



## LEGAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF GENDER EQUALITY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: EXPERIENCE OF UZBEKISTAN AND INTERNATIONAL PRACTICES

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**Abstract.** This article analyzes the legal and social aspects of gender equality among university students from the perspective of the new edition of the Constitution, Uzbek legislation, and international legal frameworks — including CEDAW, the Sustainable Development Goals, and conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The study explores the legal foundations for ensuring gender equality among students, socio-cultural barriers, gender stereotypes in the educational environment, and the influence of international experience on Uzbekistan. New challenges such as insufficient legal awareness, legislative gaps, socio-cultural obstacles, limited gender-sensitive approaches in education, and poor adaptation of international standards to the local context are deeply analyzed. The article evaluates Uzbekistan's compliance with international obligations and offers recommendations based on international experience to strengthen gender equality among university students.

**Keywords:** Gender equality, university students, legal awareness, socio-cultural barriers, Constitution of Uzbekistan, international law, educational environment, gender stereotypes.

### Introduction

Gender equality is one of the fundamental principles of a just and inclusive society and holds a significant place in the field of human rights. According to the United Nations (UN) 2024 report, significant progress has been made globally in ensuring gender equality among university students in the education sector. However, socio-cultural barriers, low legal awareness, and gender stereotypes remain important challenges. University students are the most active and promising segment of society, and promoting gender equality among them not only creates equal opportunities within the educational environment but also contributes to the overall development of society.

In recent years, the Republic of Uzbekistan has carried out important reforms to strengthen gender equality. The Constitution, updated in 2023, has reinforced provisions prohibiting gender-based discrimination. International legal frameworks — including CEDAW, the Sustainable Development Goals, and ILO conventions — define Uzbekistan's obligations to promote gender equality among university students. However, new challenges such as insufficient legal awareness, legislative gaps, socio-cultural barriers, limited gender-sensitive approaches in the educational environment, and poor adaptation of international standards to the local context continue to hinder the full realization of gender equality.

### International Legal Frameworks

#### CEDAW (1979)

CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), adopted by the UN in 1979, defines the obligations of states to ensure gender equality. The key provisions related to university students include:

Article 5: Calls for the implementation of educational and legal awareness programs in order to eliminate gender stereotypes in the educational environment.

Article 7: Guarantees equal participation of university students in political and social activities.

Article 10: Requires the elimination of gender-based discrimination at all levels of education, including the provision of equal opportunities for university students.

CEDAW emphasizes the importance of the educational environment in ensuring gender equality among university students. The Convention requires states to implement gender-sensitive approaches in educational programs, increase legal awareness among students, and eliminate discrimination.

### **Sustainable Development Goals**

The 4th Goal (Quality Education) and the 5th Goal (Gender Equality) of the Sustainable Development Goals are aimed at ensuring gender equality among university students:

Target 4.1: Ensure free, equitable, and quality education for all students by 2030.

Target 4.5: Eliminate gender disparities in education and expand educational opportunities for female students.

Target 5.1: Eliminate gender discrimination and ensure equal rights among university students.

These goals require states to implement gender-sensitive programs in the educational environment, increase legal awareness among university students, and eliminate gender stereotypes.

Uzbekistan is developing cooperation with the UN within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. For example, the Cabinet of Ministers' resolution on "Measures to cover the tuition fees of female students enrolled in the master's programs of state higher education institutions" is evidence of this commitment.

### **International Labour Organization (ILO)**

The ILO plays an important role in ensuring gender equality among university students from the perspective of labor rights. The following conventions are relevant to the educational environment:

Convention No. 100 (Equal Remuneration, 1951): Ensures that university students receive equal pay in the labor market.

Convention No. 111 (Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), 1958): Prohibits gender-based discrimination in the educational environment and guarantees equal employment opportunities for students.

Convention No. 190 (Violence and Harassment, 2019): Prohibits gender-based violence in the educational environment.

