Journal: "Social Sciences: Theory and Practice"

ISSN: 3093-9186 Volume 1/Issue 3/October/2026

https://doi.org

Legal and institutional boundaries of information sharing in social protection processes at the community (mahalla) level

Manzuraxon Yunusova

Professor, Doctor of Philosophical Sciences,
Head of the Department of Social Sciences, Andijan State University

orcid: 0000-0002-4715-2058

Abstract: This article analyzes the legal and institutional foundations of information sharing in social protection processes at the mahalla level. Particular attention is given to the study of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Personal Data," the Law "On the Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence," as well as relevant international legal instruments. The analysis revealed that information sharing should be carried out in accordance with the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. The findings substantiate the theoretical and practical aspects of the legal and institutional foundations of information sharing in social protection processes at the mahalla level.

Keywords: mahalla, social protection, legality, necessity, proportionality, confidentiality, personal data, women, information provision, information dissemination, minimum necessary information, authority, legal boundaries.

Introduction

Establishing the principles of a social state, supporting vulnerable segments of the population, and orienting the social services system toward human interests are becoming priority directions of state policy in Uzbekistan. In recent years, reforms aimed at developing the social protection system at the community (mahalla) level, organizing the activities of "Inson" (Human) social services centers, and forming the institute of professional social work have been implemented. In this process, the issue of information sharing among social service entities acquires particular significance.

However, the specific characteristic of the mahalla system—the close interrelationship among state institutions, the citizens' assembly (mahalla citizens' gathering), the family, and the local community—gives rise to complex legal and ethical issues related to data protection and utilization. From this perspective, determining the legal and institutional boundaries of information sharing at the mahalla level possesses not only practical, but also socio-philosophical significance.

Research methodology

In this scientific article, the methods of observation, literature review, comparative analysis, content analysis, systematic analysis, and the study of regulatory legal documents were utilized. Furthermore, official documents and scientific literature served as research sources.

Results and discussion

Since social protection processes at the mahalla level are directly related to the lives of individuals, families, and the community, the sources of information include the family, citizens, social workers, "Inson" social services centers, and authorized organizations (schools, healthcare facilities, internal affairs bodies, guardianship and trusteeship authorities).

In this process, each stage of information sharing is implemented through the following filters: legality, purposefulness, institutional competence, the principle of data minimization (necessary minimum information), confidentiality, and information security.

The research results can serve as a scientific and methodological basis for improving the activities of the National Agency for Social Protection, "Inson" social services centers, mahalla citizens' assemblies, and institutions training personnel in social work.

Since social protection processes at the mahalla level are directly related to the lives of individuals, families, and the community, the issue of information sharing is viewed not as a simple organizational process, but as a complex professional activity with legal, institutional, and ethical boundaries. Information exchange among social workers, "Inson" social services centers, mahalla citizens' assemblies, schools, medical institutions, internal affairs bodies, guardianship and trusteeship authorities, and other partner entities is necessary for rendering assistance to families, mitigating risks, coordinating social services, and ensuring the safety of vulnerable groups. However, such exchange must not be carried out based on generalized perceptions such as "the mahalla needs to know," "if everyone is informed, assistance becomes easier," or "public oversight will be strengthened"; rather, it must rely on the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, expedience, inviolability of private life, and confidentiality. Article 31 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan establishes that everyone has the right to the inviolability of private life, personal and family secrets, protection of their honor and dignity, and the protection of their personal data [1].

In determining the legal boundaries of information sharing at the mahalla level, it is first necessary to correctly understand the concept of personal data. In social work practice, personal data may include a citizen's surname, first name, date of birth, place of residence, marital status, children, health status, disability, material condition, income, employment, psychological state, experiences of violence, child-rearing conditions, housing circumstances, relatives, debts, or other socio-legal status data. Stemming from the content of the Law "On Personal Data," the processes of collecting, storing, using, transferring, disseminating, depersonalizing, and destroying such data possess a special legal regime. Article 12 of the Law stipulates that the use of personal data shall be carried out solely for previously stated purposes and with the provision of necessary protection [2]. This norm is critically important for mahalla practice: data obtained for the purpose of assisting a family must not be used for other purposes, such as discussion within the mahalla, reputation assessment, or informal oversight.

