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**Report on the Consultations**

# **Women of the Ferghana Valley for Peace**

Foundation for Tolerance International

Istiqbolli Avlod

Uzbekistan - 2024

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## About the Report

This report has been prepared by the Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI) in partnership with the non-governmental non-profit organisation “Istiqbolli Avlod” within the “Women of the Ferghana Valley Contribute to Conflict Resolution” Project. The project is implemented with financial support from the Rapid Response Window of the United Nations Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund and support of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict.

The project is a partnership initiative of civil society organisations from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan aimed at enhancing women’s participation in peace processes. For this purpose, national consultations were held in each of the three countries with women living in the border communities of the Ferghana Valley, government and civil society representatives (field consultations in Tajikistan were led by the Association of Scientific and Technical Intellectuals, and in Kyrgyzstan by Foundation for Tolerance International). The consultations were intended to formulate recommendations on women’s involvement, taking into account existing opportunities, gaps, and challenges.

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, the field consultations were conducted by the Istiqbolli Avlod team under the leadership of the analyst Ms. Asel Murzakulova. The team is grateful to Ms. Murzakulova, partners, and all field researchers for their contribution to peacebuilding.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

This overview summarises the findings of the consultations on women's participation in peacebuilding in the border communities of Uzbekistan. Key aspects are outlined next.

1. **There have been positive changes in the political dialogue between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.** The consultations' participants expressed a unanimous opinion that political dialogue with neighbouring countries has been restored since 2016. They emphasised the increased sense of security following the normalisation of relations and expressed positive attitudes towards the government's efforts to facilitate mobility and interaction across borders. As the government continues to improve relations with the neighbouring countries at both national and local levels, it will be critical to ensure that women and their perspectives are meaningfully included.
2. **Some efforts to improve gender equality have been undertaken, but many obstacles to women's participation remain.** The government has taken significant efforts to advance gender equality, including the introduction of women's quotas in government agencies and educational quotas for women and girls. However, the data indicate that there are differences in perceptions of these measures inside communities, especially in relation to gender socialisation. Importantly, participants noted that **young women are less likely than older women to participate in public life.** Main barriers pointed out by the participants included
  - a. **Limited mobility** due to social reproductive and care responsibilities, as well as patriarchal norms that sometimes require women to seek permission of their husband, brother, or father to travel outside of the home.
  - b. **Insufficient social infrastructure**, including childcare facilities, aggravating women's domestic labour burden.
  - c. **Gender stereotypes and the patriarchal gender order**, which are reflected in both how women are perceived by others and how they perceive themselves, and which sometimes stop women from pursuing opportunities. However, the research shows that perceptions have begun to change and people increasingly recognise women's positive roles, including in peacebuilding.
3. **Women, including those living in border areas, face different forms of violence, including domestic violence, which is widespread.** Despite recent legislation that criminalised domestic violence, it is still a problem faced by many families.
4. **Men's labour migration puts additional strain on women:** not only does it increase the burden of household work and responsibility, but sometimes also results in greater control over women by local authorities.
5. **Local authorities play an important role in addressing the impacts of violence in the border communities.** Participants emphasise the important role of local authorities in addressing the problems of cross-border communities at the local and regional levels. Local authorities actively help to address specific problems such as access to water, support for poor families, and employment.
6. **Women in Uzbekistan have extensive experience in peacebuilding, which is important to incorporate into development and peacebuilding programmes and strategies at**

**various levels.** The data analysis shows that initiatives aimed at changing women's gender socialisation can play an important role in preventing conflict at the local level.

## Recommendations

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the Uzbek government, local authorities, and international partners and donors

1. Continue to **promote women's participation in public life at both national and local levels**, including the efforts to promote dialogue and cooperation with the neighbouring countries. This could include further strengthening support for women's political candidates, organising awareness-raising campaigns to encourage women's participation, and publicising success stories of women leaders to shift gender stereotypes about women's roles in society. Dedicated support programmes should in particular be created for **young women to encourage different generations' participation in self-governance.**
2. Invest in **strengthening the social infrastructure of villages** through revitalising and creating new kindergartens, leisure centres for teenagers, and training centres for youth.
3. Continue to raise awareness and **invest in programmes to prevent and respond to domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, including by increasing their economic independence.** Specific programmes to support wives of labour migrants, including through economic and psychosocial support, should also be created.

