

# GENDER AND CORRUPTION IN UZBEKISTAN: Towards Transformational Change

Prepared within the framework of the joint project of UNDP and the Anti-Corruption Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan “Strengthening the National Anti-Corruption Ecosystem in Uzbekistan,” funded by the European Union.

## 1 Research Methodology

International experience shows that corruption affects men and women differently. It has been established that women face specific and disproportionately high difficulties due to social roles, systemic inequality, and gender asymmetry in access to resources and decision-making power. This situation increases the social, political, and economic marginalization of women. Taking this into account, many international organizations and documents emphasize the need to consider gender vulnerability when developing anti-corruption policy, including recognizing the disproportionate impact of corruption on women. It is in this context that, with the support of UNDP, the EU, and the Anti-Corruption Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan, a study was conducted aimed at identifying the gender consequences of corruption, promoting the integration of a gender-sensitive approach into the anti-corruption agenda, and strengthening Uzbekistan’s efforts to build an inclusive and corruption-free society.

In preparing this report, both qualitative and quantitative data were used. These data were obtained through the analysis of international policy documents and core legislative acts of Uzbekistan in the field of anti-corruption, as well as through a sociological study involving **539 respondents** (268 women and 271 men); 10 focus group discussions (5 for men and 5 for women) conducted in Namangan, Surkhandarya, Samarkand, Syrdarya, and Tashkent regions, and the Republic of Karakalpakstan; and the distribution of special questionnaires to institutions such as the Ministry of Justice, the Chamber of Advocates (Bar Association), the National Agency for Social Protection, and others.

## 2 Main Findings

### Systemic reforms, gender, and corruption:

Uzbekistan still has much to do to make anti-corruption reforms more systemic. This includes improving national legislation (for example, adopting a law on whistleblower protection and strengthening legal protections for journalists) and strengthening civil society institutions, independent media, public oversight, and related mechanisms. From this point of view the disproportionate impact worsened by gender stereotypes creates the necessity for integration of a gender-sensitive approach into development and implementation of anti-corruption policy.

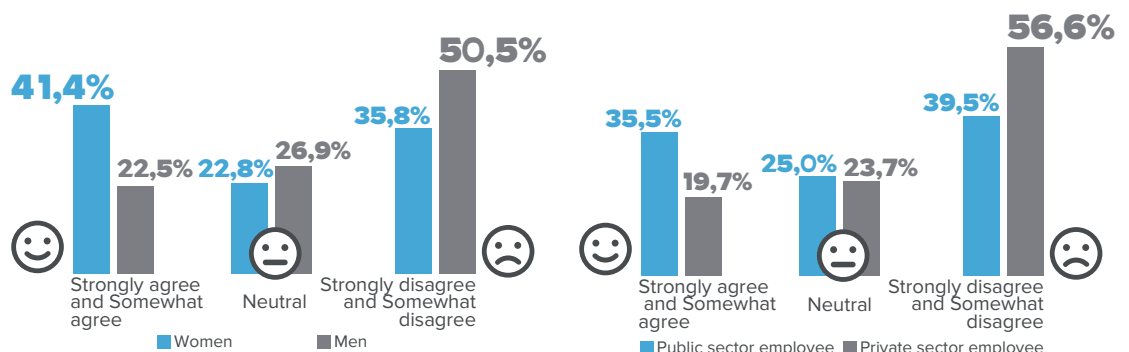
### Regulatory and legal framework in the field of anti-corruption and gender:

Uzbekistan’s anti-corruption legislative framework generally complies with basic international requirements and partially meets standards for the integration of gender issues. The absence of gender-specific provisions in this framework is partly compensated for by other laws (the Labor Code, the Law “On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men,” etc.). At the same time, when considering the interconnection between gender issues and anti-corruption efforts, legal frameworks are needed that not only guarantee gender equality, but also ensure a gender-sensitive approach in the implementation of anti-corruption policy.

### Gender Attributes of Leadership and Corruption:

In Uzbek society, gender stereotypes about women’s ability to be competent leaders are widespread. For example, 41.4% of women believe that women can be fair leaders, while only 22.5% of men share this view. At the same time, 50.5% of men and 35.8% of women do not support this view. Skepticism about women’s leadership qualities is more common among people with lower levels of education, private sector employees, and individuals with higher income levels.

If women held high positions in government, would they make fairer decisions than men?

