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THE PARTICIPATION OF FOREIGN LOCAL COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS IN GENDER-BASED CAREER GUIDANCE: AN ANALYTICAL REVIEW

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Annotation

This article presents a narrative analytical review of the role played by local community institutions in supporting gender-equitable career guidance for adolescents, drawing on international experience and its potential implications for the Uzbek mahalla system. Drawing on empirical and policy literature published between 2022 and 2026 — international-organization reports, a peer-reviewed empirical study, and Uzbek pedagogical scholarship — the study examines how community-based programs in Asia and Central Asia, together with a comparative case from Turkey, shape young people's occupational aspirations along gender lines. The analysis demonstrates that adolescents' career choices remain strongly conditioned by internalized gender roles, and that community-level actors — whether formal youth organizations abroad or the traditional Uzbek mahalla — can either reinforce or challenge these patterns depending on how deliberately they are engaged in career-guidance activity. The article argues that adapting selected elements of foreign community-based career-guidance models to the mahalla's existing social infrastructure offers a realistic pathway toward reducing occupational segregation in Uzbekistan, and it proposes practical directions for mahalla–school partnership based on the reviewed evidence.



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Career guidance is increasingly recognized as a field that is never gender-neutral, since the occupational aspirations formed during adolescence are shaped as much by social environment as by individual ability. Over the past decade, international education and labor-market research has shifted from treating career choice as a purely individual, psychological process toward viewing it as a socially constructed outcome in which family, school, and the wider community jointly participate. This shift has direct relevance for countries such as Uzbekistan, where formal career-guidance services in schools remain limited and informal community structures continue to exert a strong influence on young people's life decisions.

Sources for this review were identified through the publications of relevant international organizations (the International Labour Organization, the World Bank, and the United Nations Development Programme) together with Uzbek pedagogical journals addressing gender and career-related socialization; inclusion was limited to sources published in 2022–2026 that empirically or programmatically address community-level actors in career guidance or gender-based occupational segregation among adolescents and young adults. Given the small number of studies meeting these criteria, the review is best read as a narrative synthesis rather than a systematic one, and its conclusions should be read with that limitation in mind.

Internationally, local community institutions are increasingly engaged as partners in career guidance alongside schools and families, filling gaps that formal education systems cannot address alone. An International Labour Organization (2023) webinar report on youth career-development initiatives in Asia and the Pacific documents several such models: in Cambodia, the Impact Hub's Movers



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Programme brings secondary and university students into structured discussions with local community members about future careers; in Vietnam, the ILO's Career Guidance Package for adolescents aged 14 to 19 was adapted into a mobile application that reached more than three thousand young people through community-level dissemination; and international youth networks such as AIESEC more broadly frame their mission around cultivating community-embedded leadership across diverse career fields. These examples show that community institutions abroad are treated not as passive audiences for career information but as active co-organizers of career-guidance activity.

At the same time, at least one recent empirical study indicates that gender continues to structure how adolescents perceive and select future occupations, which is precisely the pattern that community-based interventions are meant to address. Demirtaş, Özbek, and Vural's (2026) qualitative study of one hundred secondary-school students in Sakarya, Turkey, found that male students prioritized personal interest and social prestige in their career reasoning, while female students weighed job availability and examination performance more heavily; occupations such as nursing and teaching were consistently described by participants as feminine, while engineering and piloting were described as masculine, with one student summarizing the pattern as "professions have gender in society." Only around fifteen percent of the surveyed students critically questioned this gendered division of occupations, while the remainder either conformed to or achieved success within the existing framework rather than challenging it.

This internalization of occupational gender norms is reinforced through everyday expectations about domestic responsibility, which limits the practical career options that young women consider realistic. The same Turkish study found that female students' aspirations were constrained by the belief that women should prioritize family, spouse, and children over career advancement, a belief



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transmitted primarily through family and community rather than through formal schooling. Because these expectations are absorbed informally, long before students reach the point of making concrete educational or occupational decisions, interventions confined to the classroom are unlikely to be sufficient; the same informal channels that transmit gender stereotypes — family, neighborhood, and community networks — are therefore also the channels through which alternative, gender-equitable models must be introduced.

