



GENDER EQUALITY AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO DEVELOPING WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT	KEYWORDS
<p>In the current era of globalization and against the backdrop of institutional modernization in public administration, the full and effective mobilization of human capital has become a decisive factor for increasing governance performance, achieving sustainable development goals, and maintaining social and political stability. In this context, women, as a large socio-demographic group, should be regarded not only as participants in the labor market, but also as a strategically important resource that strengthens managerial and leadership capacity. Nevertheless, in many countries women’s participation at decision-making levels remains below expectations: the low representation of women in leadership positions is largely explained by institutional constraints, persistent stereotypes, and unequal opportunities. As a result, inclusiveness in public administration may weaken, ensuring social justice may become more challenging, and the quality and legitimacy of governance decisions may be adversely affected.</p> <p>This article analyzes global trends for 2025–2026 based on data published by UN Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). At the same time, using Uzbekistan as a case study, the article provides a systematic review of the legal and regulatory framework and the institutional mechanisms currently in place to strengthen gender equality in the civil service.</p> <p>Based on the research findings, the study proposes a methodological integration of key human resource management components within the “neighborhood–district–region–republic” administrative vertical. In particular, it recommends reinforcing a competency-based approach to selection and promotion, improving workforce forecasting and planning, and establishing an integrated system of monitoring and evaluation to manage results in a coherent and continuous manner.</p>	<p>Civil service, gender equality, talent pool (personnel reserve), women’s leadership career, institutional mechanisms, quotas, monitoring and evaluation, competency model.</p>

Introduction

According to data from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), increasing the level of inclusiveness in public administration can improve the quality of governance decisions, strengthen the principles of social justice, and enhance public trust. At the same time, in many countries women's share in decision-making processes remains insufficient, and their advancement to leadership positions is constrained by institutional barriers, gender stereotypes, and unequal opportunities.

In the context of Uzbekistan, within the “New Uzbekistan” development paradigm, comprehensive reforms are being accelerated to expand women's rights and opportunities, increase their socio-political participation, and form a reserve (talent pool) of managerial personnel. Against the backdrop of global trends, this article analyzes the legal and regulatory foundations and the institutional mechanisms for developing women's managerial careers in Uzbekistan and for further increasing their participation in decision-making processes, and it proposes practical recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of women's participation in state governance and political decision-making has been manifested in various forms in the historical experience of Central Asia and the Turkic-Mawarannahr at different times. In ancient historical narratives, the image of a female leader is associated, first of all, with the protection of political sovereignty and strategic decision-making. This aspect is clearly visible in the figure of Tomaris: the ancient historian Herodotus in his work “History”¹ describes Tomaris as the queen of the Massagetae, and narrates the political positions and final decisions she took (reaction to external invasion, firm warning, military decision). The source cites the famous episode of Tomaris' warning and symbolic punishment of Cyrus for “bloodthirstiness”; this episode shows that the political legitimacy of a female leader is based not only on “position”, but also on real decisions and results.

In the Middle Ages, women's participation in state governance was more often associated with court protocol, symbols of legitimacy, and the shaping of social infrastructure (construction projects, waqf endowments, madrasas, and mosques). In the context of the Timurid Empire, the figure of Saroymulxonim represents an important example of such an “institutional” role. The Spanish envoy Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, in describing the court ceremonies of Timur, places particular emphasis on the status of the “chief wife”², this account indicates that Saroymulxonim held a highly significant position within the symbolic system of the court and the state. Within this same framework, the influence of women in the Timurid period was not limited to ceremony or title alone, but was also expressed through public works (social infrastructure). This can be observed in the example of Gawharshad Begum, who is linked in encyclopedic sources directly to the planning and commissioning of architectural and construction projects, including mosque–madrasa complexes.

Within the framework of the Kokand Khanate, Nodirabegim (Mohlaroyim Nodira) is mentioned not only as a literary figure, but also for her active involvement in state affairs and social projects. Biographical sources note that after the death of Umar Khan, she participated in the governance of the

¹ Herodotus. *The History of Herodotus*. Transl. by G. C. Macaulay. — London: Macmillan, 1890. — Book I (“Clio”), Ch. 205–214

² Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo. *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo to the Court of Timour at Samarcand, A.D. 1403–6*. — London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1859. — P. 128

khanate together with her son, and that she took a leading role in the construction of madrasas, mosques, and caravanserais³.

These facts clearly demonstrate that women actively participated in maintaining stability in state governance and in developing social infrastructure (education and public services).

