

# **ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF WOMEN IN UZBEKISTAN**

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## **Abstract**

This article analyzes the economic activity of women in Uzbekistan with an emphasis on gender discrimination in the economic sphere. The main trends in women's participation in the labor force and key barriers to equal access to employment, including structural and institutional factors, discrimination in hiring and remuneration, as well as legal and cultural restrictions, are outlined. Based on international and national sources, it has been shown that with officially declared equality, women still face a lower rate of participation in the economy, a significant wage gap and limited access to leadership positions, which requires improved government policies and protection mechanisms.

**Keywords:** Economics – feminism, gender wage gap, economic activity, average and median salary.

## **Introduction**

Diana Strassman (1955) notes that most classical economic theories were formulated by men in the 19th century, and many of their authors shared the widespread doubt about the ability of women to play an active role in economic life. Despite the fact that such views have now lost their dominant position, economics is still characterized by a gender imbalance in the face of researchers and the subjects considered in it.

Traditional models consider a household as a single economic unit headed by a male employee who provides income for family members dependent on him (wives and children), whose work remains "invisible" to national indicators. At the same time, when hiring an outside housekeeper, her work is included in the calculation of GDP, and when performing the same functions within the family, it is not taken into account. As Marianne Folbre points out, it is women who take

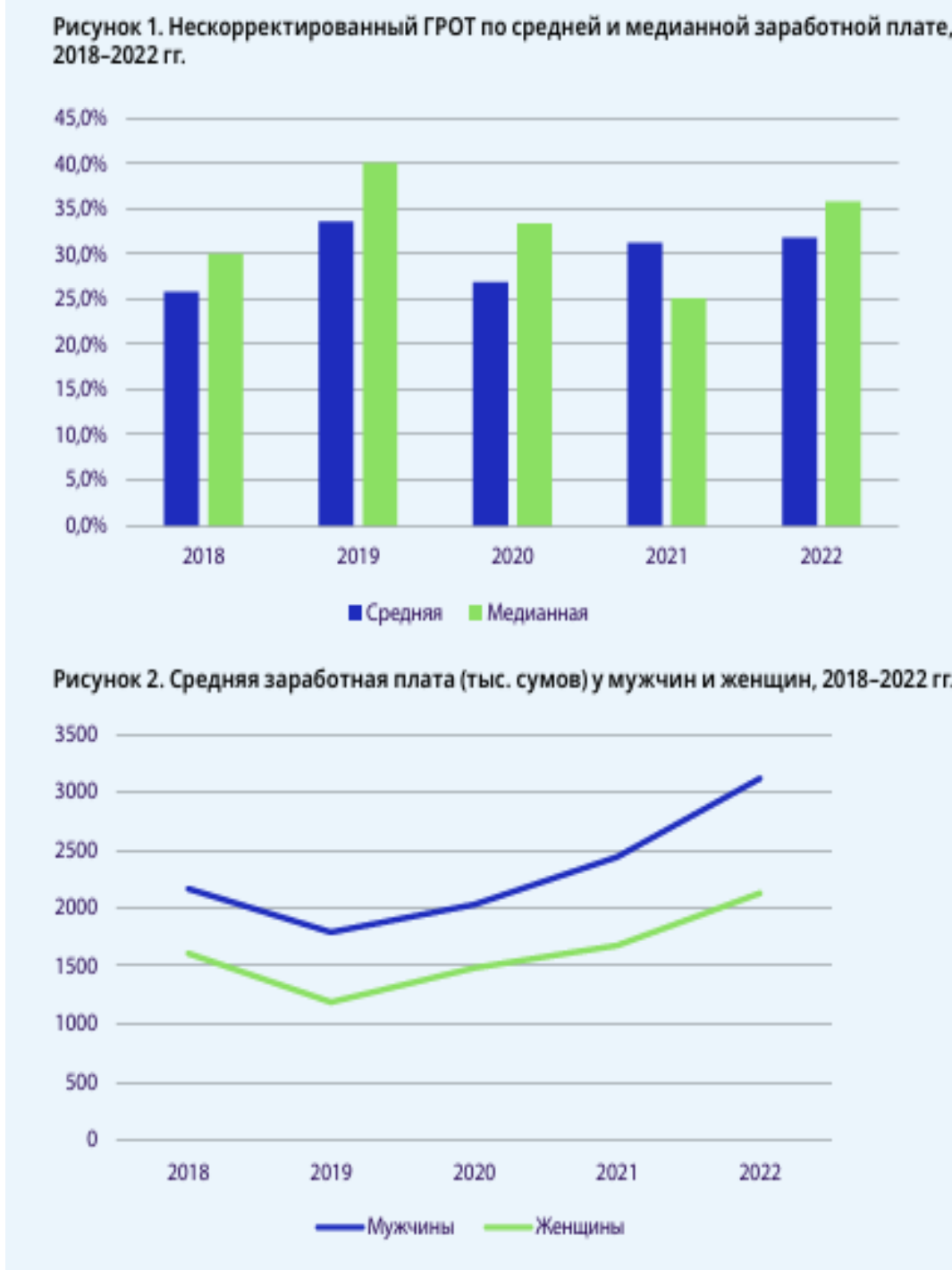
on the lion's share of the cost of reproducing the future workforce, but their contribution remains excluded from official statistics. According to UN estimates, the cost of unpaid work is equivalent to up to 70% of global production, and the bulk of it is assigned to women. Ignoring these volumes leads to a systematic underestimation of the real allocation of resources and the contribution of domestic labor to overall economic activity.