Uzbekistan's labor market illustrates the practical consequences of these unaddressed patterns with particular clarity. According to the International Labour Organization's (2022) report on women and the world of work in Uzbekistan, women remain concentrated in lower-paid sectors such as education and healthcare, occupy managerial positions far less often than men, and continue to face a persistent wage gap even within female-dominated professions. Mamadjonova's (2023) analysis in the Yale Journal of International Affairs adds further detail: preschool education is 96.9 percent female with average monthly earnings of roughly 207 dollars, while higher-education teaching positions, only 45.5 percent female, pay on average 381 dollars; nurses, who make up 91.2 percent of medical workers with secondary-level qualifications, earn considerably less than doctors, of whom fewer than half (47.7 percent) are women. The World Bank's (2024) gender-equality assessment for Uzbekistan and recent national statistics confirming that only 56 percent of women aged 25 to 34 are employed, compared with 93 percent of men, together indicate that occupational segregation formed during adolescence carries forward directly into adult economic outcomes.

Within this national context, the mahalla occupies a structural position comparable to the community institutions described in international career-guidance literature, making it a natural candidate for a similar function in Uzbekistan. Khalikulova's (2025) study of the mahalla institution's traditions and governance role emphasizes



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that mahalla structures have historically combined social-welfare, mediating, and moral-authority functions within a bounded neighborhood, and that women's participation in mahalla leadership has been expanding within recent local self-government reforms. Because the mahalla already serves as a trusted intermediary between families and formal institutions on matters ranging from social support to civil registration, it possesses the social capital that foreign community-based career-guidance programs had to build deliberately from scratch.

Uzbek pedagogical scholarship has already begun to lay theoretical groundwork for connecting gender-conscious approaches with career-related socialization, although a specific focus on mahalla involvement remains underdeveloped. Sharifzoda's (2024) analysis of the theoretical foundations for preparing pedagogical practice around gender-based socialization discusses how gender roles are formed in the course of upbringing and how educators might be prepared to address this process, including practical suggestions such as rotating traditionally gendered tasks between boys and girls in vocational training settings. Abdusamatova's (2023) study on the evolving meaning of gender equality in New Uzbekistan situates these pedagogical discussions within the broader national policy shift toward gender-responsive governance. Neither line of research, however, examines the mahalla specifically as an operational partner in career guidance, which marks the gap that the present review seeks to identify.

Comparing the foreign and domestic evidence side by side points toward specific, transferable elements rather than wholesale institutional imitation. The Vietnamese mobile-application model suggests that digitizing career-guidance content for distribution through mahalla youth committees could reach adolescents outside formal counseling structures; the Cambodian discussion-based model suggests that structured, facilitated conversations between students and diverse community role models — including women working in male-dominated fields and men working



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in female-dominated ones — can help counter the occupational stereotyping documented by Demirtaş and colleagues; and the AIESEC leadership-network model suggests that involving mahalla youth activists as trained, rather than incidental, participants in career guidance increases the likelihood that gender-equitable messaging is delivered consistently rather than left to individual discretion.

Transferring these elements is not without obstacles, and any adaptation must account for conditions that differ from the contexts in which the foreign models were developed. Mahalla activists generally lack specialized training in career counseling or gender-sensitive pedagogy, community-level resources for sustained programming are limited, and prevailing social attitudes may initially resist explicit efforts to challenge occupational gender norms: a 2022 UNDP-commissioned survey of 2,234 respondents found that 55 percent still regarded men as the household's primary breadwinner (UNDP, 2023). Successful adaptation therefore depends less on transplanting foreign program materials directly and more on building local capacity, sequencing interventions gradually, and anchoring new practices in language and examples that mahalla communities already find credible.

Taken together, the reviewed literature indicates that gender-equitable career guidance is more likely to succeed when it is embedded in the community institutions young people already trust, rather than delivered solely through formal schooling. For Uzbekistan, this points toward a concrete recommendation: schools and mahalla committees should establish structured, recurring partnerships in which trained mahalla youth activists co-organize career-guidance activities with class leaders and school psychologists, deliberately including role models who work outside the occupations conventionally assigned to their gender. Future empirical research should test the effectiveness of such mahalla-school



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partnerships directly, since the present review draws its evidence primarily from international programs and from Uzbek studies that address gender and career formation separately rather than as a combined mahalla-based intervention. A further limitation is evidentiary breadth: the claim that adolescent career choices are shaped by internalized gender roles rests substantially on a single qualitative study conducted in one Turkish province, and no European community-based career-guidance model was reviewed directly; both points should be treated as directions for further comparative research rather than as established findings.

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