

INTERNATIONAL TOURISM IN SCOPE OF GENDER EQUALITY ISSUES: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

Munisa Abdurakhmanova

Independent Researcher

Department of Political Sciences

University of World Economy and Diplomacy

Abstract: *This article is dedicated to identifying the role of women in the field of tourism. In the 1997 Tourism Policy Project, tourism emerged as a significant means for the sustainable development of humanity, contributing greatly to the creation of women's associations, the eradication of poverty, and the overall improvement of the environment. In recent years, women's participation in the business and managerial sphere has increased, despite their lower involvement in leadership roles. Women working in the tourism industry occupy high positions, but their responsibilities often involve skills that are inadequately compensated. The tourism sector, indeed, offers various opportunities for women to be employed in different areas and engage in activities generating moderate incomes.*

Key Words: *Tourism, Competence, Sector, Gender Equality, (UNWTO), Women and Girls, Hospitality, Women's Role.*

Introduction

Each country has its factors, expectations, and demands for development. These demands and expectations are often shaped by historical events that guide the country's development and formation. Currently, there is significant attention being paid to the empowerment of women and girls, and various conditions are being created for their active participation in various fields of society. Decree No. PF-5325 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated February 2, 2018, titled "On Measures to Further Strengthen the Activities in the Field of Supporting and Empowering Women and Girls and Strengthening the Family Institution" vividly illustrates this¹.

In his speech to the Senate of the Oliy Majlis in June 2019, President Sh.M. Mirziyoyev stated, "At this juncture, one deeply rooted conviction constantly preoccupies my mind. We always glorify women as the hearth, the

¹ Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Further Improvement of Activities in the Field of Supporting and Strengthening the Institution of Marriage and Family" dated February 2, 2018, No. PF-5325.

cornerstone of our families. This is correct, undoubtedly. But nowadays, every woman is not just an observer of democratic processes but rather a proactive and enterprising participant." These thoughts of the President establish the essence of research².

In this regard, during the 63rd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, held from March 11-17, 2019, the head of the UN, Antonio Guterres, expressed the following idea: "Wherever women and girls are actively involved in political and social life, there is economic growth, stability is strengthened, and the well-being of citizens improves". From these ideas, it can be concluded that we have confidence in the correctness of the state policy aimed at protecting the rights and interests of women, ensuring the full participation of women in the socio-political life of the country, and ensuring gender equality.

In many developing countries, gender equality is a major challenge. Achieving development goals requires addressing disparities between men and women in opportunities, resources, and capabilities, reducing differences in access to opportunities and resources, and addressing weaknesses relative to strengths. Gender issues play a significant role in many aspects, one of which is the development of tourism. When we consider the implications of numerous tourism studies that indicate a correlation between peripheral development and the expansion of opportunities for women, it becomes apparent that creating a conducive policy framework for investigating and addressing these issues is essential.

In many countries experiencing significant development, addressing gender inequality is crucial. Achieving this requires focusing on disparities in opportunities, resources, and capabilities between men and women, and working to reduce the gap in terms of advantages and disadvantages. One of the most important aspects is promoting gender equality in the development goals. Gender issues can play a significant role in various areas, and one such area is the development of tourism. The interrelation between tourism research, peripheral development, and expanding opportunities for women highlights the need for a comprehensive policy framework to investigate and address these issues effectively.

² Speech of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the twentieth plenary session of the Oliy Majlis Senate. June 21, 2019.

Tourism is a field that creates extensive job opportunities for both men and women, positioning itself as one of the largest sectors globally. Empowering women in tourism is considered a crucial component. In the Presidential Decree PF-60, issued by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev, in the "Strategy for the Further Development of Uzbekistan for 2022-2026," specific measures were outlined to support and strengthen women and girls. The decree emphasizes empowering and supporting women and girls, ensuring their active participation in societal life, facilitating their access to education and professional skills, providing comprehensive assistance in finding suitable employment, supporting entrepreneurship, identifying and directing talented young women, and aligning their abilities in the right direction³.

Literary analysis and methods

As a fundamental basis for the action plan, within this report, we will present positive examples of expanding women's opportunities through tourism. This is because gender issues in tourism have been extensively studied and discussed in scholarly literature over the past decade.

