

National Legislation of Uzbekistan In the Field of Countering Gender-Based Digital Violence: State and Dynamics of Reforms

Sabirova Kuvanchay Babamuratovna

Independent Researcher, Lecturer At Abu Rayhon Beruni University, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: The rapid digitalisation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, where Internet penetration reached 70.5 % by 2025, has brought to the fore the problem of gender-based digital violence (cyberstalking, online harassment, doxxing, image-based abuse and other forms of technology-facilitated aggression). The article analyses the effectiveness of the national legislation of Uzbekistan in protecting women from digital (virtual) violence. The work uses comparative legal, formal-legal, doctrinal methods and the method of legal modelling. The analysis is carried out on the basis of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the Protection of Women from Oppression and Violence” (2019), the Criminal Code, the Code of Administrative Responsibility and other normative acts in comparison with international standards (CEDAW, General Recommendation No. 35, etc.). Special attention is paid to the reform dynamics of 2023-2026, including the Presidential Decree of March 3, 2026, which introduced into the legislation such new elements as “femicide”, “stalking”, “cyberviolence” and “online grooming”. Based on the conducted research, the main systemic gaps that remain today are identified: the absence of an independent prosecution structure, the gender neutrality of existing norms, the limited effect of protection orders in the digital environment and the absence of a provider liability mechanism. A four-component reform strategy is proposed: adoption of a national strategy for countering violence, conceptual recognition of technologically conditioned gender-based violence in specialised legislation, creation of an independent criminal-legal framework and development of an institutional infrastructure to support victims.

Keywords: Gender-based digital violence, cyberviolence, cyberstalking, Uzbekistan, legal reform, CEDAW, protection order, femicide, technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV).

Introduction: The growth of the digital environment has created new forms of gender-based violence that are often more difficult to detect, prove and prevent than traditional offline abuse. In Uzbekistan, the number of Internet users is steadily increasing and the penetration of the global network has reached 70.5 %. Simultaneously, the number of women and girls who face cyberstalking, online threats, dissemination of personal information without consent, digital extortion and other forms of online aggression is growing rapidly. According to international estimates, about 38 % of women worldwide have experienced online stalking, threats or bullying. These risks are fully present in Uzbekistan as well.

For a long time, Uzbek legislation lacked special norms directly aimed at countering gender-based digital violence. The breakthrough was the adoption in 2019 of the Law “On the Protection of Women from Oppression and Violence”, which for the first time in the history of the country placed the fight against gender-based violence at the centre of state policy. However, as the analysis shows, until recently the law did not explicitly regulate digital forms of violence, which created a “regulatory vacuum” in the field of online protection.

The relevance of the study is determined by the rapid digitalisation of the country with the simultaneous absence of special legal regulation in this area. The

purpose of the work is to assess the ability of Uzbekistan's current legislation to qualify systematic digital harassment of women as an independent legal phenomenon and to propose directions for further reform. The scientific novelty lies in a comprehensive analysis of the reform dynamics of 2023-2026, including the latest changes introduced by the Presidential Decree of March 3, 2026.

Genesis of the Legal Framework for Countering Gender-Based Violence in Uzbekistan

The modern reforms of Uzbekistan in the field of combating violence against women are based on the constitutional principles of human dignity, equality and justice, which have been fully reflected in the renewed Constitution of the country. At the international level, the key guidelines are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and General Recommendation No. 35 of the CEDAW Committee, which explicitly includes technology-facilitated violence in the concept of gender-based violence against women.

On September 2, 2019, the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted a landmark law "On the Protection of Women from Oppression and Violence" (No. LRU-561). This document, which the World Bank called one of the most progressive in the region, prohibited all forms of physical, psychological and economic violence against women and introduced the institution of a protection order. However, the 2019 law did not explicitly mention digital (virtual) forms of violence, which later proved to be a significant gap.

A key moment in the development of the national legal system was April 11, 2023, when the President of Uzbekistan signed amendments to the Criminal Code and the Code of Administrative Responsibility, which criminalised domestic violence for the first time in the country's history. Uzbekistan became the fifth country in Eastern Europe and Central Asia to take this step. In addition, the amendments established liability for harassment and stalking of women, removed the possibility of early release for sex offenders and excluded reference to ignorance of the victim's age in order to avoid harsher punishment.

It should be noted, however, that even these amendments were aimed mainly at offline forms of violence and practically did not affect the digital space. As studies of that period show, the legal framework of the country lacked explicit definitions and enforcement mechanisms in relation to cyberstalking, online harassment, doxxing and image-based abuse.

In parallel, in 2022, amendments were made to the Law "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men" (2019), which introduced the

concepts of "gender audit" and "gender-integrated approach" into the legislation, strengthening the legal basis for ensuring equal rights and public oversight in this area.

The Concept of Gender-Based Digital Violence and Its Place in Uzbek Legislation

In international practice, "technology-facilitated gender-based violence" (TFGBV) is understood as any act of violence committed, facilitated, aggravated or amplified through the use of information and communication technologies. According to the UNFPA review, this concept covers a wide range of acts: cyberstalking, online harassment, doxxing (publication of personal information without consent), image-based abuse (including the dissemination of intimate images), online threats, cyber-bullying, the use of deepfakes for harassment, etc.

In 2025-2026, the theme of digital violence became a priority of the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence" campaign in Uzbekistan, which was held under the motto "Let Us Unite to End Digital Violence against Women".

A doctrinal analysis of the norms of the Administrative and Criminal Codes conducted in 2025-2026 showed that the existing corpus delicti (insult, slander, threats, violation of privacy) are, as a rule, gender-neutral and do not take into account the specifics of gender-based digital violence. The following main gaps were identified: the absence of an independent prosecution structure for acts of digital violence, the gender neutrality of existing norms that do not allow assessing the discriminatory nature of acts, the limited effect of protection orders in the digital environment and the absence of a mechanism for the liability of Internet providers for failing to remove illegal content.