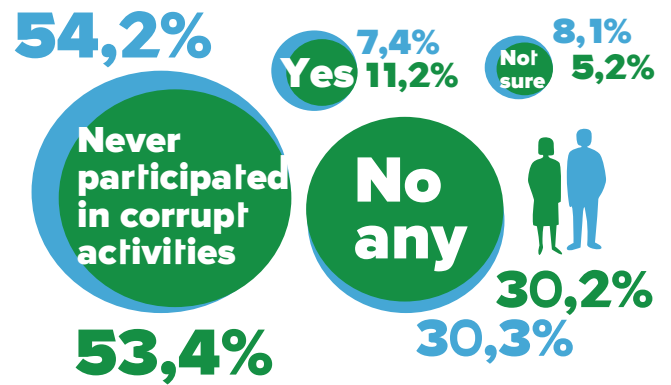


■ Public sector employee ■ Private sector employee

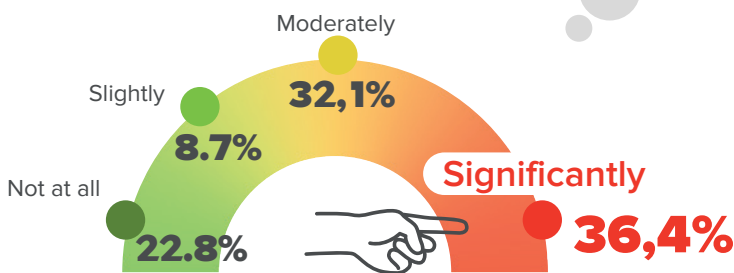
## Gender and Involvement in Corruption:

In general, citizens perceive an improving trend in the corruption situation, and they link this improvement to the introduction of digital technologies in the service sector. About 53.8% of respondents reported that they had not encountered corruption. Among the remaining 46.2% of respondents, 30.2% expressed confidence that gender had no effect on their involvement in corruption, and only 9.3% expressed the opposite view.

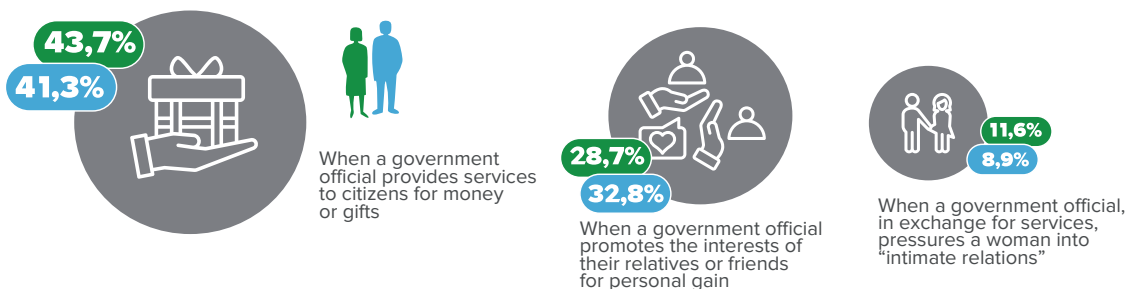
If you have ever been coerced into corruption, do you think your gender influenced this?



How do some traditional norms in Uzbekistan (suyunchi, tanish-bilish, lavish celebrations) influence the spread of corruption?



What are the most common forms of corruption in Uzbekistan?

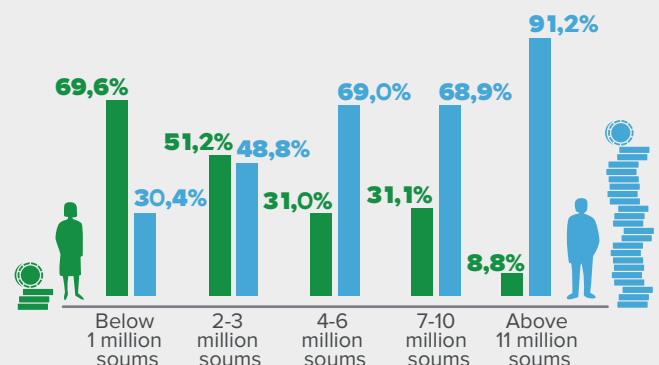


## Traditional Behavioral Norms and Corruption:

Public perceptions of the most common forms of corruption in Uzbekistan are influenced by traditional behavioral norms. Women and men gave broadly similar responses: 42.5% of respondents consider the most common form of corruption to be a government official receiving money or gifts (analogous to "suyunchi"), and 30.8% identified the promotion of the interests of relatives or friends (analogous to "tanish-bilish"). Nearly 70% of respondents believe that traditional behavioral norms such as "suyunchi," "tanish-bilish," and organizing lavish celebrations contribute to the spread of corruption. This view is strongest among citizens aged 25–54 (72.2%), which indicates how widespread these norms are in society.

