



A stylized map of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, is composed of numerous small, colorful squares. Each square contains a white icon representing one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The colors of the squares include blue, green, yellow, red, orange, and purple. The background is a light blue with a subtle geometric pattern of white lines forming triangles and polygons. The map has a white outline and a slight drop shadow, giving it a 3D appearance.

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1. Executive summary

The current Common Country Analysis (CCA) for Uzbekistan reflects a strategic, integrated, and forward-looking assessment by the UN of the country's progress and challenges in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While prepared entirely with UN's inhouse capacity, the CCA has been developed with broad stakeholder engagement, including national authorities, civil society, the private sector, and development partners. Its conclusions are informed by comprehensive analysis and ample evidence across multiple dimensions of Uzbekistan's social, economic, and environmental landscape. This analysis is guided by the UN's core principles, such as Leave No One Behind, gender equality, human rights, sustainability, and resilience.

Uzbekistan's Development Trajectory: Since gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has transitioned from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented system, with significant structural reforms accelerating under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's leadership since 2016. These reforms aim to achieve high middle-income status by 2030, building on significant GDP growth, greater openness, liberalization, elevated international commitments, and increasing international financial flows. Despite these achievements, the structural transformation remains incomplete, with inequalities, governance bottlenecks, and environmental vulnerabilities posing significant risks to the country's path to sustainable and

inclusive development. Additionally, as a double landlocked country surrounded only by other landlocked countries, Uzbekistan faces connectivity challenges that must be overcome to benefit from the international trade, and integration into global markets.

Demographic Trends: Uzbekistan's youthful and rapidly growing population offers significant potential for economic growth but presents challenges in education, healthcare, and decent employment. Rapid population growth, ageing, urbanization, and migration are straining public services and exacerbating regional disparities. Addressing these challenges will require substantial investments in quality and inclusive education,

vocational training, and healthcare to empower the people of Uzbekistan, particularly those in underserved rural areas.

Vulnerable Populations and Social

Exclusion: Despite notable progress in recent years, multiple groups remain at risk of being left behind. These include women and children in vulnerable situations, people with disabilities, people living with HIV, migrants and their children, LGBTQI+, forcibly displaced people (Afghan nationals), and stateless persons. The roots of exclusion are multidimensional, driven by discriminatory social norms, gender stereotypes, regional inequalities, and governance deficits. Achieving inclusive development requires targeted interventions to address these vulnerabilities, focusing on legal reforms, stronger enforcement, adequate social protection, and improving access to basic services, including at community (mahalla) level.

Social Development: Education, Health, and Social Protection Services: In recent years, Uzbekistan has made strides in expanding access to education and healthcare, with significant investments in preschool education and universal healthcare coverage. Moreover, disparities persist between regions and between rural and urban areas. The quality of education and healthcare, particularly in rural regions, continues to lag behind national goals. Strengthening social protection systems, reducing fragmentation and empowering the National Agency for Social Protection, will be critical to reducing poverty and ensuring that vulnerable groups can benefit from ongoing structural reforms.

Economic Transformation and Inequality: Uzbekistan's economic transformation has resulted in robust growth and impressive poverty reduction, despite the setbacks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and regional conflicts. However, the reforms have also been accompanied by rising income inequality, driven by high food and energy inflation, highly regressive energy subsidies, excessive monopolization, fiscal preferences

for state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and non-transparent privatization processes. Structural reforms, including energy tariff liberalization and the privatization of SOEs, need to be more transparent and inclusive to avoid exacerbating existing inequalities. Addressing informalities in the labour market and growing decent employment opportunities, especially for women and youth, will be key to ensuring broad-based inclusive economic growth.

Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change: Uzbekistan faces severe environmental challenges on its path to sustainable development. These are driven by climate change and the Aral Sea disaster, as well as the growing population and consumption patterns. Water scarcity, land degradation, and biodiversity loss threaten food security and rural livelihoods. Air pollution is an increasing cause of concern for the health of people especially in large urban settlements, such as Tashkent and some regional centres. The government's commitment to renewable energy and climate resilience, as part of its Paris Agreement obligations, is a critical step toward sustainability. However, significant investments are required to fully address these environmental risks and ensure a green transition.

Governance, Rule of Law, and Human Rights: Reforms in governance have led to improvements in civic space, human rights, improved public service delivery (such as e-governance), and reduction of corruption, as evidenced by the country's remarkable progress in relevant global indexes and rankings. However, significant gaps remain, especially in enforcing laws and accountability. Ensuring transparent governance and further reduction of corruption, particularly in areas such as restructuring of SOEs and social service delivery, will be essential for achieving the national SDGs at all levels (including provincial and mahalla levels).

Uzbekistan's **development financing** is characterized by a blend of public and private

financing mechanisms, innovative financial instruments such as SDG and Green bonds, and increased engagement with the private sector, IFIs and donors. The INFF and Integrated National SDG Financing Strategy, although still under government review, reflect the country's commitment to aligning financial flows with its development priorities. However, closing the annual financing gap of USD6 billion remains a challenge, necessitating continued efforts to attract private investment, optimize public spending, and secure external support from donors and IFIs.

Uzbekistan stands at a critical juncture in its pursuit of sustainable development. Going forward, the focus should be on deepening reforms to promote inclusive economic growth, enhancing governance and accountability, and investing in human capital and environmental sustainability. Ensuring that no one is left behind, particularly the most vulnerable, will require sustained efforts to reduce inequalities, promote gender equality, human rights, and address environmental challenges. The next phase of development will also necessitate strengthening regional cooperation, especially in areas of water management, climate adaptation, trade and connectivity, to foster long-term resilience and peace in Central Asia.

2. Introduction

The current Common Country Analysis (CCA) represents the United Nations' independent, comprehensive assessment of Uzbekistan's development landscape, aimed at guiding the UN system's strategic engagement in the country on its path to sustainable development. The analysis highlights key challenges and opportunities, providing a roadmap to address gaps in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, with an ultimate goal of supporting Uzbekistan in promoting inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Unlike the previous full-fledged iteration of the CCA in 2019, this CCA is prepared entirely with the UN's internal capacity, by a CCA Task Force comprised of 40 programme officers and experts from more than twenty UN agencies and the UN Resident Coordinator Office operating in Uzbekistan. No external consultants have been engaged in facilitating or drafting this CCA.

In preparing the CCA, several innovative methodologies were employed to ensure a multi-dimensional understanding of the country's complex challenges. *Systems thinking* was applied to identify the interconnections between economic, social, and environmental issues, ensuring policy recommendations consider the ripple effects of interventions. For example, the analysis looked at how energy subsidies have contributed to income inequalities and have shrunk the fiscal space to finance important social services. *Causal analysis* was used to examine root causes of persistent challenges like multi-dimensional inequalities and social exclusion, moving beyond symptoms to recommend structural solutions. The analysis

also looked at the reasons behind persisting gender inequalities in the labour market and in gender-based violence despite the notable progress in access to education for girls and young women and legislative advancements. The *risk analysis* allowed for the identification of potential threats to development, such as climate change, water shortages, land degradation, pollution, and biodiversity, with a focus on resilience-building. A *stakeholder analysis* mapped the roles and interests of key actors, ensuring inclusive and responsive policies.

The CCA used a range of robust data sources from the growing body of national statistics, international reports, studies, surveys, as well as the country's 2nd Voluntary National Review (2023). Data sources include the Multi Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS, 2022) and multidimensional poverty measurements. These data sets provided a detailed and up-to-date view of Uzbekistan's development landscape, particularly in areas of socio-economic indicators aligned with national SDG targets.

To validate the findings of the CCA, the UN conducted a series of consultations with diverse stakeholder groups, ensuring a broad spectrum of perspectives.¹ These consultations included representatives from civil society, government agencies, international development partners, and specific groups such as women, youth, migrants, and people living with HIV (PLHIV).

Each consultation brought unique insights that enhanced the CCA's depth and inclusiveness. *Civil society organizations* highlighted the systemic challenges faced by marginalised groups, including women, youth, children, persons with disabilities, and PLHIV. Their input helped to expose gaps in healthcare access, barriers in the job market, and the broader social protection system. *Women's NGOs*, for example, emphasised the urgent need for shelters for gender-based violence survivors and improved vocational training, especially in rural areas, while also calling for male engagement initiatives to promote gender equality.

Consultations with *youth representatives* shed light on critical issues such as mental health, inclusive education, gender equality, and the need for platforms to empower youth in SDG initiatives. *Migrant-focused consultations* identified key barriers, including gaps in healthcare access, vocational training, and the lack of support systems for returning migrants and their families. *Government representatives* provided invaluable input on Uzbekistan's policy landscape, offering insights into the priorities of the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy and highlighting key governance and social protection reforms, stressing the need for strengthening monitoring and evaluation of government initiatives.

¹ In total, 6 consultations with various stakeholder groups were held throughout November 2024 as part of the CCA consultations, with the minutes and videorecording of these meetings available. The list of the meetings and a brief summary of each of the meetings is provided in Annex F

The consultation with *international development partners, including IFIs*, provided an important global and regional perspective. Key discussions focused on strengthening reproductive health and family planning services, improving the quality of education and vocational training, and promoting inclusive infrastructure and services for persons with disabilities. Partners also highlighted the need for holistic approaches to address corruption in healthcare and ensure access to high-quality services. Additionally, support for Afghan refugees and stronger collaboration between civil society, businesses, and development partners were identified as critical areas for progress.

In addition, the UNICEF-led *Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Uzbekistan*, shaped through consultations and validation meetings in May 2024, added valuable insights to the process. Developed collaboratively with national organizations, civil society, international agencies, and inputs from children with disabilities, their parents, and youth via the U-report platform, the analysis incorporated perspectives and recommendations from state bodies, NGOs, and UN agencies to provide a comprehensive understanding of challenges and opportunities for children and adolescents in Uzbekistan.

This participatory process enriched the CCA by ensuring it reflects the lived realities and challenges of diverse groups while aligning with Uzbekistan's commitments to the 2030 Agenda. By integrating these varied perspectives, the CCA provides a strong foundation for a new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), which will prioritise inclusive development, transparency, and a collective vision for sustainable progress in Uzbekistan.

The report is structured into several key sections, with *Section 3* serving as the core of the analysis. It begins by exploring *demographic trends*, focusing on the opportunities and challenges posed by Uzbekistan's youthful population in areas such as education, health, social protection, and the labour market. It then examines *vulnerable*

populations at risk of being left behind, such as women and children in difficult situations, people with disabilities, people living with HIV, migrants and their children, LGBTQI+ and stateless persons. The section and the corresponding Annex provide a comprehensive overview of the types of exclusions and discriminations these groups may face and offers policy interventions to overcome them.

The *economic transformation* section assesses the structural economic reforms in privatization, energy sector liberalization, and digital trade, evaluating their impact on poverty, inequalities, and employment. The section also looks at the different structural barriers to an inclusive and sustainable economic growth that require tackling, for instance lack of transparency and inclusiveness in privatization, monopolization and lack of competition, high energy subsidies, and fiscal deficit.

Next, the CCA delves into *environmental sustainability and climate change* issues, with an emphasis on Uzbekistan's international commitments and critical issues such as land degradation, biodiversity loss, pollution, water management and the Aral Sea disaster. The report also provides a detailed review of *governance, rule of law, and human rights*, identifying both advancements and persistent challenges in law enforcement, fighting corruption, and accountability.

The CCA also looks at how Uzbekistan's *development financing landscape* is evolving with regard to internal and external, public and domestic sources of financing the national sustainable development priorities. The final sections focus on *regional cooperation and cross-border risks*, offering recommendations to ensure Uzbekistan stays on track to meet its SDG commitments by 2030.

The annexes of the CCA provide detailed supplementary information to support the main document. Annex A outlines the *status of Uzbekistan's accession and ratification of UN conventions and treaties*, while Annex B offers an in-depth structured information on the various *discrimination faced by the various vulnerable groups in Uzbekistan*, examining factors contributing to their exclusion and linking these to relevant SDGs and national duty bearers. Annex C presents *high-frequency economic indicators*, offering a snapshot of Uzbekistan's economic performance and trends. The situation with the *forcibly displaced persons (asylum seekers, refugees) and stateless persons* in Uzbekistan is covered in greater detail in Annex D, whereas Annex E provides the SPECA Regional Common Chapter that focuses on *transboundary trade, connectivity, and energy and water management issues*. Finally, Annex F provides the list of the CCA consultations with the stakeholders along with the summaries of key messages and discussion points from these meetings.

3. Progress towards 2030

Agenda and SDGs in the Country, including Commitments towards International Norms and Standards

3.1. Demographic trends

The population of Uzbekistan reached 37.4 million² in 2024, accounting for nearly half of Central Asia's total population. The country is undergoing notable demographic changes, driven by high fertility rates, internal and international migration, and an emerging trend of population aging. The population is expected to reach over 41 million by 2030, and 51 million by 2050.

Dynamic growth of the total population will be observed in all regions of the country. At the same time, not only absolute, but also relative increases will differ, because of regional differentiation of the age and sex structure of the population and age-specific fertility. Uzbekistan remains a relatively young country, with 55% of its population under 30 years old.

This presents significant economic potential, but can only be realized if public services, infrastructure, and employment opportunities keep up with the demand. The working-age population (15–64 years) is expected to grow from 23.6 million in 2023 to over 33 million by 2050. In all

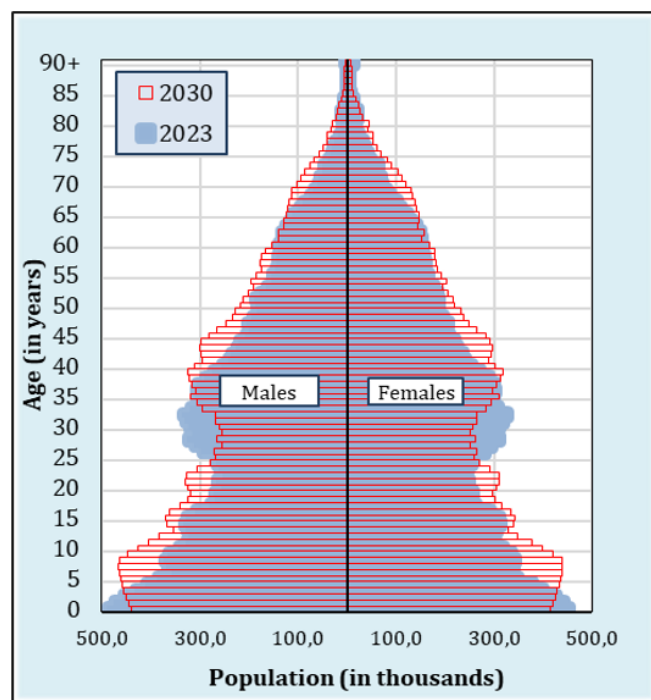
regions, this share will fluctuate between 65% and 67% by the end of the forecast period, signalling a continuation of the "demographic window of opportunities" where a high proportion of the working-age population may serve as a driver for economic growth.

To take advantage of this opportunity and harness the demographic dividend, it is necessary to invest further in health and education, stimulate economic activity of the population, especially youth and create conditions for productivity growth. Policies should aim at advancing gender equality by increasing access to family planning, education and vocational skills training, encouraging greater participation of women in the workforce through implementing family friendly policies, such as increasing access to affordable care services and care leave policies including childcare and paternity leave, facilitate male involvement in unpaid care and reintegration of women back to the labour market after the maternal break.

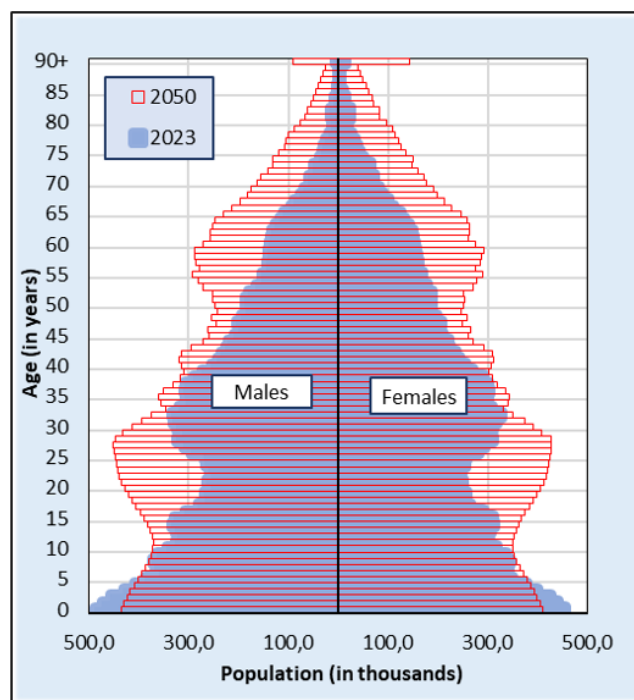
On the other hand, the population growth rate, which reached 2.2% in 2023, double the global average, reflects societal pressures that encourage early marriage and high fertility, particularly in rural areas such as the Ferghana Valley. The average age for a woman's first marriage went down from

² <https://www.stat.uz/ru/60-poleznaya-informatsiya/5902-naselenie-uzbekistana>

The expected change of population age structure between 2023 and 2030 (as of Dec.31)



The expected change of population age structure between 2023 and 2050 (as of Dec.31)



22.3 years in 2022 to 21.9 years in 2023, with some rural regions nearing an average age of 20. Restrictive gender norms limit women's access to education and career opportunities, highlighting the need for policies that address these stereotypes and provide greater access to reproductive health, family planning, decent work opportunities and women's rights.

The mean age of the country's population is expected to increase from 29.2 years in 2023 to 35.0 years in 2050, marking the transition of the country to an aged population. The age group at 65 and older is already the fastest growing segment, and their numbers projected to increase from 2.1 million in 2023 to 6.1 million by 2030, while those aged 85 and older will increase from 78 thousand to nearly 660 thousand, demanding reforms in health, social protection, and every other aspect of life. The aging population is a global phenomenon, and it is

mostly due to improvement of quality of life, better healthcare and social services.

Urbanisation is another major population trend, driven by migration from rural to urban areas and labour migration in search of better opportunities. As in other parts of the world, this trend will continue into the foreseeable future and further augmented by the government's policies to build New Tashkent, and expanding Samarkand, and Namangan. While this shift boosts economic growth in cities, it will also require substantial investments to urban infrastructure, housing, and public services.

Furthermore, Uzbekistan's population growth, changing age structure, and urbanization require comprehensive planning based on up-to-date demographic data. Reliable, disaggregated data is crucial for evidence-based policymaking. The long-awaited population census, now postponed

to 2026,³ is essential to provide such insights that will help the government and stakeholders address population needs, plan growth, allocate resources efficiently, and improve the quality of life for all people leaving no one behind.

3.2. Overview of population groups (at risk of being) left behind and main drivers of exclusion

Uzbekistan's 2nd Voluntary National Review (VNR)⁴ highlights significant achievements regarding the situation of vulnerable groups. For example, the country has made notable progress in improving gender equality through the development of a National Strategy for Gender Equality, access to higher education, and the adoption of laws to combat violence against women. For children, strides have been made in enhancing access to early childhood education and improving nutrition programs. Additionally, reforms for people with disabilities, such as inclusive education initiatives, and rural development programs targeting infrastructure and poverty reduction, are underway. The VNR also notes efforts to address economic disparities, especially in rural and underserved areas, with enhanced social protection mechanisms and targeted support for vulnerable populations.

Nonetheless, various population groups in Uzbekistan are still at risk of being left behind due to a combination of factors related to decent work deficits, discrimination, stereotypes, governance, legislation, socio-economic status, geography, and vulnerability to shocks. These groups experience multiple forms of exclusion that intersect, compounding their disadvantages and making it difficult for them to fully engage in or benefit

from the country's development efforts. The lack of accurate, comprehensive, and up-to-date information on these frequently marginalized groups, who are at higher risk of social, economic, or health disparities, further intensifies the challenges they face. These patterns of exclusion are not only a hindrance to individual well-being but also pose significant challenges to achieving the national Sustainable Development Goals.

Women in Uzbekistan face deep-rooted discrimination, often stemming from patriarchal attitudes and societal stereotypes regarding gender roles. Discriminatory laws and policies, especially those not aligned with international norms, further exacerbate this situation. In April 2023, a landmark law was enacted to criminalise domestic violence, including economic and psychological abuse, and to establish accountability for sexual violence and harassment against women. Since its adoption, reported cases of violence have risen by 30%, reflecting increased trust in the legal system and women's readiness to seek help. Over 500 protection orders were issued in the law's first year. However, much remains to be done to ensure all women are aware of their rights and pursue justice, while justice professionals receive capacity-building support to deliver coordinated services for prevention and protection. As indicated in CEDAW Concluding Observations it is reminded to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation with a definition of discrimination against women that covers direct and indirect discrimination in the public and private spheres as well as intersecting forms of discrimination, in line with article 1 of the CEDAW. Women are frequently discouraged from seeking and left behind in access to social protection, social care services including child, healthcare, decent work and economic opportunities, safe and healthy working environment free of violence and harassment and are at greater risk of being affected by disasters. They are less represented in paid economic activities and decent jobs. Young women face higher unemployment rates (15.5% vs

³ <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2024/10/23/population-census/>

⁴ <https://nsdg.stat.uz/en/publications/26>

10% for males) and the share of young women who were not in employment, education, or training (NEET) reached 42%, compared to 8.8% for males. Additionally, wage gender gaps are significant, with women earning 34% less than men, exceeding the global average of 20%.⁵ The gender pay gap between men and women in Uzbekistan is 34.0%. The proportion of women aged 15-25 who did not work, received no education or training (NEET) is much higher than that of men of the same age, 42% and 8.8% respectively (SDG, 2023)

Furthermore, gender disparities in land ownership and access to resources have been found to limit women's ability to influence agricultural practices and benefit from sectoral development.⁶

Although the HIV epidemic affects more men than women in Uzbekistan, women face additional hurdles in accessing essential HIV information, prevention, and care services, making them disproportionately vulnerable. Despite legislative efforts, weak enforcement of laws and impunity for law enforcement officers contribute to persistent gender inequalities. The consequences are severe, as women's limited participation in economic, social and decision-making spheres affects their ability to contribute to national progress and fully enjoy their rights.

Children and youth are another vulnerable group, especially those living in poverty or in rural areas. Systematic child labour in the cotton harvest has been successfully eliminated but the 2021 MICS study showed that 21% of 5–17-year-olds were engaged in labour, particularly in informal sectors outside of the cotton industry.⁷ Male children are more prone to engage in child labour

(34.3 per cent) compared to female children (25.0 per cent). Hazardous work (with 15.4 per cent of children engaged in) threatens the physical and cognitive development of these children, limiting their educational opportunities and long-term potential. This issue disproportionately affects children from the poorest households and rural communities. Children with disabilities, ethnic minority children, and those from Afghan families stranded in Uzbekistan face additional barriers, including limited access to education, healthcare, and social services. Children's vulnerability is further compounded by a lack of psychosocial support and exposure to violence, whether in their families or communities. As for the education, while school curricula and textbooks are available in seven languages, various factors contribute to lower school attendance among ethnic minority groups. Data indicates that school attendance rates for Tajik students are 95.8 %, Russian students at 91.8 %, and Karakalpak students at 96.1 %, compared to 97.5 % for Uzbek students.⁸

The exclusion of youth, especially those not in education, employment, or training (**NEET**), stems from a combination of inadequate legal frameworks, lack of civic space, and negative societal perceptions of young people. Additionally, a scarcity of employment and educational opportunities, coupled with low skill levels, deepens this marginalization, leaving many young people without viable pathways to economic and social participation. This marginalization increases their risk of radicalization, mental health issues, and involvement in illicit activities, thereby hindering their ability to contribute to Uzbekistan's development.

People with disabilities are one of the most marginalized groups in Uzbekistan, facing significant barriers to mobility, education, employment, and political participation. Social stigma and a medical approach to disability

⁵ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uzbekistan/publication/country-gender-assessment-2024#:~:text=Additionally%2C%20wage%20gender%20gaps%20are,and%20exacerbate%20poverty%20in%20Uzbekistan>

⁶ EU-ASK Annual Report 2021

⁷ [https://mics.unicef.org/surveys?display=card&f\[0\]=region:4301&keys=uzbekistan#](https://mics.unicef.org/surveys?display=card&f[0]=region:4301&keys=uzbekistan#)

⁸ 2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS, p.225

reinforce their exclusion, limiting their opportunities for decent living. Infrastructure remains inaccessible, and social protection mechanisms fail to adequately address their needs. Women and children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to violence and neglect. The continued focus on a residential approach to care and education, rather than community-based support and mainstreaming, further isolates people with disabilities from mainstream society.

The **rural population**, especially in ecologically fragile areas such as the Aral Sea region, faces compounded risks due to geographic isolation and environmental degradation. These communities suffer from a lack of access to decent jobs, healthcare, education, and social services, exacerbated by poor infrastructure and outdated agricultural practices. Rural areas are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which threatens livelihoods, exacerbates poverty, and increases the risk of food insecurity. Furthermore, the remoteness of these regions limits economic opportunities and access to essential services, contributing to the ongoing exclusion of rural populations from Uzbekistan's development progress.

The **poor**, including both rural and urban populations, experience multi-dimensional poverty that cuts across access to education, healthcare, employment, and social protection. Economic shocks, such as high food and energy inflation and job losses, disproportionately affect poor households, often pushing them further into poverty. The poorest households struggle to meet basic needs and lack access to basic social services, such as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure. Children in poor families are especially vulnerable, often engaged in child labour to support their families, which in turn hampers their education, health and overall development.

People living with HIV (PLHIV) and **LGBTQI+** community in Uzbekistan face stigmatisation, extreme marginalization and discrimination. **Migrants** make up 13% of

people living with HIV. This has prompted the government of Uzbekistan to prioritise migrant workers in its HIV prevention programmes.⁹ Gaps in treatment adherence, criminalisation of people living with HIV in relation to non-disclosure, exposure, or transmission and widespread stigma remain significant barriers. Legal barriers criminalizing consensual same-sex relationships, combined with societal stigma and violence, result in the exclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals from social protection, healthcare, and economic participation. This group is particularly vulnerable to violence, arbitrary detention, and harassment by law enforcement, with little recourse to justice. Of the 234 UPR recommendations made by various UN Member States, Uzbekistan supported 219, noting only 15 recommendations all of which related to the rights of LGBTQI+ people.¹⁰

Uzbekistan has not yet acceded to the 1951 *Refugee Convention* or its 1967 Protocol, nor has it established national **asylum** legislation governing asylum procedures. **Afghan nationals seeking asylum** (currently roughly around 500 households or up to 4,000 Afghan people) in Uzbekistan have faced challenges, including visa renewal difficulties, limited access to education, healthcare, and employment, and have reported being pressured to return to Afghanistan. Following the UPR recommendation, the government announced drafting of the law on refugees, which yet remains to be finalized.

Thanks to the 2020 law on citizenship, some 85,000 **stateless people** have acquired citizenship in Uzbekistan in recent years. However, statelessness remains a significant issue with 22,496 stateless officially registered as of January 2024, or 66% of Central Asia's stateless population. Many remain unaccounted for, such as the **Luli (local Romani)** communities. Uzbekistan has not acceded to the

⁹ <https://eca.iom.int/news/communities-take-lead-hiv-prevention-uzbekistan>

¹⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/uz-index>

Statelessness Conventions, resulting in economic and social exclusion for those without legal identity, diminishing their contribution to the economy. Addressing statelessness aligns with (SDGs, particularly SDG 10 (reducing inequality) and SDG 16 (promoting inclusive societies and legal identity for all). Uzbekistan's accession to the 1954 and 1961 *Statelessness Conventions* would support economic development, improve social integration, and advance the country's commitment to "leaving no one behind" under the 2030 Agenda.

Human trafficking remains a significant issue in Uzbekistan, with **vulnerable migrants** often falling victim to these crimes. Between January and May 2024, Uzbekistan's Supreme Court handed down 69 human trafficking convictions, with 52 resulting in prison sentences and 17 in fines or suspended sentences. Among the convicted, 53 were women and 16 men. In 2023, 126 people were convicted under human trafficking laws, with 84 sentenced to colonies. A notable gender disparity exists, with 111 women and only 15 men convicted.¹¹

Annex B of the CCA provides an updated structured overview and analysis of the various population groups that are at risk of being left behind in Uzbekistan, listing various factors and manifestations of the vulnerabilities, linkages to the relevant SDGs, and the main duty bearers concerned. In analysing the root causes of exclusion in Uzbekistan, several key factors emerge. Discriminatory laws and social attitudes, particularly toward women, people living with HIV, LGBTQI+ individuals, minorities, and people with disabilities, are significant barriers to inclusion. Governance issues, including weak enforcement of laws, lack of accountability, and impunity for law enforcement, further entrench exclusion. Socio-economic status also plays a crucial role, with poverty limiting access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

Geography, particularly for rural populations, exacerbates exclusion due to poor infrastructure and limited access to services. Finally, vulnerability to shocks - such as environmental degradation, climate change, and economic instability - further marginalizes already susceptible groups further limiting their ability to cope and thrive.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, grounded in a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA). Efforts must focus on legal reforms, improving governance and accountability, strengthening social protection systems, and addressing discriminatory attitudes through education and awareness campaigns. Additionally, targeted interventions are needed to support the most vulnerable populations, including women, children, youth, people with disabilities, minorities, and the rural poor, to ensure they are not left behind in Uzbekistan's journey toward achieving the 2030 Agenda.

3.3. Social development and exclusion analysis

Uzbekistan's path to sustainable development is deeply tied to the well-being and empowerment of its people. Uzbekistan's 2022 Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.727 places it in the high human development category (ranked 106 of 193), reflecting significant progress since 2000 with a 6-year increase in life expectancy, improved education indicators, and a 210.5% growth in GNI per capita.¹² Since 2017, the government has made notable strides, particularly in expanding access to education and healthcare, increasing social spending, prioritising universal preschool enrolment and implementing structural reforms aimed at increasing decent and inclusive employment opportunities. These efforts align with the country's national SDGs, aiming to foster an

¹¹ <https://t.me/AzizAbidov/5000>

¹² <https://chatgpt.com/c/673eb995-36bc-8001-af9a-30040654e4f1>

inclusive, equitable society where human potential can be fully realized by everyone.

However, significant challenges remain. Disparities in access to quality education and healthcare persist, particularly in rural areas and among vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities, women, people living with HIV, and low-income families. Educational outcomes fall short of global benchmarks, and gaps in skills acquisition limit the ability of young people to thrive in an increasingly digital and competitive global economy. In healthcare, there is a need for comprehensive reforms to improve quality, expand primary care access, enhance financial protection, digitalize services, and strengthen prevention and treatment of communicable and non-communicable diseases to ensure equitable and universal health coverage to avoid such high out-of-pocket payments. Addressing these challenges will require continued investment in human capital, with a focus on reducing inequalities, enhancing inclusivity, and building the capabilities needed to drive Uzbekistan's sustainable development agenda. This section (3.3) will explore the three critical pillars of people-centred development - education, healthcare, and social protection - assessing Uzbekistan's achievements and challenges that must be addressed to foster social progress and long-term sustainability.

Education

With over 30% of its population being children (under 18), Uzbekistan faces significant **educational** challenges. Despite the government consistently allocating over 20% of the state budget to education - meeting international benchmarks of allocating 4-6 of the GDP for education - funding still falls short of ensuring access to quality and inclusive education for all. The number of enrolled students is forecast to rise from 6.4 million from in the 2023/2024 academic year to 8.6 million by 2030. To accommodate this growth, the government aims to create 620,000 new preschool

places and 1.2 million general secondary education places by 2026, alongside constructing 370 new schools.¹³

Infrastructure remains inadequate, with many schools lacking proper heating, lighting, water and sanitation facilities. Many schools are forced to use a “double-shift system” to fit all students into classrooms. In 2023, only 85.2% of schools had access to drinking water, and more than 78% had just one set of functional toilets (2-3 outlets on average). Although modern construction standards have been introduced, further improvements are needed to ensure access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services, particularly for children with disabilities.¹⁴ In many cases, the absence of gender-sensitive WASH facilities, including menstrual hygiene management (MHM) provisions, has led to higher rates of absenteeism and school dropouts among girls, as they are unable to manage their menstrual health effectively while at school.¹⁵

Uzbekistan has made substantial strides in preschool enrolment, with rates climbing from under 30% in 2017 to over 73% in 2024, positively impacting almost 2 million children. Despite this progress, notable disparities persist, particularly in remote areas and for girls. Only 40.6% of girls attend early childhood education compared to 51.1% of boys, likely due to traditional social norms and socioeconomic barriers that impede equal participation for girls. Moreover, significant regional disparities in preschool attendance exist, ranging from 71.9% in Tashkent to 47.7% in Kashkadarya.¹⁶ The Early Childhood Development Index (ECDI) stands at a relatively high 82.6 per cent. However, a stark disparity exists for children with functional difficulties, whose ECDI is only 36.3 per cent.¹⁷

¹³ <https://lex.uz/docs/6600404>

¹⁴ UNICEF ‘Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Uzbekistan’, 2024, page 127

¹⁵ UNICEF equity of access to WASH schools (2011)

¹⁶ ‘2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS’, p.217

¹⁷ UNICEF, MICS (2021-2022)

Despite universal completion rates for primary and lower secondary education, the upper secondary completion rate drops to 94%, with children from the poorest families at 89%.¹⁸ The dropout rate is influenced by inconsistent education quality, inadequate infrastructure, and economic pressures, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups, including children from remote areas and those with disabilities.

