

**A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF FEMALE MIGRATION IN
UZBEKISTAN AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIETY (2001–2017)**

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Abstract: This article analyzes the factors driving the formation of female labor migration from Uzbekistan to foreign countries between 2001 and 2017, the stages of its conceptual development, and its impact on Uzbek society, based on specific statistical data and regulatory legal documents. The study examines issues such as the demographic pressure of that period, structural unemployment among women, the professional de-skilling (loss of qualifications) of female migrants abroad, and their reproductive health.

Keywords: female migration, demographic pressure, de-skilling, reproductive health, Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 162, Law No. ORQ-154, Agency for External Labor Migration.

Socio-demographic processes in Uzbekistan during the second and third decades of independence transformed external labor migration into a mass economic phenomenon. Between 2001 and 2017, there was a marked increase in women—traditionally viewed in Uzbek society as the pillars of the family and guardians of its values—traveling abroad independently for work. This trend had a profound historical impact not only on the strategy to support the national economy but also on the internal social fabric, traditional gender relations, and the public health system. The issue is particularly significant because, prior to 2017, female labor migration was never systematically analyzed; instead, it evolved as a "hidden phenomenon" amidst administrative barriers.

Demographic and structural factors driving female migration. During this period, the entry of Uzbek women into foreign labor markets was shaped



by several deep-seated domestic socio-economic factors: Demographic pressure—due to high birth rates in the late 1980s and early 1990s (with the fertility rate reaching 4.2–4.6 children per woman), an average of 450,000 to 500,000 young people were entering the labor market annually by the mid-2000s. The domestic labor market was unable to provide sufficient jobs for this influx of the workforce; consequently, the issue of female employment—particularly in rural areas—became acute [3].

Agricultural reforms and structural unemployment: The dissolution of shirkats (collective agricultural enterprises) and the transition to individual farming operations led to increased mechanization and a reduction in manual labor within the agricultural sector. As a result, the female employment rate in rural areas declined by 18.4% [3].

A demographic of single mothers left without financial security following divorce emerged. According to data from the State Committee on Statistics, the annual number of divorces in the republic rose from 12.4 thousand in 2001 to 29.6 thousand by 2015 [5]. The lack of jobs offering wages sufficient to meet these women's needs within the domestic labor market compelled them to engage in external migration.

Evolution of the regulatory framework and state policy. Between 2001 and 2017, the Uzbek government's migration policy was primarily restrictive, regulatory, and administrative in nature, relying on the following key regulatory documents: Resolution No. 162 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated April 6, 2001: This resolution approved the "Regulations on the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Agency for External Labor Migration Issues" [1]. For many years, this document established a state monopoly on the organized employment of citizens abroad; however, in practice, the agency was able to meet only 1–1.5% of the actual demand for labor migration.

Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. ZRU-154 "On Combating Trafficking in Persons" dated April 17, 2008: Through this law, the state sought to ensure the safety of women abroad, particularly those facing sexual and labor exploitation [2]. Administrative restrictions and discrimination: During this period, informal and administrative barriers were employed to curtail female migration. For instance, a procedure was implemented requiring women under the age of 35 to undergo interviews with neighborhood committees and law enforcement agencies to obtain an exit visa (sticker) for travel abroad [5]. This created conditions that further increased flows of illegal and clandestine migration.

Impact of migration on society and gender dynamics. Despite administrative barriers, the transnational economic activity of women became a primary source for ensuring the material well-being of families: Statistical data: Between 2010 and 2014, the total number of Uzbek citizens working abroad ranged from 3.5 to 4 million. According to data from the Federal Migration Service (FMS) of the Russian Federation, women accounted for 14.8% of migrants from Uzbekistan [4]. In countries such as Turkey and the UAE, however, the share of women among Uzbek migrants reached 55–62% [6]. Macroeconomic impact and income: According to World Bank data, remittances accounted for an average of 10–12% of Uzbekistan's GDP during this period [7]. The average monthly remittance sent home by female migrants is around 350–400 USD; 42% of these funds are allocated directly to daily consumption, while 28% go toward education and healthcare expenses.

Transformation of gender roles: The shift of economic resource management into the hands of women has altered the traditional family model. For women earning an independent income abroad, there has been a fundamental increase in their decision-making power within the family—including regarding property purchases—as well as in their economic autonomy within society [5]. Systemic issues: professional de-skilling and health crises.



Alongside economic stability, irregular and unprotected female migration has exacted a heavy social toll: Loss of professional qualifications (de-skilling)—thousands of women across the country with higher or specialized secondary education (particularly in the fields of education and medicine) have been unable to work in their respective professions while in countries such as Russia, Turkey, and the UAE. Studies show that while 22.4% of female migrants held higher or specialized secondary education qualifications, they were employed abroad in low-skilled sectors (such as nannyng, elderly care, and the food service industry) [6]. This process resulted in a loss of domestic intellectual potential ("brain waste").

Reproductive and psychosomatic health crisis: Women's health deteriorated sharply due to harsh and unfavorable working conditions abroad, a lack of medical insurance, and chronic psychological stress. Statistical analyses indicated a significant rise in nervous system disorders, gynecological issues, and chronic psychosomatic ailments among women returning from abroad between 2015 and 2017 [6]. Chronic reproductive system diseases were diagnosed in 38.6% of returning women, and musculoskeletal pathologies in 24.1%, placing a heavy burden on the national healthcare system.

In conclusion, the period from 2001 to 2017 represents the most complex phase of external labor migration from Uzbekistan—a time when the institutional framework was not yet fully established. Although this process granted women economic independence, it also led to adverse consequences, such as the loss of professional potential and health issues. The problems that accumulated during this period paved the way for the adoption of new decisions aimed at radically reforming migration policy and establishing a safe labor migration system in the post-2017 era.

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