The ILO conventions ensure that young students have equal rights in the labor market after completing their education. Uzbekistan has ratified ILO Conventions No. 100 and 111, but Convention No. 190 has not yet been adopted. Cooperation with the ILO is important for raising legal awareness among young students about labor rights, but specific measures against violence in the educational environment are still insufficient.

International documents emphasize the importance of the educational environment in ensuring gender equality among young students. CEDAW focuses on equality in education, the Sustainable Development Goals emphasize quality education, and the ILO highlights labor rights. Uzbekistan partially complies with these documents, but there is a need to expand gender-sensitive approaches in the educational environment and to make greater use of international experience.

#### Uzbekistan Legislation

##### The newly revised Constitution

The Constitution updated in 2023 serves as an important legal basis for strengthening gender equality:

Article 19: guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination based on gender.

Article 50: guarantees everyone's right to education and creates equal opportunities for young students.

Article 58: ensures special protection of women's rights and freedoms, including support for equality in education and labor.

These articles demonstrate Uzbekistan's commitment to its obligations under CEDAW and the Sustainable Development Goals. Article 58 establishes the state's obligation to ensure that female students have equal rights in education and social participation.

However, the practical application of the constitutional provisions depends on several factors:

Low legal awareness: Student youth lack sufficient information about their rights.

Legislative gaps: Special measures against gender-based violence in the educational environment are insufficient.

Socio-cultural barriers: Stereotypes such as "Girls should only study in traditional fields" limit the opportunities of female students.

##### Law on Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men

The main purpose of this law is to ensure equal rights and opportunities between women and men in all areas of society, including political, social, economic, and cultural life, to prevent their violation, and to guarantee gender equality.

Key aspects of the law include:

The concept of equal rights and opportunities — the law establishes the necessity of creating equal conditions legally and practically for women and men, ensuring they have the same opportunities.

State Guarantees for Ensuring Gender Equality – The law mandates that state bodies, non-governmental organizations, and other institutions are obliged to implement gender equality policies.

Measures Against Gender Discrimination – The law defines mechanisms to prevent and eliminate any form of gender-based discrimination, deprivation of women's rights and opportunities.

Gender Expertise – All normative legal documents must be evaluated from a gender perspective, meaning they must be analyzed to ensure there is no gender discrimination.

Educational Activities in the Field of Gender Equality – Systematic efforts must be carried out to raise public legal awareness and culture, and to promote the essence of gender equality.

By implementing this law, the status of women in Uzbek society is being strengthened, creating the necessary legal framework for their equal participation with men in education, labor, healthcare, politics, and other sectors.

### **Law "On Education"**

The Law "On Education" of the Republic of Uzbekistan, adopted on September 23, 2020, places special emphasis on human rights in the field of education, including the principles of gender equality.

The main purpose of this law is to establish the legal foundations of the education system, guarantee citizens' right to education, and ensure the continuity, quality, and inclusiveness of the educational process.

The key gender equality-related aspects of this law are as follows:

**Prohibition of discrimination in education** — According to Article 5 of the law, every individual is guaranteed equal rights to education regardless of nationality, gender, age, disability, social origin, religious beliefs, or other characteristics.

**Equal access to education** — The law mandates ensuring equal opportunities in education for all groups, particularly women. This creates a basis for implementing measures to open pathways to higher education for girls in rural areas.

**Social protection and support** — The law provides for state grants, coverage of contract fees, and other benefits for students from disadvantaged groups, including women in need of social protection.

**Attention to gender balance in education** — During the implementation of the law, state programs are carried out to maintain gender balance among students in educational institutions and increase the share of women in higher education.

Through this, the Law "On Education" also serves to ensure equality of educational opportunities in society and to increase the social activity of women by creating the necessary conditions for them.

**Existing problems: gap between law and practice**

Although gender equality and equal opportunities for women and men in education are guaranteed at the legislative level in Uzbekistan, a number of problems persist in practice. This indicates that the implementation of laws is not fully ensured.