An analysis of the gender wage gap in Uzbekistan for 2018-2022 shows that women earn an average of 31.7–35.7% less than men, meaning that for every dollar of male income, 64.3–68.3 cents of female income is accounted for. The obtained indicators of the gender pay gap follow from the amount of earnings: women receive an average of 2.13 million soums per month, while men receive about 3.119 million soums (Picture 2)<sup>1</sup>. The largest gender pay gap was observed in 2019, when salaries decreased for everyone, but especially for women. In 2020-2021, the gap narrowed, due to job losses mainly among low—skilled women during the pandemic, which increased the average salary of the remaining working women. In 2022, the difference in earnings increased again as employment recovered.

The data also shows discrepancies between the gender pay gap calculated by average and median salary, without a stable link between them. Such fluctuations are typical not only for Uzbekistan, but also for other countries, which is emphasized, for example, in the ILO report. In general, the level varies from 25 to 35% and does not show a stable trend.

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<sup>1</sup>The figures given correspond to the gender pay gap indicator calculated based on the average for 2022 (i.e.  $(3119-2130)/3119=31,7\%$ ). The median salary in the diagram (Picture 2) is not shown because the median level has not been assessed.



**Chart 1. The unadjusted gender pay gap in Uzbekistan**

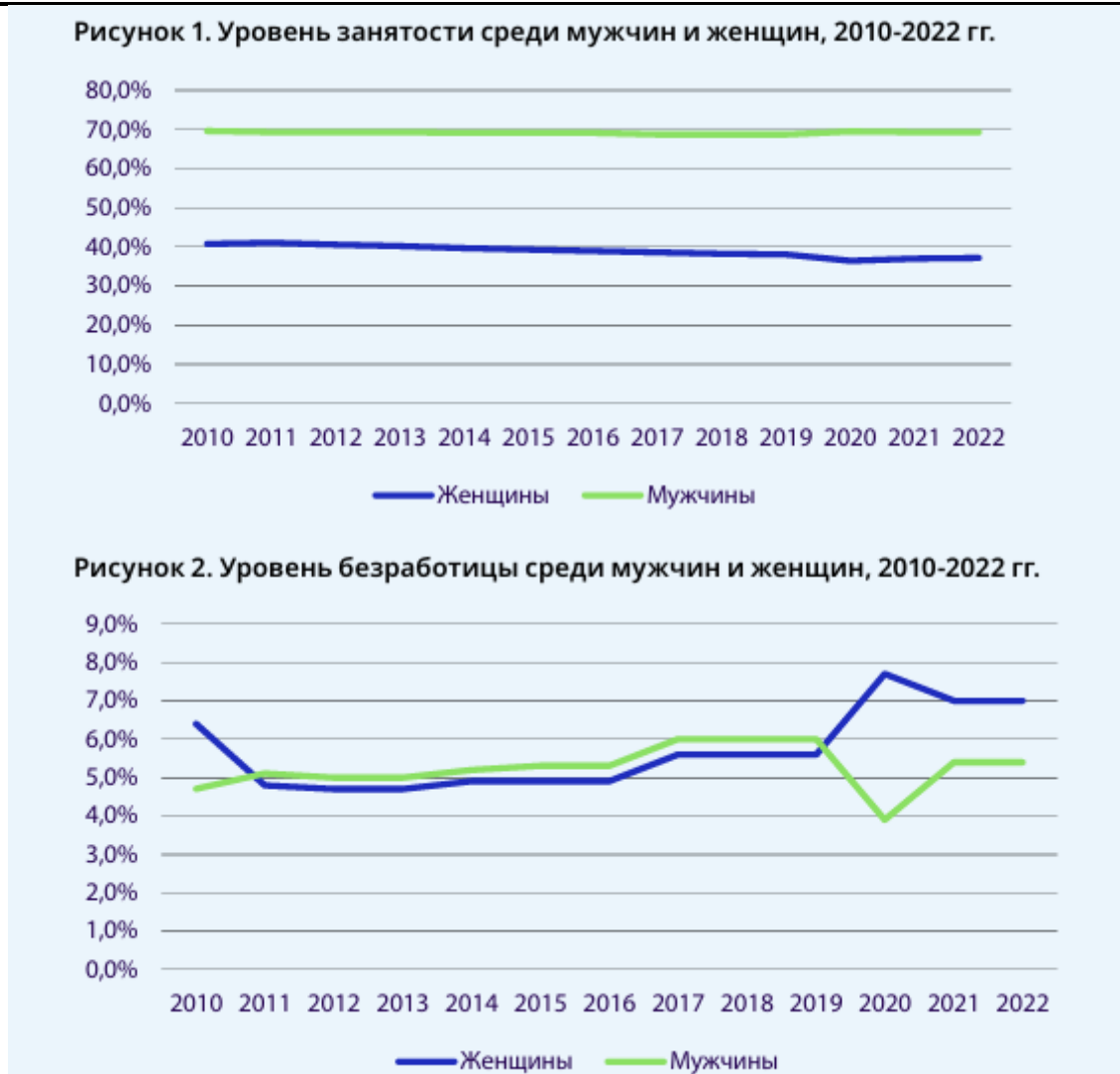
In many countries, a significant part of the gender pay gap is attributed to the maternity-related pay gap. We are talking about a situation where working mothers are paid less than women who do not have children. Lower wages for mothers may be associated with a number of factors, including more flexible

working hours, in which employees are paid less; interruption of work experience in the period before and after the birth of a child, which subsequently leads to chronic wage losses.; hiring and promotion decisions based on stereotypes or discriminatory attitudes that undermine the careers of women with children. The presence and significance of each of these factors varies greatly from country to country, depending on cultural norms and current regulations (ILO, 2015). In this regard, two final considerations deserve to be mentioned.

First, there are methodological limitations of existing surveys: only a few of them make it possible to establish parental status for all adult household members. Most often, information about the presence of children is collected exclusively in relation to the head of the household, which prevents a correct assessment of the maternal wage gap in all families where the head is not a woman. In such cases, only an analysis of the paternity gap is possible.