In the legislation on personal data, the distinction between the concepts of "providing data" (ma'lumot berish) and "disseminating data" (ma'lumot tarqatish) is of particular significance. According to Article 13 of the Law, actions aimed at disclosing personal data to a specific person are considered "provision." In Article 14, however, disclosing personal data to an indefinite circle of persons, making it publicly known in mass media, posting it on the internet, or creating conditions for wide usage by other methods is defined as "dissemination" [3]. In the mahalla environment, this distinction is practically extremely important. For instance, if there is a risk regarding a child, a social worker may provide necessary information to the school psychologist or guardianship authority. Nevertheless, discussing the problem within that same family at a mahalla assembly, among neighbors, or in social media groups constitutes the dissemination of information and can infringe upon the inviolability of private life.

The first legal boundary of information sharing at the mahalla level is limitation by purpose. This means that data concerning a family may be used solely for the purposes of rendering specific social services, assessing needs, mitigating risk, organizing assistance, or fulfilling legal obligations. This approach is also widely applied in international practice. Article 5 of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) stipulates that personal data shall be processed based on the principles of lawfulness, fairness and transparency, purpose limitation, data minimization, accuracy, storage limitation, as well as integrity and confidentiality [4]. These principles possess methodological significance for the Uzbek mahalla system as well: the approach that a social worker or mahalla representative works more effectively the more data they collect is

incorrect; on the contrary, only data necessary for the explicit purpose of service delivery must be collected and shared.

The second legal boundary is limitation by competence (authority). At the mahalla level, various subjects may possess certain information regarding a family's situation; however, not all of them have the right to know the same volume of data. A social worker can assess a family's needs and develop an individual service plan; a school needs information related to children's educational and psychological status; a medical institution works with information concerning health and care; internal affairs bodies are involved in cases where security, violence, or the risk of offenses exists; and guardianship and trusteeship authorities deal with issues pertaining to children's interests, parental obligations, and protective measures. Consequently, each subject's need for information is bounded by its legal duties and institutional competence. The violation of this boundary increases the risk of undue interference in private life, stigmatization of the family, or misuse of data.

The legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the sphere of social services also stipulates that the social service delivery process is based on the principles of human rights, legality, humanism, preventive orientation, targeting, individual approach, and voluntariness. Article 3 of the Law "On Social Services for the Elderly, Persons with Disabilities, and Other Socially Vulnerable Categories of the Population" records legality, respect for human rights, humanism, preventive orientation, targeting, and an individual approach as core principles of social services [5]. Stemming from these principles, information sharing in the social service process must also be in accordance with respect for human rights, individual needs, legal grounds, and the purpose of the service.

The third legal boundary is consent and awareness. Before collecting and sharing family-related data with other entities, a social worker must, whenever possible, explain to the person or family the purpose for which this data is being gathered, with whom it will be shared, how it will be stored, and under what circumstances sharing data without consent may become necessary. Consent is not merely a formal action of "obtaining a signature," but an ethical-legal mechanism that ensures the client's conscious control over their personal data. The Law "On Personal Data" establishes that a subject has the right to give consent to the processing of their personal data and to withdraw such consent [6]. At the same time, in certain instances—such as child safety, violence, or threats to life and health—information sharing may be based not solely on consent, but also on legal obligation and the necessity of risk prevention.

The fourth boundary is the principle of data minimization (necessary minimum information). According to this principle, information sharing at the mahalla level requires avoiding the transfer of all data to all subjects, limiting it instead to the minimum volume of data necessary to perform a specific task. For instance, the school may be provided with necessary information related to a child's school attendance, emotional state, or safety; however, the parents' debts, all details of private family disputes, or medical diagnoses do not need to be disclosed. For the crime prevention inspector (profilaktika inspektori), information regarding the risk of violence, threats, protection orders, or safety may be necessary, but knowing all socio-economic details of the family is not required. Meanwhile, a medical professional needs information related to care, disability, rehabilitation, or health status. Consequently, the legal and ethical grounding of information sharing is determined by its volume, recipient, purpose, and level of protection.

Institutional boundaries in the social protection system at the mahalla level are particularly evident through the activities of "Inson" social services centers. Pursuant to the President's Decree No. PF-82 dated June 1, 2023, the National Agency for Social Protection under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, its regional departments, and "Inson" social services centers in districts and cities were established [7]. According to the Decree, among the main activity directions of the Agency are tasks such as developing social assistance programs for socially vulnerable individuals and families, establishing guaranteed standards of social services, organizing professional "social work" services, expanding social partnership, and ensuring transparency through digitalization [8].

These tasks transform information sharing into an institutional necessity; however, at the same time, this data must be bounded by legal grounds, service objectives, and professional responsibility.

