020*. Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2020. – P. 65.

Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women” (2019) mandates gender equality in governance. Women’s roles in municipal councils have expanded, with 20% of local leaders being female. These reforms have strengthened political legitimacy, particularly in urban areas, but rural women remain underrepresented.

Kazakhstan has 18% female parliamentarians, supported by voluntary party quotas. The “Strategy for Gender Equality 2006–2016” laid the groundwork for women’s political empowerment, though its successor lacks enforceable targets. Legislative reforms, such as the 2021 law criminalizing domestic violence, signal progress. Women’s involvement in public administration (40%) enhances governance efficiency, but elite-level political roles remain male-dominated.

Tajikistan has 19% women in parliament, driven by a 20% quota. The “Law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights” (2005) promotes gender equality, but cultural norms restrict women’s political agency. Female representation in local governance is minimal (10%), limiting their influence on policy. Political stability is maintained through centralized control, but gender disparities risk social tensions¹³.

Turkmenistan reports 25% female parliamentarians, though the lack of democratic processes raises questions about their autonomy. Gender policies are state-driven, with minimal public participation. The absence of independent women’s organizations weakens advocacy for political reforms. Political stability is maintained through authoritarian control, but gender inequality may undermine long-term social cohesion¹⁴.

Comparatively, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan show progress in political representation, driven by quotas and legislative reforms. Kazakhstan’s advancements are tempered by weak enforcement, while Tajikistan and Turkmenistan face significant barriers due to cultural and governance constraints. Regionally, the lack of women in high-level decision-making limits the political impact of gender strategies.

Synthesis and Regional Trends. The analysis reveals that gender strategies in Central Asia are shaped by economic resources, political systems, and cultural contexts. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan demonstrate the strongest alignment between gender policies and economic-political outcomes, driven by strategic reforms and international commitments. Kyrgyzstan’s democratic framework supports political participation but lacks economic policy coherence. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan face systemic barriers, with limited data transparency in the latter complicating assessments.

Common challenges include occupational segregation, wage gaps, and underrepresentation in elite political roles. Regional trends indicate progress in legislative frameworks, but implementation gaps persist. International indices, such as the Gender Inequality Index (GII), rank Kazakhstan (0.179) and Uzbekistan (0.245) higher than Tajikistan (0.322) and Kyrgyzstan (0.298), with Turkmenistan’s data unavailable¹⁵. These rankings underscore the correlation between gender equality and socioeconomic outcomes.

Gender strategies in Central Asia have measurable impacts on economic development and political stability, but their effectiveness varies. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan’s targeted policies yield stronger outcomes, while Kyrgyzstan’s progress is inconsistent, and Tajikistan and Turkmenistan lag. Addressing implementation gaps, enhancing data transparency, and promoting

¹³ Freedom House. Turkmenistan: Political Stability 2023. Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2023. – P. 40.

¹⁴ United Nations. Turkmenistan: Gender Policy Review 2021. New York: United Nations, 2021. – P. 40.

¹⁵ United Nations. Tajikistan: Gender and Governance Report 2020. New York: United Nations, 2020. – P. 50.

regional cooperation are critical for advancing gender equality. Future research should explore rural-urban disparities and the role of civil society in shaping gender policies.

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of gender strategies in Central Asian countries reveals their significant yet varied impact on economic development and political stability. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan demonstrate notable progress through targeted policies, increasing women's labor market participation and political representation, which contribute to economic growth and governance legitimacy. Kyrgyzstan shows advancements in political inclusion but struggles with economic policy coherence. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan lag due to structural barriers and limited transparency, hindering their economic and political potential. Common challenges across the region include occupational segregation, wage gaps, and underrepresentation in high-level decision-making, underscoring the need for robust implementation of gender policies. International indices, such as the Gender Inequality Index, highlight Kazakhstan's and Uzbekistan's relative success, while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan face persistent disparities. To enhance gender equality, Central Asian countries should strengthen legislative enforcement, improve access to economic resources for women, and promote regional cooperation to share best practices. Investing in gender-disaggregated data, particularly in Turkmenistan, is critical for evidence-based policymaking. By addressing these gaps, Central Asia can unlock the transformative potential of gender equality, fostering sustainable economic development and long-term political stability.