



THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN UZBEKISTAN

Oybek Batirov

Managing Director at Strongman Consulting

obatirov@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the socio-economic importance of women's entrepreneurship in Uzbekistan. It investigates how female-led enterprises contribute to employment creation, poverty reduction, and inclusive growth. Drawing upon data from 2016 to 2024 and international experiences, the study reveals key trends in gender participation, sectoral distribution, and barriers affecting women entrepreneurs. The findings indicate that while female participation in entrepreneurship is growing, structural challenges such as limited access to finance and market networks persist. The paper concludes by proposing policy recommendations to enhance women's economic empowerment and support sustainable business development.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurship, Uzbekistan, socio-economic development, gender equality, business policy, employment.

Introduction

Women's entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a worldwide key engine for inclusive economic development. In Uzbekistan, it represents a vital component of national economic reform and gender equality strategies. Since 2017, the government has implemented programs to promote female participation in business through targeted financial support, training, and regulatory simplification. These measures have contributed to the steady rise in the number of women-led enterprises and their contribution to the national GDP. However, women continue to face constraints in accessing credit, land, and



business networks, limiting their full economic potential. This paper analyzes the evolution, structure, and socio-economic impact of women's entrepreneurship in Uzbekistan.

2. Literature Review

Existing studies have shown that women's entrepreneurship contributes to economic diversification, social stability, and employment generation [1]. Carter and Brush (2021) found that women entrepreneurs often emphasize social objectives alongside profit motives [1]. The World Bank [2] and OECD [3] highlight the persistent gender gap in access to finance and markets, particularly in developing economies. UNDP [4] and ILO [5] studies in Central Asia demonstrate that female-owned enterprises strengthen community welfare and promote inclusive local development. In Uzbekistan, Zokirova [6] and Karimova [7] noted that women's entrepreneurship enhances family well-being and supports household income diversification. Yet, systemic challenges remain, such as limited financial inclusion and cultural stereotypes restricting women's entry into high-value industries [12][13].

3. Methodology

The research is based on secondary data collected from national statistics, UNDP, OECD, and World Bank reports for the period 2016–2024 [2][4][5][13]. A descriptive and comparative analysis was applied to evaluate women's participation across various sectors, employment dynamics, and entrepreneurship trends. The study uses visual data interpretation through charts and tables to highlight changes in female employment and entrepreneurship structures.

4. Results

The analysis of gender-based employment trends reveals that women's participation in the labor market has grown gradually between 2016 and 2024. Despite this improvement, the unemployment rate among women remains significantly higher than that of men, indicating persistent gender disparities.



Entrepreneurship has emerged as an important mechanism for women's self-employment and economic empowerment.

Figure 1 presents employment and unemployment rates by gender in Uzbekistan from 2016 to 2024. During this period, women's employment fluctuated between 41 and 46 percent, while men's employment remained higher, averaging around 58 percent. The unemployment rate among women peaked at 14 percent in 2020 compared to 8 percent for men, later declining to about 7 percent in 2024. These differences show that despite gradual improvements, women still face notable barriers in securing stable jobs.

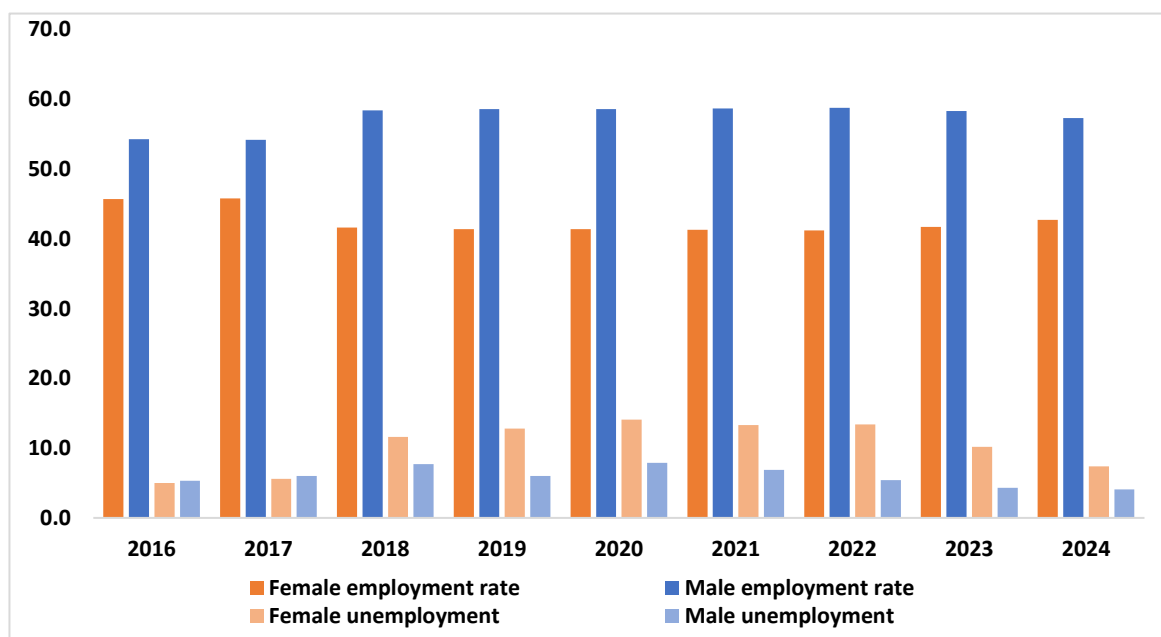


Figure 1. Comparison of male and female employment and unemployment rates, 2016-2024

