

LEGAL FOUNDATIONS OF STATE POLICY IN REGULATING THE LABOR MARKET IN UZBEKISTAN

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Introduction. The labor market plays a crucial role in ensuring workers' rights, maintaining labor productivity, and strengthening economic stability. It represents a fundamental aspect of labor law, directly influencing economic efficiency, employee well-being, and overall social stability. To understand how the labor market functions, it is essential to examine the dynamics of supply and demand within it, as all outcomes are shaped by these components and their interactions. Labor is a form of human interaction through which individuals develop and grow as persons, and thus holds a leading place in the progress of society. The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan guarantees every individual the right to decent work, the freedom to choose their profession and type of activity, the right to work in safe and hygienic conditions, and to receive fair remuneration. In regulating the labor market, emphasis is placed on economic and social stability, demonstrating that the state views labor legislation not merely as a set of rules, but as a vital instrument for national development and social well-being. These legal foundations are aimed at ensuring both economic efficiency and social justice.

The Labour Code establishes the principles of equality in labor rights and the prohibition of discrimination in the field of labor and occupation. This means that every individual has equal opportunities in the exercise and protection of their labor rights, and that any direct or indirect restrictions or privileges based on gender, age, race, nationality, language, social origin, property or official status, place of residence, or attitude toward the law are prohibited. The principle of freedom of labor and the prohibition of forced labor is also firmly enshrined. Everyone has the right to freely dispose of their labor capacity, to exercise it in any form not prohibited by law, and to choose their occupation, profession, specialty, workplace, and working conditions freely.

The current Labour Code defines the prohibition of forced labor as one of its fundamental principles. Forced labor refers to any work or service demanded of an individual under the threat of punishment, which the individual has not voluntarily offered. Uzbekistan has made significant progress in eliminating forced labor, especially in the cotton harvest, which led to the lifting of the "Cotton Campaign" boycott in 2022. These achievements are the result of reforms and monitoring by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The principle of social partnership in the field of labor is also considered fundamental, aiming to ensure a balance of interests among employees, employers, and the state. It includes the right of employees and employers to unite in order to protect their interests, as well as the right to conduct collective bargaining and conclude collective agreements. The firm commitment to eliminating forced labor, as confirmed by the lifting of the “Cotton Campaign” boycott, demonstrates that Uzbekistan’s legal reforms are aimed not only at ensuring domestic social justice but also at improving its international image and economic integration. The clear definition of forced labor and the incorporation of social partnership reflect a transition toward a modern, transparent labor market model that meets international standards.

The Labour Code sets the standard working time at 40 hours per week. In addition, reduced working hours are established for certain categories of employees, such as minors, those engaged in hazardous work, medical personnel, and teachers. Overtime work is strictly limited and must not exceed 120 hours per year; it is compensated at double the normal pay rate.

Occupational health and safety is defined as a system of legal, socio-economic, organizational, technical, sanitary-hygienic, medical-preventive, and rehabilitation measures aimed at protecting human safety, life, health, and maintaining work capacity. Employers are obligated to provide safe and healthy working conditions, supply personal protective equipment, conduct mandatory medical examinations, and organize training in occupational safety.

The detailed provisions on working hours, overtime, and leave, along with comprehensive occupational safety measures, reflect a focus on employee well-being. The clear limits and compensations for overtime work, as well as the mandatory nature of safety protections, signify a shift from a purely production-oriented approach to one that balances economic efficiency with the health and safety of workers.

Conclusion. Uzbekistan has achieved significant progress in the legal regulation of its labor market. The success in eliminating forced and child labor has brought international recognition and economic benefits. The labor legislation has been modernized, including the formalization of remote and flexible work arrangements. The broad ratification of ILO conventions and their systematic integration into national legislation demonstrate compliance with international standards. The empowerment of state oversight bodies—such as the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction and the State Labor Inspectorate—plays a crucial role in ensuring compliance.

Various and accessible mechanisms for resolving labor disputes, including digital solutions, have been developed. Protections and guarantees for vulnerable groups such as women and minors have been strengthened. These achievements as a whole reflect the government's comprehensive and continuous efforts to transform the labor market into a modern, rights-respecting, and internationally integrated system. The success in combating forced labor and the adoption of flexible work models underscore a pragmatic approach aimed at balancing social protection with economic dynamism.

Although the legal framework is well structured, challenges in enforcement and adaptability persist, requiring additional regulatory measures and support mechanisms for employers. Issues such as high turnover among labor inspectors and the requirement to obtain the Business Ombudsman's approval for inspections in the private sector can delay the elimination of violations. Gender inequality remains in the labor market: women tend to earn less and are underrepresented in managerial positions—largely due to structural factors such as unequal access to education and employment in lower-paid sectors.

Despite the significant achievements, the identified issues indicate that while the legal foundation is strong on paper, its implementation faces practical difficulties. This means that future efforts must focus on strengthening enforcement mechanisms, addressing structural inequalities through targeted policies beyond legal prohibitions, and continuously adapting to the evolving dynamics of the labor market. The path to a fully regulated and equitable labor market remains ongoing.

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