

SOCIAL MOBILITY AND EDUCATIONAL REFORMS: THE EXPERIENCE OF UZBEKISTAN KARIMOVA

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In the 21st century, social mobility has become one of the key indicators of social progress and stability. Social mobility is understood as the upward or downward movement of individuals or groups within the social hierarchy. Among the major drivers of social mobility, the education system holds a central place, as it provides opportunities for personal development, equal access to knowledge, and professional growth. In Uzbekistan, the past decades have witnessed large-scale educational reforms aimed at strengthening social justice, expanding equal opportunities, and building a knowledge-based economy.

The concept of social mobility was introduced by the sociologist Pitirim Sorokin, who distinguished between vertical mobility (movement up or down the social ladder) and horizontal mobility (movement within the same social stratum). Education is considered a vital “social elevator,” enabling individuals to improve their socio-economic status regardless of their initial background. In modern societies, educational reforms are strongly linked to the creation of merit-based systems where talent and knowledge become the primary factors of success.

Since independence, Uzbekistan has prioritized education as a strategic sector for sustainable development and social equality. Recent reforms under the “New Uzbekistan” Development Strategy have accelerated modernization across all levels of the education system.

- **Preschool Education:** The coverage of preschool institutions has significantly expanded. While only 27% of children had access to preschool education in 2017, by 2024 this figure reached nearly 70%, ensuring equal starting opportunities for children.
- **General Secondary and Vocational Education:** New curricula focusing on competencies, foreign languages, and digital literacy have been introduced. Vocational schools and academic lyceums are being reformed to prepare young people for labor market demands.
- **Higher Education:** The number of universities has more than doubled in the last five years, including branches of foreign universities. Admission quotas and state-funded scholarships have expanded, increasing access to higher education. The share of female students has risen significantly, contributing to gender equality in education.
- **Digital Education:** Online and distance learning platforms have been introduced, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, reducing regional disparities in access to education.

- **Research and Innovation:** Higher education institutions are increasingly engaged in research projects, start-ups, and international collaborations, empowering youth and supporting their upward mobility.

Social mobility has become one of the most significant indicators of social progress and equality in modern societies. It refers to the ability of individuals and groups to move upward or downward within the social hierarchy. Among the main drivers of social mobility, the education system plays a central role, as it creates opportunities for personal development, equal access to knowledge, and professional growth. In Uzbekistan, extensive educational reforms in recent years have laid the foundation for strengthening social justice and expanding equal opportunities for its citizens.

The concept of social mobility was introduced by sociologist Pitirim Sorokin, who divided it into vertical mobility, involving upward or downward shifts in social status, and horizontal mobility, referring to movements within the same social stratum. Education is considered the most important “social elevator” that enables individuals to overcome social barriers and achieve a higher quality of life.

In Uzbekistan, reforms in the education system have been one of the main pillars of social development. Preschool education coverage has expanded dramatically. While in 2017 only around 27 percent of children attended preschool, by 2024 this figure had reached nearly 70 percent, ensuring a more equal start for all. In general secondary and vocational education, new curricula focusing on digital skills, foreign languages, and practical competencies have been introduced. Academic lyceums and vocational schools are being restructured to meet the needs of the labor market.

Higher education has seen rapid growth. The number of universities has more than doubled in recent years, including the opening of branches of leading foreign universities. Admission quotas and state-funded scholarships have increased, providing greater access to higher education. This has particularly benefited women, whose participation in higher education has grown, strengthening gender equality. The introduction of online and distance learning platforms has also reduced regional disparities, allowing students from remote areas to access quality education.

Educational reforms have directly contributed to improving employment opportunities for young people, fostering innovation, and supporting the development of a knowledge-based economy. They have also helped bridge the gap between rural and urban areas, promoted gender equality, and created opportunities for international academic exchange.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain. Regional differences in the quality of education persist, and the shortage of qualified teaching staff limits the effectiveness of reforms. Access to digital infrastructure is still uneven, especially in rural areas. There is also

a need to further strengthen the link between education and the labor market to ensure that graduates can successfully integrate into the economy.

Looking ahead, Uzbekistan aims to continue modernizing its education system. Plans include expanding digital technologies, increasing international cooperation with foreign universities, providing more scholarships for youth and women, modernizing vocational education, and ensuring merit-based principles in educational and employment opportunities.

In conclusion, educational reforms in Uzbekistan are a key factor in promoting social mobility. By expanding access to quality education, reducing inequalities, and preparing a competitive workforce, these reforms are helping to create an inclusive and knowledge-based society.

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