Source: Data provided by gender.stat.uz

The data suggest that limited access to formal employment pushes many women toward entrepreneurship as an alternative source of income and independence. The persistent gender gap highlights the need for stronger policies supporting female participation in the labor market and business sector. Strengthening access to finance, skills training, and family-friendly workplace reforms could reduce inequalities and promote inclusive economic growth.



Women's employment in Uzbekistan remains highly concentrated in a few traditional sectors. Over the period 2016–2024, the share of women employed in agriculture decreased from 26.3% to 23%, while industry and trade together accounted for about one-third of total female employment. Meanwhile, education and healthcare consistently absorbed around one-fourth of all employed women, confirming the gendered nature of the labor market and the dominance of socially oriented occupations, as illustrated in

Table 1. Sectoral distribution of women entrepreneurs (2016-2024)

Indicators	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Agricultural forestry and fisheries	26.3	26.3	27.8	27.3	27.1	25.9	26.6	24.7	23.0
Industry	12.7	13	13.7	14.3	14.3	14.2	13.6	13.7	12.3
Construction	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.4	2.0	1.8
Trade	12.3	12.4	12.8	13.2	12.7	13.5	12.9	13.4	12.2
Transportation and storage	0.8	0.8	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.4	1.2
Accommodation and catering services	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.9	2.9	3.1	3.1	3.2	3.0
Information and communication	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.6
Financial and insurance activities	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.5
Education	13.8	13.5	13.6	15.3	15.8	16.1	16.3	15.8	15.4
Health care and social services	7.6	7.5	8.7	8.4	9.3	9.0	9.1	8.9	8.5
Art entertainment and recreation	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5
Other activities	21.4	21.4	17.0	14.9	14.2	14.4	14.6	15.4	21.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Data provided by gender.stat.uz

The data presented in **Table 1** indicate that women remain underrepresented in high-value and innovation-driven sectors such as information and communication, finance, and construction, which together employ less than 3% of women. This structural concentration limits women's access to higher earnings and managerial experience, reinforcing the importance of entrepreneurship as a channel for diversification and economic empowerment. Encouraging female participation in manufacturing, ICT, and financial activities could significantly enhance women's contribution to national productivity.

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of employed women across economic sectors in Uzbekistan from 2016 to 2024. Agricultural forestry and fisheries employed the largest share of women throughout the period, ranging from 23.0 percent in 2024 to 27.8 percent in 2018. This sector showed a declining trend after 2018,



dropping by approximately 5 percentage points by 2024. The “Other activities” category remained the second-largest employer, maintaining relatively stable levels between 14.2 and 21.4 percent. Education consistently accounted for 13.5 to 16.3 percent of female employment, making it the third-largest sector. Industry and trade each employed around 12 to 14 percent of women, while health care and social services represented 7.5 to 9.3 percent. Meanwhile, construction, transportation, information technology, finance, and entertainment collectively employed less than 5 percent of women, with most remaining below 1.5 percent throughout the period.