## Introduction

### Relevance of the Consultations

A study by the University of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies of 182 peace agreements signed between 1989 and 2011 demonstrated that there is a 35% increase in the likelihood that a peace agreement will last for 15 or more years when women are involved in peace processes.<sup>1</sup> Other studies have also shown that women’s participation increases the likelihood both of an agreement being reached<sup>2</sup> and of it lasting longer.<sup>3</sup> Evidence also shows that when women participate in peace processes, the resulting agreements are more likely to address issues related to gender equality, including important provisions related to economic development, education, and justice during transition.<sup>4</sup> Consultations have also pointed to clear links between overall state of gender equality and women’s rights in the country and the society’s resilience to conflict and violence.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the security of society depends on women’s ability to take leadership roles in peacekeeping and active participation in security issues.<sup>6</sup>

Despite our best efforts, we haven’t found any systematic analysis of the participation of women from border areas in peace and post-conflict recovery processes in Central Asia, and this report aims to fill this gap. The report is based on a series of consultations, which investigated women’s participation in three aspects of peace processes: (1) formal processes within or between countries that aim to establish peace and development in the countries of the Ferghana Valley, (2) processes or intermediary structures that link adopted agreements with local needs, (3) all forms of social cohesion that enable communities to be resilient to different forms of tension and potential conflicts. The purpose of the consultations was to understand the entry points for building an inclusive environment for women from border communities that will help them bring their concerns and vision of solutions to peace processes and decision-making at all levels of government.

### Goal of the Consultations

The main objective of the consultations was to identify, describe, and analyse existing practices, opportunities, gaps, and challenges in women’s participation in peace processes in the Ferghana Valley.

The consultations took place from September–November 2023.

<sup>1</sup> Marie O’Reilly, Andrea O’Sullebain, and Thania Paffenholz, “Reimagining Peacemaking: Women’s Roles in Peace Processes,” International Peace Institute, June 2015, <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IPI-E-pub-Reimagining-Peacemaking.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Thania Paffenholz et al., “Making Women Count – Not Just Counting Women: Assessing Women’s Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations,” UN Women, April 2016, [https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/making\\_women\\_count-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5712](https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/making_women_count-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5712)

<sup>3</sup> Jana Krause, Werner Krause, and Pii Bränfors, “Women’s Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace,” *International Interactions* 44, no. 6 (November 2018): 985–1016. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2018.1492386>

<sup>4</sup> Jacqui True and Yolanda Riveros-Morales, “Towards Inclusive Peace: Analysing Gender-Sensitive Peace Agreements 2000–2016,” *International Political Science Review* 40, no. 1 (January 2019): 23–40, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512118808608>; Jillian Abballe et al., “Gender-Sensitive Provisions in Peace Agreements and Women’s Political and Economic Inclusion Post-Conflict,” Global Network of Women Peacebuilders and New York University Center for Global Affairs, May 2020, <http://gnwp.org/nyu-research-2020/>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. M. Caprioli, “Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict,” *International Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2005): 161–178, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0020-8833.2005.00340.x>; Theodora-Ismene Gizelis, “Gender Empowerment and United Nations Peacebuilding,” *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 4 (2009): 505–523. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343309334576>

<sup>6</sup> In this report, security is broadly defined as the state of being protected from impacts that could cause harm to individuals and society. This definition includes economic, social, informational, environmental, and physical security.

## Methodology

Formal processes focused on resolving peace issues in border communities of the Ferghana Valley are inherently masculinised and elitist. They exclusively involve government representatives, and many documents regarding these processes are not publicly available. This is consistent with broader regional and global trends, where women tend to be excluded and marginalised, despite their contributions to peacebuilding within their communities.<sup>7</sup> While it is critical to maintain advocacy for women’s inclusion in formal negotiation spaces, it is equally important to recognise, and make visible, their contributions through informal peace processes, often at the grassroots level.<sup>8</sup> In this regard, the consultations were not intended to assess any governmental efforts or to monitor the development of intergovernmental dynamics in the region. Instead, the consultations focused on local gender dynamics in the context of peacebuilding, documenting both tensions and prospects for development. For this, we used a mixed-method approach that includes review of available publications, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. During the consultations, we adhered to the following ethical rules and do no harm principle:

- Participation in the consultations was voluntary.
- Participants of the consultations were guaranteed anonymity.
- Data collected as a result of the consultations were encrypted and access to them was restricted.

### The consultation questions were:

1. What is the current status of women’s participation in building peace and stability in the border communities of the Ferghana Valley?
2. What problems and needs do women have in order to fully utilise their capacities in building peace and stability in the border communities of the Ferghana Valley?
3. What opportunities exist to support women in their pursuit of peace and development?

Over 302 residents of border communities in the Ferghana, Andijan, and Namangan provinces participated in the field surveys. We used two methods for the consultations: the first method involved conducting 30 focus group discussions with residents and representatives of local self-government bodies of border villages; the second stage involved interviewing 40 people. Our sample included experts, local self-government officials, and local leaders. The data obtained through the in-depth interviews helped us to deepen our analysis and cross-check the data obtained through the focus group discussion method.