Inclusive education policies have been introduced, with the 2020 Law "On Education" and the 2019 Law on Preschool Education setting a legal foundation. However, challenges remain, including inadequate infrastructure, methodologies, textbooks, and teaching capacities. Access to education for children with disabilities is also limited, with only 84-87% attending secondary school compared to the national average of 99.8%.¹⁹

Despite substantial investments in Uzbekistan's education system, many students continue to miss foundational skills and competencies, impeding their academic progress and future opportunities. In the debut 2022 PISA assessment, Uzbekistan showed rankings below average in mathematics (72nd), reading (80th), and science (80th). Fewer Uzbek students reached top levels or the minimum proficiency across all subjects, with over 80% falling short of basic competency levels, and critical thinking significantly below the OECD average. Gender disparities were noted, with boys slightly leading in mathematics and girls in reading. Uzbekistan is one of the countries where the relationship between learning performance and socio-economics status (ESCS) is the weakest. Relatively low learning quality and skills are determined by inadequate assessment practices, low teacher quality, and inadequate learning environments.²⁰

¹⁸ World Bank. 'School enrolment, primary (% gross) – Uzbekistan'. 2023, 2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS'. p.225

¹⁹ MICS in Uzbekistan, 2021-2022

²⁰ <https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/pisa-2022->

While all 10,160 schools are reportedly connected to Internet, they do not meet modern standards of integrating digital technologies in education, hindering digital learning and STEM education.²¹ A 2020 UNICEF study has found that in Uzbekistan, while 86.9% of young people express strong interest in learning about computers, 37.8%, particularly females and rural youth, lack computer skills. A significant 53.9% of youth, mainly from rural areas and females, 'never' use the Internet, compared to 25.4% of urban residents and males who use it 'daily'.²² The Internet is seen both as a useful tool for social and educational purposes and a potential risk, with concerns about 'wasting time' and exposure to 'bad influences,' disproportionately affecting females due to fear of stigmatization. Comprehensive digital literacy and child protection measures are essential to mitigate these risks.²³

Reproductive health education for adolescents poses a significant challenge for the education system, as it struggles to provide accurate information to 12–13-year-olds who often turn to unreliable sources for answers.

Uzbekistan has prioritised expanding **access to tertiary education** by increasing student places and promoting the establishment of private universities. The system, managed by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation (MHESI), now includes 210 institutions. However, capacity remains insufficient, with only 360,000 to 380,000 places available for around 600,000 secondary school graduates each year. Despite investments, significant regional disparities persist, particularly for students in rural areas, who continue to face financial barriers and attend lower-quality institutions. Although

results-volume-i-and-ii-country-notes_ed6fbcc5-en/
uzbekistan_2bb94bf1-en.html

²¹ UNICEF 'Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Uzbekistan', 2024, page 110

²² These figures, however, may be outdated and have been questioned by the Ministry of Information Technology.

²³ UNICEF 'Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Uzbekistan', 2024, page 112

digitalisation, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has improved access to education, rural regions still struggle with inadequate digital infrastructure and connectivity.

Gender parity in higher education has seen marked improvements, with women now representing 52% of bachelor's and 62% of master's enrolments. However, their participation in STEM fields remains limited, and more robust tracking of post-graduation employment outcomes is essential to ensure educational progress translates into workplace equality. While private sector involvement has helped diversify educational opportunities, quality gaps between urban and rural institutions need addressing. To build a globally competitive system higher education system, Uzbekistan must continue investing in curriculum modernisation, faculty development, and infrastructure, alongside expanding international collaborations and aligning qualifications with global standards.

The country's ***technical and vocational education and training (TVET)*** system is facing similar issues. Recently restructured under Presidential Decree No. 158 on 16 October 2024, the system now consists of 600 merged technicums, replacing the previous structure of 333 vocational schools, 227 technicums, and 112 colleges.²⁴ This system plays a vital role in addressing workforce shortages in key sectors such as agriculture, ICT, and renewable energy. Despite significant reforms aimed at improving inclusivity, access to TVET remains uneven, especially in rural regions, where infrastructure and digital resources are lacking. Government efforts to enhance TVET, including financial mechanisms like educational loans and scholarships, have aimed to support disadvantaged students, but regional disparities in both quality and accessibility persist.

Gender equity is another critical challenge, with female participation in vocational education

at 52%. However, women remain underrepresented in traditionally male-dominated fields such as engineering and ICT. However, education and health are traditionally considered female domains. Gender stereotypes influence educational choices and are reproduced in the labour market. Technical fields are generally associated with higher-paying jobs, and the study of humanities usually leads to lower paying jobs.²⁵ The recently announced curriculum reforms²⁶ toward competency-based learning and the introduction of accreditation systems aim to better align with labour market needs, but there are still skills mismatches, particularly in rural areas with less access to modern training facilities. The shortage of qualified teachers further exacerbates these issues, particularly in rural areas where recruitment and retention are difficult. Enhanced public-private partnerships and teacher training are essential to improving the quality and relevance of vocational education across the country.

In summary, Uzbekistan has made strides in education access, particularly in preschool and tertiary enrolment, but faces ongoing challenges in infrastructure, inclusivity, and learning quality, particularly for vulnerable groups and children with disabilities.

Health

Since the 1990s, Uzbekistan has gradually decentralized its healthcare system, now structured in a tripartite model across national, regional, and district levels. While the Ministry of Health leads this framework, regional and municipal authorities are increasingly engaged. Funded primarily through general taxation, the healthcare system employs public health workers on a salaried basis. The

²⁴ <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/7166625>

²⁵ <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/479841/uzbekistan-country-gender-assessment-update.pdf>

²⁶ Press release data of the President Administration 24.09.2024

private sector, although limited, is growing, with private hospitals and dual practice by some doctors in both public and private settings.

Ongoing reforms since 2018 target improvements in service delivery, financing, and digitalization, guided by the "**Concept on Health Development 2019-2025**." First piloted in Syrdarya Region in 2021, these reforms are gradually being implemented nationwide. The Health Reform Strategy focuses on key objectives aimed at 1) extending life expectancy, 2) restructuring healthcare financing for equitable access, and 3) strengthening management to improve the quality of care.

Despite these initiatives, Uzbekistan faces significant healthcare challenges. The legacy of a Soviet-era centralized system, combined with chronic underinvestment and aging infrastructure, contributes to inefficiencies. The system remains hospital-centric, limiting access to quality primary care, and rural-urban disparities persist. Out-of-pocket (OOP) expenses remain a financial burden for many despite increased public funding, highlighting the need for targeted infrastructure and capacity-building investments to support SDGs and improve health outcomes. In 2021 OOP payments accounted for 60.3% of health spending, virtually the same level as in 2000. This was higher than the Central Asian average of 53.6% and the LMIC average of 52.7% in 2021, and more than double the WHO European regional average of 26.6%. In absolute terms, it equated to USD406 of health spending per person.²⁷

Digitalization efforts under the "Digital Uzbekistan – 2030" framework are advancing, with a new health financing and delivery model currently scaled from its pilot phase in Syrdarya. Although **universal health coverage** (UHC) remains a central goal, achieving it requires bolstered financial and administrative capacities,

especially for primary healthcare. While access to healthcare has improved, further action is needed to address service gaps, ensure financial protection, and enhance care quality, particularly for lower-income households.

The Ministry of Health is finalizing the **Public Health-2030 Strategy**, focused on reducing early mortality, enhancing primary healthcare, promoting healthy lifestyles, fully digitalizing health services, and reforming financing to ensure equitable resource distribution and UHC. Nonetheless, persistent systemic issues continue to impede progress, leading to mixed results across several SDG 3 targets and indicators.

Additionally, Uzbekistan's government, with WHO collaboration, has finalized a National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS) for 2024–2028, currently pending review by the Cabinet of Ministers. Aligned with the Joint External Evaluation (JEE) under the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005), the NAPHS outlines 75 priority actions across 19 technical areas. Following a "One Health, all-hazards" approach, the plan aims to strengthen national health security through cross-sector collaboration, resource allocation, and development of core health security capacities.

Health outcomes have seen improvement, with **life expectancy** rising from 69.6 years in 2000 to 75.75 years in 2023.²⁸ The government intends to elevate life expectancy to 78 years by 2030.²⁹ However, **non-communicable diseases** (NCDs) continue to lead as the primary cause of death, accounting for 85% of fatalities in 2022, which is above the global average of 74%. Despite a decline, internationally comparable figures show that Uzbekistan still ranks among the countries with the highest age-standardized mortality rates for NCDs in the WHO European Region. In 2019 NCDs

²⁷ <https://apps.who.int/nha/database/ViewData/Indicators/en>

²⁸ State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics. (2023). Retrieved from <https://stat.uz/en> (life expectancy is 77.4 for urban and 74.1 for rural areas)

²⁹ <https://lex.uz/docs/6600404>

accounted for 673 deaths per 100 000 population in Uzbekistan. While this is a clear improvement compared to earlier years, it was still substantially higher than the WHO European Region average of 427 deaths per 100 000 population for the same year. Female deaths from NCDs in 2019 were lower (585 per 100 000 population) than among males (781) but still much higher than the average for the WHO European Region (337). Premature mortality (referring to deaths in people aged 30–69 years) caused by the major noncommunicable diseases (cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes mellitus and chronic respiratory diseases) is also high in Uzbekistan. Ischaemic heart disease is the leading cause of NCD deaths for both sexes, followed by stroke and liver cirrhosis.

NCDs imposed economic losses equivalent to 4.7% of GDP in 2016, underscoring the need for stronger prevention, early diagnosis, and management measures to reduce mortality and alleviate economic pressures on the healthcare system.³⁰

Maternal health (SDG 3.1) remains a concern in Uzbekistan. While 90% of pregnant women receive at least four antenatal visits and 99% of births occur in facilities, the maternal mortality rate (MMR) is 15.9 per 100,000 live births as of 2023 (according to the official statistics)³¹. Rising caesarean section rates, up from 10.8% in 2012 to 21% in 2021, contribute to increased risks, as do inadequate antenatal, intrapartum, and postnatal care. About 31.4% of pregnant women lack education on complication warning signs, leading to preventable hospital admissions. Obstetric haemorrhage, preeclampsia, and sepsis account for up to 70% of maternal deaths, exposing gaps in clinical protocols and infection control. At the primary level, 77% of patronage nurses

lack awareness of danger signs in pregnancy, and one in five serves more than four women daily, compromising service quality. Only 50% of General Practitioners and 70% of obstetricians provide complete antenatal services, which results in low quality of care to almost 77% of pregnant women.

Family planning is a key priority for Uzbekistan, where high fertility rates persist. According to the 2022 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), the unmet need for family planning stands at 11%, rising to 16.1% among women aged 25–59. This unmet need is shaped by social, cultural, economic, and health system factors. Most women live in traditional, patriarchal families and rely on the decisions of their husbands and in-laws regarding reproductive health and family planning.

MICS also shows a decline in contraceptive use from 64.9% in 2006 to 58.8% in 2022, with an even sharper drop among women aged 15–19, from 22% to just 1.9%. Additionally, 43.2% of women surveyed reported unplanned pregnancies.³² While the government has invested in family planning programmes and offers free services, these efforts have not fully addressed the issue, as reflected in the decreased contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) from 49.6% in 2021 to 45.7% in 2023. Around 76% of women receive family planning information from patronage nurses, and 60% prefer to obtain contraceptives through family polyclinics. Increased, sustainable government funding for contraceptive procurement would help ensure better access to a broad range of modern contraceptive options.

Cervical cancer, the second most common cancer and cause of cancer death among women in Uzbekistan, remains a critical issue. Although HPV vaccination for 9-year-old girls began in 2019, it will take decades to impact cancer rates fully, with noticeable effects only expected by 2039. Effective

³⁰ [https://www.who.int/andorra/publications/m/item/prevention-and-control-of-noncommunicable-disease-in-uzbekistan.-the-case-for-investment-\(2018\)](https://www.who.int/andorra/publications/m/item/prevention-and-control-of-noncommunicable-disease-in-uzbekistan.-the-case-for-investment-(2018))

³¹ https://api.siat.stat.uz/media/uploads/sdmx/sdmx_data_662.pdf

³² Assessment of the quality of antenatal care at primary healthcare level, UNFPA, 2022

cervical screening must continue as a priority over the next 50 years to protect unvaccinated women, yet current screening efforts are inadequate, as shown by high incidence, mortality, and the high mortality-to-incidence ratio (MIR). Annually, 1,650 women develop cervical cancer, and 1,000 die from it. A national HPV-based screening programme could reduce cases and deaths by over 90%, potentially preventing 8,500 cases and 5,000 deaths by 2030.

Infant and child mortality rates in Uzbekistan vary across different data sources. Despite progress, the survival rate of babies in the first 28 days remains a concern. 57% of child deaths occur within the first 28 days, with three-quarters of these neonatal deaths occurring in the first week.³³ The leading causes of neonatal mortality include premature birth, infections, asphyxia/trauma, and congenital anomalies.³⁴ Significant regional disparities in health outcomes persist, with the Republic of Karakalpakstan, Andijan, and Khorezm reporting higher neonatal mortality rates than the national average. Survival rates of underweight newborns are below 90% in several regions, reflecting inadequate newborn care. The prevalence of congenital anomalies doubled in Karakalpakstan between 2021 and 2022, signalling deficiencies in prenatal care and public health interventions.

Additionally, low adherence to WHO-recommended practices, such as skin-to-skin contact and exclusive **breastfeeding**, exacerbates neonatal mortality. Only 26% of newborns received skin-to-skin care immediately after birth, and just 40% were breastfed within the first hour (MICS, 2022). Although breastfeeding legislation was introduced in 2019, enforcement has been limited, covering less than half the provisions of the *International Code of Marketing of*

Breastmilk Substitutes. Consequently, the exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) rate has dropped by **25%** since 2017.

On the contrary, **child nutrition** (SDG2.2) has improved, with stunting reduced to 6.9% and the prevalence of overweight children decreasing to 4.2% (UNICEF, WHO, World Bank Group, 2023). However, children in southern regions face significantly higher rates of malnutrition due to elevated poverty levels, limiting progress on child health outcomes.³⁵

Anaemia remains a significant public health concern in Uzbekistan, particularly among women of reproductive age and children under five. In 2019, approximately 23% of women aged 15-49 and 21.9% of children aged 6-59 months were affected by anaemia, primarily due to iron deficiency and poor dietary diversity. Anaemia impacts both maternal and child health, hindering physical and cognitive development in children.

Mental health issues among children and adolescents in Uzbekistan are increasingly alarming. A recent study found that 16% of students experience social isolation, 15.4% face moderate to severe anxiety, and 9.8% suffer from depression (UNICEF, 2022).³⁶ Family conflicts, academic pressure, and bullying are key contributing factors. The 2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS Survey reported that 12.9 per cent of children (11.8 % of boys and 14% of girls) aged 5-17 years old experience anxiety, and 3.5 per cent (both boys and girls equally) suffer from depression. These estimates are notably higher in the Western Region (the Republic of Karakalpakstan, and the Bukhara, Navoiy and Khorezm regions), and in the Southern Region (the Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya regions).. Improving mental health services and increasing support for young people are essential for

³³ UNIGME-2023-Child Mortality

³⁴ Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan

³⁵ Center for Economic Research and Reforms (CERR) and UNICEF, Child Monetary Poverty in Uzbekistan Report, 2024

³⁶ UNICEF. Adolescents' mental health and psychosocial well-being at schools. 2022.

promoting well-being, aligned with SDG3.4, which seeks to reduce premature mortality from mental health disorders.

Viral hepatitis, particularly **Hepatitis B and C**, presents a major public health challenge in Uzbekistan. A recent population study revealed that 4.3% of adults have Hepatitis C, and 2.7% are affected by Hepatitis B, with higher prevalence among men and individuals aged 40-49. Systemic barriers, including inadequate laboratory capabilities and outdated healthcare practices, limit the effectiveness of hepatitis management and prevention.

Tuberculosis (TB) remains a serious public health issue in Uzbekistan, which is one of the 30 high-burden countries globally for drug-resistant TB (MDR/RR-TB). Although the country has made progress, scaling up modified short treatment regimens has become a priority, with treatment success rates for MDR/RR-TB rising from 71% to 86%. Despite these improvements, TB continues to strain healthcare resources.

Uzbekistan bears the highest **antimicrobial resistance (AMR)** burden in the region. In 2019, there were 4,500 deaths directly attributed to AMR, with an additional 17,200 deaths associated with it. Among 204 countries, Uzbekistan ranks 73rd in age-standardized mortality rates related to AMR and holds the third-highest rate across nine countries in the Central Asia region, according to the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study. Alarming, AMR-related deaths in Uzbekistan exceed those caused by other major health issues, including digestive diseases, respiratory infections, tuberculosis, diabetes, kidney diseases, maternal and neonatal disorders, and unintentional injuries.

Uzbekistan is experiencing a rapidly growing **HIV epidemic**, the fastest in Central Asia (SDG 3.3). As of 2023, an estimated 62,000 people are living with HIV in the country, including 3,400 children aged 0 to 14, as well as 27,000 women

and 31,000 men aged 15 and over.³⁷ Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV (PMTCT) in Uzbekistan has improved, with 78% of pregnant women living with HIV receiving antiretroviral therapy to prevent mother-to-child transmission. In 2023, 783 pregnant women received ARV for PMTCT out of the 1,000 who needed it. Early infant diagnosis coverage is at 66%, and the final vertical transmission rate, including during breastfeeding, is 16.15%. New HIV infections averted due to PMTCT are estimated to be fewer than 500, and there are approximately 6,100 HIV-exposed uninfected children.³⁸ The surge in new HIV infections, especially among key populations - such as sex workers, people who inject drugs, MSM, and migrants - highlights systemic gaps in access to essential prevention, treatment, and care services. Despite government efforts, including targeted HIV testing and treatment programmes for most at risk population, only 66% of people living with HIV are receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART). This shortfall poses a significant challenge to meeting the 2030 Fast Track Targets to end the HIV epidemic. Furthermore, children and adolescents living with HIV remain underserved, with only 24% accessing ART, a critical gap in achieving sustainable epidemic control.

Migrants who make up 40% of new HIV cases, face limited access to healthcare and prevention services, worsening their vulnerability. Government initiatives, including those supported by the UN, are working to improve outreach and education, but gaps in treatment adherence, criminalisation of people living with HIV in relation to non-disclosure, exposure, or transmission and widespread stigma remain significant barriers.

³⁹ Deep-seated gender inequality and patriarchal

³⁷ <https://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/uzbekistan>

³⁸ Elimination of vertical transmission at: <https://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/uzbekistan>

³⁹ International Treaty Bodies and experts recommend no to criminalize people living with HIV in relation to

norms further complicate this landscape, disproportionately restricting women's access to HIV services and economic opportunities.

A significant obstacle to an effective HIV response in Uzbekistan is the availability and quality of HIV data, which is critical for strategic decision-making. Data on HIV is limited and often lacks gender and age disaggregation, particularly for key populations. Inconsistent data collection, stigma-related data quality issues, and limited technical capacity for data analysis further hinder informed decision-making and resource allocation. Additionally, systemic and legal barriers exacerbate the situation. The criminalization and stigmatization of people living with HIV and key populations create substantial barriers to accessing essential healthcare services, severely impacting treatment adherence and health outcomes. Systemic and legal barriers, compounded by the lack of formal recognition of these vulnerable groups, further limit access to HIV-related services.

While the government has implemented targeted HIV testing and treatment programs, stigma and criminalization continue to impede effective coverage and positive outcomes.

non-disclosure, exposure or transmission of the virus except, in extremely rare circumstances where people intend to transmit HIV and effectively transmit the virus. See for instance, UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General comment No. 22 (2016) on the right to sexual and reproductive health (article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), E/C.12/GC/22, May 2, 2016; The 8 March Principles for a Human Rights-Based Approach to Criminal Law Proscribing Conduct Associated with Sex, Reproduction, Drug Use, HIV, Homelessness and Poverty. International Commission of Jurists. March 2003. Online: <https://www.icj.org/icj-publishes-a-new-set-of-legal-principles-to-address-the-harmful-human-rights-impact-of-unjustified-criminalization-of-individuals-and-entire-communities/> and Criminalization of HIV Transmission. Police Brief. UNAIDS. 2008. In the alternative, it is recommended that the legislation strictly limits HIV criminalization to exceptional cases of intentional transmission.

Preventive programs, especially those targeting key populations, rely heavily on international funding, raising concerns about their long-term sustainability and reach.

Uzbekistan continues to sustain high immunization coverages, reporting an official 99% **vaccination** coverage, with more than one million children having access to essential vaccines (SDG3.8). The MICS study (2022) found that 20% of newborns did not receive the Hepatitis B vaccine within the recommended one day of birth, and 4% of children did not receive it at all. Vaccine hesitancy, driven by concerns over vaccine safety and lack of awareness, contributes to some children receiving partial, delayed or no vaccination. Enhancing public trust in vaccines through education and addressing misconceptions is vital to further improving immunisation rates. Other factors contributing to vaccine acceptance and delayed vaccinations include staff shortages, false contraindications and awareness of health workers on the importance of timely vaccinations.

In Uzbekistan, the availability, affordability, and quality of food strongly influence **dietary habits** and health outcomes. The increased accessibility of processed foods has driven up **obesity** rates and related health issues, while many households still struggle to afford nutritious options. The absence of national food-based dietary guidelines and limited data hinder efforts to assess and improve diet quality. In 2020, the economic cost of diseases linked to poor dietary patterns reached USD34 billion, marking diet-related health issues as a major public health concern.⁴⁰

Road Accidents are a significant public health challenge in Uzbekistan, with fatalities exceeding the EU average by over 45%. Traffic accidents are among the leading causes of death for individuals aged 5 to 29 and account for substantial economic losses, estimated at 2.6% to 3.8% of GDP. This issue puts immense pressure on emergency care

⁴⁰ SOFA (2023)

services, with trauma cases requiring significant healthcare resources. Improving emergency care, improving road infrastructure, and addressing road safety are critical components of reducing preventable injuries and deaths. Reducing fatalities from road accidents aligns with SDG3.6, which calls for halving global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2030. Uzbekistan needs to invest in both preventive road safety measures and emergency response capacity to address this issue effectively.

A significant systemic issue is the high ***out-of-pocket healthcare expenses*** that undermine access to necessary services, particularly for vulnerable populations. The most vulnerable populations facing restricted access to healthcare due to financial and other barriers include low-income families, the elderly, rural residents, unemployed or underemployed individuals, women and children, those with chronic illnesses or disabilities, and migrant or refugee populations, all of whom are disproportionately affected by high medical costs and limited service availability.

Despite recent initiatives to introduce state health insurance mechanisms, out-of-pocket payments continue to burden families, limiting access to essential care and reducing health equity. Financial protection through universal health coverage is central to SDG3.8 (Achieve universal health coverage), which aims to provide financial risk protection and access to quality essential healthcare services.

Efforts to ***digitalize healthcare*** and introduce ***health insurance*** mechanisms are underway yet face challenges. The national health information system is still largely paper-based, and government investment in health information technology (IT) has previously been limited to basic electronic data collection and entry. The liquidation of “IT-Med” and the transfer of its functions to “UZINFOCOM” has created uncertainties regarding institutional memory and human resources. However, full digitalization and improved access through health insurance are key

steps toward equitable and effective healthcare.

To sum up, Uzbekistan’s healthcare system faces deep-rooted systemic challenges, particularly in non-communicable diseases, maternal and neonatal care, financial protection, and regional health disparities. The country’s path toward universal health coverage, improved healthcare quality, and digital transformation is crucial for advancing **SDG3**. Systemic reforms, including improved quality of care, financial protection, equitable health services, and addressing regional disparities, are necessary.

Social protection services

Uzbekistan has made significant strides in enhancing its social protection system, aligning with international standards. The adoption of the National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) in 2022 sets medium- and long-term goals in line with the SDGs. A key development was the establishment of the National Agency for Social Protection (NASP) on June 1, 2023, overseeing services for children, people with disabilities, survivors of domestic violence, and families in difficult situations. The nationwide Single Registry, launched in late 2020, streamlines access to social programs by integrating application, eligibility assessment, and benefit delivery. Starting 1 January 2020, the system covers key programmes of financial assistance to vulnerable families/ individuals, such as child benefits, material support, partial compensations on maternity benefits for women working in the private sector, cash compensations to the vulnerable families affected by the increase of energy utility tariffs in April 2024. However, since the beginning of 2024, the government has been toughening the eligibility criteria, resulting in more than 50% reduction in the number of the vulnerable families receiving the state child support. Stateless individuals, migrants, ethnic minorities, and rural dwellers remain particularly vulnerable, as their conditions may intensify their weaknesses and risks for them.

Furthermore, social services are managed parallelly through the Unified Social Protection Platform, a digital system developed by NASP in 2023. While some services have been digitized, the system primarily serves as a needs assessment and case referral tool.⁴¹

Despite these improvements, challenges remain, such as the reliance on manually maintained local "notebooks" (registers) that complicate social protection administration. Additionally, the absence of a grievance redress mechanism tailored for social protection affects vulnerable families, especially children.⁴² The effectiveness of the Single Registry, vital during emergencies, is limited by the lack of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Under NASP's leadership, Uzbekistan has expanded social services by establishing 208 *Inson* centres with 1,048 district-level social workers. These professionals collaborate with local Mahalla teams (Team of Seven) to ensure coordinated support at the grassroots level, demonstrating the government's commitment to addressing the needs of vulnerable populations. However, the system remains focused on response services, reaching only a portion of those in need. Shifting toward preventive measures, investing in capacity building, and expanding public-private partnerships will be crucial to improving service delivery and ensuring a sustainable, inclusive social protection system.

Uzbekistan has further strengthened its social protection framework by placing gender-based violence (GBV) oversight within the NASP, including managing the Rehabilitation and Adaptation Centres for Women. This integration reflects a comprehensive approach to GBV, embedding it within the broader social protection system to ensure coordinated, accessible support for

survivors. To reinforce this integration, the NASP, with support from the UN, has implemented Standard Operating Procedures within *Inson* centres to deliver consistent, multisectoral services for GBV survivors. These centres aim to provide an inclusive response with improved interagency coordination, though there is need to refine service quality and referral pathways. By enhancing guidelines and standards, Uzbekistan can build a survivor-centred approach, elevating the NASP's capacity to address the complex needs of GBV survivors and advancing a more resilient and responsive social protection system.

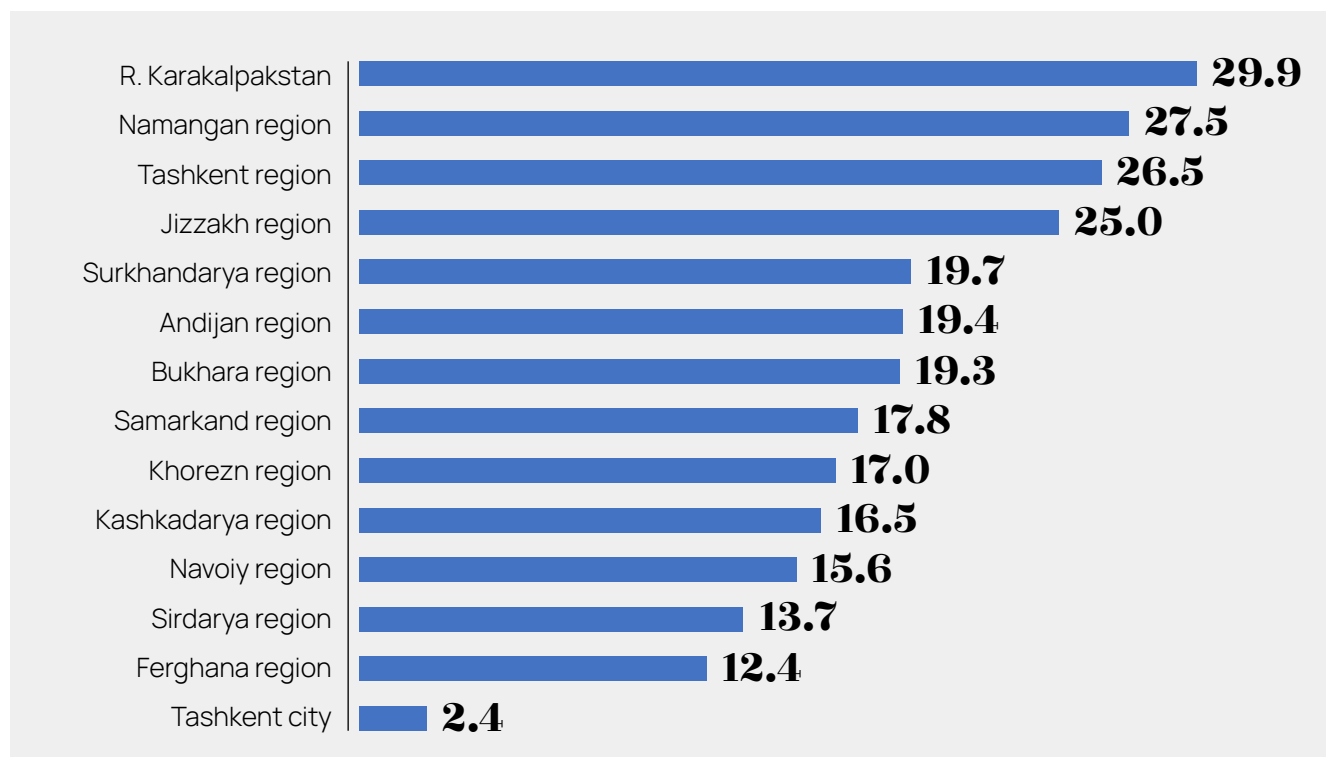
3.4. Economic transformation analysis

Uzbekistan's transition from a centralized, state-driven economy to a more open, market-oriented system has gained momentum under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev since 2017. Early reforms, including the liberalization of the exchange rates, trade, and pricing, along with taxation simplification and visa-free entry to boost tourism, have boosted growth and encouraged private sector participation. However, the restructuring and privatization of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), agricultural reforms, and energy tariff liberalization have encountered delays, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, regional conflicts, and internal political dynamics. Despite robust GDP growth averaging around 6% in the post-pandemic years, translating this growth into tangible social and environmental benefits remains a challenge.

Despite the external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the regional conflicts, the economic performance in Uzbekistan continues to be strong, with GDP growth reaching 6.0% in 2023 and 6.4% in the first half of 2024, driven by expansionary fiscal policies, increased investments, and strong consumer demand. Inflation remains a concern, particularly after a substantial increase in energy tariffs for consumers in April 2024, which reversed the downward trend and pushed

⁴¹ <https://daryo.uz/en/2023/10/19/uzbekistan-launches-hotline-for-accessing-social-assistance>

⁴² The Presidential Decree No. PD-82 and the Regulation on Identifying Low-Income Families do not include provisions for addressing grievances related to social benefits applications.