## Economic Vulnerability, Gender, and Corruption:

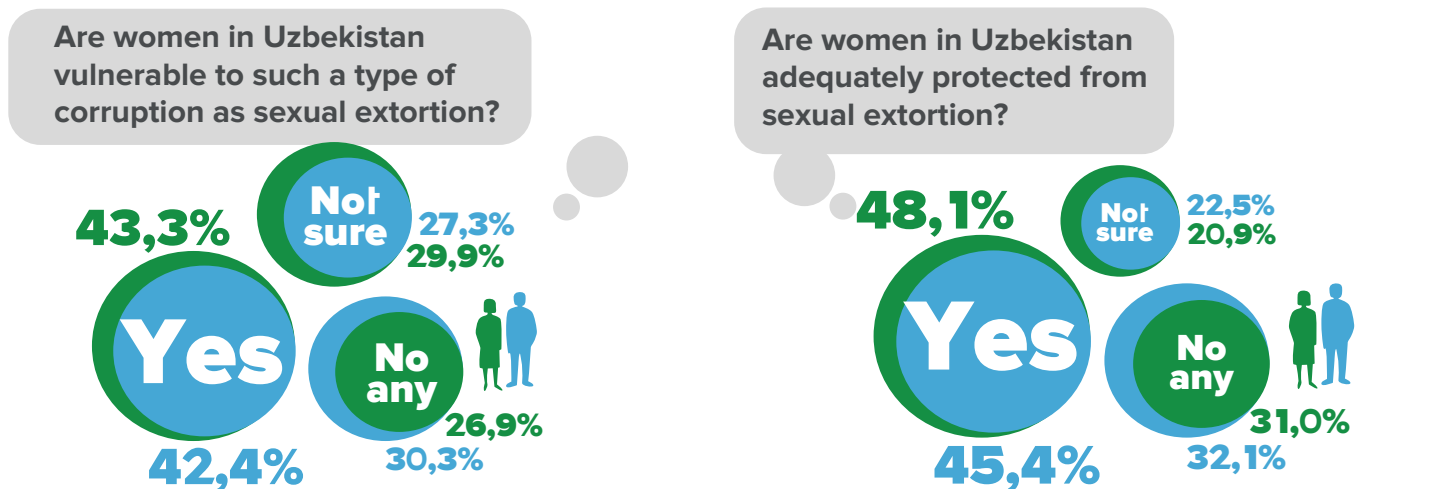
According to the study, 36% of respondents reported a monthly income of less than 1 million soums. Among them, almost 70% were women. The data is based on respondents' self-assessment of their total monthly income. At the same time, the public generally views the impact of corruption on income as gender-neutral — more than half of respondents (53.2%) believe that corruption negatively affects men and women equally. In addition, 42.8% of men and 16.8% of women believe that men suffer from corruption more than women. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents (78.7%) stated that if corruption has a more negative impact on women, the government should take this into account when implementing anti-corruption measures.



Gender distribution of respondents by monthly income level

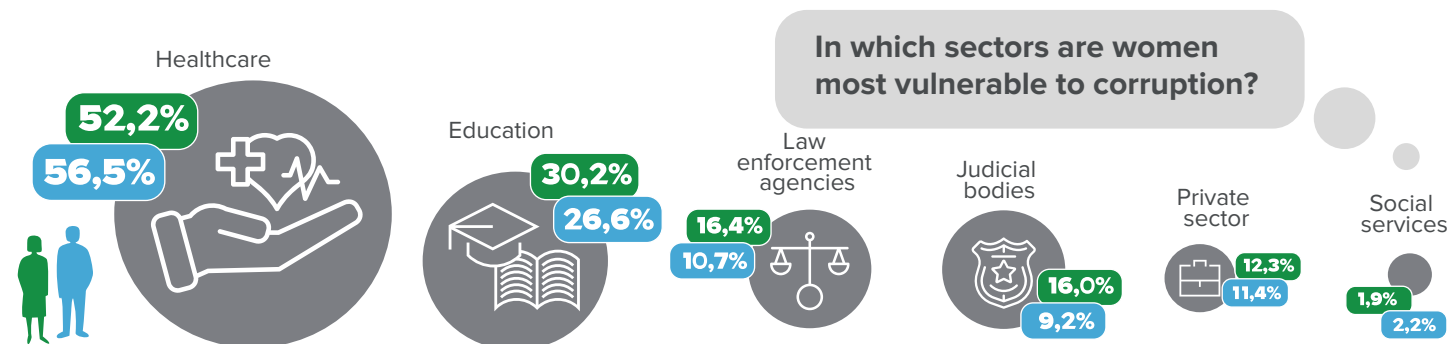
## Sexual Extortion:

Society recognizes women's vulnerability to sexual extortion. 46.8% of respondents believe that women are adequately protected from sexual extortion, while 31.5% do not share this view. 37.3% of women and 29.2% of men reported that there are barriers to reporting cases of sexual extortion. These barriers include shame, fear of public condemnation, lack of knowledge, and insufficient legal literacy. At the same time, 41% of men and 35.4% of women deny the existence of psychological barriers.