Following are breakdowns of respondents by gender (Figure 1) and age (Figure 2).

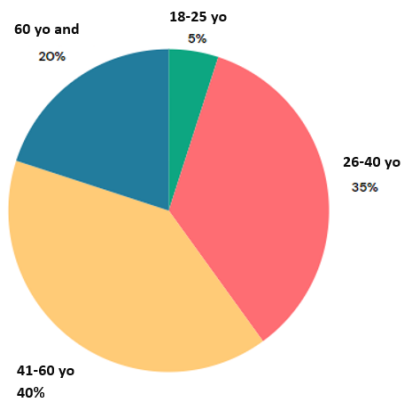
<sup>7</sup> Agnieszka Fal-Dutra Santos, “Towards Gender-Equal Peace: From ‘Counting Women’ to Meaningful Participation | HD Centre,” Oslo Forum, December 2021, <https://www.hdcentre.org/publications/towards-gender-equal-peace-from-counting-women-to-meaningful-participation/>

<sup>8</sup> Agnieszka Fal-Dutra Santos, “Building Trust through Care: A Feminist Take on Inclusion in Multi-Track Mediation,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* (2024): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2024.2326623>

**Figure 1. Breakdown of respondents by gender**



**Figure 2. Breakdown of respondents by age**





## Context: Security Dynamics of Border Areas in the Ferghana Valley

During the period from 1991 to 2023, border areas of the Ferghana Valley underwent significant changes in terms of security, which had a significant impact on local communities. In the Ferghana Valley, Uzbekistan borders Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Our analysis reveals the dynamics of de-escalation of tensions in border communities due to the opening of borders and the formation of new impulses for cooperation and peacebuilding in the Ferghana Valley after 2016.

Uzbekistan has been in negotiation over the border demarcation with the two neighbouring countries since the 2000s. The dynamics of these negotiations have varied and included both stages of successful agreement on certain parts of the territories and periods of protracted conflicts and freezing of cooperation. During the period of escalation between 1999 and 2016, residents of the border areas experienced difficulties in transit across the borders, as a visa regime was introduced between the countries of the region, which required an invitation and an exit visa to cross the border. These processes had a negative impact on people's mobility and led to the deterioration of social ties in the region. The dynamics of escalating tensions at the borders were particularly hard on women who had family ties on different sides of the borders in the Ferghana Valley. In Uzbek society women traditionally carry greater responsibility for maintaining family ties, which made the mobility restrictions impact them disproportionately.

In addition to these challenges, women's mobility was also limited by institutional frameworks. For example, until 2017, women had to obtain an OVIR sticker (equivalent to an exit visa) to travel, which was only given with the permission of their parents or husband.<sup>9</sup>

*"It used to be difficult, families from both sides practically did not communicate face-to-face, daughters-in-law from neighbouring countries travelled with passports of stateless persons, there were even cases when they gave money to people who helped them cross the border". – A group of women of different ages, Ferghana Province.*

During the most acute phase of escalating border tensions, Uzbekistan placed mines along its border areas. Anti-personnel mines on the borders with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were planted in 2000–2001 following the attempts of militants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan – an armed group that took part in fighting in Afghanistan and the civil war in Tajikistan – to enter Uzbekistan through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. According to unofficial data, more than 150 people in Uzbekistan itself have been killed or injured by mine explosions.<sup>10</sup> During this period, there was a significant deterioration of the situation in the border areas with neighbouring countries. Kyrgyzstan, due to the militarisation of the borders in the Ferghana Valley, made transit and movement across its borders more difficult for the residents of the Sokh enclave. During the deterioration of the situation, the enclave population was not able to access mainland Uzbekistan and thus experienced problems with

<sup>9</sup> Darina Solod, "A Woman, Not a Person? How Gender Equality Issues Are Changing in Uzbekistan," June 2019,

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/ru/uzbekistan-gender-inequality-violence/>

<sup>10</sup> We have not found official data about the number of people injured by landmines, so in the report we refer to the data published in the media; for more details please see: Nigmatullo Mirsaidov, "Official Sources: Uzbekistan Has Completed Demining of Its Border with Tajikistan," February 2020, [https://central.asia-news.com/ru/articles/cnmi\\_ca/features/2020/02/04/feature-02](https://central.asia-news.com/ru/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2020/02/04/feature-02)

access to food, medicines, and the economic and labour markets.<sup>11</sup> For many women in border villages, the deterioration of relations between countries and the securitisation of borders have had a negative impact on their ability to maintain social and family ties, and there have been cases where women have been forced to find illegal ways to cross the border due to the tightened border regime and the introduction of exit visas.