Figure 1: Multi-dimensional poverty incidence in Uzbekistan by administrative regions

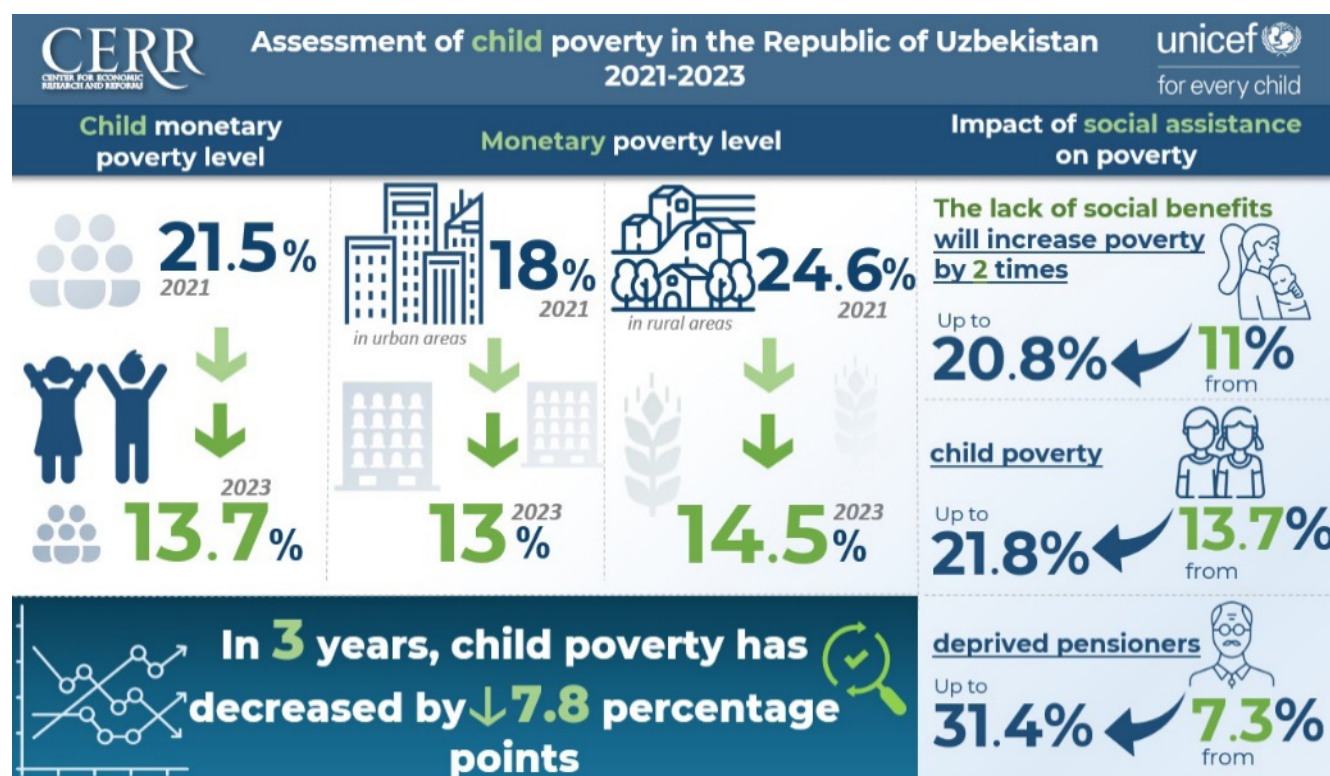
the inflation back to 10.6%, reaching double digits once again. The current account deficit widened significantly to 8.6% of GDP in 2023 from 3.5% in 2022, due to increased imports and higher foreign debt payments. International reserves, however, remain substantial, covering more than nine months' worth of imports. Record level fiscal deficit is of concern, although the government is committed to fiscal consolidation, aiming to reduce the budget deficit to 4% of GDP in 2024 and 3% in 2025 by scaling back the energy subsidies and improving the targeting of social expenditures.

The robust economic growth has helped lift around 2 million people out of **poverty** since 2021. According to official data income poverty has decreased from 17% in 2021 to 11% in 2023. The primary driver behind this reduction has been household income growth, with wages contributing to 60% of the overall progress in poverty reduction.

Poverty remains more widespread and severe in agricultural regions compared to non-agricultural areas in Uzbekistan, where income distribution is often imbalanced, showing significant disparities against national averages. The social cost associated with poverty among agrifood workers was USD338 million in 2020, underscoring the economic challenges faced by those in Uzbekistan's agrifood sector and indicating a persistent issue of income insufficiency.⁴³

The next biggest driver was **social benefits spending**. In 2023, the government allocated UZS19.2 trillion (6.8% of the total budget) to social protection, with the largest share (UZS13.8

⁴³ The State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA, 2023), <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/d18c268b-55bc-435f-8b6d-6f6efbf39479/content>



trillion, or 4.9% of the state budget) going to pension security and UZ\$12.3 trillion (1.9% of the state budget) channelled to social benefits and child allowances. Social benefits reach some 10.8 million people, including 2.2 million low-income families, which is about four times more than 5 years ago. Social assistance programs have proven to significantly reduce poverty. According to UN estimates, the absence of transfers could raise overall poverty from 11% to 20.8%, child poverty from 13.7% to 21.8%, and elderly poverty from 7.3% to 31.4%. Significant gaps remain, however, with around 60% of households in the lowest income quintiles still not receiving child allowances.⁴⁴

According to the pilot N-MPI report (2024) around 18.4 percent of the adult population

(4.2 million) are **multidimensionally poor** in Uzbekistan as they experience deprivations in at least 34 percent of the weighted indicators.⁴⁵ The main contributors to the multi-dimensional poverty in the country have been found to be Educational attainment (13.7%), Food security (11.7%) and Informal employment (11.5%).

The highest proportion of the adult population that is poor and deprived is found in indicators such as Sanitation (14.0%), Bank account (13.9%), Educational attainment (13.2%), and Heating Fuel (13.0%). Regional disparities are also stark, with the Republic of Karakalpakstan (29.9%), Namangan region (27.5%), and Tashkent region (26.5%) having the largest proportion of the multidimensionally poor.

Child monetary poverty in Uzbekistan has significantly decreased, falling from 21.5% in 2021

⁴⁴ Center for Economic Research and Reforms (CERR) and UNICEF, Child Monetary Poverty in Uzbekistan Report, 2024

⁴⁵ Uzbekistan Pilot Multidimensional Poverty Index Report 2023 | United Nations Development Programme (undp.org)

to 13.7% in 2023, with the number of children in poverty dropping from 2.66 million in 2020 to 1.8 million in 2023.⁴⁶ However, disparities persist, as 15% of households with children are poor, compared to just 6% of those without children. Regional differences in child poverty are pronounced, with the highest rates in Syrdarya, Jizzakh, and the Republic of Karakalpakstan. Contributing factors include urban-rural income gaps, over-reliance on agriculture, adverse climate conditions, and inadequate social protection tailored to regional needs.⁴⁷ Beyond monetary poverty, the Multidimensional Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) has revealed that 44.7% of children and adolescents are multidimensionally poor, with key deprivations in access to safe water, sanitation, housing, and integrated social services.⁴⁸

The impact of Uzbekistan's recent economic growth on household welfare has thus been mixed. While *unemployment* has decreased to 8.5% in 2024, high labour market informality continues to affect job security (SDG8) and income stability (SDG1). The Ministry of Economy and Finance estimates the size of the shadow economy to be 25% to 45% of the GDP, resulting in an estimated annual loss of UZS30 trillion (USD2.4 billion) in state revenue, which undermines public services funding. Informal workers, especially women (61%) and men (73%) in the private sector, often lack social security coverage, with higher rates in small enterprises. Vulnerable groups, including women, youth, migrants, and people with disabilities, face heightened risks of low wages, unsafe conditions, and lack of social protections.

The Not in Education, Employment, or Training (*NEET*) rate reveals a stark gender disparity in the transition from education to the workforce, with 42% of young women aged 15-25 classified as NEET, compared to 8.8% of young men.⁴⁹ This highlights the significant barriers young women face in accessing education and employment, limiting their potential and economic independence. Early marriage, marital status, and caregiving responsibilities, including having children, are key determinants of this disparity, driven by traditional gender norms and societal expectations.

Reforms since 2017 have improved economic and labour market performances, which has reduced youth unemployment among men. However, the unemployment rate of young women has significantly increased, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels.⁵⁰ Female school graduates face more barriers to enter the labour market than male counterparts. Similarly, labour market inclusion of *persons with disabilities (PwD)*, especially women with disabilities, requires improvement. According to a study in 2019, only 4.4% of working-age women were employed, compared with 8.9% of men with disabilities.⁵¹ Since the ratification of the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* in 2021, increasing efforts have been devoted to socio-economic inclusion of PwD.

Employment rates also reflect significant gender gaps. In 2022, only 37.2% of women of working age were employed, compared to 69.3% of men. This employment gap has widened over the past decade, growing from 28.9 percentage points

⁴⁶ CERR: child poverty in Uzbekistan decreases by 7.8% in two years — Daryo News

⁴⁷ UNICEF Annual Report, 2023, estimation based on the 2022 National poverty rate for population

⁴⁸ Center for Economic Research and Reforms (CERR) and UNICEF, Child Monetary Poverty in Uzbekistan Report, 2024

⁴⁹ World Bank, Women, Business and the Law, Uzbekistan: <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/data/exploreconomies/uzbekistan/2024>

⁵⁰ World Development Indicators, accessed on 27 September 2024

⁵¹ World Bank (2023) Technical Note on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Uzbekistan

Youth unemployment rate (ages 15-24, %)



in 2010 to 32.1 points in 2022. Unemployment trends show smaller but still notable gender differences, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affected women's employment prospects.

Labour force participation (LFP) rates in Uzbekistan have shown a declining trend over the past two decades, and with significant gender disparities. Between 2003 and 2023, the female LFP rate dropped by 7.1 percentage points, while the male rate fell by 4.4 percentage points. In 2023, the female LFP rate stood at just 39.9%, compared to 72.8% for men. The rising fertility rates in Uzbekistan, alongside declining contraceptive use and increasing teenage pregnancies, also contribute to the falling female LFP, as globally it has been found that additional child reduces women's participation by 10-15% in

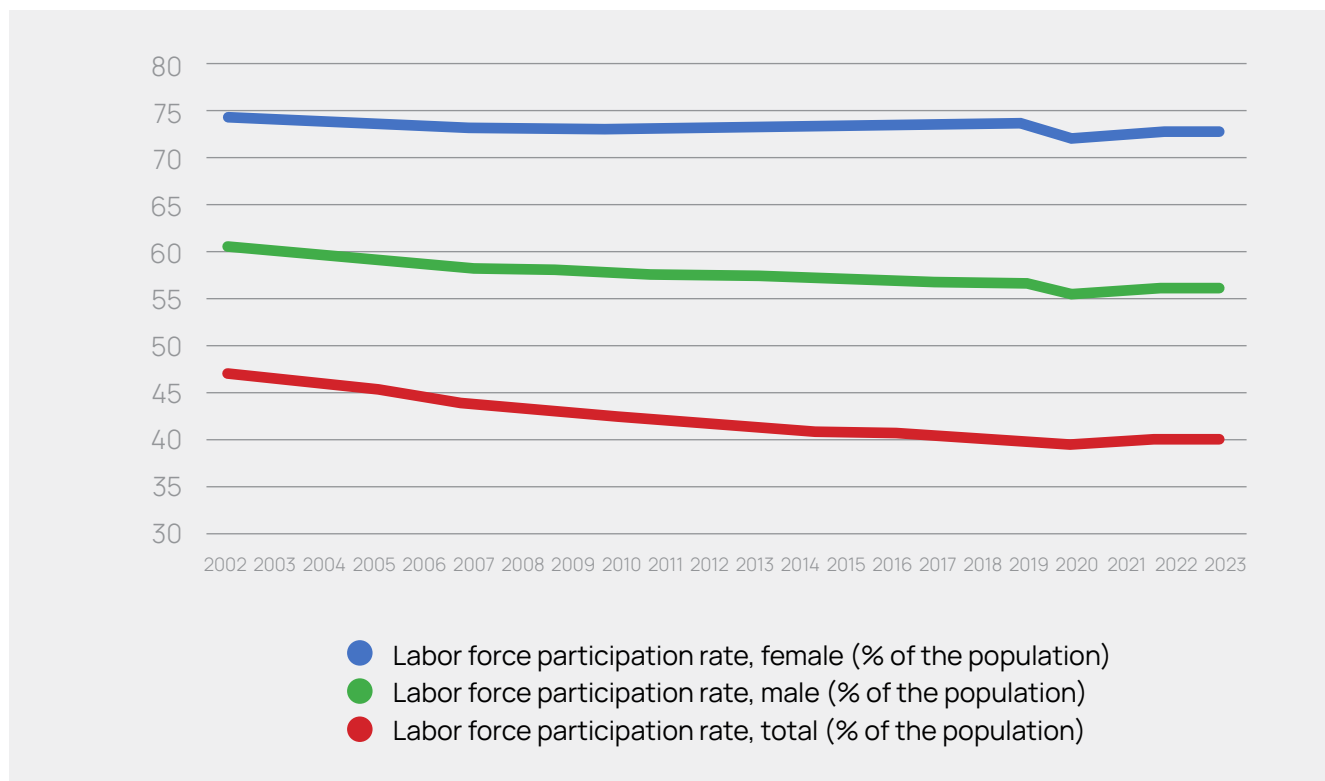
the 25-39 age group.⁵²

A persistent **gender pay gap (GPG)** compounds these challenges, with women earning 34% less than men, exceeding the global average of 20%.⁵³ The GPG is even wider for young workers, those with low educational attainment, and in lower-paying sectors. The gap is similar for both formal and informal workers, with women earning around 30% less than men in both

⁵² Closing the deadly gap between what we know and what we do: Investing in women's reproductive health (The World Bank, 2013).

⁵³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uzbekistan/publication/country-gender-assessment-2024#:~:text=Additionally%2C%20wage%20gender%20gaps%20are,and%20exacerbate%20poverty%20in%20Uzbekistan>

Labor force participation rate (ages 15+, %)



categories. Informal female workers are particularly disadvantaged, earning roughly half of what formal male employees earn.

Horizontal job segregation persists, with women concentrated in sectors like healthcare, education, and social services, where they make up 76.6%, 72.7%, and 50.7% of the workforce, respectively. In contrast, women are underrepresented in traditionally male-dominated (and better paying) fields such as construction, mining, and transportation. Cultural norms associating women with specific jobs, like in the care industry, and bans on women working in certain occupations are the main reason for this disparity. Furthermore, a significant barrier to women's participation in the workforce is the unequal distribution of **unpaid household care** responsibilities, with women spending 5.3 hours

per day on domestic work compared to men's 2.2 hours.

A comprehensive approach to care leave policies and services is vital for ensuring the best early start for children, income security for families, and sustained employment for women, thereby helping prevent poverty. **Early childhood care and education** (ECCE) services support child development, create jobs, reduce unpaid care work, and boost women's employment and lifetime income. However, in Uzbekistan, despite increased investment in pre-school education and parental leave, a "childcare policy gap" of five years persists due to free primary education starting at age seven, while paid childcare leave ends when a child turns two. Closing this gap through universal care services could create over 1 million jobs by 2030 and raise GDP by USD6.23 for every dollar

invested, with women's employment projected to reach 47.3% by 2030.⁵⁴

The growing number of *self-employed individuals*, particularly among women, highlights a shift in employment dynamics. From 2020 to 2024, the number of self-employed people increased significantly, from 95 thousand⁵⁵ to 2.8 million⁵⁶. Among these, 260,265 are domestic workers, 90.9% of whom are women.⁵⁷ However, the informality of this sector remains a challenge, with the proportion of registered domestic workers decreasing from 17.6% in 2020 to 10.5% in 2023, despite overall growth in self-employment. To address these disparities, targeted policies are needed to protect women in the care economy and ensure fair labour rights. Investments in quality care services and decent working conditions for care workers are essential to enabling women's workforce participation and responding to the growing demand for care services in Uzbekistan.

Migration and remittances play a critical role in Uzbekistan's inclusive and sustainable development, particularly in reducing poverty and inequalities (SDG1 and SDG10), as well as employment (SDG8). Remittances from labour migrants are a significant contributor to household incomes, particularly in rural areas. In 2023, they reached over USD13 billion, representing approximately 17% of the country's GDP, helping to alleviate poverty and support basic needs.⁵⁸

While Russia remains the primary destination for Uzbek migrants, its share of total remittances has decreased to 75.3% in nine months 2024⁵⁹,

down from 87% in 2022, as sanctions and economic challenges in Russia and a broader diversification of labour destinations, such as South Korea, Japan and EU, take effect. Despite this shift, Uzbekistan remains heavily dependent on these remittances, which increased by 34.8% in the nine months of 2024 compared to the previous year, amounting to USD2.5 billion.^{60, 61}

The government has been actively working to improve migration management since 2018, as part of aligning policies with the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). At the beginning of 2024, it aimed to train 100,000 workers for organised migration abroad. However, actual placements may fall short of this target, partly due to a lack of language and vocational training, which are critical for securing higher-paying jobs. Labour opportunities for Uzbek migrants in sectors like healthcare and logistics have expanded, but many still find themselves limited to lower-skilled roles, particularly in Russia and Kazakhstan.⁶² One major challenge is the quality and accuracy of migration statistics. As Uzbekistan continues to strengthen its migration policies, there is a growing recognition of the need for more precise data collection and monitoring to ensure the effective management of both outflows and inflows.

Although migration offers economic benefits, it also presents challenges, including social costs, such as family separation and the impact on children left behind. Furthermore, reliance on remittances makes Uzbekistan vulnerable to external economic shocks, highlighting the need for sustainable domestic job creation. Addressing these challenges is key to ensuring that migration continues to contribute to Uzbekistan's long-term development.

Despite the remarkable progress in poverty reduction, the Gini coefficient rose from 0.31 in

⁵⁴ ILO Country Brief on Care at Work in Uzbekistan: Investing in Care Leave and Services for a More Gender Equal World of Work (forthcoming, 2024).

⁵⁵ <https://gender.stat.uz/en/main-indicators/labor>

⁵⁶ Telegram Channel of the Tax authorities of Uzbekistan here <https://t.me/soliqnews/13133>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ <https://daryo.uz/en/2024/01/23/central-bank-of-uzbekistan-forecasts-10-15-surge-in-2024-remittances-reaching-12-125bn>

⁵⁹ <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2024/10/31/money-transfers/>

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ <https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/how-are-patterns-of-labor-migration-from-uzbekistan-changing/>

⁶² Ibid.

2022 to 0.35 in 2023 (WB estimates), as measured by the Gini coefficient⁶³, signalling a **growing income inequality** between the rich and the poor (SDG10). According to World Bank, if it weren't for rising inequalities, poverty reduction rates could have been even higher (by about 1.5 times) in recent years⁶⁴, meaning that roughly around 1 million additional people could have been lifted from poverty.

The growing income inequalities in Uzbekistan can be attributed to several structural factors that limit equal opportunities and wealth distribution. **Monopolization** remains a significant issue, where key sectors are dominated by state-owned enterprises or select private businesses, often receiving generous fiscal and financial preferences. This creates an uneven playing field and restricts competition, innovation and growth among smaller businesses, as well as more fair income and wealth distribution. Imperfect competition exacerbates these inequalities, as it limits market access for new entrants, entrenching the wealth of a few.

Moreover, non-transparent **privatization** processes may enable select individuals to amass significant assets, further widening the wealth gap. Independent commentators and bloggers have been pointing to the lack of open competition in sale of public assets, with allegations of insider deals to flourish at the expense of the broader population.⁶⁵

Additionally, the government's **energy subsidies** – estimated to be one of the largest globally in terms of the share of the GDP⁶⁶ – while aimed at supporting the economy and consumption, are highly regressive. The wealthiest households tend to benefit more from these

subsidies, as they consume more energy. This aggravates income inequality, leaving the most vulnerable populations behind.⁶⁷ Instead, replacing poorly targeted energy subsidies with the further expansion of the new social protection instruments that have proven to be effective in reducing poverty may be a better policy option. **Inflation**, especially in food and energy prices, has eroded household purchasing power, particularly for lower-income families. Addressing these issues is crucial for fostering more inclusive economic growth in Uzbekistan (SDG10).

The Uzbek government has implemented several policies to address socio-economic challenges, prioritising poverty reduction under both the national SDG framework (SDG1) and the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy. Since 2022, this mandate has shifted across various bodies, including the Ministry of Economy and Poverty Reduction, the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction (2023), and the National Agency for Social Protection (NASP) in 2024. To improve policymaking, the income-based poverty definition was updated in 2021, and the national Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (n-MPI) was introduced in 2023 with the support from the UN (SDG1.2).

Other important reforms include expanding the Single Registry for social protection, expansion of vocational training opportunities, initiating the energy tariff reforms, and focusing on fiscal consolidation. While these reforms are intended to improve efficiency and attract investment, delays and transparency issues in the privatization programme and energy sector reforms continue to pose challenges. The government's ongoing commitment to structural reforms, including dismantling state enterprises and monopolies, fair and transparent privatization, fostering and protecting competition, and complying with WTO accession rules, remains critical for sustained economic growth.

⁶³ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/charting-uzbekistan-s-path-to-poverty-reduction--insights-from-i>

⁶⁴ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/charting-uzbekistan-s-path-to-poverty-reduction--insights-from-i>

⁶⁵ See, for example: https://t.me/the_bakiroo, and https://t.me/yuliy_yusupov

⁶⁶ <https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/charts/value-of-fossil-fuel-subsidies-by-fuel-in-the-top-25-countries-2022>

⁶⁷ <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2019/03/19/inequality/>

New nationwide movement to reduce poverty

On 11 September 2024, President Mirziyoyev announced the launch of a nationwide movement to reduce poverty. Key points from the President's message include:

- 3.5 million people have risen out of poverty in recent years, reducing the poverty rate to 11% by the end of 2023. However, in some areas, no progress has been made in the past six months, and in 15 districts poverty remains above 20%.
- Poverty cannot be overcome solely through financial aid. The focus should be on providing people with skills and jobs.
- A new programme, "From Poverty to Prosperity," will introduce Uzbekistan's strategies to fight poverty across seven areas.
- Each family will have an individualized poverty exit plan, with USD1.6 billion allocated for neighbourhood infrastructure development next year. Part of this will fund pumps and solar panels in 300 problem areas.
- Social tax exemptions for hiring low-income workers will continue for another three years and will apply across all sectors.
- An additional 50,000 hectares of land will be distributed to 100,000 low-income families for agriculture and horticulture, following a cooperative model. Families will earn from both wages and land rent or dividends.
- A new centre for employment and worker training under the Chamber of Commerce, teaching skills to low-income families that match business needs.
- Special attention will be given to ensuring that low-income families, particularly women, have access to higher education, supported by interest-free loans and grants.

Uzbekistan's **digital transformation** has become a key pillar of the country's broader structural reforms, driving the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) across various sectors, including public administration, education, healthcare, and agriculture. The country's notable strides in ICT and innovation are key drivers of its economic transformation, reflected in rising global rankings, an expanding digital ecosystem, as well as fast rising revenues from ICT services. The "Digital Uzbekistan-2030" strategy aims to accelerate digital development through initiatives such as expanding internet access, developing e-government, and

promoting digital literacy.⁶⁸ Significant progress has been made, with roadmaps for digital industry, e-government, and AI development paving the way for a more connected and innovative economy. Uzbekistan's IT ecosystem is further bolstered by the IT Park and initiatives like the "ENTERPRISE Uzbekistan" International Digital Technology Centre, promoting entrepreneurship, outsourcing, and IT education both in the capital Tashkent and the regions of the country.

The country's commitment to digitalization is reflected in its improving global rankings. Uzbekistan has advanced 24 positions in the

⁶⁸ <https://lex.uz/docs/5030957>

past two editions of the UN E-Government Development Index (EGDI), moving into the group of countries with a "Very High EGDI", ranking 63rd globally.⁶⁹ The government is committed to making further improvements aiming to be among the top 30 countries by 2030. In the 2024 Global Innovation Index, Uzbekistan ranked 83rd, up from 93rd in 2020. The Global Cybersecurity Index 2024 placed Uzbekistan in the "Advancing" tier, with a total score of 89.2, highlighting strong legal frameworks and international cooperation. Internet usage in Uzbekistan increased to 89% in 2023, up from 70.4% in 2019, with 90.9% of men and 87.1% of women online.⁷⁰ The proportion of mobile phone users is 81.5% in rural areas and 86.1% in urban areas. In 2023, Uzbekistan recorded 38 million active mobile-broadband subscriptions, which demonstrates a high level of connectivity and internet access across the country.⁷¹ The startup ecosystem of Uzbekistan is currently developing and ranks 4th in Central Eurasia according to the Startup Central Eurasia 2023 ecosystem rankings.⁷²

However, despite this progress, challenges remain. Uzbekistan's cybersecurity framework requires further enhancement in technical and organizational measures. In the start-up ecosystem, issues such as limited research-focused start-ups, inadequate investor protection, and insufficient venture capital activity persist. Furthermore, while the IT sector continues to expand, particularly in outsourcing and software services, there is a need for deeper integration of higher education institutions and greater opportunities for start-ups

to attract foreign investment.

Uzbekistan, being a *double landlocked country*, faces unique challenges in accessing global markets, making efficient **connectivity and transport corridors** essential for its economic growth. Strategic investments in transport infrastructure, such as roads, railways, and intermodal hubs, are critical to overcoming geographic barriers. Key corridors, including the Middle Corridor and Trans-Caspian Corridor, present valuable routes for linking Uzbekistan with Europe and Asia, enhancing trade and economic integration. The Middle Corridor alone, estimated to require EUR3.5 billion in upgrades, could become a competitive trade route if supported by necessary infrastructure improvements and streamlined logistics.⁷³

Moreover, modernizing customs processes and adopting digital trade facilitation tools like eTIR and eCMR could cut trade costs by as much as 7%, helping Uzbekistan optimize its position within Central Asia.⁷⁴ Strengthening cooperation with neighbouring countries to harmonize transport standards and procedures will further enhance connectivity, supporting Uzbekistan's economic transformation and promoting a more integrated regional economy. Addressing these connectivity challenges will allow Uzbekistan to better leverage its strategic location, bolstering resilience and competitiveness in the global market.

Uzbekistan has been leveraging its rich **cultural heritage** (SDG 11) and creative industries as key drivers of economic transformation. Traditional craftsmanship, cultural tourism (SDG 8), and creative sectors such as design, contemporary art and music, modern performing arts and others contribute significantly to economic diversification

⁶⁹ <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Data/Country-Information/id/186-Uzbekistan>

⁷⁰ ITU (2023) DataHub: Uzbekistan's profile. Individuals using the Internet. <https://datahub.itu.int/data/?e=UZB&i=11624&v=chart>

⁷¹ ITU (2023) DataHub: Uzbekistan's profile. Active mobile-broadband subscriptions <https://datahub.itu.int/data/?e=UZB&i=11632>

⁷² <https://startupcentraleurasia.com/startup-ecosystem/8>

⁷³ EBRD (2023), Sustainable Transport Connections between Europe and Central Asia

⁷⁴ ESCAP (2018), <https://repository.unescap.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12870/1513/ESCAP-2018-WP-Impact-of-implementation-digital-trade-facilitation-on-trade-costs.pdf>

and job creation. According to the State Statistics Committee, the cultural and creative industries (CCI) contribute around 3.2% to the national GDP, providing employment to approximately 200,000 people, particularly in regions such as Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khiva, which are known for their craft and tourism activities. The national "Travel Uzbekistan" programme aims to boost local tourists to 12 million and foreign tourists to 9 million by 2026.

The integration of culture and tourism in Uzbekistan's economic strategy has significant implications for sustainable development. The government has made certain efforts to promote world cultural heritage, museums, intangible heritage, including traditional craftsmanship and cultural tourism as key economic drivers. Traditional craftsmanship, particularly in textile production, pottery, and woodworking, provides livelihoods for many families, especially in rural areas.

Despite these efforts, challenges include the need to diversify tourism offerings beyond major cities and to improve infrastructure in less accessible and rural regions. There is also a gap in the training and skills development of cultural entrepreneurs, which could limit the growth potential of the safeguarding of cultural heritage and creative industries.

Uzbekistan's *agri-food systems* show both progress and challenges in aligning with the SDGs. Agriculture is a significant sector in Uzbekistan's economy, contributing approximately 25% to the GDP.⁷⁵ Over the past two decades, the value of agricultural production has nearly tripled, with an average annual growth rate of 6.3%, significantly outpacing the global average growth rate of 2.8% during the same period.⁷⁶ The Gross Value Added (GVA) from agriculture, forestry, and fishing has shown a consistent upward trend, underscoring

the sector's resilience amidst reforms and external shocks.⁷⁷ This sector is crucial for rural livelihoods, providing jobs for over 3.6 million people, which represents 27% of the country's labour force. The sector has gradually transitioned from lower-value commodities like cotton to higher-value horticultural products, leveraging the country's favourable climatic conditions and skilled labour. The primary export markets for Uzbek agrifood products are neighbouring countries, including China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, and Afghanistan.

The shift away from cotton towards food cultivation has contributed positively to food security and more sustainable management of water, energy, and land resources. Reforms since 2017 have aimed at more inclusive governance, but marginalized groups, especially women, are still underrepresented in decision-making. Weak inter-ministerial coordination and budgetary misalignment continue to hamper effective policy implementation (SDG 16, SDG 5).

As will be shown in greater detail in the next section on Environment, water and land management are significant issues. Uzbekistan's agrifood sector faces several constraints impacting its competitiveness, including limited access to advanced technologies, fragmented farm structures, and challenges in meeting international food safety standards. Compared to its regional neighbours, Uzbekistan's agrifood sector shows potential for growth but is hampered by relatively low total factor productivity and trade balance issues. Outdated irrigation infrastructure worsens water stress, while unsustainable practices contribute to land degradation and biodiversity loss (SDG 6, SDG 15). Addressing these requires both infrastructure upgrades and shifts toward sustainable agriculture. The dual structure of

⁷⁵ FAOSTAT (2022)

⁷⁶ World Bank

⁷⁷ International Strategic Center for Agri-Food Development (ISCAD), 2021. Uzbekistan Agri-food: Facts & Trends 2020-2021

agriculture creates inefficiencies in food supply chains. Limited access to technology and markets weakens competitiveness, while significant food loss and inadequate storage reduce productivity (SDG 8, SDG 12). Neighbouring countries have invested more substantially in infrastructure, market access, and technological advancements, which boosts their competitive edge. For example, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan benefit from better access to high-value markets and have more developed logistics and distribution networks, making them more competitive in international markets⁶³.

Inequities in land ownership and access to resources persist, especially for smallholders and women. Working poverty remains high, highlighting the need for more inclusive policies (SDG 1, SDG 5, SDG 10). Environmental degradation from over-reliance on natural resources remains severe. Policies for sustainability exist, but slow technology adoption and weak enforcement hinder progress (SDG 13, SDG 15). Resilience is undermined by climate change and ecosystem stress. Efforts to promote crop diversity and sustainability are ongoing, but infrastructure and technology gaps limit adaptive capacity (SDG 2, SDG 13).

To sum up, Uzbekistan faces several critical socio-economic challenges that need urgent attention to sustain inclusive economic growth and development.

1. *Large Fiscal Deficit*: The country has been grappling with a substantial fiscal deficit (5.5% of the GDP), exacerbated by excessive energy subsidies and numerous tax preferences and exemptions to selective sectors and businesses. Although the government has started phasing out the energy subsidies, the deficit remains a significant challenge both for financing SDGs and macroeconomic stability. Effective fiscal consolidation measures, including the rationalization of public expenditures and improved revenue collection, are essential to stabilize the fiscal situation (SDG17, SDG7).
2. *Growing Income Inequalities (SDG10)*: Despite

significant economic growth and poverty reduction, income inequality - as measured by the growing Gini coefficient - indicates a widening gap between the rich and the poor, highlighting the need for policies that promote more inclusive growth and equitable distribution of wealth (SDG10). On the contrary, if growing inequalities are not resolved, they can lead to social unrest and instability undermining the trust in the reforms and the new emerging social contract in the country.

3. *High Informalities and Gender Disparities in the Labour Market (SDG8)*: The labour market in Uzbekistan is characterized by high levels of informality and gender disparity, especially in the construction, agriculture, care, and transportation sectors. Many workers lack job security, social protections, and access to formal employment benefits. Addressing these informalities through labour market, social protection, and tax reforms, as well as enhancing the business environment is crucial for sustainable economic development. Achieving gender parity in the labour market requires comprehensive policies that address remaining barriers to education and training, promote equal access to employment opportunities in all sectors, enforce anti-discrimination laws, and provide support for work-life balance, including affordable childcare and parental leave.
4. *Delays and Lack of Transparency in Privatization (SDG16, SDG17)*: The privatization programme in Uzbekistan has faced numerous delays and setbacks, coupled with a lack of transparency. Accelerating the privatization of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and improving governance and transparency in the process are necessary to enhance efficiency, attract investment, and stimulate economic growth. Promoting fair competition is essential for equitable growth in Uzbekistan's structural reforms and privatization of state assets, as it fosters inclusivity, innovation, and efficiency, while preventing monopolies and ensuring that

the benefits of economic progress are broadly shared across society.

5. *Challenges in Agri-Food Systems (SDG 2, SDG 12, SDG 15)*: Food security in Uzbekistan faces significant risks due to weak inter-ministerial coordination, outdated irrigation infrastructure, and unsustainable practices that are exacerbating water stress, land degradation, and biodiversity loss. Limited access to technology, markets, and modern storage facilities hampers productivity and competitiveness, while food loss remains high. Gender disparities and inequities in land ownership persist, particularly affecting women and smallholders. Strengthening governance, accelerating technology adoption, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices are essential to building a more resilient and inclusive agri-food system.