Presidential Resolution No. PQ-319 dated September 28, 2023, sets the objectives of organizing social protection at the mahalla level, providing social services and assistance based on a comprehensive approach, preventing individuals and families from falling into difficult social situations, and increasing targeting and effectiveness [9]. In accordance with this resolution, social worker groups in "Inson" centers are entrusted with tasks such as directly providing professional social services at the mahalla level on the basis of a comprehensive approach to individuals and families who have fallen into difficult situations or face high risks thereof, developing individual social service plans through the assessment of needs and existing opportunities, organizing services and assistance, and, when necessary, engaging internal resources—such as relatives, neighbors, and volunteers [10]. Precisely at this point, the issue of institutional boundaries becomes acute: relatives or neighbors can be engaged to provide assistance, but in this process, the family's personal secrets and sensitive data must not be disclosed.

Information sharing in the activities of "Inson" centers manifests in two main forms. The first is formal information sharing necessary for rendering professional services. This includes assessing needs, drawing up individual service plans, and referral to institutions related to medical, psychological, legal, rehabilitation, employment, or material assistance. The second is limited information exchange during the process of mobilizing mahalla resources. In this regard, relatives, neighbors, sponsors, volunteers, or mahalla activists can assist the family, but they must be informed only with the general information necessary to provide assistance. For instance, information such as "the family needs food assistance," "housing conditions need improvement," or "help is needed to ensure the child regularly attends school" may be sufficient. Details of domestic violence, medical diagnoses, psychological conditions, or personal disputes, however, should be examined solely within the circle of authorized specialists.

A distinct direction of information sharing in social protection processes at the mahalla level is associated with the protection of children's rights. Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration; furthermore, Article 16 consolidates the right of the child to protection against arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy, family, home, or correspondence, as well as unlawful attacks on their honor and reputation [11]. At the same time, Article 19 of the Convention requires taking all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury, abuse, neglect, maltreatment, or exploitation [12]. Consequently, in cases involving children, confidentiality and safety are not opposed to each other: the child's private life is protected, but when a risk exists, the exchange of necessary information among authorized subjects serves the child's best interests.

In the legislation of Uzbekistan, ensuring the safety of children and women is also viewed as one of the legal grounds for information sharing. The Law "On Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence" establishes that a protection order shall be issued by internal affairs bodies within 24 hours from the moment the fact of harassment and violence or the threat of its commission is identified [13]. Moreover, it is stipulated that information regarding the issuance and extension of a protection order concerning victims under the age of eighteen or recognized as legally incompetent must be sent to the guardianship and trusteeship authority and the citizens' self-governance body within 24 hours [14]. This norm demonstrates that in certain hazardous situations, information sharing is not a breach of confidentiality, but rather a legal protective measure. However, such exchange must also be implemented exclusively among relevant authorized subjects, in the necessary volume, and for the purpose of safety.

Within the framework of the Law "On the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence," adopted in 2024, the National Agency for Social Protection under the President is

designated as the authorized state body in the sphere of protecting children from all forms of violence [15]. Official data indicate that for the purpose of rendering assistance, providing counseling, and preventing violence against children, the Agency ensures the operation of a round-the-clock helpline across the entire territory, and the disclosure of information received via the helpline is strictly prohibited [16]. This condition clearly expresses the dual requirement in information sharing: on the one hand, information about risk must be promptly obtained and appropriate measures taken; on the other hand, data pertaining to the victimized child or family must not be disclosed.

From an institutional perspective, information sharing at the mahalla level is regulated among several central subjects. The first subject is the social worker, who assesses the family's situation, identifies needs and risk factors, develops an individual service plan, and coordinates services. The second subject is the "Inson" social services centers, which institutionally manage social services, assistance, appeals, referrals, and monitoring. The third subject is the mahalla citizens' assembly and its active representatives, who play a supporting role in identifying families, mobilizing mahalla resources, and providing social support. The fourth subject consists of specialized organizations—such as schools, medical facilities, internal affairs bodies, guardianship and trusteeship authorities, employment, justice, psychological, and rehabilitation services—which must work with necessary information solely within the scope of their competence.

In the relations among these subjects, the principle of "central coordination — limited information" is of vital importance. That is, while all organizations may participate in assisting a single family, not all of them are required to know all information concerning the family. For instance, the social worker may possess the most comprehensive information regarding the case, whereas a mahalla activist must be limited solely to the general information necessary for organizing assistance. The school should receive information related exclusively to the child's education and safety, while medical personnel should obtain information concerning health and care. This approach is an institutional manifestation of the "necessary minimum information" principle. Otherwise, data can expand excessively, increasing informal oversight, gossip, stigma, and social pressure over the family.