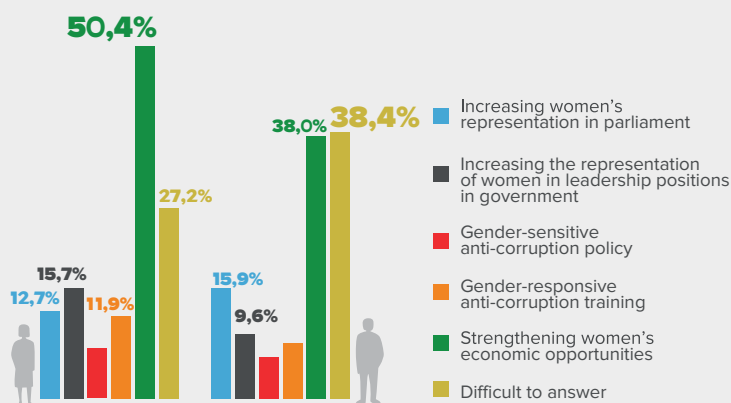
## Gender and Corruption-Prone Sectors:

In Uzbekistan, women face sector-specific vulnerability to corruption, especially when dealing with issues related to reproductive labor and childcare. More than half of respondents (54.4%) identified healthcare as the sector in which women are perceived as most vulnerable to corruption, followed by education (28.4%). Other sectors of concern include the judicial system (13.5%), law enforcement agencies (12.6%), and the private sector (11.9%).



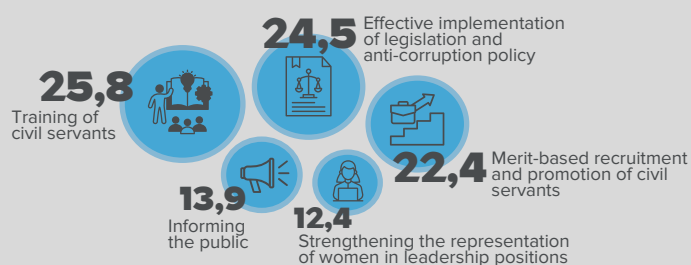
## Empowerment of Women, Gender and Corruption

According to the results of the study, 50.4% of women and 38% of men believe that strengthening women's economic opportunities will be a more effective approach to combating corruption. Only 14% of respondents expressed support for increasing the representation of women in parliament and 13% in government leadership positions. This situation indicates a high level of economic marginalization of women.



## Priority Measures from Citizens' Perspective:

According to citizens, the most important anti-corruption measures are: training and capacity building of public officials (25.8%); effective implementation of legislation and anti-corruption policy (24.5%); and merit-based recruitment and promotion of public officials (22.4%). Gender-sensitive recommendations based on qualitative data include recognizing the disproportionate impact of corruption on women, introducing targeted preventive measures, amending anti-corruption legislation to incorporate gender aspects, and creating safe systems for reporting corruption and sexual extortion, etc.



## 3 Recommendations

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All recommendations are presented in two blocks. The **first block** includes measures to improve national anti-corruption legislation in order to bring it into compliance with international requirements on gender mainstreaming, as formulated by the Working Group on Gender, Inclusion and Corruption under the UNCAC Coalition, the International Association of Women Judges, the OECD, etc. In particular, it is proposed to supplement the following laws with relevant provisions, including the criminalization of such a gender-based form of corruption as sexual extortion:

- “On Combating Corruption”;
- “On Anti-Corruption Review of Regulatory Legal Acts and Their Drafts”;
- “On Conflict of Interest”;
- “On Openness of the Activities of State Authorities and Administration”;
- the Criminal Code;
- the Code of Administrative Responsibility.

The **second block** of recommendations complements measures aimed at improving national anti-corruption legislation and outlines possible directions for institutions in terms of further contextualization and priority-setting, in order to ensure more effective integration of gender aspects into anti-corruption efforts. In particular, it is necessary to strengthen interagency cooperation between anti-corruption bodies and institutions dealing with gender equality issues. The recommendations also include the development of gender-sensitive anti-corruption policy, building relevant competencies, and adopting targeted measures to address such phenomena as sexual extortion and gender vulnerability in specific sectors (healthcare, education, etc.). All recommendations in this block are formulated within the following areas:

- Development and implementation of anti-corruption policy and legislation with due consideration of gender aspects;
- Strengthening anti-corruption enforcement and reporting channels;
- Overcoming the harmful impact of traditional norms;
- Transforming public gender norms;
- Raising the level of knowledge and awareness;
- Women’s empowerment as an anti-corruption measure;
- Building a comprehensive public approach to overcoming the gender consequences of corruption.