De-escalation of the situation on the borders started in 2016. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev ordered the opening of the country's borders and started implementing a policy of openness, economic development, and cooperation with neighbouring countries. The country's leadership has proclaimed a political course towards regionalisation. In this context, the process of negotiations on border delimitation and demarcation has been resumed. An agreement between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on the remaining sections of the Uzbek–Tajik border was signed on 9–10 March 2018 during the state visit of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Dushanbe.<sup>12</sup> In 2020, Uzbekistan fully de-mined the border areas with Tajikistan,<sup>13</sup> and by 2023 Uzbekistan and Tajikistan completed delimitation and demarcation of more than 95% of the common border.<sup>14</sup> The border areas with Kyrgyzstan were de-mined in 2006.<sup>15</sup> After a series of negotiations with Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan signed a final border agreement with Kyrgyzstan in 2023.<sup>16</sup>

All of the consultations' participants positively assessed the efforts of the governments and the opening of borders in the Ferghana Valley:

*“In the past, the borders with Tajikistan were closed, and in order to cross the border, we had to go to the embassy. Now there is no such thing, we cross the border freely in both directions, and people come from there too. Free movement across borders gives a sense of freedom and security”. – Woman, 40–60 age group, Ferghana Province.*

*“After the borders were opened, we saw only positive changes. Many people study in neighbouring countries, trade is developing, we grow fruit, and get potatoes and apples from our neighbours”. – Woman, self-employed, 40 years old, Namangan Province.*

*“Very big changes have happened! Now a lot of business opportunities have opened up, those who can, bring goods from other countries. It was not like this before. The most important thing is that we live in peace, everyone is occupied with what they can do, there are almost no barriers. People go abroad to study, rest, or work without any problems. Equal conditions have been created for people”.*

<sup>11</sup> According to the consultations in Sokh.

<sup>12</sup> Payrav Chorshabiev, “How Uzbekistan and Tajikistan Became Friends,” Asia-Plus, August 2022, <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/politics/20220818/kak-uzbekistan-s-tadzhikistanom-podruzhilis>

<sup>13</sup> “Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy.” Accessed: <https://www.uzbekistan.org.ua/ru/yangiliklar/5367-vneshnyaya-politika.html>

<sup>14</sup> Sputnik, “Tajikistan and Uzbekistan Have Signed a Protocol on the Border: Details,” October 2022, <https://tj.sputniknews.ru/20221022/tajikistan-uzbekistan-protokol-granitsa-podrobnosti-1052360667.html>

<sup>15</sup> Azamat Tynayev, “Uzbek Sappers Will Start Demining of Mined Areas on the Border with Kyrgyzstan,” 24.kg, April 2006, <https://24.kg/archive/ru/community/1252-2006/04/27/1376.html/>

<sup>16</sup> President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, “The President of Uzbekistan Signed Laws Concerning the Border with Kyrgyzstan and the Andijan Reservoir, November 2022, <https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/5745>; Gazeta News, “Kyrgyz Parliament Ratifies Border Documents with Uzbekistan,” November 2022, <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2022/11/17/kg/>

– **Woman, 42 years old, Ferghana Province.**

*“There have been big changes in my personal life. My mother lives in Kyrgyzstan. In the past, in order to go there, we had to show a telegram. In order to send this telegram, money was spent, there were inconsistencies. For example, if some letters were different from the ones in the original document, then there were problems. There were times when we could not meet our brothers or relatives. Every time there was a thorough inspection. Even handkerchiefs were checked. But now, the situation has changed. With the efforts of our president, the borders have been opened. We used to cross the borders with foreign passports, and now we cross the border with our national ID cards. Border guards have also become more polite. There have even been cases when soldiers helped carry heavy luggage”. – Woman, 48 years old, Ferghana Province.*

Thus, the security dynamics on the borders of the Ferghana Valley at the time of the consultations described in this report were characterised by de-escalation of previous tensions, a new spirit of cooperation, and a focus on regionalisation. The process of restoring trust and strengthening ties has changed the space of opportunities for border communities. At the highest political level, they started to be seen as an important element in strengthening bilateral ties and building peace. In one of his speeches, Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted: “I have instructed the heads of all districts and cities of Uzbekistan bordering Tajikistan to establish effective cooperation with border cities and districts of Tajikistan; thus we will ensure cooperation at the level of presidents, governments, provinces, cities and districts”.<sup>17</sup>

In parallel, during the same period from 2016 to 2020, the Councils of Khokims of border provinces of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Plenipotentiary Representatives of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic in border provinces were established jointly with Kyrgyzstan.<sup>18</sup> Establishment of this level of cooperation helps to resolve tasks more effectively and quickly at the local level related to economic issues of cross-border cooperation, while issues of political level are discussed and resolved at the level of intergovernmental commission between the countries.<sup>19</sup>

The ongoing changes aimed at strengthening intergovernmental cooperation in the Ferghana Valley have directly affected the lives of women in the border regions. Many women from neighbouring countries who were married in Uzbekistan could not settle their civil status for a long time and were stateless. The strengthening of inter-state relations has had a positive impact on resolving their legal status and allowed them to obtain Uzbek citizenship.