Key Reforms of 2025-2026: Transition to a New Model of Legal Regulation

On July 15, 2025, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted Resolution No. 441, which amended the system for protecting women from harassment and violence. The document updated the 2020 regulations and improved the coordination mechanism of the relevant bodies.

In 2025-2026, UNFPA experts prepared a 64-page "Review of Legislation on Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in the Republic of Uzbekistan", which became the basis for further reforms. In November 2025, the Senate of the Oliy Majlis and UNFPA agreed on joint recommendations to improve the legal framework, emphasising the need for effective legal measures to counter online violence.

The most significant event in the field of countering gender-based digital violence was the Decree of the

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan of March 3, 2026 “On additional organisational and legal measures to strengthen the protection of the rights of women and children, as well as to prevent cases of harassment and violence against them”. The Decree introduces into the legislation fundamentally new concepts based on international experience:

- 1) Femicide – the intentional killing of women on the basis of gender;
- 2) Stalking – the unlawful persecution of a person against his or her will;
- 3) Cyberviolence – violence committed on the Internet or through social networks;
- 4) Online grooming – actions aimed at the sexual exploitation of minors.

The Decree also provides for the introduction of a mobile SOS application for victims and special training for investigators and judges from January 1, 2027.

Criminalisation of Femicide: From Research to Legislative Implementation

A separate important area of reform has been the introduction of the concept of “femicide”. Studies conducted in 2023-2024 showed that 9 out of 10 women murdered in Uzbekistan become victims of male perpetrators, and more than 150 cases of gender-motivated killings that meet UN criteria were identified. However, until 2026, the term “femicide” was not legally recognised in the country.

The Presidential Decree of March 3, 2026 eliminated this gap by directly indicating the need to establish criminal liability for femicide as a gender-based intentional killing of women. This step, although yet to be implemented through amendments to the Criminal Code, is of fundamental importance from the point of view of bringing national legislation in line with international standards and Council of Europe recommendations.

Institutional Infrastructure for Victim Support

Since November 15, 2024, a new Law “On the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Republic of Uzbekistan (Ombudsman)” has been in force in Uzbekistan, expanding the powers of the ombudsman to respond to violations of citizens’ rights. In 2025, the Ombudsman received 26,372 appeals, an increase of 12.6 % compared to 2024. The Ombudsman actively participates in the campaign against digital violence and develops training programmes for students on cyber hygiene.

One of the innovative elements of the 2026 Decree is the introduction of an SOS mobile application, which from April 1, 2026 will be installed on the phones of

women victims who have received a protection order. After activating the application, police officers within a 5-kilometre radius must arrive at the scene within 10 minutes. This technical solution can help overcome the “under-detection” problem – one of the main reasons for the low official registration of digital violence cases.

From September 2026, specialised training programmes on combating violence against women and children will start at the Law Enforcement Academy, the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Academy of Justice. From January 1, 2027, the investigation and consideration of cases of harassment and violence against women and children will generally be carried out by investigators and judges who have undergone special training, with priority given to women.

Based on an analysis of national legislation and international best practices (UK, South Korea, Kazakhstan), the following four-component reform strategy for Uzbekistan can be proposed:

- 1) National strategy for countering violence – development and adoption of a separate document on countering technology-facilitated gender-based violence (with specific indicators and a financing plan).
- 2) Conceptual recognition of TFGBV in specialised legislation – amendments to the Law “On the Protection of Women from Oppression and Violence” with the explicit inclusion of digital forms of violence and the concept of “technology-facilitated gender-based violence”.
- 3) Independent criminal-legal framework – adoption of a separate article (or chapter) of the Criminal Code on cyberstalking and cyberviolence, as well as amendments providing for a gender-sensitive approach.
- 4) Institutional infrastructure to support victims – establishment of a specialised TFGBV unit within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, mandatory training for judges and investigators, creation of a digital evidence collection mechanism, conclusion of memoranda with Internet providers and strengthening of the role of civil society.

CONCLUSION

Thus, as the digital dawn illuminates every corner of Uzbek society, it also casts long, unsettling shadows—shadows where new forms of gendered violence breed and thrive. The journey of Uzbekistan’s legal system from the landmark Law of 2019 to the transformative Presidential Decree of March 3, 2026 is nothing short of remarkable: a nation awakening to the silent screams embedded in pixels, to the bruises left not on skin but on the soul, to the stalking that follows a

woman not through dark alleys but through the glowing screens of her own home.

Yet, for all its courage and momentum, the law still walks with a limp. It has learned to name the monster—cyberviolence, stalking, femicide, online grooming—but it has not yet fully forged the sword to slay it. Protection orders, so effective in the physical world, dissolve like mist against anonymous avatars and offshore servers. Internet providers stand as silent giants, unburdened by any duty to act. And the brilliant new SOS application, for all its promise, can only protect those who dare to press the button—a button that too many, paralysed by fear or shame, will never reach for.

What Uzbekistan has achieved is a foundation of granite; what remains to be built is a cathedral of complete protection. The four pillars of reform—a national strategy, conceptual recognition in law, a dedicated criminal framework, and a compassionate institutional infrastructure—are not mere policy recommendations. They are the urgent architecture of justice in the digital age. For technology, left ungoverned, becomes a weapon of patriarchy; but technology, wisely tamed, can become the shield of the oppressed.

The story of Uzbekistan's fight against gender-based digital violence is still being written. The ink is fresh, the pages are turning, and the world is watching. Let the next chapters be not of gaps and delays, but of a legal system that runs as fast as the algorithms of abuse—and, at last, outpaces them.

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