



The role of women in small business development in Uzbekistan

Джамалова Жамила Эркиновна

Annotation

The report examines the importance of women in the development of the Uzbek economy, specifically analyzing their activities in small and medium-sized businesses, providing examples of successful women's entrepreneurial projects, and listing various barriers to successful women's business activities in Uzbekistan.

In modern Uzbekistan, increasing attention is being paid to the role of women in entrepreneurship. Small business is becoming an important avenue for economic growth, job creation, and improved family well-being. Women are one of the driving forces in these processes.

In Uzbekistan, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a significant role: they create jobs, generate a portion of GDP, and contribute to the diversification of the economy. According to Asian Development Bank report: “Most female entrepreneurs are involved in small-scale production... in the retail trade or professional services.”

As of mid-2023, women entrepreneurs accounted for approximately 37% of all entrepreneurs in Uzbekistan. As of January 1, 2025, the number of small businesses headed by women reached 43,860. The vast majority of these operate in the services (17,239) and trade (17,161) sectors. These data highlight that woman are actively engaging in entrepreneurial activity, particularly in sectors with fewer barriers and where they can combine business activities with other family responsibilities.

Women entrepreneurs create jobs—both for themselves and for others, especially in micro- and small businesses. For example, programs with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have documented that program for women entrepreneurs in the Fergana Valley have contributed to the creation of over 50 permanent jobs. Furthermore, women entrepreneurs in Uzbekistan have demonstrated increased profitability: by the end of 2024, over 20,000 women-led businesses had generated a net profit of 4.2 trillion sums.



When a woman runs her own business, it strengthens her economic independence, expands her role in the family and society, and promotes equality. Thus, women's entrepreneurship is not only an economic activity, but also a factor of social dynamics

Women often launch businesses that focus on local communities, family-based, or collective forms of employment. This promotes sustainable employment, poverty reduction, and social integration. Furthermore, given that women often view business as a way to balance family life, they choose models that can be flexibly combined with other responsibilities.

Uzbekistan is taking a number of measures aimed at stimulating female entrepreneurship:

1. In March 2024, Resolution PP-122 "On additional measures for the organization and development of women's entrepreneurship" was signed, which allocated a loan equivalent to \$100 million with a preferential rate and grace period.
2. The International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Ipak Yul Bank signed an agreement to provide a \$42 million syndicated loan, with 25% of the funds earmarked for women-led firms.
3. The Council of Women Entrepreneurs has been established under the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Uzbekistan (CCI) with 27 members, including 21 female entrepreneurs. It aims to promote the interests of businesswomen and provide legal and financial support.
4. Training and Development Program: The EMPOWER Women project offers online courses on entrepreneurial skills aimed at homemakers and women from remote areas.

Despite the positive dynamics, women entrepreneurs in Uzbekistan face a number of challenges, such as insufficient funding, sectoral inequality, cultural barriers, and others.

To accelerate the development of women's entrepreneurship, the following measures can be proposed:

1. Expanding access to finance: creating special low-interest programs, guarantee mechanisms, and microloans specifically for women.
2. Developing business education and mentoring: programs that will help women not only start but also scale their businesses.
3. Regional equalization: active support for women entrepreneurs in remote regions where access to resources is limited.



4. Assistance in developing women's networks and platforms – exchange of experience, cooperation, joint initiatives.

5. Encouraging women to enter new industries and technologies: promoting startups with female founders, green businesses, and digital formats.

6. Promotion of flexible business forms that allow combining entrepreneurship and family responsibilities (remote work, flexible schedules, cooperatives).

Women are playing an increasingly significant role in the development of small businesses in Uzbekistan – they create jobs, strengthen economic independence, and expand the entrepreneurial landscape. The government is already taking important steps to support women's entrepreneurship, but significant barriers remain that require further attention. Increasing women's participation in business is not only an improvement in female employment but also a strategic resource for sustainable economic growth and societal transformation.

Bibliography:

1. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document>,
"UZBEKISTAN"

2. <https://uza.uz/en/posts/>

3. <https://stat.uz/en/press-center/news-of-committee>

4. Ostapenko A. B. "Gender asymmetry of professional employment in modern Russian society" 2010 Journal "The System of Values of Modern Society"

5. Gulnar Dugalova "The Role of Women in Economic Development" 2023 64
Economic Research Institute