As A. Saidov noted, the universality of human rights is one of the important principles in the field of human rights. Complete equality between women and men in all aspects of societal life is considered the fundamental requirement of this principle⁴.

Gender equality envisages a society where both women and men have equal opportunities, outcomes, rights, and responsibilities in all areas of life. Gender equality allows for the possibility of both sexes having equal power and influence in distributing resources; having equal opportunities for financial independence through employment or entrepreneurship; and benefiting equally from education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions. It can be easily stated that tourism serves as a means to provide women with opportunities in various aspects. This is because tourism can enhance women's economic opportunities by increasing control and empowerment over natural resources; it can assist in expanding educational opportunities and political participation.

³ Presidential Decree No. PF-60 dated January 28, 2022, on the "Strategy for the Development of Uzbekistan for 2022-2026."

⁴ Uzbekistan representatives participated in a regional forum dedicated to gender equality issues. "Xalq Sozi" newspaper // March 17, 2021.

The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sh. Mirziyoyev approved Decree No. PF-9, regarding the significant development of foreign tourism and further enhancement of domestic tourism. The proposal to develop large-scale trading complexes (Luxury tourism village) consisting of duty-free shops and major international brands in the "Zomin" tourist-recreational zone, the "Chimyon" international general resort, and the "Amirsay" mountain resort area, has been considered positively. This undoubtedly contributes to the role and activity of women in the socio-political life of the country.

It is known that a significant portion of the workforce in the tourism industry, according to some studies, consists of women, estimated to be around 80% of employees in tourism agencies. What motivates women to choose this challenging, sensitive, and often demanding profession when selecting a profession that is not particularly high-paying?

A crucial aspect of promoting gender equality is expanding women's opportunities, identifying and eliminating power imbalances, and empowering women to have greater autonomy in managing their lives. Enhancing women's opportunities is vital for sustainable development and for realizing human rights for all.

Tourism serves as a genuine means for promoting gender equality and can be instrumental in expanding opportunities for women. The newly proposed measures, as outlined in the PF-60 decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sh. Mirziyoyev focuses on empowering women and girls in various aspects, including supporting their education, and career development, and fostering entrepreneurial activities.

Saida Mirziyoeva, the aide to the President of Uzbekistan, emphasized the importance of ensuring women's full rights and active participation in society, envisioning a society where women live confidently, and independently, and achieve their goals without constraints⁵.

It is known that the majority of workers in the tourism industry, a vital sector of the economy, are associated with the beautiful half of humanity. According to some studies, approximately 80% of employees in travel agencies are women. What motivates women to choose this challenging and often high-stress profession?

⁵ Saida Mirziyoyeva: "Let our women and girls not be objects of violence and oppression." *Gazeta.uz* // <https://www.gazeta.uz/uz/2023/03/08/saida-mirziyoyeva/>

Psychologists have proposed several significant ideas in this regard. Working in the field of tourism, which is associated with the emotional trade, appeals to certain sensitive qualities and intuitions, and it is estimated that women are more suitable for this profession. Additionally, the travel agency's work involves offering tourist products, attracting luck and positive emotions, according to specialists, and aligning with what women naturally excel at. Beyond that, women's inclination to nurture, akin to caring for children, might be a motivator for some women to choose professions in the tourism industry.

Zurab Pololikashvili, the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), emphasizes the importance of the involvement of women and girls in the development of tourism. He underlines that both the state and the private sector should leverage tourism opportunities to achieve financial independence for women, break stereotypes, and empower them to start their businesses⁶.

It is interesting to note that the cultural level of any given society is often reflected in its attitude towards women. Therefore, in Uzbekistan, creating appropriate working conditions, providing legal rights and benefits, and fostering the capabilities and skills of women have become priorities in the state policy, aiming to elevate the status and potential of women⁷.