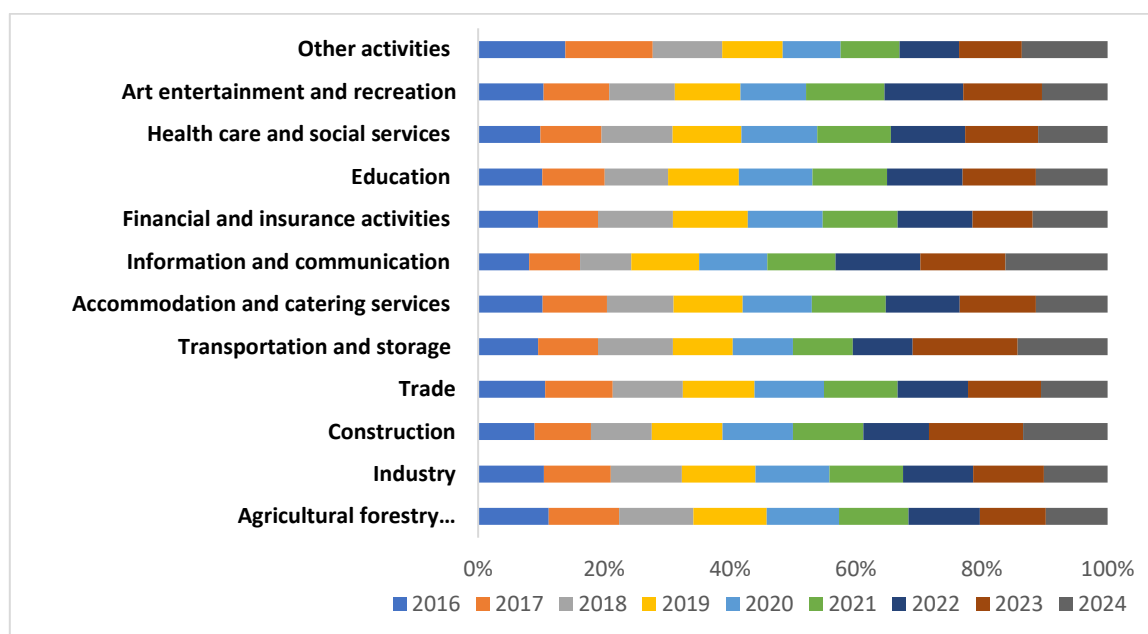


Figure 2. Employed women by type of economic activity, in % of the total
Source: Data provided by gender.stat.uz

The concentration of female employment in agriculture, education, and trade reflects traditional gender-based occupational patterns. The limited representation in high-growth sectors like information technology, finance, and construction suggests barriers to entry in these fields. The declining share in agriculture may indicate structural economic shifts or rural-to-urban migration. These patterns reveal that women remain concentrated in lower-productivity sectors with limited advancement opportunities. Expanding access to technical



training, removing discriminatory hiring practices, and creating supportive policies for work-life balance could help diversify female employment across higher-value sectors and reduce occupational segregation.

5. Discussion

The findings confirm that women's entrepreneurship has become an increasingly important component of Uzbekistan's private sector. The steady increase in women-owned enterprises demonstrates the effectiveness of recent policy measures aimed at supporting small business development. However, the sectoral distribution still reflects a gendered pattern typical for developing economies. Similar to Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, women tend to dominate in trade and services but remain underrepresented in industry and finance. Institutional reforms, including improved access to credit and entrepreneurship training, have helped mitigate some barriers, but deeper structural changes are required to ensure equality of opportunity.

6. Conclusion and policy implications

Women's entrepreneurship is a crucial factor in Uzbekistan's socio-economic transformation. It contributes to employment generation, household income growth, and gender equality. Despite the positive trends observed from 2016 to 2024, women still face significant challenges in financing, networking, and formal sector access. To strengthen women's entrepreneurial participation, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

1. Expand access to microfinance and guarantee schemes targeted at women-owned businesses.
2. Increase investment in entrepreneurship education and digital literacy for women.
3. Promote sectoral diversification by encouraging women's participation in manufacturing, ICT, and finance.
4. Strengthen social infrastructure, such as childcare facilities, to balance work and family responsibilities.
5. Develop mentorship and networking platforms linking experienced entrepreneurs with young women innovators.



If effectively implemented, these measures can enhance the economic resilience of women entrepreneurs and ensure their broader contribution to Uzbekistan's sustainable development goals.

References

1. Carter, S., & Brush, C. (2021). *Gender and Entrepreneurship: Contemporary Issues and Debates*. London: Routledge.
2. World Bank. (2022). *Women Entrepreneurs in Central Asia: Opportunities and Challenges*. Washington, D.C.
3. OECD. (2023). *Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment Report*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
4. UNDP Uzbekistan. (2024). *Women's Empowerment and Entrepreneurship Development in Uzbekistan*. Tashkent: UNDP Publication.
5. ILO. (2022). *Women's Employment and Entrepreneurship in Central Asia*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
6. Zokirova, M. (2022). *The Role of Women in Uzbekistan's Economy: National Experience and Prospects*. Tashkent: Fan va Taraqqiyot.
7. Karimova, N. (2023). The Social Impact of Women's Entrepreneurship in Uzbekistan. *Iqtisod va Jamiyat Journal*, 3(2), 45–52.
8. FAO. (2021). *Empowering Rural Women Entrepreneurs in Uzbekistan*. Rome: FAO Report.
9. EBRD. (2023). *Supporting Women Entrepreneurs in Uzbekistan*. London: European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
10. UN Women. (2022). *Women and Entrepreneurship: Central Asia Outlook*. New York: UN Publications.
11. Mirzayeva, F. (2023). Regional Role of Women's Entrepreneurship in Uzbekistan. *O'zbekiston Iqtisodiyoti Journal*, 6(1), 32–38.
12. Rustamova, M. (2023). Barriers and Solutions for Women's Entrepreneurship in Uzbekistan. *Economic Analysis Journal*, 1(4), 17–25.
13. World Economic Forum. (2023). *Global Gender Gap Report*. Geneva: WEF.
14. Azizova, G. (2023). Social Factors in Increasing Women's Economic Activity in Uzbekistan. *Ijtimoiy Fanlar Journal*, 5(1), 61–70.



***Modern American Journal of Business,
Economics, and Entrepreneurship***

ISSN (E): 3067-7203

Volume 01, **Issue** 07, October, 2025

Website: usajournals.org

***This work is Licensed under CC BY 4.0 a Creative Commons
Attribution 4.0 International License.***

-
15. USAID Uzbekistan. (2023). Women's Economic Empowerment Program Report. Tashkent.
 16. gender.stat.uz — National Statistics Portal on Gender Indicators (Accessed 2024).