

GENDER ASPECTS IN THE CIVIL SERVICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN: ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses gender aspects within the civil service of the Republic of Tajikistan, exploring the challenges faced by Tajik women and putting forward potential solutions. Despite progress in gender equality, women continue to encounter obstacles rooted in gender stereotypes, family traditions, and limitations on career advancement. Inequality persists within the civil service, particularly regarding the appointment of women to senior government positions, despite targeted efforts by the Tajik Government through gender-focused legislation. The country remains committed to addressing gender issues and consistently implements policies to improve the situation, including the development of gender-oriented programmes and comprehensive support for marginalised groups. To overcome these barriers, continued efforts in education, legal regulation, and cultural transformation are crucial. This article offers recommendations for addressing existing problems and improving the circumstances of women, youth, and other marginalised groups within the civil service.

Keywords: *Gender Equality, Civil Service, Tajikistan, Women's Rights, Gender Stereotypes, Reforms, Marginalised Groups.*

INTRODUCTION

In June 2024, Dushanbe, the cultural capital of Tajikistan, eagerly awaited the unveiling of a global poster campaign. As part of the celebrations commemorating the 817th anniversary of the revered *Mavlono Jalal al-Din Rumi*, two grand concerts took place on prestigious international stages: the UNESCO Great Hall (*Maison de l' UNESCO*) in Paris and Troxy Hall in London. These performances featured the renowned European Persian choir and orchestra '*Bahar*', along with the East Parisian orchestra '*Flamingo*'. These significant events garnered worldwide attention, captivating millions. The highlight was a stunning arrangement by Arash Foladwanda of Rumi's iconic composition, '*Guli Surkh*' (*Gole Sorkh*).

Alongside international stars like Sarah Naini and Vahid Taj (Iran), the talented Tajik artist Nigina Amonkulova delivered a captivating solo performance. Equally impressive as her renowned colleagues, she charmed the audience with both her vocal prowess and remarkable charisma, adding a unique magic to the event. Her performance earned her a standing ovation from the global audience, a testament to her exceptional talent and skill. These are precisely the kind of women President Emomali Rahmon recognised when he stated, "Our women and mothers, even at the dawn of state independence, made efforts to protect their rights and freedoms, normalise the situation in the country and played a major role in achieving peace, stability and national unity"²

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² Emomali, R. (2021). Address of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan to the Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan '*Key Directions of the Domestic and Foreign Policy of the Republic*'. Dushanbe, Tajikistan, www.president.tj

For Tajikistan, achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 regarding gender equality and women's empowerment is a key priority. Today, Tajik women and girls have made significant strides in diverse fields, rivalling their international counterparts. This progress demonstrates the country's active development in public administration and the economy, contributing to an improved quality of life and expanded opportunities for women and youth. It is widely recognised that equality and women's participation in the public sector are fundamental to sustainable growth.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

To analyse the gender situation within Tajikistan's civil service, the author employed several methods: examining statistical data, reviewing the current legislative framework promoting gender equality, and studying international best practices in this area. Interviews of experts and civil servants were also conducted to identify obstacles hindering further progress toward gender equality in the civil service.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that women constitute approximately 26% of all active civil servants, yet their representation in management positions remains low, at 19%. This underscores the need for further efforts to ensure gender equality in career development (Table 1). Conversely, young people (under 35) comprise a substantial portion of the civil service, particularly in central and local government bodies (approximately 50% of the total headcount). However, their representation in management roles is also limited, highlighting the need for more proactive measures to stimulate career advancement for young professionals.

Table 1: The civil service of the Republic of Tajikistan in numbers (as of 1 January 2025)³

Number of government positions	22,377	Women	Youth
Actively working	18,801	4,849	9,394
of which, in senior management positions	5,955	1,146	1,717
Civil servants	12,248	3,092	6,543
of which, in senior management positions	3,333	559	1,052
Civil servants in local government bodies	3,553	1,096	1,668
of which, in senior management positions	1,488	323	395
Civil servants in local self-government bodies of cities and villages	3,000	661	1,183
of which, in senior management positions	1,134	264	270

It can be assumed that the reason young people do not occupy leadership positions is due to the limited professional experience they possess. In the civil service of Tajikistan, the career advancement system often requires considerable seniority, which is determined both by professional requirements and cultural traditions that value the experience of older colleagues. Although young people possess modern knowledge, they may not have enough practical management experience, which reduces their chances of taking leadership positions. This is especially true for women, who, in addition to the general lack of experience, face additional social barriers that limit their career advancement in the civil service, due to gender-related issues. Therefore, while the percentage of women and youth is slightly higher in local

³ Source: Letter of the Civil Service Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan (January 29, 2025).

government bodies and local executive bodies of state power, their share of leadership positions still requires improvement.