This historical experience provides a methodological foundation for shaping women's managerial careers in the modern civil service. In other words, women's leadership has historically existed in various institutional forms, and today it is developing systematically through competence, merit, equal opportunity, and mechanisms of institutional support.

From ancient times onward, there have also been many prominent women leaders who exercised real state authority or de facto determined political decisions. Among them is Cleopatra VII Philopator, who lived in the first century BCE and was the last active ruler of the Ptolemaic dynasty⁴. She sought to preserve political legitimacy and defend sovereignty through external alliances. Her political strategy functioned as a mechanism for advancing Egyptian interests within the balance of power among rival empires, particularly against the backdrop of internal struggles in the Roman Republic.

In the sixth century, Theodora⁵, who lived in Byzantine Empire, is recorded as a powerful political figure who exerted significant influence over court and state policy as the partner of Justinian I. She took an active position in religious and social policy and is also noted for supporting approaches related to women's rights.

The reign of Elizabeth I in the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries is described as a period in which England emerged as a major European power, marked by intensified activity in politics, trade, and culture. Her rule is associated with the institutionalization of state governance and firmness in foreign policy, elevating “reason of state” to the level of a central governing principle.

In close continuity with this long historical trajectory, the modern era has also witnessed influential women leaders in global politics. These include Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (1979–1990); Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany (2005–2021); Indira Gandhi, the first woman Prime Minister of India (1966–1977; 1980–1984); Golda Meir, who played an active political role in the formation of Israel and later served as its Prime Minister (1969–1974); and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia (2006–2018), the first woman in Africa to be elected head of state through democratic elections—along with many other prominent women political leaders from around the world.

KEY ANALYSES

According to data compiled by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), so far, 28 women have served as heads of state and government in 25 countries, and it is noted that if the current pace of gender equality at the highest levels of power is maintained, it will take about 130 years. It also indicates that the share of women in the composition of ministers (portfolio heads) who manage policy areas is 22.9 percent, and in only 9 countries is this indicator 50 percent or higher.

According to the global average as of January 1, 2026, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Parline data:

³ <https://ziyouz.uz/ilm-va-fan/tarix/manaviyat-yulduzlari/nodira-1792-1842/>

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cleopatra-queen-of-Egypt>

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Theodora-Byzantine-empress-died-548>

- the share of women in the lower/single chambers — **27,4 percent**;
- in the upper chambers — **27,8 percent**;
- across all chambers — **27,5 percent**.⁶

UN Women analysis (data from 145 countries) shows that the average share of women in local deliberative bodies is 35.5 percent, with 2 countries reaching 50 percent and 26 countries exceeding 40 percent. It also notes that in countries with a statutory candidate quota, women's representation is on average +5 percentage points higher in parliaments and +7 percentage points higher in local government than in countries without quotas.⁷

In the political arena of our country, women are not only active participants, but also emerging as leaders. The analysis of the share of women in existing ministries and departments is as follows:

According to the results of the last elections for deputy seats in the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan held in October 2024, the share of women was 39.19% (out of 150 deputies)⁸ while the share of women senators in the Senate of the Oliy Majlis was 27.1% (16 out of 59 members)⁹.

At present, women in Uzbekistan make up 45 percent of entrepreneurs, 49 percent of political party members, 54 percent of higher education students, and 38 percent in STEAM fields.

By sector, women account for 8 percent in construction; 12.6 percent in transport; 35.3 percent in information and communication; 37.2 percent in finance and insurance; 43.3 percent in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries; 49.3 percent in trade; 46.9 percent in industry; and 50.7 percent in accommodation and food services.

In 2025, gender strategies through 2030 were approved for the Ministries of Energy, Agriculture, and Water Resources—sectors where women have traditionally been underrepresented.

According to Presidential Decree No. PD-78 of 5 May 2025 issued by the President of the Uzbekistan, the Academy of Public Administration introduced the “Women Leaders” program. This initiative provides up to six months of training aimed at developing leadership skills among proactive women and preparing them for careers in public service. Within the joint educational program “School for Preparing Governors” 14 women were sent to Germany for a specialized training internship. A total of 95,273 civil servants participated in short-term courses designed to enhance political and legal knowledge, of whom 21 percent were women.

Currently, out of 2,026 state-owned enterprises, 365 have supervisory boards, comprising 1,944 board member positions. Women occupy 130 of these positions, representing 6.7 percent.