Research methodology

Certainly, women have the right and competence to participate in tourist activities as a part of societal life. Women are expected to demonstrate significant competence in meeting the demands of the tourism sector in the future because their average life expectancy is generally higher, and they are distinct from men in various aspects. Women continually adapt to new trends in the tourism business, and, therefore, they need to be well-prepared. Hence, proposals that respond to women's needs are being increasingly diversified, such as wellness tourism, resort tourism, fitness tours, business tours, visits to high-fashion centers, purchasing the latest clothing, perfumes, and jewelry, and engaging in elite tourism⁸.

⁶ UN News. Women are conquering the tourism industry - a new study by the World Tourism Organization. November 8, 2019.

⁷ Mirziyoyev Sh. "We are preparing to serve women with sincerity for them to live happily." *Gazeta.uz* // <https://www.gazeta.uz/uz/2017/03/07/8-mart/>

⁸ S. A. Shcherbakova. *Tourism and Recreation // The Role of Women in the Development of International Tourism*. 2006. P.181-184.

Therefore, to maximize development in tourism, it is essential to take action to enhance the capacity and participation of existing resources. Both men and women have equal opportunities to contribute to the development of society as resources. As mentioned above, women play a similar role to men in the tourism sector, in line with current policies.

Analysis and results

In most studies, women's involvement in employment is associated with inequality and discrimination, unequal distribution of privileges, struggle for power, exploitation, and criticism. We aim to combine positive examples of women's tourism experiences to highlight the added value they bring.

In the developing world, there is no region where women enjoy equal legal, social, and economic rights as men. This gender disparity affects access to and management of resources, political voice, economic opportunities, and power dynamics. Consequently, the costs of such inequalities are widespread throughout society and ultimately detrimental to everyone. So, how can tourism help? Tourism serves as one of the many tools that contribute to achieving gender equality. The power of tourism lies in its ability to reduce poverty, increase job opportunities, enhance ecological sustainability, and promote gender equality and women's empowerment, thus contributing to improving lifestyles. In today's world, women and girls are actively pursuing economic independence through tourism opportunities, challenging stereotypes, and utilizing tourism as a means to start their businesses. Their involvement in guesthouse businesses, the promotion of travel products and services, and the encouragement of cultural heritage play a crucial role in ensuring gender equality in our country.

However, the research in this field reveals various nuances regarding the roles of women in tourism. The results indicate that women in tourism often play subordinate roles in organizational structures. They are more commonly involved in regional rivalries, rural agriculture, home-based work, and the production of food, beverages, and souvenirs. In particular, the roles of women and men in tourism show significant differences.

Despite the existence of policies addressing gender equality in tourism, women still often find themselves in precarious positions compared to men. Therefore, this research delves into the analysis of the role of women in tourism.

Beyond that, integrating a gender perspective into tourism discussions is crucial, as the tourism industry is a significant contributor to economic activities and offers various opportunities for independent income generation. Gender and tourism research is vital for several reasons. First, gender relations in tourism are shaped by societal gender norms. Second, gender relations help maintain the dynamism of gender identity in tourism. Third, a gender perspective serves as a means to understand the relationship between tourism and social processes. Ensuring gender equality is paramount for the sustainable development of tourism.

In various studies, women's roles are often confined to domestic and maternal functions, emphasizing their natural and biological responsibilities as homemakers and caretakers. These functions result in women dedicating a significant amount of time and energy, usually being perceived only in terms of necessity, and are not considered economically important.

For instance, women may not hold high-status jobs but are more likely to engage in roles such as cooking, cleaning, and hospitality positions. The nature of work assigned to women often implies lower economic value compared to the tasks traditionally assigned to men. However, research indicates that women's role in tourism politics suggests a greater potential for success in challenging circumstances.

For example, the "Sambhali Trust" organization in Jodhpur, India, recognized by the United Nations, has been creating economic opportunities and educational programs for over ten years for rural Indian women and girls. Over 10,000 individuals have received education in areas such as embroidery, clothing production, entrepreneurship, and general education.

"Ock Pop Tok" is a fair trade social enterprise located in the city of Luang Prabang in Laos, employing more than 150 women in six villages. Founded in the year 2000 by two entrepreneurial women, Veo Liu, a local weaver, and Jo, a photographer, "Ock Pop Tok" is dedicated to ensuring fair employment and creating economic opportunities for ethnic minority women⁹. In many instances, women have close ties with the physical environment of their societies. For example, Maasai women possess specialized knowledge about walking routes, craftsmanship, and beneficial plants, all of which can be related to the development of tourism products and services. In such contexts, it is logical for these women to participate in managing tourism projects.