Addressing these challenges will require comprehensive and well-coordinated policy interventions, innovative approaches, strong governance and integrated national financing framework (INFF), as well as continued commitment to reform.

3.5. Environment and climate change analysis and progress on global commitments

Uzbekistan's current development agenda places environmental sustainability at its core, reflecting the urgency of addressing challenges posed by climate change, resource scarcity, and ecological degradation. Recognising that environmental issues directly impact public health, economic resilience, and social stability, the Uzbekistan 2030 strategy includes a dedicated pillar focused on ensuring favourable environmental conditions for the population. This priority aligns with national goals to advance climate adaptation, sustainable water and land management, biodiversity conservation, reducing pollution, and green energy initiatives. Yet, despite significant progress, Uzbekistan faces persistent challenges in

climate change mitigation and adaptation, water resource management, and pollution control, underscoring the need for continued investment and multilateral cooperation to build a sustainable, resilient future.

Uzbekistan ranks 107th of 180 countries in the latest *Environmental Performance Index* (EPI).⁷⁸ Uzbekistan ranks low due to high pollution levels, inefficient waste management, and increasing greenhouse gas emissions. Positive progress includes improved water resource efficiency, high wastewater treatment rates, and modest gains in biodiversity protection, though challenges remain in air quality, climate change mitigation, and sustainable agriculture practices. Comprehensive environmental reforms are necessary to address these gaps and support Uzbekistan's sustainability goals by 2030.

Public access to environmental information is essential for public engagement and informed decision-making on environmental matters. The recent publication of the National State of Environment Report (NSoER))⁷⁹ in February 2024 after a decade-long pause, along with an online portal for air quality data, reflects the country's efforts to improve transparency and align with the principles of the UNECE *Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)*.⁸⁰ Although Uzbekistan has yet to ratify the Convention, ongoing initiatives aim to build public awareness and strengthen government capacity for environmental participation and accountability, including public participation in environmental impact assessment, judiciary training and tools to promote public access to justice on environmental issues.

⁷⁸ <https://epi.yale.edu/country/2024/UZB>

⁷⁹ <https://www.iisd.org/publications/report/uzbekistan-state-of-the-environment>

⁸⁰ <https://unece.org/environmental-policy-1/public-participation>

Climate change poses a significant and growing challenge to Uzbekistan, particularly due to the country's vulnerability to drought and arid conditions. Since 1951, Uzbekistan has experienced warming at more than twice the global average, leading to increased water shortages, changing precipitation patterns, and more frequent extreme weather events. With a Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI) of 5.4, the second highest in the ECA region, the country faces extreme risks from climate-induced shocks. Heatwaves have been estimated to threaten the health and well-being of 9.6 million children, or 91% of the child population.⁸¹

These issues are compounded by the ongoing environmental disaster of the Aral Sea, which has seen a massive reduction in its size, turning the region into a salt desert known as Aralkum. This has severe consequences for both the environment and public health across the country.

Water salinization affects around 20% of the population, particularly in the most arid and impoverished areas of the country. Residents in these regions, who largely rely on subsistence agriculture, are increasingly vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change, such as dwindling natural resources. Additionally, limited public awareness, inadequate social protection systems, weak legal and regulatory frameworks, and insufficient institutional capacity exacerbate the impacts of climate change. The lack of climate-resilient infrastructure, particularly in schools, highlights the need for stronger, coordinated action to safeguard children's rights and well-being. Addressing these challenges requires immediate and comprehensive climate adaptation measures.

The Uzbek government has recognized the need for climate adaptation in its latest **Nationally Determined Contribution** (NDC) under the

Paris Climate Agreement⁸² but has yet to integrate these measures fully into its budgetary processes. Current funding focuses more on energy efficiency and mitigation activities, while climate adaptation lacks a dedicated budget window, making it difficult to monitor expenditures and investment effectiveness.

Uzbekistan's 2nd NDC, formalised in October 2022, increased the ambition by more than 300 per cent, with plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions per unit of GDP by 35 percent of 2010 levels by 2030, compared to the 10 percent reduction stated in the first NDC. To achieve this, the Government plans to increase the share of renewable energy sources to 25 percent of total power generation, double the energy-efficiency indicator relative to the level of 2018, halve the energy intensity of GDP, and decrease industrial consumption of natural resources. As part of this effort, relevant SMART indicators have been tied to and included in the country's national SDGs framework, the Green Economy Strategy, the Climate Change Strategy, the National Biodiversity Strategy and the Concept for the Development of the Electric Power Industry.

The UN Uzbekistan, through the Climate Promise and NDC 3.0 initiatives, has currently offered support to Uzbekistan's climate goals in adaptation, energy transition, and transparency. This support includes technical guidance on adaptation planning in key sectors, such as agriculture and water, developing long-term energy transition strategies, increasing transparency in emissions tracking for agriculture, and assistance with renewable energy policies. In addition, the UN emphasises child-sensitive and gender-responsive climate policies, as well as green job training to ensure a socially inclusive transition. The aim is to strengthen Uzbekistan's capacity to

⁸¹ UNICEF, 'Beat the heat: Protecting children from heatwaves in Europe and Central Asia', 2023, www.unicef.org/eca/reports/beat-heat

⁸² https://cdn.climatepolicyradar.org/navigator/UZB/1900/uzbekistan-first-ndc-updated-submission_5e91dae2e50ae1626a1d3a1706a4b625.pdf

achieve its Paris Agreement targets, driving forward a green economy that prioritises just, transparent, and low-carbon development.

A National Adaptation Plan (NAP) has been developed with the support from the UN and partners to guide Uzbekistan through the adaptation process. This plan focuses on key sectors such as agriculture, water management, construction, healthcare, and emergency management, and includes regional adaptation plans targeting the areas most at risk. Despite the development of these plans, there is a significant funding gap, with an estimated USD18 billion required by 2030, while only USD8 billion has been budgeted, leaving a USD10 billion to be mobilized for climate adaptation efforts.

Climate change is increasingly influencing **human mobility**, with its impacts affecting both the decision to migrate and the development outcomes in affected regions. Environmental hazards such as droughts, floods, and other climate-related events drive various forms of mobility, including disaster displacement, planned evacuation, pastoralism, and labour migration. These mobility patterns are shaping household vulnerability. A recent study in Jizzak, Fergana, Andijan, and Namangan regions, conducted by IOM, the Hydrometeorological Research Institute, and the Population Council Consulting, shows that climate change is disrupting food systems and livelihoods, particularly in pastoralism, where over half of households struggle with accessing fodder and water.⁸³ The study also highlights that labour migration, often driven by environmental stress, primarily involves informal employment, leaving migrants without social security or benefits, which undermines development goals on decent work (SDG8) and poverty reduction (SDG1). Remittances, while a critical resource,

are mainly used for immediate needs such as food and healthcare, and not invested in long-term adaptation measures, limiting their potential to build resilience to future climate shocks.

As Uzbekistan integrates human mobility into its Sectoral Adaptation Plans, especially in water management and agriculture, there is a need for greater capacity to address these challenges, ensuring that mobility, driven by climate change, does not further exacerbate development inequalities but instead contributes to resilience and sustainable growth.

Water resources in Uzbekistan are crucial for the country's agriculture, food systems, economy, and social stability, but are increasingly strained due to climate change, population growth, and regional dependencies. Uzbekistan relies on upstream countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan for 80% of its water, which makes the transboundary management of water resources vital. As will be analysed in greater detail in a following section on transboundary issues, regional cooperation on water management remains complex. According to the World Resources Institute, Uzbekistan was placed 25th out of 164 countries of the world in the most water stressed countries ranking. The water stress level in Uzbekistan is caused by the use of 169% of own freshwater reserves. Water use remains inefficient, particularly in irrigated agriculture, which consumes about 90% of the country's water, with an estimated 30% loss due to outdated practices. These inefficiencies are estimated to cost the country 8% of its GDP.⁸⁴

Despite recent reforms aimed at improving water management, such as the introduction of water-saving technologies across 35% of Uzbekistan's irrigated land and the installation of smart water systems at thousands of facilities, progress is insufficient. Projections indicate that water availability will decline significantly by

⁸³ Nexus between Migration, Environment, and Climate Change in Mountain Areas of Kyrgyzstan, Ecuador, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, IOM

⁸⁴ <https://www.iisd.org/publications/report/uzbekistan-state-of-the-environment>

2030-2050, exacerbated by climate change and external pressures like Afghanistan's Qush-Tepa canal, which is expected to reduce water in the Amudarya basin by 30% by 2030.⁸⁵

Climate change is expected to decrease average river flows in Central Asia by 10-20% by 2050, worsen water quality through salinization, and intensify extreme weather events. Only 73% of Uzbekistan's population has access to centralized water supply, and 20% are already affected by water salinization. By the 2040s, irrigation water shortages may rise by 8-33.5%, depending on climate impact scenarios.⁸⁶

Uzbekistan became the first Central Asian country to join the UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health in late 2023, committing to concrete targets for water, sanitation, hygiene, and health. Safe water and adequate sanitation and hygiene are crucial for safeguarding the attainment of human rights and gender equality. Facing outdated *wastewater infrastructure* and limited sewerage access (under 20% in urban centres), Uzbekistan is enhancing these systems with the support of the Swiss-funded project "Strengthening Action on Water and Sanitation." and revising the wastewater standards and classification of the ecological status of waterbodies in the country. The revised high-quality standards would impact the water quality which is ultimately important for households especially for women. Efforts also include a USD161 million ADB-backed project to modernise treatment facilities, aiming to increase sewage coverage to 31.4% and boost treatment efficiency from 55% to 80% by 2030 (SDG6).

Uzbekistan's *energy sector* is undergoing substantial transformation, driven by government reforms and rising domestic demand. The country aims for a 40% renewable energy share by 2030, a key step in its sustainable development

journey. This ambition aligns with international commitments under the Paris Agreement, including a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions per unit of GDP by 35% compared to 2010. These goals are embedded in Uzbekistan's NDCs and various national strategies aimed at boosting renewable energy and enhancing energy efficiency in sectors like construction, industry, and agriculture.⁸⁷

Despite its large natural gas reserves, Uzbekistan faces recurring energy shortages, particularly during peak summer and winter periods. The situation is particularly severe in rural areas. In 2023, the government predicted a 3.4 billion kWh electricity shortfall due to rising demand. This has accelerated investments, including through public-private partnerships, in renewable sources such as solar and wind. These projects are expected to help meet future energy needs while addressing the country's energy deficit.⁵³

As part of the country's social policy, the government sets end-user prices for electricity and natural gas below full cost-recovery levels. Subsidized energy prices, coupled with continuously rising demand and high levels of non-payment for gas and electricity, led to growing losses in domestic supply.⁸⁸ Even with large investments in gas exploration and extraction, the natural gas extraction has been declining over the last 10 years due to the absence of major new discoveries and the depletion of existing deposits, which caused an output drop down to 3.71 billion cubic meters by February 2024. It has turned Uzbekistan into a net importer of gas, with Russia becoming the largest supplier. This shift underscores deeper challenges in energy security and highlights the urgent need for sectoral reform and diversification (SDG7).⁵⁴

Even with large investments in gas exploration

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ <https://www.gazeta.uz/en/2023/04/23/column/>,

⁸⁸ https://www.e3s-conferences.org/articles/e3sconf/pdf/2023/107/e3sconf_esr2023_01009.pdf

and extraction, production has steadily declined, with output dropping to 3.71 billion cubic meters by February 2024. This decline is expected to continue, and combined with growing domestic demand, it has turned Uzbekistan into a net importer of gas, with Russia becoming the largest supplier. This shift underscores deeper challenges in energy security and highlights the urgent need for sectoral reform and diversification (SDG7).⁸⁹

In response, the government has prioritized the expansion of **renewable energy** and the modernization of infrastructure. The 2023 Presidential Decree #57⁹⁰ introduced incentives, such as allowing households and entities to sell surplus energy back to the grid. Additionally, plans are in place to install solar panels on at least half the roofs of new multi-storey residential buildings. Through international collaborations, like the Just Energy Transition Partnerships, Uzbekistan is positioning itself not only to meet domestic energy needs but also to export green energy to Asia and Europe. A December 2023 address by the President reinforced the country's ambition to become a future supplier of clean energy to global markets.

A major aspect of the energy reform agenda is the phased removal of **energy subsidies**, coupled with the liberalization of tariffs. Uzbekistan has historically relied heavily on energy subsidies, with fossil fuel subsidies reaching as high as 32% of the GDP in 2022.⁹¹ The government has begun raising electricity and gas tariffs to reduce overconsumption, promote energy efficiency, and attract private investments. This market-driven approach is aimed at reducing dependency on state subsidies, attracting private investments, and ensuring long-term sustainability of the sector.

Uzbekistan's energy strategy also involves **nuclear power**. The government is in talks with

Russia's Rosatom to build a nuclear power plant, with the first reactor planned to be operational by 2028. Additionally, the government is exploring small modular reactors, seen as a safer and more flexible nuclear option, as part of its broader efforts to diversify the energy mix and enhance energy security.

Uzbekistan is grappling with significant **land degradation** issues (SDG15), which pose a serious threat to the country's sustainable development. Nearly 30% of Uzbekistan's territory is affected by land degradation and desertification, creating a major barrier to achieving food security (SDG2) and combating rural poverty (SDG1). Key issues include severe soil salinization, which impacts almost half of the irrigated land, extensive wind erosion affecting over half of all lands, and significant soil compaction that reduces agricultural productivity. Additionally, nearly 73% of Uzbekistan's pasturelands and hayfields are experiencing degradation due to unsustainable grazing practices, anthropogenic pressures, and the impacts of climate change. These challenges are not only environmental but also socio-economic, as they threaten the livelihoods of rural communities and exacerbate poverty (SDG1).

The causes of land degradation in Uzbekistan are complex and region-specific, with different types of land suffering from various forms of degradation. Croplands are primarily affected by soil erosion, salinization, and nutrient depletion, while grazing lands face vegetation loss and soil degradation due to overgrazing. The unsustainable overuse of fertilisers is another factor. Fertiliser usage has grown considerably, reaching 268.65 kg per hectare in 2021 - a 77% increase since 2000. Overreliance on nitrogen fertilisers has led to nitrogen emissions that alone cost the country an estimated USD1.6 billion in 2020.⁹² Inadequate

⁸⁹ <https://www.gazeta.uz/en/2024/03/26/energy-resources/>

⁹⁰ <https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC218530>

⁹¹ <https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/charts/value-of-fossil-fuel-subsidies-by-fuel-in-the-top-25-countries-2022>

⁹² FAO. 2023. Integrated land use management systems in Uzbekistan – Part 1. Case studies and governance recommendations. Literature review. Tashkent. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc6132en>; FAO. 2023. The State of Food

farmer training and weak regulatory enforcement compound the problem, contributing to soil and water pollution that intensifies degradation risks. Uzbekistan loses up to 30% of its 21 million tons of annual fruit and vegetable production due to inadequate post-harvest practices, such as poor storage and transportation.⁹³ Only 15% of the produce is processed, with underutilized facilities operating at 50-60% capacity.⁹⁴ The lack of modern cold storage and reliable cold chain infrastructure exacerbates these losses, further reducing the available supply for both domestic consumption and export.⁹⁵ Forest lands are under pressure from deforestation and unsustainable logging practices, leading to a loss of biodiversity (SDG15).

Land degradation is also linked to increasingly frequent sand and dust storms, with severe and transboundary health, environmental, and economic impacts. These issues have wide-reaching impacts, undermining efforts to achieve the SDGs such as on poverty (SDG1), food security (SDG2), climate resilience (SDG13), gender equality (SDG5), and water management (SDG6).

To effectively address land degradation, Uzbekistan needs to adopt sustainable land management practices, secure land tenure, develop supportive policies, and engage local communities in restoration efforts. By focusing on these strategies, Uzbekistan can mitigate the impacts of land degradation, restore degraded areas, and advance towards its sustainable development objectives. As a party to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Uzbekistan

is driving international efforts to address inter-related land degradation and sand and dust storms, including as a host of the 21st session of the UNCCD Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 21) in December 2023, and by promoting the adoption of the “Samarkand Declaration on Dust and Sand Storms” at UNCCD COP16 in Saudi Arabia, in December 2024.⁹⁶

Uzbekistan is making efforts to accede to the UN(ECE) *Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents*, showing commitment to address industrial accidents and accidental water pollution while strengthening subregional cooperation mechanisms and inter-institutional coordination. A major focus in 2024 has been on tailings management safety, essential for protecting Central Asian water resources from industrial pollution under changing climate conditions. Establishing an Inter-institutional Working Group on accidental water pollution and tailings safety in July 2024 is a strategic step under and involves developing a road map and draft law for Convention accession, aligning with Uzbekistan’s 2019 Concept on Environmental Protection until 2030.

Uzbekistan is advancing governance in water, sanitation, pollution control, and resilience, with regional collaboration at the Syrdarya River Basin level and a Joint Contingency Plan for accident response. While Uzbekistan has made notable advances, accession to the UN(ECE) *Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents* remains a strategic goal. Continued commitment is needed to enhance long-term resilience and industrial accident preparedness, supporting Uzbekistan’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, including the Sendai Framework Gender Action Plan, endorsed in 2024.

In response to the urgent need to address the environmental and socio-economic impacts

and Agriculture 2023 – Revealing the true cost of food to transform agrifood systems. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc7724en>

⁹³ FAO. 2022. Framework Paper towards Uzbekistan National Strategy on Food Loss and Waste Prevention, Reduction and Monitoring

⁹⁴ Frankfurt school of Finance and Management. 2022. Insurance of fruits and vegetables in Uzbekistan. Feasibility study.

⁹⁵ GIZ. 2021. Organic Stone Fruits Value Chain Analysis in Fergana Valley

⁹⁶ <https://president.uz/en/lists/view/6906>

The Aral Sea Crisis and Regional Vulnerability

The Aral Sea region, once anchored by the world's fourth-largest inland lake, has suffered unprecedented environmental and socio-economic challenges. Now reduced to just 10% of its original size, the drying of the Aral Sea has triggered widespread human, ecological, and economic insecurities. Agriculture, the backbone of local livelihoods, has been severely impacted, and the situation is further aggravated by ongoing climate change, adding to the region's fragility.

Progress in the Aral Sea Region (2017-2022)

Despite these challenges, notable advancements have been made:

- Karakalpakstan's gross regional product and agricultural yield grew by 140%, with investments surging by 220%.
- Preschool enrolment rose from 28% to 81%, while access to drinking water increased from 48.2% to 60%.
- Initiatives such as afforestation of 1.5 million hectares of the dried Aral seabed and public health upgrades (with hospitals increasing from 41 to 58) mark crucial steps in improving living conditions.

These gains demonstrate the positive impact of focused development and resource allocation, yet underlying vulnerabilities persist. Despite progress, the region remains hampered by:

- **Harsh Environment:** With temperatures exceeding 40°C for up to 50 days in some areas, the desert climate continues to strain resources and living conditions.
- **Water Scarcity and Climate Threats:** Rising temperatures and water scarcity are projected to intensify, with water shortages expected to reach 13,000 m³ by 2050, significantly impacting agriculture, as crop production for legumes and cereals could decline by 8% and 7%, respectively.
- **High Unemployment and Infrastructure Gaps:** Economic security remains fragile,

with unemployment among women, youth, and low-income households particularly high. Remote areas like Muynak and Karauzyak report unemployment rates of up to 17.2%. Poor infrastructure and transportation issues compound the population's dissatisfaction with access to goods and services.

- **Healthcare Challenges:** Infant and child mortality rates are considerably higher than the national average. Anaemia affects over 120,000 people, with 60% of cases among women, possibly linked to high rates of digestive diseases (47% in women), helminthiasis in children (74% bloody flux cases), and tuberculosis, with women accounting for 50% of cases.

Uzbekistan is responding with a comprehensive strategy to foster long-term resilience and sustainable development:

- **Regional Adaptation Plan (RAP):** This framework aims to address climate vulnerabilities and promote environmental recovery.
- **Afforestation and Land Protection:** Efforts include planting saxaul trees across 2 million hectares of the dried seabed to combat desertification, safeguarding 5.2 million hectares of vulnerable land.
- **Water Management Investments:** Over USD20 million has been mobilized by the UN and Uzbekistan to enhance water infrastructure, including 650 km of water canals and irrigation systems.
- These initiatives demonstrate Uzbekistan's strong commitment to climate adaptation, positioning the Aral Sea region as a model of resilience and sustainable development for Central Asia. Through targeted investments, innovative water management, and green technologies, Uzbekistan aims to secure a sustainable future for the region.

of the Aral Sea crisis, the UN together with the Government of Uzbekistan established the ***Aral Sea Trust Fund*** (The UN Multi-partner Human Security Trust Fund for Aral Sea), following Uzbekistan's President highlighting the issue at the 2017 UN General Assembly. While it aimed to raise USD123.2 million, only USD16.2 million was mobilized from 2018 to 2023, primarily from seven donors, with the Government of Uzbekistan being the largest contributor. Despite its relevance to national and regional priorities, the Fund's effectiveness has been limited by resource mobilization challenges and coordination issues. Nonetheless, it has adapted by focusing on smaller, targeted joint programmes (JPs) and has become a model for other initiatives in Uzbekistan, such as the Vision 2030 Fund. However, leadership changes and modest outreach have hampered its role as an integrated platform for partnerships.

The Fund has made progress in building resilience in Karakalpakstan, contributing to community-based initiatives and achieving tangible outputs, despite insufficient resources. It has effectively utilized its USD16.2 million budget to support over 293,000 beneficiaries across 8 districts. Through collaboration with the Government of Uzbekistan and international donors, the Fund has promoted green growth, health, agriculture, climate resilience, youth, livelihoods, and water management improvements. While the Fund's sustainability and coherence remain moderately satisfactory, it has laid a foundation for long-term socio-economic and environmental impacts in the region.

In a broader environmental context, the ***Yashil Makon (Green Nation) initiative*** launched in November 2021 is one of Uzbekistan's most ambitious projects aimed at increasing the country's green areas from 8% to 30% (SDG15). This initiative, which plans to plant 1 billion trees and shrubs over five years, has already seen the planting of 646 million trees and shrubs, along with the establishment of 588 hectares of green parks and 2 million hectares of green cover on

the dried seabed of the Aral Sea. The initiative is monitored through an online platform and represents a key step in rehabilitating the country's degraded landscapes, particularly in the Aral Sea region, where land degradation has been a pressing environmental issue.⁹⁷

With 3.7 million hectares of forest covering 8.7% of its land area⁹⁸, Uzbekistan is considered a Low Forest Cover Country⁹⁹. Yashil Makon aligns with Uzbekistan's willingness to substantially increase its forest area and broader commitment to global environmental sustainability, reflecting the country's leadership on issues like afforestation and sustainable forest management. Supported by a UN General Assembly resolution initiated by Uzbekistan, the initiative ties into President Mirziyoyev's proposals at the 78th UN General Assembly and the 28th UN Climate Conference. These efforts contribute not only to national environmental restoration but also to global objectives under the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in combating climate change and addressing the severe degradation of the Aral Sea region.

Furthermore, Uzbekistan is advancing its ***green transition in agriculture***, guided by the 2020-2030 Agri-Food Development Strategy. Key actions include forming an Inter-ministerial Technical Working Group on Agri-food Climate Adaptation and establishing units within the Ministry of Agriculture and ISCAD to draft a National Agri-food Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Programme. The country has already implemented water-saving technologies on 1.2 million hectares of irrigated farmland, aiming to expand to 1.6 million hectares by 2025. Additionally, land reforms, including Land Code amendments, are promoting fairer, market-driven practices in the agricultural sector.

⁹⁷ Source?

⁹⁸ <https://forest-data.unece.org/Countries/UZ>

⁹⁹ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099250007072236900/pdf/P1708700ef21870290b1a9019310003c250.pdf>

Uzbekistan's diverse landscape, encompassing grasslands, hills, and mountains, plays a vital role in **biodiversity and ecosystem preservation**, supporting a rich array of flora and fauna essential for both environmental sustainability and rural livelihoods. The northern plains' grasslands, characterized by fertile soils, support species such as saiga, wild sheep, and various birds. These ecosystems are not only central to agriculture and livestock grazing but also serve as vital habitats for wildlife. Uzbekistan's hills, featuring a mix of shrubs and sparse woodlands, hold both environmental and cultural significance, as they are home to ancient settlements and archaeological sites. The country hosts at least 4,500 species of vascular plants, of which 8% are endemic. Its fauna includes 14,900 invertebrate species and 714 vertebrate species, with notable endemics among mammals, reptiles, and birds. However, overgrazing and land degradation remain critical issues, driven by overstocking, poor infrastructure maintenance, and limited awareness of sustainable practices.

To address these challenges, Uzbekistan has expanded its protected areas to 6.3 million hectares, covering 14% of its territory. Conservation efforts have identified Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), and new reserves have been introduced. However, illegal harvesting of medicinal plants and competition between livestock and wild species pose ongoing threats. Climate change, illegal deforestation, and infrastructure development also endanger species like the snow leopard and the Aral Sea's biodiversity.

Uzbekistan is a signatory to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and has set national biodiversity targets aligned with the 2030 global goals. Despite these efforts, biodiversity financing remains limited. In 2022, only 1.21% of the state budget (about USD260 million) was allocated to environmental causes, with a mere 0.33% (USD70 million) dedicated to biodiversity. Private sector involvement is minimal, and most biodiversity projects rely on international aid,

averaging USD4.6 million annually between 2017 and 2022. This indicates a pressing need for more robust biodiversity funding and private sector engagement to meet conservation targets effectively while contributing to broader sustainable development goals.

Uzbekistan's rich **cultural heritage** is closely linked to its diverse natural landscapes, making environmental sustainability a priority in heritage management. Efforts are underway to promote eco-tourism and sustainable tourism models that minimize environmental impact. Furthermore, the promotion of sustainable practices in traditional crafts, such as the use of natural dyes and locally sourced materials, contributes to biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource management. Challenges include the need for enhanced coordination between cultural and environmental agencies, as well as increased community awareness and participation in heritage and environmental conservation efforts. There is also a need to develop more comprehensive disaster risk management plans for heritage sites to ensure their resilience to climate change impacts.

Population growth and socio-economic development in Uzbekistan have led to **increasing waste generation**. Municipal solid waste (MSW) rose from 6.933 million tonnes in 2016 to 7.425 million tonnes in 2020. By 2022, MSW volumes reached 6.817 million tonnes, with an average generation rate of 0.775 kg/day per capita.¹⁰⁰ Despite investments in waste management infrastructure, recycling is limited, and most MSW ends up in landfills, with illegal dumping continuing in various areas. Polymer waste, including PET containers, constitutes a significant portion, with 1.6 million tonnes of polymer waste, including 0.44 million tonnes of PET, disposed of

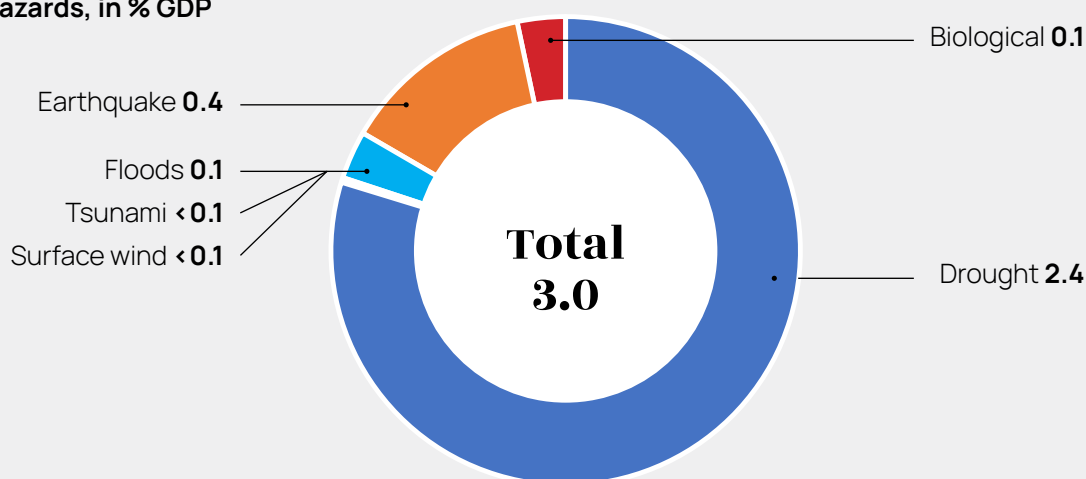
¹⁰⁰ IISD and Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan (2024). National State of Environment Report. <https://www.iisd.org/system/files/2024-02/uzbekistan-state-of-the-environment-en.pdf>

Disaster Risk

Average Annual Loss (AAL), Current

	USD, Millions	% GDP
Drought	2 437.1	2.4
Floods	116.8	0.1
Surface wind	0.0	0.0
Tsunami	0.0	0.0
Earthquake	409.6	0.4
Biological	93.4	0.1
Multi-hazard	3 072.5	3.0

Average Annual Loss (AAL), Current All hazards, in % GDP



in 221 landfills.¹⁰¹

Industrial waste, primarily from mining and industry, amounts to around 115 million tonnes annually, largely stored in designated sites. Medical waste generation averages 42,411 tonnes annually, of which 1,668 tonnes is hazardous, often treated onsite. E-waste amounted to 139.7 kilotonnes in 2019, but only 0.2% was officially collected or recycled, hindered by outdated technology and

¹⁰¹ Ibid

limited processing capacity.¹⁰²

To address these challenges, a Presidential Decree issued on 4 January 2024 aims to improve waste management by digitalizing MSW payment systems, introducing sorting systems in large cities, and promoting green investments in recycling, including e-waste. By 2025, certain waste transportation will require licensing, supported by a 2024-2026 roadmap overseen by the Ministry of

¹⁰² Ibid

Ecology, Environmental Protection, and Climate Change.¹⁰³

Uzbekistan faces significant challenges in **disaster risk reduction (DRR)**, with an estimated 1.4 million people affected annually and nearly USD3 billion in damages recorded in 2021. Climate change is expected to exacerbate these risks, particularly from droughts, floods, landslides, wildfires and earthquakes. Floods are the most frequent natural disaster, with annual average losses (AAL) amounting to USD116.8 million, while earthquakes result in an AAL of USD409.6 million. AAL from droughts, however, are the biggest, amounting to 2.4 per cent of the GDP. Combined, direct losses from these disasters constitute 3 percent of the country's GDP, among the highest in the region.¹⁰⁴

Severe floods could cost up to 5% of GDP, and droughts are similarly projected to have devastating economic impacts, especially as Uzbekistan's water security is further threatened by rising temperatures and glacial melt.

The government has recognized these vulnerabilities and taken steps to strengthen disaster resilience through legislation and national frameworks aligned with global standards, such as the Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement. Key measures include constructing earthquake-resistant infrastructure, improving flood defences, and enhancing early warning systems. The National Action Plan aimed at the implementation of the strategy to achieve the goal of "Sendai Framework for Natural Disaster Risk Reduction for 2015-2030" was approved in Uzbekistan to increase the effectiveness of reforms in the field of comprehensive protection of the population and territories from natural disasters, to significantly reduce the deaths and economic damage by 2030. The National Action Plan for 2023-2030

emphasizes improving disaster preparedness and institutional capacity, with a focus on public awareness and gender-inclusive disaster risk management.¹⁰⁵

Despite these advancements, challenges remain in vulnerability assessments, emergency preparedness, and data access. The country's risk exposure is heightened by socioeconomic factors, including poverty and inequality, particularly among vulnerable populations. While Uzbekistan's coping capacity has improved, as reflected by its score of 4.4 on the INFORM Global Risk Index, continued efforts are needed to strengthen governance, infrastructure, and disaster preparedness across sectors and regions to mitigate the impact of large-scale disasters.¹⁰⁶

Air pollution in Uzbekistan is a significant and growing concern, with the country ranked 23rd among the most polluted nations in 2023.¹⁰⁷ The average concentration of PM2.5 exceeds WHO standards by 5-7 times, with Tashkent ranking as the 27th most polluted capital.¹⁰⁸ The primary sources of air pollution in Uzbekistan are both anthropogenic and natural, driven by rapid industrial growth, energy expansion, and increasing motor vehicles emissions. Key contributors to air pollution include residential heating, transport, the energy, oil and gas, metallurgy, chemical, and construction sectors, with energy accounting for 76% of emissions.¹⁰⁹ The situation is exacerbated by Uzbekistan's arid climate and stagnant air conditions, which trap

¹⁰³ <https://timesca.com/uzbekistan-successful-reforms-in-environmental-protection-and-waste-management/>

¹⁰⁴ <https://rrp.unescap.org/country-profile/uzb>

¹⁰⁵ <https://lex.uz/docs/6565975#>

¹⁰⁶ <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Risk/Country-Risk-Profile/moduleId/1767/id/386/controller/Admin/action/CountryProfile>

¹⁰⁷ World Air Quality Report (2023), available at <https://www.iqair.com/newsroom/waqr-2023-pr>. Note: the ranking is based on average annual PM2.5 concentrations

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ International Institute for Sustainable Development, National State of the Environment Report for Uzbekistan (2024), <https://www.iisd.org/system/files/2024-02/uzbekistan-state-of-the-environment-en.pdf>

pollutants, especially in urban areas. Seasonal factors such as coal-based heating in winter further aggravate the issue, contributing to higher levels of pollution during colder months.