Secondly, empirical data from different countries point to the multidirectional effects of parenthood on the incomes of men and women. Thus, women with children, as a rule, receive a lower income than childless women, while male fathers have a higher average earnings level than men without children. The main explanations for this asymmetry include the increased economic activity of fathers in response to increased family obligations, as well as the uneven distribution of unpaid domestic work within the family division of responsibilities.

Chart 2 illustrates the dynamics of employment (Figure 1) and unemployment (Figure 2) by gender category in Uzbekistan for the period 2010-2022. An analysis of the data shows that women not only receive significantly lower incomes, but also have fewer employment opportunities. So, in 2022, the share of employed people in the working-age population among women was 37.2%, while among men it was 69.3%, that is, the probability of their employment among men is almost twice as high. Although the gender gap in employment is observed in almost all countries, it is relatively high in Uzbekistan and has not shown a downward trend over the past decade. In particular, the difference between the employment rates of men and women increased from 28.9 percentage points in 2010 to 30.1 percent in 2016, reaching 32.1 percent by 2022.



**Chart 2. Employment and unemployment rate**

According to the ILO, the rate of economic activity of women in Uzbekistan is about 51% and is significantly lower than the male level of 76%<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, official statistics that reflect only formal employment underestimate the contribution of women, as they do not take into account unpaid domestic work and employment in the informal sector. An analysis of audit experiments revealed that resumes with female names receive 15% fewer responses from employers compared to similar male candidates<sup>3</sup>. Safayeva's study (2024) confirms the existence of institutional and cultural barriers when employers cite women's family responsibilities as a reason for refusing employment. Traditional gender

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women\\_in\\_Uzbekistan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Uzbekistan)

<sup>3</sup> Gender Discrimination in Hiring Evidence from an Audit Experiment in Uzbekistan

roles are enshrined in legislation and social norms: the Uzbek Labor Code assumes by default that women have the main family responsibilities, which limits their ability to work part-time or flexibly. Moreover, according to the GRN Journal, up to 75% of the women surveyed admit discrimination in the workplace<sup>4</sup>.

Uzbekistan ratified the ILO Convention No. 111 on Discrimination in Employment back in 1992, but in practice, the means of protecting women from unbiased treatment work poorly. National legislation prohibits discrimination, but does not provide effective mechanisms for monitoring and sanctioning violations of the rights of working women. Low economic activity and discrimination lead to underutilization of the labor potential of more than half of the population, which leads to a decrease in GDP and a limitation of sustainable development. In addition, the lack of equal opportunities hinders women's professional growth and representation in leadership positions, where they currently occupy only about 33% of middle and senior management positions<sup>5</sup>.

Policy recommendations and practices:

1. Strengthening legal protection – the introduction of mandatory monitoring of compliance with anti-corruption and anti-correction standards, the creation of specialized equal opportunities commissioners within ministries and large companies.
2. Support for flexible forms of employment – the development of part-time and remote work programs, which will allow women to combine professional and family roles.
3. Anti-discrimination training is mandatory training for managers and HR specialists on gender diversity and avoiding bias in hiring.
4. Monitoring and evaluation – regular research and publication of statistics on gender gaps, taking into account not only formal but also informal employment.
5. Transformation of social institutions. They should be aimed at the formation and institutionalization of the principle of gender equality, in which neither sex has the right to dominate the other. It is necessary to develop and implement mechanisms that ensure mutual respect and equal value for the contributions of both men and women in all spheres of public life, as well as the education of

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<sup>4</sup> Factors influencing the choice of profession by Uzbek women

<sup>5</sup> GENDER EQUALITY IN UZBEKISTAN: AN OVERVIEW AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

appropriate attitudes through legislation, educational programs and personnel policy.

## **Conclusion**

Despite regulatory guarantees of equal rights, women's economic activity in Uzbekistan remains limited due to the combined effects of discrimination in the labor market, outdated social norms, and insufficient institutional support. The implementation of a comprehensive policy to eliminate gender barriers will not only increase women's employment, but also significantly strengthen the country's economic potential.

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