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SITUATION ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS in UZBEKISTAN

2024



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Foreword

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UNICEF Representative

In 2024, the world celebrates the 35th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a State Party to the Convention since 1994, Uzbekistan has committed itself to realising the rights of all children, including their rights to survival, health, education, and protection from all forms of violence and discrimination.

The Government of Uzbekistan continuously undertakes comprehensive measures to advance children's rights in line with national priorities and international commitments. There is growing acknowledgement that evidence-based policymaking should be at the centre of economic and social reforms.

The Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents of Uzbekistan was developed with the engagement of key stakeholders, including representatives of line ministries and NGOs, and also people and children with disabilities. The analysis is largely based on the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and key publications, commissioned by UNICEF and development partners, as well as government statistical data submitted to the TransMonEE database.

The Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Uzbekistan outlines achievements, trends, and remaining areas for improvement. I believe that its recommendations will inform development of the 2026-2030 Country Programme Document between the Government of Uzbekistan and UNICEF in line with the National Strategy 2030, leading Uzbekistan to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals with a particular focus on the well-being of children and adolescents.

UNICEF remains committed to supporting the Government of Uzbekistan in its progressive realization of children's rights, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable children and adolescents, based on the "Leaving no one behind" principle.



Foreword

Surayo Rakhmonova

**The Commissioner of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Children's Rights
(Children's Ombudsperson)**

The promotion of children's best interests has been recognized as a key priority in government policy in Uzbekistan. The state has assumed a significant social responsibility at the constitutional level to ensure and protect children's rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests, while fostering optimal conditions for their physical, mental, and cultural development.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has undertaken extensive efforts to enhance its legal framework and law enforcement practices concerning children's rights, introducing fundamentally new approaches and methods. It is essential not only to establish an effective legal mechanism to ensure children's welfare but also to cultivate a new mentality and social norms that prioritize children's rights and emphasize their value in society.

To build on and sustain the progress made in protecting children's interests, the national policy agenda has outlined new, important tasks. The Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Uzbekistan, prepared by UNICEF, assesses the state of children's rights, highlighting achievements, positive trends, and areas requiring further improvement.

The analysis focuses on children and adolescents from the perspective of key human rights principles such as equality, non-discrimination, and justice, with a special emphasis on equitable opportunities and outcomes for all children. It is the product of collaborative consultations involving national organizations and civil society institutions, reflecting constructive cooperation.

This analysis serves as a valuable tool in shaping new policy goals and key programs aimed at improving the well-being of children and adolescents in Uzbekistan. I would like to express my gratitude to the UNICEF Uzbekistan Country Office for its dedicated work in preparing the Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in the country, as well as for its meaningful collaboration with national institutions to safeguard the best interests of children.



Acknowledgements

Core report team: The Situation Analysis was written by Arkadi Toritsyn, a Senior Policy Advisor in the Government of Canada with extensive experience as an evaluator with UNDP and UNICEF in the ECARO region, including in Uzbekistan. He is included in the UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women, and OSCE rosters of pooled vetted evaluators. He was supported by Sherzodbek Inakov, a national consultant.

Consultations and validation: The Situation Analysis was informed from a consultative and participatory process. Several consultations took place in May 2024. Consultation and validation meetings with state bodies were attended by the following agencies: The Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan (the Parliament), the Ministry of Health (including the Republican AIDS Center), the Ministry of Preschool and School Education, the Agency for Preschool Education, the Ministry of Digital Technologies, the Committee for Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the Prosecutor General's Office, the National Agency for Social Protection under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Institute of Civil Protection at the Academy of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic, the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change, the Commissioner of Uzbekistan for Children's Rights (the Children's Ombudsperson), the Agency for Youth Affairs, the National Center for Human Rights, and the Center for Economic Research and Reforms. Consultations with civil society were attended by the following organizations: The Association of Disabled Persons of Uzbekistan, the Center for Retraining Journalists of Uzbekistan, the Republican Center for Social Adaptation of Children, the 'Istiqbolli Avlod' NGO, and the 'Tech4Impact' NGO. Amongst international agencies, the World Bank, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Japan International Cooperation Agency, all took part in the consultation process and contributed documents to inform the Situation Analysis. Most importantly the Situation Analysis was informed by consultations with children with disabilities and their parents, as well as youth, conducted through the U-report platform.

Oversight and guidance: The present update of the Situation Analysis is the result of a collaborative and consultative process led by the Child Rights Monitoring and Evaluation (CRM&E) section of UNICEF Uzbekistan. Special thanks go to Geoffrey Ijumba (OIC UNICEF Representative), and Alberto Biancoli (OIC Deputy Representative) who provided overall leadership and support during their duty stay in Uzbekistan, in preparation for this analysis. The UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (ECARO), and in particular Siraj Mahmudlu (Planning and Monitoring Specialist) provided technical support and guidance throughout the process. Day-to-day management and guidance for the Situation Analysis was provided by Shakhlo Ashrafkhanova (Child Rights Monitoring Specialist), Zokir Nazarov (Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist), and Rustam Abdumanov (Programme Associate). Programme staff in the Uzbekistan country office provided peer review of the thematic chapters, guided the work on the Situation Analysis by offering technical inputs and perspectives, and commented on interim drafts of the Situation Analysis report.

The interpretation of data in the analysis presented in this report, as well as the recommendations contained, are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of UNICEF or the Government of Uzbekistan.

Executive summary

This Situation Analysis (SitAn) represents a critical milestone in understanding the situation of children and adolescents in Uzbekistan. Since the last SitAn was conducted in 2019, Uzbekistan has made progress across multiple areas, and this SitAn examines how these developments have affected the realization of children and adolescents' rights, with a strong equity focus on the most vulnerable children and their families. The SitAn provides an objective and verifiable analysis of children's rights in Uzbekistan, helping partners address critical challenges that prevent children, especially those most disadvantaged, from enjoying their rights as captured in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other international obligations.

Uzbekistan is committed to the principle of leaving no one behind, and addressing inequality and discrimination. The SitAn supports this focus and examines the situation of children and adolescents from the perspective of critical human rights principles, such as equality, non-discrimination and accountability. The report examines causality between the underlying factors, opportunities, and barriers to achieving child and adolescent rights and well-being, and provides an understanding of existing deprivations and inequities. This SitAn reflects the country's context with a clear recognition of regional and global issues impacting children's lives. It explores reasons behind the uneven realization of children and adolescents' rights, and the opportunities to achieve progress for all children, especially those who have been left behind or are most at risk of being left behind.

The research methodology is informed by UNICEF's Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to Programming and Monitoring Results for Equity System approach, and UNICEF's Core Guidance: New Generation Situation Analysis. HRBA principles include universality, non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to survival and development, the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, accountability, and respect for the child's voice. The analysis covers equity and equality dimensions, focusing on fair opportunities and outcomes for all children. An extensive set of different and complementary evidence was collected and analysed using qualitative and quantitative data collection methods.

Uzbekistan, a vibrant nation in Central Asia, is home to over 36 million people, making it the most populous country in the region. Its population is strikingly youthful, with children and young people forming a significant portion of the demographic landscape. This demographic structure promises a substantial workforce entering the labour market, driving economic growth and innovation while maintaining a low dependency ratio. It also places tremendous pressure on the education and health care systems that must keep up with the demographic trends.

Uzbekistan is undergoing rapid urbanization, with more people migrating to cities for better employment and educational opportunities. While urban residents often have better access to education, health care, and economic opportunities, the rapid influx of people can strain these systems, creating new challenges. In contrast, rural areas remain predominantly agricultural, with lower access to quality education, health care, and social services.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who took office in 2016, initiated a series of reforms to modernize the governance structure and economy. These changes, aimed at improving government accountability and social protection, hold potential benefits for children by enhancing the delivery of essential services such as education and health care.

Uzbekistan has seen several positive developments in civil society over recent years. However, the operational environment for NGOs remains restrictive due to bureaucratic hurdles and stringent government oversight.

Over the past five years Uzbekistan has experienced notable economic growth, averaging around 5-6 per cent annually, which has been driven by a series of reforms to liberalize the economy, support the private sector and attract foreign investment. This economic growth has translated into increased resources for education and health care for children. New schools and hospitals have sprung up, and existing ones are being upgraded. Uzbekistan has enhanced the financing landscape for children's policies by dedicating substantial national budgets to areas critical for children's rights realization. Education has been a top priority, with over 20 per cent of total expenditures allocated to education. Conversely, budget expenditures on health have declined from 13.5 per cent of total budget expenditures in 2020 to 10.7 per cent in 2024. In 2023, the government allocated 19.2 trillion soums (6.8 per cent of the total budget) for social protection, with child allowances and material assistance amounting to 12.3 trillion soums. A series of Public Finance Management (PFM) reforms have set the stage for improved effectiveness and efficiency of state funds allocation, with a potential positive impact on children's rights realization.

Over the past five years Uzbekistan has significantly advanced the protection and promotion of child rights through implementing comprehensive legislative and policy reforms. Grounded in the CRC principles, these efforts are reflected in the 2023 constitutional reforms, Uzbekistan's Strategy 2030, the Law on the Guarantees of the Rights of the Child and the 2020 Education Law, the 2022 National Strategy for Social Protection, the 2023 Law on Gender-Based Violence, and other legislative and policy developments positively affecting children's rights realization.

Accurately monitoring and evaluating progress made in achieving children's rights, is crucial for attaining their comprehensive realization in Uzbekistan. The official website of the Agency of Statistics under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan has launched a page titled "Statistical Data on Children." This page provides statistical information on key aspects of children's lives, including health, education, social protection, and more. By offering access to current data, users can more effectively analyze trends and identify areas requiring attention to improve children's well-being.

Despite the improvements made, significant data and evidence gaps in Uzbekistan hinder the effective tracking of children's rights, particularly due to the lack of disaggregated and real-time data. While the Child Rights Monitoring framework covers 68.1 per cent of the relevant indicators, only 15 per cent of this data is from 2023, underscoring the need for more timely and granular information to support evidence-based policy-making.

The SitAn findings confirm substantial progress made by Uzbekistan over the last five years in advancing the rights of children and adolescents. It also identifies areas where improvements are needed. Below is a detailed summary divided by sub-domains, highlighting main achievements and areas for improvement.

Health and nutrition

Achievements:

- **Improvement in universal health coverage:** Uzbekistan's Universal Health Coverage Index ranking increased by 20 points since 2000, reaching a score of 75 in 2021, highlighting improved accessibility and quality of primary health care for children and mothers.
- **Introduction of state health insurance:** A state health insurance programme was launched in 2021. It aims to increase life expectancy from 74.4 years in 2023 to 78 years by 2030, focusing on primary health care to benefit children and mothers.
- **Expansion of perinatal centres:** In 2022, Uzbekistan opened 46 inter-district perinatal centres, addressing increasing childbirth complications, while improving care for mothers and newborns. Uzbekistan has achieved a 98 per cent antenatal care coverage rate at the primary health care level, indicating significant progress in maternal health services.
- **Increased human papillomavirus vaccination (HPV) coverage:** The HPV vaccine was introduced into the national immunization plan in 2019, achieving a 94 per cent first-dose coverage among girls aged 12–14 years, and contributing to better health outcomes for young females.
- **Consistently high child immunization rates:** A successful vaccination campaign halted a measles outbreak in 2021 and 2022 among children aged 0–14 years, showcasing the importance of sustained immunization efforts.
- **Reduction in child malnutrition:** A comprehensive School Feeding Programme has been prioritised, with a Presidential Decree in 2023 allocating 2.3 trillion Uzbek soums to provide free meals to all primary school students. Stunting among children under five decreased from 13.2 per cent in 2012 to 6.9 per cent in 2022, and the prevalence of overweight children also declined. The prevalence of wasting among children stands at 2.4 per cent, considered to be very low by global standards.
- **Investment in modernizing health information systems:** Efforts are underway to develop robust health information systems to improve data collection, monitoring, and analysis.

Areas for improvement:

- **Gaps in health care financing:** Despite plans to double health care financing by 2030, the share of the public health budget has declined from 13.5 per cent in 2020 to 10.7 per cent in 2024, with over 60 per cent of health care spending coming from out-of-pocket payments, affecting accessibility for children and mothers.
- **Disparities in health care access:** Significant disparities exist across socio-economic groups, with the lowest quintile having 55 per cent unmet health needs, compared to 37–38 per cent in higher quintiles.
- **Neonatal mortality remains a significant concern:** 57 per cent of under-five deaths occur within the first 28 days of life, highlighting the need for improved early-life medical interventions.

- **Gaps in childhood vaccination coverage:** Despite high reported vaccination coverage, approximately 9,000 zero-dose children still exist, with there being notable gaps in the timeliness of follow-up doses.
- **Decline in the exclusive breastfeeding** rate by 25 per cent since 2017: currently only 25 per cent of infants aged 0-5 months are exclusively breastfed, despite supportive legislation.
- **Limited knowledge about HIV/AIDS:** Only 10 per cent of young women aged 15–24 years have comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS, with even lower figures among those aged 15–19 years, indicating a need for better reproductive health education and services.
- **Significant gaps in mental health and psycho-social support services:** There is a lack of integration between mental health services in schools and primary health care, with new mental disorder cases among children rising from 79 per 100,000 in 2019, to 81 per 100,000 in 2022.
- **Road safety:** The number of fatalities and injuries from road accidents, particularly among children and adolescents, remains high, requiring urgent action.
- **WASH infrastructure:** Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure in schools and health facilities need additional investment to ensure safe and adequate conditions.

Education, leisure, and culture

Achievements:

- **High investments in educational infrastructure:** There are plans to construct over 370 new schools by 2026 as part of the New Uzbekistan Vision to address the rising student population, and also plans to create over 620,000 preschool places and 1.2 million general secondary education places by 2026.
- **Legislative reforms:** Adoption of the 2020 Education Law and subsequent policies laid a strong foundation for inclusive education, guaranteeing eleven years of free, compulsory education, and promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. There has also been adoption of inclusive education definitions in the Law 'On Education', and approval of a comprehensive road map for inclusive education by a Presidential Decree, as well as expansion of inclusive classrooms.
- **High education participation rates:** Primary school enrolment was 99 per cent in 2021-2022, showing high participation rates in early education stages.
- **Preschool enrolment** increased from less than 30 per cent in 2017 to over 73 per cent in 2024, with nearly 2 million children benefiting from early education programmes during the 2022-2023 period.
- **Increased digital learning and ICT access:** 94 per cent of schools have internet access and 47 are equipped with computers for educational purposes, as evidence of technology's strong integration in education.

Areas for improvement:

- **Limited capacity in education sector policy planning:** Insufficient adoption of result-based education financing negatively impacts the effective and efficient implementation of education reform.
- There are **significant regional disparities in preschool attendance**, with enrolment rates ranging from 71.9 per cent in Tashkent city, to 47.7 per cent in the Kashkadarya region.
- **Inconsistent implementation of inclusive education practices:** While progress has been made, challenges remain in implementing truly inclusive education practices, particularly for children with disabilities, with there being remaining issues related to physical infrastructure, learning materials, and teacher capacities.
- **Limited quality of education:** Despite increased investments, the quality of education, particularly in terms of foundational skills and competencies, remains a concern. This is evidenced by Uzbekistan's below-average rankings in the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) assessment.
- **Limited use of digital learning:** Uzbekistan's standards and specifications for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) laboratories do not meet 21st century requirements, resulting in a low availability of digital learning for education, which in turn impacts learning outcomes and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) results.
- **Gaps in teacher quality and training:** The quality of teachers is hindered by outdated training programmes and a lack of effective practicum opportunities, affecting overall educational outcomes.

Family environment, and protection from violence and harmful practices

Achievements:

- **Legislative reforms:** Amendments to the Criminal and Administrative Liability Codes in April 2023 criminalised domestic violence, and introduced additional protective measures for children and women. In August 2024, the 'Law on protecting children from all forms of violence' was approved by the Senate.
- **Establishment of the National Agency for Social Protection (NASP) in June 2023:** This agency has consolidated and enhanced child protection services, by streamlining social welfare functions and introducing a structured approach to child protection. The NASP is recruiting 4,800 para-professional social workers, 2,352 social work assistants, and 1,866 employees for district-based 'Inson' centres.
- **Reduction in residential care:** Uzbekistan closed 23 child care institutions in the past two years, transitioning 2,448 children to family and community-based care.
- **Repatriation and reintegration:** Uzbekistan has shown leadership in repatriating and reintegrating children and women from conflict zones, providing comprehensive support services and avoiding institutionalization to reduce stigma.

- **Progress in addressing child labour:** Uzbekistan has eradicated systemic child labour from its cotton sector, receiving international recognition for these efforts. In October 2022 Labour Code introduced stricter restrictions on child labour, aligning with international laws.

Areas for improvement:

- **Lack of formalised inter-agency collaboration and comprehensive data collection mechanisms to monitor and address violence against children effectively:** Sector-specific standard operating procedures (SOPs) and the Inter-Agency SOP on Child Protection are still pending approval.
- **Deeply rooted local customs, religious influences, and strong patriarchal traditions:** Engrained social norms continue to perpetuate early marriage and violence against children and women.
- **Gaps in inclusive and family-based care:** Children with disabilities are overrepresented in residential care, with 79 per cent of all children in residential care having a disability. Family support and reintegration services are underdeveloped, and family and community-based alternative care options are scarce.
- **Systemic challenges affect children and adolescents in conflict with the law in Uzbekistan:** There is a lack of specialized bodies and justice professionals, which hinders implementation of child-sensitive procedures, and results in a failure to address the unique needs of children in conflict with the law. There is a lack of quality data evidence to understand the factors driving the rise in child crime rates.
- **Child labour remains a pervasive issue in non-cotton sectors and informal employment:** According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) 2021-2022 survey, 21 per cent of children aged 5-17 are engaged in child labour.
- **Children in Afghan families face significant barriers to accessing essential services due to their legal status:** The non-ratification of the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the absence of a comprehensive national asylum system in Uzbekistan, both create significant legal and economic challenges for Afghan citizens, particularly children. Specifically, it hinders their ability to secure registration, proper visas, and access to essential services such as housing, nutrition, and health care.

Participation and civil rights

Achievements:

- **Legislative improvements:** In 2018, Uzbekistan amended its legislation to guarantee birth registration for all children. Since 2023, a remote registration service via the Unified Portal of Interactive Public Services allows parents to obtain birth certificates free of charge through a QR code. According to recent data, 100 per cent of children under five have their births registered, reflecting effective implementation of birth registration policies.
- **Youth participation initiatives:** Established in 2019, the Youth Parliament provides a platform for adolescents and youth to voice their opinions and influence policy decisions.

- **Citizenship Law for Stateless Persons:** The 2020 Citizenship Law has enabled thousands of stateless persons to gain citizenship, reducing statelessness, and improving access to rights and services.
- **Digital education focus:** The 'Digital Uzbekistan – 2030' strategy focuses on youth and adolescents, integrating ICT into education and expanding internet connectivity, particularly in rural areas. Uzbekistan recognises the growing concern of cyberbullying, and emphasises the need for comprehensive cyber safety education.

Areas for improvement:

- **Challenges for stateless and refugee children:** Despite progress made, stateless children and children of individuals in need of international protection face significant obstacles in obtaining legal identities due to the lack of a systematic government approach and reliable data.
- **The legal framework protects the confidentiality of adoption:** It prevents adopted children from accessing information about their biological parents, leading to emotional and psychological challenges.
- **Deeply entrenched cultural norms prioritize obedience over independent thought:** These norms hinder the meaningful participation of children and adolescents, particularly at the local level.
- **Inadequate platforms for genuine youth-led participation,** often dominated by adult agendas.
- **Digital divide:** Despite advancements, there are persistent disparities in ICT access and usage, especially among girls and children in rural areas, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to close the digital gap.

Poverty and adequate standards of living

Achievements:

- **Social protection reforms:** The adoption of the National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) in 2022 has set medium- and long-term objectives to enhance social protection. This includes ratifying maternity protection, expanding social insurance coverage, and establishing a social protection floor.
- **Implementation of the Single Registry:** Since its nationwide implementation in late 2020, the Single Registry has streamlined access to social protection, simplifying the application process and ensuring consistent eligibility assessments. The Single Registry now covers 336,000 families as of 2023, demonstrating its scalability and effectiveness during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Significant reduction in child poverty:** The child monetary poverty rate in Uzbekistan decreased significantly from 21.5 per cent in 2021 to 13.7 per cent in 2023. Additionally, the number of children living in poverty dropped from 2.66 million in 2020 to 1.8 million in 2023, reflecting the effectiveness of social protection measures.

Areas for improvement:

- **Underdeveloped grievance redress mechanism:** The absence of a dedicated grievance redress mechanism tailored for social protection forces vulnerable families to use general channels like the President's Portal. Given that 3.1 million children are receiving benefits, the lack of a specialized grievance system can exacerbate their vulnerabilities.
- **Fiscal constraints on social protection expansion:** Despite the government allocating 19.2 trillion soums (6.8 per cent of the total budget) for social protection in 2023, with 12.3 trillion soums going to child allowances and material assistance, the limited fiscal space constrains the expansion of these programmes. As a result, the number of children receiving child benefits decreased in the first quarter of 2024.
- **Regional disparities in child poverty rates:** These reflect diverse socio-economic conditions across the country.
- **Disparities in WASH access:** Significant disparities persist in terms of WASH access, with 26 per cent of households still lacking drinking water on their premises. As for schools, 13 per cent lack proper water services. These disparities particularly affect rural schools, where only 71 per cent have basic water services compared to 83 per cent in urban areas.
- **Underdeveloped social protection during crises:** The social protection system lacks readiness for emergencies, relying on ad hoc decisions rather than established procedures. This was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where despite the Single Registry's capabilities, the absence of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) led to delays in aid delivery.

Cross-cutting

Achievements:

- **Increase in access to higher education for youth:** The number of higher education institutions in Uzbekistan increased from 108 in 2019 to 199 in 2022. As a result, the coverage of young people (aged 18-22 years old) in higher education rose from 20 per cent in 2019 to 28 per cent in 2021, enhancing opportunities for adolescents to further their education and career prospects.
- **National strategy for disability inclusion:** The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2021, and the subsequent National Action Plan, demonstrate Uzbekistan's commitment to improving the rights and inclusion of children with disabilities. This includes a shift towards a social model of disability, emphasizing functional and social needs assessments alongside medical evaluations.
- **Integration of climate education:** Climate education was integrated into school curricula. These efforts aim to educate children about sustainability, and involve them in environmental protection activities, promoting their right to a healthy environment.

Areas for improvement:

- **Gender disparities affecting adolescent girls:** A significant portion of the population still holds traditional views on gender roles, with 43.9 per cent of young women and 64 per cent of young men agreeing that men should earn money while women should take care of the home and children. The Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) rate for young women aged 15-24 is 42 per cent, compared to just 8.8 per cent for young men. This disparity highlights significant barriers faced by adolescent girls in accessing education and employment opportunities, which need to be addressed to ensure gender equality.
- **Underreporting and support for children with disabilities:** Official figures indicate that 142,300 children under 18 are recognized as having disabilities. However, underreporting due to inadequate early identification systems and cultural stigmas likely means that many children with disabilities are not receiving the support they need, limiting their rights to education, health, and inclusion.
- **Comprehensive Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes that integrate health, nutrition, social protection, and parental support services, are currently unavailable:** This lack can be attributed to an underdeveloped and fragmented policy environment for ECD, and an underdeveloped early detection and intervention system that lacks standards for children under five with developmental risks, delays, or disabilities.
- **Impact of air pollution on children's health:** Uzbekistan's high levels of air pollution, with PM2.5 concentrations at 6.7 times higher than World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines set in 2022, are linked to increasing respiratory diseases among children. The incidence rate of respiratory diseases in children rose from 1,090,140 in 2019 to 1,151,115 in 2022, posing a serious threat to their health and development.
- **Climate change and its impact on children's rights realization:** Climate change poses significant risks to children in Uzbekistan, particularly due to increasing heatwaves and water scarcity, with 91 per cent of the nation's children being exposed to heatwaves.

The SitAn identifies the following vulnerable groups of children, adolescents and mothers, within the listed sub-divisions.

Groups vulnerable in terms of health and nutrition include: Children from poor households, mothers and children affected by a lack of mothers' autonomy in reproductive health care decisions, children dying from preventable causes, children exposed to climate change and negative environmental impacts, children and adolescents affected by road accidents, children at risk of having congenital defects, children missing out on immunization, children who do not benefit from exclusive breastfeeding, women of reproductive age and pregnant women experiencing anaemia, adolescent girls facing the triple burden of malnutrition (undernutrition, hidden hunger, and being overweight), children not receiving adequate and quality school meals, adolescents lacking access to quality mental health support, and adolescents living with HIV unable to realize their human rights.

Groups vulnerable in terms of education, leisure, and culture include: Children with disabilities and special education needs, children unable to access early childhood education, children out of school, and children of ethnic minorities (including Tajik, Russian, Karakalpak, and Lyuli/Roma children).

Groups vulnerable in terms of family environment, and protection from violence and harmful practices, include: Children and adolescents exposed to violence, children experiencing family separation (including children with disabilities, children victims or witnesses of crime, children in conflict with the law, and girls who marry early), children from poor households engaged in labour in non-cotton and informal sectors, children repatriated from conflict zones, and children in Afghan families who require support.

Groups vulnerable in terms of participation and civil rights include: Children of individuals in need of international protection and stateless children, adopted children without access to information on their biological parents, children with disabilities facing barriers to participation in various activities, children from low-income families, ethnic minority children facing discrimination, girls and young women restricted by discriminatory gender norms, girls and adolescent girls with limited access to ICT and professional opportunities, children and adolescents in rural areas facing ICT education challenges, and children who fall victim to cyberbullying and cybercrime.

Groups vulnerable in terms of poverty and adequate standards of living include: Children in regions with high levels of monetary poverty, children experiencing multidimensional poverty, children and adolescents in rural areas with limited access to WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene), and children and adolescents in areas with poor medical waste management.

Recommendations

To improve the realization of children's rights in Uzbekistan, it is essential to enhance national policy-making, implementation and reporting frameworks through a comprehensive and evidence-based approach. National partners are advised to refine the policy cycle by systematically identifying issues, analysing alternative methods, and developing risk management strategies with clear indicators to measure policy effectiveness. This will ensure policies to support children have well-defined targets, delivery timetables, and allocated resources, including finances, skills, and infrastructure. Furthermore, improving data quality and availability, particularly disaggregated and real-time data, is crucial for effective policy development, monitoring, and evaluation. Embedding high-quality data into the policy cycle will better inform decision-making processes and allow for the timely adjustments needed to advance children's rights.

It is recommended to increase budget allocations for child rights, advance public finance reforms and promote cross-sectoral coordination and the inclusion of vulnerable groups in decision-making processes. Strengthening cross-sectoral coordination among relevant ministries and agencies will help identify service gaps and improve collaboration across the social protection, justice, education, and health sectors. Additionally, empowering local institutions such as mahallas, and integrating NGOs into policy development and service delivery, will enhance participatory approaches and ensure that the needs of vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities, are addressed. Emphasising the inclusion of these groups in decision-making, particularly through use

of modern technologies and innovative platforms, will amplify their voices and ensure policies and programmes are more responsive to their specific needs.

Addressing deeply rooted stigma and negative social views is crucial for the inclusion of vulnerable groups in Uzbekistan, particularly children with disabilities, those with mental health needs, and those affected by HIV. Comprehensive awareness campaigns and educational programmes should be implemented to promote the acceptance of these groups, shifting away from the medical model of disability, and challenging tolerance of violence against children. Simultaneously, it is essential to address gender disparities affecting women and girls through targeted interventions that increase their labour force participation, improve access to education, and strengthen legal protections against violence. This approach should incorporate social behaviour change (SBC) interventions, using evidence-based methods to influence social norms and behaviours, particularly regarding girls, women, and children with disabilities. Additionally, supporting the transition to a social model of disability, improving disability-inclusive infrastructure, and empowering organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and parent groups are necessary to ensure access to rights-based services, with a particular focus on the needs of women and girls with disabilities.

To improve the realization of children's rights to health and well-being, efforts should focus on enhancing nutrition, health care access, and community engagement. This includes promoting timely complementary feeding and continued breastfeeding, continuing utilization of the Bebbio app for parenting support, and better coordinating psycho-social services. Increasing midwives' and nurses' capacity is crucial for promoting health practices while modernising health information systems and increasing government health expenditures, which are essential for better service delivery. Outdated policies should be revised, and a national adolescent health strategy, including mandatory sexual and reproductive health education, should be implemented. Finally, community education on key health topics should be expanded to include both men and women through local organizations and religious institutions.

To improve the realization of children's rights to education, leisure, and culture, significant investments are needed to upgrade and optimize educational infrastructure, including constructing new schools and upgrading existing ones to accommodate the growing student population. This includes creating 600,000 preschool and 1.2 million general secondary education places by 2026, ensuring facilities have adequate heating, lighting, water, and sanitation systems, and addressing disparities in infrastructure management. Increasing investment in inclusive education is crucial to enhance learning outcomes for students with disabilities, requiring clear standards, comprehensive training for educators, and fully inclusive school environments. Expanding access to quality early childhood education (particularly in underserved areas) through use of alternative models like public-private partnerships is also essential. Additionally, enhancing the teaching profession through applying comprehensive policies for recruitment, retention, and continuous professional development, especially in modern disciplines like ICT and STEM, will be vital for aligning with national standards and improving education quality.

To improve the realization of children's rights to the family environment and protect children from violence and harmful practices, it is crucial to establish and enhance cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms to effectively prevent and respond to cases of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. This includes adopting the draft Law on the

Protection of Children from all Forms of Violence, implementing a multi-sectoral plan for violence prevention, and ensuring the enforcement of laws with adequate resources. Social services should shift from crisis-oriented responses to universally supportive, outcome-driven care, with a focus on family strengthening, community engagement, and transitioning from institutional to family- and community-based care, particularly for children with disabilities. Additionally, comprehensive training for specialists on trauma-informed care, the integration of legal aid, and community-based support systems are essential. Investment in the social service workforce, improvements in child-friendly justice, and the promotion of diversion and restorative justice are recommended to enhance outcomes for vulnerable children. Finally, addressing harmful social norms, expediting the repatriation and reintegration of children from conflict zones, and simplifying legal processes for Afghan families, are all critical steps in safeguarding the rights and well-being of all children.

To improve the realization of children's rights to participation and civil rights for children and youth, it is crucial to implement the CRC recommendations for systematic data collection and analysis on implementation of the 2020 Act on Citizenship to address statelessness more effectively. This should be complemented by ratifying international conventions on the status of refugees and stateless persons. Amendments to legislation should ensure adopted children have access to information about their biological origins. Additionally, promoting positive attitudes towards children as active decision-makers is essential, including strengthening national authorities' capacities for meaningful consultation with youth. Institutionalised platforms should be developed to ensure regular engagement of young people at all levels of decision-making, with special mechanisms to include vulnerable children, particularly those with disabilities. Schools should model student councils to empower students in decision-making, and establish safe channels through which they can express their concerns. Finally, legislation and policies must protect children's privacy in digital environments, improve ICT education, and promote responsible use of personal devices to support learning.

To effectively address child poverty and improve the realization of children's rights to an adequate standard of living, a comprehensive cross-sectoral approach is needed. This should include expanding the coverage of child allowances for low-income families, and ensuring that social assistance programmes are inclusive, accessible, and tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable groups, especially children with disabilities. A robust early warning and response system should be established to monitor and evaluate families' socio-economic status, leveraging existing data and engaging social workers for accurate identification and timely intervention. Region-specific strategies are necessary to address the unique challenges posed by child poverty across different geographic areas, particularly in regions like Kashkadarya, Surkhandarya, and the Republic of Karakalpakstan, which face significant socio-economic difficulties. Additionally, developing comprehensive Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for social protection will enhance the delivery and coordination of support, including establishment of clear grievance mechanisms to ensure families can appeal rejected applications and access the assistance they need.

To further support child and adolescent development, the Government of Uzbekistan is advised to implement a costed Early Childhood Development (ECD) strategy, ensuring systematic outreach, developmental screening, and case management. Enhancing the school curriculum to align with Sustainable Development Goals, particularly

by introducing comprehensive career counselling, sexual and reproductive health education, and tailored mental health support, is crucial for supporting adolescents' transition to adulthood. Moreover, addressing climate change and disaster risk reduction should involve strengthening regulatory frameworks, expanding renewable energy, and integrating disaster risk education into school curricula. Developing a shock-responsive social protection system and enhancing institutional capacity with child-centric approaches will help build a resilient future for all, including vulnerable children and communities in high-risk areas.



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Bibliography, Indicators per Child Rights Monitoring Framework, Semi-structured Interviews with UNICEF staff: Key Informants and Questionnaires, Semi-structured Interviews with Key Informants: Interview Guides and Questionnaires, Focus Group Discussion Guide, Consent Forms and Questionnaires: Adolescents, including adolescents with disabilities, Focus Group Discussion Guide, Consent Forms and Questionnaires: Parents Identified by Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, Research Ethics Approval are available upon request.

Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ART	Antiretroviral therapy
BMS	Breastmilk Substitutes
CCRI	Children's Climate Risk Index
CEDAW	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CERR	Center for Economic Research and Reforms
Children's Ombudsperson	Commissioner of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Children's Rights
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DALYs	Disability-adjusted life years
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EBF	Exclusive breastfeeding
ECA	Europe and Central Asian countries
ECDI	Early Childhood Development Index
ECE	Early childhood education
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDP	Gross domestic product
GEP	Greening Education Partnership
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GTI	Global Terrorism Index
HDI	Human Development Index

HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HPV	Human papillomavirus
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICF	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMR	Infant mortality rate
IPC	Interpersonal communication
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
JMP	Joint Monitoring Programme
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MODA	Multidimensional Overlapping Deprivation Analysis
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
MR	Mortality rate
NASP	National Agency for Social Protection
NCD	Non-communicable disease
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NGO	Non-government organizations
NMR	Neonatal mortality rate
NSSP	National Strategy for Social Protection
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PBB	Programme-based budgeting
PCV	Pneumococcal vaccine
PFM	Public Finance Management
PGO	Prosecutor General's Office
PHC	Primary health care
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment

PLHIV	People living with HIV
PPP	Public-private partnership
PSS	Psychosocial support
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
SAM	Severe acute malnutrition
SBC	Social behaviour change
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SFP	School Feeding Programme
SitAn	Situation Analysis
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TransMonEE	Transformative Monitoring for Enhanced Equity
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
U5MR	Under-5-mortality rate
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIGME	United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VNR	Voluntary National Review
VOCs	Volatile organic compounds
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization



1. Introduction



1. Introduction

This Situation Analysis (SitAn) is a critical milestone in understanding the state of affairs of children and adolescents in Uzbekistan. Since the last SitAn conducted in 2019, Uzbekistan has progressed across multiple areas. This SitAn examines how these developments have affected children and adolescents' rights realization, with a strong equity focus on the most vulnerable children and their families. The SitAn provides an objective and verifiable analysis of children's rights in Uzbekistan, helping partners address critical challenges that prevent children, especially the most disadvantaged, from enjoying their rights as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other international obligations.

Uzbekistan is committed to leaving no one behind and addressing inequality and discrimination. The SitAn supports this focus and examines the situation of children and adolescents from the perspective of critical human rights principles such as equality, non-discrimination, and accountability. The report examines causality between the underlying factors, opportunities, and barriers to achieving child and adolescent rights and well-being, and provides an understanding of the existing deprivations and inequities¹. This SitAn reflects the country's context with a clear recognition of regional and global issues impacting children's lives. It explores the reasons behind the uneven realization of children and adolescents' rights and the opportunities to achieve progress for all children, especially those who are left behind or most at risk of being left behind.

The SitAn aims to develop a deep understanding of the situation of children and adolescents in Uzbekistan by analysing existing policies, strategies, and socio-economic trends, utilising disaggregated data to highlight specific impacts on various groups. Supporting national government partners with comprehensive, equity-sensitive, and evidence-based analysis is a key objective of the SitAn, ensuring that decisions are evidence-informed and targeted.

The SitAn provides recommendations to ensure that children remain at the centre of Uzbekistan's development priorities. It is expected that the SitAn will inform policy dialogue and support the government and other partners in meeting their commitments and goals focusing on children's rights.

The research methodology is informed by UNICEF's Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to Programming and Monitoring Results for Equity System approach and UNICEF's Core Guidance: New Generation Situation Analysis. HRBA principles include universality, non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to survival and development, the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, accountability, and respect for the child's voice. The analysis covers equity and equality dimensions, focusing on fair opportunities and outcomes for all children.

The SitAn assesses the enabling environment, the immediate, underlying, and structural causes of shortfalls and disparities across various groups of children, and data gaps. It reflects new developments and relevant sectoral (e.g., health, nutrition, education, social and child protection) and cross-cutting issues (e.g., disabilities, gender, participation).

¹ In conducting the determinants analysis, the SitAn focuses on ten most important factors that include social norms, legislative/policy frameworks and budget allocations; key supplies and capacities of relevant partners to support children; and demand and advocacy on the part of children and their parents to have their rights realized.