Natural factors also play a significant role, with dust from the Karakum and Kyzylkum Deserts, as well as the dry Aral Sea, contributing to high levels of background dust pollution. Over 3.1 million people are vulnerable to sand and dust storms, with transboundary air pollution flows affecting the region. The health impacts are severe, with air pollution contributing to approximately 3,000 premature deaths annually in Tashkent alone.¹¹⁰ According to the World Bank estimates, the annual health costs from ambient PM2.5 pollution, disproportionately affecting women, children, and vulnerable groups, account for 6.5% of the country's GDP.¹¹¹

Respiratory diseases affect one in ten children and adolescents, with cases rising from 1,090,140 in 2019 to 1,151,115 in 2022.¹¹² Particularly concerning are children under five in Karakalpakstan, who are increasingly showing physical development delays, a trend linked to environmental factors such as air pollution and the ecological degradation of the Aral Sea. A study revealed a decline in lung capacity and muscle strength among school-age children in the region, further highlighting the negative impact of these

conditions. Additionally, the World Bank warns that climate change could increase mortality by 0.6–1.2% by 2050 due to rising waterborne and heat-related illnesses.¹¹³

In response, Uzbekistan is enhancing its air quality monitoring network, with plans to add 26 new stations by the end of 2024.¹¹⁴ The government is also modernising its air quality standards, particularly for PM2.5 and PM10. Furthermore, Uzbekistan's planned accession to the UN(ECE) *Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution* (CLRTAP) underscores its commitment to regional cooperation in addressing air pollution. The Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change has outlined plans to regulate coal use, improve transportation, and increase green spaces, aiming for a cleaner, greener Tashkent by 2030.^{115, 116}

3.6. Governance, Rule of Law, Justice, Human Rights and Political Analysis

Democratic governance and the rule of law are key to Uzbekistan's pursuit of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**. The 2018 MAPS Report identified governance reform as a key acceleration area for achieving national SDGs in Uzbekistan.¹¹⁷ The report highlights that strengthening governance, particularly through

¹¹⁰ World Bank, Air Quality Assessment for Tashkent and the Roadmap for Air Quality Management Improvement in Uzbekistan, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/3fd0bf55-595c-481f-bd9b-23b40b9c55cc>

¹¹¹ World Bank Group, Country Climate and Development Report for Uzbekistan (2023), https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099111423124532881/pdf/P1790680f452f10ba0a34c06922a1df0003.pdf?_gl=1*lc3ub*_gcl_au*MTU5MTIyMTQzNy4xNzE5OTc4ODkz

¹¹² Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan. National state of the environment report: Uzbekistan. International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2023

¹¹³ Uzbekistan-Country Climate and Development Report', p.16

¹¹⁴ <https://zaminfoundation.ngo/ru/project-info/a79936a1-bdd3-4126-bf69-89e2ecfe23ee>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2024/01/23/air-quality-urgent-measures/>

¹¹⁶ According to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures for Socio-Economic Development of Tashkent City until 2030 (No. UP-112, dd. 26.07.2023)

¹¹⁷ <https://uzbekistan.un.org/en/46176-mainstreaming-acceleration-and-policy-support-maps-achieving-sustainable-development-goals>

institutional reforms, improving transparency, and enhancing accountability, is critical for advancing sustainable development. By fostering democratic governance and the rule of law, Uzbekistan can address key challenges such as corruption, inefficient public service delivery, and limited citizen engagement, which are essential for accelerating progress across multiple SDGs, particularly SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions.

The reform of the governance and judiciary systems have been an integral part of the structural transformations initiated by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev since 2016. The *Action Strategy for 2017-2021* laid the foundation for these changes, particularly in ensuring greater openness, raising public accountability, decentralizing power, increasing the role of local governance and media, and promoting political pluralism. Reforms in the judiciary aimed to enhance transparency and strengthen the rule of law by introducing the institution of appeals in courts and creating mechanisms for citizens to challenge administrative decisions.¹¹⁸ The strategy also promoted political engagement, with parliamentarians encouraged to engage more directly with the public, particularly the youth. Additionally, reforms sought to tackle corruption and inefficiency at all levels of government.¹¹⁹

In 2023, Uzbekistan adopted a *new Constitution* following a national referendum on constitutional amendments held on 30 April 2023, which introduced several rights and norms including 1) commitments to international law and integration into international law obligations and norms; 2) social protection; 3) right to favourable environment, reliable information about its

condition; and 4) individual rights protection (particularly in criminal proceedings) as well as several SDG entry points, such as, for example, on SDG16 and related changes in expanded human rights, government accountability, access to information, separation of powers, etc.

The new Constitution entailed substantial reorganization of state power, particularly affecting the legislative, presidential, and judicial branches, alongside local government administration. It included inter alia a reduction in the Senate's size, increased legislative oversight, expanded presidential powers including extended terms and greater appointment authority, and judicial reforms to allow citizen appeals to the Constitutional Court and implement term limits for court chairs. Local government saw a clearer separation of powers, potentially impacting Senate representation. In December 2023, the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev signed a constitutional law providing for a transition from a majoritarian to a majoritarian-proportional electoral system in the country. These reforms represent a crucial step in creating a fair and transparent legal system that upholds the rule of law and curbs corruption. The broader governance restructuring is expected to continue transforming Uzbekistan into a more democratic, just, and modern state, in line with the objectives of the *Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy*.

The process leading up to the referendum on the new Constitution, however, revealed the socio-economic and political vulnerabilities within Uzbekistan, particularly highlighted by the events in Karakalpakstan. In 2022, initial proposals for the constitutional reform included changes to the autonomy of the Karakalpakstan Republic, a region with unique political and cultural significance that is grappling with the consequences of the Aral Sea ecological disaster. When these changes were released for public discussion, they sparked *mass protests in Nukus on 1-2 July 2022*, leading to clashes that tragically resulted in 22 casualties and hundreds of detentions. The unrest underscored underlying socio-political

¹¹⁸ <https://strategy.uz/index.php?news=1478&lang=en> (Five Years with Action Strategy: Result of The Reforms)

¹¹⁹ <https://www.silkroadstudies.org/publications/silkroad-papers-and-monographs/item/13284-political-reform-in-mirziyoyevs-uzbekistan-elections-political-parties-and-civil-society.html>

tensions within the region and its relationship with the central government. In response, President Mirziyoyev visited Nukus, announcing the withdrawal of the contentious amendments and ordering an investigation into the events. The subsequent trial of alleged protest organizers in November 2022 emphasized Uzbekistan's commitment to transparency, with live coverage and journalist access. These events, coupled with the constitutional adoption in 2023, signal a careful balancing act between pursuing broader reforms and addressing regional vulnerabilities, essential for fostering national unity and stability.

Soon after his inauguration for the next term in July 2023, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev initiated the development of the new national development strategy until 2030. Formulated based on public discussions and approved on 12 September 2023, the ***Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy*** represents a comprehensive development plan, with 100 main targets across five priority areas that are largely aligned with the SDGs:

- I. Creation of education, healthcare and social protection systems that fully meet the needs of the population and international standards
- II. Joining the ranks of upper-middle-income countries through a stable economic growth
- III. Ensuring favourable environmental conditions for the population
- IV. Creation of a just and modern state serving the people
- V. Ensuring the sovereignty and security of the country.

Pillar IV of the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy is focused on ensuring the rule of law and building a people-centred public administration and includes several strategic activities aimed at improving governance and legal transparency. These activities include strengthening the independence of the judiciary by fully implementing the *habeas corpus* principle and expanding peoples' rights to challenge government decisions through streamlined appeal processes. A major priority is the full digitalization

of public services by 2030, making government more accessible and reducing administrative delays. In parallel, the government plans to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses and individuals by 30%, addressing inefficiencies that hinder service delivery and governance.

While Uzbekistan has made significant progress in modernising ***public services*** and enhancing digital connectivity, key challenges remain in establishing a unified framework for public service provision. The absence of a Law "On Public Services" leaves a gap in ensuring uniform standards and procedures across the country. Such a law could introduce criteria for service provision, define standards and principles, and clarify the powers of government agencies. Additionally, it could enhance the procedures for online public services, ensuring transparency and accessibility for all people. A unified legal framework is crucial to ensure that public services are delivered consistently and fairly across all regions, preventing regional disparities in service quality and access.

At the end of 2023, the Association of Mahallas of Uzbekistan was established to unify 9,452 ***mahallas*** (local community councils) nationwide. Within each mahalla, a "Mahalla Seven" task force was formed to represent community interests, foster cooperation and best practice exchange, support local initiatives, and drive innovative community programs. This task force will also identify mahalla needs, promote social justice and cohesion, and enhance resident participation in decision-making. This reform strengthens local communities by amplifying their voice and role in governance, improving public service delivery, and fostering collaboration among residents. However, adding a new governance layer within mahallas may introduce risks of inefficiency and bureaucratic delays, with success contingent on sufficient financial and human resources.

The mahallas are positioned to play a key role in public engagement, with the government aiming to boost community involvement in local budget allocations and infrastructure projects,

ensuring governance aligns closely with public needs. This decentralised approach is designed to enhance public trust, accountability, and overall administrative effectiveness. The strategy also includes implementing key performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate government effectiveness, promoting greater transparency and accountability to better serve the population.¹²⁰

Uzbekistan's **administrative reforms**, part of its broader national reform agenda, have shown mixed results. The 2022 government restructuring aimed to improve efficiency by streamlining ministries, reducing executive roles, and enhancing accountability. However, these efforts faced challenges, resulting in reversals and rapid restructuring. Difficulties in maintaining the intended streamlined structure, such as the delinking of tax and customs functions, indicate struggles in achieving efficiency. Nonetheless, the creation of the National Agency for Social Protection in 2023 reflects a strong commitment to address service delivery and tackle inclusive development issues.

These challenges highlight capacity gaps, particularly in aligning civil service skills with new demands, fostering accountability, and addressing issues like nepotism and corruption. The civil service lacks a robust recruitment system, and frequent reorganizations have weakened institutional memory, leading to inconsistent policy implementation. While successes have been achieved in areas like e-governance, the overall reform agenda needs greater policy coherence and effective local governance.

Uzbekistan's **parliamentary elections**, carried out on 27 October 2024, marked a critical juncture in the country's political evolution. These elections were the first held under a new mixed electoral system, where 150 members of the Legislative

Chamber were elected - 75 through single-member constituencies and 75 through proportional representation from party lists. This system aims to balance local representation with political inclusivity, giving voters a chance to choose both individual candidates and political parties.

Since his presidency began in 2016, Mirziyoyev has focused on deepening reforms, including on enhancing the role of parliament and local councils. In addition to electing members of the national parliament, voters also elected representatives to regional councils, city councils, and district councils, making this a wide-reaching political event for the country. The elections also showed an increase in the number of female candidates, with political parties required to ensure that women make up at least 40% of their nominees. Currently exceeding the global average of 26.7%, Uzbekistan demonstrates progress in women's political participation with 38% female Members of the Parliament as a result of the October 2024 elections.¹²¹ This shows a significant and gradual increase since 2014 which was 16% (32% in 2019, 32.7% in 2020, 33.6 in 2022 and 34.6% in 2023).¹²² However, achieving the 50/50 target enshrined in the Agreed Conclusions of the CSW 65th session requires further action.¹²³

On the other hand, Uzbekistan's **low representation of women in the Cabinet of Ministers, at just 4.8%** compared to the global average of 22.8%, highlights a critical area for improvement, with the country ranking 179th out of 184 globally.¹²⁴

The political environment in Uzbekistan still presents challenges. While five political parties are officially registered, competition remains limited,

¹²⁰ https://gov.uz/en/pages/2030_strategy, <https://daryo.uz/en/2023/09/12/president-shavkat-mirziyoyev-approves-uzbekistan-2030-strategy>

¹²¹ <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2024/10/31/deputies/>
<https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2024/10/31/deputies/>

¹²² Uzbekistan | Legislative Chamber | Data on women | IPU Parline: global data on national parliaments

¹²³ https://api.data.ipu.org/parliament/uz?chamber_id=13480

¹²⁴ Poster-Women-political-leaders-2024-en.pdf

and the registration of new political movements has proven difficult. Observers, including international monitors, are keen to see whether these reforms translate into genuine political pluralism or whether they will merely consolidate existing power structures.¹²⁵ Meanwhile, Uzbekistan ranked 148th out of 167 countries in the 2023 **Democracy Index**, sharing this position with China. For several consecutive years, the country's democracy score has remained at 2.12 out of 10. Similar to other nations in Central Asia, Uzbekistan continues to be classified as an authoritarian regime.¹²⁶

One of the recent developments is the adoption of the **Law “On conflicts of interest”** that establishes comprehensive rules to prevent and manage conflicts of interest within public administration in Uzbekistan. It mandates public officials to disclose potential conflicts of interest, introduces preventive measures, and outlines the responsibilities of the Anti-Corruption Agency of Uzbekistan in oversight and practical enforcement.

The legal status of the **Anti-corruption Agency** remains unclear due to the absence of the Law “On Anti-corruption Agency”, which is yet to be adopted. **Whistleblowers protection** also requires improvement through adoption of the law “On the protection of people reporting corruption” that would ensure the full protection from retaliation of the reporters of wrongdoings in the workplace. In April 2024, the government unveiled the long-awaited draft Anti-Corruption Strategy¹²⁷ for public discussion. The draft Strategy provides for a set of measures aimed at preventing and minimising corruption, including strengthening liability for corruption offences, increasing transparency in public procurement and introducing anti-corruption education to raise citizens' legal awareness.

¹²⁵ <https://thediomat.com/2024/07/uzbekistan-sets-october-date-for-parliamentary-elections/>,

¹²⁶ www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2023/

¹²⁷ Draft Anti-Corruption Strategy, Public Consultation Document, 2024.

Uzbekistan has also made progress in **human rights**, including the release of some political prisoners, relaxation of media censorship, and engagement with international human rights organizations that demonstrate progress in this area. By 1 September 2024, Uzbekistan has ratified seven out of nine core human rights UN treaties and four out of nine optional protocols, most recently the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) in 2021.

The progress in this area also includes the adoption of laws to promote equal rights between men and women, including the adoption of the landmark legislation on the **criminalization of domestic violence against women and children** that aims to provide women and children with greater protections against domestic violence. The country has also adopted a **National Gender Equality Strategy**.¹²⁸

Despite progress in policy and public awareness on gender equality and violence against women, including domestic violence, systemic challenges continue to drive high rates of **gender-based violence (GBV)** in Uzbekistan. Official figures report over 72,000 GBV cases from 2021 to 2022, with 85% occurring within households.¹²⁹ However, these statistics are likely conservative due to underreporting driven by social stigma, victimisation fears, and cultural norms. Uzbekistan also faces a significant data gap, especially in areas such as disability status, which hampers effective monitoring and evaluation of GBV interventions. This challenge is compounded by the absence of comparative surveys to explore key drivers of violence and provide insights into its distribution across regions and demographics. Cultural attitudes further complicate the issue: according to the 2022 MICS study, 40% of women aged 15-49 justify domestic violence under certain conditions,

¹²⁸ National Gender Equality Strategy 2021, Government of Uzbekistan.

¹²⁹ Eurasianet (2023).

with rates higher in rural (42%) and low-income (43%) households, highlighting a persistent need for systemic, culturally sensitive reform and comprehensive data.

A key issue affecting the effectiveness of measures against GBV has been the lack of sustained social assistance and skill-building opportunities for survivors. The establishment of the National Agency for Social Protection (NASP) and the launch of *Inson* centres in 2024 designed to offer multi-layered support for survivors, are crucial steps toward a more coordinated and comprehensive response. Additionally, a recent Presidential Resolution (2024) aims to improve social services for GBV survivors by setting clear standards and guidelines across sectors.¹³⁰ However, significant challenges remain in ensuring the quality, accessibility, and coordination of GBV services across Uzbekistan. Many survivors - particularly women and girls with disabilities - struggle to access timely, survivor-centred assistance. Variability in service quality and gaps in referral pathways hinder the system's effectiveness. Strengthening the capacity of social service providers and infrastructure to deliver integrated care is essential, as is improving interagency coordination and establishing robust referral mechanisms across law enforcement, health, and social services. Ensuring inclusivity requires special focus on marginalized groups, including women and girls with disabilities and rural communities. Further investment in data collection and monitoring is needed to ensure accountability. By addressing these gaps, Uzbekistan can progress toward an inclusive GBV support system that offers sustainable, survivor-centred solutions and actively works to prevent violence in all its forms.

A well-functioning **National Women's Machinery** (NWM) is essential for advancing women's rights as a central policy-coordinating body within government, tasked with

mainstreaming gender equality across all policy areas. However, the Senate Committee on Women and Gender Equality's Charter has yet to be formally adopted and made publicly accessible, and an effective coordination mechanism among various bodies remains absent, hindering efforts to achieve gender equality at all levels. UN Women completed the review on the effectiveness of NWM system of Uzbekistan and submitted to Senate with short, mid and long-run recommendations.

The December 2023 Presidential decree mandates that the share of **women in management positions** in government-owned enterprises must reach 30% by 2030.¹³¹ Additionally, it expands the category of individuals eligible for social protection to include victims of domestic violence, ensuring their access to job placement services and potential training programs. Other measures include training of unemployed women in home-based businesses & crafts (funded by the government), supporting female entrepreneurs with rent subsidies for traditional clothing businesses and introducing special family judges/courts to handle family disputes. Following to Presidential decree, Government of Uzbekistan hosted Asian Women's Forum in May 2024, with the technical assistance of UN Women and prepared Samarkand Declaration which underlines the importance of women's economic empowerment and comes up with cross-national efforts to eliminate barriers to increase women's labour force participation in Asian countries and beyond ([Asian Women's Forum 2024: "Regional approach in issues of women's economic, social and political empowerment" | UN Women – Europe and Central Asia](#)). It is also important to underline sub-regional role of the Central Asian Women Leaders' Caucus (CAWLC) which was founded by the efforts of Uzbekistan in 2021 and serves as a platform to enhance GEWE policies in central Asian countries with a joined-up approach. As the

¹³⁰ <https://lex.uz/docs/6916641>

¹³¹ <https://lex.uz/uz/docs/6704838>

first chair of the Caucus, Uzbekistan will lead it again in 2026 as per the rotation principle.

Uzbekistan's **child protection system** has seen significant improvements, particularly with the creation of the NASP and the passing of the Law on the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence. These reforms have led to a more coordinated approach to preventing and addressing violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect. Key reforms include deinstitutionalization, shifting from large-scale residential care to family- and community-based alternatives, which provide more supportive environments for children. A strengthened child protection system offers integrated, sustainable solutions that address risks holistically, avoiding fragmented, short-term responses.

Despite these advancements, significant challenges remain in fully realising an inclusive child protection system. The successful implementation of the law will require substantial investments in financial, human, and technical resources. Uzbekistan must strengthen its social services infrastructure, improve training for child protection professionals, and ensure law enforcement and the judiciary are equipped to handle child-related cases effectively. Currently, only 1 in 4 children in Uzbekistan has access to child-sensitive legal representation in judicial processes, underscoring the need for urgent reform.

Reforms such as deinstitutionalization, which focus on shifting from large-scale residential care to family- and community-based alternatives, are crucial. However, services like statutory family support are still in their early stages. Limited resources and capacity gaps hinder efforts to provide comprehensive support, including professional foster care and family reintegration programmes. Special attention is needed for children with disabilities, particularly those aging out of care, to ensure they can transition to independent living and social integration.

Community-based protection mechanisms, such as local communities and *Inson* Centres,

require strengthening to adequately support vulnerable children. Support is urgently needed for the 31,000 children in institutional care, 79% of whom have disabilities, and for the 60% of children who experience violent discipline. Additionally, 21% of children aged 5-17 are engaged in child labour, with 15% involved in hazardous work. Access to justice remains a critical gap. Child-friendly legal proceedings are necessary to prevent re-traumatization, and alternative, community-based measures should be developed for children in conflict with the law to promote their rehabilitation and reintegration. Investment in cross-sectoral collaboration, capacity building, and expanded social services is vital to ensuring a protective environment for all children in Uzbekistan.

Despite these improvements, **the civic space** remains restricted in Uzbekistan. Key challenges include stringent controls on NGO registration, limitations on foreign funding for international projects, and persecution of journalists and bloggers. Independent journalists and human rights defenders, though somewhat freer than before, still encounter harassment and intimidation. NGOs face considerable bureaucratic obstacles under the Ministry of Justice, which requires prior notification and approval for large gatherings, especially those involving foreign participants. Additionally, the law imposes strict operational requirements, with legal consequences for any perceived violations, which can deter organisations from seeking formal registration.

Regulations also require NGOs to report foreign funding received for international grants, and the Ministry of Justice retains the authority to reject such projects arbitrarily, effectively chilling civil society activity. This restricted environment hampers meaningful dialogue between authorities and civil society, fostering distrust in governance and low public engagement in political processes.¹³²

¹³² Uzbekistan 2023 Human Rights Report,

This restricted civic space undermines the potential for meaningful dialogue between authorities and civil society, contributing to a lack of trust in governance and low levels of public engagement in the political process.

Despite the Government of Uzbekistan enacting laws to guarantee *citizens' right to information* and foster a more liberal media environment, implementation has been weak, and international standards are poorly reflected. A shrinking media space remains a common concern. Existing legislation on public access to information lacks clear guidelines for easy, barrier-free access, fails to provide a public interest override for information requests, and includes restrictions that undermine freedom of expression. It also lacks independent oversight and effective monitoring. The prohibition on disseminating inaccurate information extends beyond cases of defamation or false statements under oath, creating a chilling effect that leads to self-censorship and hinders media openness.

Additionally, governance of digital platforms is insufficient. The Agency of Information and Mass Communication (AIMC) under the President's Administration is developing a unified Information Code to regulate issues currently covered by separate laws on open data, media, and access to information. The outcome of this reform will be crucial in shaping Uzbekistan's progress in areas like access to information, transparency, open data, accountability, journalist safety, and digital platform governance.

Efforts to improve the protection of *vulnerable groups*, including forcibly displaced people, minorities, people living with HIV, persons with disabilities, victims of GBV, human trafficking and vulnerable children, remain insufficient. The lack of comprehensive anti-discrimination

legislation continues to allow for discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals, with consensual homosexual relationships still criminalized. Without legal protections, these vulnerable populations are at risk of harassment, exclusion, and human rights violations.

Uzbekistan has also demonstrated its willingness to engage with *international human rights bodies*, as evidenced by its ratification of several core UN human rights treaties. As of 1 September 2024, Uzbekistan has ratified seven out of nine core human rights UN treaties and four out of nine optional protocols. The latest ratification was of the CRPD in 2021. The National Centre for Human Rights (NHRC) plays a key role in coordinating the country's reporting to these mechanisms and overseeing the implementation of international recommendations. However, the NHRC's capacity to monitor and implement diverse human rights action plans can be further strengthened. The government has also issued a standing invitation to the *UN Special Procedures* since 2018, with the most recent visit from the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing in August 2024. Further visits, such as those by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Special Rapporteur on Torture, are still pending, reflecting ongoing concerns about Uzbekistan's adherence to global human rights standards.

The Authorized Person of the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Human Rights (*Ombudsman*) is another critical institution. The Ombudsman's office, while operational, does not yet fully comply with the Paris Principles, leading to a "B" status accreditation from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).¹³³ The office has announced plans to pursue "A" status through a new draft law on the Ombudsman, which is currently under consideration by

available: https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/528267_UZBEKISTAN-2023-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf

¹³³ GANHRI Report on National Human Rights Institutions, 2023.

Parliament. This draft law is expected to enhance the Ombudsman's role in promoting and protecting human rights in line with international standards.

The Children's Ombudsperson of Uzbekistan, part of the Oliy Majlis, plays a vital role in safeguarding children's rights by monitoring compliance with child protection laws, handling complaints, and advocating for policy enhancements. It provides an accessible channel for children and their representatives to report abuses and seek justice, fostering a child-friendly approach in legal and administrative processes. However, the Ombudsperson requires additional funding, staffing, and technical resources to fully realise its mandate. Broader challenges persist in areas such as anti-discrimination legislation, judicial independence, protection from torture and ill-treatment, decriminalisation of consensual homosexual relationships and HIV transmission, and protection of journalists, human rights defenders, and vulnerable groups.

3.7. Humanitarian-development-peace linkages

Spillover of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, there have been concerns regarding the spread of violence, drugs, firearms and the flow of refugees from Afghanistan to Uzbekistan. To mitigate these risks, Uzbekistan has been among the first countries in the region to establish contacts with the de-facto authorities without formally recognising them as the legitimate government. Uzbekistan has hosted meetings and conferences to facilitate peace and stability in Afghanistan, aiming to prevent instability from affecting the broader region, including a major conference in July 2022 to discuss the Afghan crisis. The government of Uzbekistan prioritizes economic cooperation, connectivity and energy sector cooperation with Afghanistan, focusing on trade and infrastructure projects. At the 79th UN General Assembly,

Uzbekistan's statement highlighted needs for collective efforts in Central Asia to promote peace, stability, and dynamic development, highlighting the need for regional integration and collaboration. It also called for unified international action against terrorism, emphasizing cooperation within Central Asia and with the UN to enhance regional security and counter drug trafficking. Furthermore, it recognized Afghanistan's integral role in Central Asia-Uzbekistan support initiatives for economic reconstruction and education to foster stability.

Terrorism. Due to its geopolitical position, Uzbekistan faces several border-related challenges, particularly those originating in Afghanistan and other countries/regions with ongoing conflicts and security concerns. Uzbekistan faces threats from the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), in addition to concerns resulting from the activities of militant groups in Afghanistan. In 2022, ISKP claimed a rocket attack launched on Uzbek territory from Afghanistan's Hairaton border town. While Uzbek authorities and the De-facto authorities of Afghanistan denied the claim, the latter later confirmed the incident. On 5 July 2022, the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that five shells were fired from Afghanistan toward Termez of Surkhandarya Region.

Uzbekistan's key national policy document that regulates the activities of state actors in the field is the National Strategy on Counteracting Extremism and Terrorism for 2021-2026 and its roadmap.¹³⁴ These documents mention the roles of women as important actors in harmoniously raising children whose fathers remained abroad and in preventing the influence of radical ideology on their children.

Uzbekistan's efforts to support repatriation from conflict zones have been praised for their gender- and child-sensitive approach. However, to strengthen support for women and child returnees, a deeper understanding of gender dynamics is needed. Relying on traditional

¹³⁴ <https://lex.uz/en/docs/5491628>

gender binaries—viewing women and girls as victims and men and boys as perpetrators—can limit opportunities for men and boys and hinder the reintegration of women and girls, who may struggle with accessing education, employment, and societal acceptance.

Firearms trafficking contributes to all forms of transnational organized crime including drug trafficking. Firearms, often acquired illegally, embolden criminals and escalate the severity of their crimes. Since 2021, there has been increased concern regarding the spill-over of Afghan weapons fueling organized crime and terrorism in Central Asia. The interconnected relationship between narcotics and firearms trafficking in Central Asia is apparent in numerous dimensions. Narcotics trade is often associated with violence, frequently involving firearms through using of drug trafficking routes for firearms trafficking to organized crime groups. Dependence on drugs may lead individuals to criminal activities to secure the necessary funds for their drug consumption, making use of firearms. For instance, in 2023, “Uzbekistan’s customs officers identified 38 offenses and seized 1433 weapons and 10 offenses with the seizure of 2712 ammunition”.¹³⁵

The nexus between firearms trafficking, terrorism, and organized crime is a critical concern. The return of battle-hardened terrorist fighters from Afghanistan and other conflict zones presents a growing threat to the region.

Tensions between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which may directly affect the regions in the Fergana Valley, a densely populated area with

a history of border disputes. The current tensions can escalate into conflict, as seen in previous clashes over resources like water and land, resulting in disruption of regional trade and local conflicts.

Border management and infrastructure challenges. Some parts of Uzbekistan’s borders, especially those with Tajikistan, are remote and difficult to monitor effectively. Limited border infrastructure and surveillance technology make it challenging to prevent illegal crossings and smuggling. This creates opportunities for criminal and extremist groups to exploit.

3.8. National vision and development plan vis-à-vis the 2030 Agenda with links to regional and global frameworks/goals

Uzbekistan aspires to become an upper middle-income country by 2030. Following the referendum and the snap presidential elections, where President Mirziyoyev was re-elected with 87.1% votes to serve a 7-year term in line with the new Constitution, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev initiated the development of the new national development strategy until 2030. Formulated based on public discussions and approved on 12 September 2023, the “**Uzbekistan-2030**” *Strategy* represents a comprehensive development plan, with 100 main targets across five priority areas, which largely align and contribute to the achievement of the national SDGs:

1. creation of education, healthcare and social protection systems that fully meet the needs of the population and international standards
2. joining the ranks of upper-middle-income countries through a stable economic growth
3. ensuring favourable environmental conditions for the population
4. creation of a just and modern state serving the people
5. ensuring the sovereignty and security

¹³⁵ Minister of Internal Affairs Bobojonov presented data on preventive measures and crime prevention related to terrorism, weapons, and criminality during the plenary session of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan. He emphasized the importance of combating the illegal trafficking of firearms and light weapons, as well as their unlawful supply to terrorists, in line with the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution SCR.2370/2017 and the Madrid Guiding Principles Phase II

of the country.¹³⁶

Building on the lessons learned from the previous national Action Strategy for 2017-2021, the new strategy is more results-oriented with concrete, ambitious and measurable targets, such as reducing poverty, increasing coverage by pre-school education and higher education, etc. Other strengths of the new strategy are a stronger focus on improved governance and democratic institutions, the fight against corruption, promotion of civil society and freedom of speech, decentralization, support to rural development and sustainable development with a focus on Aral Sea, other vulnerable regions, and the environment.

While the Strategy does not explicitly reference the national SDGs, its priorities and goals largely align with the national SDGs and should significantly contribute to their achievement. A key entry point for better alignment of the Strategy with the national SDG framework lies in the role of the Development Strategy Center, which, in collaboration with the Coordinating Council for the Implementation of National SDGs, has been tasked with establishing a system for public monitoring and annual analysis of the 2030 Strategy. This annual review will assess how well the reforms align with the SDGs and is to be publicly released, ensuring transparency and encouraging public engagement in the implementation process."¹³⁷

Uzbekistan continues to demonstrate strong commitment to **the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs**. Along with the national SDG Coordination Council – an interagency government set-up headed by the Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Jamshid Kuchkarov, - the monitoring and implementation of the national SDGs is supported by the Parliamentary Commission on SDGs that conducts regular public multi-stakeholder hearings on the

progress and challenges in SDG implementation, involving civil society organizations as well as the UN and other development partners.¹³⁸

In July 2023, the country presented its 2nd Voluntary National Review (VNR) of its progress on SDGs. Key achievements include economic growth despite global crises, increased educational coverage, healthcare improvements, and efforts in gender equality and social inclusion. The country also focused on environmental sustainability, committing to substantial emissions reductions and transitioning to a green economy and highlighted remaining challenges in addressing demographic growth and continuing structural reforms across economic, administrative, social, and environmental dimensions.¹³⁹ The National Commitments on SDG Transformation address four key areas: Economic Reforms, Human Capital, Gender Equality, and Green Transition and are basically closely aligned with the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy.¹⁴⁰

According to the UNDP global “Integrated Insights” report, Uzbekistan is on track to achieving 50 (40%) of the national SDG targets.¹⁴¹

The country has also been continuously improving its statistical capacity to collect data for SDGs through harmonising the national SDG indicator framework with the global one, and undertaking important surveys, such as the MICS and MPI. As a result, data for 140 out of the 190 n SDG indicators is now published at the national SDG web-portal at nsdg.stat.uz. Significant data and statistical capacity gaps however remain, especially in governance (SDG16), environment, and gender equality (SDG5). Furthermore, a significant number of national SDG targets lack target values for 2030, weakening the results

¹³⁶ <https://lex.uz/docs/6600404>

¹³⁷ <https://lex.uz/docs/6600404> (Point 8 of the Presidential Decree)

¹³⁸ <https://senat.uz/ru/post/post-1579>

¹³⁹ <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2023/VNR%202023%20Uzbekistan%20Report.pdf>

¹⁴⁰ <https://sdgs.un.org/national-commitments-leadorg-list?leadorg=UZBEKISTAN>

¹⁴¹ Uzbekistan - UZB (undp.org)

orientation of the dedicated programmes and public financing that is channelled to their achievement.¹⁴²

3.9. Financial landscape analysis

Uzbekistan's *development financing landscape* is evolving as the country takes proactive steps to meet its national SDGs by 2030. The country's Development Finance Assessment (DFA), conducted in 2020-2021 with support from the UN revealed that Uzbekistan's total development finance amounted to USD69.77 billion in 2021. A significant portion of this financing is derived from tax revenues and external debt, which account for the largest shares. Private investments make up 21% of the total, demonstrating the growing importance of engaging the private sector in the country's development efforts.