<sup>17</sup> Radio Ozodi, “Tajikistan and Uzbekistan Signed an Agreement on Transit of Goods and Simplified Mutual Travel of Citizens,” June 2021, <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/31300657.html>

<sup>18</sup> “Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on the Establishment of the Council of Khokims of Border Provinces of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Plenipotentiary Representatives of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic in Border Provinces,” Lex.uz, June 2017, <https://lex.uz/docs/4091814>; Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic, “Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the Council of Plenipotentiary Representatives of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and Khokims of the Border Provinces of RUZ Signed,” April 2022, <https://www.gov.kg/ru/post/s/21137-kr-prezidentinin-ygarym-ukuktuu-kldrn-zhana-ozbekstan-respublikasynyn-chektesh-oblustarynyn-akimderinin-keeshinin-trtnch-zhyvynynyn-protokoluna-kol-koyuldu>

<sup>19</sup> “Chairperson of the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan A. Zhaparov Held a Meeting with the Prime Minister of Uzbekistan A. Aripov,” Commonwealth of Integrations, April 2023, <https://e-cis.info/news/568/108709/>

*“There are women in our makhalla [community] who have passports of stateless persons. From the conversations with them I have learned that in those times, when the border was closed, they suffered a lot from the fact that they could not pass through the border, often they hid in ditches, ran away from the border guards. But now they are all happy, they all say that it has become very easy, freer. People’s trust in the government has been strengthened. The feeling that we are not indifferent to the government has strengthened. Recently several people have received citizenship of Uzbekistan, and they were very happy, even crying”. – Woman, 43 years old, Ferghana Province.*

### Opportunities and challenges for women’s participation in public life in Uzbekistan

Women’s contribution to peacebuilding and development is embedded in the gender order, which defines the role of women in the family, society, and the state as a whole. Previously, studies have stated that the gender order in Uzbekistan is characterised by patriarchal norms.<sup>20</sup> For example, a national survey conducted in 2022 by the United Nations Development Programme with the support of the Oliy Majlis among more than 2,000 respondents confirmed that the strongest gender stereotypes are related to the perception of the role of men as leaders, as owners of property and land, and as primary breadwinners.<sup>21</sup> The majority of surveyed respondents supported the view that men should make the most important family and managerial decisions.<sup>22</sup> At the national level, existing gender stereotypes produce a gender gap – women’s participation in the public and economic life of the country is less compared to that of men. In economic terms, the stereotypes lead to women dropping out of the formal labour force, which negatively affects the economic and social development of the country as a whole.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to note that gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Taking into account the need to support women, the country has launched large-scale reforms aimed at the protection and development of women’s rights and the large-scale involvement of women in the social, economic, and political development of the country. Under the National Sustainable Development Goals and targets for the period until 2030, the state has identified ‘ensuring gender equality and the empowerment of all women’ as one of its priority goals. At the same time, a national programme was adopted to increase women’s activity in all spheres of economic, political, and social life in 2022–2026. The laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the protection of women against violence” and “On guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for women and men” and the resolution of the Oliy Majlis Senate “On the approval of the Gender Equality Strategy for the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030” were also adopted. The national programme considers women’s rights to be an integral part of human rights and is a set of measures for comprehensive support of women, based on the principle of ‘human dignity’.

<sup>20</sup> For details please see the nationwide sociological assessment “Negative Impact of Gender Stereotypes and Patriarchal Attitudes on Gender Equality in Uzbekistan,” UNDP, Tashkent, March 2023, <https://www.undp.org/uzbekistan/publications/negative-impact-gender-stereotypes-and-patriarchal-attitudes-gender-equality-uzbekistan>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> For more details please see UN Women, “Uzbekistan,” <https://data.unwomen.org/country/uzbekistan>

In addition to the adoption of different laws and policies, a national commission on enhancing the role of girls in society, gender equality, and the family has been established. The Academy of Public Administration runs courses to train women leaders and trains at least 100 women each year. A decree has been adopted requiring the state executive authorities, ministries, and departments to increase the proportion of women among the system's employees by at least 30% and to appoint at least one deputy head from among women to all state bodies and organisations with a state share of 50% or more in the authorised capital. The state also provides support for women running their own private businesses (entrepreneurs): women's business projects are financed, and preferential loans are also provided.