The SitAn primarily relies on secondary data analysis, with limited primary data collection from major duty-bearers for child rights. **An extensive set of different and complementary evidence was collected and analysed by utilising both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods that included the following:**

- **A desk documents review.** The desk review aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the context, trends, and current developments in children's rights realization in Uzbekistan. It included the most relevant and recent documents and data from secondary sources such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), other United Nations (UN) agencies, international human rights committees, governmental and non-governmental actors, academia, civil society, independent institutions, and others.
- **Statistical and administrative data review and analysis.** The SitAn is based on statistical data from government sources and the international data produced by UNICEF, including Transformative Monitoring for Enhanced Equity (TransMonEE), the World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the World Health Organization (WHO), and others.
- **Semi-structured interviews.** In late Spring 2024, the SitAn team conducted more than 50 semi-structured interviews with partners, including UNICEF experts, practitioners, line ministries, the Oliy Majlis (the Parliament of the Republic of Uzbekistan), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
- **Focus group discussions (FGDs).** In May 2024, two focus group discussions (FGDs) with organizations of persons with disabilities and adolescents with disabilities were conducted.
- **U-Reports.** The report extensively reflects the existing UNICEF U-Reports² for insights into adolescents' views on the key challenges and barriers they face.

All data gathered was verified through triangulation.

The SitAn begins with an introduction, which outlines the equity-focused, rights-based approach and methodology that guided the report development. Chapter 2 addresses overarching issues and presents Uzbekistan's context, focusing on the child rights landscape and governance. Chapter 3 goes into a more detailed analysis of specific areas of rights such as health and well-being, education and leisure, protection, participation, and cross-cutting areas. Key deprivations in child rights and inequities, and along with specific vulnerable groups, are all identified, followed by causality analysis. Conclusions and recommendations for the SitAn are provided in Chapter 4. The report contains Annexes, which include a range of supporting documents.

² UNICEF's digital community for young people, by young people, where they can raise their voices and share opinions on topics that matter to them.



2. Child rights landscape and governance

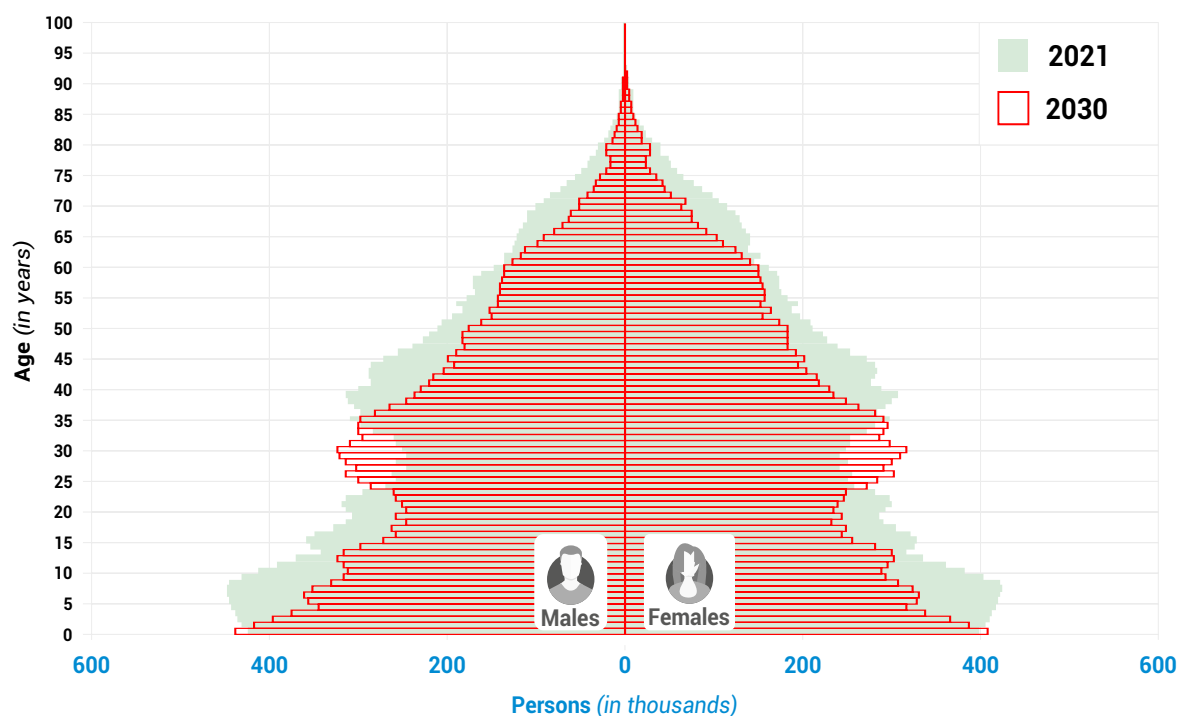
2. Child rights landscape and governance

2.1. Demographic profile

Uzbekistan, a vibrant nation in Central Asia, is home to over 36 million people. This makes it the region's most populous country. Its population is strikingly youthful, with children and young people forming a significant portion of the demographic landscape. This youthful population presents both immense opportunities and formidable challenges. Over the past five years, Uzbekistan has experienced steady population growth, driven by high birth rates and declining mortality rates. Uzbekistan is set for significant demographic changes over the next three decades, with its population projected to grow by approximately 44 per cent between 2022 and 2050, reaching 40 million by 2028, and surpassing 50 million before 2050. This growth will be driven by natural increase, characterised by high birth and low death rates.

With its classical conical shape, the population pyramid in Graph 2.1.1. is highly favourable for Uzbekistan, indicating a broad base of young individuals. This demographic structure promises a substantial workforce entering the labour market, driving economic growth and innovation while maintaining a low dependency ratio. It also places tremendous pressure on the education and health care systems that must keep up with the demographic trends.

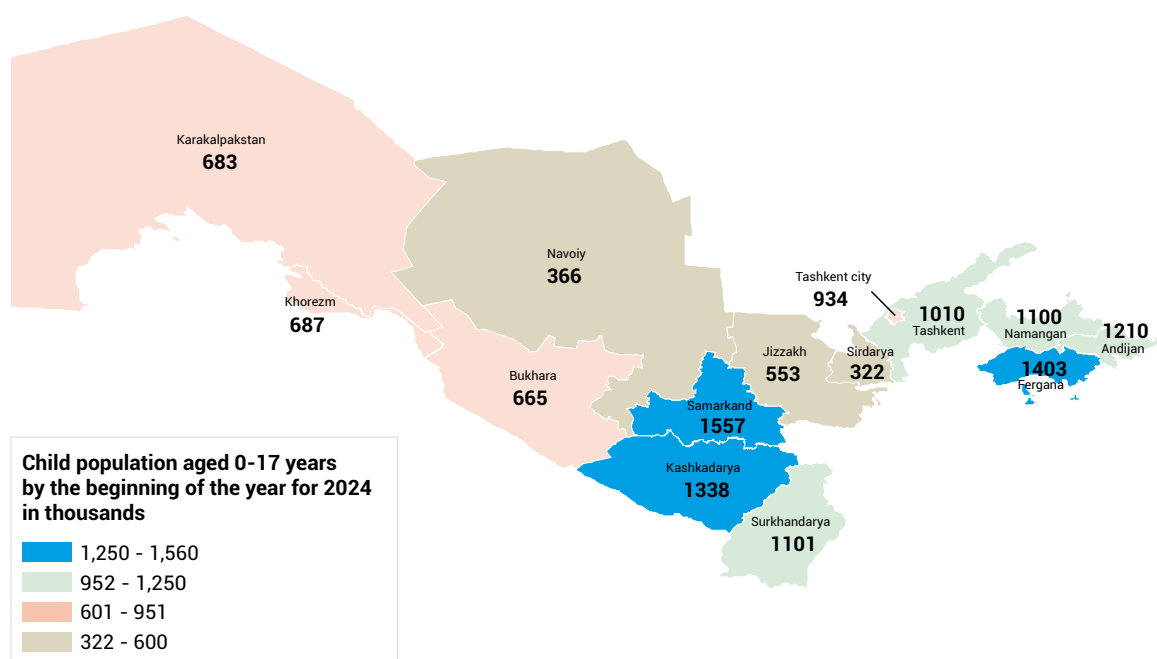
Graph 2.1.1. The expected change in population age structure between 2021 and 2030, Uzbekistan



Source: Kuchera T., Akhmedov D., Burtsin B., Kadatskaya N., Kuranda Ya., Ivlev A., Kurilo I., Akramova Sh., Alimukhamedov B., Golychev V., Maksakova L., Umurzakov B. 'Projections of the Demographic Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Its Regions Until 2050. Main Principles, Premises, and Results of Projections.' - Publisher 'Complex Print' -Tashkent, 2023.

Existing regional disparities presented in Graph 2.1.2. will become more visible, with significant growth in the southeastern and eastern parts of the country, particularly in the Surkhandarya, Kashkadarya, Samarkand, and Jizzakh regions. Tashkent city and its surrounding region will see growth driven by natural increase and positive migration.³

Graph 2.1.2. Child population aged 0-17 years by the beginning of the year for 2024 by regions (In thousands)



Source: Calculated from available data from the web page of the Statistics Agency under the President of The Republic of Uzbekistan.

The impact of these demographic trends on children and adolescents' rights realization is profound. A rapidly growing population necessitates significant investments and improvements in education, health care, and social protection systems. While urban areas have seen the construction of new schools and hospitals, and enhancements to maternal and child health programmes, rural regions still struggle with inadequate infrastructure and access to qualified professionals. Recent educational reforms aim to modernize curricula and expand vocational training, but these efforts may not be as effective as needed to support the increasing number of school-aged children. Similarly, social services for vulnerable children need substantial enhancement to support the growing population effectively.

Uzbekistan is undergoing rapid urbanization, with more people migrating to cities for better employment and educational opportunities. This urbanization brings both benefits and challenges. Urban areas, particularly Tashkent, are experiencing significant growth, leading to increased demand for housing, public services, and infrastructure. While urban residents often have better access to education, health care, and economic opportunities, the rapid influx of people can strain these systems, creating new challenges.

³ Charles University, Prague Faculty of Science, Department of Demography and Geodemography, Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. 'Population forecasts for the Republic of Uzbekistan and its regional administrative units until the year 2050: Basic principles, assumptions, and results of forecasts'.

In contrast, rural areas remain predominantly agricultural, with lower access to quality education, health care, and social services. These services are also notably underfunded in rural regions, exacerbating the disparities between rural and urban communities. The economic opportunities in these regions are limited, driving migration to urban centres or outside Uzbekistan, and exacerbating rural-urban disparities. Children in rural areas often face higher rates of poverty and have fewer opportunities for advancement, compared to their urban counterparts.

2.2. Political economy

Uzbekistan is the geographic and population centre of Central Asia. The country is administratively divided into 12 regions, one autonomous republic (Karakalpakstan), and the capital city, Tashkent (see Figure 2.2.1. below). Uzbekistan is a presidential republic where the President serves as both the head of state and the head of Government. The executive branch is headed by the President, who holds significant authority over domestic and foreign policies, appoints the Prime Minister, and oversees the Cabinet of Ministers. The legislative branch is bicameral, comprising the Oliy Majlis, which includes the Senate (the upper house) and the Legislative Chamber (the lower house). These bodies are responsible for drafting and enacting legislation. The judiciary is independent, with the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, and other lower courts ensuring the rule of law.

Figure 2.2.1. Map of Uzbekistan



Source: This map was created using QGIS software, integrating freely available ESRI satellite imagery, Google Earth imagery, and world map shapefiles from DevInfo software.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who took office in 2016, initiated a series of reforms to modernize the governance structure and economy. These reforms included reducing state control over the economy, attracting foreign investment, and combating corruption. In late 2022, Uzbekistan initiated a major administrative reform to enhance government efficiency by streamlining state bodies and merging key ministries. By mid-2023, the attempted reform faced significant challenges, leading to several reversals and restructurings. Concurrently, the 2023 constitutional amendments, following an April referendum, introduced new rights and norms, expanded presidential powers, increased legislative oversight, and implemented judicial reforms, including allowing citizens' appeals to the Constitutional Court. These changes, aimed at improving government accountability and social protection, hold potential benefits for children by enhancing the delivery of essential services such as education and health care.

Uzbekistan has seen several positive developments in civil society over recent years. In 2021, President Mirziyoyev signed the Law on Normative Legal Acts, enhancing public participation in lawmaking by mandating public discussions on draft laws. The Concept of Civil Society Development in 2021-2025 and new regulations on foreign funding for NGOs reflect these advancements.⁴ **However, the operational environment for NGOs remains restrictive due to bureaucratic hurdles and stringent government oversight.** Despite increased state budget allocations and formal partnerships for grant implementation, these constraints limit NGOs' effectiveness and ability to fully advocate for children's rights and deliver essential services.

In recent years, Uzbekistan's Government has embarked on a path toward decentralization, seeking to delegate more power to local governments. The transition to the mahalla model has been carried out, which means working from the smallest government institution (from below) in places where the population lives.⁵ However, the central control remains strong, particularly over critical policy areas. **This governance structure impacts child well-being in various ways.** On the one hand, centralised control ensures uniform national policies by providing a baseline standard for education and health care. On the other hand, local variations in implementing these policies create disparities. Regions with more resources tend to offer better services, leading to inequalities in child well-being between regions. Decentralization efforts have allowed some local governments to address specific community needs more effectively, but discrepancies in resource allocation often widen the gap between urban and rural regions. For instance, though robust at the national level, child protection measures suffer in effectiveness at a local level, due to limitations in local capacity and resources.

Over the past five years Uzbekistan has experienced notable economic growth, averaging around 5-6 per cent annually, driven by a series of reforms to liberalize the economy, support the private sector and attract foreign investment.⁶ Key sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services have expanded significantly, contributing to the country's economic prosperity. **This economic growth has translated into increased resources for education and health care for children.** New schools and hospitals have been erected, and existing ones are being upgraded.

4 Freedom House (2024), [Uzbekistan](#).

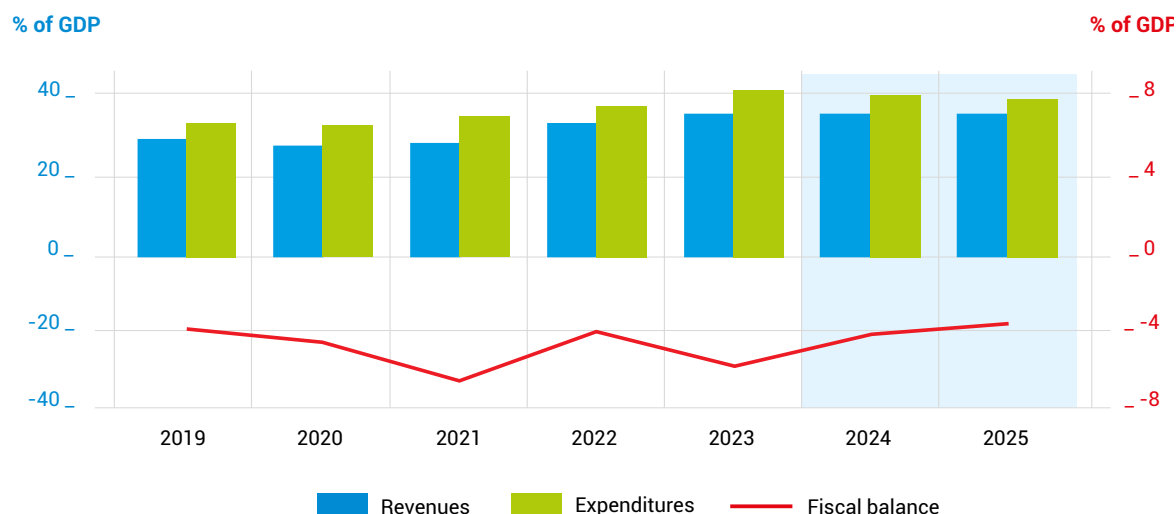
5 Uzbekistan, Second Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023.

6 World Bank (2024), Uzbekistan: [Overview](#).

In the future, Uzbekistan's structural reforms and increased social spending will impact fiscal consolidation and deficit reduction. The fiscal deficit is expected to be 4.0 per cent of GDP in 2024, narrowing to 3.5 per cent in 2025. Revenue is forecasted to remain at 33.0 per cent of GDP in 2024, and increase slightly to 33.5 per cent in 2025 (see Graph 2.2.2. below).⁷

However, the benefits of this growth and increased social spending are unevenly distributed. Rural areas, where most of the population resides, often lack access to quality education, health care, and social services. The disparities in infrastructure development mean that children in these regions do not benefit equally from the country's economic advancements. For example, while new schools and hospitals are being built in urban centres, many rural areas still struggle with outdated facilities, obsolete equipment, and a shortage of qualified professionals.

Graph 2.2.2. Fiscal forecast



Source: International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank estimates (ADB, Uzbekistan).

Uzbekistan's formal economy is dominated by state-owned enterprises and large private firms, primarily those in agriculture, manufacturing, and services. Meanwhile the informal economy plays a significant role, especially in rural areas, where informal employment is often the only livelihood available for many families. **Children in families reliant on the informal economy face heightened risks of poverty.**

Uzbekistan has declared itself a socially oriented state, focusing on improving the well-being of its vulnerable populations. The government has recognised several groups needing targeted support, including women, girls, children, persons with disabilities, the elderly, ethnic minorities, low-income families, and rural populations. Initiatives have been implemented to combat gender-based violence, enhance access to education and health care for children, and improve accessibility and inclusivity for persons with disabilities. Additionally, low-income families receive financial assistance and support to improve living conditions, and targeted investments in rural infrastructure aim to bridge the urban-rural divide.

⁷ ADB (2024), Economic trends and prospects in developing Asia: Caucasus and Central Asia, Uzbekistan, Asian Development Outlook April 2024.

2.3. Child rights governance and policy

UN CRC recommendations



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

5. The Committee recommends that the State party ensure the realization of children's rights in accordance with the Convention, the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, throughout the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It urges the State party to ensure the meaningful participation of children in the design and implementation of policies and programmes aimed at achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals as far as they concern children.

6. Taking note of the amendments made to the Children's Rights Safeguards Act in 2016 and 2017, the Committee reiterates its recommendation that the State party ensure the incorporation of all principles and provisions contained in the Convention and its Optional Protocols into domestic legislation, and their application by relevant authorities.

7. Taking note of the 2021 plan of measures to improve the child rights system, the Committee recalls its recommendation that the State party develop a comprehensive policy, strategy and action plan on children, encompassing all areas of the Convention, and that it allocate adequate human, technical and financial resources to their implementation.

8. The Committee welcomes the establishment of the National Commission on Children's Issues and its territorial divisions in 2021, and recommends that the State party ensure that it has the necessary authority and resources to coordinate all activities related to the implementation of the Convention at different levels.

12. Welcoming the establishment, in 2021, of the Office of the Ombudsman for the Rights of the Child, the Committee recommends that the State party provide the Office with adequate human, financial and technical resources to effectively discharge its mandate and to strengthen the mandate to address complaints from or made on behalf of children, in a child-friendly manner. It also recommends that the State party align the draft Act on the Children's Ombudsman with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles) and with the Committee's general comment No. 2 (2002), with a view to the Act's swift adoption.

14. Noting as positive the measures taken to enhance the role of NGOs since 2017, the Committee recalls its previous recommendations and urges the State party to create an enabling environment for NGOs, including those working on children's rights, to foster their participation in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of legislation, policies and programmes relating to the rights of the child, and in the preparation of periodic reports to the Committee;

17. Recalling Sustainable Development Goal targets 5.1 and 10.3, the Committee recommends that the State party adopt, implement, monitor and evaluate a comprehensive anti-discrimination law and a strategy comprising measures, including

awareness-raising and media campaigns, to change social norms and behaviours that contribute to discrimination, in particular on the basis of gender, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity. It also recommends that the State party implement targeted policies and programmes to address discrimination against girls, children with disabilities, children belonging to minority groups, refugee, asylum-seeking and internally displaced children, children in alternative care, children in street situations, and other children in vulnerable situations.

18. Recalling its general comment No. 14 (2013), the Committee reiterates its previous recommendation that the State party explicitly stipulate the principle of the best interests of the child in its legislation and ensure that it is integrated and consistently applied in all administrative and judicial proceedings concerning children, including by developing specific procedures, criteria and tools, and by providing training for education, justice, police, child protection and health professionals to strengthen their capacity to apply the principle of the best interests of the child in their work;

51. The Committee recommends that the State party, in order to further strengthen the fulfilment of children's rights, ratify the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure;

52. The Committee recommends that the State party, in order to further strengthen the fulfilment of children's rights, consider ratifying the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families;

53. The Committee recommends that the State party take all appropriate measures to ensure that the recommendations contained in the present concluding observations are fully implemented, and that a child-friendly version is disseminated to, and made widely accessible for, children, including those in the most disadvantaged situations. The Committee also recommends that the fifth periodic report, the written replies to the list of issues and the present concluding observations be made widely available in the languages of the country;

54. The Committee invites the State party to submit its combined sixth and seventh periodic reports by 28 July 2027 and to include therein information on the follow-up to the present concluding observations. The report should be in compliance with the Committee's harmonized treaty-specific reporting guidelines and should not exceed 21,200 words. In the event that a report exceeding the established word limit is submitted, the State party will be asked to shorten the report. If the State party is not in a position to review and resubmit the report, translation thereof for the purposes of consideration by the treaty body cannot be guaranteed;

55. The Committee also invites the State party to submit an updated core document, not exceeding 42,400 words, in accordance with the requirements for the common core document contained in the harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties, including guidelines on a common core document and treaty-specific documents, and paragraph 16 of General Assembly resolution 68/268.

Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

N/A

Demand (financial access and social behavioural drivers)

13. The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its awareness-raising programmes, in cooperation with civil society and the media and with the participation of children, to ensure that the Convention and its Optional Protocols are widely known by the general public, including by parents and children themselves, and to provide mandatory training on the rights of the child to all professionals working with and for children.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1994, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2021, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1996, have profoundly shaped the child rights governance structure in Uzbekistan. These international treaties have driven the development of a comprehensive legal and policy framework aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of children, including those with disabilities and girls. The ratification of these conventions has prompted the government to align its domestic laws with international standards, resulting in amendments to existing legislation and the adoption of new laws focused on child protection, education, health, and social services.

Over the past five years, Uzbekistan has significantly advanced the protection and promotion of child rights through comprehensive legislative and policy reforms. Grounded in the CRC principles, these efforts are reflected in the 2023 constitutional reforms, which bolstered provisions for family, motherhood, and childhood protection. Additionally, Uzbekistan's Strategy 2030, with 100 goals aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), demonstrates the government's continuous commitment to child rights. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process further underscores this dedication.⁸ Uzbekistan's second Voluntary National Review (VNR) in July 2023, a process through which countries assess and present national progress made in implementing the 2030 Agenda, highlighted significant progress towards the SDGs, particularly in early childhood and tertiary education, health care improvements, and advances in gender equality and social inclusion.

The Law on the Guarantees of the Rights of the Child has been updated to enhance child protection mechanisms, improve access to social services, and align with international standards. In the health sector, Uzbekistan has prioritized primary health care transformation, emphasizing accessible and efficient services particularly for children, and introduced a state health insurance programme in 2021. The 2020 Education Law guarantees eleven years of free compulsory education, including one year of preschool education, and promotes inclusive education for children with disabilities.

Regarding social protection, the 2022 National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) focuses on enhancing the social protection framework, with key elements including

⁸ The UPR is a process which involves a periodic review of the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States. It provides an opportunity for all States to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to overcome challenges to the enjoyment of human rights. The UPR also includes a sharing of best human rights practices around the globe.

maternity protection, extending social insurance to the informal sector, and establishing a social protection floor. The 2023 Law on protection of children and women from violence addresses domestic violence comprehensively. In August 2024, a new 'Law on protecting children from all forms of violence' was approved by the Senate of Oliy Majlis. Additionally, In October 2022 Labour Code introduced stricter restrictions on child labour, aligning with international laws.

Consequently, Uzbekistan **has developed several national programmes and plans focused on children's rights in response to the aforementioned international commitments.** These plans outline strategic priorities and actions for stakeholders by providing a clear roadmap for advancing children's rights.

In Uzbekistan, the protection and realization of child rights involves a diverse network of stakeholders, each playing a vital role in implementing and monitoring policies that ensure the well-being of children. This collaborative effort spans government bodies, international organizations, NGOs, the private sector, and multilateral institutions, all working together to create a supportive environment for children.

The National Commission on Children's Affairs is expected to play a pivotal role in overseeing the implementation of the CRC, ensuring a coordinated approach across various ministries and agencies to uphold children's rights, and addressing issues affecting them. However, the Commission has not been fully functioning as intended, which hinders the effective implementation and monitoring of child rights legislation, policies, and programmes. As per CRC recommendations, there is a clear need to improve cross-sectoral coordination among national partners responsible for children's rights realization, supported by adequate human, financial, and technical resources. Other key national stakeholders responsible for children's rights realization are listed below.

The Ministry of Preschool and School Education implements educational reforms incorporating modern technologies and innovative teaching methods. In addition to policy development, the Ministry is dedicated to improving access and quality through infrastructure development, particularly in rural and underserved areas, and by offering continuous professional development programmes for teachers. In 2024, the Preschool Education Agency in Uzbekistan was dissolved and reassigned to the Ministry of Preschool and School Education.⁹

The Ministry of Health plays a crucial role in enhancing maternal and child health services. By expanding vaccination programmes, providing comprehensive prenatal and postnatal care, and supporting nutrition initiatives, the Ministry aims to improve health outcomes for children across Uzbekistan.

The Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction plays an essential role in shaping labour policies and promoting employment, focusing particularly on children and adolescents. The Ministry is responsible for developing and enforcing labour laws and regulations, including recent updates aligning with international standards on child labour. Strategies are designed to create job opportunities, reduce unemployment, and support workforce development through vocational training programmes tailored for young people. Additionally, the Ministry ensures the protection of young workers' rights and workplace safety through regular inspections, and provides mediation and arbitration services to resolve labour disputes.

9 [Pre-school education agency was abolished, 2024.](#)

The National Agency for Social Protection (NASP), established in 2023, consolidates and enhances social services nationwide. The NASP aims to standardize social assistance programmes, ensuring quality support for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children, people with disabilities, and victims of domestic violence. The agency promotes the profession of social work and transitions the approach to disability from a medical to a social model.

The Ministry of Emergency Situations plays a fundamental role in disaster preparedness and management across various sectors. It leads practical training initiatives in schools, focusing on fire safety, earthquake preparedness, and preparations for other emergency scenarios. The Ministry also conducts monthly awareness campaigns and practical evacuation drills to ensure that children and school staff are well-prepared for potential emergencies.

The State Committee on Family and Women works to promote gender equality and protect women and children from violence and exploitation, addressing critical issues like early marriage and domestic abuse.

The National Human Rights Center monitors the realization of human rights, including child rights, and provides recommendations to the government to ensure that policies align with international standards.

The Oliy Majlis, Uzbekistan's parliament, plays a pivotal role in the realization of children's rights by reviewing and endorsing legislation and policies aimed at protecting and promoting children's welfare. Parliamentary committees within the Oliy Majlis ensure that these laws align with international standards, such as the CRC, and oversee their effective implementation.

The Children's Ombudsperson¹⁰ plays a crucial role in ensuring children's rights are protected and upheld. Further information on the role of the Children's Ombudsperson can be found in Section 2.6.

International organizations: Several international organizations are crucial for realising children's rights in Uzbekistan, and accordingly they work collaboratively with the government to ensure comprehensive development and protection for children. UNICEF is a key advocate for child rights, supporting policy development, implementing programmes ensuring every child's right to education, promoting child health, and safeguarding against violence and exploitation. The WHO contributes significantly to health-related initiatives, particularly those related to maternal and child health, by providing expertise and resources. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supports broad development goals that include strengthened entrepreneurship for young people and green development for children, contributing to the overall well-being of children and their families. Other UN agencies under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), also play vital roles in improving reproductive health, supporting individuals in need of international protection, and enhancing education quality and access to culture, respectively. Financial institutions like the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) support state reforms by providing financial and technical assistance to

¹⁰ The Tashkent Times, Shavkat Mirziyoyev signs Children's Ombudsman Bill into Law. Effective July 14, 2024. <https://www.tashkenttimes.uz/national/12575-shavkat-mirziyoyev-signs-children-s-ombudsman-bill-into-law>.

improve infrastructure, education, health care, and social protection systems. The International Labour Organization (ILO) also plays a significant role by advocating for children's rights in the workplace, promoting safe and fair working conditions, and ensuring children's protection and right to education.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs): A limited number of international, national and local NGOs focus on various aspects of child rights, including education, health, protection, and advocacy. These organizations provide direct support and services to vulnerable children and families, filling gaps left by government services and ensuring that more children receive the care and support they need. Only a few NGOs in Uzbekistan, can effectively advocate for children's rights. As some key informants indicated, there are no NGOs capable of working with decision-makers to promote the inclusion of children with disabilities.

2.4. Public spending on children

UN CRC recommendations



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

9. The Committee notes as positive the measures to expand the social assistance to low-income families with children. Recalling its general comment No. 19 (2016) and Sustainable Development Goal target 16.5, the Committee recommends that Uzbekistan introduce evidence-based and results-based participatory planning and budgeting in social sectors by fostering a culture of learning within the public administration and mahallas on data collection, analysis and use;

10. The Committee, taking note of the Anti-Corruption Act of 2017, the State anti-corruption programme of 2021–2022 and the establishment of structures to counter corruption at different levels, recommends that the State party ensure that corruption is addressed in practice in all areas, in particular in relation to birth registration, health care and education.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

Over the past five years, **Uzbekistan has enhanced the financing landscape for children's policies by dedicating substantial national budgets to areas critical for children's rights realization.** Education has been a top priority, with over 20 per cent of total budget expenditures allocated to education. Conversely, budget expenditures on health have declined from 13.5 per cent of total budget expenditures in 2020 to 10.7 per cent in 2024. In 2023, Uzbekistan's government allocated 19.2 trillion soums (6.8 per cent of the total budget) for social protection, with child allowances and material assistance amounting to 12.3 trillion soums (equivalent to approximately \$1.025 billion, assuming an average exchange rate of 1 USD = 12,000 UZS).

Nevertheless, the increasing budget allocations are not sufficient to support increasing numbers of children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable groups. High out-of-pocket health care costs, for example, strain vulnerable families and limit children's

access to quality health care. Additionally, inefficiencies in public spending in education contribute to relatively low educational outcomes. Inadequate spending on social protection further exacerbates the issue, leaving many children and adolescents without the support needed to thrive.

As the fiscal deficit is expected to be 4.0 per cent of GDP in 2024, narrowing to 3.5 per cent in 2025,¹¹ maintaining consistent and sustainable funding levels for children's programmes is crucial, as economic fluctuations and budget constraints can impact the availability of resources for essential services. **A series of Public Finance Management (PFM) reforms have set the stage for improved effectiveness and efficiency of the allocation of state funds, with a potential positive impact on children's rights realization.** Key measures include establishing a unified budget and accounting system for greater transparency, streamlining financial management, and adopting a medium-term budget framework to enhance future-focused financial planning. However, challenges remain in aligning state policy with budget financing due to inconsistent use of the medium-term expenditure framework in technical planning.

The PFM reforms introduce programme-based budgeting (PBB), which ties funds to tangible results in education, health care, and social and child protection, and is essential for realising children's rights. While some ministries have adopted PBB with specific indicators and targets, further implementation is needed. The Ministry of Finance is working to institutionalize PBB to align funding with priority issues. The complete implementation of the PBB approach will improve the allocation of resources, ensuring that they directly support children's rights realization, which is critically important amidst the constraints imposed by the government's budget deficit. Fiscal pressures may lead to contemplating scaling back allocations on children's rights realization, while PBB and other PFM reforms can improve the effectiveness of spending on children's rights.

Uzbekistan's introduction of participatory budgeting models has enhanced transparency and accountability in funding utilization. This progressive step towards inclusive governance, especially for children's rights, was marked by the 2021 Presidential Decree allocating 5 per cent of district budgets to citizen proposals.¹² Additionally, 30 per cent of additional district and city revenues are directed to citizen initiatives. Nationwide implementation began in 2022, with biannual cycles for proposing and selecting budget-funded projects. Digital platforms, such as the Ministry of Finance's 'Open Budget' portal, support this initiative by making budget information accessible, and enhancing public understanding of government spending.

Some challenges remain in advancing participatory budgeting. The Open Budget portal, while designed to increase transparency, is not always easy to navigate, which can make finding necessary information difficult. Additionally, there is currently no system in place to track child, youth, or gender-sensitive public spending, which complicates evidence-based decision-making and policy alignment with budgets. In the absence of regularly published editions of 'The Children's Budget in Uzbekistan', targeted engagement of stakeholders in undertaking budget scrutiny and advocacy for effective and equitable public spending focusing on children, is limited to sectoral budgets.

¹¹ Economic trends and prospects in developing Asia, p. 94.

¹² [Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, No.RP-5072 'On additional measures to ensure active participation of citizens in the budget process'](#), 13 April 2021.

Amidst a challenging fiscal environment with increasing deficits, the government has recognised the need for more diversified funding mechanisms, including enhancing **public-private partnerships (PPPs)** to attract new investment, particularly in the education and health care sectors. For example, the PPP model is widely used in the education sector to expand coverage of early childhood education opportunities.

PFM results need time to materialize fully. More comprehensive capacity-building efforts and reforms are required to implement a medium-term budgetary framework¹³ and PBB based on performance indicators.¹⁴ Broader changes in the enabling environment focusing on systemic approaches to sectoral planning, changing views, and implementing participatory approaches are needed to support the PFM's success.¹⁵

2.5. Data and evidence on children

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

11. Recalling its general comment No. 5 (2003), the Committee recommends that the State party further strengthen its system of collection and analysis of disaggregated data and access thereto and ensure that it covers all areas of the Convention and its Optional Protocols, including violence against children, mental health, children in street situations, children with disabilities, children belonging to minority groups, children in employment, children deprived of liberty and children in the justice system, including those who are victims of and witnesses to crime, with a view to informing its policies and strategies.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

Monitoring child rights and progress made towards the SDGs is crucial for realising children's rights. The Statistics Agency, under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, improved its statistical infrastructure, which is a combination of technical, financial, informational and human resources that constitute the basis of any modern statistical system and is essential for the agency's successful operation. As the central body responsible for collecting, analysing, and disseminating statistical data, the agency's work is crucial in tracking the nation's progress towards achieving the SDGs,¹⁶ particularly those related to children's rights and well-being. Uzbekistan recognises that bringing the national statistical system in line with international standards will improve the quality of statistical information and make it possible to create a comprehensive

¹³ Frederic, Martin, et al., 'Consultancy to support capacity development of the Ministry of Finance and other social ministries in public finance for children (pf4c) for JP for establishing integrated national financing framework in Uzbekistan (sc200421) – Uzbekistan', 2022.

¹⁴ Jörg Nadoll, 'Assessment of Ongoing Work to Implement Programme-Based Budgeting in Uzbekistan', 2023.

¹⁵ Tatyana Vinogradova, 'Analytical Review for the development of a training manual on programme budgeting and a training of trainers programme in Uzbekistan within the framework of the Global Flagship Finance (GEF) Initiative', 2023.

¹⁶ The Statistics Agency provided the necessary data within the framework of the created national information platform for SDGs. See, Uzbekistan, Second Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2023.

database of statistical indicators. The National Strategy for the Development of Statistics in Uzbekistan in 2020–2025 was adopted to introduce modern statistical methods.¹⁷

The 'Statistical Information Analysis and Transformation' portal serves as a critical tool for real-time data management and integration, allowing various ministries to input and update statistical information directly. The official website of the Agency of Statistics under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan has launched a page titled 'Children Statistics'.¹⁸ This page provides statistical information on key aspects of children's lives, including health, education, social protection, and more. By offering access to current data, users can more effectively analyze trends and identify areas requiring attention to improve children's well-being.

Despite these improvements, **data and evidence gaps hinder the effective tracking of children's rights realization, posing challenges to informed policymaking**. One major challenge is the limited availability of disaggregated data. Without detailed information broken down by age, gender, disability, and geographic location, it is difficult to understand and address the specific needs of different child groups, particularly vulnerable populations like girls, children with disabilities, and those in rural areas. Additionally, there can be delays in updating certain datasets, impacting the portal's real-time monitoring capabilities.

Another critical issue is the **limited availability of real-time data**. Current data systems often do not provide timely information on the accessibility and quality of services, making it hard to respond swiftly to emerging issues affecting children and youth. There are also significant gaps in data for specific indicators related to child rights, such as child labour, violence against children, and data on child victims and witnesses of crime. This missing data prevents comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of progress towards national and international commitments. The scarcity of longitudinal data, which tracks children's outcomes over time, presents another challenge and makes it difficult to assess the long-term impact of policies and interventions on children's rights realization.

The Child Rights Monitoring (CRM) framework in Uzbekistan, adapted from the globally recognized framework, includes domains such as health and nutrition, education, family environment, and more. Data from various sources in the country covers 68.1 per cent of the CRM indicators, with the most extensive data available in the health and nutrition domain (80 per cent), and the least in child rights governance (55 per cent). However, only 15 per cent of the data is from 2023, highlighting significant gaps in the timeliness and granularity of information, particularly at sub-population levels.