In sum, although women and youth constitute a significant segment of the civil service workforce, their underrepresentation in management positions necessitates focused attention and active implementation of gender equality and youth leadership policies. The Tajik Government's efforts in this area are substantial, even upon a cursory examination. In 2022, Tajikistan adopted the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan "On Equality and Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination",⁴ which mandates anti-discrimination reviews of draft regulatory acts. The State Programme and the Action Plan for the Education, Selection and Placement of Leadership Personnel from Among Gifted Women and Girls for 2023-2030 were also approved.⁵

To further attract women to the civil service, a presidential decree was issued, granting women certain advantages in civil service job competitions. Specifically, women receive three additional points upon their first appointment to the civil service. 'Soft quotas' for women have been implemented in party lists and civil service, along with presidential quotas for applicants. To combat gender stereotypes, a working group has developed draft amendments to several laws, including the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan "On State Guarantees of Equality between Men and Women and Equal Opportunities for Their Implementation".⁶ University curricula have also been revised to include courses on combating violence and discrimination. At the policy level, the National Strategy for Enhancing the Role of Women for 2021-2030 has been approved, encompassing measures to prevent violence against women and girls.⁷

Tajikistan has implemented measures to protect victims of violence, including the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan "On the Prevention of Domestic Violence" and domestic violence injunctions.⁸ The criminalisation of domestic violence as a distinct offense is also being actively considered. Within the framework of the State Programme for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the National Strategy for Activating the Role of Women, efforts are ongoing to ensure gender equality and eliminate discrimination. The 2023-2030 programme to increase the number of women in government leadership positions aims to achieve 30% female representation in government bodies and 25% in leadership roles.

For several years, the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan has conducted annual 'Woman Leader' courses. These courses competitively recruit active, young, and innovative women under 35 from four regions of the country (Sughd and Khatlon provinces, regions of republican subordination and Dushanbe, and the autonomous province of the Gorno-Badakhshan) who are already civil servants. Over the

⁴ Law 1890. (2022). Law of the Republic of Tajikistan No. 1890, "On equality and elimination of all forms of discrimination", adopted by the resolution No. 773 of the Majlisi namoyandagon and approved by the resolution No. 286 of the Majlisi milli, www.president.tj

⁵ Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan "On the State Program for the Education, Selection and Placement of Leadership Personnel from among Gifted Women and Girls for 2023-2030", https://adlia.tj/show_doc.fwx?Rgn=142096

⁶ Law 89. (2005). Law of the Republic of Tajikistan "On state guarantees of equality of men and women and equal opportunities for their implementation", <https://afif.tj/images/files/pdf/ogosgarantiyah.pdf>

⁷ Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan "On the National Strategy for Activating the Role of Women in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2021-2030", <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/taj209955.pdf>

⁸ Law 954. (2013). Law of the Republic of Tajikistan "On Prevention of Domestic Violence" (Akhbori Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2013, No. 3, Art. 197), <https://www.comwom.tj/ru/laws>

year-long programme, participants study the fundamentals of public administration, effective management, human resources management psychology, team building, time management, and other relevant subjects. They then defend final theses and take state final exams. These courses are highly popular among young female civil servants, offering valuable theoretical knowledge from the Academy combined with practical on-the-job skills development. This format of skills and potential development has proven attractive and convenient, making such training highly sought after.

Despite these positive changes, gender imbalance remains a pressing issue within the civil service. "Society continues to see stereotypes about women's work in the public sector and at the decision-making level. Although, the situation is improving dynamically".⁹ Women face numerous obstacles, including limited access to education, insufficient support for career advancement, and persistent traditional stereotypes that restrict their opportunities.

Addressing these barriers requires a comprehensive approach, encompassing both legislative improvements and the practical implementation of effective programmes that foster equal opportunities for men and women in the civil service.

Centuries-old traditions, family values, and social stereotypes that restrict women's choices pose significant challenges for Eastern women pursuing careers in the civil service. They continue to face obstacles in achieving professional advancement, making 'gender equality' not just an abstract concept but a tangible struggle. The Japanese phrase 'good wife, wise mother' exemplifies the traditional image of an 'ideal' woman (Shao and Lee, 2023), a concept that, while originating in Japan, resonates with the experiences of many Tajik women. Clearly, societal perceptions of women's roles, which limit their career opportunities, are a primary factor hindering their advancement to leadership positions.

Despite these deeply rooted historical and cultural barriers, a genuine transformation has been underway in recent decades. Analysis of the current situation indicates that Tajik women are gradually breaking through the 'glass ceiling' in management and decision-making, their voices growing stronger despite the challenges they face (US Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995).