Through the El-yurt umidi Foundation, 266 out of 764 scholarship recipients studying at prestigious foreign universities are women. In the Foundation's 2025 First Open Scholarship Competition, 173 candidates were awarded the “El-yurt umidi” scholarship, of whom 43 were women.

The number of advisory councils to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men in organizations has been increased to 4,000¹⁰.

These indicators indicate significant changes in our country not only in the civil service, but also in all areas, and indicate that the “women's base” is expanding, but at the same time, specific institutional measures are needed to mitigate the “glass ceiling” effect in senior management.

⁶ https://data.ipu.org/women-averages/?date_year=2026&date_month=01

⁷ <https://social.desa.un.org/sdn/facts-and-figures-womens-leadership-and-political-participation>

⁸ <https://parliament.gov.uz/deputies>

⁹ <https://senat.uz/oz/senators>

¹⁰ <https://gov.uz/oz/wcu/news/view/129004>

The legal framework for gender equality and protection mechanisms in Uzbekistan is strengthened by the following fundamental documents, and by 2025 alone, 1 Law, 1 Senate Resolution, 2 Presidential Decrees, 3 Resolutions, 9 Government Resolutions, a total of 17 regulatory legal acts aimed at supporting women and ensuring gender equality were adopted¹¹.

At the same time, work is being done to implement targeted indicators, programs and projects aimed at establishing special systems aimed at targeted training of women for high-level leadership positions in the state civil service, which are enshrined in the following normative and legal documents:

1. By the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On measures to organize the state civil service based on new approaches and form a professional and performance-oriented corps of civil servants” dated 19.06.2025 No. PD-95¹², the strategy for the development of the state civil service until 2030 includes specific target indicators for gender equality, in accordance with which it was approved to increase the share of women in the state civil service to 40 percent, increase the share of women in the national personnel reserve to 40 percent, test and expand flexible/remote work modes for women, and introduce special interactive online educational programs for women.

2. The Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On measures to further improve the system of targeted training of promising personnel and their effective involvement in public administration and service” No. PD-78 dated 05.05.2025¹³ establishes measures aimed at training promising management personnel, increasing their potential, and transforming personnel training institutions. Within the framework of the Decree, the Deputy Prime Minister - Chairman of the Committee on Family and Women was included in the Board of Trustees of the Academy as an institutional basis for taking into account women's issues, which creates a coordination opportunity at the management level to integrate the gender agenda in the processes of coordinating personnel policy and educational programs.

CONCLUSION

Available data show that women in Uzbekistan are gaining significant participation in education, political activism, and entrepreneurship. However, their representation at the top levels of government (especially in strategic governance institutions such as supervisory boards) remains low.

Therefore, the scientific and practical problem is concentrated in the following 4 areas:

- a) Lack of gender-specific integration of HR planning and forecasting;
- b) Inadequate integration of recruitment and training of reserve personnel with the “competence-career path”;
- c) Fragmented implementation of monitoring and evaluation indicators across departments;
- d) Insufficient institutionalization of targeted work and promotion mechanisms at the “neighborhood-district-region-republic” level.

Based on the above-mentioned urgent problems, we would like to make the following suggestions in advance:

1. Forecasting and planning needs: Through the “Gender HR-forecast” module, a 3-year forecast of personnel needs in each ministry and department is formed by gender and linked to a “career map”

¹¹ https://api-portal.gov.uz/uploads/41/2026/02/16/68ef0b26-bb0a-7631-4759-49f0d5966b8c_media_.pdf

¹² <https://lex.uz/uz/docs/-7587464>

¹³ <https://lex.uz/uz/docs/-7520315>

(succession planning) for leadership positions, and as a result, the coefficient of women in the process of preparing or selecting candidates for leadership positions increases, career growth accelerates.

2. By introducing competency-based selection through the “neighborhood-district-region-republic” system, a base of potential women at the lower levels (neighborhood/district) is created, and they are assessed according to a single competency model for transfer to the reserve at the regional and republican levels.

3. By introducing flexible, remote work modes for women, their effectiveness in their work is preserved, along with their role in the family. In particular, the implementation of the digital government system in Uzbekistan, where all documents are electronic, removes obstacles such as the stereotype of sitting after work for a leadership position.

Although the share of women in the civil service is growing, gender inequality at the highest political and administrative levels is still a distant prospect. If documents such as PD-95 and PD-78 have “indicated” gender equality, then at the next stage, integrating these indicators into a single methodological outline of forecasting-selection-training-monitoring, and creating their career model, remains relevant as a scientific and practical task.

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