There is a growing recognition of the importance of evidence-based policymaking as national action plans increasingly emphasize the need for data-driven decisions. It is expected that the implementation of the Law on the Statistics Agency of Uzbekistan will enhance data collection, disaggregation, and transparency, aligning with international standards. The law mandates comprehensive and reliable statistical data on children's health, education, and social protection, enabling better targeted policies and programmes. To improve the collection and utilization of data on children's indicators in

¹⁷ Human Rights Council. [National report submitted in accordance with Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, Uzbekistan. 6–17 November 2023. \(A/HRC/WG.6/44/UZB/1\)](#).

¹⁸ The Statistics Agency, under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Integrated information system statistics, [Children Statistics](#).

Uzbekistan, a comprehensive data mapping exercise can be conducted to systematically identify both routine and periodic data collected by ministries, agencies, research institutions, and international organizations. This mapping will identify the data gaps and overlaps in data collection efforts that can be addressed through data collection improvements, greater focus on standardization and capacity building, and integration of data sources into a cohesive information management system.

2.6. Right to remedy

Uzbekistan's legal framework incorporates several provisions to ensure the right to remedy for children. The Constitution of Uzbekistan guarantees the protection of human rights and freedoms, including the right to seek redress for rights violations (Chapter VII).¹⁹ The Family Code addresses children's rights in regards to protection within the family, ensuring that children can seek redress in cases of violation of the rights and legitimate interests of the child (Article 67).²⁰ The Criminal and Administrative Liability Codes include specific provisions that penalize offences such as child abuse, neglect, and exploitation. In August 2024, the 'Law on protecting children from all forms of violence' was approved by the Senate. These legislative measures create a comprehensive framework to protect children's rights and ensure access to justice for rights violations.

Despite a relatively well-developed legal framework, **the practical use of these provisions to protect and remedy children's rights violations is not consistent. A significant barrier is the lack of child-sensitive procedures.** The existing legal processes often do not consider children's specific vulnerabilities and dependencies, making it difficult for them to navigate the system independently.

Additionally, awareness and understanding of these legal rights among children, parents, and some legal professionals remain limited. Efforts to educate stakeholders about their rights and available remedies have been sporadic and insufficient. For example, legislative provisions emphasize the need for children to be informed of their rights, but practical implementation is insufficient. Moreover, the infrastructure supporting the enforcement of children's rights needs improvement. Independent complaint mechanisms are underdeveloped for reporting rights violations safely and confidentially. Consequently, the lack of effective complaint channels and feedback mechanisms lead to underreporting and unresolved violations. The National Strategy on Human Rights 2020-2025, which includes child protection measures, highlights the need to establish effective complaint mechanisms, but related progress has been slow.²¹

The Commissioner of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Children's Rights (Children's Ombudsperson) plays a crucial role in ensuring children's rights are protected and upheld. This institution monitors compliance with child protection laws, handles complaints of children's rights violations, and advocates for policy improvements.²² The Children's Ombudsperson provides an accessible mechanism for children and their representatives to report abuses and seek justice, promoting a child-friendly approach

19 Republic of Uzbekistan, Constitution, 1 May 2023.

20 Republic of Uzbekistan. Family Code ([Семейный кодекс](#)). Art. 153.

21 The National Strategy on Human Rights 2020-2025 ([Национальная стратегия Республики Узбекистан по правам человека](#)).

22 Daryo, [Uzbekistan's Senate appoints Surayyo Rahmanova as Ombudsman for Children's rights](#).

in legal and administrative processes. The Children's Ombudsperson collaborates with various governmental and non-governmental organizations to enhance child welfare and ensure children's voices are heard in policymaking. The Children's Ombudsperson requires increased funding, human resources and technical support to effectively fulfil its role in realising children's rights for remedy.

2.7. Business and child rights

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

15. Recalling its general comment No. 16 (2013) and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Committee reiterates its previous recommendations that the State party establish a clear regulatory framework for the business sector, ensure its effective implementation, and appropriately sanction and provide remedies when violations occur.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

In Uzbekistan, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is steadily gaining importance as businesses recognize their potential to foster sustainable development. CSR initiatives can contribute significantly to societal well-being by encouraging businesses to adopt ethical practices, invest in community development, and support initiatives that benefit children and families. By integrating CSR into their core strategies, companies enhance their reputations and drive positive social change, aligning their operations with global sustainability goals and ensuring a better future for the next generation.²³

Regrettably, implementing CSR in Uzbekistan is challenging. **A primary hurdle is the lack of awareness and understanding of CSR among business leaders and employees.** Many companies remain focused on profit maximization and may not see the value in investing in CSR initiatives. Resources and expertise are also often scarce to develop and execute effective CSR programmes. There is a broad recognition of the importance of supporting the realization of children's rights, including eliminating child labour. Still, the extent of business involvement remains limited to donations and support for various charity events for children.

23 UNICEF, '[Children are Everyone's Business: Workbook 2.0](#)', Second edition, August 2014.

A photograph of a baby being held by a healthcare professional. The baby is looking towards the camera. The healthcare professional is wearing a white cap and a blue uniform. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The text '3.1. Health and nutrition' is overlaid on the image in white font.

3.1. Health and nutrition

3.1. Health and nutrition

Over the past five years, Uzbekistan has made notable strides in improving its health care system, with a particular focus placed on the health and well-being of children and adolescents. This progress is grounded in the country's constitutional commitment to the right to health, ensuring that health services are accessible to all citizens.²⁴ These reforms to the health care system will help the country ensure healthier lives for children (CRC 24), improved well-being (CRC 39) and healthy development (CRC 6).

Sub-domain 3.1.1. Health system

The government provides a basic package²⁵ of health services, which includes primary health care, emergency care and treatment, medicines, treatment of socially-significant and dangerous diseases, and specialised treatment for population groups classified by the state as being particularly vulnerable.²⁶

One of the most significant indicators of progress in Uzbekistan's health care system is the improvement in its Universal Health Coverage (UHC) index. The UHC index measures how well a country provides essential health services to its population without causing financial hardship. Since 2000, Uzbekistan's UHC index has increased by 20 points, reaching a score of 75 in 2021.²⁷ This significant rise shows that Uzbekistan has greatly improved the accessibility and quality of its primary care. Among Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan now ranks second in terms of UHC, highlighting the effectiveness of its primary care reforms.

In 2021, Uzbekistan introduced a state health insurance programme and approved a national 2030 strategy.²⁸ This strategy aims to address the primary causes of early death and to boost life expectancy from 74.4 years in 2023²⁹ to 78 years by 2030. A key element of this plan is the emphasis on primary health care, which is expected to meet 70 per cent of the population's medical needs. By focusing on primary care, the government hopes to ensure healthier lives for children, improved well-being, and overall development, in line with goals set forth in the CRC.

Despite these system-level advancements, the financing of the health care system is insufficient to address the needs of the growing population and vulnerable groups of children and adolescents. Although the government has agreed to double health care financing by 2030,³⁰ the share of the public health budget within total government expenditure has been declining since 2020 (see Graph 3.1.1. below). Furthermore, out-of-pocket payments continue to represent a significant financial risk for the population,

24 [Republic of Uzbekistan, Constitution](#), 1 May 2023, art. 40.

25 Republic of Uzbekistan, Law No. 265-I '[On protection of Public Health](#)' ([«Об охране здоровья граждан»](#)), 29 August 1996, III, arts. 29–32.

26 Ministry of Health (2018). Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV and Syphilis: Situation Analysis.

27 The World Bank (2024). [UHC service coverage index, 2021](#).

28 [Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, No.DP-5590 'On comprehensive measures for radical improvement of the Healthcare system of the Republic of Uzbekistan'](#), Tashkent, 7 December 2018.

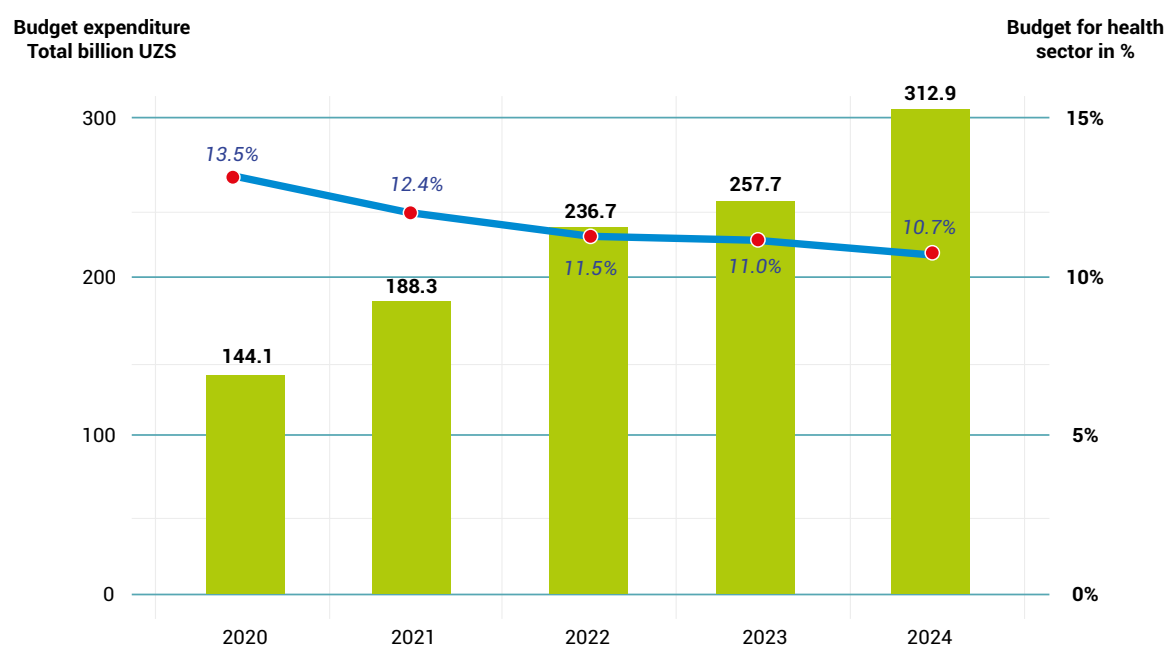
29 [Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No.DP-300 'On measures to implement the Strategy 'Uzbekistan – 2030' in 2023 within the established time frame'](#), Tashkent, 11 September 2023.

30 SDG Summit 2030. [National Commitments of Uzbekistan to the Transformation of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030](#).

with more than 60 per cent of health care spending coming directly from patients.³¹ This financial burden disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including children and adolescents from poor families, often denying them access to necessary services and infringing on their rights.

The impact of health care expenses on poor households can be profound. In 2018, nearly 14.4 per cent of households in Uzbekistan have incurred catastrophic health expenditures.³² The illness or death of a household member can lead to significant economic shocks, further impoverishing children who lose parents or primary caregivers. This situation often results in children dropping out of school and engaging in risky behaviours.

Graph 3.1.1. Budget expenditures, total and on health care, by percentage, 2020-2024



Source: Open Budget portal of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

A significant challenge in achieving equitable health care access is the disparity across different socio-economic groups. In the lowest socio-economic quintile, 55 per cent of the population have unmet health needs. The stark contrast in unmet health needs – 38 per cent and 37 per cent in the fourth and fifth quintiles³³ respectively – highlights the significant inequality in health care access. Another 7.5 per cent of multidimensionally poor children aged 0-17 years have been ill in the last three months, and could not obtain the medicine they needed due to lack of money.³⁴ The poorest segments of the population are much more likely to lack necessary health care compared to their wealthier counterparts, reflecting how financial constraints and resource limitations disproportionately affect the most vulnerable.

31 World Bank (2021). [World Development Indicators. Out-of-pocket expenditure – Uzbekistan. 2021.](#)

32 World Bank (2022). "Uzbekistan Public Expenditure Review. Better Value for Money in Human Capital and Water Infrastructure", World Bank, Washington, D.C., pp. 58-59.

33 Ibid., p. 56. Quintiles divide the population into five equal groups based on income, with the first quintile representing the poorest 20 per cent and the fifth quintile representing the wealthiest 20 per cent.

34 CERR and UNICEF Country Office in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan Multidimensional Child Poverty Report 2023. p. 12.

Over recent years, Uzbekistan has made significant efforts to enhance its health care system, particularly focusing on children and adolescents. Despite these efforts, several system level challenges remain, particularly in maternity care and primary health care facilities, hindering the realization of children and mother's rights to access quality health care.

The quality of care and service delivery is often affected by insufficient competencies of **medical workers in primary health care facilities and maternity hospitals. Many of them lack effective interpersonal communication skills.** This deficiency hinders their ability to support health education and behaviour change, which are crucial for improving health outcomes, including immunization rates and breastfeeding practices.

Another significant challenge is the **outdated health information system, which lacks the capacity to monitor performance of the health care system effectively.** This shortfall means that data-driven actions to address performance gaps are limited. Without timely and accurate data, the health care system struggles to support assessment and planning, which are critical for continuous improvement and resource allocation.

To address these challenges, the government has been working on several initiatives. Efforts are underway to update policies related to midwifery services to ensure there are more appropriate staffing levels, that can provide adequate care. Training programmes are being implemented to improve the interpersonal communication (IPC) skills of health care workers, equipping them with the necessary skills to educate patients and encourage positive health behaviours. However, it should be noted that while some elements of social and behavioural changing interventions such as the development of IPC skills have been initiated, **behaviour change communication is not yet established at the system level as a concept or function.**

Currently, investments in modernising health information systems are being prioritised. The goal is to develop a robust health information infrastructure that can support data collection, monitoring, and analysis. This will enable the health care system to take evidence-based actions to improve its performance, and more effectively meet the population's health needs.

Sub-domain 3.1.2. Maternal, newborn and child health

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

38(b) Establish a maternal and perinatal death surveillance, analysis and response system, address irregularities in reporting stillbirths in a systemic rather than punitive manner, and publish data on the causes of mortality.

Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

38(a) Pursue its efforts to further reduce neonatal, infant, under-five and maternal mortality rates, including by improving the quality of and access to prenatal and

postnatal services and facilities, and early identification and intervention and screening programmes;

38(d) Strengthen tuberculosis prevention and care, with particular attention to children.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

The population of Uzbekistan is growing rapidly, with approximately one million children born each year, corresponding to a current total fertility rate of 3.3.³⁵ However, the health system's capacity remains designed to cater for only 600,000 births annually. This mismatch has contributed to a **fourfold increase in childbirth complications over the past five years, particularly in the densely populated eastern regions.**³⁶ Furthermore, the maternal mortality rate has stagnated since 2010, with only a 6 per cent decrease, and remains three times higher than the average for Europe and Central Asia.³⁷ Leading causes of maternal mortality, such as bleeding, sepsis and eclampsia, have doubled since 2013.

In response to these challenges, Uzbekistan opened 46 inter-district perinatal centres in 2022 and allocated 7,500 positions for midwives and patronage nurses at the primary level,³⁸ focusing on recent graduates who require further capacity building. Despite these efforts, **alarming mortality rates among newborns and their mothers persist**, stemming from limited health worker capacity, obsolete medical equipment, and the prevalence of corruption.³⁹ These issues collectively undermine the health service delivery system's performance.

Groups experiencing deprivations and their causes

Mothers and children affected by the lack of mothers' autonomy in reproductive health care decisions

The WHO recommends a minimum 24-month birth-to-pregnancy interval, or a 33-month interval between two consecutive births, to optimize maternal and newborn health. However, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) revealed that more than half (59 per cent) of women experience the onset of pregnancy within just two years of a previous birth. This can be attributed to dominant social norms, lack of awareness, and lack of access to and insufficient use of contraceptive methods postpartum.

The provision of care and protection of sexual and reproductive rights for adolescents and young people remains a significant gap in Uzbekistan's health care services. Among married women aged 18-19, one in ten has an unmet demand for family planning. Alarming, **only one-quarter of these young women make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use, and reproductive health care.** There is a

35 United Nations Population Division. [World Population Prospects: 2024 Revision](#).

36 Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

37 World Health Organization (2019). [Trends in maternal mortality 2000 to 2017: estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and the United Nations Population Division: executive summary](#). World Health Organization.

38 [Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No.RP-216 'About strengthening protection of maternal and childcare in 2022-2026'](#). Tashkent. 25 April 2022.

39 UNFPA. Assessment of primary health and patronage services in the field of health protection for women of reproductive age. Tashkent, 2022.

discrepancy between different legislations of Uzbekistan as well. According to the Family Code the age of consent for marriage is 18 years for both men and women, while the Criminal Code sets 16 years for engaging in sexual relations (with parental consent required for accessing reproductive health services).

Children dying from preventable causes

Infant and child mortality rates in Uzbekistan vary according to different data sources, including the UN Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (IGME), official statistics, and survey data (see Table 3.1.2.1. below). However, all sources agree that the country has made positive strides in improving key child survival and development indicators. Despite this progress, the survival rate of babies in the first 28 days of life remains a significant concern. Of all deaths of children under five, 57 per cent occur within the first 28 days, with three-quarters of these neonatal deaths happening in the first week.⁴⁰

There are significant regional disparities in neonatal mortality rates, with the Republic of Karakalpakstan, the Andijan, Khorezm, Navoiy and Syrdarya regions, and Tashkent city, all experiencing higher rates than the national average. **The leading causes of neonatal mortality in Uzbekistan include premature birth, infections, asphyxia/trauma, and congenital anomalies.**⁴¹

Table 3.1.2.1. Children mortality rates indicated by different sources

	UN Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (IGME)			Official (State Committee on Statistics)			2021-2022 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)	
	2022	2017-2021	2012-2016	2022	2017-2021	2012-2016	2017-2021	2012-2016
NMR	7.6	8.8	12.0	4.5	6.6	6.8	17.0	12.0
IMR	11.9	13.9	19.3	8.7	9.9	10.6	22.0	20.0
U5MR	13.3	15.6	21.7	11.4	13.0	14.1	25.0	24.0
MR 5-14 years old	3.0	5.0	4.0	Not available			Not available	

Despite achieving a high percentage of antenatal care coverage (98 per cent)⁴² at the primary health care level, the quality of this care remains insufficient. Antenatal services are often organised sub-optimally, leading to the late detection of communicable and non-communicable diseases in pregnant women, with many cases only being identified at childbirth. Cultural factors within Uzbekistan may further complicate the timely diagnosis and management of these conditions. Further studies are needed to understand the social and behavioural factors that might be influencing this phenomenon.

40 UNIGME-2023-[Child Mortality](#).

41 [Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan](#).

42 State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2022. 2021-2022 Uzbekistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, Survey Findings Report. Republic of Uzbekistan, Tashkent.

Among children aged 0-14 years, the top five leading diseases in 2022 were conditions originating in the perinatal period, respiratory diseases, gastrointestinal diseases, blood diseases, and some infectious and parasitic diseases. Notably, the incidence of perinatal conditions has dramatically increased since 2019, rising from 945 cases per 100,000 children aged 0-14 years to 1,402 in 2022.

Children exposed to climate change and negative environmental impacts

Climate change has significantly impacted the health of children in Uzbekistan, particularly in regions like Karakalpakstan. Between 2021 and 2022, the number of congenital anomalies in Karakalpakstan doubled compared to other regions, with numbers of cases rising from 500 to 1,205. This alarming trend suggests that there is a further need to investigate correlation between environmental factors and adverse health outcomes in children.

Uzbekistan is also highly susceptible to natural disasters, including earthquakes, flooding and droughts, which further exacerbate health risks for vulnerable populations, especially mothers and children. The compounded effects of climate change and frequent natural disasters create a precarious environment that threatens the well-being of future generations.

Given these concerning trends, it is crucial to gather more evidence and data to comprehensively assess the impact of climate change and environmental factors on maternal and child health in Uzbekistan. Further research is needed to understand the specific mechanisms by which climate change affects health outcomes. This information will help inform policy decisions and improve health care strategies, ultimately safeguarding the health of mothers and children across the nation. Understanding the broader environmental influences on health is essential for developing effective interventions and ensuring the well-being of future generations.

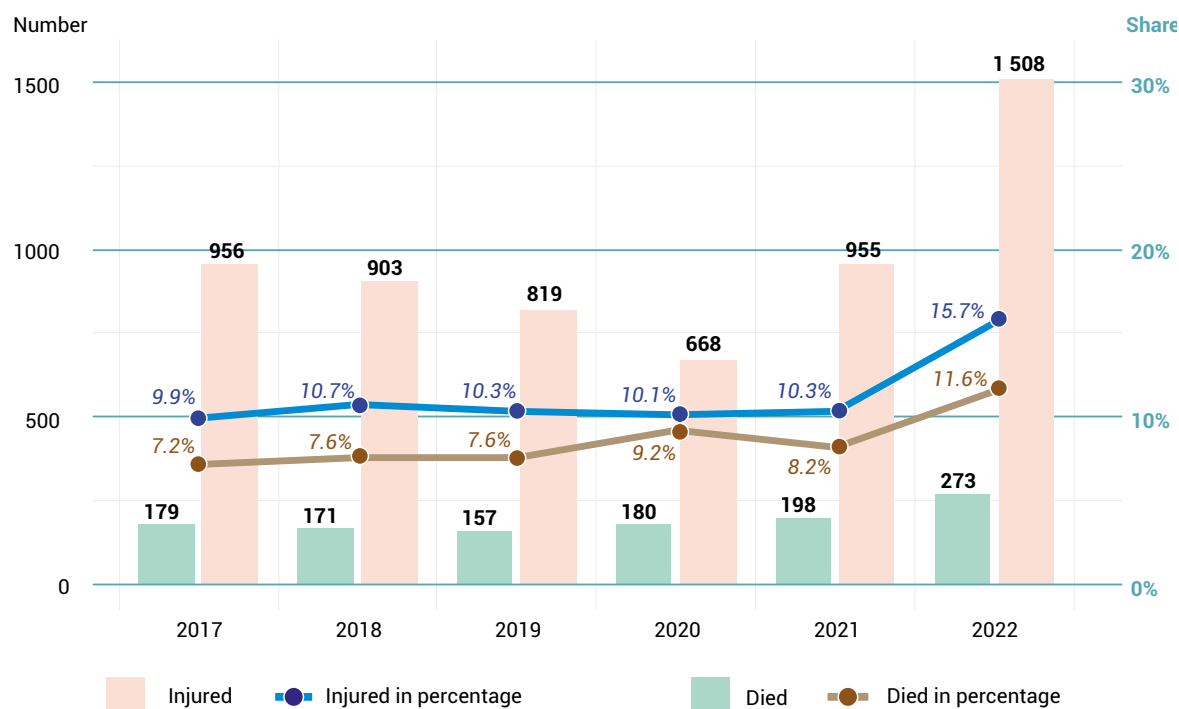
Children and adolescents involved in road accidents

In Uzbekistan, the number of road accidents and fatalities remains alarmingly high, exceeding the EU's annual average by more than 45 per cent. These figures result in significant economic costs, with estimates ranging from 2.6 per cent to 3.8 per cent of the GDP, depending on the data source. With almost two fatal accidents occurring per day, traffic accidents rank among the top five causes of death in Uzbekistan. They are the leading cause of death for individuals aged 5 to 29 years, and the second leading cause of death among adolescents.

Over the past four years, both the number of fatalities and injuries from road accidents have unfortunately increased. From 2019 to 2022, the number of injuries rose by 21 per cent, from 7,924 to 9,606, and fatalities increased by 14 per cent, from 2,067 to 2,356. In 2022, the highest percentage of fatalities were among drivers and passengers (51 per cent), followed by pedestrians (36 per cent) and bicyclists (11 per cent).⁴³ The impact on children and adolescents is particularly concerning as Graph 3.1.2.1. depicts. The number of deaths among those aged 0-16 due to road traffic injuries increased by 52 per cent, from 180 in 2020 to 273 in 2022.

43 UNECE, UNICEF, Road Safety Performance Review: Uzbekistan. 2024.

Graph 3.1.2.1. Number and share of children aged 0-16 years killed and injured in road accidents, from 2017 to 2022



Source: UNECE, UNICEF, Road Safety Performance Review: Uzbekistan, 2024.

Children at risk of having congenital defects

Consanguineous marriages are a contributing factor in transmitting congenital defects across generations, increasing the risk of postnatal mortality.⁴⁴ Although the Family Code prohibits consanguineous marriage in the country, 16 per cent of women, primarily residing in the Surkhandarya region, were involved in such unions.⁴⁵

Sub-domain 3.1.3. Immunization and vaccination

Immunization and vaccination are critical components of public health, playing a pivotal role in protecting children from preventable diseases. Effective vaccination programmes have been instrumental in controlling and even eradicating diseases that once caused significant morbidity and mortality among children. In Uzbekistan, a successful vaccination campaign halted a measles outbreak in 2021 and 2022 among children aged 0-14 years, showcasing the importance of sustained immunization efforts.

As per official data every year approximately 2,500 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer in Uzbekistan, and over recent years its prominence has increased from 13.2 per 100,000 women in 2019 to 15.3 in 2022. Unfortunately, each year over 585 women die from cervical cancer in the country, although many of these fatal cases could have been prevented. Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus that can cause almost six

44 Bağcı N, Pamukçu U, Altunkaynak B, Peker İ. Dental anomalies in consanguineous marriage: A clinical-radiological study. *Int Dent J.* 2022;72:133–40.

45 Assessment of primary health and patronage services in the field of health protection for women of reproductive age'. p. 14.

different types of cancers in the later years of life. Cancer development takes years, often decades, to show up after a person gets infected with HPV. According to the Ministry of Health, 94 per cent of girls in Uzbekistan aged 12–14 years are now covered with a first dose of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine. The HPV vaccine was first introduced into the national immunization plan in 2019, with the help of WHO and UNICEF, in order to protect girls in the country against cervical cancer.

In an effort to improve vaccination monitoring, Uzbekistan launched the web-based COVID-19 electronic immunization registry 'emlash.uz' in 2021 to track COVID-19 vaccinations and issue certificates. In 2022 and 2023, with support from UNICEF, USAID, WHO, and GAVI, the information system was upgraded to manage routine vaccination initiatives and related logistics more effectively. The upgraded system is now linked to the one-stop state portal for electronic services (my.gov.uz) and the Civil Registry. The widespread use of electronic tools helps to consistently enhance decision-making and policy-making processes.

Groups experiencing deprivations and their causes

Children missing out on immunization

Despite official statistics showing 99 per cent vaccination coverage, there are approximately 9,000 zero-dose children in the country. One out of five children are not vaccinated against Hepatitis B within one day after birth, and 4 per cent of children have not received the vaccine at all.⁴⁶ According to different surveys, only half of children (45 per cent) under one year of age have been vaccinated against measles-mumps-rubella, causing the aforementioned outbreak of measles in 2019-2020 and chicken pox during the past five years. These outbreaks raise concerns about immunization coverage and the timeliness of follow-up doses within the nation.

According to the national vaccination calendar, children should receive the third dose of vaccines against pneumococcal (PCV) and rotavirus diseases by one year of age. However, coverage for these vaccines is inefficient in Uzbekistan. Around 40 per cent of children aged 2-3 years did not receive their last PCV vaccination on time, and 91 per cent missed their rotavirus vaccine. This shortfall likely contributes to the high prevalence of respiratory infections and gastrointestinal diseases among children.

Low immunization rates are caused by vaccine hesitancy, poor communication from healthcare workers, and difficulties in maintaining the vaccine cold chain. Recently conducted behavioural insight studies on childhood immunization highlighted the importance of vaccine safety perception and vaccine related knowledge as the most important psychological drivers of parental vaccine-behaviour. Health care workers' quality of communication regarding vaccine recommendation is a significant social driver influencing parents' decision to vaccinate their children. Promoting trustworthy sources of information also seems to be important as these findings highlight that vaccine-accepting parents rely more on official sources of information, like family doctors.

46 2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS, p. 127.

Key psychological drivers for promoting vaccination among health workers include their perception of vaccine efficacy, trust in the information sources about vaccines, and their motivation to advocate for vaccination. To address vaccine hesitancy and misinformation among parents, thereby fostering higher vaccination uptake rates. System support in the form of guidelines and training for childhood vaccination promotion related to both vaccine promotion and vaccine hesitant behaviour, implying that present support may be inadequate for health care workers.

Older parents and those living in rural areas were more likely to be accepting of timely vaccines. Parents living in Tashkent city were less likely to be vaccine-accepting than those from the Andijan, Bukhara, Jizzakh, Kashkadarya, Navoi, Namangan, Samarkand, Syrdarya, Fergana, and Khorezm regions.

According to the latest MICS, almost half (41 per cent) of respondents are concerned about potential adverse reactions to vaccines, particularly in rural and hotter regions where maintaining the cold chain can be challenging. In terms of social influences on vaccination intention, the most influential social agents were family members and health care providers. The least influential social agents were friends, other parents, community members, and religious leaders. On the supply side, findings suggest that the role of descriptive norms in shaping health care workers' vaccination behaviour may be complex and require further exploration. In Uzbekistan, nearly half (44.7 per cent) of parents or caregivers believe that religious leaders support the importance of vaccinating children, indicating the potential for positive influence through religious and community leaders.⁴⁷

Sub-domain 3.1.4. Nutrition

UN CRC recommendations:



Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

38(f) Improve the micronutrient deficiency status of women and children, and address child malnutrition and growing trends in overweightness and obesity, including by providing access to qualified child health professionals, establishing a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the State's nutrition programmes across the country, promoting healthy lifestyles and physical activity, promoting, protecting and supporting breastfeeding, and implementing the baby-friendly hospital initiative.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

Proper nutrition is crucial for the growth and development of children, because it significantly impacts their physical health, cognitive development, and overall well-being.

According to UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank, and the Group Joint Malnutrition Estimates (2023 edition), the past decade has seen significant improvements in child nutrition in Uzbekistan. Notably, the proportion of children suffering from stunting has decreased by

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 181.

nearly half, from 13.2 per cent in 2012 to 6.9 per cent in 2022. Similarly, the prevalence of overweight children has dropped from 7.7 per cent in 2012 to 4.2 per cent in 2022. Additionally, the prevalence of wasting stands at 2.4 per cent, which is considered to be very low prevalence.⁴⁸

The prevalence of anaemia among women aged 15-49 and children under five years old in Uzbekistan remains a significant concern. According to data from the World Bank and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), in 2019, approximately 23 per cent of women in this age group were affected by anaemia. Similarly, around 21.9 per cent of children aged 6-59 months are affected by anaemia. This condition is primarily driven by nutritional deficiencies, particularly iron deficiency, which is the most common cause of anaemia globally. Other contributing factors include poor dietary diversity, infections, and overall poor health conditions.

These concerns are further validated by data showing that 8 per cent of children are deprived in the nutrition dimension. These children either live in households experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale standards, or do not consume healthy food according to the Dietary Diversity Score standards. Specifically, they consume less than four of seven food groups (grains, roots and tubers; legumes and nuts; dairy products; meat and fish; eggs; vitamin A foods and fruits, and vegetables).⁴⁹

In Uzbekistan, significant disparities in nutritional status are observed based on regional and socio-economic factors. Being underweight and wasting are concerns most prevalent among infants under six months old, particularly in Uzbekistan's western and southern regions. As children grow to 1-2 years of age, overweight issues become more common, especially in the central and central-eastern regions.⁵⁰ By the time children reach kindergarten age (3-5 years), stunting becomes a prominent concern, primarily affecting those in Uzbekistan's western and eastern regions.

Children under five from the southern region of Uzbekistan exhibit high rates of being underweight, wasting, being overweight, and stunting. These issues are likely linked to the region's high poverty rate (at 16 per cent), which is higher than the national average.⁵¹ Meanwhile, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months significantly decreases the likelihood of undernutrition (including stunting and wasting) and of obesity and being overweight later in childhood.

Groups experiencing deprivations and their causes

Children who do not benefit from exclusive breastfeeding

Exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) is crucial for the health and development of infants, providing essential nutrients, strengthening the immune system, and reducing the risk of infections. The WHO has set a global target to increase the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding to 70 per cent by 2030. However, in Uzbekistan, only 40 per cent of

48 UNICEF, WHO, World Bank Group Joint Malnutrition Estimates, 2023 edition.

49 Uzbekistan Multidimensional child poverty report, 2023|MODA, CERR, UNICEF, p. 15.

50 2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS', p. 171.

51 Center for Economic Research and Reforms (CERR) and UNICEF, Child Monetary Poverty in Uzbekistan Report, 2024, p. 19.

newborns are breastfed within the first hour of birth, with significantly lower rates among the poorest households, which are half the national average.⁵²

Despite the adoption of legislation in 2019 to support breastfeeding, its enforcement remains limited as Uzbekistan, which covers less than half of the provisions of the Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (BMS), with a score of 43 which ranks at fourth place among Central Asian countries. As a result, the EBF rate has decreased by 25 per cent compared to 2017, with only one-quarter of infants aged 0-5 months being exclusively breastfed. This decline is concerning because infant formula and other breastmilk substitutes can be life-threatening in settings where hygienic conditions and safe drinking water are not readily available.

Women of reproductive age and pregnant women who experience anaemia

Proper nutrition for women of reproductive ages and pregnant women is vital for the health of both mother and baby. Adequate nutrition during these critical periods supports healthy pregnancies, optimal foetal development, and long-term health outcomes for children. According to the WHO, iron deficiency anaemia among pregnant women is associated with adverse reproductive outcomes such as preterm delivery, low-birth-weight infants, and decreased iron stores in the baby, which may lead to impaired development. According to official statistics, anaemia among pregnant women has been steadily increasing over the past five years (269,400 cases in 2019 to 287,500 in 2022). Moreover, the incidence of anaemia among infants has been increasing over the past few years.

Adolescent girls in Uzbekistan who face serious nutritional challenges, experience a triple burden of malnutrition: Undernutrition, hidden hunger (lack of essential vitamins and minerals), and being overweight

Although the prevalence of stunting and wasting in Uzbekistan is lower than the regional average, they still present a risk for adolescent health if early nutritional deficits are not addressed.⁵³ These issues not only affect individual adolescents' health and development but also have significant implications for the country's future. Currently one in ten adolescent girls is either underweight or overweight, and 16.5 per cent suffer from anaemia. Alarming, three-quarters of these anaemic girls have iron deficiency anaemia, with iron deficiency rates reaching around 50 per cent.⁵⁴ Iron deficiency anaemia is particularly worrisome because it increases the risk of infections, including COVID-19. Additionally, adolescent girls in Uzbekistan often lack other important nutrients like vitamins A, B12, and folate,⁵⁵ further impacting their health and growth.

Overweight and obesity among adolescents aligns with global patterns of increasing rates of diet-related non-communicable diseases. Nearly 21.8 per cent of adult women and 16.1 per cent of adult men in Uzbekistan are obese, with rates higher than the regional average.⁵⁶

52 2021-2022 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in Uzbekistan. p. 158.

53 [Global Nutrition Report](#).

54 UNICEF. Nutrition report: Uzbekistan. 2019. p. 30.

55 UNICEF. Landscape analysis of adolescent health and well-being in Uzbekistan. 2021. p. 34.

56 [Global Nutrition Report](#).

Children not receiving adequate and quality school meals

School feeding is prominent matter in the Uzbekistan 2030 Development Strategy and the 2030 Health Strategy. Additionally, the Government of Uzbekistan has prioritised the implementation of a comprehensive School Feeding Programme (SFP) aimed at improving primary school students' nutritional status and educational outcomes. Following a successful pilot in 2022 in the Republic of Karakalpakstan and Khorezm regions, where over 276,100 students received free meals, the programme was set to expand nationwide in 2023. This expansion, supported by Presidential Decree,⁵⁷ allocates 2.3 trillion Uzbek soums from the state budget to provide free meals to all primary school students. Despite the political support, the absence of a clear implementation strategy and quality standards raises concerns about the programme's effectiveness and sustainability.

Sub-domain 3.1.5. Adolescent physical, mental and reproductive health

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

39 (a) Adopt a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policy for adolescents and ensure that sexual and reproductive health education is part of the compulsory school curriculum and is targeted at all adolescents, girls and boys, with special attention given to preventing sexually transmitted infections;

39(c) Develop and implement a mental health policy and strategy, with a focus on prevention on developing outpatient services and on addressing emerging mental health issues in children and adolescents, including self-injuries and suicidal behaviour, ensure the availability and accessibility of mental health services and programmes for children and adolescents, increase the availability and accessibility of trained child psychiatrists and child psychologists in all areas, and encourage children to seek mental health services, without stigma.

Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

39(b) Ensure that adolescents have access to modern contraception, confidential testing and HIV treatment;

39(d) Continue its efforts to prevent substance abuse and provide accessible and youth-friendly substance dependence treatment and support services.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

Mental health is crucial for the overall well-being and development of children and adolescents. It influences their emotional, psychological, and social functioning, affecting their ability to handle stress, build relationships, and make decisions. Ensuring

⁵⁷ Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No.DP-27 'On the state programme for the implementation of the development strategy of the new Uzbekistan for 2022-2026' in the 'Year of care for people and quality of education', Tashkent, 28 February 2023.

good mental health in young people is essential for fostering healthy and productive adults.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the mental health of children and adolescents in Uzbekistan. According to official statistics, new cases of mental disorders among children and adolescents (aged 0-17 years) increased from 79 per 100,000 in 2019 to 81 per 100,000 in 2022. A 2021 survey revealed that the leading causes of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) lost among this group were unintentional injuries for boys and mental disorders for girls (aged 10-19 years).⁵⁸

Mental disorders are often comorbid with nervous system diseases, sharing common risk factors and pathogenesis. However, mental disorders can be easily overlooked by neurologists. Despite a reported decrease in the incidence of mental disorders among adolescents (aged 15-17 years) over the past five years (from 208.7 new cases per 100,000 in 2019 to 110.0 in 2022), the incidence of nervous system diseases has increased (from 3,157 per 100,000 in 2019 to 4,199.8 per 100,000 in 2022).⁵⁹

Self-harm and interpersonal violence are significant issues among adolescents, particularly in the 15-19 age group. Over the past three years (2021 to 2023), the number of such cases has doubled, with boys and girls in this age group accounting for the highest share of deaths due to suicide and self-harm (9.8 per 100,000 adolescents). Depression, anxiety, and behavioural disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability in this age group. A comprehensive 2022 study⁶⁰ found that 16 per cent of students experienced social isolation, 15.4 per cent had moderate to severe anxiety, and 9.8 per cent had depression. Additionally, almost 20 per cent of students felt that their school was unsafe due to risky, violent, and discriminatory behaviours of other students. Participants mentioned several risk factors that can worsen adolescents' mental health and psychosocial well-being. The most common risk factors were family conflicts/violence, lack of communication and understanding in the family environment, absence of friendships, superficial friends, unsupportive teachers, academic pressure, bullying, bad school conditions, excessive screen time, poverty, and parents' migration.

The most common barriers to adolescents and parents seeking help were linked to stigma and embarrassment, scarcity of information about school psychologists and other community resources for mental health and psychosocial support, and a lack of trust by both adolescents and their parents regarding psychologists' skills and qualifications.

The 2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS Survey reported that 12.9 per cent of children aged 5-17 years old experience anxiety, and 3.5 per cent 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).

58 UNICEF. Landscape analysis of adolescent health and well-being in Uzbekistan', 2021. p. 27.

59 Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

60 UNICEF. 'Adolescents' mental health and psychosocial well-being at schools'. 2022. p. 47.

Groups experiencing deprivations and their causes

Adolescents who do not have access to quality mental health support

Quality mental health services are essential for the well-being and development of children and adolescents. These services provide the necessary support to help young people cope with emotional, psychological, and social challenges, enabling them to thrive and succeed in various aspects of life. However, in Uzbekistan, there are significant gaps in the provision of mental health and psychosocial support (PSS) services for children and adolescents.

One major gap in Uzbekistan's health care system is the lack of integration between mental health and psychosocial support (PSS) services in schools and the primary health care system. Currently, mental health services provided in schools are not linked with broader health care initiatives, making it challenging to deliver comprehensive care. This disconnect prevents effective detection, referral, and treatment of mental health issues among students.

Additionally, there is a shortage of adolescent friendly health services that offer comprehensive mental health and PSS, leaving many young people without necessary support. This gap highlights the need for better coordination and resource allocation to ensure that mental health services in schools are integrated with the primary health care system, providing a more holistic approach to ensuring student well-being.

A critical issue in Uzbekistan's educational system is the limited availability and effectiveness of psychological support in schools. While school psychologists are present, they are mostly overwhelmed with administrative responsibilities and do not have dedicated hours to interact meaningfully with students and ensure an enabling environment for psychosocial support, as well as facilitating timely referrals to specialized services. Their function is often restricted to conducting various psychological tests rather than offering direct support. Moreover, the working hours of school psychologists typically end when classes finish, making it difficult for students to access support when they need it most.

The coordination among various entities providing mental health services is also insufficient as the National Guard, the Ministry of Preschool and School Education's, and the Ministry of Health's psychologists and psychiatrists all operate without clear functional division of roles and responsibilities. This lack of clarity leads to gaps in service delivery, as responsibilities are not well-defined, and coordination is poor.

Sub-domain 3.1.6. HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS continues to pose a significant public health challenge in Uzbekistan, affecting the well-being of children and adolescents. **In Uzbekistan, HIV is at a concentrated stage and steadily increasing in terms of infection rate, making it the fastest rising HIV epidemic in Central Asia.**⁶¹ The number of people living with HIV (PLHIV) has increased from 31,088 in 2016 to 48,658 in 2023,⁶² with 14 per cent (about 6,600 PLHIV) being

61 UNAIDS. Gender Assessment of the National Response to HIV: Republic of Uzbekistan. 2024.

62 Official data of the Uzbekistan's Republican Center to fight AIDS.

children and adolescents.⁶³ Although there has been a decrease in HIV incidence and AIDS-related deaths among children under 14 years over the past five years, there has been a rise in cases among adolescents aged 15-19 years.

Each year Uzbekistan registers about 3,500-4,000 new HIV cases, with one in four of these cases occurring in young people aged 18-30 years. A significant majority of new infections (79 per cent in 2022) are transmitted via sexual contact, leading to a higher involvement of women in the epidemic. The top five regions in Uzbekistan where PLHIV is prevalent are the city and region of Tashkent, Andijan, Samarkand, and Fergana.⁶⁴

Discrepancies exist between official data and estimates by UNAIDS regarding HIV testing among pregnant women and mother-to-child transmission rates. According to UNAIDS,⁶⁵ 95 per cent of pregnant women were tested for HIV or already knew their HIV status, and the mother-to-child transmission rates were 16 per cent, but in according to the Republican AIDS Center these figures were instead 99 per cent and 0.2 per cent, respectively. However, annually 25-38 new HIV cases were registered among children aged 0-4 years between 2019 to 2022, indicating that the cases occur through pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.

In 2023, the proportion of pregnant women living with HIV receiving effective ARVs for PMTCT, and the proportion of children born to pregnant women living with HIV who had received a virological test for HIV within two months of birth, had both increased. Specifically, the former increased from 57 per cent in 2020 to 66 per cent in 2023, and the latter from 58 per cent in 2020 to 78 per cent, respectively. However, the percentage of children aged 0-14 years living with HIV receiving ART decreased from 44 per cent in 2021 to 24 per cent in 2023.

High unemployment rates drive both international and domestic labour migrations, which have been linked to an increase in HIV prevalence among labour migrants. **The prevalence of HIV among Uzbek migrants increased from 0.01 per cent in 2011 to 0.29 per cent in 2021.** Regions with high migration rates, such as Samarkand, Kashkadarya, and Fergana, also report higher numbers of PLHIV. According to the Integrated Bio-Behavioural Surveillance on HIV among key population groups, in 2023 there was a downward trend in HIV prevalence among IDUs from 5.1 per cent in 2017 to 1.9 per cent, and among FSW from 3.2 per cent to 1.5 per cent.

Young people tend to engage in risky behaviours,⁶⁶ contributing to an increase in new HIV cases among adolescents and young people aged 15-24 years. Compared to 2020, new HIV cases among this group increased by about 40 per cent in 2022 (from 424 to 591 cases).

There is also a low level of awareness of sexual and reproductive health among youth. Although the curriculum for school children on Health Literacy has been revised, and topics on SRH, HIV and STIs were integrated into the general school curriculum, essential topics such as safe sex practices and effective contraception methods are still not adequately covered in class. Surveys reveal that a significant portion of adolescents (25 per cent of those aged 14-19 years) have never received education on reproductive

63 [Uza.uz](https://uza.uz) – 2022.

64 [Uzbekistan's Open Data Portal: Number of people living with HIV.](https://data.uz)

65 [Global AIDS Monitoring and UNAIDS 2024 estimates.](https://www.unaids.org/en/monitoring)

66 Ibid.

health.⁶⁷ Additionally, 49 per cent of boys and 42 per cent of girls aged 18-19 years are unaware of effective contraception methods.⁶⁸ Moreover, 10 per cent of women between 15-24 years of age have comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS. This indicator was lower among young women of 15-19 years of age (at 6.5 per cent).⁶⁹ Also, cultural barriers, gender stereotypes, and national mentality inhibit open discussions about sexuality and sexual health, limiting adolescents' access to vital knowledge on HIV prevention.

Groups experiencing deprivations, and their causes

Adolescents living with HIV who cannot realize their human rights

Adolescents living with HIV face significant stigma and discrimination in their social, educational, and health care environments. According to the MICS survey, 76 per cent of women aged 15-49 believe that children living with HIV should not be allowed to attend school with children who do not have HIV, reflecting deep-seated prejudices. This stigma often results in exclusion from necessary social and educational activities, further isolating these children and adolescents.

Legal and policy barriers prevent adolescents from accessing HIV prevention services without parental consent.⁷⁰ This restriction hinders the expansion of HIV testing, timely medical care, and effective treatment, particularly for those who may be at risk and who wish to seek help confidentially. Over the past 12 months, only 16 per cent of women aged 15-24 have been tested for HIV and know their results, and 10 per cent have comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS, with an even lower figures for girls aged 15-19 years (8.2 per cent and 6.5 per cent respectively).⁷¹

According to the Republican AIDS Center, as of 2022, 88 per cent of people living with HIV (PLHIV) in Uzbekistan knew their HIV status, 80 per cent were receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART), and 79 per cent had their viral loads suppressed, all meaning that the virus was well-controlled and less likely to be transmitted.⁷² However, there is no data about children with viral load. According to UNAIDS, only 24 per cent of children and adolescents aged 0-14 years old living with HIV were on ART. This low number shows there are big gaps in receiving treatment, support, and adhering to treatment plans, which means Uzbekistan will not meet its commitment towards the 2030 Fast Track Targets to end the AIDS epidemic.

67 UNICEF, U-report on reproductive health, 2020.

68 UNICEF, Landscape analysis of adolescent health and well-being in Uzbekistan', 2021, p. 37.

69 2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS', p. 123.

70 Republic of Uzbekistan, Law No. 528 of 11 March 2019 'On Protecting the Reproductive Health of Citizens' ('Об охране репродуктивного здоровья граждан'). Art. 13. Republic of Uzbekistan, Law No.353 of 23 September 2013 'On Countering the Spread of the Disease Caused by the Human Immunodeficiency' ('О противодействии распространению заболевания, вызываемого вирусом иммунодефицита человека (ВИЧ-инфекция)'). Art. 13.

71 '2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS', p. 123.

72 Igamberdiev Bakhrom, 'The situation with HIV infection in the Republic of Uzbekistan and further activities in the field of combating HIV'. PowerPoint presentation. Tashkent, 2023.

Conclusions

The Government of Uzbekistan has a strong political commitment and support for the implementation of health care reforms to ensure that children and adolescents have access to quality basic health services. However, without sufficient investments in Uzbekistan's health system, it will be challenging to achieve the global targets (SDG 3) regarding children's lives and well-being by 2030.

The enabling environment does not promise to provide equitable and quality health care, but it is favourable to ensure coverage of different socio-economic groups, including the most vulnerable groups of children. System level challenges at maternity care and primary health care facilities negatively affect the realization of children and mothers' rights in accessing quality health care, due to limited health worker capacity and obsolete medical equipment. The country needs to address gaps in childhood vaccination coverage and timeliness of follow-up doses. The country's infant, child and adolescent nutrition programmes require the development of a clear implementation strategy and needs assessment. Children and adolescents have the right to quality mental health, access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education, and knowledge of how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. However, WASH infrastructure in schools and health facilities requires additional investment.

In terms of supply, the Ministry of Health is making significant progress in meeting the needs of a growing population and vulnerable groups of children and adolescents. However, the comprehensive and ambitious health reform within Uzbekistan's overall development agenda may require substantial technical support and expertise provided by international partners, to progressively fulfil, protect, and ensure children's rights. As the country's health system transitions to national health insurance and in response to climate change in the region, advanced knowledge, experience, and international support are all needed to overcome potential challenges and achieve sustainable progress for children.

In terms of demand, despite the overall improvements in the lives and well-being of children and adolescents, many children and their parents are in demand of knowledge, equal access to quality health care across socio-economic groups, access to vaccination, reproductive health and HIV prevention services, and access to quality mental health support. Ensuring health financing to accelerate progress, prioritising knowledge and evidence for children, and taking cross-sectoral action between schools, health facilities and mahallas, are all needed to address these gaps.

Recommendations

Ambitious targets need to be tailored based on a country's technical, governance and financial capabilities to ensure achievable progress towards the SDGs. This approach should focus on cross-sectoral interactions, expanding immunization coverage, capacity building of health workers, and ensuring that health reforms are inclusive and accessible to all vulnerable families. By addressing the gaps identified in this chapter, exploring factors contributing to children and adolescents' health and well-being, and making support cross-sectoral and streamlined, Uzbekistan can provide equitable access to and improve quality of health care.

The main recommendations based on this chapter analysis include:

Service delivery

- Ensure children receive proper nutrition to help mitigate long-term developmental issues and promote better overall health. Timely introduction of appropriate, adequate, and safe complementary foods, alongside continued breastfeeding from six months of age, can significantly enhance health and growth outcomes, potentially reducing stunting during the critical first two years of life.
- Improve mothers' parenting practices by actively incorporating the Bebbio mobile parenting app in maternity hospitals, assisting mothers with its installation on mobile phones, and skilling midwives in briefly explaining the application to mothers. This activity should be continued at the primary health care level through establishing schools for parents and/or young families.
- Implement cross-sectoral actions and thoroughly coordinate psychologists' actions from different authorities to provide better psychosocial support services for children and adolescents.
- Strengthen efforts to reach zero-dose children and missed communities through a multifaceted approach that includes improved record-keeping, targeted outreach, active community engagement, and enhanced capacity building for patronage nurses and health workers.

Health workforce

- Increase the capacity of 7,500 midwives and patronage nurses from 46 inter-district perinatal centres by further disseminating a universal progressive patronage model based on the Presidential Decree.⁷³
- Strengthen the interpersonal communication skills of midwives and patronage nurses to effectively conduct confident conversations with mothers, their husbands, and relatives to promote exclusive breastfeeding and effective immunization.

Health information system

- Prioritize investments in modernising health information systems. A clear and transparent universal certification process, building on international best practices for software used in health facilities, should be established to foster quality and innovation through better equal engagement of public and private enterprises.

Financing

- Government health expenditure, at just US\$74 per capita in 2024, is currently too low to fully fund the state-guaranteed benefit package. Uzbekistan should realize its national commitments to transforming Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 (SDG 3.5) to allocate at least 15.4 per cent of general government expenditure to

⁷³ Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, No.RP-4887 'On additional measures to ensure healthy nutrition of the population' ([«О дополнительных мерах по обеспечению здорового питания населения»](#)), 10 November 2020.

health and ensuring health services for vulnerable populations, including children and adolescents.

Leadership/governance

- Outdated policies negatively affect the realization of newborns' and mothers' rights to quality midwifery services, and they should be revised to ensure these are accessible.
- Establish an audit system, composed of diverse national experts, to address maternal, neonatal, infant, and under-5 mortalities across various levels of health care facilities, focusing on prevention.
- Improve regulations on breastfeeding. While there is a law supporting breastfeeding, it is essential to introduce measures to prohibit the promotion of infant formula in maternity hospitals and establish clear restrictions on its widespread distribution.
- While the percentage of children under five affected by stunting, wasting, and overweight in Uzbekistan in 2022 has declined steadily since 2000, continued and enhanced interventions are necessary to maintain and improve this trajectory to achieve 2030 targets for child nutrition. This includes addressing underlying causes such as food insecurity, quality of diets, and nutrition education.⁷⁴
- Adolescents and young people tend to engage in risky and unhealthy behaviours. Accordingly, policies and legislation that reduce the affordability of tobacco, alcohol, and unhealthy foods and beverages should be implemented. A National strategy on adolescent health and well-being for 2024-2028 and a related action plan should be approved, establishing effective cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms coupled with certified social work and psychology expertise to achieve universal health coverage (UHC) for adolescents in the country.
- Introduce mandatory age-appropriate and inclusive education on sexual and reproductive health and rights in school curricula, including education on modern forms of contraception, the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, and the risks of unsafe abortion.

Community engagement

- Concentrate efforts on increasing the education level on a wide variety of contemporary topics, including reproductive health, birth spacing, consanguineous marriages, healthy diet, and other critical matters related to health, not only amongst women but also amongst men. These initiatives can be implemented through community-based organizations and religious institutions.

74 World Health statistics 2024. [Monitoring Health for the SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals](#), WHO, 2024.

A young girl with dark hair in two braids, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, is seated at a desk in a classroom. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. In the background, other children are visible at their desks, and there are green and grey storage cabinets. A semi-transparent blue banner with a decorative pattern is at the bottom of the image.

3.2. Education, leisure, and culture

3.2. Education, leisure, and culture

Sub-domain 3.2.1. Education system

This chapter explores Uzbekistan's progress in realising children's right to education and development over the past five years from both human capital and rights-based perspectives. It highlights the need for strategic investments, robust digital infrastructure, inclusive education practices, and effective teacher professional development to ensure all children, including those with disabilities, receive quality education at all levels. It also emphasises the importance of addressing socio-economic barriers and improving governance and planning within the education sector to foster equitable and inclusive learning environments.

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

43(e) Allocate adequate financial, human and technical resources to improve safety and infrastructure in schools, with particular attention to rural schools attended by large groups of children belonging to minority groups, including by providing adequate heating and lighting, water and sewage services, appropriate sanitation facilities and by upgrading laboratories and information and communication technology classrooms;

43(f) Continue to provide education in the languages of its minority groups and address reports of violations of the right to use minority languages, including in education.

Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

43(b) Strengthen pre-service and in-service training for teachers, and ensure an adequate number of trained teachers in preschools;

43(g) Continue to expand the coverage and capacity and improve the infrastructure and monitoring of preschool education, giving particular attention to rural and remote areas, children with disabilities and children from economically disadvantaged families, establish national standards on early childhood care and qualifications of preschool teachers, and ensure that they receive systematic and appropriate in-service training.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

With positive demographic growth, as discussed in detail in Chapter 2, Uzbekistan's population is expected to reach 40 million by 2028, and over 50 million by 2050.⁷⁵ The share of children in the total population will peak in the second part of the 2020's, when children are set to make up more than 30 per cent of the country's population.

⁷⁵ Kuchera, T, et al, 'Forecasts of demographic development of the Republic of Uzbekistan and its regions until 2050. Basic principles, premises and results of forecasts' ([Прогнозы демографического развития Республики Узбекистан и ее регионов до 2050 года. Основные принципы, предпосылки и результаты прогнозов](#)), Complex Print, Tashkent, 2023.

The demographic increase in Uzbekistan poses a significant challenge to the current educational infrastructure as in 2023, for instance, the annual birth rate was 962,000.⁷⁶

In the 2023/2024 academic year, there were over 6.4 million students in general secondary education, with this number expected to rise to over 8.6 million by 2030.

This surge necessitates substantial investments, including the creation of an additional 620,000 places in preschool and 1.2 million places in general secondary education by 2026. To meet these needs, the New Uzbekistan Vision includes plans to construct over 370 new schools, highlighting the urgency of addressing this educational demand to ensure quality education for all students.⁷⁷ Along with infrastructure upgrading, high-quality and inclusive teaching and learning are essential for national human development and economic growth. Data on learning outcomes suggests that major reforms are needed to improve the quality of teaching and learning, emphasizing that infrastructure improvements must be complemented by enhancements in instructional methods and educational content to truly elevate educational standards and outcomes.

Uzbekistan's education system has navigated significant challenges and adaptations during COVID-19, paving the way for future improvements. During the pandemic, about 96 per cent of students continued their education through various distance learning methods, accelerating the need for robust digital infrastructure and equitable access to technology. This shift underscores that access to technology and digital learning is a major requirement for 21st century education, highlighting the importance of modernizing and expanding digital resources to ensure all students can benefit from these advancements. The crucial role of parents and teachers in supporting students' learning emphasized the importance of increased parental engagement and improved continuous teacher professional development in digital education. This experience also showcased the potential of blended learning models, which combine in-person and online education, highlighting a transformative shift towards integrating digital tools in the educational framework.⁷⁸

As the fiscal deficit is projected to be 4.0 per cent of GDP in 2024, narrowing to 3.5 per cent in 2025, maintaining consistent and sustainable funding levels for education programmes is crucial. The government consistently allocates over 20 per cent of its total expenditure to education, which is in line with the SDG 4 benchmark⁷⁹ (see Graph 3.2.1.1.). This level of funding meets international benchmarks of allocating at least 4-6 per cent of GDP or 15-20 per cent of total public expenditure to education, necessary to meet SDG 4 targets. However, this funding may still be insufficient to ensure access to inclusive, quality education for the growing number of students. Despite progress made with the medium-term expenditure framework, the education sector's effectiveness and efficiency are still hampered by limited capacities in results-based budgeting and sector planning. These limitations lead to inefficiencies, reducing the potential impact of educational investments and the ability to achieve long-term educational goals.

⁷⁶ Agency for Preschool Education, Uzbekistan: Investing for the Future.

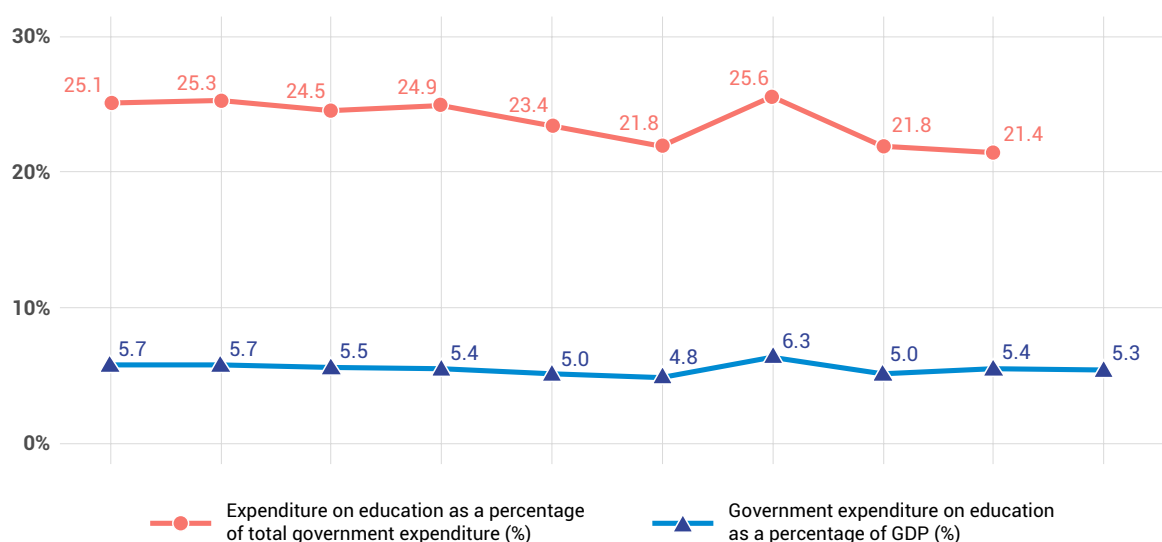
⁷⁷ The Government of the Republic Uzbekistan, [Uzbekistan - 2030 Strategy](#).

⁷⁸ Sankar, Deepa, UNICEF, ['Education Continuity in COVID-19 Pandemic times: Impressions on Introducing Distance Learning in Basic Education in Uzbekistan'](#), Tashkent, Uzbekistan, September 2020.

⁷⁹ Adherence to the international benchmarks of allocating at least 4-6 per cent of Gross Domestic Product and/or at least 15-20 per cent of total public expenditure to education is necessary to meet SDG 4 targets. There is a need for more efficient and equitable resource allocation and improved accountability in expenditure achieved including through legislation. See, [Review of SDG implementation and interrelations among goals, Discussion on SDG 4 – Quality education](#).

The current number and distribution of schools results in students studying in two or three shifts daily. This situation, which has been confirmed by key informants, arises from rapid population growth and increased demand for educational facilities, which the existing infrastructure struggles to accommodate. Consequently, students have shortened class time which impacts their education's quality. The double or triple-shift system also strains teachers and resources, exacerbating existing challenges within the education sector. These challenges highlight the need for strategic investment in educational infrastructure to maintain pace with demographic changes, and ensure all students receive a quality education.

Graph 3.2.1.1. Government expenditures on education, percentage of GDP and total government expenditure



Source: UNESCO.

Infrastructure issues across the education system frequently include inadequate heating and lighting, insufficient water and sewage systems (WASH), and a lack of proper sanitation facilities. More information can be found in sub-domain 3.5.3 Water and sanitation.

Expanding access to digital learning and **Information and Communication Technology (ICT) remains crucial.** According to the International Telecommunication Union, 76.5 per cent of children 14 years and younger, and 93.9 per cent of individuals aged 15-24, used the Internet in 2022 in Uzbekistan.⁸⁰ Although 94 per cent of schools have access to the Internet and 47 per cent have computers for educational purposes,⁸¹ access to the Internet in schools, particularly in rural areas, does not necessarily ensure that students receive proper training on how to use ICT in their studies. This disparity means that many students in rural areas often miss out on crucial digital literacy skills that are increasingly important for their academic and professional futures in the modern world.

80 International Telecommunication Union, 'DataHub: Uzbekistan'.

81 'Ministry of Preschool and School Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 'Uzbekistan Partnership Compact for Education Reform', Tashkent, Uzbekistan, March 2023, p. 81.

Sub-domain 3.2.2. Education access and participation

UN CRC recommendations:



Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

43(a) Ensure equal and non-competitive access to quality education for all children, with particular attention to girls, children from poor families, children in rural and remote areas and children with disabilities, and also ensure that all children remain in and finish school, including by supporting their transition to secondary schools;

43(c) Implement the concept of development of inclusive education for the period 2021–2025, and ensure that all children with disabilities have access to inclusive education in mainstream schools, ensuring that schools are equipped with trained teachers, accessible infrastructure and teaching materials adapted to the needs of children with disabilities.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan has made positive strides in improving access to education, especially at the preschool level. The Government of Uzbekistan has defined universal preschool enrolment as a national target for its national strategy for New Uzbekistan 2030. **Preschool enrolment has seen remarkable growth, increasing from less than 30 per cent in 2017 to over 73 per cent in 2024, with nearly 2 million children benefiting from preschool education during the 2022-2023 period.** One-year free and compulsory preschool education for 6-year-olds was introduced in 2019 to ensure equitable preparation for primary education. It provides all children with a strong foundation for their educational journey, a policy which has proven to be successful.

Uzbekistan's primary school enrolment was 99 per cent in 2021-2022,⁸² while lower secondary school enrolment was 97 per cent, and upper secondary enrolment was 94 per cent. These statistics highlight challenges in maintaining access and participation in education as children advance through the education system.

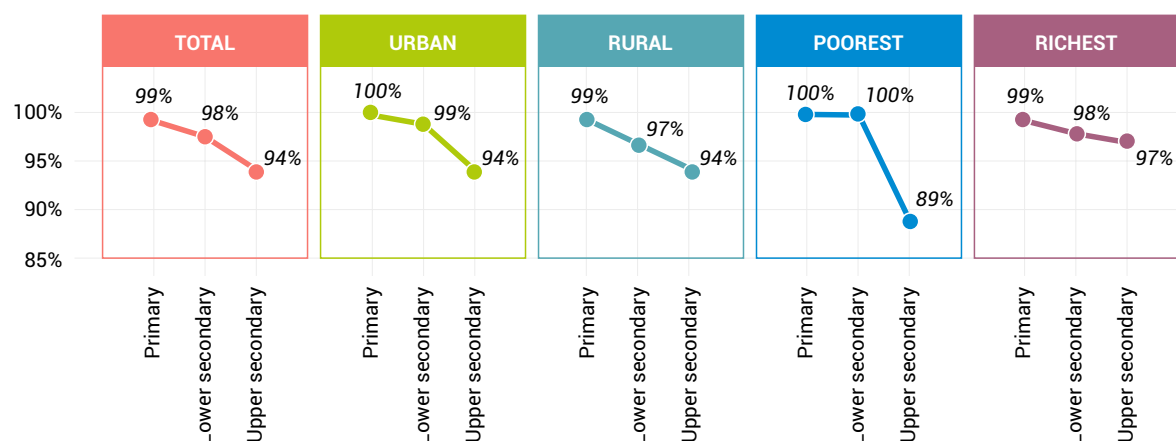
In Uzbekistan, repetition and dropout rates are low, with most children transitioning smoothly from primary to lower secondary, and from lower secondary to upper secondary school. The completion rates are quite high at all levels of education. The completion of primary and lower secondary school is nearly universal, at 99 per cent and 98 per cent respectively. However, the **completion rate for the last two years of compulsory education (such as for upper secondary school) drops somewhat to 94 per cent,** with children from the poorest families standing at 89 per cent (see Graph 3.2.2.1.). The non-transition rate for grade 11 is significantly higher at 70 per cent, indicating that most students do not pursue higher education after upper secondary school.⁸³ According to 2023 data, 1.9 per cent of children aged 8-17 years enrolled in school did not attend school or did not attend a grade appropriate to their age.⁸⁴

⁸² World Bank. 'School enrollment, primary (% gross) – Uzbekistan'. 2023.

⁸³ '2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS', p. 214.

⁸⁴ CERR and UNICEF Country Office in Uzbekistan, 'Uzbekistan Multidimensional Child Poverty Report', 2023.

Graph 3.2.2.1. School completion rates



Source: UNICEF Education Analysis for Global Learning and Equity based on data of the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2021-2022 Uzbekistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, Survey Findings Report.

In order to ensure compulsory access to education, the government deploys the National Guard to monitor and enforce school attendance. This initiative aims to reduce absenteeism by sanctioning families and students. However, there are concerns regarding the appropriateness or effectiveness of this punitive approach. **Addressing school drop-out and absenteeism requires understanding and addressing the root causes behind these issues rather than relying solely on enforcement measures.**

Groups experiencing deprivations and causes

Children with disabilities and special education needs

In Uzbekistan, public opinion still largely supports the medical model of disability, favouring specialised schools as the best setting for children with disabilities and special education needs. Although access to secondary school stands at 99.8 per cent in Uzbekistan, for children with disabilities it is estimated at 84-87 per cent. The inconsistency in applying different definitions related to disability and special education needs, coupled with the underdeveloped Education Management Information System (EMIS), significantly hampers the proper identification and support of children with disabilities. According to key informants, there is no protocol for identifying and supporting children with autism, for instance.

Uzbekistan has made significant strides in inclusive education policy. The Law 'On Education' adopted in 2020 and the Law on 'Preschool Education and Upbringing' adopted in 2019 include definitions of inclusive education, setting a clear legal foundation for its implementation. This milestone is further supported by a Presidential Decree that approved a comprehensive road map for developing inclusive education.⁸⁵ Additionally, the recent Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers has enhanced

85 Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, No. RP-4860 'On measures to further improve the system of education and upbringing of children with special educational needs' («О мерах по дальнейшему совершенствованию системы образования и воспитания детей с особыми образовательными потребностями»), 13 October 2020.

opportunities for children with disabilities to attend regular local schools.⁸⁶ These policy advancements reflect Uzbekistan's commitment to fostering an inclusive educational environment, ensuring that more children with disabilities can participate in mainstream education and receive the support they need. As key informants indicated, the Ministry of Preschool and School Education has been focusing on developing clear standards and guidelines, training educators and administrators, ensuring that inclusive education practices are properly implemented, and enhancing collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other agencies to address the complex needs of children with disabilities. **Despite these efforts, challenges remain in terms of physical infrastructure, learning materials, teaching methodologies, educators' capacities, application of individualised approaches, and guaranteed transportation of children with disabilities to schools.**

At the preschool level, four state multidisciplinary specialised preschool educational opportunities have been established, along with the 'Imkon' (Opportunity) rehabilitation centres in the Nukus, Karshi, and Kibray districts, and the 'Umid' (Hope) centre in Zarafshan. Additionally, there is a state preschool educational organization of a combined type in Tashkent. These institutions are designed to support 650 groups of children with physical or mental disabilities, and currently, 576 groups are serving 6,007 pupils with and without disabilities aged 2 to 7 years. Impressively, 3,153 of these pupils (52 per cent) are children with disabilities. Furthermore, 5,525 pupils (91 per cent) are exempt from parental fees, ensuring that financial barriers do not impede access to quality education and rehabilitation.⁸⁷ These initiatives are commendable starting points in fostering an integrated, inclusive educational environment for children with disabilities at the preschool level, and these models can be reviewed and scaled up nationwide.

The number of children with disabilities in mainstream inclusive schools has increased from 87 in 2021-2022 to 736 in 2023-2024.⁸⁸ As was indicated in the FGD with representatives of NGOs representing persons with disabilities, **the implementation of inclusion practices varies widely and is often inadequate.** Often schools have inclusive classes, but they lack the full integration models needed for true inclusivity, which can further marginalize these children and exacerbate existing inequalities.⁸⁹

Currently, there are no mechanisms to ensure that students with intellectual and developmental disabilities can progress within the general education curriculum with the necessary support. Furthermore, there are no specific assessment criteria for children with special education needs, leading to artificially inflated grades.⁹⁰ Mainstream schools in Uzbekistan lack assistive technologies, and only a few teachers are adequately trained to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Schools are equipped with voice assistants, devices for children with hearing impairments, and computers. Based on the findings from the FGD with children with disabilities, it is evident that while there are strict hiring requirements for teachers in special education schools and a generally good provision of adaptive technologies, significant challenges remain. The most pressing

86 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, No.638 'On approval of regulative acts on teaching children with special educational needs', ([Алохида таълим эҳтиёжлари бўлган болаларга таълим беришга оид норматив-ҳуқуқий ҳужжатларни тасдиқлаш тўғрисида](#)) 12 October 2021.

87 Agency of Preschool Education, Uzbekistan: Investing for the Future, May 2024.

88 Information about organization of inclusive education in preschool and school education system, 2023.

89 'Technical Note on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Uzbekistan' p. 105.

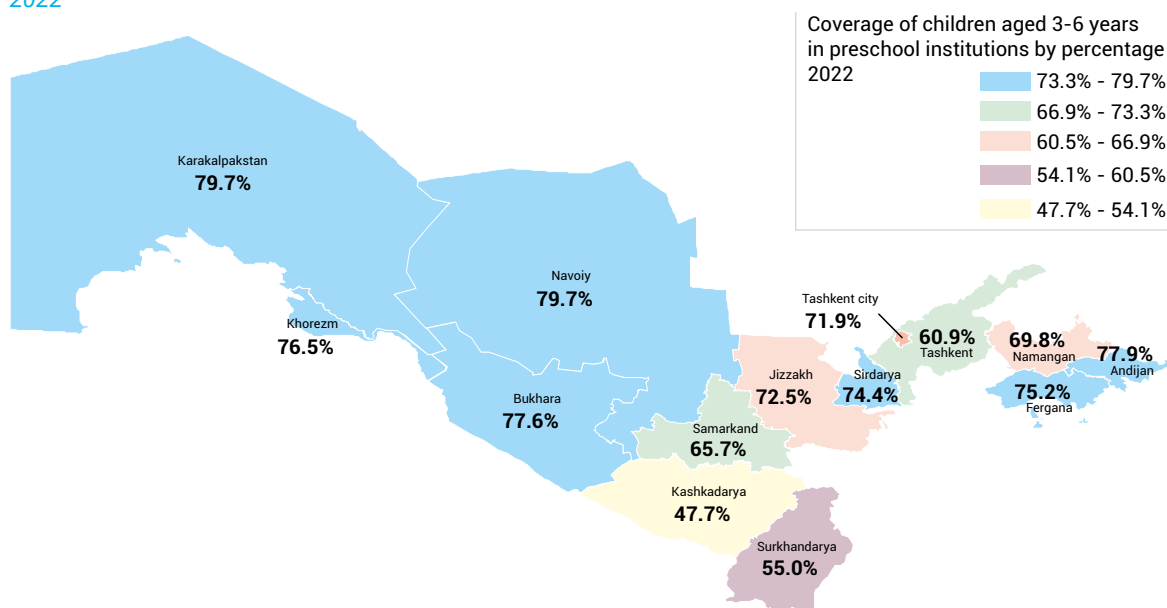
90 Goldie-Scot Matthew, 'In-depth Report on Existing Assessment Practices in Uzbekistan, including Detailed Analysis, and Key Recommendations,' May 2021.

issue is the lack of trained specialists, particularly in teaching and communicating in sign language, which is crucial for deaf children. There is also a notable shortage of audio books in Uzbek language, materials in Braille, and resources translated into sign language. Further analysis of realizing the rights of children and adolescents with disabilities can be found in Chapter 3.6.2.

Children unable to access ECE

Preschool attendance in Uzbekistan is influenced by various determinants, including socio-economic status, parental education, and household size.⁹¹ Enrolment ranges from 71.9 per cent in Tashkent city, to just 47.7 per cent in the Kashkadarya region, as Graph 3.2.2.2. below depicts. Families in remote areas often lack access to early childhood education, and opportunities for children with disabilities remain limited. This highlights the need for targeted interventions to address these educational gaps as public-private partnerships, family-type provisions, and alternative forms of preschool education may not be available for these vulnerable groups. Furthermore, girls aged 36 to 59 months have less access to early childhood education compared to boys (40.6 per cent for girls versus 51.1 per cent for boys). This situation can be attributed to traditional social norms and socio-economic barriers that hinder equal participation for girls.⁹²

Graph 3.2.2.2. Coverage of children aged 3-6 years in preschool institutions by sub-regions, by percentage, 2022



Source: Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
<https://api.stat.uz/api/v1.0/data/3-6-yoshli-bolalarni-maktabgacha-talim-bilan-qa?lang=ru&format=xlsx>.