Women's participation in public offices is important, as it is often a critical avenue for them to contribute to peacebuilding efforts and to address other problems of their communities. The participants often and without prompting referred to and provided examples of local government representatives helping them to solve specific problems with access to water, support for low-income families, employment, and the purchase of equipment serving as a source of income for women.

Throughout our consultations, we have found that women officers responsible for implementing government policies in the field have positively evaluated the government's gender policy and see the following five main challenges in its implementation.

1. **Low activity of women in solving socially significant problems is closely intertwined with women's age.** Young married women with small children are often less mobile outside of their families compared to older women.

*"There are such young women, who may be influenced by their husbands' decision and their unwillingness to see their wives as leaders. Many young married women want to work, but their husbands or mothers-in-law do not allow them". – Woman, age group 40–60, Ferghana Province.*

2. **Insufficient social infrastructure in some regions.** Absence of kindergartens or clubs for children's education also affects young mothers' reduced mobility outside their homes and lower participation in public life.

*"We don't have a kindergarten in our village, we don't know where to send our child. I take my two-year-old child to the neighbouring village, I get up early to get to work by eight o'clock". – Woman, 37 years old, Ferghana Province.*

*"Our women have such a characteristic: they lack confidence. I have also been invited to various positions a lot, and frankly speaking, I was afraid too. First of all, uncertainty and responsibility to the family. My children were small then. I had to pay a lot of attention to their upbringing". – Woman, 52 years old, Ferghana Province.*

*“A woman in the prime of life, still young, gives birth to two or three children in a row, takes care of their upbringing, mostly she devotes all her time to it”. – **Woman, 60 years old, Andijan Province.***

- 3. Gender stereotypes persist despite the normative progress on women’s inclusion** and can act as a barrier to women’s meaningful participation.

*“Most of our women have husbands who don’t allow them to work as employees. A simple example, if a woman has to go to a night shift, her husband does not allow her to work at night”. – **Woman, entrepreneur, 40 years old, Ferghana Province.***

*“Sometimes it happens that people ask for advice, call for advice at off-hours, my husband protests, I have to explain to him that this is the specifics of my work, that people need help, they can call at any time and I have to help them”. – **Woman, health worker, 50 years old, Ferghana Province.***

*“My opinion is that women are not very good leaders. Why? At home a man is a leader, and in other matters a man should lead. I myself will not go to a woman leader, but I will go to a man leader. Why? Because a man will fulfil what he has promised, and a woman will listen, say okay, and that’s it. I have received so few positive decisions from turning to a woman leader, so it is better to turn to a man right away. Or we women tend to respect fathers more when we are young, we listen to their opinion, and then this role goes to our husbands.” – **Woman, self-employed, 47 years old, Ferghana Province.***

- 4. Gender norms are also translated into women’s gender socialisation, which remains an important constraint to the implementation of adopted political direction towards gender equality.** Women’s gender socialisation refers to the process by which children learn about the social expectations, attitudes, and behaviours typically associated with boys and girls. Often because of their gender socialisation, women themselves further perpetuate the gender stereotypes that contribute to barriers to their participation in public life.

*“In the family, Father is the first priority, ‘What will Father say’, ‘How will Father look at it’, ‘Your Father would do this’, or ‘would not do this’, and Father is also the first to start eating, and I think men should solve the issues”. – **Woman, 48 years old, Andijan Province.***

*“I grew up in such a family where everything was solved by my father, including financial support, supplies, everything, and nobody else held money in our hands”. – **Woman, 51 years old, Namangan Province.***

*“A woman in the family is the keeper of the hearth. The roles of a man and a woman are divided in the family. Men do hard work, women keep cosiness, help them. Women’s help is in supporting men. Women by nature are weaker than men, so the resolution of difficult issues is*

*a man's work. If a woman is a leader and her duties require it, then she will have to do it". –  
**Woman, 57 years old, Ferghana Province.***

- 5. Religious norms may also influence women's activism and activity outside of the home,** although these were indicated only by a small proportion of respondents.