**Social stereotypes and gender role expectations**

In some families, attitudes such as "higher education is not necessary for a girl" or "she should get married soon" persist. This directly affects women's right to make independent decisions and their access to education.

**Limited financial opportunities**

High tuition fees, housing problems, and other material barriers create difficulties especially for girls from large families or socially vulnerable families. Although social support is envisaged in the "Law on Education," it is not sufficiently comprehensive in practice.

**Insufficient gender data**

According to the Law "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men," gender equality analysis and statistics should be maintained. However, many state organizations and educational institutions still do not regularly collect sex-disaggregated statistics, which hinders the accurate assessment and solving of problems.

**Discrepancy between official policy and practice**

Measures outlined in laws and state programs are well formulated, but their implementation at local levels is weak. For example, although gender expertise is a legal requirement, many new documents do not take this aspect into account

### **Proposals and solutions**

#### **Strengthening legal mechanisms**

To fully implement the principles of gender equality enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan and special laws:

Institutionalize a system of gender expertise for every education policy. This aligns with Article 2 of CEDAW, which requires the state to take measures against discrimination at all policy levels.

Establish a gender equality monitoring system in higher education institutions to conduct statistical analyses on admission, academic activities, financial aid, and other aspects.

#### **Ensuring equality in education**

Based on the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (inclusive and equitable quality education), the following actions are recommended:

Allocate state grants, mechanisms to cover tuition fees, and targeted scholarships for female students in rural areas to reduce social inequality in access to education.

Strengthen digital education infrastructure to reduce social barriers, for example, by providing subsidized internet access to online learning platforms.

#### **Eliminating social stereotypes**

Introduce gender-neutral educational materials and methods in preschool and school education and train teachers in gender sensitivity.

Organize regular seminars, open discussions, and academic competitions among students to raise legal awareness about gender issues.

#### **Expanding and supporting economic opportunities**

According to the principles of the International Labour Organization, introduce programs for vocational training, entrepreneurship skills development, and practical orientation for female students to enhance their competitiveness in the market economy.

Establish gender centers within higher education institutions to provide legal advice, psychological assistance, and social support services.

#### **Introducing monitoring and accountability mechanisms**

Prepare annual reports based on gender equality indicators and publish them publicly.

Implement a reliable and confidential complaint system to combat discrimination, pressure, and violations against female students.

### **Conclusion**

Ensuring gender equality among students is one of the key goals of the Republic of Uzbekistan in building a human rights-based and just society. The updated 2023 Constitution and gender equality legislation, along with international legal frameworks such as CEDAW, Sustainable Development Goals, and International Labour Organization conventions, have created an important legal foundation to strengthen gender equality. These documents promote equal opportunities in education, elimination of gender stereotypes, and increase in students' legal awareness.

Uzbekistan, demonstrating commitment to international obligations, has achieved significant progress through scholarship programs for female students, gender-sensitive educational initiatives, and legal reforms. However, challenges such as lack of legal awareness,



gaps in legislation, socio-cultural barriers, limited gender-sensitive approaches in education, and incomplete adaptation of international standards to local contexts hinder full gender equality.

Particularly in rural areas, limited educational opportunities for female students, stereotypes like "girls should study traditional fields," and insufficient measures against violence in educational environments require serious attention.

#### **Measures to address problems:**

1.Raise legal awareness: Introduce compulsory gender equality courses in higher education and expand media campaigns.

2.Improve legislation: Develop special mechanisms against gender violence in education and establish helplines.

3.Eliminate socio-cultural barriers: Work with parents and communities, implement gender-neutral educational programs.

4.Expand gender-sensitive education: Organize training for teachers and increase gender discussions among students.

5.Adapt international experience: Develop local-context programs based on the experiences of Norway, Bangladesh, Canada, etc.

Harmonizing international experience and Uzbekistan's national legislation will strengthen gender equality among students, creating equal opportunities in education and contributing to social and economic development. Cooperation between the government, civil society, and international organizations is key to success in this area.

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