Increase in preschool attendance is a direct result of increased investments and diversification of ECE provision. The new Preschool Education Law, adopted in 2019, recognized alternative forms of preschool education. This has led to a significant increase in the number of preschools, growing from 27,609 to 35,741 institutions from 2022 to 2024. The number of state preschools increased from 6,379 to 7,067 in the time period, while the number of private preschools rose from 250 to 847. The number of PPP-based preschools slightly increased from 1,313 to 1,405, and family-based

91 Sankar, Deepa, Parents' and caretakers' knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) towards early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Uzbekistan, UNICEF, 2020.

92 '2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS', p. 217.

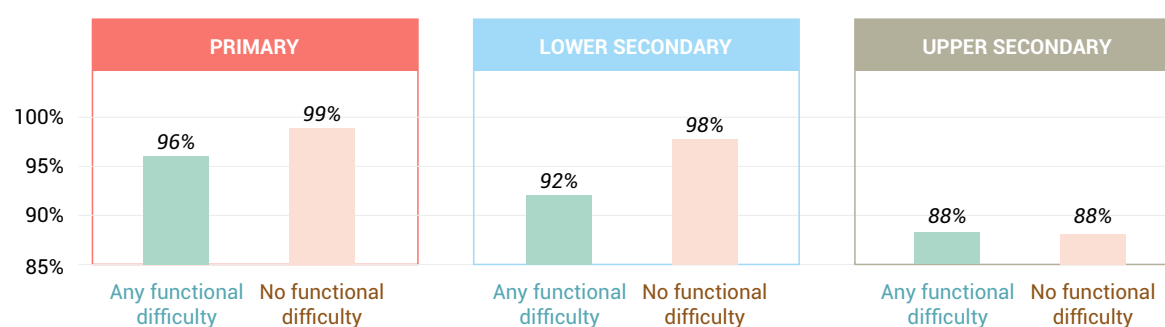
preschools expanded from 20,676 to 26,422. By 2024, 60 per cent of enrolled children were in state preschools, with the remaining 40 per cent attending family-based, PPP-based, and private preschools.⁹³ It is expected that the expansion of ECE would reduce the share of children who are not developmentally on track as measured by the Early Childhood Development Index 2030 (ECDI).⁹⁴ In 2021, 17 per cent of 3- to 4-year-olds were not developmentally on track as measured by ECDI.⁹⁵

Children out of school

School drop-out rates are influenced by various underlying and immediate factors. For example, inconsistent education quality, marked by inadequate infrastructure, lack of trained teachers, and insufficient learning materials, leads to disengagement. Economic pressures are significant, as families struggling with poverty may need their children to work instead of attending school. Additionally, the lack of inclusive education practices for children with disabilities and other vulnerable groups exacerbates drop-out rates, preventing these children from receiving the education they need. Vulnerable groups, such as children from remote areas, children with disabilities and special education needs, and children of Afghan nationals who have fled to Uzbekistan, are disproportionately affected by these educational shortcomings.⁹⁶

As Graph 3.2.2.3. below presents, the school attendance rates of children with functional difficulties (excluding anxiety and depression) lag behind those of children without functional difficulties, suggesting that these children face significant obstacles to regular school attendance. Some girls are also affected by the absence of proper WASH facilities in schools, and are unable to attend school as a result.⁹⁷

Graph 3.2.2.3. Adjusted net attendance rate by functional difficulties excluding anxiety and depression (children aged 5 to 17)



Source: UNICEF Education Analysis for Global Learning and Equity based on data of the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2021-2022 Uzbekistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, Survey Findings Report. Republic of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, 2022.

93 Agency of Preschool Education, Uzbekistan: Investing for the Future, May 2024.

94 The ECDI2030 captures the achievement of key developmental milestones by children between the ages of 24 and 59 months. Mothers or primary caregivers are asked 20 questions about the way their children behave in certain everyday situations, and the skills and knowledge they have acquired. UNICEF, [Early Childhood Development Index 2030](#).

95 2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS', p. 198.

96 Joint Submission of the UN Country Team of Uzbekistan, prepared on the occasion of the Fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Uzbekistan, March 2023.

97 According to MICS 2021-2022, 7.2 per cent of women did not participate in social activities, school or work due to their last menstruation in the last 12 months, which increased to 12 per cent for the poorest wealth quintile. See, 2021-2022 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in Uzbekistan.

Ethnic minorities, including Tajik, Russian, Karakalpak, and Lyuli/Roma children, face unique vulnerabilities within the education system

While school curricula and textbooks are available in seven languages, various factors contribute to lower school attendance among these groups. Data indicates that school attendance rates for Tajik students are at 95.8 per cent, for Russian students at 91.8 per cent, and for Karakalpak students at 96.1 per cent, compared to 97.5 per cent for Uzbek students.⁹⁸ However, data on these groups is minimal and requires further investigation, making it difficult to fully understand the scope of their educational challenges. There is anecdotal evidence suggesting that Lyuli/Roma children, particularly girls, have even lower attendance rates, highlighting their increased educational marginalization.⁹⁹ These disparities underscore the need for further investigation and targeted interventions to ensure equitable access to education for all ethnic minority children in Uzbekistan.

Sub-domain 3.2.3. Learning quality and skills

Despite substantial investments in Uzbekistan's education system, many students continue to miss foundational skills and competencies, impeding their academic progress and future opportunities. These educational gaps often stem from inadequate resources, such as outdated textbooks, insufficient access to digital tools, and the limited capacity of teachers who lack necessary training to deliver effective and inclusive instruction. Addressing these deficiencies is crucial for fostering equitable learning environments in Uzbekistan, and ensuring that all students can thrive and achieve their full potential, thus better preparing them for future academic and professional success.

UN CRC recommendations:



Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

43(d) Regulate private tutoring to make it accessible to all, continue to improve the quality of school education, and enhance gender-sensitive and inclusive teaching practices.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan's Grade 3 and 5 students show solid foundational reading skills in their first language, with notable progress in alphabet knowledge, decoding, and oral reading fluency as they advance in grade levels. However, a decline in reading comprehension from Grade 3 to Grade 5 suggests challenges with more complex texts. Despite strong performances in some language groups, there is a notable dip in comprehension among older students, particularly in non-Uzbek language schools. Compared to neighbouring Central Asian countries, Uzbek students generally perform comparably or better.¹⁰⁰

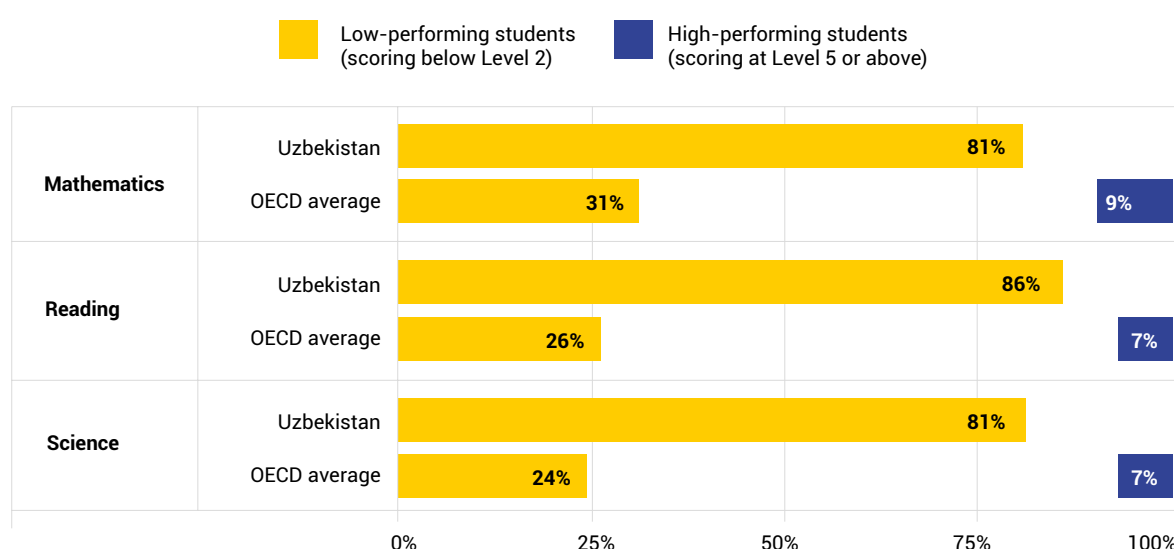
⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 225.

⁹⁹ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

¹⁰⁰ Harden, K., et al., '[Report on the 2021 Uzbekistan National Early Grade Reading and Mathematics Assessments](#)', USAID, 23 August 2022.

Uzbekistan deserves commendation for its participation in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), demonstrating a commitment to evaluating and improving its educational system on an international scale. In the 2022 PISA assessment, Uzbekistan's debut showed rankings below average in mathematics (72nd place), reading (80th place), and science (80th place). Fewer Uzbek students reached top levels or the minimum proficiency across all subjects, with over 80 per cent falling short of basic competency levels, significantly below the OECD average (shown in Graph 3.2.3.1. below). Gender disparities were noted, with boys slightly leading in mathematics and girls in reading. Additionally, Uzbekistan had one of the lowest rates of fully certified teachers among participating nations.

Graph 3.2.3.1. PISA results: Top performers and low-performing students in mathematics, reading and science for OECD countries and Uzbekistan



Source: OECD, PISA 2022 Database.

Relatively low learning quality and skills are determined by inadequate assessment practices, low teacher quality, and insufficient learning environments.¹⁰¹ The absence of a robust pedagogical tradition informed by formative assessment in Uzbekistan creates significant barriers to achieving educational goals. Formative assessments, which provide continuous feedback to guide and improve student learning, are critical for identifying learning gaps, supporting diverse needs, and boosting student engagement. Without these practices, educators lack insight into student progress, personalised instruction is limited, and overall student motivation can decline, contributing to the aforementioned dropout concerns outlined. In 2019, Uzbekistan launched a curriculum reform for transitioning to a competency-based approach. A National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and a new curriculum for primary school were developed, but the implementation of the new curriculum remains ongoing. Historically, inadequate early childhood assessment practices has left preschool learning uninformed by evidence. The National Preschool Curriculum now includes guidelines for observation skills to ensure formative assessment through everyday activities and play, aligned with developmental

101 World Bank, ['Transforming Public Education for Economic Growth Project', Uzbekistan](#), 2 June 2023.

milestones. New guidelines outlined by the curriculum will help practitioners address developmental delays with child-centred, play-based approaches.

Teacher quality remains a major challenge, with pre-and-in-service training programmes being outdated and non-selective, thus often attracting students who view teaching as a last resort. Out of the total number of 525,737 teachers working in general secondary schools (as of September 2023), 459,546 (87.4 per cent) have higher education, 40,693 (7.7 per cent) have unfinished higher education, and 25,498 (4.8 per cent) have specialized high school education.¹⁰² There is abundant international evidence showing that the quality of teachers is a key determinant of student achievement.¹⁰³ The current training model and limited practicum opportunities inadequately prepare teachers. Efforts to improve teacher quality include raising entry standards for pre-service training, revising the certification process, and enhancing the profession's competitiveness through salary increases and promotional campaigns. However, the decentralised and opaque hiring process, coupled with an oversupply of teacher graduates, underscores the need for a more selective and effective training system to attract and retain high-quality educators.¹⁰⁴

Sub-domain 3.2.4. Leisure and culture

The right to leisure and cultural activities is essential for children's overall development, offering numerous benefits such as enhanced creativity, social skills, emotional well-being, and student retention in educational facilities. In Uzbekistan, various initiatives have been undertaken to ensure children have access to these opportunities. Cultural centres and children's music and art schools play a pivotal role in this regard.

Uzbekistan has 837 cultural centres under the Ministry of Culture, with significant efforts made between 2013 and 2023 to construct, repair, and strengthen the material and technical base of 393 cultural centres. Through programmes such as 'Prosperous Village' and 'Prosperous Mahalla,' 64 such cultural centres were renovated over the last ten years. These centres host 3,873 clubs, including studios, courses, culture and art clubs, and 270 courses on foreign languages and speech culture, benefiting 2,712 learners. The establishment of 5,250 culture and art clubs in 2023, in collaboration with secondary schools, highlights the growing engagement of youth in cultural activities. In 2023, 43,919 young people between ages 7 and 30 participated in these activities, generating over 3 billion soums.

Children's music and art schools in Uzbekistan also play an important role, with 325 such schools offering education in 14 disciplines to 90,085 children aged 6 to 16. These schools provide training in piano, string instruments, traditional instruments, academic and pop singing, and more. The government supports these institutions through significant investments into musical instruments and educational materials. However, improving the coverage and quality of these educational opportunities is still a necessity.

Despite these efforts, several challenges remain. Approximately 53 per cent of cultural centres are currently under repair, with 165 needing new buildings. The poor conditions and outdated materials in these centres limit their ability to attract children and young

¹⁰² Data provided by the Ministry of Preschool and School Education.

¹⁰³ World Bank, Education Excellence Towards Human Capital and Economic Growth in Uzbekistan, 2021.

¹⁰⁴ UNICEF, 'Building Effective Teacher Policies of the Republic of Uzbekistan: Priority Areas of Improvement'.

people. Additionally, there are issues related to personnel qualifications, and limited use of public-private partnership mechanisms.

Conclusions

In terms of the enabling environment. Uzbekistan has made significant progress in enhancing education legislation and policies, laying a solid foundation for ensuring access for all pre- and school-aged children to inclusive quality education. The 'Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy' highlights education-specific goals such as increasing preschool and higher education access. This strategic vision is reinforced by the '2020 Education Law',¹⁰⁵ guaranteeing eleven years of free, compulsory education and one year of school readiness.¹⁰⁶ These reforms include formalising internal and external assessments for educational institutions to ensure systematic evaluation and encouraging public-private partnerships to improve academic outcomes. Additionally, a decree also passed in 2020 promotes inclusive education by opening mainstream schools for children with disabilities.¹⁰⁷

The 'Concept for the Development of Public Education in Uzbekistan until 2030'¹⁰⁸ further supports the enabling environment initiatives. It aims to modernize the education system by enhancing educational content, providing continuous teacher professional development, and incorporating modern technologies. The concept also addresses outdated teaching methods, insufficient use of technology, and the need for better infrastructure and funding. Its key goals include improving Uzbekistan's standing in international educational rankings, such as the aforementioned PISA by 2030, meeting the demands of an innovative economy, and increasing the use of modern teaching methods and technologies in schools. The vision includes updated educational content, improved continuous teacher professional development programmes, an emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, and internet connectivity for all schools. All of these efforts combined are fostering a more efficient and transparent education system by 2030.

In terms of supply, the '2023-2026 Partnership Compact for Education Reform' was developed with the support of international partners, with the aim of prioritising and operationalising education reform interventions in Uzbekistan for 2023-2026, ensuring equitable access to quality education. Following the adoption of new preschool and secondary education laws, the Compact seeks to strengthen the coordination and alignment of education reforms. Key focus areas include expanding infrastructure to accommodate an additional 620,000 preschool children and create over 1.2 million school places by 2026, investing in quality, inclusive education, enhancing teacher professional development, and introducing quality assessment and governance for better education results. By strengthening coordination and scaling up cost-effective solutions, the Compact is an evidence-based policy roadmap endorsed by the government and

105 Republic of Uzbekistan, Law No. 637 'On Education' ([«Об образовании»](#)), 23 September 2020.

106 Republic of Uzbekistan, Law No. 595 'On Preschool Education and Upbringing' ([«О дошкольном образовании и воспитании»](#)), 16 December 2019.

107 'On measures to further improve the system of education and upbringing of children with special educational needs'. sect. 4.

108 Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, No.DP-5712 'On approval of the concept for the development of the Public Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030' ([«Об утверждении концепции развития системы народного образования Республики Узбекистан до 2030 года»](#)), 29 April 2019.

development partners designed to ameliorate existing shortcomings in the Uzbek education system.

In terms of demand, to fully achieve these ambitious goals, concerted efforts from all stakeholders are essential. This includes but is not limited to sustained government commitment, active participation from civil society, and continued support from international partners. Ensuring effective implementation of these policies and programmes will be crucial in building a robust educational framework that meets the needs of the growing population, while also fostering a capable and productive future workforce, thereby driving national human development and economic growth.

Recommendations

- Upgrade and ensure optimization of educational infrastructure. In order to accommodate the growing number of students, it is recommended to invest in constructing new schools and upgrading existing facilities. This includes creating an additional 600,000 places in preschool and 1.2 million places in general secondary education by 2026, as outlined in the New Uzbekistan Vision. The government is advised to ensure all educational facilities have adequate heating, lighting, water, and sanitation systems. Furthermore, it is recommended to address the challenge of inconsistent infrastructure management, staffing, and maintenance across schools, which leads to diverse learning experiences and outcomes. To reduce inequities and enhance learning outcomes, resources must be allocated efficiently, through strategic planning and monitoring.
- Increase investment in inclusive education to significantly enhance learning outcomes for students with disabilities and special education needs. Inclusive education practices should be mainstreamed to create equitable learning environments for all students. It is advisable to develop and implement clear standards and guidelines, alongside offering comprehensive training for educators and administrators, to create fully inclusive school environments (rather than just inclusive classes).
- Expand access to quality early childhood education by expanding early childhood education and school readiness programmes, focusing on reaching underserved and remote areas. It is recommended to support alternative models by promoting and supporting alternative forms of preschool education, such as public-private partnerships and family-type provisions, to increase access and meet the population's diverse needs. It is recommended that the quality of service delivery in preschool education should be improved by upskilling and building the capacity of educators, particularly in relation to their competency in effectively delivering the enhanced 'Ilk qadam' preschool curriculum, including through the development of specialized learning materials and a specialist training module.
- Enhance the teaching profession by formulating comprehensive policies for teacher recruitment, retention, and continuous professional development. The government is advised to update pre-service and in-service curricula for preschool schoolteachers, aligned with national teaching standards, and expand continuous teacher professional development centres focusing on modern disciplines like ICT and STEM.



3.3. Family environment, and protection from violence and harmful practices

3.3. Family environment, and protection from violence and harmful practices

This chapter examines Uzbekistan's progress in implementing child protection systems by strengthening and focusing on critical aspects. Examples of such aspects include: addressing violence against girls, boys and women, enhancing family and community-based care to prevent separation of children from their families and placement into institutional care, and enhancing children's equitable access to justice. It also touches upon ongoing efforts to address child marriage and child labour, ensuring community-based reintegration assistance to children and women repatriated from conflict zones, and providing child protection support to Afghan children in Uzbekistan.

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

26(a) Align the definition of torture with the definition stipulated in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment as recommended by the Committee against Torture in its concluding observations;

26(b) Investigate the allegations of torture and ill-treatment of children, including during police interrogation, effectively prosecute and bring to justice the perpetrators with commensurate sanctions, and provide victims with access to justice;

26(d) Consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, assess the conditions of detention of children in the child justice system, and ensure that monitoring mechanisms, including the national preventive mechanism, have further unhindered access to such institutions for monitoring purposes;

28(a) Conduct a study to assess the prevalence, causes, nature and forms of violence against children, such as corporal punishment, domestic violence, bullying, sexual exploitation and abuse, including online, and, based on the results, formulate and implement, with the participation of children, a comprehensive strategy for preventing and combating all forms of violence against children, with particular attention to girls, children with disabilities, children in alternative care, children left behind by migrant parents and children in the justice system;

28(b) Enact, implement and monitor legislation to explicitly prohibit all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment, in all settings;

28(c) Ensure in legislation that a protection order is granted to a child in the case of domestic violence, including violence between parents;

28(d) Promote positive, non-violent and participatory forms of child-rearing and discipline and attitudinal change within the family, the community and schools, including through awareness-raising campaigns.

28(g) Ensure that all cases of violence against children, including sexual violence, are promptly investigated, applying a child-friendly and multisectoral approach, and that children's testimony is recorded in audio/visual form without delay, and allowed as evidence during court proceedings;

28(h) Ensure that perpetrators of crimes involving violence against children, including sexual violence, are prosecuted and duly sanctioned and that reparations are provided to victims, as appropriate.

Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

26(c) Ensure that children have access to confidential, child-friendly complaint mechanisms for reporting cases, particularly in children's detention centres and alternative care, and that those reporting such cases do not face reprisals.

26(e) Provide training to judges, law enforcement officers and lawyers on working with children and on child-friendly and child-sensitive methods of investigation.

28(e) Establish mechanisms, procedures and guidelines, including multi-agency and child-friendly infrastructure, to ensure and promote mandatory reporting and multi-agency intervention in all cases of violence against children, and train teachers, health professionals, social workers and mahalla representatives to identify different forms of violence and refer victims accordingly;

28(f) Ensure that children have access to confidential, child-friendly complaint mechanisms, and encourage them to make use of them;

28(i) Establish legislative and institutional frameworks and standardized, gender-sensitive and child-sensitive procedures, and provide regular training and guidelines for judges, law enforcement officials, teachers, health-care and social workers, and other relevant professionals in this regard;

28(j) Provide children who are victims of violence with specialized, child-friendly and gender-sensitive services, including psychosocial services, and access to information about remedies to ensure their recovery and reintegration.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

An effective child protection system is crucial for ensuring the safety and well-being of every child. Such a system works to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation, creating a safe and nurturing environment where children can thrive. By strengthening families and communities, an effective child protection system empowers them to offer the care and protection children need.

Uzbekistan has made significant strides in enhancing its institutional and legal framework for child protection. In April 2023, the Oliy Majlis passed amendments to the 'Criminal and Administrative Liability Codes', criminalising domestic violence and introducing additional protective measures for children and women. In August 2024, the 'Law on protecting children from all forms of violence' was approved by the Senate of Oliy Majlis. An inter-ministerial working group under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice drafted a strategy and roadmap on children's access to justice, with approval pending.

In June 2023, the Government of Uzbekistan established the National Agency for Social Protection (NASP) under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, marking a significant step in child protection. Previously, social welfare functions were dispersed across various ministries, affecting service quality and coverage. A notable achievement is the introduction of social workers at community and district levels, which is crucial for identifying and supporting vulnerable individuals. The NASP now coordinates child protection services and provides social welfare services. It has recruited 4,800 para-professional social workers, 2,352 social work assistants, and 1,866 employees for the district-based 'Inson' centres, each featuring child protection specialists and psychologists. The NASP also focuses on capacity building and has improved social work case management tools to ensure consistent, efficient, and effective social welfare and child protection service delivery. Further information on the NASP can be found in Chapter 3.5.

Sub-domain 3.3.1. Violence against children and women

There has been a gradual but noticeable shift over the previous five years in how violence against children is viewed in Uzbek society, moving toward a broader recognition of children's rights and the importance of their well-being and protection. Many in society, however, still view domestic violence, including child abuse, as private family matters. Uzbekistan has made significant strides in protecting girls, boys, and women from violence through crucial legislative amendments. Notable developments include the criminalization of domestic violence in the 'Criminal Code' and the inclusion of sexual harassment in the 'Code of Administrative Liability'.

The new 'Law on the protection of children from all forms of violence' has been formulated under the Ministry of Justice's leadership, adhering to international child rights standards.¹⁰⁹ This proposed law outlines inter-sectoral responsibilities and preventive measures. It aligns with the NASP's commitment to develop a national strategy for coordinated action in opposition to violence against children, emphasising proactive and preventative approaches.

Despite Uzbekistan's commitment to prohibiting all corporal punishment of children in the 2018 Universal Periodic Review, explicit prohibition is still needed in homes, alternative care settings, daycare, and schools.

There are notable gaps in the implementation and enforcement of existing legal safeguards to protect girls, boys and women from violence. This includes limited multi-sectoral coordination in the prevention and justice response to violence, and inadequate availability of and access to education and life skills programmes for children and adolescents, as well as parent and caregiver programmes. Additional coordination is needed in terms of response and support services, and social and behaviour change programmes to address violence against girls, boys and women, including its gender dimensions.

¹⁰⁹ [UNICEF, NASP and Ministry of Justice call on swift and decisive national action to enact the Law on Ending all Forms of Violence Against Children](#), Tashkent, 10 October 2023.

Groups experiencing deprivations and their causes

Children and adolescents exposed to violence

Girls and boys experience different forms of violence throughout their life cycle, with younger children often facing violent discipline, while adolescents are more likely to encounter bullying, domestic violence, and sexual violence.

In Uzbekistan, 2 in 3 children aged 1-14 (62 per cent) have experienced violent disciplining methods (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression). There is only a slight difference between percentages of boys and girls who have experienced such violence (64 per cent compared to 60 per cent), and between rural and urban children (65 per cent compared to 59 per cent). However, there is a significant difference between percentages of children in southern and eastern regions experiencing this violence (79 per cent compared to 51 per cent)¹¹⁰ that can be attributed to entrenched traditional views on child-rearing, socio-economic challenges, urbanization levels and other reasons. According to the MICS 2021-22 survey, 10.7 per cent of mothers and caretakers in Uzbekistan believe that physical punishment is a necessary part of child discipline. In many Uzbek families, such disciplinary methods, both physical and psychological, are culturally normalised and often go unrecognised and unreported as abuse.

The acceptance of violence extends into family settings, where a significant proportion of women justify domestic violence under various circumstances. The MICS data reveal that an alarming 39.7 per cent of women and 33.1 per cent of girls aged 15-19 believe a husband is justified in beating his wife under various circumstances.¹¹¹ This belief is deeply rooted in cultural norms and gender stereotypes, reinforced by societal acceptance of domestic violence and gender-based violence, limited awareness of women's rights, and the normalization of violence within the family structure. Additionally, economic dependency on men, limited access to legal protection, and inadequate support services contribute to the perpetuation of these attitudes.¹¹²

In Uzbekistan, **significant efforts have been made to combat bullying in schools.** According to key informants, specifically the Ministry of Preschool and School Education in collaboration with various stakeholders, has implemented several initiatives aimed at raising awareness and providing support for victims of bullying. Over the past three years, educators have been actively engaged in awareness-raising campaigns to address and mitigate bullying within school environments. One notable development is the establishment of a dedicated protocol for responding to bullying incidents, which has been developed by a central body overseeing education. This protocol guides school staff on how to handle and report on bullying cases effectively.

There are many underlying factors behind violence against girls, boys and women. These include the reluctance of communities to intervene or report cases of violence, and the lack of child-friendly reporting mechanisms. This is especially true in cases of

¹¹⁰ '2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS', p. 244.

¹¹¹ '2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS', p. 264.

¹¹² UNFPA Uzbekistan (2020), '[Combating Domestic Violence in Uzbekistan: Challenges and Solutions](#)'; UNICEF Uzbekistan (2020), '[Education and Gender Equality in Uzbekistan](#)'; USAID (2021), '[Uzbekistan Education Sector Assessment](#)'; UN Women Central Asia (2020), '[Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Uzbekistan](#)'; Human Rights Watch (2020), '[World Report 2020: Uzbekistan](#)'; World Bank (2019), '[Uzbekistan Gender Assessment: Investing in Women's Economic Empowerment](#)'; UNFPA Uzbekistan (2021), '[Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#)'.

domestic and gender-based violence, with distinct reasons for victims/survivors and potential interveners. Cultural norms and harmful gender stereotypes reinforce the belief that outsiders should not interfere in family issues, perpetuating a cycle of silence and inaction. This perspective deeply ingrained in many communities allows the violence to continue unchecked and unaddressed.

Victims and survivors often do not report violence due to social stigma, fear of retaliation, lack of trust in the system, economic and emotional dependency on the abuser, and lack of awareness about reporting and support options. Social stigma and fear of retaliation create an environment in which victims feel isolated and helpless, fearing further harm or community ostracism if they come forward. Additionally, many victims are unaware of available support services or how to navigate legal and social systems, leaving them feeling powerless and trapped.

A significant systemic factor is the absence of an intersectoral Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) focused on child protection, including confidential reporting channels and coordinated mechanisms among law enforcement, health care, and social services. This systemic gap contributes to the relatively high rates of violence against girls, boys, and women in Uzbekistan. Without clear guidelines and infrastructure for response and support, it is challenging to address and mitigate violence effectively.

Another significant systemic barrier is the lack of comprehensive and reliable data on violence against girls, boys, and women, including sexual violence and child online sexual exploitation and abuse. Without accurate data, it is challenging to monitor trends, identify at-risk populations, and assess the effectiveness of existing programmes. The data gap also affects resource allocation, as policymakers and service providers lack the necessary information to prioritize and address the most urgent needs. A comprehensive approach to data collection is essential for developing evidence-based strategies, ensuring accountability, and ultimately enhancing protection and support for vulnerable populations.

Sub-domain 3.3.2. Children in alternative care

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

32(a) Ensure that the reform of the child protection and social protection systems at the national level brings together the different strands of social work under a single social protection agency working for the welfare of children;

32(b) Speed up the adoption of the deinstitutionalization strategy and its action plan, adequately secured by human, financial and technical resources, with a view to transforming the child protection and social protection systems, prioritizing family-based options over institutional placements;

32(c) Introduce case management in care and protection work, including individual care plans, establish quality standards for all alternative care settings as well as regular and

substantive reviews of placements in institutional and family-based childcare facilities, and monitor the quality of care therein;

32(d) Ensure that poverty, disability or divorce are never the sole justification for family separation and that children are separated from their family only if it is in their best interests after a comprehensive assessment of their situation;

32(g) Put an end to the institutionalization of children under 3 years of age and ensure that they are exclusively cared for in a family environment;

32(i) Put in place procedures and facilities to ensure that all children have opportunities to maintain contact with family and that siblings are accommodated together whenever possible, when it is in their best interests.

Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

32(e) Increase the number and strengthen the capacity of professionals working with families and children, in particular social workers, service providers, guardianship inspectors and mahalla workers, in order to ensure family-based care responses and to enhance their awareness of the rights and needs of children deprived of a family environment;

32(f) Establish a formal foster-care system, set selection criteria and conduct a national recruitment campaign for foster parents, and provide regular and adequate training for foster parents and for guardianship and patronage care providers before and during the placement of children, especially with regard to fostering children with disabilities;

32(h) Ensure sufficient family-based and community-based care options for children who cannot stay with their families, including by allocating sufficient financial resources for foster care and adoption, and facilitating the reunification of children with their families when possible;

32(j) Ensure the availability of accessible and child-friendly channels for reporting, monitoring and remedying violence and/or abuse for children in care, and provide children with information on the risks of trafficking and of economic and sexual exploitation;

32(k) Ensure adequate support for children leaving care, including housing options and business loans, and develop community-based services to help them to start independent lives;

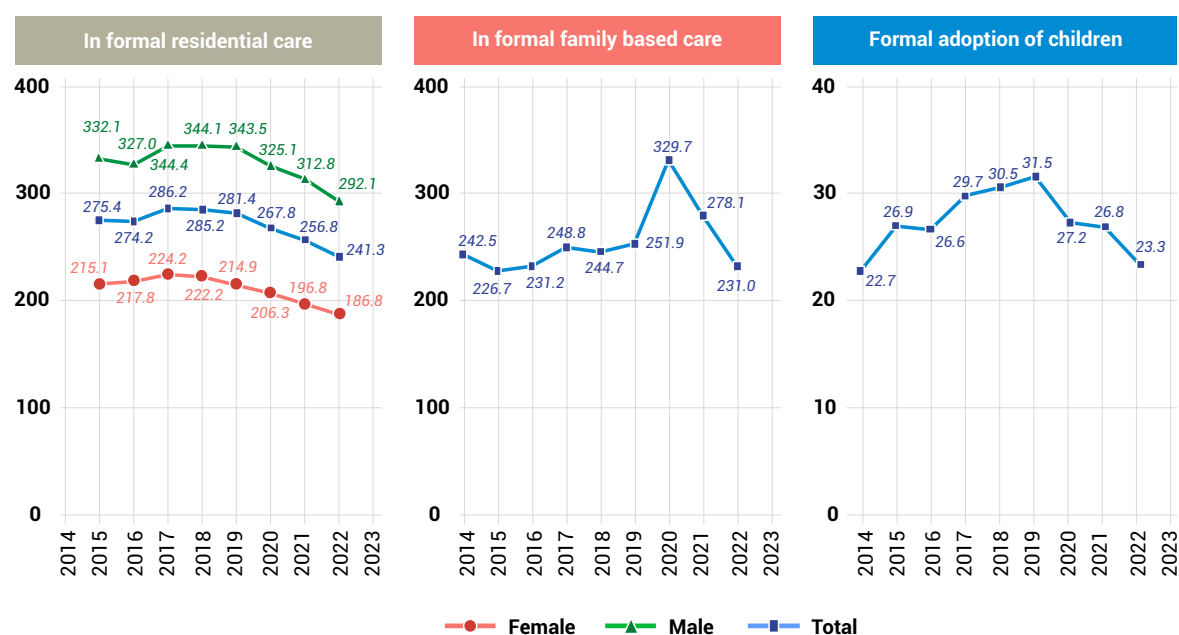
33. The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen the capacity of adoption services to evaluate and ensure the best interests of the child in adoption proceedings; provide pre-adoption and post-adoption services and monitoring; and consider ratifying the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption;

34(c) Ensure that, when the incarceration of caregivers is not avoidable, children have access to adequate early childhood education, nutrition and health services, enjoy the right to play and are visited regularly by social workers to guarantee their physical, mental and social development.

In Uzbekistan, significant progress has been made in reducing the number of children in residential care. Uzbekistan has closed 23 large-scale residential care facilities for children over the past two years, transitioning 2,448 children to family and community-based care.

The rate of children aged 0-17 years in formal residential care decreased from 268 at the end of 2020, to 241 by the end of 2022, but it is still one of the highest rates in the regions of Europe and Central Asia. The majority of children in institutional care are not orphans but in fact have one or both living parents. **Children with disabilities are overrepresented in residential care, with 79 per cent of all children in residential care having a disability.** Unfortunately, they have limited opportunities for alternative care (1 per cent of children in formal foster care). The rate of children in formal family-based care by the end of 2022 was 231 per 100,000 children, with children with disabilities only accounting for 0.2 per cent, while the rate of formal adoption in 2022 was 23.3 per 100,000 children. Further information on numbers and trends regarding children in alternative care can be found in Graph 3.3.2.1. below.

Graph 3.3.2.1. Rate of children (0-17 years) in formal residential care and formal family-based care at the end of the year (per 100,000), and rate of formally adopted children (0-17 years) during the year (per 100,000) by time



Unit of measure: Rate per 100,000 of child population.

Source: TMEF Data Collection (2023 Publication)

UNICEF's finding report on census and mapping of 18 residential care facilities in the Tashkent Region of Uzbekistan shows that 95 per cent of children living in residential care have at least one living biological parent, and 75.4 per cent have both biological parents and are still in contact with them. Additionally, only 1 in 4 children aged 2-4 in residential care are on track in their developmental progress, with 36.5 per cent having foundational reading skills, and 23.6 per cent having foundational numeracy skills. Furthermore, only 7 out of 18 residential care facilities for children had a child safeguarding policy, and nearly 1 in 3 adolescents were involved in a physical fight inside the residential care facility within the past year.

While there have been investments in family- and community-based care, **the primary focus over the past two years has been on establishing family-type small group homes.** The government continues ongoing reforms in the care system, moving from family-type children's homes to foster families and paid kinship care. However, the approach of providing small-scale institutional care to children with severe disabilities, adolescents with challenging behaviour, or those who have experienced violence, remains underdeveloped. There is a need to bring alternative care options to international standards. Promoting foster care involves developing legal and regulatory frameworks, raising public awareness, providing training and support for foster parents, and establishing robust oversight mechanisms. As some key informants observed, well trained and supported foster parents are critical to the success of any de-institutionalization initiative. Strengthening kinship care, where children are placed with extended family members, is crucial as it helps maintain family bonds and provides children with a more familiar and stable environment.

Groups experiencing deprivations and their causes

Children experiencing family separation, including children with disabilities

While the closures of residential care settings represent significant progress, there has been limited advancement in preventing family separation through effective gatekeeping and expanding access to community-based support and care services. **Several underlying factors contribute to relatively high rates of children's separation from their parents and other primary caregivers.**

Parents have limited awareness about the negative effects of residential care on child development and well-being. Many parents, influenced by the legacy of institutional care practices, believe that placing their child in a residential institution is the only viable option. This perception persists despite evidence that institutional care can hinder a child's emotional, social, and cognitive development. Furthermore, social norms and beliefs that the presence of a child with a disability in the family will negatively affect the future of other children and the image of the family in the community, are still prevalent in the country.

Economic hardships often contribute to parents' decision to place their children in residential institutions. Severe financial difficulties make caring for a child, particularly one with disabilities requiring costly or specialised care, seem impossible. As a result, institutions are sometimes viewed as a practical solution to alleviate these economic burdens despite not being in the child's best interest.

Limited access to inclusive education and inadequate social protection benefits and services are some system-wide limitations that contribute to parents' decisions. The existing social protection benefits and services, due to exclusion errors and low values, fail to reach all vulnerable families effectively. Furthermore, family support and reintegration services are underdeveloped, and there is a shortage of family and community-based alternative care options. Families often lack the necessary resources and support to care for their children at home, leading parents to feel they have no choice but to place their children in alternative care.¹¹³

¹¹³ [International Conference discusses the path from institutional to family and community-based care for children in Uzbekistan, 29 June 2021.](#)

Medical professionals sometimes play a role in perpetuating this cycle, by suggesting to parents that they relinquish their child when the child has a disability or is suspected of having a disability. This advice often reflects a lack of resources and support for families having children with disabilities, coupled with outdated medical practices that view institutional care as an acceptable solution.