*"Our mentality in Islam is such that women are one level below men. Because of this, women do not rise to leadership. If a woman becomes a leader, her husband will drive her away. When I go to the city on business, my husband tells me not to sit in the front seat in the car, he repeats it every time. If I sit in the front seat, will something change because of it? Or if I drive myself, I will make my life easier. I can't explain it to him in any way. It is difficult to explain one's vision to one person, it is not easy to change their thinking, and it is even more difficult to change the whole society". –  
**Woman, 32 years old, Ferghana Province.***

## Key Findings

### Women's Safety and the Problem of Domestic Violence

Women's insecurity in Uzbekistan – as in most places – occurs along a continuum, meaning that women experience insecurity linked not only to the border tensions, closures, and related displacement, but also face other forms of violence, including in their home. Domestic violence emerged as an important issue for women in the consultations. As a major source of insecurity for the women living in Uzbekistan, including in Ferghana Province, it can be viewed as a potential barrier to women's full participation in public life, including peacebuilding processes.

On 6 April 2023, the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan approved a law on strengthening the protection of women and children from violence.<sup>24</sup> The law criminalises domestic violence. It establishes liability for sexual violence and harassment of women. The Senate Chairperson Tanzila Narbayeva, speaking at the plenary session of the upper house of the Parliament, called the adopted law long-awaited and progressive and noted the difficulties on the way to its adoption. She also emphasised the importance of the law, noting that 'in 2021–2022, 72,000 cases of violence against women and girls were reported, out of which 85% of them occurred in families'.<sup>25</sup>

The consultations conducted in the border areas have shown that the majority of women are aware of the adopted law. The interviewed women from different social positions noted the timeliness and high importance of the adopted law. In the data collected, women noted that family violence affects their overall sense of security, as its negative and destructive impact is transferred to children:

*"It is hard for a woman to cope with family violence, lack of support or violence from a close person seriously affects her psyche, she will take it out on her child, she will be angry, fight or withdraw, there can be bad consequences". – Woman, health worker, 35 years old, Ferghana Province.*

At the same time, the consultations' participants agreed that, despite the adoption of the law and great attention to this problem at all levels of government, traditionally the first people a woman can turn to and confide her problems to is her family and close women friends, so it is important to work with all groups of women in society.

*"Our women, as a rule, do not take their problems outside. We usually turn to our mothers or relatives. Sometimes when we turn to our mother with our problem, she will say 'Be patient, it will pass'. This is our mentality". – Woman, health worker, woman, 50 years old, Ferghana Province.*

### Mapping Women's Problems

During the consultations, we asked questions aimed at measuring women's problems in the border areas. As the collected data show, the most acute problems of women are financial difficulties and lack of formal income sources.

<sup>24</sup> The Uzbekistan Senate has approved a law to protect children and women from violence. For details please see Gazeta News, "Uzbek Senate Approves Law on Protection of Women and Children from Violence," April 2023, <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2023/04/06/stop-violence/>

<sup>25</sup> Gazeta News, "Tanzila Narbayeva: The Law on the Protection of Children and Women from Violence Is Progressive and Meets International Standards," April 2023, <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2023/04/07/tanzila-narbayeva/>



*“Lack of money is one of the causes of family disputes. If a husband does not work, his wife has to do different work. Women become more susceptible to stress, become depressed. For example, if she sees that her neighbour’s children are well dressed, well cared for, well fed, she gets embarrassed, she also wants good conditions for her children”. – **Woman, age group 40–60, Ferghana Province.***

*“Unemployed women do not go to the khokim [head of province] or anyone else with requests for employment. They are all in the field. Now there is no work, but from March next year the work will start again”. – **Woman, self-employed, 46 years old, Ferghana Province.***

*“Lack of money negatively affects women’s behaviour. It makes them do all kinds of things, become angry, and very vulnerable. Women who do not receive support will also not help anyone themselves, and this also affects the upbringing of children”. – **Woman, 37 years old, Andijan Province.***

Labour migration is known to be a common source of income in rural areas of Uzbekistan. Men’s labour migration has many negative impacts on the remaining family members. During the consultations, women participants expressed concern about child-rearing problems and difficulties with children during adolescence. The participants noted that children of migrant workers may have poorer school performance. Despite the widespread government assistance to low-income families noted by participants during the consultations, the one-time nature of the assistance provided to low-income women as well as prolonged delays in receiving this assistance in some cases remain major problems. This is the case even for women included in the so-called “women’s book” – an electronic database on unemployed women above 30 years old who are in need of socioeconomic support maintained by local authorities.