Another important boundary of information sharing at the mahalla level is distinguishing between formal and informal information flows. The formal information flow refers to the social worker's assessment sheets, applications, individual plans, referral letters, protection orders, medical or psychological conclusions, and service documentation. Such information must be maintained in a documented, protected, and controlled manner by authorized persons. The informal information flow, on the other hand, is formed through verbal rumors, information from neighbors, correspondence in mahalla chat groups, informal consultations, or reports on social networks. A social worker must not automatically accept informal information as truth, but rather verify it, separate facts from assumptions, and choose a cautious approach that does not harm the family.

The ethical and legal boundaries of information sharing at the mahalla level are particularly tested during cases involving violence, child safety, mental health, disability, elderly care, poverty, and social stigma. For instance, if there is a risk of domestic violence, concealing this information merely as a "family secret" can pose a threat to the victim's safety. At the same time, disclosing such information to the broader mahalla community also harms the victim's honor, safety, and social standing. The correct path is professional risk assessment, engagement of relevant authorized subjects, implementation of protective measures, and sharing solely the necessary minimum information. Consequently, the fundamental question in information exchange should not be "can the information be provided?", but rather "what information, to whom, for what purpose, on what legal basis, and with what security measure should be provided?"

In determining institutional boundaries within the mahalla environment, the distinction between "collective assistance" and "collective intervention" is also crucial. Collective assistance

refers to directing mahalla resources toward the family's interests, supporting vulnerable families, and creating a safe and caring environment. Collective intervention, on the other hand, entails undue intrusion into a family's internal life without consent or legal grounds, discussing personal data, sensationalizing problems, or delivering informal judgments. In social work practice, utilizing mahalla resources must take the form of the first direction—assistance, support, and service coordination. The second direction—namely, publicly discussing family problems and exerting informal pressure—may contradict both professional ethics and the principle of the inviolability of private life.

The research results indicate that the mahalla institution is emerging as a unique national model of information sharing. On the one hand, the mahalla creates the opportunity for early detection of the population's social problems and prompt rendering of assistance. On the other hand, the high level of social proximity within the mahalla also increases the risk of informal data dissemination. Therefore, the effectiveness of information sharing in the sphere of social protection is determined not merely by the volume of data, but by its legal grounding, institutional regulation, and compliance with the requirements of professional ethics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, information sharing in social protection processes at the mahalla level is necessary; however, it cannot take the form of unrestricted, uncontrolled, and informal information dissemination. Its legal boundaries are defined by the Constitution, legislation on personal data, social services, protection of women and children from violence, as well as international human rights standards. Its institutional boundaries are determined by the competencies of subjects such as social workers, "Inson" centers, mahalla citizens' assemblies, schools, healthcare facilities, internal affairs bodies, and guardianship and trusteeship authorities. Therefore, the fundamental criterion for information sharing in mahalla practice should be as follows: information must be provided on a legal basis, for a specific purpose, to the relevant authorized subject, in the necessary minimum volume, and with the protection of the family's honor and safety.

References

1. Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Article 31. https://constitution.uz/oz/clause/index
2. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Personal Data" (July 2, 2019, No. O‘RQ-547). Article 12. https://lex.uz/docs/-4396419
3. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Personal Data" (July 2, 2019, No. O‘RQ-547). Articles 13–14. https://lex.uz/docs/-4396419
4. European Union. General Data Protection Regulation. Article 5. https://gdprinfo.eu/art-5-gdpr/
5. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Social Services for the Elderly, Persons with Disabilities, and Other Socially Vulnerable Categories of the Population" (December 26, 2016, No. O‘RQ-415). Article 3. https://lex.uz/docs/3083192
6. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Personal Data". Article 30. https://lex.uz/docs/-4396419
7. Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Measures for the Establishment of a Quality Social Service and Assistance System for the Population and Its Effective Control Mechanism" (June 1, 2023, No. PF-82). https://lex.uz/docs/-6480342
8. Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PF-82 dated June 1, 2023, Annex 1. https://lex.uz/docs/-6480342
9. Resolution of দ্বিতীয় the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Measures to Further Improve the System of Providing Social Services and Assistance to the Population" (September 28, 2023, No. PQ-319). https://lex.uz/docs/-6624639

10. Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated September 28, 2023, No. PQ-319. https://lex.uz/docs/-6624639
11. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 3 and Article 16. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child
12. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 19. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child
13. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence" (September 2, 2019, No. O'RQ-561). https://lex.uz/docs/-4494709
14. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence". Article 24. https://lex.uz/docs/-4494709
15. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence" (November 14, 2024, No. O'RQ-996). https://lex.uz
16. Government Portal of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Procedure for issuing protection orders to children victims of violence. https://gov.uz/oz/advice/782/document/3332