⁹ Women who strengthen tourism. Electronic resource. <https://www.worldfootprints.com/>

A significant percentage of women with relatively high incomes contribute to improving their relative economic prosperity. In other cases, from the perspective of formal employment, local women are often overlooked when tourism job opportunities are created. Consequently, women often bypass official opportunities in tourism because societal norms continue to limit the types of economic activities in which women can engage.

Their potential for political activism compared to men may be lower, and they may face more obstacles to family well-being. Therefore, expanding women's opportunities can significantly contribute to achieving gender equality.

The potential contributions and roles of women in the tourism sector highlight several advantages, including:

1) The presence of opportunities for women in tourism to contribute to its development and the revitalization of high-income businesses.

2) The potential for women to expand their knowledge about their roles by interacting with other communities, especially women from different countries. Additionally, there are opportunities for women to enhance their participation in various work and income-generating activities, providing them with a broader perspective on different situations.

The results indicate that women play a key role in the quality of sustainable tourism, particularly in their knowledge of cultural values. However, women face challenges due to limited financial resources for education and business operations. These constraints limit their ability to start their businesses and hinder their acquisition of quality education and business management skills. This, in turn, poses additional difficulties for women in male-dominated environments.

It is clear that women's roles in enhancing family income are constrained, and their contributions to society are not fully recognized. While women participate in various sectors, including agriculture, craft making, tourism, and textile work, these contributions are not highly valued by society as a whole.

The study emphasizes the importance of women's involvement in shaping and leading tourism activities, contributing to the sector's success and ensuring a more equitable distribution of benefits. However, challenges, particularly related to the gender-based division of labor, still need to be addressed.

The second aspect is a supervisory function, which ensures justice and equality in making decisions or implementing the results of the revolution. It emphasizes justice and equality for both men and women.

The fourth aspect is the promotion of justice and equality in utilizing the results of development for men and women. This involves highlighting the fair and equitable aspects for both men and women in benefiting from the outcomes of development.

These aspects contribute to the overall progress of our country on a broad scale, including:

- Elevating our country's ranking in the global rankings of gender equality;
- Reducing the unemployment rate between men and women;
- Advancing women's entrepreneurship;
- Minimizing gender disparities;
- Enhancing the role of women and men in tourism, including participation, supervision, and benefits, to ensure gender justice.

By addressing the four aspects and incorporating the elements of admission, participation, supervision, and equitable benefits, the opportunities for women can be expanded. If the aspects of admission, participation, supervision, and fair benefit are integrated, it will promote gender justice.

Summary

The analysis of articles related to the role of women in tourism literature indicates that women occupy a distinct place in tourism.

In conclusion, implementing necessary changes is demanded in all fields, and engaging in proactive actions is essential. The tourism industry stands out as an excellent avenue for women's empowerment due to its rapid growth, flexibility, and dynamic nature. The industry can play a significant role in advancing women's development by creating opportunities and utilizing strategies from other sectors.

Women globally, as tourists, hosts, or employees, contribute extensively to the tourism sector. Women influence travel decisions and actively participate in resolving household expenses related to travel, making 80% of global travel purchase decisions. Their involvement extends beyond leisure, impacting the global economy. Women possess high competency for environmental and sustainable development.

Improving women's conditions through expanding their opportunities in tourism involves enhancing their economic capabilities and ensuring their financial independence. It is crucial to consider and improve women's circumstances, providing them with economic opportunities and evaluating their contributions with fairness and appreciation.

The cultural wisdom states that "The foundation of everything in the world is through women. Just as there is no blooming of flowers without the sun and no happiness without love, there is no existence without women. Neither poets nor heroes are born without them" emphasizes the invaluable role of women, and their importance should not be overlooked¹⁰. Analyzing literary works related to women's roles in tourism indicates that women hold a distinctive place in the industry.

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