*“In my opinion, each family has to be considered individually. The main problems arise due to lack of money. Makhalla committees, women’s councils should consider and study each case. Some families have husbands in migration and their wives are engaged in daily work, the upbringing of their children should also be under special control. For example, there are such children who come to school untidy, we talk to their mothers, they say ‘What can we do’, their husbands are in migration, they submit documents for financial aid, but it takes a long time to consider them, while some people get it quickly. If a child gets sick, it also affects his/her academic performance. We should pay more attention to this issue. So that everyone is treated fairly”. – **Woman, health worker, 51 years old, Andijan Province.***

Alongside this, the participants noted an increase in public control over migrant wives, which can negatively affect their sense of safety in public spaces:

*“When husbands are in migration, wives become kind of under surveillance, sometimes there are rumours about them, it is difficult for women in this respect”. – **Woman, self-employed, 28 years old, Ferghana Province.***

Participants also noted that the economic situation of many families is made even more precarious because of the increasing costs of traditional ceremonies:

*“Right now, I think there is enough attention paid to addressing women’s issues. In my opinion, more attention should be paid to unreasonable expenses during weddings. Brides’ parents bear a lot of expenses, gifts for a groom after the wedding are also unnecessary. For this purpose, parents of newlyweds should talk in advance about limiting unnecessary expenses, so that there will be no misunderstandings later”.* – **Woman, 48 years old, Ferghana Province.**

## Women and Peacebuilding

During the consultations, we invited participants to discuss the role of women in building peace at the levels of the family, the local community in their neighbourhood, society, and the state as a whole. Following are extracts from the consultations’ participants’ opinions, which demonstrate that women see their position in resolving conflict situations within the framework of existing cultural norms and gender subordinations:

*“Women should solve conflict situations patiently, politely. Men should be treated very respectfully, this is the only way to solve conflicts”.* – **Woman, 42 years old, Ferghana Province.**

*“The woman’s role in a family is very important in everything. It should be the same in other matters too. For example, in the family, a woman still has her voice, which is heard at least to some extent. A woman’s opinion determines whether the issue will be solved positively or negatively”.* – **Woman, 48 years old, Ferghana Province.**

It is important to note that the consultations confirmed the adoption of the chosen course of increasing the role of women in the public space. In confirmation, the participants of the discussions shared examples from their practice, reflecting the changes in the perception of women’s role as decision-makers:

*“We have such women who stand up for their interests together with men. There have even been cases when those problems that were not solved by men were solved by women. For example, we did not have drinking water, [so] we drilled a well for water. This happened thanks to the efforts of one woman who applied to the khokim, obtained funds, and supervised the drilling process herself. Then, thanks to the efforts of the same woman, the road in our makhalla has been paved with asphalt”.* – **Woman, age group 40–60, Ferghana Province.**

*“I think there should be women leaders. Nowadays, this is from my personal observations, some women lead better than men. Some women entrepreneurs are better to deal with than men. They solve issues more easily”.* – **Woman, 43 years old, Ferghana Province.**

At the same time, the consultations’ participants noted women’s agency, which can manifest itself in everyday routine and outside of leadership positions. Participants in the consultations highlighted

many examples of women in their communities who are making important and significant contributions to building peaceful and harmonious societies. This lens allows us not to minimise the role of women within patriarchal gender norms, but to highlight the nuanced understanding in the everyday positioning of women as actors in building a peaceful and developed society.

*“A teacher, by educating students, prepares them for a life in a society. Nowadays it is not necessary for women to drive a tractor. It is good to educate children, to prepare them for life, and to think freely in a society. Someone has to educate them, if we fulfil this task, we will accomplish a big thing”. –*  
**Woman, 35 years old, Ferghana Province.**

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## Conclusion

As the consultations have shown, the current state of women's participation in peacebuilding in the border communities of Uzbekistan demonstrates the dynamics of progressive development, regionalisation, and restoration of good-neighbourliness.

It is important to note that the consultations' participants were unanimous in their positive assessments of the resumption of political dialogue with neighbouring countries after 2016. The participants noted that their feelings of security when crossing borders considerably increased after the normalisation of relations between the countries. They positively assessed the government's efforts to establish and facilitate mobility of people, trade, and any form of interaction across borders.

The state has made extensive efforts to enhance gender equality in the country. In particular, women's quotas have been introduced for women's representation and participation in all government bodies. There are special educational quotas for women and girls, which allow them to receive education or improve their qualifications at the expense of the government. However, as our data indicate, the success of these measures within communities is seen differently. On the one hand, some participants noted that actions taken by the government have significantly improved women's representation in decision-making institutions. On the other hand, others noted that these actions do not affect the process of women's gender socialisation, which continues to promote patriarchal values.

The consultations' participants noted the important role of local state authorities in communicating and addressing the problems of cross-border communities at both local and regional levels.

The data collected and analysed during the consultations indicate that initiatives aimed at changes in women's gender socialisation can be an important element in local conflict prevention strategies and in achieving the government's goals of gender equality in the country. Women in Uzbekistan have the potential to significantly contribute to peacebuilding in the country and it is important that this is heard and integrated into development strategies at local and national levels.