Migration also plays a role in child abandonment. Many parents, especially those who migrate for work, leave their children with relatives who may not be equipped to provide the necessary care. Unfortunately, children left behind face psychological issues and sometimes physical punishment. Parental migration can lead to missed schooling and hazardous work for children. Despite social support provisions, awareness and access is limited. While remittances help, parental absence significantly negatively impacts children's well-being and rights.¹¹⁴ This arrangement can lead to situations where children are eventually placed in residential care due to the relatives' inability to cope with the additional responsibilities.

One of the immediate factors affecting high rates of unnecessary separation of children from their families is the lack of an effective gatekeeping mechanism. Gatekeeping is a systematic procedure to ensure alternative care for children is used only when necessary, involving decisions made by social welfare professionals, community members, and local service providers. The NASP plans to introduce a gatekeeping mechanism to assess beneficiaries' needs and determine the most appropriate support, but its implementation will require significant effort and time.

Sub-domain 3.3.3. Justice for children

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

48(b) Ensure that the procedural safeguards for children who are suspects or accused of crime are respected, and that children benefit from free and quality legal aid from the investigation onwards;

48(c) Promote non-judicial measures, such as diversion, mediation and counselling, for children accused of criminal offences and, wherever possible, the use of non-custodial sentences, such as probation or community service;

48(d) Ensure that detention is used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period of time, and that its use is reviewed on a regular basis with a view to its withdrawal;

48(e) For the few situations where deprivation of liberty is used as a measure of last resort, ensure that children are not detained together with adults and that the conditions of detention and their treatment comply with the Convention and with the United Nations Rules on the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty, including with regard to access to education and health services;

¹¹⁴ UNICEF, *Effects of migration on children of Uzbekistan*, 2019.

48(f) End the use of any kind of solitary confinement (kartcers) as a punishment and disciplinary measure, and repeal the law allowing such solitary confinement.

Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

48(a) Establish a specialized comprehensive child justice system with adequate human, technical and financial resources, designate specialized judges and prosecutors for children and ensure that they receive specialized training, and seek technical assistance from the United Nations Children's Fund to this end;

48(g) Develop community-based rehabilitation and reintegration services, including psychological support, to prevent recidivism.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

A holistic approach to justice for children is preferred, encompassing child victims and witnesses, children in conflict with the law, and children involved in civil and administrative proceedings. This section prioritises the most vulnerable groups of children, and identifies the causes of their deprivations to enable better-targeted support.

Groups experiencing deprivations and causes

Child victims or witnesses of crime

The Criminal Procedure Code¹¹⁵ contains specific provisions that recognize the need for special treatment of child victims and witnesses of crime and emphasises the importance of safeguarding their mental and physical well-being. This includes provisions for closed hearings conducted at a judge's discretion to protect their privacy. Special interviewing rooms have been set up in selected locations to create a safe and comfortable environment in which children can give their testimony. According to MOI data, child-friendly interview rooms have been established in 42 locations nationwide, including at the Investigation Department under the Ministry of Interior. However, there is no information on their use. This development is crucial in ensuring children feel safe and supported when participating in legal proceedings.

An underlying factor contributing to the deprivations of this vulnerable group is **inconsistent implementation of the policies and programmes supporting victims and witnesses of crime.** Also, legal aid, while available, is often not free or easily accessible. Additionally, the absence of crucial legal safeguards leads to secondary victimization. Some challenges include repeated interrogations, lack of professional support services, and inadequate protocols to protect children during legal proceedings. There are no requirements for video or audio recording of evidence to prevent repeated interviews, no measures to ensure child victims and witnesses do not encounter the alleged offender, and a lack of specialised professionals for handling these cases.

Some immediate factors contributing to deprivations include **insufficient psychological support and recovery services.** There is no established referral system from law

¹¹⁵ Republic of Uzbekistan, Criminal Procedure Code, 1 April 1995.

enforcement to service providers, meaning children do not receive the emotional and psychosocial support they need to cope with trauma and stress. For instance, in 2023, there were 325 victims in criminal cases for sexual intercourse with a person under sixteen. These cases highlight the urgent need for psychosocial support services, and also physical and psychological recovery services, for the affected individuals.

While social workers are expected to assist children and their families in navigating legal and social systems, no social workers are actually available to provide such support. While legislation allows a psychologist or teacher to accompany children during investigations, there is not a pool of professionals trained for this purpose. These individuals often meet the child for the first time during the interview, and lack proper guidelines for carrying out this interview, leading to ineffective support being given to the child. Ideally, a trained professional should consistently support the child from the application submission through the criminal process. Addressing these gaps by providing trained support professionals is crucial for the well-being of child victims and witnesses.

Children in conflict with the law

Key systemic challenges affecting children and adolescents in conflict with the law in Uzbekistan include the **lack of specialized bodies and justice professionals, which further hinders the implementation of child-sensitive procedures, and represents a failure to address the unique needs of children in conflict with the law.** The principle of using deprivation of liberty as a last resort is not widely applied, leading to children being placed in closed educational and correctional institutions for minor crimes or behavioural issues, often isolating them from their families and communities. This approach overlooks root causes such as family problems, poverty, and lack of access to quality education, resulting in negative outcomes like mental health issues and reduced social integration. Although preventive measures have increased, with the number of at-risk children identified by internal affairs bodies rising from 7,527 in 2022 to 12,318 in 2023, there is still a need to strengthen the quality and relevance of support to effectively address the underlying issues these children face. Diversion and a wide range of alternatives in line with international justice for children's standards are not yet part of juvenile justice measures applied for children in conflict with the law in Uzbekistan.

One factor contributing to deprivations is a **lack of quality data evidence to understand the factors driving the rise in child crime rates.** Although the increase in child crimes can partly be attributed to COVID-19 and broader socio-economic trends, thorough background analysis and detailed data collection are essential for developing targeted interventions that address root causes of and prevent future crimes.

Several immediate factors contribute to the deprivations faced by children in the child justice system in Uzbekistan. **One critical issue is that only children in conflict with the law receive legal assistance, leaving other children needing legal assistance without the necessary support.** While the 'Law on State-Funded Legal Assistance' provides a framework for vulnerable groups, there is a pressing need for explicit provisions to ensure free and child-sensitive legal aid specifically for all children.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ The Republic of Uzbekistan, Law No. 848 of 16 June 2023 'On Provision of Legal Assistance at the Expense of the State' ([Об оказании юридической помощи за счет государства](#)).

The absence of social workers within the justice system further hampers support for children. Social workers play a crucial role in providing counselling and ensuring that children's best interests are considered throughout legal proceedings. Their absence means many children do not receive the comprehensive support they need.

School-based psychologists are also essential in preventing child crime by identifying behavioural issues early and implementing preventative interventions. **However, their effectiveness is limited by inadequate training, insufficient resources, high workloads, and a police-driven approach to handling child issues.** This limitation reduces the ability of school-based psychologists to support at-risk children, and effectively prevent children and adolescents' involvement with the justice system.

The National Strategy for Improving the System of Access to Justice for Children (2024-2034) is expected to enhance equitable access to justice for all children. The strategy aims to reduce interrogation times, ensure parental presence during questioning, separate children from adults in detention, and introduce social investigations to understand child cases better.¹¹⁷ It emphasises diversion, non-custodial alternatives, restorative justice programmes, and the creation of child-friendly environments in courts and law enforcement. Proper and full implementation of this strategy will be crucial for overcoming challenges within the child justice system, and providing more effective protection and support for children.

The NASP and other key players recognize the importance of integrating diversion mechanisms into the child justice system, focusing on rehabilitation over punishment for children in conflict with the law. The NASP, for instance, is working to expand services at the Centers of Social and Legal Support. However, effective implementation requires legislative support, operational guidance, and capacity building. While diversion and alternative measures fall under the purview of the Prosecutor General's Office, the MOI, and the Supreme Court, collaboration between law enforcement, the judiciary, and the NASP is essential. These efforts should focus on addressing key factors contributing to antisocial behaviour and family separation, providing better support and rehabilitation for at-risk youth and promoting their reintegration into society.

¹¹⁷ Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 'National Strategy for Further Improving the System of Access to Justice for Children in the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2024-2034' and the 'Road Map' for the years 2024-2025 (2024 – 2034 йилларда Ўзбекистон Республикасида болаларнинг одил судловдан фойдаланилиш тизимини янада такомиллаштириш Миллий Стратегияси ва 2024-2025 йиллари учун «Йўл Харитаси»).

Sub-domain 3.3.4. Child marriage and other harmful practices

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

16. Welcoming the establishment of the age of marriage for boys and girls at 18 years in 2019, the Committee calls upon the State party to remove all exceptions that allow marriage below the age of 18.

Demand (financial access and social behavioural drivers)

29. Welcoming the prohibition of child marriage, and recalling joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019) and Sustainable Development Goal target 5.3, the Committee recommends that the State party effectively enforce this prohibition; strengthen its efforts to promote attitudinal change, including through awareness-raising campaigns and programmes on the harmful effects of child marriage on the physical and mental health and well-being of children; and establish protection schemes for victims who file a complaint.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

In 2019, Uzbekistan made significant strides in improving legislation and policies addressing child marriage. **One of the most notable changes was the equalization of the legal marriage age for both genders, raising the minimum age to 18 for girls, which matches the existing age for boys.** This amendment represents a crucial step towards gender equality and the protection of children.

According to the MICS 2021-2022, 11.9 per cent of women aged 15-19 are currently married or in a union. However, the rate among girls aged 15-17 is much lower, at 0.5 per cent (only 380 girls), indicating that incidences of child marriage are low.

Groups experiencing deprivations and their causes

Girls who marry early

Despite significant legislative efforts such as penalties for facilitating underage unions and recent government initiatives that resulted in a reduction of reported child marriage, the issue of early marriages requires continuous focus. Key factors contributing to the persistence of early marriages include **deeply rooted local customs, religious influences, and the challenge of changing long-standing societal attitudes**, which is particularly affecting regions with strong patriarchal traditions. Recent Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) data highlights ongoing efforts to combat child marriage. In the past year, 22 cases of marriages involving children were recorded, leading to administrative penalties

for 41 individuals and the prevention of 55 underage marriages. The PGO emphasises the responsibility of adults who facilitate child marriages, and aims to hold parents and religious leaders accountable, particularly those who permit religious ceremonies involving children. Moreover, the Children Ombudsperson has intervened in cases where underage girls sought help to escape engagements, indicating a proactive stance in addressing this issue. Engagement with religious leaders, especially imams, is critical to these efforts.

Sub-domain 3.3.5. Child exploitation

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

45. The Committee welcomes the establishment of the Coordinating Council on Child Labour, the system of annual national surveys, the 1006 helpline and the online help desk, as well as other measures taken that have led to the reduced incidence of child labour during the cotton harvest. Taking note, however, of persisting reports of child labour cases, in particular in the construction and cotton industries, the Committee recalls Sustainable Development Goal target 8.7, and recommends that the State party pursue its efforts to eliminate the use of child labour, including through the use of regular labour inspections and continuous capacity-building of employers, farmers, local authorities, and other relevant stakeholders. It also recommends that the State party ensure that the employment of children above the age of 16 is based on genuine free choice and subject to labour safeguards in line with international standards.

47(a) Review its legislation to ensure that the definition of trafficking includes the essential elements of the crime in accordance with international law and that the penalties for trafficking, including trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, are commensurate with the gravity of the crime and that house arrest is never used instead of imprisonment, including for trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation;

47(b) Strengthen the capacity of relevant authorities, including law enforcement, border management, judicial and front-line services, to identify and refer child victims of trafficking to assistance and protection services, giving particular attention to foreign families and Uzbek families repatriated from armed conflict zones, and to investigate and prosecute all cases of trafficking of children and to bring perpetrators to justice, while ensuring that prosecutions are victim-centred, child-friendly and gender-sensitive;

49. The Committee, taking note of the lack of information on the implementation of its concluding observations in the report of the State party submitted under article 12 of the Optional Protocol, recalls its 2019 guidelines on the implementation of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and reiterates its previous concluding observations, urging the State party to explicitly define and criminalize all offences under articles 2 and 3 of the Optional Protocol and address the distinction between the sale and trafficking of children.

Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

47(c) Ensure that child victims have access to necessary support and services, including psychological support and legal assistance;

47(d) Establish procedures to protect victims and witness in criminal proceedings, ensure that they are aware of their right to seek compensation, and provide training to prosecutors and judges in this respect.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

In October 2022 Labour Code introduced stricter restrictions on child labour, aligning with international laws. This legislative change is part of broader efforts to safeguard young individuals from exploitation and ensure their workplace rights and safety. This formulation in the Labour Code is crucial as it protects children and aligns with international labour laws prohibiting child labour.

Uzbekistan has made significant progress in eradicating child labour within its cotton sector, highlighted by collaborations with international bodies like the ILO, and initiatives such as the 'Better Work' programme.¹¹⁸ These efforts focus on aligning local labour standards with international norms, enhancing labour inspections, and promoting freedom of association. A landmark achievement in this journey was reported in 2021, when the ILO's Third-Party Monitoring Report on the Cotton Harvest in Uzbekistan confirmed that the **Uzbek cotton industry was free from systemic child labour**. This was a significant milestone considering the country's historic challenges with child labour in its cotton sector, which had been a major concern for international human rights organizations. Furthermore, in 2023, the U.S. Department of Labor's Trade and Development Act report recognised Uzbekistan's 'significant development' in eradicating child labour.¹¹⁹

Despite positive strides in the cotton industry, challenges remain in other areas. **Limited information and data exist on the prevalence of other forms of exploitation, such as trafficking and child sexual exploitation and abuse.** Traffickers exploit Uzbek children in sex trafficking transnationally in the Middle East, Eurasia, and Asia. Children are also vulnerable to internal human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation.¹²⁰ In terms of online sexual exploitation and abuse of children, gaps in legislation and governance are evident, and the capacities of law enforcement, the judiciary, prosecutors, and the child protection workforce are often inadequate. Lastly, education programmes addressing these issues are not sufficiently scaled.

¹¹⁸ [Better Work Uzbekistan](#) is part of a larger ONE ILO programme that focuses on the entire cotton and textile value chain. It aims to "further improve the working conditions of garment industry workers, enhance dialogue between employers and employees, implement international labour norms and standards, as well as increase the competitiveness of garment enterprises and promote economic growth."

¹¹⁹ US Department of Labor, Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports, Uzbekistan, 2022, para 1.

¹²⁰ Ibid.art.1.

Groups experiencing deprivations and their causes

Children engaged in what constitutes child labour

Despite significant progress in eliminating child labour within Uzbekistan's cotton industry, **child labour remains a pervasive issue in other sectors and in informal employment.**¹²¹ According to the MICS 2021-2022, 21 per cent of children aged 5-17 are engaged in child labour, encompassing economic activities and household chores that exceed age-specific thresholds. The prevalence of child labour is significantly higher among children from rural areas and households in the poorest wealth quintile. This disparity highlights a systemic issue that extends beyond mere economic necessity, suggesting underlying factors such as but not limited to access to quality education, inadequate social protection, harmful cultural norms and traditions. These children are often compelled to work due to inadequate household income, reinforcing a cycle of poverty and restricting their opportunities for future development.

Child labour is prevalent in non-textile sectors, particularly in farming and livestock care. In urban and rural areas, vulnerable children often work in informal sectors such as family businesses, roadside stalls, markets, workshops, and street vending. Begging, frequently organised by adults exploiting children, is especially visible in larger cities where children solicit money from passersby. These roles often involve physically demanding work, exposure to harmful substances, and long hours. Some children are subjected to the worst forms of child labour, including commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking.¹²²

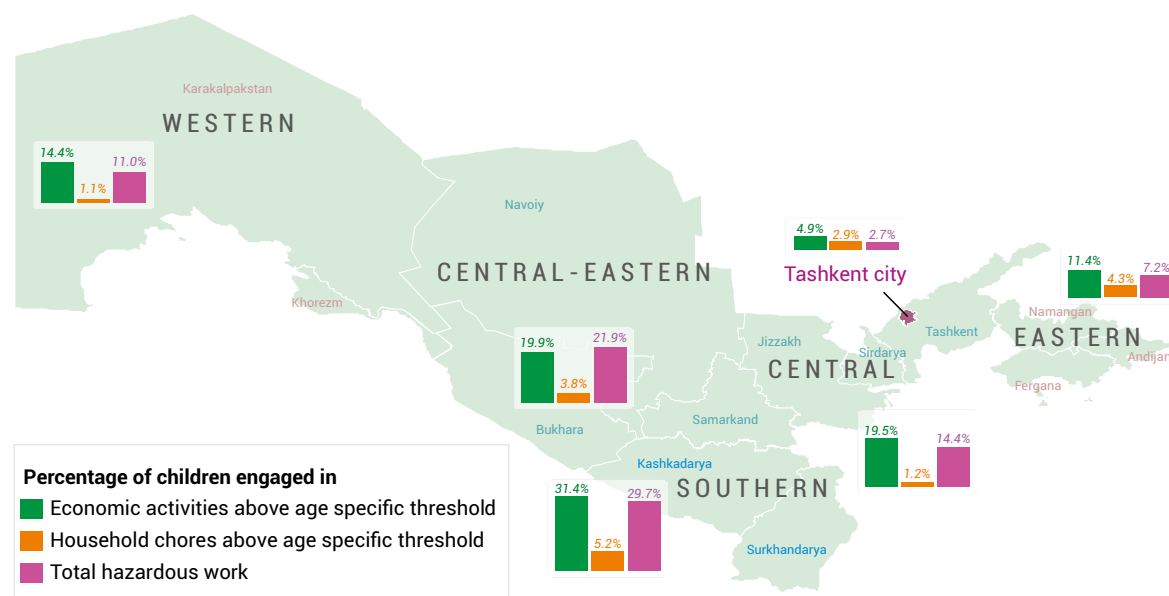
Male children are more prone to engage in child labour (34.3 per cent) compared to female children (25.0 per cent). Conversely, female children are more likely to be involved in household chores (4.36 per cent) than their male counterparts (2.59 per cent). The rate is higher for children from rural areas and from households in the poorest wealth quintile. There are significant regional variations as well.

Several underlying and immediate factors contribute to relatively high numbers of children engaged in economic activities, household chores above their thresholds, or working under hazardous conditions. **Regulatory oversight of non-textile sectors is often less stringent than that for the cotton industry.** Although the government has been trying to extend labour protections to these additional areas by enforcing laws against child labour, and improving educational opportunities, these efforts have been insufficient. The lack of rigorous monitoring and enforcement in small-scale manufacturing, domestic work, and other informal sectors poses severe risks to the safety and well-being of children engaged in these sectors.

121 The UNICEF definition of child labour as used in MICS, is: 1) economic activities above threshold such as work or help on plots, farms, food gardens, looking after animals; helping in a family business or running his/her own business; producing or selling products; 2) hazardous works such as carrying heavy loads, using dangerous tools; exposure to dust, fumes, gas, extreme temperature, noise, heights, and/or chemicals; 3) House chores above threshold: shopping, cooking, washing, cleaning, caring for children, and/or caring for sick person; water fetching, and/or firewood collecting. Children being engaged in economic activities: threshold: Age 5 to 11: above 1 hour, age 12 to 14: above 14 hours, age 15 to 17: above 43 hours; Hazardous works: observation of one or more hazardous working condition(s) is counted as child labour; House chores: threshold Age 5 to 14: Above 21 hours.

122 'Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports', para. 1.

Graph 3.3.5.1. Percentage of children engaged in economic activities or household chores above thresholds, or working under hazardous conditions, by geo-economical regions



Source: Uzbekistan MICS 6 Secondary Analysis on Child Labour, UNICEF Uzbekistan, 2024.

Sub-domain 3.3.6. Children repatriated from conflict zones and Afghan children stranded in Uzbekistan

Children repatriated from conflict zones

Like other nations whose citizens travelled to Iraq and Syria, Uzbekistan has faced complex considerations regarding their return, including security concerns and potential criminal responsibility. UNICEF acknowledged Uzbekistan's right to protect its security but emphasised balancing this with the human rights of returning children and mothers, based on the CRC. Children living in the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)-controlled territories witnessed extreme violence, including public executions and air bombardments, endured severe food and medical shortages, and faced immense psychological trauma. Upon escaping or being transferred to camps, they encountered new challenges in sprawling facilities with limited services available to address their complex needs.¹²³

Uzbekistan has shown global leadership by facilitating the repatriation and reintegration of women and children associated with foreign fighters. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights while Countering Terrorism praised the Government of Uzbekistan for its integrated, multidisciplinary approach to the repatriation and reintegration of its nationals from conflict zones, including children and mothers.¹²⁴ In 2019, the Government of Uzbekistan launched the 'Mehr' campaigns,

¹²³ Repatriation and Reintegration of Children from Uzbekistan Affected by Armed Conflict in Syria and Iraq, 2019.

¹²⁴ [A/HRC/49/45/Add.1: Visit to Uzbekistan - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, Uzbekistan, 2022.](#)

focusing on the large-scale repatriation of its citizens, particularly women and children, from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. The repatriation efforts were complex, requiring significant political, financial, and logistical coordination, especially since many returnees lacked proper documentation and faced various health challenges. The government's Inter-Ministerial Action Plan #2,157 of 2019 provided a structured approach for supporting these families, including amnesty for returning women and children over 14 who might have faced legal charges, recognizing children primarily as victims in line with international law.

Upon arrival in Uzbekistan, the returnees were accommodated in a well-equipped sanatorium where they received comprehensive support services. These included medical checks, clothing, nutrition, educational activities, and psychological counselling. The government, with support from UNICEF, ensured the continuity of care, family tracing, and proper documentation for the returnees. Psychologists and social workers received specialized training to address the unique needs of these children and women, focusing on mental health and psychosocial support. Efforts also included family reunification, and providing interim residential care for unaccompanied children.

For long-term reintegration, returnees were placed with relatives or guardians in their communities of origin. Social workers conducted thorough needs assessments and provided continuous support, ensuring the children's educational and social needs were met. The government's decision to avoid institutionalizing the returnees helped reduce stigma and promote their successful reintegration.¹²⁵

A known caseload remains in camps in Syria, comprising 65 women, 149 children (including four children without parental care), and two young men of Uzbek origin. A significant number of Uzbek women remain detained in prisons in Iraq, and there is a known caseload of 13 unaccompanied and separated children.

Children in Afghan families who are in need of support

Following the collapse of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2021, many Afghans sought refuge in Uzbekistan, particularly in the Surkhandarya region. These Afghan families face significant barriers to accessing essential services due to the non-ratification of the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the lack of a comprehensive national asylum system. This legal vacuum makes it difficult for Afghan citizens stranded in Uzbekistan to obtain registration and proper visas, complicating their legal status and access to services, particularly for children.

Many Afghan nationals stranded in Uzbekistan report an urgent need for assistance due to difficult economic conditions related to their legal status. The financial burden of visa renewals and registration, and difficulties in obtaining business or work visas, make it challenging for many Afghans to access adequate housing, nutrition, and health services.¹²⁶

Many Afghan children and their families have experienced significant trauma due to conflict and displacement. High levels of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and low

¹²⁵ Repatriation and Reintegration of Children from Uzbekistan Affected by Armed Conflict in Syria and Iraq, 2019.

¹²⁶ [UNICEF Afghanistan Humanitarian Situation Report No. 2 - Reporting Period 1 January to 31 December 2023 \(2 February 2024\)](#).

immunization rates among Afghan children stranded in Uzbekistan pose severe health risks, meaning they require immediate medical care and nutritional support. Additionally, mental health and psychosocial support services are crucial to address trauma and psychological impacts on these children. This can lead to poor mental health and psychosocial well-being, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression, which may also be exacerbated by stress related to challenges in legalizing their stay while in Uzbekistan, and uncertainties regarding their future (including resettlement to other countries). Additionally, Afghan children born in Uzbekistan face challenges in obtaining birth certificates and passports.

Conclusions

Uzbekistan has made significant strides in child protection. **In terms of the enabling environment**, Uzbekistan has implemented critical legislative amendments to criminalize domestic violence and introduce additional protective measures for children and women. The establishment of the NASP has been a significant step in centralising and enhancing child protection services. However, there is still a need for formalised inter-agency collaboration, comprehensive data collection mechanisms to monitor and address various child protection issues effectively, and targeted social and behavioural change programmes to address harmful social norms and gender stereotypes.

In terms of supply, Uzbekistan has achieved notable progress in reducing the number of children in residential care, and shifting towards family- and community-based care. The NASP is well positioned to advance integrated support for vulnerable children and their families. Considering the overrepresentation of children with disabilities in institutional settings, a key focus in the continuous reforms needs to be placed on ensuring comprehensive and holistic support provided to children with disabilities and their caregivers. Strengthening family support services to prevent unnecessary separation of children from their families and to facilitate the reintegration of children into their families, and strengthening family-based alternative care options (in particular kinship and foster care) are essential to sustaining progress and ensuring realization of children's rights to grow up in a family environment. Significant gaps remain in ensuring children's equitable access to justice, providing child- and gender-sensitive justice proceedings, and ensuring that deprivation of liberty is used as a measure of last resort, and for the shortest duration possible.

There are no child friendly mechanisms such as a child helpline, through which children or adolescents can report about incidents of violence towards them, and obtain required support and assistance. The 'Law on protection of children from all forms of violence' not only lays down the foundation of the future system to prevent and respond to all forms of violence, but also includes measures for strengthening sector specific and inter-agency mechanisms to prevent and better address cases of violence. In addition, it also envisages development of prevention and support and recovery services to help child victims of violence, and more enhanced protective mechanisms for child victims and witnesses of crime participating in legal proceedings.

In terms of demand, Uzbekistan's parents and communities increasingly recognize the importance of child protection, and the negative impact of institutional care on children's development. There is a growing demand for child and family welfare services,

including family support services such as parenting education and counselling. Parents are seeking more support in caring for children with disabilities, and ensuring their inclusion in community-based settings. However, this demand is still limited by a lack of awareness and resources. The legacy of institutional care practices influences many parents, and some parents still believe that placing their child in a residential institution is the only viable option. Economic hardships and traditional social norms further limit parents' ability to seek and advocate for effective child protection solutions for their children.

Children and adults do not get enough information about child rights and available remedies to protect children's legal and human rights in case of their violation. Though important legislative changes have been made concerning the right of every child (of all ages) to apply to state bodies in the case of their rights being violated, social norms that children are objects of parental care rather than subjects of rights and can't act without parents' permission, lack of knowledge about child rights, as well as a lack of child-friendly complaints mechanisms, are all significant obstacles for children's access to justice and effective remedies.

Recommendations

- Strengthen coordination mechanisms across sectors to effectively prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children. The NASP is advised to establish a formalised inter-ministerial committee to enhance collaboration and effectively prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children, and also implement inter-ministerial SOPs for child protection. This includes establishing confidential reporting channels and coordination mechanisms among law enforcement, health care, and social services.
- Operationalise the "Law on the Protection of Children from all Forms of Violence," by developing a comprehensive multi-sectoral plan for preventing and responding to violence against children. The government is advised to prioritize finalising and adopting the Strategy and Roadmap on Children's Access to Justice, and the Roadmap on the Deinstitutionalization of the Child Care System. It is strongly recommended to reform laws to legally prohibit corporal punishment in all settings, including in homes, alternative care facilities, daycare facilities, and schools.
- Ensure effective enforcement of all enacted laws and strategies, supported by adequate financial and human resources. The government is advised to commit to providing sufficient resources and ensure enforcement mechanisms to fully achieve intended protections and support outlined through these measures.
- Reform social service provision for children and their families, to shift towards universally supportive care and outcome-driven services, moving away from crisis-oriented responses. The government is strongly advised to invest in preventive services, particularly family strengthening and support, and community engagement and transition from large-scale institutions to family- and community-based care, with systematic planning and significant investment. The NASP is advised to expand its collaboration with CSOs to deliver specialized services, and optimize the use of resources through public-private partnerships. A particular emphasis

needs to be placed on enhancing support and care for children with disabilities and their caregivers, considering the overrepresentation of children with disabilities in institutional care settings.

- To enhance support for girls and boys victims of violence, it is essential to provide comprehensive training for specialists on trauma-informed care, develop holistic rehabilitation programmes, and strengthen community-based support systems. It is recommended to make legal aid available to all children and their families who are in need, integrate case management, and establish safe spaces. It is advisable to increase community awareness and involvement in supporting victims of violence.
- Invest in recruiting, training, and retaining workers, as well as quality management and promotion of career development for the social service workforce, especially at community and district levels, which are key to ensuring effective prevention and response to family dysfunctions and vulnerability.
- Improve access to child-friendly justice and reduce impunity for perpetrators. The respective ministries are advised to intensify efforts to support vulnerable families and protect at-risk children, recognize violence against children as being a public health issue, and ensure safe, equitable learning opportunities. To enhance service provision and outcomes for children across all sectors, it is paramount that professionals interacting with children understand their responsibilities in recognising and responding to such cases, effectively supporting child survivors while avoiding stigma and blame, and not prioritising the reputation of families or perpetrators over the well-being of child survivors.
- Introduce diversion (directing children away from judicial proceedings and towards community solutions), restorative justice (promoting reconciliation, restitution and responsibility through the involvement of the child, family, victims and communities), and expand alternatives to custodial sentencing (including counselling, probation and community service). The social protection and justice sectors are advised to improve inter-ministerial collaboration to ensure detention is used only as a last resort.
- Invest in administrative data collection systems to track child abuse and neglect cases, monitor institutional practices, and document sector-specific expenditures. Implementing robust monitoring and data collection on children in alternative care is recommended to inform policy development and establish quality standards.
- Address harmful social norms that support unnecessary separation of children from their families and placement into institutional care settings, and harmful social norms and gender stereotypes that condone violence against girls, boys and women.
- Expedite the repatriation of the remaining children and their mothers from Iraq, and from camps in Syria, and ensure the availability of community-based age-appropriate and gender-sensitive reintegration assistance.
- Simplify the process for Afghan families and their children to obtain legal status and documentation, ensuring they have access to basic rights and services. Work with international organizations to ensure Afghan children receive the necessary protection and support, including accessible mental health services such as counselling and trauma support.

A photograph of three young women sitting at a table in a room with wood-paneled walls. The woman on the left is wearing a white t-shirt and has her hand near her face. The woman in the middle is wearing a black and white jacket and is gesturing with her hands while speaking. The woman on the right is wearing a bright yellow-green t-shirt and is looking towards the woman in the middle. There are water bottles and papers on the table. A semi-transparent dark overlay covers the bottom half of the image, and a decorative grey pattern is visible in the bottom right corner.

3.4. Participation and Civil Rights

3.4. Participation and Civil Rights

The chapter explores the importance of birth registration in Uzbekistan, noting significant legislative improvements achieved, but also ongoing challenges regarding refugee and stateless children. It also assesses progress made in promoting children's participation and civil freedoms. It covers the digital divide and growing cyberbullying concerns, emphasising disparities in ICT access for rural children and girls despite national digital transformation strategies.

Sub-domain 3.4.1. Birth registration and identity

Birth registration is crucial as it provides legal identity, enabling access to essential services such as education, health care, and social protection. Without birth registration, children may face significant barriers to asserting their rights and receiving government benefits, impacting their rights realization and well-being.

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

21. Welcoming the progress made in registering births and reducing and preventing statelessness, the Committee recommends that the State party collect data on the implementation of the Act on citizenship of 2020, including on the number of applications submitted by stateless persons, disaggregated by age and gender; and consider ratifying the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

22. While taking note of the information provided by the State party about secrecy relating to adoption, the Committee recommends that it ensure the effective enforcement of the right of adopted children to have access to information about their biological origins.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, and concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

In 2018, **Uzbekistan amended its legislation to guarantee birth registration for all children born in the country's territory.**¹²⁷ In Uzbekistan, birth registration is compulsory and must be performed at the local Civil Registry Office within one month of birth. Additional documents confirming the child's birth are required if a birth is not registered within this period. A stamp tax is collected to issue a birth certificate. However, since 2023, Uzbekistan has introduced a service for remote registration of birth certificates via the Unified Portal of Interactive Public Services (my.gov.uz). This new service allows parents to obtain a birth certificate free of charge through a QR code, streamlining the process and ensuring that every child can receive a legal identity more conveniently.

¹²⁷ Saidov Akmal, 'Central Asian Conference on Ensuring Birth Registration to Prevent Statelessness'. May 2024. Tashkent. Uzbekistan.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) collaborate closely to facilitate this service. The MOH is responsible for issuing birth notifications from medical facilities, which are essential for registration. These notifications are forwarded to the Civil Registry Offices managed by the MOJ. The MOJ then verifies the information and processes the registration through the online portal, generating a QR code for the birth certificate. This partnership between the MOH and MOJ ensures that birth registration is efficient, accessible, and integrated, reducing the need for physical visits and making the process easier for families across Uzbekistan.¹²⁸ According to the latest MICS, 100 per cent of children under age 5 had their birth registered in Uzbekistan.¹²⁹

Groups experiencing deprivations and their causes

Children of individuals in need of international protection and stateless children face significant challenges, albeit for different reasons

Stateless children face obstacles due to their lack of recognised nationality. A core issue is the absence of a comprehensive and systematic government approach to registering births within stateless families. This problem is compounded by insufficient reliable data on the number of stateless persons in Uzbekistan, making it difficult to gauge the full extent of the issue and the number of affected children and families.

For children of individuals in need of international protection, particularly Afghans who had fled Afghanistan after August 2021, the absence of national legislation concerning refugees and asylum procedures makes it nearly impossible for them to obtain official refugee status. This lack of recognised status complicates the process of birth registration for Afghan children, leaving them in legal limbo. Uzbekistan's non-accession to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention further exacerbates this issue, as there are no standardised procedures or protections in place to support these families.

In 2020, Uzbekistan enacted a new Citizenship Law that allowed approximately 50,000 stateless individuals who had permanent residence in Uzbekistan before 1 January 1995, to acquire citizenship. It allowed for the successful resolution of 33,000 cases of statelessness in 2021. In 2023, 4,993 stateless persons were recognised as citizens, reducing the total number of registered stateless individuals from 27,389 at the beginning of the year, to 22,396 by the year's end.¹³⁰

Organizations like UNHCR and UNICEF assist stateless persons, helping them navigate registration procedures to better protect children's rights. However, a systemic government approach is still lacking. The country is currently reforming its statistical systems to better align with contemporary needs, aiming to improve data collection and reporting. For stateless children, the immediate factors of unreliable data and lack of systematic registration approaches directly impact their ability to obtain legal identities.

In November 2021, the government reported that 13,020 Afghan citizens had arrived on short-term visas. Due to the ongoing conditions in Afghanistan, these individuals cannot return, and UNHCR considers that they may need international protection.¹³¹ The national

¹²⁸ [Unified portal of interactive government services \(Единый портал интерактивных государственных услуг\)](#). 2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS, p. 242.

¹²⁹ 2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS, p. 242.

¹³⁰ UN. [Uzbekistan UN Common Country Assessment: 2023 Update](#).

¹³¹ [UNHCR, Uzbekistan](#).

authorities started preparing a first draft law on asylum, being a critical step towards establishing a national asylum system, and an opportunity to align the country's policies with international standards of refugee protection.

Adopted children who do not have access to information on their biological parents. In Uzbekistan, the adoption process is governed by laws that protect the confidentiality of adoption, which can prevent adopted children from accessing information about their biological parents. The Family Code of Uzbekistan and specific regulations, such as the Adoption Secrecy decree,¹³² enforce strict confidentiality to maintain the privacy of adoptive families. These laws stipulate that information about an adoption can only be disclosed with the consent of the adoptive parents or, in their absence, the consent of the guardianship authorities. However, **this secrecy can violate the child's right to know their biological origins**, which is otherwise an internationally-recognised right.

Sub-domain 3.4.2. Child participation

The participation of children and adolescents is crucial in Uzbekistan, especially in view of the current demographic situation, as it empowers young people to express their views, influence decisions affecting their lives, and engage actively in their communities. Involving them in decision-making processes enables Uzbekistan to better address their varied needs and rights, ensuring that related policies and programmes are more effective and inclusive. The country can foster a more responsive and equitable society by actively engaging children and adolescents.

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

20(a) Ensure the enforcement of legislation and regulations recognizing the rights of all children, including those under the age of 10, to be heard, including in judicial and administrative proceedings, especially in those concerning civil and alternative care, and establish systems and/or procedures for social workers and courts to comply with that principle, as well as child-friendly processes, procedures, and spaces where children feel safe to express their views;

20(b) Introduce a child-friendly local governance system, such as a children's parliament, for the systemic civic engagement of children, in particular girls, children from economically disadvantaged families, children from rural areas, children belonging to minority groups, children with disabilities, and children in street situations;

20(c) Further promote the meaningful and empowered participation of all children within the family, in communities and in schools, and include children in decision-making in all matters related to them, and ensure that their views are given due weight.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

¹³² Resolution of the Plenary of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Uzbekistan 'On practice of application of legislation courts in cases on adoption' ([О практике применения судами законодательства по делам об усыновлении](#)), Tashkent. 11 December 2013.