However, the DFA highlighted a critical financing gap, estimating that Uzbekistan needs an additional USD6 billion annually to bridge this gap and fully achieve its SDG targets. To address these challenges, the government has initiated an ***Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF)***, a comprehensive approach to aligning public and private financial flows with the national development agenda supported by the UN. This framework encourages cross-sectoral collaboration, ensuring that government institutions, private enterprises, and civil society work together to mobilize resources effectively. The INFF also forms the foundation for a new Integrated National SDG Financing Strategy, developed in partnership with UNDP. This strategy, currently under government review, aims to create a coherent approach for combining both domestic and external financial resources, enhancing their efficiency in advancing SDG progress.

In terms of public financing, Uzbekistan has been implementing ***SDG budget tagging*** since 2019. This initiative helps align approximately

70% of state budget expenditures with the SDGs, enabling more targeted allocation of resources to priority areas. The tagging process is now expanding to include green budget tagging, which will further improve tracking and ensure that resources are directed toward environmentally sustainable development projects, which is in line with Uzbekistan's broader efforts to achieve its green transition goals. In 2024, the government also launched ***Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB)*** programme to integrate gender equality objectives into policy, budgetary, and audit processes, assessing whether budget revenues and expenditures reinforce, reduce, or promote gender equality.

A key element of Uzbekistan's financing strategy is the issuance of sovereign ***SDG and Green bonds***. In July 2021, Uzbekistan became the first country in the region to issue sovereign SDG bonds, raising USD235 million. This was followed by a second issuance of Green bonds, totalling USD350 million. The SDG Bond Allocation and Impact Report, published in 2022, details how the funds are being utilized, reflecting the country's commitment to transparency and accountability in financing its development goals.

Uzbekistan is increasingly turning to ***public-private partnerships (PPPs)*** to modernize its infrastructure and advance its sustainable development goals. By attracting private financing, the country aims to address gaps in critical sectors like energy, water, transport, healthcare, and education. The government's recently announced PPP strategy for 2024-2030 outlines ambitious financial targets — USD10 billion for energy, USD7 billion for infrastructure, USD5 billion for healthcare, USD3 billion for education, and USD2 billion for utilities. These investments are designed to modernize essential services while contributing to the country's broader social and environmental objectives.¹⁴³

¹⁴² nsdg.stat.uz

¹⁴³ <https://lex.uz/ru/pdfs/7089558>

In the energy sector, reforms focus on reducing inefficiencies in electricity distribution and increasing the share of renewables to 40% by 2030. Projects are aimed at improving service reliability and lowering system losses, critical for achieving sustainable energy goals.¹⁴⁴ Water management, supported by investments in key regions like Surkhandarya, is another priority, with projects targeting better access to clean water and sanitation (SDG6).

Education and healthcare sectors are also integral to this development push. Plans to build 450 schools by 2030, alongside the modernization of hospitals and clinics, reflect the government's commitment to improving social infrastructure. These initiatives will enhance public services and contribute to SDGs related to quality education (SDG 4) and healthcare (SDG 3).

A robust legal framework is essential to attracting private financing for these projects. The introduction of “take or pay” contracts and other measures to secure investor confidence will help ensure successful implementation. Uzbekistan's reliance on PPPs underscores the importance of private sector involvement in delivering sustainable development outcomes across key areas, helping to build a more resilient and inclusive economy.¹⁴⁵

External borrowing and donor/IFI financing remain central pillars of Uzbekistan's development finance. IFIs such as the ADB, World Bank, EBRD, and Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) have played pivotal roles in financing important reform initiatives, budget support, infrastructure development, energy efficiency improvements, and other sectors crucial to Uzbekistan's growth. The country also benefits from development assistance and concessional loans from a variety of bilateral and multilateral donors. These partnerships are critical in financing Uzbekistan's development projects while

supporting reforms that enhance governance, transparency, and institutional capacity.

In conclusion, Uzbekistan's development financing is characterized by a blend of public and private financing mechanisms, innovative financial instruments such as SDG and Green bonds, and increased engagement with the private sector, IFIs and donors. The INFF and Integrated National SDG Financing Strategy, although still under government review, reflect the country's commitment to aligning financial flows with its development priorities. However, closing the annual financing gap of USD6 billion remains a challenge, necessitating continued efforts to attract private investment, optimize public spending, and secure external support from donors and IFIs.

3.10. Stakeholder and Partnerships Analysis

Uzbekistan's pursuit of the national SDG agenda hinges on the active engagement of a diverse array of stakeholders, ranging from international financial institutions, bilaterals, and hybrid partnerships to government agencies, civil society organizations, and the private sector. While progress has been made in several areas, there are critical gaps that must be addressed to ensure sustainable and inclusive development as the country works toward achieving the 2030 Agenda. (SDG17)

The public sector in Uzbekistan continues to be a major driver of SDG implementation, particularly through key ministries like the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the National Agency for Social Protection. These institutions are essential in shaping national policies that align with the SDGs, with a focus on governance, social protection, and sustainable agriculture. The Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction, for instance, has been at the forefront of labour market reforms and social protection strategies,

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2024/09/04/electricity/>

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2024/09/05/ppp/>

aiming to create more inclusive employment opportunities and improve the quality of life for vulnerable populations. Despite these efforts, challenges remain in ensuring that these initiatives are fully inclusive, particularly in integrating marginalized communities such as people with disabilities. Ensuring that national policies align with international labour standards is also critical to making progress toward SDG targets related to decent work and economic growth.

The private sector holds significant potential to contribute to Uzbekistan's SDG agenda. As was highlighted in the preceding section on development finance landscape, private investments (including foreign) are increasing their contribution to the country's national sustainable development priorities through investing in important infrastructure and social sectors. However, Uzbekistan has yet to fully leverage the potential of corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies to align private sector investments with the country's SDG goals. To address this, targeted efforts to foster public-private partnerships, as well as strategic frameworks to incentivize sustainable business practices, are necessary.

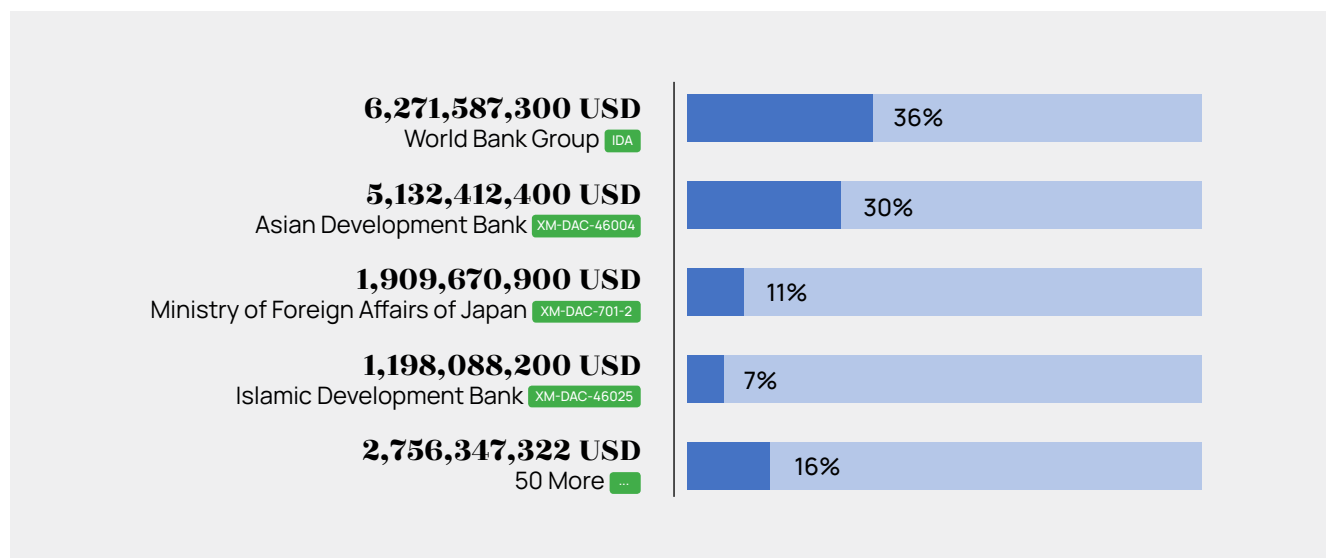
Civil society organizations (CSOs) also play a critical role in Uzbekistan's development landscape, particularly in promoting social norms and advancing rights-based approaches. Organizations focused on gender equality, youth empowerment, health, and social protection have made important contributions, especially in the areas of women's rights, health awareness, and gender-based violence prevention, as well as the review of the country's two Voluntary National Reviews on SDG progress so far. However, CSOs face significant institutional challenges, such as limited funding and a lack of integration into formal decision-making processes. This has constrained their ability to scale their efforts and influence national SDG implementation. Enhancing the role of CSOs in policy advocacy and capacity building will be crucial for making development efforts more inclusive and ensuring

that the voices of marginalized communities are heard. Moreover, improving mechanisms for CSO engagement in SDG monitoring and accountability frameworks will help promote transparency and inclusivity in the country's development agenda.

International financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, EBRD, and ADB have been pivotal in supporting Uzbekistan's development goals, providing significant financial and technical assistance. In 2023, the World Bank alone invested over USD1.09 billion in infrastructure projects, which underscores the strong commitment of IFIs to key sectors such as agriculture, water supply, and transportation. These investments are crucial to economic growth and environmental sustainability, helping Uzbekistan make significant strides toward achieving the SDGs. Between 2021 and 2024, the International Aid Transparency Initiative reported that the World Bank Group, Asian Development Bank, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, and the Islamic Development Bank are the top four largest stakeholders in terms of aid provision to Uzbekistan.¹⁴⁶

Alongside traditional IFIs, Uzbekistan has partnered with various organizations, blending public and private sector resources. These include the Coca-Cola Foundation, the Green Climate Fund, and Gavi–The Vaccine Alliance. Beyond these organizations, Uzbekistan collaborates with a wide array of partners, including bilateral agencies such as the USAID, Germany's Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Canada's Global Affairs Canada, JICA, and Sweden's Sida. Uzbekistan also works with hybrid and global funds: The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria; the Global Green Growth Institute; and the GEF Secretariat. The other development partners include the European Commission and the European Investment Bank.

¹⁴⁶ https://d-portal.org/ctrack.html?country_code=UZ&year_min=2021&year_max=2024#view=main



IATI maintains a more comprehensive list of these aid partners to Uzbekistan. Such partnerships have been instrumental in addressing critical issues like energy policy, government & civil society, agriculture, water Supply & sanitation, transport, social Infrastructure & services, energy distribution, health, education, and tourism.¹⁴⁷

The UN continues to be a central player in Uzbekistan's SDG efforts, working through its 25 agencies, funds, and programmes to support the government in addressing a wide range of development challenges. The UN has forged strong partnerships with various stakeholders, including IFIs, civil society, and cross-border organizations like the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS). These partnerships have enabled the UN to address pressing issues such as healthcare, climate resilience, and gender equality while aligning efforts with national priorities. In particular, the UN's work during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of international cooperation in strengthening healthcare systems and pandemic preparedness. However, maintaining

momentum in the health sector, especially in areas like maternal health and immunization, will be critical to avoiding regression and ensuring sustained progress.

Another critical factor in advancing the SDGs in Uzbekistan is the role of **volunteerism**. In sectors such as healthcare and environmental conservation, volunteers have played a vital role in reaching underserved populations. For example, in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, volunteer-driven health campaigns have improved access to healthcare services in remote areas, while nationwide environmental campaigns, such as the "One Million Trees" initiative, have helped combat land degradation and promote climate action. These initiatives highlight the transformative potential of volunteerism in supporting SDG implementation, particularly in rural regions.

Despite the progress made, significant gaps remain in Uzbekistan's stakeholder engagement in SDG efforts. These include the still limited involvement of local private sector actors, and insufficient integration of civil society into decision-making processes. To address these challenges, Uzbekistan must adopt a more diversified and inclusive approach to stakeholder

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

engagement. This should include strengthening public-private partnerships, enhancing the capacity of government institutions to manage international funds effectively, and creating platforms for meaningful CSO participation in SDG planning and monitoring. By fostering a more inclusive and resilient partnership framework, Uzbekistan can ensure that its SDG progress is sustainable, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all its people.

3.11. Regional risks and cross-border security cooperation

Uzbekistan's location next to the former main producer of opium in the world has traditionally posed a significant risk for the illicit trafficking and use of opiates and other illicit substances. In 2023, Afghanistan experienced a dramatic decline in opium poppy cultivation, with the area under cultivation plummeting by 95%, from 233,000 hectares in 2022 to just 10,800 hectares in 2023. This sharp decrease followed the enforcement of a drug ban by the de facto authorities in April 2022. The 2023 reduction had a profound impact on the availability of opiates and implications for drug markets and regional stability.

Early reports suggest that illicit opium production in 2024 in Afghanistan could be similar or slightly higher than in 2023, but not reaching the levels observed prior to the drug ban announced by the de-facto authorities of Afghanistan in April 2022. The major trafficking routes for Afghan opiates through Central Asia, Southwest Asia and Türkiye have been experiencing a reduction in seizures of opiates originating from Afghanistan.

Despite the decline in opium cultivation, Afghanistan's drug economy is not limited to opiates alone. Reports indicate an increase in methamphetamine production and trafficking, raising concerns about the diversification of the illicit drug trade in the country and its possible expansion into other countries in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan. The increasing prevalence

of synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances particularly Amphetamine Type Stimulants, poses a new challenge for both Afghanistan and its neighbouring regions due to various reasons including the lack of appropriate drug use treatment services.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, Uzbekistan drug use treatment services are somewhat limited with the scarcity of evidence-based interventions particularly the Medically Assisted Treatment services. Additionally, observed drug use trends in Uzbekistan inform on the increase in the non-medical use of prescription medications. This can be explained primarily due to the limited availability of conventional illicit drugs, their rising costs and reduced purity. Central Asia, in particular, is facing heightened levels of drug trafficking, not just in opioids but also in synthetic substances. This trend reflects a broader regional issue, with synthetic drug trafficking reaching record levels across West and Southeast Asia.

According to the thirty-fourth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team under UNSC resolutions, the threat posed by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan has grown with significant terrorist attacks outside Afghanistan, notably in Moscow on 22 March 2024, and with increased threat levels in Europe and other areas. The terrorist threat emanating from Afghanistan is causing heightened concern in many Member States. Online recruitment and radicalisation efforts focusing on Tajik and, to a lesser extent, Uzbek communities encourage potential recruits to conduct attacks outside Afghanistan. Principal routes to Afghanistan for new recruits involve travel from Central Asia through Türkiye and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In recent years, Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan, have witnessed a substantial increase in the volume of legal trade through containers and other shipments, both destined for and transiting through the region. The new

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.unodc.org/LSS/Page/NPS>

international transport corridors and initiatives in Central Asia has played a key role in boosting legitimate trade and transit capacities of these countries. Moreover, the current geopolitical instability across the broader Eurasian region has led to significant shifts in traditional trade and transport routes, giving rise to alternative east-west and north-south trade routes. This shift is placing additional pressure on border management law enforcement agencies to secure the international trade supply chain while minimising disruptions to legitimate trade. While these new routes offer improved connectivity, they also present opportunities for criminal activities, such as smuggling drugs, precursors, weapons, falsified

medical products, and other contraband concealed within legitimate cargo. In response, Uzbekistan has prioritized cross-border law enforcement cooperation and the practical exchange of information to prevent and combat illicit cargo flows and is actively engaged in various bilateral and multilateral cooperation frameworks.

National authorities have intensified efforts to strengthen border security and combat drug trafficking but further investment in drug prevention, treatment, and the management of drug use disorders is needed to address the challenges posed by both traditional and synthetic drugs.

4. Conclusions

The 2024 CCA for Uzbekistan identifies several critical development challenges and opportunities that will have a significant catalytic impact on achieving the SDGs. These key issues must be addressed by the government and all stakeholders, including development partners, civil society, and the private sector, to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth aligned with the 2030 Agenda.

1. Demographic Risks and Opportunities

Uzbekistan's rapidly growing and youthful population presents significant potential for economic growth and innovation, with projections suggesting that the population will reach over 50 million by 2050. However, this growth also places immense pressure on public services, particularly education, healthcare, and the labour market. The country must invest in preparing this young population for the future workforce by enhancing vocational training, higher education quality, and employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas where disparities are most pronounced. Urbanization and migration trends are also shaping the demographic landscape, highlighting the need for infrastructure development in urban centres while preventing rural economic stagnation.

2. Social Development (Human Capital)

Education: Uzbekistan has made progress in expanding access to preschool and tertiary education, but disparities persist, particularly in

rural areas and among vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities. Improving the quality of education and infrastructure, especially in rural schools, and addressing gender disparities in early childhood education are essential for achieving long-term development goals.

Health: Significant efforts have been made to enhance universal health coverage (UHC), with reforms focusing on primary healthcare, infrastructure and digitalisation of health services. However, challenges remain in addressing non-communicable diseases (NCDs), infection diseases, maternal health, family planning, and healthcare quality. Strengthening financial protection mechanisms and improving healthcare in rural areas will be crucial for equitable health outcomes.

Social Protection: The expansion of social protection systems, including the National Strategy for Social Protection, has improved service delivery to vulnerable populations. However, gaps remain in coverage and efficiency, particularly for women, children, informal workers and those in rural regions. Continued investment in social protection infrastructure, improving quality and coverage of services to GBV survivors, and data systems

(hardware, software, databases) is critical for reducing poverty and inequality.

3. Economic Transformation

Uzbekistan has seen robust GDP growth and a reduction in poverty, driven by market-oriented reforms, energy liberalisation, and privatisation efforts. However, rising income inequality remains a significant challenge, exacerbated by monopolization, non-transparent privatisation, and high energy subsidies. Addressing labour market informality, fostering decent employment, especially for women and youth, and ensuring inclusive economic growth are key priorities. Further reforms in privatisation and tariff liberalization must be more transparent and inclusive to avoid deepening disparities.

4. Environment and Climate Change

Climate change poses severe risks to Uzbekistan's long-term sustainability, particularly in terms of water scarcity, land degradation, and the ongoing Aral Sea disaster. Progress has been made in renewable energy and climate resilience as part of Uzbekistan's commitments under the Paris Agreement, but significant investments in adaptation measures are still required. The country must address critical issues such as pollution, biodiversity loss, and unsustainable water and land management practices, with a special focus on the Aral Sea region. Coordinated efforts are needed to improve agricultural practices, reduce water waste, and rehabilitate degraded lands.

5. Governance, Rule of Law, Justice, Human Rights, and Political Analysis

Governance reforms have led to improvements in public service delivery, civic space, and human rights, but challenges remain in ensuring

accountability and transparency, especially in law enforcement and anti-corruption efforts. Continued focus on improving governance structures, enhancing rule of law, and ensuring the protection of human rights will be crucial for sustaining progress. Judicial reforms and mechanisms for public oversight are particularly important in creating a fair and just society. The civic space remains restricted. Key challenges include restrictions on the registration of NGOs, issues with receiving foreign funding for international projects, and persecution of journalists and bloggers. Despite the relaxation of media censorship, independent journalists and human rights defenders still face intimidation and harassment. This restricted civic space undermines the potential for meaningful dialogue between authorities and civil society, contributing to a lack of trust in governance and low levels of public engagement in the political process.

6. Cross-border Cooperation

Based on the findings of the SPECA Regional Common Chapter, cross-border cooperation in areas such as trade and investment, transport connectivity, energy connectivity, and transboundary water management is essential for Uzbekistan's development. Regional cooperation, particularly in transboundary water management with upstream countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, will be critical to addressing water scarcity and ensuring regional stability. Improving trade and transport infrastructure will also enhance Uzbekistan's position as a regional economic hub.

7. National Vision and the 2030 Agenda

Uzbekistan's national development strategy is strongly aligned with the 2030 Agenda, focusing on inclusive economic growth, social protection, climate resilience, and good governance. The country's progress on the SDGs has been supported

by reforms in fiscal policy, particularly efforts to reduce the fiscal deficit and energy subsidies. The financial landscape analysis underscores the need for further investments in infrastructure, social services, and climate adaptation. Partnerships with international financial institutions (IFIs), development partners, and the private sector will be key to achieving the 2030 Agenda goals.

8. Gender and Youth Empowerment

Empowering women and youth remain central to Uzbekistan's development agenda. Gender inequality in the labour market, political participation, and education persists, despite legal reforms. Gender inequalities including discrimination, lack of social and labour protection, gender occupations segregation and unpaid care and domestic work remains as a main barrier toward women's economic empowerment. Addressing gender disparities and improving access to economic opportunities and education for youth, particularly those Not in Education,

Employment, or Training (NEET), and for STEM careers, will be essential for achieving inclusive development.

9. Digital Transformation

Digital transformation is a major opportunity to accelerate progress across all areas of development. Uzbekistan's efforts in expanding digital infrastructure, promoting e-governance, and investing in ICT are creating new opportunities for innovation and economic growth. The Digital Uzbekistan 2030 strategy aims to boost digital literacy, enhance e-services, and support start-ups and entrepreneurship, positioning the country to leverage technology for sustainable development.

These challenges and opportunities reflect the complex landscape of Uzbekistan's development journey. Addressing them through inclusive, transparent, and sustainable policies will be essential for advancing toward the 2030 Agenda and realising the country's national development aspirations.

Annex A.

Status of Uzbekistan's Accession/ Ratification of UN Conventions and Treaties¹⁴⁹

	Name of UN Convention, etc.	Status	UN Agencies in Charge / Mandated
1.	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	Recommended to ratify through UPR recommendations.	OHCHR
2.	Optional protocol to ICESCR ¹⁵⁰	Recommended to be ratified by the CESCR Committee and through relevant UPR recommendations.	UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, WHO, UNESCO, OHCHR, UNHCR
3.	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families ¹⁵¹	Recommended to be ratified by the CESCR Committee and through relevant UPR recommendations.	ILO, IOM, UNDP, OHCHR
4.	International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance ¹⁵²	Recommended to be ratified by the CESCR and CRC Committees.	UNDP, UNODC, OHCHR

¹⁴⁹ The table contains only pending and recently ratified/signed conventions, treaties, and protocols.

¹⁵⁰ Also recommended by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Uzbekistan, n.28 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FUZB%2FCO%2f2&Lang=en

¹⁵¹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Uzbekistan, para.29// https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FUZB%2FCO%2f2&Lang=en; Committee on the Rights of the Child. Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Uzbekistan, adopted by the Committee at its sixty-third session (27 May-14 June 2013). Para. 72 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC.12%2FUZB%2FCO%2f3-4&Lang=en

¹⁵² Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Uzbekistan, para.29// https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FUZB%2FCO%2f2&Lang=en; Committee on the Rights of the Child. Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Uzbekistan, adopted by the Committee at its sixty-third session (27 May-14 June 2013). Para. 72 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC.12%2FUZB%2FCO%2f3-4&Lang=en

Name of UN Convention, etc.	Status	UN Agencies in Charge / Mandated
5. Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women CEDAW ¹⁵³	Recommended to be ratified by the CEDAW Committee and through relevant UPR recommendations	UNFPA (advocating Uzbekistan's ratification of the Optional Protocol), UNDP
6. ILO Convention No. 189 (2011) concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers ¹⁵⁴	Not ratified Recommended to be ratified by the CRC Committee.	ILO
7. ILO Convention 144 Tripartite Consultations to promote the implementation of International Labour Standards	Ratified on 13 August 2019	ILO
8. ILO Conventions on Labour Inspection 081 (in Industry) and 129 (in Agriculture)	Ratified on 19 November 2019	ILO
9. P029 - Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention 029	Ratified on 16 September 2019	ILO
10. Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure ¹⁵⁵	Recommended to be ratified by the CRC Committee and through relevant UPR recommendations	UNICEF, OHCHR
11. Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	Recommended to be ratified through UPR recommendations.	UNDP, UNODC, OHCHR
12. 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol ¹⁵⁶	Not ratified Recommended to be ratified by the CAT, CCPR, CERD, CESCRC Committees, and UPR recommendations	UNHCR, OHCHR

¹⁵³ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan. para.37//

¹⁵⁴ Committee on the Rights of the Child. Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Uzbekistan, adopted by the Committee at its sixty-third session (27 May-14 June 2013). Para. 66//

¹⁵⁵ Committee on the Rights of the Child. Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Uzbekistan, adopted by the Committee at its sixty-third session (27 May-14 June 2013). Para. 72 // https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fUZB%2fCO%2f3-4&Lang=en

¹⁵⁶ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Concluding observations on the combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Uzbekistan, p. 21// https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexter

	Name of UN Convention, etc.	Status	UN Agencies in Charge / Mandated
13.	Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons ¹⁵⁷	Not ratified Recommended to be ratified by the CCPR, CERD, CESCRC Committees, and UPR recommendations	UNHCR, UNICEF, OHCHR
14.	Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness ¹⁵⁸	Not ratified Recommended to be ratified by the CCPR, CERD, CESCRC Committees, and UPR recommendations	UNHCR, UNICEF
15.	Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions	The Convention was ratified on 15 November 2019.	UNESCO
16.	Rome Statute, ICC and Agreement on Privileges and Immunities of the International Criminal Court ¹⁵⁹	Recommended to ratify through UPR recommendations.	UNDP, UNODC
17.	Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity ¹⁶⁰	Not ratified	UNODC
18.	Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982	Not ratified	IOM
19.	International Convention on Plant Protection	Accession on 23 December 2019 with coming into force on 13 January 2020 Adherence When adhering to the IPPC contracting parties accept responsibilities, obligations and rights as specified in the IPPC revised text completely aligned with the Agreement on the Application of	UN FAO

¹⁵⁷ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Concluding observations on the combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Uzbekistan, п.20// https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fUZB%2fCO%2f8-9&Lang=en

¹⁵⁸ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Concluding observations on the combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Uzbekistan, п.20// https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fUZB%2fCO%2f8-9&Lang=en

¹⁵⁹ 101.29 Ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the Agreement on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Criminal Court (Estonia). Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. Thirty-ninth session 10–28 September 2018./Available at: A/HRC/39/7

¹⁶⁰ 101.27 Ratify the Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity (Armenia). Thirty-ninth session 10–28 September 2018./Available at: A/HRC/39/7

Name of UN Convention, etc.	Status	UN Agencies in Charge / Mandated
	<p>Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures. However, the Convention does not exercise compliance mechanism. There are no additional financial obligations when adhering to the IPPC.</p> <p>Becoming a contracting party is a simple process of depositing an instrument of adherence with of adherence with the Director-General of F AO.</p> <p>So far, the State Inspection on Plant Quarantine provided necessary information to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for getting through internal process of approval for joining the IPPC. Necessary justification/explanatory note of necessity to join and benefits to Uzbekistan from joining have been provided. No further progress has been made so far.</p>	
20. Unidroit Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (1995, Rome)	<p>Not ratified</p> <p>The ratification of the Convention is considered by the Ministry of Culture; however, the documents not submitted towards the ratification yet.</p> <p>UNESCO works towards the promotion of the ratification of this Convention.</p>	UNIDROIT / UNESCO
21. The Paris Agreement	Ratified on 9 November 2018 ¹⁶¹	UNEP, UNDP
22. Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances Depleting the Ozone Layer	Kigali Amendment is at its initial stage of discussions with no clear dates of adoption.	UNDP, UNEP

¹⁶¹ https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVII-7-d&chapter=27&clang=_en

	Name of UN Convention, etc.	Status	UN Agencies in Charge / Mandated
23.	Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products to FCTC (Framework Convention on Tobacco Control)	Protocol is accessed by the Senate on December 27, 2022 as a Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On restriction of distribution and use of alcoholic and tobacco products", and will enter into force after 3 months from the signing by the President	WHO
24.	Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes	Accession on 26 December 2023 Entered into force on 26 March 2024	UNECE, WHO/ Europe
25.	The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	Accession on 14 October 2019 with coming into force on 23 January 2020	UNDP
26.	Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants	Accession on 28 June 2019, Entry into force on 26 September 2019 ¹³	WHO, UNDP, UNEP
27.	The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention)	<p>Not ratified. The convention is being considered by the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change.</p> <p>The Republic of Uzbekistan has achieved considerable progress in strengthening its capacity to develop the national environmental assessment system in line with the Convention and the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment, based on the technical assistance provided by the Espoo Convention secretariat. The Government was assisted in the development of provisions on national EIA and a draft chapter on EIA and SEA to the draft Environmental Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan that is pending adoption.</p>	UNECE

	Name of UN Convention, etc.	Status	UN Agencies in Charge / Mandated
28	Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the Espoo Convention	Not ratified Uzbekistan is considering the ratification of the Protocol on SEA – after the adoption of its new legislation and further capacities in its implementation.	UNECE
29	The Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention	Not ratified. Ratification of the Convention is being considered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change. The government deems it a priority to work on institutional strengthening and development of human resources for the implementation of the UNECE environmental conventions, specifically to fulfil obligations under the Air Convention.	UNECE
30	Tampere Convention on the Provision of Telecommunication Resources for Disaster Mitigation and Relief Operations	Signatory 6 October 1998	ITU
31	European Agreement on Main International Traffic Arteries (AGR), 1975	Not signed yet	UNECE
32	European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (AGTC), 1991	Not signed yet	UNECE
33	Agreement concerning the Adoption of Harmonized Technical United Nations Regulations for Wheeled Vehicles, Equipment and Parts which can be Fitted and/or be Used on Wheeled Vehicles and the Conditions for Reciprocal Recognition of Approvals Granted on the Basis of these United Nations Regulations of 1958	Not signed yet	UNECE

	Name of UN Convention, etc.	Status	UN Agencies in Charge / Mandated
34	Agreement Concerning the Adoption of Uniform Conditions for Periodical Technical Inspections of Wheeled Vehicles and the Reciprocal Recognition of Such Inspections, 1997	Not signed yet	UNECE
35	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.	Adopted. Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated September 10, 2004, No. 424 On measures to organize the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution No. 1540 (2004)	UNICRI, UNODC, IAEA
36	Convention on the prohibition of the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons and on their destruction	Ratified. Resolution of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated 26.04.1996, No. 236-I On the ratification of the 1993 Convention on the prohibition of the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons and on their destruction	UNICRI
37	Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction. Opened for Signature at London, Moscow and Washington. 10 April 1972.	Ratified. Resolution of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated 22.12.1995, No. 185-I On joining the convention on the prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of bacteriological (biological) and toxic weapons and their destruction	UNICRI
38	Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare. Geneva, 17 June 1925	Ratified. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on June 26, 2020, No. ZRU-623 On the accession of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the Protocol on the prohibition of the use of asphyxiant, poisonous or other similar gases and bacteriological agents in war (Geneva, June 17, 1925)	UNICRI

	Name of UN Convention, etc.	Status	UN Agencies in Charge / Mandated
39	UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)	Not ratified yet. Ratification of the Convention is being considered by the Parliament. The Republic of Uzbekistan has achieved considerable progress in strengthening its capacity to develop its national environmental assessment system in line with the Convention. Article 49 of the new Constitution (adopted on 30 April 2023) has recognized the rights to access reliable environmental information and to public participation in city planning. The Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change promotes the practical application of the environmental impact assessment tool with public participation by developers as a requirement of the state environmental expert review of their projects.	UNECE
40	Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Aarhus Convention (PRTR Protocol)	Not ratified yet. The Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change considers public access to air pollution data on large industrial installations and the ratification of the PRTR Protocol could facilitate its alignment with relevant international standards.	UNEP
41	United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)	Accession on 29 Jul 2008	UNODC
42	United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC)	Ratified on 9 Dec 2003	UNODC

Annex B.