The tragic story of Saltanat, a Kazakh woman, has become a catalyst for a broader fight for women's rights in Tajikistan. In 2018, Saltanat was brutally assaulted and killed by her husband, the former Minister of Economy of Kazakhstan, in a restaurant while no one intervened. This crime sparked widespread outrage and ignited a movement for women's rights, known as the 'Saltanat's Cause'. Since then, Tajik women have become more vocal in discussing issues of gender equality, domestic violence, and equitable career advancement at public meetings, trainings, and lectures at the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. Analysis reveals that many women continue to encounter situations where their rights are subordinated to traditional family or social norms.

Globally, gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) has proven to be an effective tool for advancing gender equality. GRB ensures that the needs of both women and men are considered at all levels of government programming. This approach is widely used in countries with well-established democratic institutions, such as the Scandinavian countries, where gender-

⁹ National Review. (2000). *National Review of the Republic of Tajikistan on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. The Framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Outcome Documents. 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly, https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Tajikistan-Report_ru.pdf

sensitive budgets direct resources to support women in various aspects of life, including healthcare, education, employment, and social protection

While GRB is still in its early stages of development in Tajikistan, initial positive results indicate its potential as a powerful tool for addressing gender disparities in economic and social spheres. It is crucial that GRB becomes a cornerstone for the equitable distribution of resources and the creation of fair opportunities for women.

The "Gender-oriented budgeting: goals, objectives and prospects" project, implemented by the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan with UN Women's financial support, exemplifies the successful application of gender-responsive budgeting. This project aimed to enhance civil servants' knowledge, skills, and competencies in developing and implementing gender-sensitive budgets. Its primary goal was to ensure the economic efficiency and transparency of budget expenditures while considering the needs of women, men, girls, and boys. This approach enables the timely identification of gender gaps in budget programmes, facilitating prompt action to reduce and eliminate them, thereby ensuring the effective implementation of gender equality policies (Garashchenko et al., 2024: 4).

The project also disseminated information on international best practices in gender budgeting and the application of gender-sensitive approaches to resource allocation. During the project's Phase 1 in 2022, over 200 civil servants from central and local government bodies enhanced their knowledge and skills in developing gender-sensitive budgets. Phase 2 introduced the principles of gender-oriented budgeting to more than 200 civil servants from Kulob city and the Dusti district of the Khatlon province. Phase 3, launched in September 2024, aims to build the capacity of additional 200 civil servants from Bokhtar city and Khuroson district.

It is clear that gender equality remains a central focus for the Tajik Government. However, it is also understood that even the most progressive laws cannot instantly transform deeply ingrained cultural norms. Therefore, the most critical task today is not only expanding opportunities for women but also diligently working to dismantle the stereotypes that continue to limit their choices and opportunities. Every woman, regardless of social status, should have the freedom to choose her own path, including education, career, and political participation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Analysis of the current situation suggests that overcoming these obstacles and effectively utilising women's potential in the civil service requires, first and foremost, continued development and implementation of specialised educational programmes. These programmes should equip women with the necessary knowledge and skills for civil service careers. Furthermore, these educational and career programmes should focus on challenging stereotypes and fostering women's confidence in leadership roles.

It is also considered important to create an infrastructure to support women in public service, including mentoring programmes, professional women's networks, and psychological support. Mechanisms for introducing flexible schedules and other conditions that facilitate a better work-life balance—important for women in Tajikistan—can also play a major role.

The practice in some regions of the country demonstrates the effectiveness of involving traditional and religious leaders in promoting gender equality. This helps convince society

that women can successfully combine the roles of mother and professional, which aligns with the Islamic value of respect and support for women.

In addition, it is proposed to conduct public campaigns and dialogues with local mahallas and families to gradually shift perceptions of women's roles in society, emphasising their importance not only in the household but also in socio-political life.

Tajikistan has, for many years, implemented quotas and introduced legislation to stimulate an increase in the number of women in leadership positions within government bodies. What is now needed is a clear mechanism for regular monitoring and research to assess the effectiveness of existing gender programmes and to implement corrective measures if current approaches do not yield the expected results.

Gender equality in public service and society is not simply a matter of rights, but also of progress. While Tajikistan is making significant efforts to ensure women's rights, it is crucial to remember that change happens not only through laws and programmes, but also through a shift in mindset. Women in Tajikistan, like women in other Central Asian countries, need support as they strive to fully realise their rights and opportunities.

Gender-responsive budgeting, the development of legislative initiatives, and support for women's rights are all steps toward a sustainable and equitable society. However, it is essential to continually emphasise the importance of women's place in society, their right to choose, and their roles within the family, the state, and the political sphere. Only when traditions and laws work in harmony can we truly speak of achieving gender equality.

Today, it is necessary to continue improving public policy to support women at all levels. Overcoming gender stereotypes, strengthening legal and institutional support, and developing culturally sensitive programmes that consider traditions, and religious characteristics will create conditions for women to participate more actively in public service and assume leadership roles.

Therefore, at this stage of societal development, further efforts are needed to dismantle barriers and support women's aspirations to participate fully in the political and public life of the country.

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