Uzbekistan has strengthened its legal framework by adopting key laws and policies to support children's participation. The adoption of the new Education Law in 2020 and the Law About the State Youth Policy 2016 advanced the civil and political rights of children and adolescents in Uzbekistan. Basic principles of the Law About the State Youth Policy include 'Participation of youth in the realization of the state youth policy'. The Education Law integrates civic education into the school curriculum, promoting awareness of civil rights and responsibilities. It encourages critical thinking and debate, preparing students to engage in democratic processes. The law also supports the formation of student councils, giving children a voice in school governance and decision-making, which fosters a sense of participation and leadership. However, despite this legislative support, student councils have not yet been established in practice.

The establishment of the Youth Parliament under the Senate of the Oliy Majlis in 2019 marked a significant advancement in promoting political participation among young people in Uzbekistan. The Youth Parliament intends to transform young people into an active political force within society.¹³³ This body is envisioned to provide a structured platform through which adolescents and youth can voice their opinions on legislative matters, and influence policy decisions. Measures are in place to make the Youth Parliament inclusive, reflecting the views and aspirations of diverse groups, including vulnerable populations. However, the capacity of the Youth Parliament needs to be strengthened, in order to reach its full potential and reflect the wide diversity of views of the country's youth. Some key informants mentioned plans to establish a Children's Parliament in Uzbekistan, to ensure that younger children's voices are heard in decision-making processes. Enhanced capacity building and resources would be needed to empower the Children's Parliament to effectively represent and advocate for the interests of all children in policy discussions.

Consultations with children and adolescents in the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan. On 23 November 2023, participants including 26 children aged 12-18 and NGOs' representatives, discussed implementation of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's recommendations in the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan.¹³⁴ Key recommendations expressed by the children focused on protecting against bullying, improving the quality of education and school infrastructure, and enhancing access to information and participation in societal activities. During another meeting, children and NGO representatives recommended involving NGOs extensively in drafting and reviewing laws related to child rights, to ensure they align with the needs of children and society, and establishing a system for NGOs to propose alternative draft laws and conduct mandatory public examinations of new draft laws. It was suggested to implement monitoring of school textbooks, and prepare promotional materials to educate parents and legal representatives about children's rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and belief.¹³⁵ Participants emphasised the need for regular consultations with children, and effective collaboration between NGOs and government bodies.

¹³³ [National news agency of Uzbekistan](#), 2024.

¹³⁴ Khazova, A., Olga. Report on Consultations in the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Uzbekistan. Tashkent, 23 November 2023.

¹³⁵ *ibid*

The State Youth Affairs Agency, previously known as the Youth Union, supports youth engagement in Uzbekistan¹³⁶ by providing a structured platform for young people to express their views and influence policies. It also facilitates leadership and skills development programmes, helping young people understand civic responsibilities and the functioning of government institutions.¹³⁷ Additionally, the agency supports youth-led projects and initiatives that address community needs, empowering young people to take the lead in implementing local solutions. The agency promotes youth's economic empowerment by administering educational loan programmes to support young students, complemented by social grants to further assist those in need. It includes a significant initiative by the President that has created 2,000 places specifically for young females, empowering them to pursue tertiary education.¹³⁸ Still the agency's reach may not adequately cover remote and rural areas, leading to unequal opportunities for participation.

The President of Uzbekistan continually emphasises the importance of maintaining a constant dialogue with young people, leading to the establishment of platforms such as 'Khokim va Yoshlar' (Local Governor and Youth) by the government.¹³⁹ However, **opportunities for meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes and youth-led initiatives remain limited, especially at the local level.** The current implementation lacks a systematic approach and effective methodology for youth engagement, often resulting in a tokenistic approach that addresses individual problems rather than common interest issues. Only 15.1 per cent of young people aged 14-30 are involved in activities related to public or political organizations or movements. In comparison, a higher 27.2 per cent are engaged with the Youth Union.¹⁴⁰

In Uzbekistan, several underlying and immediate factors create deprivations and barriers to children's participation in decision-making. **Some of these factors include deeply entrenched cultural and social norms prioritising obedience and respect for authority over independent thought and expression.** Traditional family values often emphasize that children should follow adults rather than actively engage in discussions. This cultural mindset extends to the education system, where the curriculum and school practices do not encourage critical thinking and active student participation.

Some immediate factors that limit children's participation include inadequate mechanisms and platforms for children to express their views and engage in meaningful dialogue with adults. Although such structures as the Youth Parliament exist, they are often dominated by adult agendas and lack support for genuine youth-led initiatives. Additionally, there is a shortage of resources and training to empower children and adolescents to participate effectively. The national authorities recognize the need to deepen democratic reforms by enhancing civil participation and strengthening human rights protections.¹⁴¹ **There are no institutional mechanisms enabling student**

¹³⁶ UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia, [New Youth Affairs Agency of Uzbekistan and UNODC discussed youth strategies for 2020-2025](#).

¹³⁷ Adolescent health and well-being analysis, 2021, p. 48.

¹³⁸ [Interview with Alisher Sadullayev, Director of the Youth Affairs Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan, about goals of the year of youth in Uzbekistan, 2021.](#)

¹³⁹ UNICEF, [Youth and Child-Friendly Local Governance initiative builds communities where the voices and needs of children and young people are an integral part of public policies and decisions, 2024.](#)

¹⁴⁰ UNICEF, [Youth of Uzbekistan: Challenges and Prospects, December 2020.](#)

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Council. [National report submitted in accordance with Human Rights, Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, Uzbekistan.](#) 6–17 November 2023. (A/HRC/WG.6/44/UZB/1).

participation in school affairs. The Agency for Presidential Educational Institutions of the Republic of Uzbekistan has established Presidential Schools that aim to provide high-quality education to gifted students nationwide. While these schools emphasize student engagement and leadership development, they do not have formal mechanisms such as student councils to enable children's participation.¹⁴²

Many children who participated in focus groups stated that they feel they lack a safe mechanism to voice their concerns, and face threats if they speak up. Educators and parents mostly do not value student input, nor allow students to lead in setting the agenda and making decisions.

Groups experiencing deprivations and their causes

Children with disabilities face numerous barriers that significantly hinder their participation in various activities

The lack of inclusive infrastructure, such as ramps and accessible restrooms in schools and public buildings, restricts this group's physical access to social engagements. Additionally, the scarcity of accessible communication tools like Braille materials and sign language interpreters further isolates these children, limiting their ability to access information and express their opinions. The number of NGOs representing children with disabilities and their families, and their capacities to support participation are limited, reducing advocacy and collective action opportunities.

Children from low-income families

Children from low-income families encounter significant barriers to participation. Economic hardship frequently forces families to prioritize immediate needs over long-term investments in their children's education and social engagement. This results in substantial opportunity gaps, where children from low-income backgrounds are unable to fully participate in community activities, further perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion.

Ethnic minority children

Ethnic minority children, including those from Central Asian Romani communities (Lyuli), face unique challenges in Uzbekistan. Discrimination and cultural biases frequently prevent these children from participating equally in educational and social activities. Cultural norms and prejudices further marginalize them, limiting their engagement in community and decision-making processes.

Girls and young women

Girls and young women face discriminatory gender norms that negatively affect their participation. Traditional cultural expectations often restrict their opportunities for civic activities and leadership roles. Practices such as the expectation for them to undertake

¹⁴² The Agency for the Development of the Presidential, Creativity and Specialized Schools under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, [Presidential schools](#).

domestic responsibilities limit their time and ability to participate in community and social activities.

Sub-domain 3.4.3. Civil and political freedoms

The civil and political freedoms of children and adolescents, as defined by the CRC, are vital for fostering an inclusive and democratic society in Uzbekistan. These freedoms include the right to freely express their views in all matters affecting them, freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and access to information from various sources. Additionally, children have the right to freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and protection of their privacy from arbitrary or unlawful interference.

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

24. Noting some positive changes for religious freedoms, the Committee recommends that the State party continue its efforts to ensure the right of the child and the rights and duties of parents and legal guardians under article 14 of the Convention, with a view to attain a peaceful co-existence of different religions, including those that are not officially recognized, in a manner consistent with this provision.

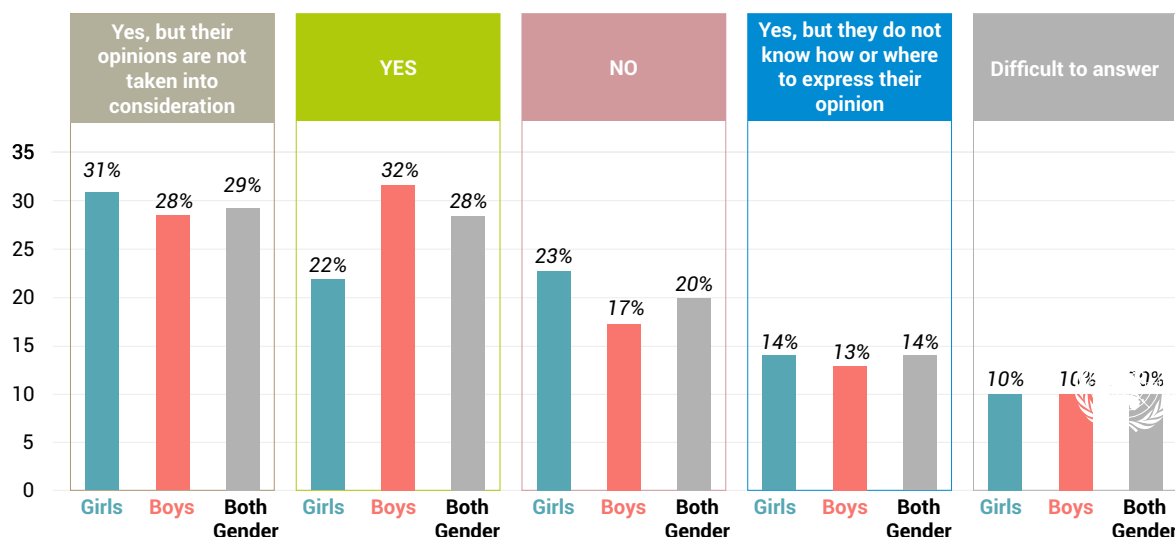
Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

In terms of realising children's **right to express their views freely on all matters** affecting them, civic education has been integrated into school curricula to equip children with the knowledge and skills necessary to exercise their rights. These programmes cover democracy, human rights, and active citizenship to foster a sense of participation in community and national issues. However, the realities are quite different. In recent U-report survey of Uzbek children and youth, in response to a question on whether they believe their rights are taught in schools, 38 per cent of the responding children said "no", 28 per cent said "yes, but not sufficiently", and 13 per cent said "yes, very well". Additionally, 19 per cent of respondents could not offer a response to this question. In terms of freedom of expression, **29 per cent of respondents expressed that they believe that children in Uzbekistan can freely express their opinions where they live, but their views are often not considered**, with girls agreeing with this sentiment 3 per cent more frequently than boys. Additionally, 28 per cent of participants felt they could not freely express their opinions, with boys being 10 per cent more likely to hold this view than girls (32 per cent compared to 22 per cent). Interestingly, one in five respondents affirmed that children could freely express their views, with this opinion being more favoured by girls than boys. The options "Yes, but I don't know where and how to do it" and "I find it difficult to answer" accounted for 14 per cent and 10 per cent of the responses, respectively, with little difference between genders (see Graph 3.4.3.1. below).¹⁴³

¹⁴³ UNICEF, U-report, November 2023.

Children who participated in focus groups revealed that they often could not freely express their views to educators, as they feared punishment for doing so.

Graph 3.4.3.1. Can children express their opinions freely where they live (even if it does not correspond to or contradicts the opinion of adults, such as parents and teachers)



Source: UNICEF, U-Report, November 2023

In terms of realising freedom of religion, Uzbekistan has made notable progress in improving religious freedoms for children and adolescents. Legal protections, such as those enshrined in the Constitution and the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, guarantee that minors can practice their religion with the guidance of their parents or guardians.¹⁴⁴ Educational reforms have incorporated teachings on various religious traditions into school curricula, promoting understanding and tolerance among young people. These initiatives have fostered a more inclusive environment where community programmes and interfaith dialogues encourage respect for diverse beliefs.

In terms of realising rights to freedom of association and assembly, while the Constitution and various laws guarantee freedom of expression, practical implementation often falls short. **Uzbekistan's restrictive approach to public demonstrations significantly impacts the civil and political liberties of children and adolescents.**¹⁴⁵ These limitations affect young people's ability to express their views, and engage in collective actions essential for advocating their rights.

The establishment of the Children's Ombudsperson office in 2020 represents a significant advancement in Uzbekistan's efforts to protect and promote the civil and political freedoms of children. This dedicated office provides a crucial mechanism for addressing complaints related to children's rights, ensuring that children's voices are heard, and their issues are addressed at the national level. By advocating for children's rights, the Children's Ombudsperson plays a pivotal role in enhancing the legal and social framework that supports the realization of children's rights, and their participation in society.

¹⁴⁴ The Republic of Uzbekistan, Law No. 618-I of 1 May 1998 'About freedom of conscience and religious organizations' ([О свободе совести и религиозных организациях](#)).

¹⁴⁵ Joint Submission of the UN Country Team of Uzbekistan, prepared on the occasion of the Fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Uzbekistan, March 2023.

Sub-domain 3.4.4. Information, the Internet and protection of privacy

Access to information, the Internet, and the protection of privacy are crucial for children and adolescents in Uzbekistan. Internet access facilitates learning, communication, and the ability to seek and share information, being essential for personal and intellectual development. Protection of privacy ensures that children can explore the digital world safely, fostering a secure environment where they can freely express their views and engage with their communities.

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

25. The Committee recalls its recommendation that the State party safeguard the right of children in alternative care and in child justice facilities, to the privacy of their personal belongings and correspondence. It also recommends, recalling its general comment No. 25 (2021), that the State party develop legislation, regulations and safeguarding policies for the media and in the digital environment to protect the privacy of children, as well as standards for ethical reporting on children, and establish mechanisms to prosecute violations.

Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

23. Taking note of the information provided by the State party indicating that schools were equipped with broadband Internet, the Committee recommends that the State party strengthen connectivity for all children, giving particular attention to remote areas and economically disadvantaged families. The Committee also recommends that the State party enhance the digital literacy and skills of children, teachers and families and that it ensures, in law and in practice, that children are able and encouraged to effectively exercise their rights to freedom of expression and to access information without unnecessary restrictions, in accordance with articles 13 and 17 of the Convention.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan has prioritised digital transformation as part of its broader national development strategy. **The 'Digital Uzbekistan – 2030' strategy is a comprehensive plan** that aims to transform the country's digital landscape, focusing significantly on youth and adolescents. Key elements of this strategy include integrating information and communication technologies (ICT) into the education system, and ensuring that students develop essential digital literacy skills. This is supported by comprehensive training programmes for teachers to enhance their ability to deliver ICT-based education effectively. Inclusive education initiatives are also emphasised, aiming to bridge the digital skills gap for girls, rural youth, and children with disabilities. The strategy seeks to create 300,000 jobs for youth in the IT sector by 2030, providing necessary training and fostering economic opportunities by supporting ICT startups, including providing

financial incentives and infrastructure support via programmes like IT-Park's 'Zero Risk Program'.¹⁴⁶ Significant investments in expanding fibre-optic communication lines and improving internet connectivity, particularly in rural areas, are being made to ensure equitable access to high-speed Internet. The development of e-government services is another priority, making public services more accessible online. Additionally, the strategy promotes digital inclusion programmes and emphasises cybersecurity education to protect youth privacy online. These comprehensive efforts aim to create a digitally literate, economically empowered, and inclusive society, ensuring all young people in Uzbekistan can thrive in the digital age.

The Ministry of Digital Technologies is pivotal in advancing Uzbekistan's digital agenda and implementing the 'Digital Uzbekistan – 2030' strategy. It focuses on increasing digital literacy, particularly among youth, women, and persons with disabilities. The ministry organises training programmes, supports ICT infrastructure development, and promotes the use of digital technologies in education and public services. Special initiatives of the Digital Education Development Center aim to train young people in IT skills, enhancing their employability in the tech sector.

Fibre-optic connections are provided to more than 78 per cent of educational institutions, and most of them are connected to the internet (out of 9,783 schools, 9,274 are connected with an average internet speed (download) of 11.5Mb/s).¹⁴⁷ According to the national Concept for School Development, up to 2030, the proportion of classrooms equipped with modern computers must increase from 30 per cent in 2022 to 60 per cent by 2025. However, there is limited information on the accessibility and effective use of these facilities at the school level.¹⁴⁸ As the consultations conducted in preparing this SitAn found, many ICT classrooms remain closed, and students cannot access them after school or for other non-ICT classes.

Many children and adolescents in Uzbekistan, including those with visual impairments, have expressed a strong interest in learning ICT skills such as programming, video and audio editing, and database management with SQL.¹⁴⁹ Uzbekistan is making strides in the field of digital education, with initiatives to enhance ICT literacy among students and educators. New textbooks with QR codes are being introduced, although only around 70 per cent of students have mobile phones, and some have to share them with relatives. Media literacy and responsible internet use are being integrated into the curriculum, though these efforts remain small in scale. Despite **the national authorities' focus on improving the ICT skills of educators**, their skills still remain limited, and non-ICT teachers do not feel sufficiently qualified to integrate ICT into their teaching.¹⁵⁰ The Ministry of Digital Technologies is preparing trainers to improve the qualifications of public school teachers, addressing the challenge of outdated computer equipment, and ensuring students, starting from grade 1, learn proper ICT use.

¹⁴⁶ IT-Park Uzbekistan, [Explore Opportunities: Zero Risk program](#).

¹⁴⁷ Giga global, [Sustainable School Connectivity in Uzbekistan: Transforming schools into community internet hubs](#), September 2022.

¹⁴⁸ [Ministry of Preschool and School Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 'Uzbekistan partnership compact for education reform'](#), Tashkent, Uzbekistan, March 2023.

¹⁴⁹ UNICEF, Report on consultations with young people with disabilities – beneficiaries of the UNICEF-supported programme Skills4Girls, Uzbekistan, 2023.

¹⁵⁰ 'Youth of Uzbekistan', p. 139.

Cyberbullying is a growing concern in Uzbekistan, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive cyber safety education. As a recent WHO-Europe study found, one in six school-aged children experiences cyberbullying.¹⁵¹ Although the data for Uzbekistan is not available, it may be consistent with global and regional trends. For children, cyberbullying can lead to severe emotional distress, mental health issues, and academic problems.

Cybersecurity remains a critical issue, with the government actively working to train specialists to safeguard against digital threats. The focus must also include educating children on safe internet practices, data privacy, and protecting themselves from online dangers. Implementing robust cyber safety programmes in schools, and integrating cybersecurity awareness into the curriculum, can empower children to navigate the digital world safely and responsibly.

There are notable disparities in digital literacy and internet usage among Uzbekistan's children and youth. There are significant regional variations in Uzbekistan regarding internet access at home. Wealthier households (92.8 per cent) and those in urban areas (85.8 per cent) have much higher internet connectivity compared to poorer households (64.1 percent) and those in rural areas (78 percent). These disparities highlight the country's digital divide, affecting different population groups' ability to benefit equally from digital resources and opportunities (see Graph 3.4.4.1. below).

Graph 3.4.4.1. Percentage of households with access to the Internet at home, by geo-economic regions and for Uzbekistan, including by urban/rural areas and by wealth index quintile



Source: MICS Uzbekistan, 2021-2022

¹⁵¹ WHO, [One in six school-aged children experiences cyberbullying, finds new WHO/Europe study, 2024](#). See also Cosma A, Molcho M, Pickett W. A focus on adolescent peer violence and bullying in Europe, Central Asia and Canada. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children international report from the 2021/2022 survey. Volume 2. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2024.

While young people in Uzbekistan are strongly interested in learning about computers (86.9 per cent), a significant group (37.8 per cent), particularly females and rural youth, lack computer skills. Additionally, there is a notable gap between those who 'never' use the Internet (53.9 per cent, mostly rural youth and females) and those who use it "daily" (25.4 per cent, primarily urban residents and males). The Internet is seen as both a "useful" tool for maintaining social contacts, and for studying or working, and also a potentially dangerous place for "wasting time" or being exposed to "bad influences", a concern that disproportionately affects females due to fear of stigmatization.¹⁵²

Groups experiencing deprivations and their causes

Girls and adolescent girls

Girls and adolescent girls in Uzbekistan use the Internet significantly less than boys. Among youth aged 14-30, the daily use rate is 16.1 per cent for females compared to 38.1 per cent for males. Additionally, 68.1 per cent of female respondents reported never using the Internet, versus 34.3 per cent of male respondents. Furthermore, 27 per cent of female respondents stated that they never chat online, compared to 15.2 per cent of males.¹⁵³ ICT professions are heavily gender stereotyped. Girls have limited opportunities to pursue various ICT careers, and predominantly work as graphic designers within this field. In coding and robotics classes in schools and IT institutes, it is rare to see female students or instructors, highlighting the significant gender disparity in these fields.

Children and adolescents residing in rural areas

Children and adolescents in rural areas face several challenges in accessing ICT education. Compared to those in Tashkent, IT centres in rural regions often have poorer computer facilities, fewer qualified IT trainers, and weaker internet connections. This makes it challenging to provide the same ICT curriculum across the country, especially across areas such as coding and robotics. There is also a significant difference in ICT skill levels among IT trainers in these regions, further hindering effective learning.

Children who fall victim to cyberbullying and cybercrime

Increased internet usage and the anonymity of online platforms make children vulnerable to harassment and deceit. Although the data is not available, consultations conducted during the SitAn development revealed that cyberbullying and cybercrime affect increasing numbers of children who lack the digital literacy required to recognize threats, and experience peer pressure, or have unsupervised access that exacerbates risks. Related emotional impacts include anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, which can affect academic performance and lead to social isolation.

¹⁵² 'Youth of Uzbekistan', p. 9.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 121.

Conclusions

The chapter highlights the critical role of birth registration in providing legal identity and access to essential services in Uzbekistan. Legislative changes in 2018 and the introduction of remote registration in 2023 have improved access to birth certificates. However, stateless children and children of individuals in need of international protection still face significant challenges due to the lack of a systematic approach and reliable data, despite efforts to reduce statelessness made through the 2020 Citizenship Law.

Uzbekistan has made significant strides in promoting children's participation through laws like the Education Law and the Law on Guarantees of the Rights of the Child. Initiatives such as the Youth Parliament have been established to enhance children's involvement in decision-making. However, cultural norms prioritising obedience and limited platforms for genuine youth participation remain substantial barriers.

Despite significant advancements in internet coverage, the digital divide remains an important issue in Uzbekistan, with children in rural areas and girls facing more significant challenges in accessing ICT education. Despite the 'Digital Uzbekistan – 2030' strategy, infrastructure and training quality disparities persist. Cyberbullying and cybercrime are growing concerns, affecting children's emotional and psychological well-being.

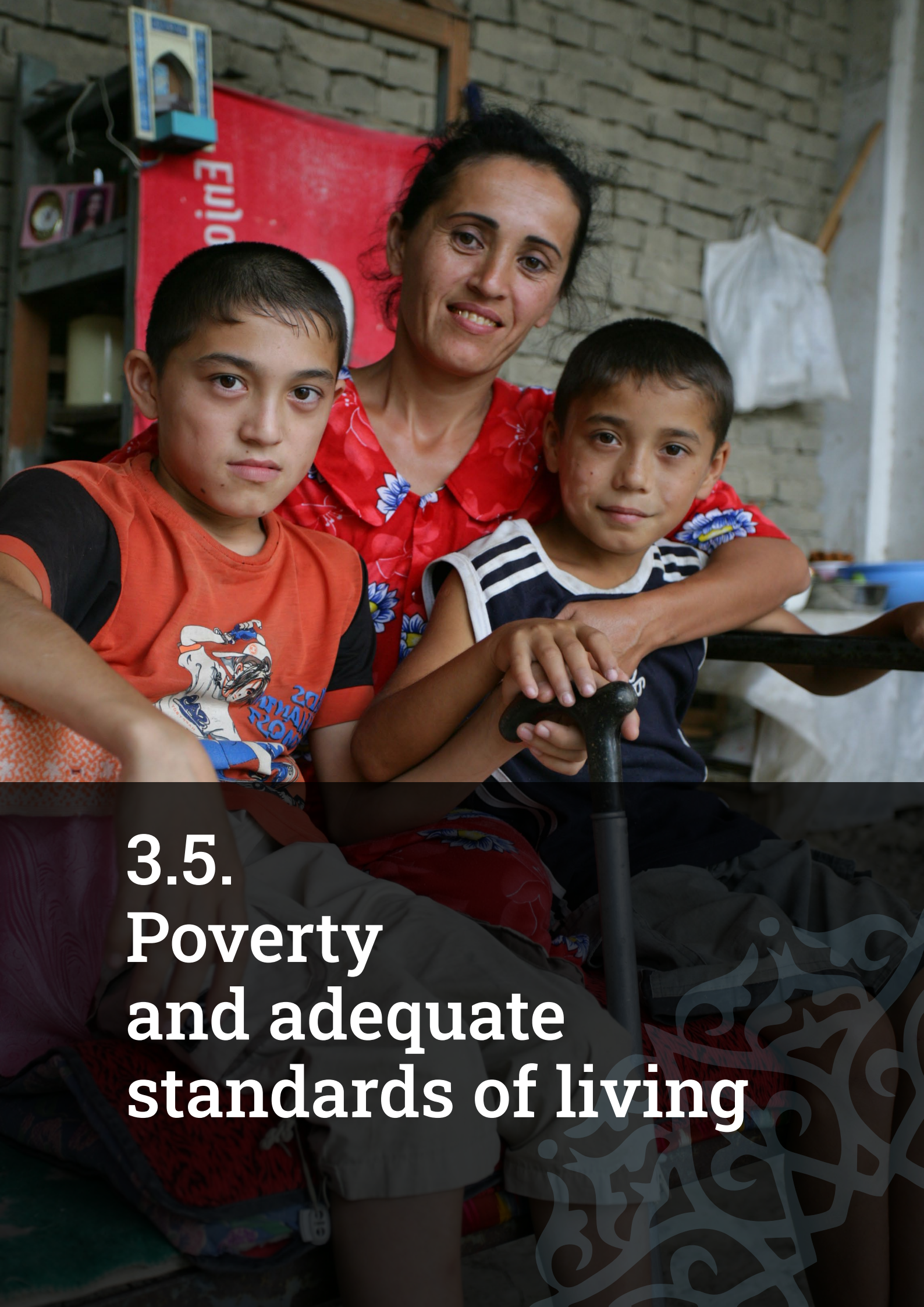
Recommendations

- Implement CRC recommendations to systematically collect and analyse data on implementation of the 2020 Act on Citizenship, disaggregated by age and gender, to better understand and address statelessness. Also ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, to strengthen the legal framework for preventing and reducing statelessness.
- Introduce amendments to current national legislation concerning the right of adopted children to have access to information about their biological origins.
- Promote positive attitudes towards children, adolescents and youth, as active participants in decision-making on matters affecting their life.
- Strengthen the capacities of national authorities in Uzbekistan to consult children and youth. It is essential to provide comprehensive training for officials on participatory decision making, including meaningful and inclusive consultation methods for engaging children and youth. Create institutionalised platforms and mechanisms for regular, structured engagement with young people to ensure their voices are consistently integrated into decision-making processes, and expand participatory decision-making mechanisms beyond the national Youth Parliament to enable participation at regional, local and community levels. Develop special mechanisms to include vulnerable children, particularly those with disabilities, in policy design and monitoring.
- Model student councils in target schools to empower students in decision-making, ensuring student-led and inclusive agendas. Provide necessary training and

resources to support effective operation and overcome participation barriers. Some children recommended establishing regular forums where students can share their thoughts, ideas, and suggestions with school directors. Civil society representatives, including those from organizations for the deaf and blind and the Children's Ombudsperson, should be allowed to monitor schools regularly.¹⁵⁴

- Children with disabilities who participated in focus groups recommended establishing safe and confidential mechanisms for students to voice their concerns without fear of repercussions, and to train school administration and teachers to effectively support students in expressing their needs and concerns.
- Develop legislation, regulations, and safeguarding policies for media and digital environments to protect children's privacy, ensure ethical reporting standards, and establish mechanisms to prosecute violations. It is recommended that ICT be integrated and expanded into the curriculum, and facilities be improved, while teacher capacity building and ensuring children's safe Internet use need to be promoted. It is advisable to amend the Law 'On the Mass Media' to protect children's privacy and raise awareness about the benefits of ICT education for girls and women. Some key informants and children who participated in focus groups recommended allowing students to use personal devices responsibly to complete homework and access educational resources.

154 Children's Proposals for the Implementation of the Provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Based on Consultations Held over 22-23 November 2023. (Предложения детей по реализации положений Конвенции ООН о правах ребенка и Заключительных замечаний Комитета ООН по правам ребенка по результатам консультаций 22-23 ноября 2023).



3.5. Poverty and adequate standards of living

3.5. Poverty and adequate standards of living

An effective social protection system is crucial for addressing economic and social vulnerabilities, particularly among families and vulnerable children. Social protection typically comprises social assistance cash benefits, in-kind transfers, social insurance benefits, and social services. These components are designed to provide essential care and support, including home and respite care, day and week care centres, early intervention services, shelters, emergency assistance, family consultation centres, and conflict resolution services. Ensuring these components are well-integrated and effectively managed is vital for mitigating the adverse effects of poverty and social instability, especially for children who are most vulnerable to these adversities. Addressing poverty among children is of paramount importance, as it directly impacts their development, well-being, and future opportunities. This chapter examines Uzbekistan's progress made in realising children's rights to an adequate standard of living, focusing on the effectiveness of social protection systems in addressing child poverty and enhancing the overall well-being of children.

Sub-domain 3.5.1. Social protection system

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

30(c) Promote parenting roles of men and equal sharing of parental responsibilities between mothers and fathers, in accordance with article 18 (1) of the Convention, including by using awareness-raising campaigns and expanding the use of paternity leave and flexible working arrangements for both parents;

41(a) Establish a multidimensional measure on child poverty to inform the reform of the social protection system to ensure that it adequately protects children in vulnerable situations and their families, including by overcoming institutional fragmentation, enhancing inter-agency coordination and interconnection between social, health-care and legal protection services, strengthening the quality of social protection programmes, and establishing a network of professional social workers and community-based social services;

41(b) Allocate adequate funding to social assistance schemes for all families with children, establish an objective definition of vulnerable families and ensure socioeconomic support for them, giving particular attention to low-income families in the Republic of Karakalpakstan and the Khorezm province;

41(c) Collect and analyse data on children in employment, and the root causes and conditions of such employment, with a view to informing its policy action.

Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

30(a) Increase social assistance benefits, and develop and scale up parenting programmes;

30(b) Strengthen its efforts to prevent child abandonment and family separation and to facilitate family reunification, including by allocating adequate resources to ensure community-based services, giving particular attention to poor families, families with children with disabilities and children left behind by migrant parents, by enlarging the pool of trained social workers and psychologists to provide such services, and by raising awareness of children and families about them.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

During the COVID-19 crisis, employment levels in Uzbekistan dropped significantly. Vulnerable households, especially those in the bottom welfare quintile and self-employed families, were hardest hit and have experienced slower recovery. Recognising the urgent need for a fiscal stimulus package, the government swiftly implemented a series of anti-crisis measures. These included horizontal and vertical expansions of existing social protection schemes, and the introduction of two new one-off cash transfers aimed at vulnerable groups. Although recipient households benefited from the government's COVID-19 response, the broad reach needed to mitigate the crisis's impact on the child population was insufficient, highlighting the need for more inclusive and comprehensive social protection mechanisms.¹⁵⁵ **The COVID-19 crisis demonstrated that a sustainable lifecycle social protection system, accessible during times of vulnerability and expandable during crises, is essential for ensuring children's well-being.**

In recent years Uzbekistan has embarked on a series of reforms to enhance its social protection system, aiming to align with unified approaches and international standards. Adopting the **National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) in 2022** has set medium- and long-term objectives aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the medium term, the strategy focuses on ratifying maternity protection, extending social insurance coverage to the informal sector, and identifying greater fiscal space for equitable social protection. Long-term goals include establishing a social protection floor, expanding temporary disability benefits, and adapting public works and labour market policies to meet the needs of people experiencing poverty. This strategy emphasizes the importance of social protection in mitigating poverty and supporting vulnerable populations, particularly children, through improved social insurance and assistance schemes.¹⁵⁶

A significant milestone in improving the social protection system was the establishment of the National Agency for Social Protection (NASP) under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on 1 June 2023. The NASP consolidates various social services under a single umbrella, streamlining social assistance programmes and developing standards for guaranteed social services. It oversees a broad range of social services, including those for the elderly, minors, people with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, and families in difficult situations. The agency's objectives encompass promoting social work as a profession and shifting from a medical model to a social model for assessing and establishing disability, focusing on social adaptation and integration. Although the NASP is still evolving and has limited institutional capacities, its creation represents a

¹⁵⁵ Kidd, Sarina, et al., 'The road to recovery: How social protection can address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Uzbekistan', Tashkent, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), November 2021.

¹⁵⁶ International Labour Organization, '[Uzbekistan: Social Protection](#)'.

critical step forward in addressing child poverty and enhancing social protection in Uzbekistan.

Although Uzbekistan's population is relatively young, approximately 75 per cent of social protection spending has been on old-age pension plans – spending more than most countries with older populations.¹⁵⁷ This allocation indicates a prioritization of pensions over other social protection measures that could benefit younger populations, such as child welfare programmes, education, and health care services. For children, the focus of social protection is primarily on non-contributory programmes. Core programmes that children may benefit from include child allowance for low-income families, disability allowance, child disability allowance, maternity benefits for women working in the non-state sector, breadwinner-loss allowance, and disability and old age pensions.¹⁵⁸ Eligibility for these programmes is based on factors such as household income, family composition, and employment status.¹⁵⁹

A digitised Single Registry managed by the NASP for beneficiaries of various social allowance programmes, implemented nationwide in late 2020, simplifies access to the social protection system by integrating application, eligibility assessment, and benefit delivery processes. For children, the Single Registry's continuous on-demand application process enhances the system's responsiveness, allowing for timely updates and appeals. By minimising bureaucratic hurdles and ensuring that eligibility criteria are consistently applied, the Single Registry provides a more reliable and accessible social protection framework. The introduction of a Single Registry and simplified procedures in Uzbekistan's social protection system has addressed the stigma and practical difficulties associated with accessing social benefits. Previously, applying for assistance required individuals to present their case in person before a local mahalla committee, and gather various documents from different government offices, a process often accompanied by stigma and a sense of shame. The Single Registry streamlines the application process, allowing for a more discreet and efficient experience. Applicants can now apply online, reducing the need for multiple in-person visits and documentation collection.

The Single Registry has demonstrated its capacity to scale up cash transfer programmes during emergencies, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. It consolidates data from various ministries and agencies, including the Civil Registry and banking systems, to automate eligibility assessments, fund requests, and payment processes. The data collected through the Single Registry can play a pivotal role in ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently, and that support reaches households most in need, particularly those facing financial constraints. It is advisable to transform the current targeted child benefits into universal benefits, ensuring that every child receives necessary support, which is fundamental to promoting equity and inclusion. This approach would establish a foundational safety net for all children, addressing broad socio-economic disparities. However, it is also essential to maintain a set of targeted programmes to provide additional support to the most vulnerable groups. By combining universal child benefits with these targeted interventions, all administered through the Single Registry, the government can ensure comprehensive social protection. This mixed strategy leverages

¹⁵⁷ 'The road to recovery', p. 10.

¹⁵⁸ Scoping the role of cash transfers and other social protection responses to heat extremes in Uzbekistan, For UNICEF, 1 October 2023.

¹⁵⁹ World Bank. 2022. 'Uzbekistan Public Expenditure Review. Better Value for Money in Human Capital and Water Infrastructure', World Bank, Washington, D.C., pp. 94.

the strengths of universal coverage to guarantee basic support for all children, while using targeted programmes to address specific needs and vulnerabilities. Before the Single Registry, re-enrolment for low-income allowances in Uzbekistan varied by region, causing gaps of up to six months due to resource management practices by mahallas.¹⁶⁰

As of 1 July 2024, a unified system for tracking financial assistance and other social services has been introduced. Social payments for each citizen (family) and their entitlements, including subsidies, services, and support, will be recorded in the 'Social Protection' information system on an individual basis. A 'Hotline' for social assistance provides expedited handling of requests from socially-vulnerable segments of the population.¹⁶¹

One of the underlying factors limiting the effective operation of the social protection system is the **lack of a dedicated grievance redress mechanism explicitly tailored for the social protection sector, which impacts children and their families adversely.**¹⁶²

This omission forces vulnerable families to use general complaint channels like the President's Portal, which are not designed for addressing social protection issues, complicating the process and exacerbating their vulnerabilities. Integrating a specialised grievance mechanism into the Single Registry is essential to provide children and their families with accessible and efficient channels for resolving their social protection-related issues. The Single Registry currently includes a built-in grievance redress mechanism, previously linked to the Pension Fund, being the system's former host. As the NASP is now the host of the Single Registry, it is imperative that the NASP establishes its own grievance redress mechanism and ensures it is properly linked to the Single Registry.