Leave No-one Behind: Identification of Vulnerable Groups

Basis of Vulnerability	Population Group	Manifestations	Causes	Which SDGs / Human Rights affected	What needs to be done	Principal Duty Bearers
DISCRIMINATION BASED ON:						
Sex/Gender	Women, LG-BTQI+, people living with HIV, including children and adolescents	<p>Violence, discrimination, detention, stigma based on sex or sexual identity / orientation</p> <p>Exclusion from social protection (women living with HIV, LG-BTQI+)</p> <p>Female partners of drug users including PWID</p> <p>Gender vulnerability to disasters</p>	<p><u>Immediate Causes</u> Lack of access to facilities, care and support especially for women with HIV, MSM, and LGBTQI+</p> <p><u>Underlying causes:</u> Discriminatory laws and policies not aligned to international norms and standards Refusal to decriminalise consensual sex between men, vulnerable to violence based on sexual identity / orientation), arbitrary arrest / detention Legal barriers for MSM to seek help Weak implementation and monitoring of laws No accountability of law enforcement agencies who act with impunity</p> <p><u>Root Causes:</u> Patriarchal attitudes, stereotypes about women's role in society, linking women rights with family values and attitudes about sexual identity and orientation</p>	1.3 5.1 5.2 5.3 5.c 8 16 10.2 10.3	<p>Repeal discriminatory laws, Accept UPR recommendations; Promote advocacy by discriminated groups; Repeal articles 113 and 120 of the Criminal Code; Provide safe spaces, Introduce quotas and affirmative action; Combat discriminatory social norms and practices; Create awareness; Strengthen and sensitise institutions; Ensure better enforcement of laws; Prevent gender-based violence, promote gender; equality strategies and approaches; Create a system of social support and decent living; Promote equal economic rights and opportunities for women and men, including through use of enabling technology such as IT.</p>	<p>Ministry of Justice</p> <p>National Agency for Social Protection,</p> <p>The Women's Committee of Uzbekistan</p> <p>Commission on Gender Equality of the Republic of Uzbekistan</p> <p>Committee of Senate on Women and Gender Issues</p> <p>Commission on Women and Family Issues under the Legislative Chamber</p>

Basis of Vulnerability	Population Group	Manifestations	Causes	Which SDGs / Human Rights affected	What needs to be done	Principal Duty Bearers
Age	Elderly men and women especially those living alone	Social isolation, poverty, lack of access to emotional support, stigma and discrimination	<u>Immediate Causes</u> Lack of economic security, social protection, social work, old age homes, community living <u>Underlying Causes:</u> Inadequate policy, legal and institutional framework <u>Root Causes:</u> Out migration of young, change in values	1.1 1.2 3.0	Strengthen social protection for the elderly; Promote professional social work.	Ministry of Health Ministry of Economy and Finance
	Children in care centres, Children without parental care, children in institutions, orphans, out of school, Children with special needs (mental stress), Children in conflict with law, Child labourers, Children living with HIV, Victims of domestic violence, Child victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation Children living in poverty	Corporal punishment and other forms of abuse and exploitation, Neglect (including parental), Exclusion, High suicides among children No effective mechanisms for public oversight 75 per cent children in homes are disabled and poor Social isolation, stigma, inability to meet basic needs, limited access to social and other services	<u>Immediate Causes</u> Lack of access to care and socio-psychological support facilities for children at risk. <u>Underlying Causes:</u> Outmoded model of sending children at risk to care centres No professional help available to children at risk and under stress Guardianship and Custody Act 2014 does not explicitly prohibit corporal punishment, still goes on in day care centres, alternative care centres <u>Root Causes:</u> Poverty, Social attitudes	1.1 1.2 4.2 4.5 4.a	Strengthen psycho-social support (sending children to care homes should be last option); Amend Domestic Violence Bill to make provisions against corporal punishment in all settings. Strengthen social benefits system for low-income families to support them in providing for at least basic needs Consider introduction of Universal benefit for children	Ministry of Public Education Ministry of Interior Ministry of Justice General Prosecutor Republican Centre to fight AIDS Ministry of Health

Basis of Vulnerability	Population Group	Manifestations	Causes	Which SDGs / Human Rights affected	What needs to be done	Principal Duty Bearers
	Youth NEET, Youth at-risk, youth living with and affected by HIV, drug-abusing youth, sex workers, trafficked youth, youth in orphanages or correctional homes, youth in conflict with law, youth exploited for labour, youth victims of violence or abuse, migrant youth, and youth stigmatised due to who they are, Roma youth (Lulis)	Radicalisation, psychological and mental health issues, depression, violence, exclusion	<u>Immediate Causes</u> Lack of access to education, economic opportunities or vocational training Little social protection or psycho-social support <u>Underlying Causes:</u> Insufficient and ineffective policy, legal and institutional framework for youth. Lack of civic space, Lack of awareness. Lack of rehabilitation and re-integration system (for those in conflict with law) <u>Root Causes:</u> Social attitudes, perception about youth, lack of participation in decision making, discrimination, lack of parental care	4.4 4.5 SDG 5, 8 8.6	Promote healthy life-styles through youth clubs; Age-appropriate sex education; Health counselling at school level; Drug de-addiction; awareness; skills training for employment; family skills training; Promote responsible use of social media (cyberhealth / cyberhygiene); Promote volunteerism.	Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction Ministry of Economy and Finance Ministry of Interior Ministry of Public Education Ministry of Health
Disability	Persons with disability, Women with disability, Women with disability and victims of violence, Children with disability and their parents	Limited mobility, Stigmatisation (worse for people with mental disabilities), Lower employment, Lower participation in politics and administration; Exacerbated vulnerability to disasters Limited opportunity for decent living	<u>Immediate Causes</u> Lack of access to public spaces, inadequate infrastructure, care and support, Higher disability related costs. <u>Underlying Causes:</u> Lower employability, Residential approach to care, Low coverage of social protection, Lack of professional social workers. Ineffective policy environment. <u>Root Causes:</u> Social attitudes, Stereotypes, Stigma, Medical approach to disability	1.4 3.0 3.3 5.5	Ratify CRPD and OP; Enact national law on PWDs; Implement measures to support PWDs; Enhance skills and employability; Improve access to buildings and transport; Support NGOs working with PWDs; Counselling for parents of children with disabilities; Inclusive education (not segregated); Fiscal incentives for quality mobility aids and those who employ PWDs; Reform the disability assessment system and move from medical to social model of disability assessment ;	Ministry of Health Ministry of Public Education Ministry of Higher and Specialised Education Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) Ministry of Economy and Finance

Basis of Vulnerability	Population Group	Manifestations	Causes	Which SDGs / Human Rights affected	What needs to be done	Principal Duty Bearers
					Direct engagement with PWDs in decision making; Ensure disaster risk reduction inclusive approach, including specific measures such as early warning systems. Reform the Social Protection system to make it disability sensitive	
HIV Status	People living with HIV, People affected by HIV	<p>Criminalization of HIV transmission or exposure to the risk of HIV infection</p> <p>Stigmatisation and discrimination Lower employment, No / inadequate access to social protection</p> <p>Detention of the MSM, SW. (according to the criminal law). Low coverage for the harm reduction and drug dependence treatment</p>	<p><u>Immediate Causes</u> Inadequate access to HIV related services including prevention, testing, treatment and care . Access to HIV treatment especially by migrants.</p> <p><u>Underlying Causes:</u> Lack of awareness, Laws that impede effective HIV response, Lack of HIV impact mitigating strategies like social protection</p> <p><u>Root Causes:</u> Social attitudes, Stereotypes, Discrimination, Stigma, Inadequate mainstreaming</p>	1.3 3.3	<p>Decriminalize HIV transmission and repeal laws that hinder an effective HIV response. Enhance the availability and accessibility of HIV-related services. Scale up rapid diagnostic strategies to improve early detection. Implement integrated, patient-centered care, treatment, and support strategies Remove legal barriers that stigmatize key populations, including MSM, sex workers, and people who use drugs. Provide social protection services for people living with and affected by HIV. Make stigma reduction and general awareness-raising integral components of the HIV response. Increase ART coverage to improve treatment outcomes.</p>	<p>Ministry of Interior</p> <p>Ministry of Health</p> <p>Sanitary and Epidemiological Wellbeing and public Health Committee</p> <p>Republican Centre to Fight AIDS</p> <p>National Agency for Social Protection</p> <p>Public Foundation for Support and Development of National Mass Media</p>

Basis of Vulnerability	Population Group	Manifestations	Causes	Which SDGs / Human Rights affected	What needs to be done	Principal Duty Bearers
GEOGRAPHY:						
Fragile Ecology / Location	Environmental degradation affected rural communities around Aral Sea area Surkhandarya (due to remoteness)	Decline in incomes and productivity, Lower quality of life, Serious health issues	<u>Immediate Causes</u> Degraded land, lack of irrigation water, salinization, contamination of soil with heavy elements, chemical fertilisers and pesticides, inefficient irrigation system with waste of water, Contaminated water. <u>Underlying Causes:</u> Lack of climate-resilient policies and programmes. <u>Root Causes:</u> Overexploitation of natural resources for cotton production	13.1 13.2 13.3 15.1 15.2 15.3	Promote climate-resilient agriculture and pastoral system; Address unsustainable and outmoded irrigation practices; Direct income transfers to vulnerable farmers.	Ministry of Economy and Finance Ministry of Health Council of Ministers of Karakalpakstan IFAS Ministry of Agriculture Ministry of Water Resources
VULNERABILITY / EXPOSURE TO SHOCKS:						
Disasters	Communities in Fergana valley (and mostly eastern portion of the country, Tashkent) Communities living around mining sites and industrial waste sites.	Sense of insecurity; Disincentive to invest	<u>Immediate Causes</u> High exposure to hazards that may cause disruption / damage to people, property, infrastructure and environment <u>Underlying Causes:</u> Lack of capacity to implement policies on disaster preparedness and risk reduction; lack of awareness; lack of technologies (e.g. quake proof buildings); weak adaptation to climatic risk <u>Root Causes:</u> Public apathy, sense of resignation	11.5	Enhance resilience and local capacity to manage seismic and climatic risks; Improve systems to gather and analyse hazard information; Modernise early warning systems (including surveillance of disease with epidemic potential) and weather forecasting; Strengthen adaptation to water stress / droughts; Modify building codes; Create repository of database with central authority; Disseminate data; Mainstream DRR in sector programmes.	Ministry of Emergency Situations

Basis of Vulnerability	Population Group	Manifestations	Causes	Which SDGs / Human Rights affected	What needs to be done	Principal Duty Bearers
Economic Shocks	People in poverty, Migrant labour, households with catastrophic health expenditure	Vulnerability to inflation (electricity, water, food prices); Reduced incomes; Loss of jobs; Catastrophic health expenditures	<u>Immediate Causes</u> Loss of jobs, catastrophic health expenditure <u>Underlying Causes:</u> External factors (e.g., economic slowdown in host countries); Return of migrants; Structural reform; Labour market reform; SOEs privatisation (lay-offs); lack of social protection and health finance support <u>Root Causes:</u> Economy based on commodity exports vulnerable to global price changes; regressive health system; lack of employment	1.5 2.1 2.2	Social protection; Income transfers; health financing protection; Active labour market programmes (ALMPs); pre-migration orientation for migrants; skills training.	Ministry of Economy and Finance Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction Agency for External Labour Migration
GOVERNANCE:						
Impact of laws, policies, institutions	Women, LG-BTQI+, Forced labour, Persons evicted by force, national and ethnic minorities Forcibly displaced population and Stateless people	Violence based on sex or sexual identity / orientation Exclusion from social protection (LGBTQI+) Lack of participation Work and studies compromised due to forced labour Exclusion from protection; no access to asylum	<u>Immediate Causes</u> No immediate recourse available. No access to support system. <u>Underlying Causes:</u> Lack of progressive laws and policies, linking women rights to family code. Impunity of law enforcement agencies. <u>Root Causes:</u> Social attitudes, lack of awareness, Stereotypes, Stigma, Immediate Causes Insecurity in Afghanistan. <u>Underlying Causes:</u> <u>Lack on national asylum law and system</u>	5.1 5.2 5.3 5.c 16.3	Remove barriers to gender justice (amend laws, provide protection, civic space,) Establish national asylum system	Ministry of Justice Ministry of Interior General Prosecutor Ministry of Foreign Affairs National Center for Human Rights

Basis of Vulnerability	Population Group	Manifestations	Causes	Which SDGs / Human Rights affected	What needs to be done	Principal Duty Bearers
Civil registration	Undocumented/ persons without civil registration documentation, Stateless persons, Refugees, Persons of undetermined nationality, Lulis/Roma	Vulnerable to police harassment/brutality, Denial of social services, Social protection, Inheritance, Restricted mobility for employment	<u>Immediate Causes</u> Lack of legal documents. <u>Underlying Causes:</u> Administrative capacity, Corruption apathy towards stateless <u>Root Causes:</u> Illegality, Hard to reach, Cultural factors (Lulis);	16.9	Strengthen civil registry, provide registration certificates,	Ministry of Interior
Persecution	Political opponents, journalists, religious leaders in detention, Women in detention	Lack of freedom of expression and association	<u>Immediate Causes</u> Lack of independent and effective human rights mechanisms and judicial system; no oversight to executive actions; impunity of law enforcement agencies <u>Underlying Causes:</u> Non-ratification of treaties; aversion to international scrutiny; lack of capacity; weak demand for justice from people <u>Root Causes:</u> Legacy of repressive previous regime; intolerance to dissent	16.3 16.6 16.10	Allow human rights defenders to work; Promote independence of judiciary; Comply with UPR recommendations	Ministry of Interior General Prosecutor
Illegality / Stigma	Drug users, sex workers, PLHIV, MSM Prison population and released prisoners	Stigmatisation, Discrimination, Lower employment, Inadequate access to social protection, poor quality and limited access to prevention, treatment and care services for key population (drug users, IDUs)	<u>Immediate Causes</u> Lack of facilities, care and support system; lack of infrastructure to treat drug abusers. Lack of access to social and psychological services and social workers. <u>Underlying Causes:</u> Regressive laws; lack of awareness, no rehabilitation and reintegration policies / programmes <u>Root Causes:</u> Social attitudes, biases, Stereotypes	3.5	Expand access to quality service on prevention, treatment and care. Expand social protection to cover these groups.	Ministry of Interior Ministry of Health Republican Centre to fight AIDS

Basis of Vulnerability	Population Group	Manifestations	Causes	Which SDGs / Human Rights affected	What needs to be done	Principal Duty Bearers
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS:						
Employment	Unemployed youth, women in informal employment, national and ethnic minorities	Radicalisation; Violent social behaviour; Exclusion,	<u>Immediate Causes</u> Lack of employment; Lack of higher education, vocational training, skills; Absence of entrepreneurship; <u>Underlying Causes:</u> Economic slowdown; weak GDP growth; lack of social protection for unemployed <u>Root Causes:</u> Job-less growth; capital-intensive economy	8.6	Formulate an action-oriented youth policy and time-bound reduction in NEET youth; Promote skills and vocational education; Co-create curriculum with private sector; Promote safe migration Enhance active labour market policies aimed at expanding employment opportunities for youth including women Develop labour market information system strengthening analytical functions, skills needs and occupations forecasting	Ministry of Economy and Finance Ministry of Higher and Professional Education
Poverty	People in extreme poverty Roma	Helplessness; Exclusion	<u>Immediate Causes</u> Unemployment; Inadequate social protection coverage <u>Underlying Causes:</u> Lack of education or skills to get out of poverty; inadequate access to digital technology; geographical isolation; lack of legal identity; climatic and environmental factors <u>Root Causes:</u> Job-less growth	1.1 1.2 11.1	Public works; Direct income transfer; Free access to social services; needs analysis of homeless and targeted assistance	Ministry of Economy and Finance Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction

Basis of Vulnerability	Population Group	Manifestations	Causes	Which SDGs / Human Rights affected	What needs to be done	Principal Duty Bearers
Mobility	Migrants, Disaster-displaced persons	Lack of legal protection, vulnerability to economic slow-downs, Violence, discrimination, psychosocial issue in host countries, exploitation by radical elements	<u>Immediate Causes</u> Economic slowdown in host countries forcing migrants to return; Inadequate access to health, legal, and social services. Episodes of violence or discrimination. <u>Underlying Causes:</u> Ineffective labour and migration policies; limited pre-migration information; poor monitoring of migrants; mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction in policies and programmes <u>Root Causes:</u> Limited access to employment at home; lack of disaster resilient infrastructure and livelihoods		Scale up psychosocial support to mobile groups of population, provide social protection services, develop regional cooperation to protect human rights of mobile population; Take resilience building measures to reduce impact to dwellings.	Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction Agency for External Labour Migration

Annex C.

High Frequency Economic Indicators

No	Indicator	2022_YR	2023_YR	2024_Q1	2024_Q2	2024_Q3	2024_Q4	2024_YR
1	Real GDP Growth (%)	5.6	6.0	6.2	6.4			
1.1.	Growth (%) Value-added Agriculture		3.1	3.6	3.8			
1.2	Growth (%) Value-added Industry		3.8	6.5	7.8			
1.3	Growth (%) Value-added Services		7.9	6.8	12.9			
2	Inflation Rate (Annualized)	12.3	8.8	8.0	10.5			
2.1	Food Inflation Rate (Annualized)	15.6	9.7					
2.2	Energy Inflation Rate	8.4	N/A					
3	Fiscal Balance (% of GDP)	-4.2	-5.5					
4	Exports (goods in mln USD)	19,310	19,247	5,245				
5	Imports (goods in mln USD)	30,670	35,575	8,747				
6	Official Reserves mln (USD)	35,440	34,565		36,634			
7	External Public Debt mln (USD)	29,200	34,900					
8	External Public Debt to GDP Ratio	36.4	38.4					
9	FDI Inflow mln (USD)	2,531						
10	Remittances Inflow mln (USD)	16,900	16,100	2,500				
11	Central Bank Refinancing Rate (%)	14	14	14	14	13.5		
12	Current Exchange Rate (Local to USD)	UZS 11,477	UZS 12,339	UZS 12,620	UZS 12,635			
13	Non-performing loan rate (banks)	4.9	3.5	4.5				
14	National Unemployment rate (%)	8.9	6.8					
15	National Poverty Rate (%)	14.1	11					
16	Gini Coefficient (official)	0.283	0.288					
17	Gini Coefficient (World Bank)	0.310	0.350					

Annex D.

The situation with the forcibly displaced persons (asylum seekers, refugees) and stateless persons in Uzbekistan

Forcibly displaced persons (Asylum seekers, refugees) and stateless persons constitute another important group of vulnerable people in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan has not acceded to the *1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* and its *1967 Protocol*. There is no established national asylum legislation and procedure, except for the 2017 Presidential Decree on the Approval of the Regulations on the Procedure for Granting Political Asylum.

However, all cases known to the UN who approached authorities to apply for such asylum were refused filing and registration of their asylum claims to the UN reported difficulty with registration, extension of visa, access to education, access to health services and employment. Several Afghan nationals reported about the issuance of exit visa on their passports, because of which they feel forced to return to Afghanistan where they might be in danger. As a result of burdensome and expensive procedure for renewing visas and getting registration, Afghan refugees have been left without protection and may be at high risk of being exposed to exploitation. (e.g., bribes).

Forcibly displaced population (Afghan nationals) in the country are considered as migrants, and their status is regulated by migration legislation. Regularizing the status Afghan nationals would enable them to enjoy a full range of rights in Uzbekistan. In 2023 a draft

Law on Refugees was initiated (as reported by the government at UPR 2023 reporting session), however, no further efforts have been taken for the finalization of the law.

As of January 2024, 22,496 *stateless people* were officially registered by the Government of Uzbekistan. No data is available on the extent or number of people with undetermined nationality or at risk of statelessness. However, civil society organizations in Uzbekistan, which are members of the Central Asian Network on Statelessness (CANS), are aware of ‘Luli’ (Romani) communities in several regions of Uzbekistan who are largely undocumented and at risk of statelessness. UNHCR is providing expertise and support to the planned population census which may contribute to mapping the full extent of statelessness in the country.

The new Law on Citizenship, enacted in September 2020, closed some gaps to better ensure statelessness prevention and contributed to a significant reduction of statelessness. In particular, the Law, and its 2021 amendments, entitles all stateless people permanently residing in Uzbekistan prior to 1 January 2005 to be recognized as citizens of Uzbekistan. In the last five years, over 85,000 stateless people have acquired or confirmed Uzbek citizenship.

Nevertheless, national legislation and practice are not yet fully in line with international

standards and remaining gaps may contribute to the occurrence of statelessness. In particular, there are inadequate safeguards during citizenship renunciation and against statelessness for children born in Uzbekistan who would otherwise become stateless. If foreign parents are unable to pass their nationality on to their child, the child will become stateless.

Although hosting the largest known stateless population in Central Asia (some 66% of the CA population), Uzbekistan is not yet a party to the Statelessness Conventions. The economic and social exclusion and marginalization of people who are stateless or of undetermined nationality comes at a high cost for Uzbekistan. As long as these persons are not integrated into mainstream economy, they do not contribute to the formal economy, the economic development of the country, mandatory social health insurance, social security and pension schemes, or income tax revenues of the state. Their educational development, and as a consequence their income potential and contribution to the GDP, is reduced by their status as persons who are stateless or of undetermined nationality. The significant loss of income for Uzbekistan, which results from keeping these persons in a fragile, uncertain status, has to be balanced off against the moderate costs of procedures that confirm their status and protect their rights. An accession to, and the actual domestic implementation of the 1954 and 1961 Conventions, would therefore create many economic benefits that offset the administrative costs.

Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals requires the regularization and integration of persons who are stateless or of undetermined nationality:

SDG 10.3 is a commitment to “ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard”. Legislation that is in the sense of SDG 10.3

appropriate to reduce inequality encompasses legislation that resolves statelessness.

SDG 16 foresees that States “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.” The inclusion of stateless persons creates a more inclusive society. The rights encompassed in the 1954 Convention enhance access to justice for all.

SDG Target 16.9 refers to legal identity for all, including birth registration. By resolving stateless and protecting all the rights contained in the 1954 Convention, in particular the right to be issued identity papers, the access to civil registration and legal identity documentation will be enhanced.

SDG Target 16.b which commits States to promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development is pursued by ending all discrimination based upon statelessness.

In the same vein, the “Leave no one behind” principle is not only a central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but also a commitment of all UN Member States to end discrimination and exclusion, and to reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole. Addressing protection gaps that affect forcibly displaced people and those who are stateless or of undetermined nationality, resolving the nationality status of individuals, and reducing and preventing statelessness in the future are core elements of any country strategy to leave no one behind. In November 2021, the UN Member States called for a follow-up on the UN Secretary General’s Report on “Our Common Agenda”. It is among the key proposals of this Agenda to ensure legal identity for all and to end statelessness.

Considering this, it can be concluded that an accession of Uzbekistan to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions will be essential to meet the SDGs, to fulfil the international aspiration of leaving no one behind, and to implement “Our Common Agenda”, as envisaged by all UN Members States in November 2021.

Main Recommendations:

- Accede to the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* and its *1967 Protocol*;
- Develop and implement a national legislative framework on asylum, in line with international standards;
- As an interim measure, until the Government accedes to the *1951 Convention* and establishes an adequate national asylum system, immediately ensure implementation of the existing Presidential Decree on Political Asylum and register and document persons seeking international protection as asylum-seekers, in particular to enable Afghan citizens already in the country to legalize their stay, access essential rights and services, protecting them from possible refoulement;
- Ensure that any Afghan citizen or other national seeking international protection is not forcibly returned to their country of origin, pending an assessment of their international protection needs and in accordance with Uzbekistan's non-refoulement obligations under the 1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and customary international law;
- Allow for unhindered access to territory, including at the borders, for all Afghan

citizens or other nationals seeking international protection, and access to a process to assess international protection needs, in accordance with Uzbekistan's non-refoulement obligations under the 1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and customary international law;

- Provide the remaining five mandate refugees, who have been living in the country for nearly twenty years, with access to naturalization;
- Accede to the *1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* and the *1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*;
- Seek the technical assistance of UNCHR in the development and implementation of a national legislative framework to ensure safeguards against statelessness;
- Develop and implement a statelessness determination procedure, in line with international standards;
- Amend the national definition of a stateless person, in line with the *1954 Convention*; and,
- Invite UNHCR to resume its work in Uzbekistan and facilitate the Office's activities in pursuance of its mandate on refugee protection as well as the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

Annex E.

SPECA Regional Common Chapter

Launched in 1998, the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was established to promote sub-regional cooperation and integration into the world economy. The total population of SPECA participating States (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) increased from 83 to 132 million between 2000 and 2023, while its GDP grew over tenfold during this period - from \$46 to \$525 billion.¹⁶²

The 2024 SPECA Heads of States Summit called for further deepening economic cooperation and regional integration, with commitments to improve connectivity, harness digital transformation and support green transition. The establishment of the SPECA Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) aims to collectively address bottlenecks in trade, energy, cross-border investments, and transport. This CCA common chapter explores issues that affect SPECA participating States simultaneously, with focus on trade and investment, transport connectivity, energy connectivity and transboundary water management, highlighting opportunities for greater cooperation to promote sustainable economic transformation.

¹⁶² Source: The World Bank DataBank – World Development Indicators <https://databank.worldbank.org/home.aspx>

Trade and Investment

While total *trade* flows of SPECA participating States stood at approximately \$269.7 billion in 2022,¹⁶³ intra-SPECA trade amounted to only \$24.5 billion, or 9.1% of the total trade volume. Despite a gradual increase from 8.2% in 2018, these figures remain modest compared to other economic regions,¹⁶⁴ highlighting untapped potential. Kazakhstan emerges as a major trade partner, accounting for around 50% of the region's total trade volumes, but its trade integration within SPECA is below the regional average with only 8.3% of its exports and 4.7% of its imports being intra-SPECA (see Figures 1 and 2).

Azerbaijan contributes 25% to regional exports, yet only 0.5% of these exports are directed towards SPECA participating States. In contrast, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, despite very modest trade volumes, show strong reliance on regional partners.

At the commodity level, intra-SPECA trade flows¹⁶⁵ underscore the dominance of natural

¹⁶³ Source: UN Comtrade Database <https://comtradeplus.un.org/TradeFlow> Most recent data on Afghanistan (2019) is not included in the analysis. However, SPECA trade with Afghanistan is included. For Turkmenistan, national statistics for the year 2022 are reported.

¹⁶⁴ The intra-EU28 trade accounts for 61% of the total trade, while intra-regional trade in East Asia and ASEAN accounts for 28% and 23% of the total for the region, respectively. Source: UN Comtrade Database <https://comtradeplus.un.org/TradeFlow>

¹⁶⁵ Source: UN Comtrade Database <https://comtradeplus.un.org/TradeFlow> For Turkmenistan, 2022 national statistics are reported, which do not include commodity-

Figure 1. SPECA Exports, 2022

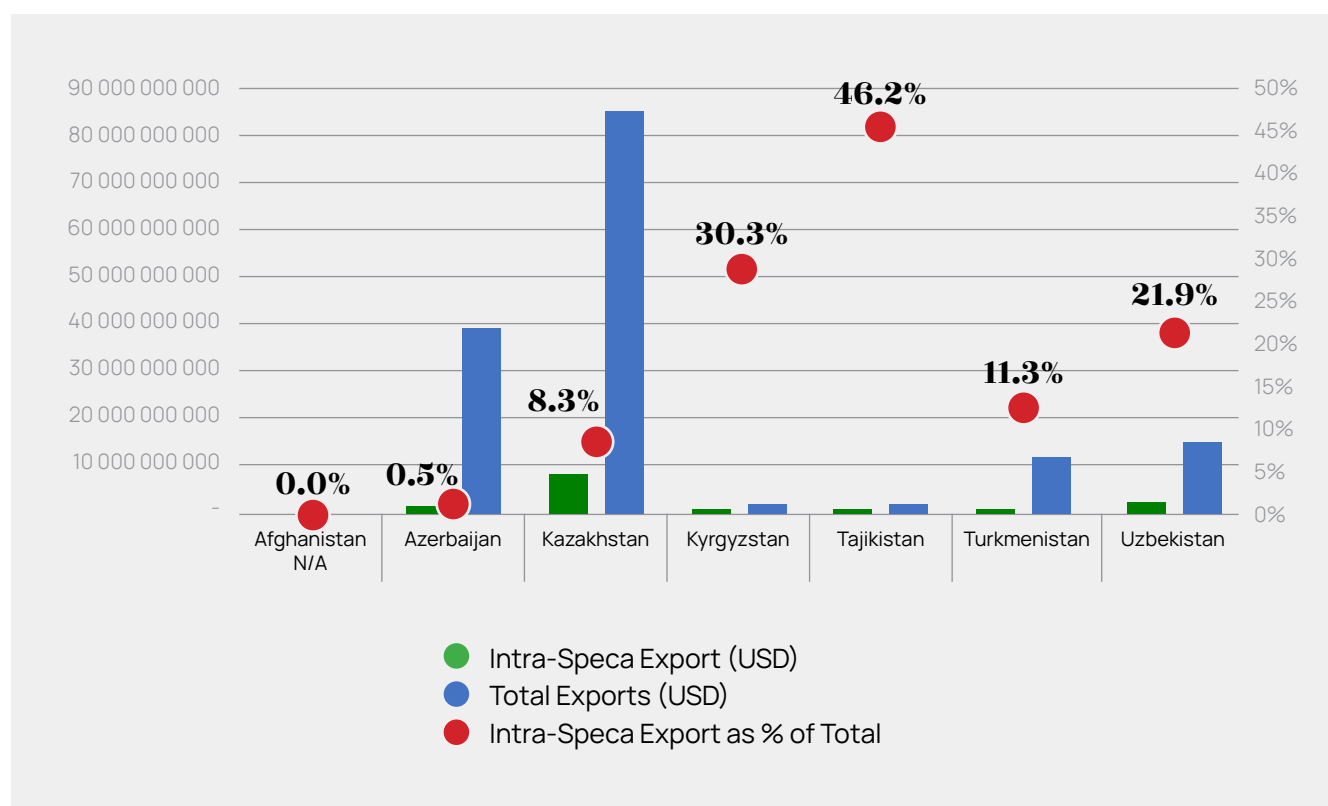
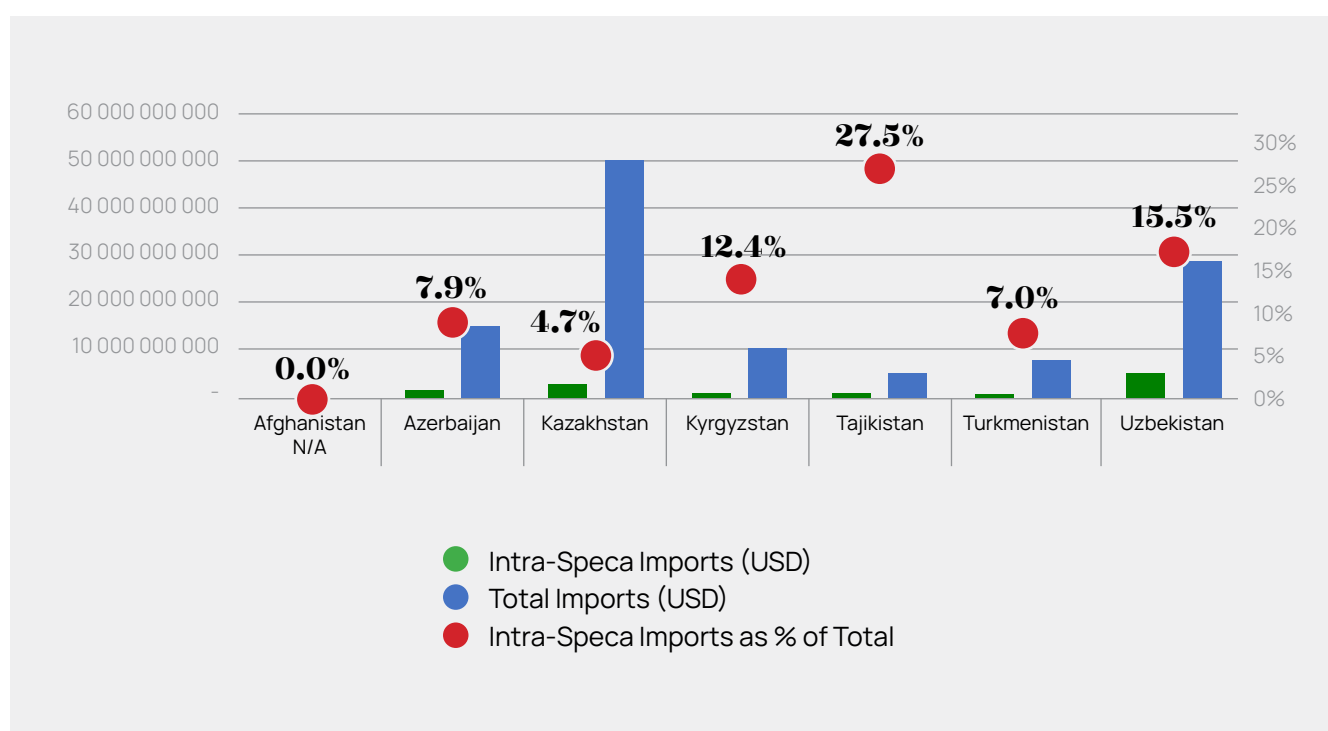


Figure 2. SPECA Imports, 2022



resources and primary sectors. Cereals are the top traded commodity, while other agricultural products include vegetables, fruits, and animal or vegetable fats and oils. The region's wealth in hydrocarbons and raw materials is reflected in the concentration of trade in petroleum, metalliferous ores, gas, metals and minerals (see Figures 3 and 4). With the concentration of trade in natural resources and primary commodities, the potential for developing more complex value chains within SPECA remains largely untapped. Building upon the agricultural sector, there is an opportunity to advance trade of processed food. Similarly, the textile and garments sub-sector could lead to trade of goods along more complex value chains.

Addressing underlying root causes is essential for economic diversification and to increase the value of intra-SPECA flows. Historically, SPECA participating States opted for competition rather than economic integration, prioritising trade with large economies. The total manufacturing value added (MVA) as a proportion of GDP in SPECA participating States dropped from 15% in 2000 to 9.5% in 2023, reflecting structural shifts in SPECA's economies despite a doubling MVA per capita.¹⁶⁶ This decline in MVA's GDP ratio, coupled with insufficient investments in infrastructure and technology, limited the growth of advanced manufacturing and processing industries, crucial for a diversified trade portfolio in the region. Despite these challenges, recent studies indicate a unique trend: Central Asia leads with a 48% infrastructure development rate. Yet, it lags in industrial performance and innovation,

level data. This implies the SPECA trade balance does not add up, especially at the commodity level, where for example Petroleum is the 2nd most imported commodity within SPECA (USD 1,192,017,052 or 11% of the TOT M) but only the 8th most exported one (USD 402,623,289 or 3% of TOT X) due to the sizeable imports from Turkmenistan, not recorded among the exports.

¹⁶⁶ UNIDO Statistics Portal https://stat.unido.org/analytical-tools/sdg?tab=charts&country=R2_143&code=004&year=2022

underscoring the need for SPECA participating states to prioritize enhancements in technological and creative capacities.¹⁶⁷

However, while improving trade facilitation continues to be a significant challenge for the primarily landlocked SPECA participating States, new opportunities and challenges have emerged.¹⁶⁸ In response to the geographical limitations, countries are prioritising the digitalization of customs procedures to enable effective integration in global value chains (GVCs).¹⁶⁹ Existing tariff and non-tariff barriers, such as complex customs procedures, inconsistent documentation and tariff regimes, create significant delays and high transaction costs. Countries in the region face significant problems related to dysfunctional sanitary (animals) and phytosanitary (plants) systems and a lack of coordination between border controls which create vulnerability to transboundary pests and diseases and constrain the potential of Central Asian nations to expand agri-food trade.

Trade is also hampered by uneven adoption of digital and sustainable trade facilitation measures¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ UNIDO Industrial Development Report 2024 <https://www.unido.org/sites/default/files/unido-publications/2024-06/Industrial%20Development%20Report%202024.pdf>

¹⁶⁸ Recent limitations regarding the use of land and airspace of the Russian Federation, have necessitated adjustments to regional transport routes.

¹⁶⁹ UNIDO Statistics Portal https://stat.unido.org/analytical-tools/sdg?tab=charts&country=R2_143&code=004&year=2022

¹⁷⁰ A UN survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation shows that while some countries have made strides in implementing digital customs systems and single window systems, adoption of technology for customs and border procedures is uneven across the region. In 2023, SPECA participating States have an average implementation rate of digital and sustainable trade facilitation measures of 66%, with Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan leading with 87% and 85%, while Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan lag behind with rates as low as 43%.

Source: United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023

Figure 3. Top 10 Intra-SPECA Exports, 2022

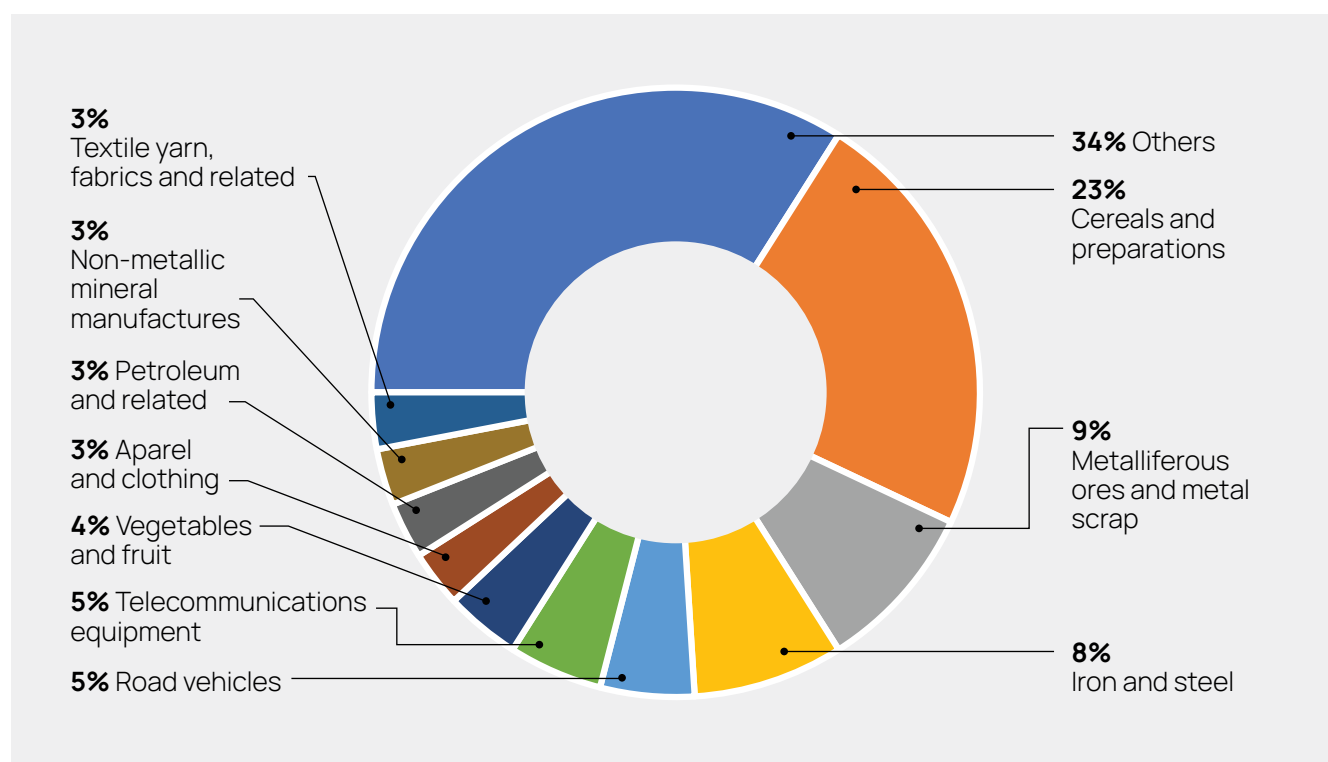
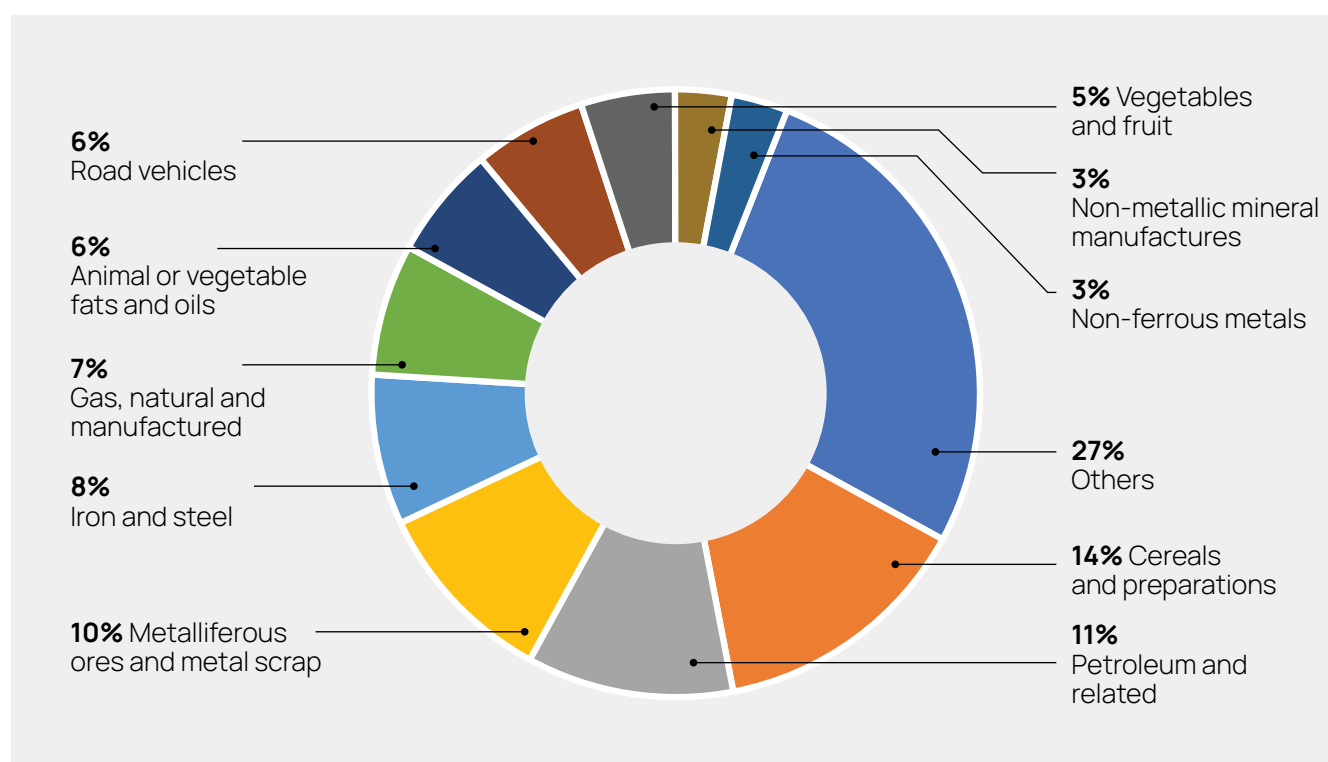


Figure 3. Top 10 Intra-SPECA Exports, 2022



and insufficient implementation of paperless trade,¹⁷¹ which remain below comparable economic regions. Further, restrictions on people movement, such as Turkmenistan's visa regimes, as well as complex import licensing procedures and varying standards and regulatory practices, including health and safety regulations, limit intra-SPECA trade in goods and services. Migrants play a crucial role in international trade and exports. In SPECA region, 5.9 million international migrants were residing, and 14.8 million were originating from this region, with 4.1% of all movements being within SPECA.¹⁷² Remittances play a fundamental role in SPECA participating States, where 0.05% of total SPECA GDP relies on inward remittances. At the same time, remittances make up 39.1% of GDP in Tajikistan and 22.3% in Kyrgyzstan and 15.3% in Uzbekistan, making them a significant income source in these countries.¹⁷³

Concerning the *intra-regional investments*, in Central Asia, mutual Foreign direct investment (FDI) reached around USD 1.1 billion, with Kazakhstan (87%) and Uzbekistan (13%) as the main investors. Kyrgyzstan received 63% of the mutual FDI, mostly in the extractive industry (31.7%). Compared to other economic regions, intra-SPECA investments are limited¹⁷⁴ and

mostly channelled into natural resources due to perceived lower risks, hindering diversification into manufacturing and services. Issues like unclear investment protection concepts and risks from inconsistent legislative transparency remain, with states varying in their openness to foreign investment and maintaining monopolies in certain sectors.¹⁷⁵

Through joint ventures SPECA participating States can offer a large market and incentives for mutual FDI. Such investments require harmonising regulatory and administrative procedures and further improving the business environment, as well as investment promotion strategies addressing barriers related to the size of business. An integrated market with movement of people, goods, services, and capital can mutually benefit SPECA participating States. To approach trade holistically it is extremely important to incorporate the human mobility aspect to advance sustainable development¹⁷⁶. For example, by extending trade agreements to include regulations on free movement of people, in turn countering irregular migration and protecting rights.¹⁷⁷

For a shift towards more intra-SPECA trade and investments in value chains, SPECA participating States must capitalize on existing strengths while addressing challenges through comprehensive reforms. Some key steps include improving infrastructure, liberalising economic policies, and creating an investor-friendly environment. Regional cooperation and integration can open larger markets for manufactured goods, supporting complex industrial sectors. Leveraging greener technologies

¹⁷¹ SPECA regional average has increased from 55% to 60% between 2021-2023, but remains 6 percentage points lower than the Asia-Pacific average. Source: United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023.

¹⁷² The main five destination countries were Russian Federation (38.5%), followed by the Islam Republic of Iran (18.3%), Pakistan (10.8%), Germany (10.7%) and Ukraine (4.2%) (UNDESA 2021: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock>)

¹⁷³ KNOMAD, World bank (2024) <https://www.knomad.org/data/remittances>, World bank (2022) Official Development Assistance and (2022) Foreign direct investment <https://data.worldbank.org>

¹⁷⁴ Intra-ASEAN investments, for example, account for 17% of total FDI. See <https://unctad.org/publication/asean-investment-report-2021>

¹⁷⁵ BITs in Central Asia: Opportunities and Risks, The American Review of International Arbitration, Columbia Law School. <https://aria.law.columbia.edu/bits-in-central-asia-opportunities-and-risks/?cn-reloaded=1>

¹⁷⁶ https://rosanjose.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1446/files/documents/2024-01/oim_sdg_consultancy-2.pdf

¹⁷⁷ Global Compact for Migration (2018), Objectives 18 and 19:

and financing, sharing expertise and infrastructure costs, and developing regional agreements for sustainable projects can create favourable conditions. It is estimated that implementing Trade Facilitation Agreement measures as outlined by the World Trade Organization could reduce trade costs by 7%, while digital trade facilitation measures could cut costs by over 15%.¹⁷⁸ As underlined in the 2024 SPECA Joint Ministerial Statement¹⁷⁹, the promotion of e-commerce, cross-border paperless trade, and power trade, the effective use of trade portals, and the establishment of direct contacts between relevant authorities, can boost regional trade turnover.

Transport Connectivity

Transport connectivity is crucial for trade and economic growth in the SPECA region, but significant gaps remain and disparities in transport infrastructure quality and capacity are evident. The relative connectivity ranges from 53% to 70% of the connectivity achieved by the Netherlands, with Azerbaijan leading at 70% followed by Turkmenistan (68%), Tajikistan (53%) and Kyrgyzstan (54%).¹⁸⁰ These gaps result from uneven development focus, with investment decisions influenced by national interests rather than by comprehensive regional strategies.

Road networks are underdeveloped, especially in rugged terrain like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Even in areas with better infrastructure and extensive networks, such as in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, road quality and maintenance are a major obstacle to efficient and safe transport. Outdated design and construction standards inherited from the USSR, inadequate design axle load and severe climatic conditions lead to much faster deterioration of roads than maintenance can be carried out. Urgent changes are also needed to improve the national road safety system to significantly reduce the number of road deaths and injuries. Updates could be done by accession to and efficient implementation of core Road Safety UN Legal Instruments.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have relatively extensive rail networks, critical for their connectivity to both Europe and Asia, but face capacity limitations due to insufficient tracks and outdated logistical handling facilities, which lead to bottlenecks especially at border crossings. Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, on the other hand, struggle with outdated rail technology and insufficient service frequencies.

Seaports in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan such as Baku/Alat, Aktau and Turkmenbashi, are crucial for trade along the Caspian Sea but require modernization and better integration with rail and road networks to improve handling capacities. Notably, both Baku/Alat and Aktau have expansion plans in place, and the port of Alat has recently been modernized, including its rail and road connections, to significantly expand its capacity. However, most other seaports remain underutilized due to infrastructure gaps, underdeveloped intermodal transport hubs, regulatory barriers, limited number of vessels and irregular shipment schedules in the Caspian Sea, which makes them costly and uncompetitive compared to alternative routes. This is largely due to administrative inefficiencies, lack of modernization, and insufficient regional planning.

Enhancing the multimodal interoperability of cargo information exchange along corridors and with neighbouring regions is needed. Use

¹⁷⁸ ESCAP, UNECE (2023), Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation in the United Nations Special Programme for Economies of Central Asia.

¹⁷⁹ Joint Ministerial Statement of Ministers/Heads of Delegations of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) participating States gathered in Bangkok on 23 April 2024 on the sidelines of the 80th session of the UNESCAP for a high-level dialogue with the heads of the UN regional commissions and heads of international organizations

¹⁸⁰ ITF North and Central Asia Transport Outlook, International Transport Forum Policy Papers, No. 105, OECD Publishing, Paris

of tools for digitalization of transport services (e.g., eTIR, eCMR) and common semantic standards for the digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange is recommended to better harmonize the procedures.¹⁸¹ Despite the advancements, fragmented adoption of digital technology hampers regional efficiency and affects both the speed and costs of cross-border movements.¹⁸² Contributing factors include the absence of advance cargo information systems and customs-to-customs cooperation, non-unified regulatory regime for cross-border shipments by rail, limited IT infrastructure, lack of technical expertise, absence of integration between national agencies at the border and with their counterparts across the international border and insufficient governmental support. Harmonization of transport documents and customs procedures across SPECA participating States remains fragmented, which complicates cross-border transportation and creates barriers to effective regional integration.

These discrepancies are often rooted in differing national legislative priorities and the absence of a common regional framework to oversee and coordinate trade and transport procedural standards, as well as the lack of a

unified regional transport policy, which leads to unoptimized resource allocation. The existing UN transport infrastructure agreements and regional commissions/ committees serve as frameworks for harmonization of efforts on rail and road transport, and better coordination in operationalization of the Trans-Caspian corridor. However, a cohesive strategy is needed to unify these efforts under a regional agenda. There are some efforts to coordinate interoperability of transport corridors, such as Coordination Committee on the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul Corridors, however their effectiveness needs further assessment.

Lastly, the Middle Corridor has the potential to improve connectivity between Europe and Asia through SPECA participating States. Traditionally, the Eurasian Northern Corridor via the Trans-Siberian railway has been the primary route, transporting around 1.5 million 20-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of cargo or containers in 2021.¹⁸³ The Middle or Trans-Caspian Corridor through Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan is considered the second-best overland option, but is constrained by issues listed above. Should it become the preferred new route, existing Caspian Sea infrastructure may become a bottleneck. Immediate investment needs for transport infrastructure upgrades in the Middle Corridor are estimated at €3.5 billion.¹⁸⁴

Energy Connectivity and Transboundary Water Management

SPECA participating States have significant energy production capacities due to vast

¹⁸¹ Common semantic standards and Multimodal Transport Reference Model offered by the UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) should be used as the basis, as envisaged in the SPECA Roadmap for the Digitalization of Multimodal Data and Document Exchange along the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor, Using United Nations Legal Instruments and Standards (<https://unece.org/speca/speca-digitalization-roadmap>), which was adopted by the Presidents of the SPECA participating States on 24 November 2023 at their summit in Baku.

¹⁸² Azerbaijan is connected with eTIR International and NCTS, Uzbekistan is connected with eTIR and has developed its own system, the etransit, which digitalized fully all customs processes, while Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are working with the UN to interconnect with eTIR and have their own customs systems and automations. Notably, SPECA customs authorities signed an agreement to develop a common transit system.

¹⁸³ According to the Eurasian Rail Alliance Index, transported volumes between EU hubs and China via Northern Corridor fell 31.9% on the year in 2022 (from 618,180 TEUs in 2021 to 386,374 in 2022). EBRD (2023), Sustainable Transport Connections between Europe and Central Asia

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

reserves of coal, oil, natural gas, and hydropower resources. However, energy resources are unevenly distributed, leading to varied power generation structures. Kazakhstan (12th in proven oil reserves¹⁸⁵), Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan (4th in proven natural gas reserves¹⁸⁶) rely on hydrocarbons, while Kyrgyzstan (55 TWh/year) and Tajikistan (264 TWh/year) heavily rely on hydropower given their river systems and mountainous terrain. In Soviet times, the power systems of South Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan were part of the United Power System of Central Asia (UES CA), which enhanced operational reliability.

This integrated UES CA system managed energy and water needs collectively,¹⁸⁷ minimising fuel prices and power losses while coordinating irrigation and energy supplies, thus ensuring efficient resource management across borders.¹⁸⁸ After the USSR's dissolution, centralized funding for UES CA operations stopped, disrupting this regime and causing energy shortages and environmental issues. To overcome these challenges, the CA states signed the Agreement on Parallel Operation of Power Systems in 1991 and established the jointly financed Unified Dispatch Office of Central Asian Power Systems. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan maintain interconnected electricity grids, supporting mutual electricity trade and enhancing grid stability. Turkmenistan operates its energy system with Iran, having exited the UES in 2003. Tajikistan, after a

period of isolation due to non-compliance with operational standards, is anticipated to rejoin the UES CA in 2024.

SPECA participating States are increasingly focusing on low- and zero-carbon energy sources to reduce emissions and transition to sustainable energy systems. Azerbaijan aims to generate 30% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030, while Kazakhstan plans to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are expanding their hydropower capacities and exploring other renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind. Uzbekistan is investing in solar energy projects and improving efficiency of its natural gas-fired power plants.

To meet growing electricity consumption, extensive construction of generating capacities and power grids is required at both national and regional levels. Geographically long transmission distances and uneven load distribution in the UES CA might cause stability issues and equipment overloading. A Centralised Emergency Control System is needed to manage emergency disturbances and maintain system stability.¹⁸⁹ Additionally, to manage imbalanced capacity due to rising share of renewable energy and increasing consumption, a centralized system for automatic frequency and power control should be established. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Merging Energy Systems to catalyse production and export of green energy to Europe through Azerbaijan, integration of energy systems, and the effective utilization of renewable resources.¹⁹⁰

Water resources are critical for the Central Asia's economic development, agri-food production, and energy production. Agriculture accounts for 80% of water consumption in Central

¹⁸⁵ <https://www.iea.org/reports/kazakhstan-energy-profile>

¹⁸⁶ <https://www.spglobal.com/commodityinsights/en/market-insights/latest-news/electric-power/042623-turkmenistan-to-develop-pipeline-to-export-gas-to-europe-president>

¹⁸⁷ https://eabr.org/upload/iblock/599/EDB_WEC_CA_Report_EN_web.cleaned.pdf

¹⁸⁸ For instance, during summer irrigation, electricity from the Naryn and Vakhsh HPP Cascades was given to neighbouring republics, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan received fuel and electricity for thermal plants from Soviet reserves in autumn and winter.

¹⁸⁹ Software and hardware complex providing automatic preservation of power system operation Energy Connectivity in Central Asia | UNECE

¹⁹⁰ <https://report.az/en/energy/azerbaijan-kazakhstan-and-uzbekistan-sign-mou-on-merging-energy-systems/>

Country	SDG 6.9.1 (Water Use Efficiency \$/m ³)	SDG 6.4.2 (Water Stress %)
Azerbaijan	4 \$/m ³ (2021)	57 % (2021)
Kazakhstan	8 \$/m ³ (2021)	34.1 % (2021)
Kyrgyzstan	0.88 \$/m ³ (2021)	50.04 % (2021)
Tajikistan	1 \$/m ³ (2021)	70 % (2021)
Turkmenistan	2 \$/m ³ (2021)	135 % (2021)
Uzbekistan	2 \$/m ³ (2021)	121.5 % (2021)

Asia,¹⁹¹ often using outdated and inefficient irrigation practices that exacerbate water loss. Water use is highly inefficient in all countries of the SPECA region, with water stress exceeding 100% in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.¹⁹²

The transboundary nature of water creates dependence and potential for conflict. Upstream countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have significant water resources due to their mountainous terrain, and account for almost all the water resources in Central Asia. Downstream countries, like Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, heavily depend on these flows. This geographic disparity has been a source of tension, particularly during droughts or water allocation disputes.

The situation is further compounded by the fast population growth in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, as well as the threat of climate change. Rising temperatures and the retreat of glaciers, particularly in the Pamir Mountains, are projected to significantly reduce water availability in the coming decades: average river flows in Central Asia are expected to decrease by 10-20% by 2050.¹⁹³

Furthermore, in 2022, Afghanistan started the construction of the Qush-Tepa canal. As a result, water availability in the Amudarya basin in Uzbekistan is expected to decrease by 30% by 2030, and land area under cultivation may decrease by 19%. The estimated impact would be equal to 0.7% of Uzbekistan's GDP, and about 250,000 jobs could be lost in crop production.¹⁹⁴

Climate change is expected to worsen the uneven distribution of Central Asia's water resources, making them more seasonal and geographically variable. Regional water models often have uncertainties, resulting in missed opportunities, especially in areas needing coordination with neighbouring countries over shared water resources, demanding regional-scale modelling. Optimal infrastructure investments urgently require enhanced data availability and improved biophysical system modelling capacity. Developing advanced, transparent modelling and monitoring tools will enable more precise infrastructure planning and irrigation development. New technologies, such as enhanced remote sensing, offer opportunities to improve water and meteorological modelling systems,

¹⁹¹ <https://www.fao.org/aquastat/en/>

¹⁹² Source: <https://www.sdg6data.org/en/node/1>

¹⁹³ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2022 <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

¹⁹⁴ <https://www.german-economic-team.com/en/newsletter/qush-tepa-canal-to-significantly-impact-uzbekistans-agriculture/>

addressing changing availability and competing demands for water.

The institutional framework to manage transboundary water resources is considered inadequate. Agreements like the 1992 Almaty Framework Agreement¹⁹⁵ provide a foundation for cooperation, but progress is hindered by lack of comprehensive dialogue and a focus on water in isolation from energy and agriculture. The International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea¹⁹⁶ has facilitated regional water management discussions since 1993, but its effectiveness is limited by resources, non-participation of Kyrgyzstan¹⁹⁷, and lack of enforcement levers.

¹⁹⁵ Almaty Framework Agreement on the Use of Water and Energy Resources of Interstate Sources, established by the five Central Asian states http://www.cawater-info.net/library/eng/l/ca_cooperation.pdf

¹⁹⁶ <https://aral.uz/en/about/>

¹⁹⁷ <https://www.newscentralasia.net/2023/09/15/kyrgyzstan-eyes-ifas-return-but-only-if-all-countries-interests-are-considered-equally/>

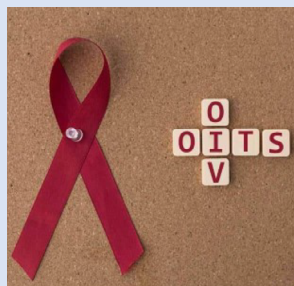
Despite these challenges, opportunities for regional collaboration exist, as countries share a recognition of interdependence on water resources. The Dushanbe Water Process, launched by Tajikistan in 2016, serves as a platform for dialogue on water cooperation. International actors like the UN and the World Bank can promote dialogue, support innovative water management practices, and encourage the integration of a "nexus approach" that acknowledges the interconnectedness of water, energy, and agriculture. Local ownership and participation in water governance, particularly by women who play a central role in water management at the household level, are also crucial for long-term stability.

Annex F.

2024 CCA Consultations with Stakeholder Groups

Nº	Name of the Stakeholder Group	Date of the Consultation	Details
1	People Living with HIV and Key Population Groups	04 November 2024	Online, minutes available
2	Youth Representatives	15 November 2024	In-person (UNDP Conference Hall), minutes available.
3	Women NGOs	19 November 2024	Online, minutes available
4	Government agencies and government-supported NGOs, think tanks, etc.	26 November 2024	Hybrid, Panarams hotel, minutes available.
5	NGOs supporting migrants	28 November	Hybrid, IOM Office, minutes available
6	International Development Partners	29 November 2024	Hybrid, Hilton hotel, videorecording and transcript available.

CCA Consultations: People Living with HIV and Key Population Groups



- **Data Gaps:** Inconsistent and incomplete HIV data limit effective analysis and program planning.
- **Funding and Services:** Insufficient funding, resources and outdated protocols delay the implementation of modern HIV services, especially in remote areas.
- **Treatment Adherence:** Resistance and lack of understanding among patients create challenges for lifelong treatment.
- **Proposed Solutions:** Decriminalise HIV-related laws, enhance confidentiality, and conduct stigma-reduction training for authorities and communities.
- **Awareness and Prevention:** Launch advocacy campaigns, integrate reproductive health education in schools, and expand PrEP and vocational support programs.
- **Stigma and Discrimination:** Criminalisation of HIV, breaches of confidentiality, and discrimination in healthcare and governance hinder support for people living with HIV (PLHIV).
- **Improved Protocols and Data:** Update treatment protocols, enhance ART access, and ensure comprehensive data collection with gender and age breakdowns.

CCA Consultations: Youth representatives



- **Inclusive Education:** Investment in school infrastructure, teacher training, and accessibility for children with disabilities (CWDs)
- **Health and Stigma Reduction:** Address mental health, stigma around PLWHIV, and access to treatment.
- **Gender Equality and GBV Prevention:** Strengthen legal frameworks, awareness, and support for GBV victims, especially in rural areas.
- **Substance Abuse Prevention:** Enhance awareness and prevention of drug use among youth.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Promote innovative solutions and investments for ecological restoration, including the Aral Sea region.
- **Youth Empowerment:** Support youth-led SDG initiatives and platforms for collaboration and policy influence.
- **Nutrition and Health Awareness:** Expand programmes to educate parents and paediatricians on child nutrition.

CCA Consultations: Women NGOs



- **Support for GBV Survivors:** Expand access to shelters, and social services, prioritizing district-level and inclusive solutions.
- **Data and Knowledge Gaps:** Improve gender-disaggregated data collection on GBV, employment discrimination, and reproductive health.
- **Male Engagement:** Increase initiatives targeting men's role in promoting gender equality and preventing GBV.
- **Media and Awareness:** Train journalists in gender-sensitive reporting and foster NGO-media collaboration for advocacy.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Promote government-supported vocational training centres and women's participation in digital and e-commerce sectors. Address unemployment, discrimination, and lack of vocational training, particularly for women and PLWHIV.
- **Policy Reforms:** Implement legal measures to prevent discrimination in employment and eliminate mandatory HIV testing.

CCA Consultations: National Stakeholders



- **Good Governance:** Strengthen institutional capacities, promote legal literacy, and improve public participation in policymaking. Enhance transparency, accountability, and monitoring mechanisms to build trust.
- **Inclusive Social Protection:** Expand social security systems, develop fair inclusion criteria, and enhance vocational training. Prioritize barrier-free environments and targeted support for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities and NEET youth.
- **Health Equity and Access:** Address healthcare gaps by improving WASH facilities, expanding training for medical professionals, and reducing stigma. Enhance maternal and child health services and promote mental health awareness.
- **Quality Education:** Invest in teacher training, inclusive curricula, and school infrastructure to address capacity gaps. Improve engagement between schools, parents, and communities to foster a supportive learning environment.
- **Environmental Resilience:** Promote sustainable water management, regional climate cooperation, and ecosystem restoration. Strengthen cross-border initiatives, public awareness, and early warning systems for climate adaptation.

CCA Consultations: Migrants



- Returning migrants face **unemployment, depression, unrecognised vocational certificates**.
- Families left behind risk **neglect, education gaps, and exploitation**.
- **Health Challenges:** Limited access to ARVT and rehabilitation for migrants, rising HIV and drug-resistant TB cases, and insufficient sex education worsen public health risks.
- **Support Services:** Lack of shelters, psycho-social support, and ineffective embassy assistance for migrants, especially in destination countries.
- **Policy Gaps:** Weak labour law enforcement, non-transparent recruitment, and inadequate penalties for fraudulent private agencies harm migrants' rights.
- **Limited NGO engagement and duplication of UN programs** hinder impact. **Greater focus on youth** as key migrant demographic needed.
- **Vocational Training:** High demand for online courses in Uzbek language with financial support needed for participation.
- Leverage **digital tools** to improve migration services and transparency.



CCA Consultations: International Development Partners



- **Reproductive Health and Family Planning:** Promote awareness and access to contraceptives, addressing harmful social norms and early marriages.
- **Quality Education and Vocational Training:** Invest in teacher development, raise the profession's prestige, and strengthen the link between education and vocational training to address skills mismatches.
- **Inclusion and Accessibility:** Expand infrastructure and services for persons with disabilities (PWD), ensuring their equal participation in all aspects of society.
- **Healthcare Integrity:** Adopt a holistic approach to address corruption in healthcare, improving trust and access to quality services.
- **Support for Refugees:** Enhance policies and services addressing the needs of Afghan refugees, ensuring their integration and access to basic rights.
- **Civil Society Collaboration:** Strengthen cooperation between civil society, development partners and businesses, and training institutions to promote sustainable development.