Despite the advancements in social protection, some underlying challenges remain, particularly due to the **multiple, manually-maintained notebooks that provide diverse targeted benefits at the mahalla level, in turn complicating streamlined social protection administration.** Integrating these local records with the centralised digital Single Registry is essential for establishing a cohesive and efficient social protection system. This integration is crucial for addressing inconsistencies and ensuring that resources are allocated based on a comprehensive understanding of family needs, ultimately enhancing the system's responsiveness to shocks and improving outcomes for children across Uzbekistan.

Additionally, the Cabinet of Ministers approved Resolution No. 362 in August 2023, which outlines a National Action Plan 2023-2030 to reduce the risk of natural disasters and increase resilience to climate change. This plan highlights the government's proactive approach to addressing environmental challenges, and protecting vulnerable populations, including children, from the adverse effects of climate change. However, Uzbekistan's social protection system has critical gaps in its readiness to respond to shocks, particularly for children. While the system functions relatively well during regular times, it relies on ad hoc decisions during crises rather than established operating procedures, leading to delays and inefficiencies. This is concerning for children who need timely support in emergencies. The absence of regulatory frameworks specifically for social protection during shocks means vulnerable children may not receive the

160 World Bank, 'Targeting Assessment: Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice', World Bank, Washington, DC., 2019.

161 Daryo, '[Uzbekistan launches 'Hotline' for accessing social assistance](#)', Uzbekistan, October 2023.

162 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.

targeted aid they need promptly. The Single Registry is a vital tool for managing social cash transfers and has significant potential for scaling up during emergencies. However, its effectiveness is limited without Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Sub-domain 3.5.2. Child poverty and material deprivation

Groups experiencing deprivations and their causes

Children in regions with high levels of monetary poverty

In Uzbekistan, the poverty level was determined based on the consumption of 2,100 kilocalories per day from 2001 to 2020. Starting in 2021, it began to be based on minimal consumer spending (MCS),¹⁶³ calculated using annual Household Budget Survey data, which includes about 10,000 households. The 30 per cent of households with the lowest expenses are analysed to determine the average amount necessary for daily consumption, including 2,200 kilocalories of food, non-food goods, and services. At the beginning of 2024, the MCS increased by 9.3 per cent, from 568,000 soums to 621,000 soums per month, or from 18,900 soums to 20,700 soums per day.

In 2023, the government allocated 19.2 trillion soums (6.8 per cent of the total budget) for social protection. Child allowances and material assistance amounted to 12.3 trillion soums, 1.8 trillion soums more than planned, due to an 18 per cent increase in beneficiaries registered in the 'Unified Social Protection Registry' (including 336,000 families). Transfers to the non-budgetary Pension Fund were 13.8 trillion soums (4.9 per cent of the budget).

Social benefits in Uzbekistan covered 10.8 million people in 2023, including 2.2 million low-income families receiving child allowances and material assistance. Child allowances were given to about 2.1 million families (with 4.8 million children), while 73,000 families received material assistance. The amount of the child allowance varied based on the number and age of children, with specific rates for each child.

The child benefits programme is designed to target the most vulnerable segments of the population. It prioritises low-income families, single-parent households, and families with multiple children, ensuring the assistance reaches those most in need. The administration of these benefits is managed by the NASP, which oversees the programme's distribution and monitoring to ensure transparency and efficiency. Concerns about the programme's sustainability due to budgetary constraints resulted in a reduction of the total number of children receiving child benefits for low-income families, from 4.8 million to 3.1 million within the first quarter of 2024.

Since April 2024, citizens have been able to apply for child allowances and material assistance online, whereas previously, applications were submitted through local community councils and 'Inson' centres. Eligibility is based on three main criteria, including family income below the national poverty line (currently at 621,000 soums per

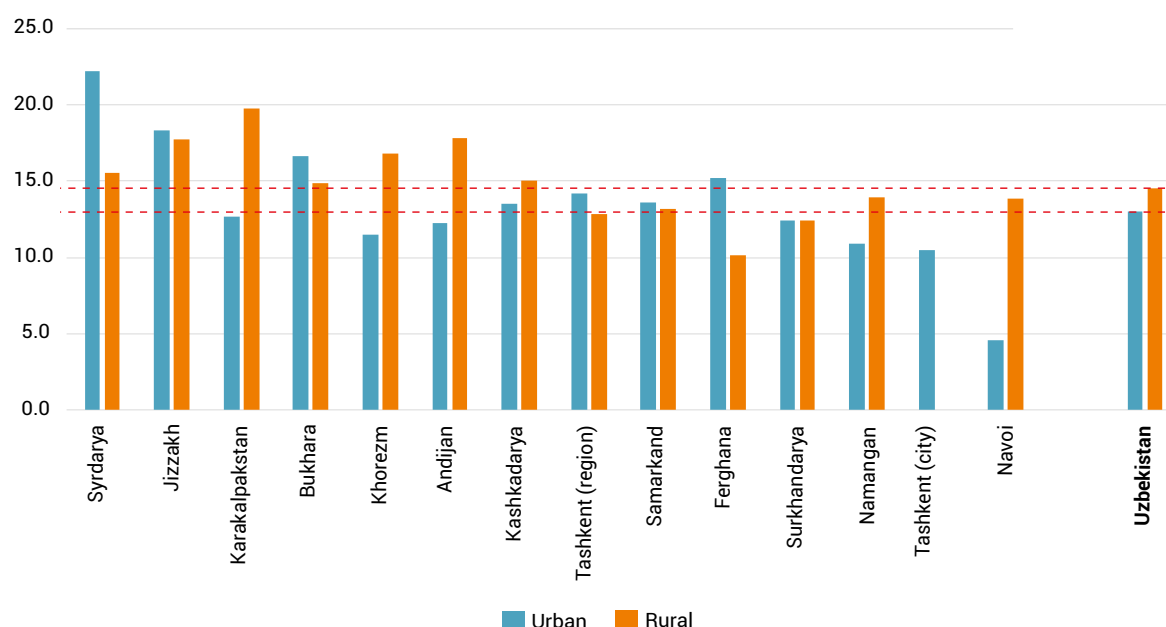
¹⁶³ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, No.544 'On the introduction of the procedure for calculating the amount of minimum consumer spending' ([Минимал истеъмол харажатлари қийматини ҳисоблаш тартибини амалиётга жорий этиш тўғрисида](#)), 27 August 2021.

capita), the employment status of non-disabled family members, and restrictions on property and financial assets.

There has been a significant decrease in the child monetary poverty rate in Uzbekistan, dropping from 21.5 per cent in 2021 to 13.7 per cent in 2023. This reduction is evident in both urban and rural areas. In cities, the poverty rate among children has decreased from 18 per cent to 13 per cent, while in rural areas, it has declined from 24.6 per cent to 14.5 per cent.¹⁶⁴ According to national monetary poverty lines, the number of children living in poverty decreased from 2,660,000 in 2020 to 1,800,000 in 2023.¹⁶⁵ However, 15 per cent of households with children are poor, compared to 6 per cent of households without children. At the same time, approximately 60 per cent of households within the first and second quintiles do not receive child allowances.¹⁶⁶

In 2023, child poverty rates in Uzbekistan exhibited significant regional disparities, reflecting diverse socio-economic conditions across the country. For instance, in the Syrdarya region, Graph 3.5.2.1. presents urban areas experiencing a notably high child poverty rate of 22.2 per cent, while the rural areas saw a decrease to 15.5 per cent. Similarly, the Jizzakh region had high child poverty rates in both urban (18.3 per cent) and rural areas (17.7 per cent), indicating widespread economic difficulties affecting children regardless of their geographic location. In contrast, the Navoi region presented a starkly different picture, with the lowest child poverty rate among the urban population being at just 4.5 per cent. In the Republic of Karakalpakstan, the child poverty rate was significantly higher in rural areas (19.7 per cent) compared to urban areas (12.6 per cent), resulting in an overall poverty rate of 16.2 per cent. This disparity highlights the unique challenges faced by rural populations, negatively affecting child poverty.

Graph 3.5.2.1. Child monetary poverty rate in Uzbekistan in 2023 by region and locality type (by percentage)



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

¹⁶⁴ Center for Economic Research and Reforms (CERR) and UNICEF, Child Monetary Poverty in Uzbekistan Report, 2024.

¹⁶⁵ UNICEF Annual Report, 2023, estimation based on the 2022 National poverty rate for the population.

¹⁶⁶ Center for Economic Research and Reforms (CERR) and UNICEF, Child Monetary Poverty in Uzbekistan Report, 2024.

Some underlying factors behind regional variations in the child monetary poverty rate include:

- Differences in income generation between urban and rural areas. Urban areas typically offer more diverse economic opportunities and employment prospects than rural areas, leading to lower poverty rates. However, urban poverty remains high in regions like Syrdarya and Jizzakh, possibly due to a lack of industrial sector growth and over-reliance on low-paying jobs.
- Over-dependence on agriculture. Many rural areas in Uzbekistan rely heavily on agriculture, which is affected by seasonal variations, climate conditions, regulatory constraints, and market prices. This dependence can lead to fluctuating incomes and higher poverty rates, as seen in the Republic of Karakalpakstan.
- Adverse climate conditions. Regions prone to extreme weather conditions, such as droughts, may experience more severe impacts on agriculture and livelihoods, leading to higher child monetary poverty rates. This is particularly relevant for rural areas in regions such as the Republic of Karakalpakstan.
- Geographic remoteness of some communities. Remote regions often struggle to access markets, services, and economic opportunities, contributing to higher poverty rates.

Some immediate factors behind regional variations in the child monetary poverty rate include:

- Volumes of governmental infrastructure investments. Areas with significant governmental and private sector investments in infrastructure, such as roads, schools and hospitals, generally have lower poverty rates. Regions lagging in such investments face persistent economic hardships.
- Lack of social protection programs tailored to each region's specific conditions and needs weakens their effectiveness. Ensuring that these programs are region-specific and uniformly implemented is crucial for reducing disparities and providing comprehensive support to children, ultimately leading to more equitable child welfare outcomes nationwide.

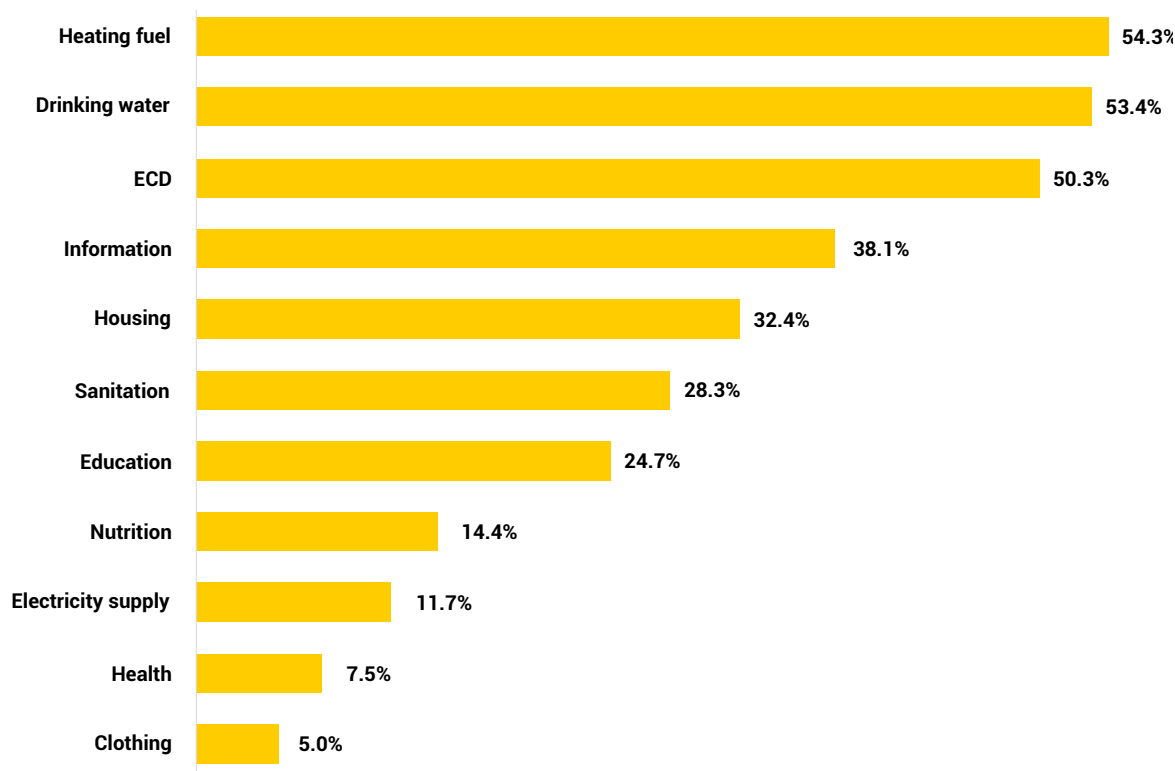
Children experiencing multidimensional poverty

The Multidimensional Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) framework provides a comprehensive tool for assessing child deprivation and poverty, going beyond income-based measures. In Uzbekistan, the National-MODA framework evaluates various indicators such as housing, electricity, heating fuel, drinking water and sanitation, education and access to information, clothing, health, early childhood development, and nutrition for different age groups. For example, children aged 5-17 are considered deprived if they lack a space for homework, and households are considered deprived if they lack improved sanitation or electricity. The study found that 44.7 per cent of children and adolescents under 18 are multidimensionally poor. As Graph 3.5.2.2. presents, specific areas where these children experience deprivation include:

- **Heating fuel:** Over half (54.34 per cent) of multidimensionally poor children live in households that rely on unclean energy sources for heating. This affects their physical health due to potential respiratory issues, and reduces their comfort and safety during colder months.
- **Drinking water:** 53.37 per cent of these children do not have access to an improved source of drinking water on their premises. This lack of access to clean water can lead to various health issues, including waterborne diseases.
- **Early Childhood Development (ECD):** For children aged 0-5 years, 50.29 per cent have no access to children's books, lack interactive engagement with parents or caregivers over the past three days, or do not have toys to play with. This deprivation in early childhood development activities can hinder cognitive and emotional growth.
- **Information access:** Among children aged 8-17 years, 38.07 per cent do not have access to essential information technology such as mobile phones, computers, tablets, or the internet. This digital divide restricts their ability to access educational resources and stay connected with the broader world.
- **Housing:** About 32.38 per cent of multidimensionally poor children live in households with inadequate housing materials for the floor and walls, which affects their living conditions and overall health.
- **Sanitation:** 28.31 per cent of these children live in households without access to improved sanitation facilities. Poor sanitation increases the risk of diseases and negatively impacts hygiene and health.
- **Education:** 24.72 per cent of children aged 3-17 years are not attending preschool, are not currently enrolled in school, or are not in grade levels appropriate for their age. This educational deprivation limits their future opportunities and personal development.
- **Nutrition:** 14.38 per cent of multidimensionally poor children live in households experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity or consuming less than four of seven essential food groups. Inadequate nutrition can lead to stunted growth, weakened immune systems, and other health problems.
- **Electricity:** 11.71 per cent of these children live in households without access to electricity, which impacts their ability to study at night, use electric appliances, and maintain a standard living environment.
- **Health:** 7.51 per cent of children aged 0-17 years have been ill in the last three months but could not obtain necessary medicine due to a lack of money, have disability status but do not receive any benefits, or consider themselves disabled but do not have access to necessary medical and social expertise. This lack of medical support can exacerbate health issues and disabilities.
- **Clothing:** 4.96 per cent of children aged 1-17 years do not possess essential winter clothing, such as a winter coat or shoes. This lack of appropriate clothing can lead to health problems, especially in winter.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ CERR and UNICEF Country Office in Uzbekistan (2023). '[Uzbekistan Multidimensional Child Poverty Report 2023](#)'.

Graph 3.5.2.2. Deprivation headcount ratios by dimension



Source: CERR and the UNICEF Country Office in Uzbekistan, 'Uzbekistan Multidimensional Child Poverty Report 2023'.

Some main underlying factors behind multidimensional poverty include:

- Access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities remains a significant challenge, particularly in impoverished areas. Implementing comprehensive national strategies to ensure all communities have access to these essential services is vital for improving children's health and well-being.
- Current heating and housing conditions pose risks to children's health. Many homes have inadequate flooring and walls, which are not weatherproof or safe. Establishing government-funded programmes to retrofit these homes can significantly improve living conditions. Providing subsidies or low-cost loans to families for home improvements ensures these essential modifications are accessible to low-income households.

Some immediate factors contributing to multidimensional poverty include a lack of cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms for integrated service delivery. Support should be family-focused, identifying specific areas of deprivation such as income, employment, health, housing, and education. Personalized support plans could ensure targeted interventions across sectors, with social workers providing ongoing support and monitoring progress. Regular follow-up visits would assess the effectiveness of interventions and allow for timely adjustments.

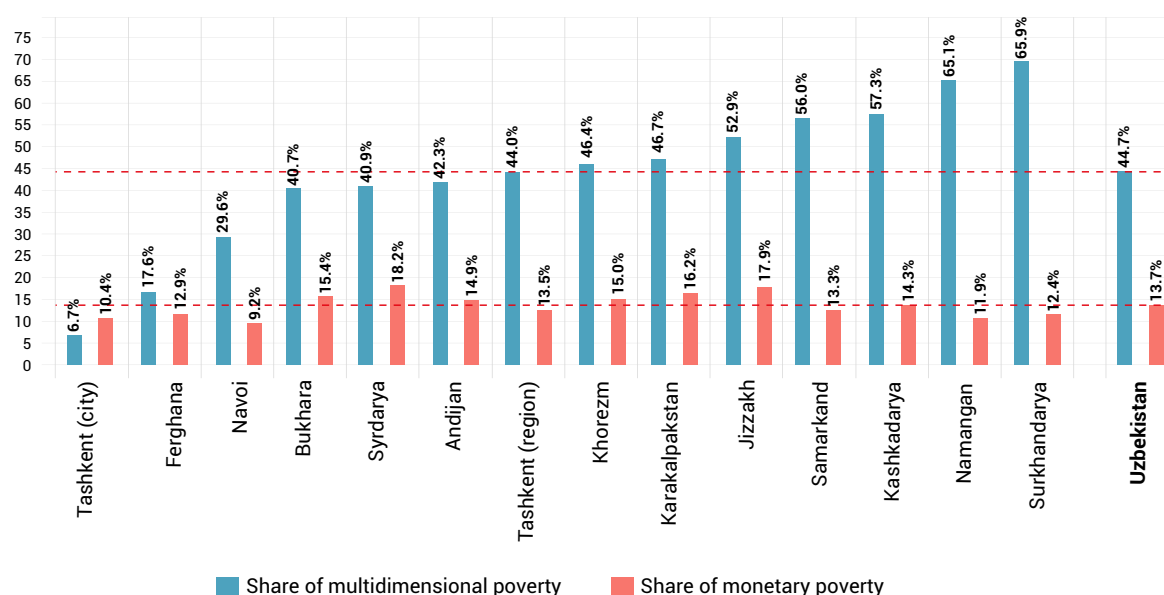
A combined analysis of monetary and multidimensional poverty is crucial for fully understanding child poverty in Uzbekistan, particularly given the significant regional disparities. While monetary poverty rates shed light on income deficiencies, the

multidimensional poverty approach reveals broader challenges by considering factors such as access to education, health services, and adequate housing. This analysis shows that regions outside of Tashkent City experience much higher multidimensional poverty rates compared to monetary poverty rates, highlighting the disparities in children's living conditions across the country.

For example, as shown in Graph 3.5.2.3, regions like Surkhondaryo and Namangan exhibit a stark contrast between monetary and multidimensional poverty rates. Although these regions may have moderate levels of monetary poverty, their multidimensional poverty rates are significantly higher, reflecting severe deficiencies in such areas as education and healthcare. On the other hand, Tashkent City has relatively low multidimensional poverty rates, indicating better access to services and infrastructure, despite similar or lower monetary poverty rates compared to other regions.

By incorporating both monetary and multidimensional poverty analyses, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse challenges faced by children in different regions. This approach reveals the uneven distribution of multidimensionally poor children, offering a clearer picture of where targeted interventions are most needed.

Graph 3.5.2.3 Monetary and multidimensional child poverty rates in regions of Uzbekistan (in per cent).



Source: CERR, UNICEF, Child Monetary Poverty in Uzbekistan Report, April 2024

Sub-domain 3.5.3. Water and sanitation

Access to clean water, proper sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) is crucial for the health, well-being, and development of children and adolescents. Inadequate WASH services can lead to serious health issues, including infectious diseases, malnutrition, and increased school absenteeism, particularly among girls.

Despite significant progress, challenges remain in Uzbekistan's WASH sector. According to a 2021 survey, unsafe water, sanitation, and handwashing were the second leading

risks contributing to disability-adjusted life years (DALYs)¹⁶⁸ among children aged 10–14 years, after malnutrition.¹⁶⁹ This highlights the critical need for continued efforts to improve WASH services across the country.

The latest MICS indicates that 97 per cent of households in Uzbekistan have access to improved drinking water sources. However, 26 per cent of these households still lack drinking water on their premises. These gaps underscore the need for targeted interventions to ensure that all communities have reliable access to safe water and sanitation. Moreover, the deprivation analysis shows that 31 per cent of children are deprived in terms of access to drinking water, and 15 per cent of children live in households without access to an improved sanitation facility. The worst-performing regions regarding sanitation include the Andijan region (67 per cent access to improved drinking water), the Republic of Karakalpakstan (62 per cent), and the Tashkent region (62 per cent). In terms of access to drinking water, the worst performing areas include the Kashkadarya region (81 per cent), the Fergana region (80 per cent), and the Bukhara region (73 per cent).¹⁷⁰

Sanitation services have also shown promising trends, with 94 per cent of households benefiting from improved facilities. However, 6 per cent of households lack proper sanitation facilities, instead relying on flush toilets connected to open drains, pit latrines without slabs, and open pits. In particular, 18 per cent of households lack handwashing facilities. The deprivation analysis shows that 15 per cent of children live in households without access to improved sanitation facilities. One third (28 per cent) of multidimensionally poor children live in households without access to improved sanitation facilities, indicating that greater efforts are needed to reach these underserved populations.¹⁷¹

Health care facilities (HCF) face significant challenges in WASH infrastructure. Only 21 per cent of HCF have hot running water, 29 per cent have sanitation facilities, and 16 per cent have safe health care waste management. Improving WASH infrastructure in health care settings is crucial for infection prevention and better health outcomes, especially for children. WHO defines safe health care waste management (HCWM) as "Waste is safely segregated into at least three bins, and sharps and infectious waste are treated and disposed of safely." In Uzbekistan, 80 per cent of HCFs use improvised sharps containers (e.g. empty plastic bottles). 36 per cent do not separate wastes (with infectious waste, general waste and sharps all found in the same bin). Health care waste from 47 per cent of facilities ends up in public bins. The main treatment method for HCWM is uncontrolled low temperature burning in open incinerators, mixing with general municipal wastes, or dumping.¹⁷² Overall, according to WHO's strict definition, only 15.6 per cent of HCFs in Uzbekistan have safe HCWM management.

Menstrual hygiene management remains an important issue. While a high percentage of women aged 15–49 years use appropriate materials for menstrual management, 7 per

168 Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) is a measure that combines the years of life lost due to early death, and years lived with a disability or illness. One DALY equals one lost year of healthy life. This tool helps to understand the overall impact of diseases and health conditions on a population.

169 UNICEF, 'Landscape analysis of adolescent health and well-being in Uzbekistan', 2021, p. 32.

170 CERR and the UNICEF Country Office in Uzbekistan (2023). 'Uzbekistan Multidimensional Child Poverty Report' 2023, p. 45.

171 Ibid, p. 11.

172 Ministry of Health of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Global Fund and UNICEF. 'Medical waste management practices in healthcare facilities in Uzbekistan'. June 2022.

cent of women did not participate in social activities, work, or school due to menstruation in the past 12 months. This indicator was higher among adolescent girls aged 15-19 years old (8 per cent), women with secondary education (9 per cent), and among poorest households (12 per cent). This points to the need for comprehensive menstrual hygiene management programmes to ensure that women and girls can participate fully in all aspects of life without stigma.

Schools are also struggling with WASH services. The condition of water sanitation and hygiene in schools significantly impacts students' health and attendance. The incidence of infectious and parasitic diseases among children aged 0-14 years has increased over the past five years. According to the MICS, every 14th woman and girl in rural areas misses school or work due to menstruation, with this figure rising to one in eight in poorer households.

In Uzbekistan, more than 78 per cent of general secondary schools have only one set of functional toilets (2-3 outlets on average). According to the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) ladder of services classification,¹⁷³ 57 per cent of schools have only limited sanitation services, and another 23 per cent have almost no services. While 2 per cent of schools fall into the advanced service delivery category, another 10 per cent are in the basic services category.¹⁷⁴

As per the JMP classification, drinking water from an improved source available at the school throughout school time is regarded as a "basic service", and improved sanitation facilities at the school that are single-sex and usable (available, functional, and private) are considered "basic service". A recent school self-assessment shows that basic drinking water services are available in 83 per cent of urban schools, 71 per cent of rural schools, and 64 per cent of schools in remote areas. However, only 1 in 10 schools have basic sanitation services (21 per cent of urban schools, 6 per cent of rural schools, and 12 per cent of schools in remote areas). Nationally, for every 168 students a handwashing outlet is available in the first shift, and for every 84 students in the second shift. This lack of personal hygiene facilities negatively affects school attendance, especially for girls.¹⁷⁵

Around 13 per cent of general secondary schools in the country still do not have proper water services.¹⁷⁶ While 3 per cent of schools do not have a water connection, another 3 per cent use unprotected well or stream water, and 8 per cent use unprotected water from artesian sources.

Government records of provision at ECE facilities report that out of 6,549 state preschools, only 77 per cent (5,045) have access to a centralized source of drinking water, while 11 per cent (746) use alternative sources, including artesian water. Additionally,

173 JMP Ladder of Services:

- **No Service:** Schools have no sanitation facilities at all.
- **Limited Service:** Schools have sanitation facilities that are not always functional or accessible. This can include toilets that lack maintenance, necessary supplies, or are not regularly cleaned.
- **Basic Service:** Schools have functional toilets that are usable, but they may still lack some elements such as proper maintenance or gender separation.
- **Advanced Service:** Schools have well-maintained, fully functional sanitation facilities that meet all requirements, including regular cleaning, accessibility, adequate supplies, and gender-segregated toilets.

174 UNICEF, 'A rapid assessment of the Situation of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in Schools in Uzbekistan', 2020.

175 Ibid.

176 UNICEF, 'A rapid assessment of the Situation of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in Schools in Uzbekistan', 2020, p. 79.

children from 12 per cent (764) of state preschools reportedly bring water from special facilities. Records also show that at early childhood facilities, 1,322 toilet facilities are located outside the main preschool building, while only 24 per cent of state preschools are connected to a central sewage system.¹⁷⁷

Investments are needed to improve these infrastructural shortcomings, with costs estimated in billions of soums. Although modern construction standards have been introduced, further enhancement is necessary, especially in providing safe drinking water and ensuring hygiene facilities are accessible to all students, including children with disabilities and special education needs.

Groups experiencing deprivations and their causes

Children and adolescents living in rural areas with limited access to WASH

Data reveals significant disparities between urban and rural educational institutions in Uzbekistan. While 83 per cent of urban schools have basic water services, only 71 per cent of rural schools have the same level of access. This discrepancy means that a considerable number of rural students do not have reliable access to safe drinking water at school. A similar gap is evident in sanitation facilities, with 86 per cent of urban schools equipped with basic sanitation services compared to just 63 per cent in rural areas. This lack of proper sanitation in rural schools can lead to higher rates of absenteeism, particularly among girls, who may stay home during menstruation due to there being inadequate facilities at school.

Addressing these disparities is crucial for ensuring equitable access to WASH services for all students. Improving water and sanitation infrastructure in rural schools will not only enhance students' health and well-being, but also boost attendance and academic performance. It is especially important for girls, as access to clean water and proper sanitation is key to their ability to attend school regularly and participate fully in educational activities.

Children and adolescents living in areas with poor medical waste management

Children and adolescents living near health care facilities face significant risks posed by poorly managed medical waste. This waste, often discarded in public bins, open areas, or inadequately secured landfills, can expose children to hazardous materials such as infectious agents, sharp objects, and toxic chemicals. Children and adolescents risk contracting diseases, sustaining injuries, and suffering from long-term health issues due to exposure to pathogens and toxic substances. Poorly managed health care wastes can contaminate ground, air and water resources, and environments as a whole, affecting children and adolescents living near health care facilities. Low temperature open burning of medical wastes puts children and adolescents living close to health care facilities at risk, due to long term cancer risks posed by smoke rich in furans and dioxins. These environmental and public health hazards underscore the urgent need for improved waste management practices to protect vulnerable population groups in these regions.

¹⁷⁷ Ministry of Preschool and School Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, '[Uzbekistan Partnership Compact for Education Reform](#)', Tashkent, Uzbekistan, March 2023.

Conclusions

Despite a challenging fiscal situation, 3.1 million children in Uzbekistan continue to receive crucial child benefits. These benefits are a vital part of the country's social protection system, providing essential support to families to help cover the costs of raising children.

The enabling environment is not favourable to the introduction of universal child benefits, but is favourable to improved targeting and expansion of coverage of the most vulnerable groups of children. Limited fiscal space poses a constraint on the expansion of social protection programmes. It is crucial for the Ministry of Economy and Finance to accurately estimate the costs associated with the National Social Protection Strategy's goals and timelines. Advancing the Public Financial Management (PFM) agenda is essential to enhance the impact of social protection initiatives. Emphasising results-based budgeting will ensure that resources are used efficiently to achieve tangible outcomes in improving social protection, particularly for children and vulnerable populations.

In terms of supply, the NASP is making commendable strides in enhancing social protection systems, demonstrating a strong commitment to improving the welfare of vulnerable populations, including children. However, the ambitious nature of the NASP's plans may require substantial technical support and expertise from international partners to ensure successful implementation. The complexities of modern social protection systems necessitate advanced knowledge and experience, and international support will be crucial in overcoming potential challenges and achieving sustainable progress for children.

In terms of demand, despite overall improvements in public perceptions of social assistance, many families are unaware of the social protection benefits they are entitled to, leading to underutilization of available support. Further awareness-raising campaigns and direct involvement of mahalla committees and social workers can address these gaps.

Targeted interventions need to be realized to ensure that all communities, especially those including children living in poor households, have reliable access to safe water and sanitation. Investments into HCWM infrastructure and hardware are needed to provide basic health care waste management equipment at HCFs, in line with WHO recommendations and the Standard Rural and Urban HCWM Models.

Recommendations

A comprehensive cross-sectoral approach is needed to improve the social protection system in Uzbekistan, and effectively address child poverty. This approach should focus on building NASP capacity, expanding coverage, enhancing support services, and ensuring that social assistance programmes are inclusive and accessible to all vulnerable families. By addressing the gaps identified in this chapter, and exploring factors contributing to child poverty while simultaneously establishing cross-sectoral and streamlined support, Uzbekistan can provide more effective support to low-income families and children with disabilities. The main recommendations based on this chapter's analysis include:

- **Increase the coverage of child allowances for low-income families, to ensure that all eligible families receive these benefits.** The process of developing strategies to expand coverage should include improving families' awareness of child allowances, simplifying application processes, and ensuring that eligibility criteria are inclusive and accessible. Additionally, social assistance programmes must be tailored and expanded to better meet the aforementioned needs of low-income families, particularly those with children with disabilities.
- **Establish a comprehensive early warning and response system to effectively monitor and evaluate the socio-economic status of families in Uzbekistan.** This system should include regular data collection, thorough analysis, and consistent reporting to identify at-risk families promptly. Leveraging the existing registry and engaging social workers in consultations with mahallas will ensure quick and accurate identification of families in need. In order to enhance data accuracy and provide a comprehensive understanding of challenges faced by vulnerable families, social workers can conduct field assessments to gather detailed information on family conditions. Integrating this system with the registry will streamline the identification process and facilitate efficient resource allocation, ensuring support reaches those who need it most. Timely interventions are crucial once at-risk families are identified.
- **Implement targeted social protection measures tailored to each region's specific needs and conditions to address child poverty across Uzbekistan.** While regions such as Navoi have shown promising results in urban poverty reduction, others, such as Syrdarya and Karakalpakstan, face significant challenges in rural and urban areas. It is recommended to develop region-specific strategies, focusing on the unique socio-economic factors contributing to child poverty in each individual region.
- **Develop comprehensive Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for social protection, to enhance the social protection of children.** These SOPs should encompass both routine social assistance and emergency responses, clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. The SOPs should include provisions for inclusive targeting and registration procedures, effective methods for delivering cash transfers, and robust coordination and partnership mechanisms. Special emphasis should be placed on establishing a grievance redress mechanism tailored to meet the needs of social protection beneficiaries, ensuring that children and their families can appeal rejected applications.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Göran Jonsson, 'Report of an assessment of the national social protection system's readiness to respond to shocks in Uzbekistan, including activation of emergency cash support', UNICEF, 2023.



3.6. Cross-cutting

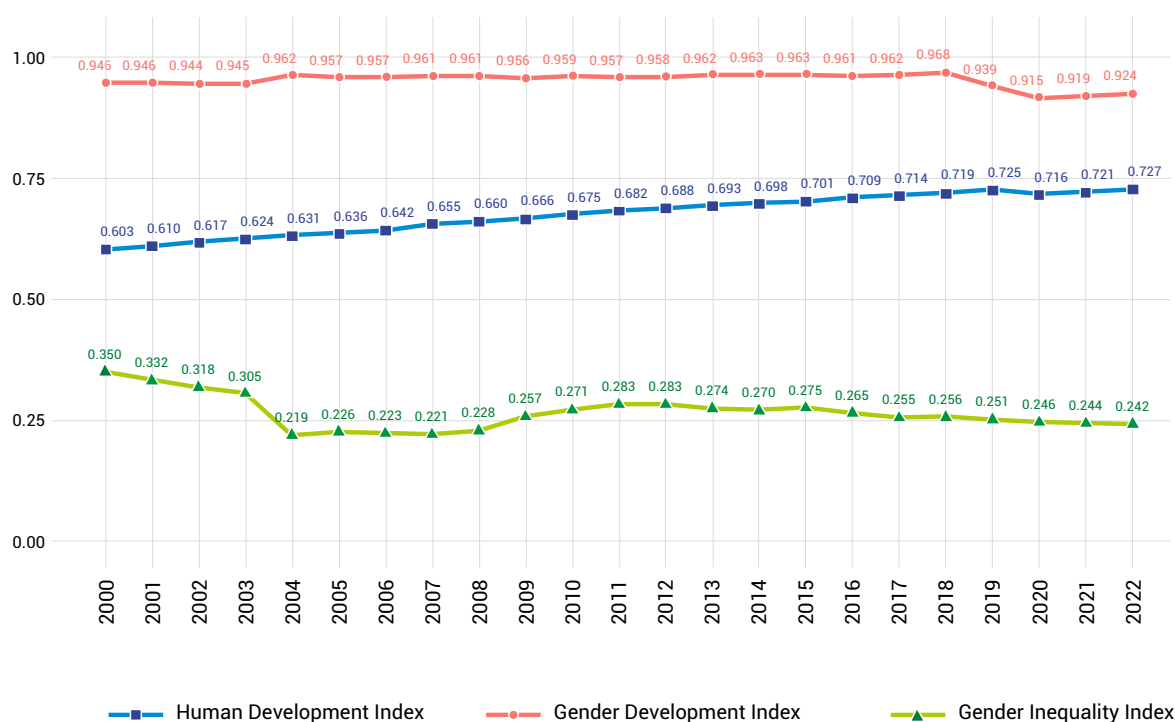
3.6. Cross-cutting

Some critical issues and groups of children and adolescents transcend standard sectoral boundaries, requiring a holistic approach to fully realize their rights and ensure their well-being. Cross-cutting topics such as climate change, gender equality, disability inclusion, and the unique challenges faced by adolescent boys and girls, demand focused attention due to their profound impact on the fulfilment of children's rights. This chapter addresses these areas and groups, highlighting the necessity of a comprehensive approach to fully realize children's rights in Uzbekistan.

Sub-domain 3.6.1. Gender

In Uzbekistan, gender disparities are evident across various social and economic areas, revealing systemic challenges in an enabling environment that persist despite government efforts to promote gender equity. The country is ranked 106th out of 193 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), with an HDI value of 0.727 in 2022, marking a 20 per cent increase from 2000. However, gender disparities persist, with females having an HDI value of 0.691 compared to 0.748 for males, resulting in a Gender Development Index (GDI) value of 0.924, which has decreased by 0.044 over the past five years (2018-2022). The Gender Inequality Index (GII) for Uzbekistan is 0.242, showing a positive downward trend over the past five years (see Graph 3.6.1.1. below).¹⁷⁹

Graph 3.6.1.1. Human Development, Gender Development and Gender Inequality Indices for Uzbekistan, by year



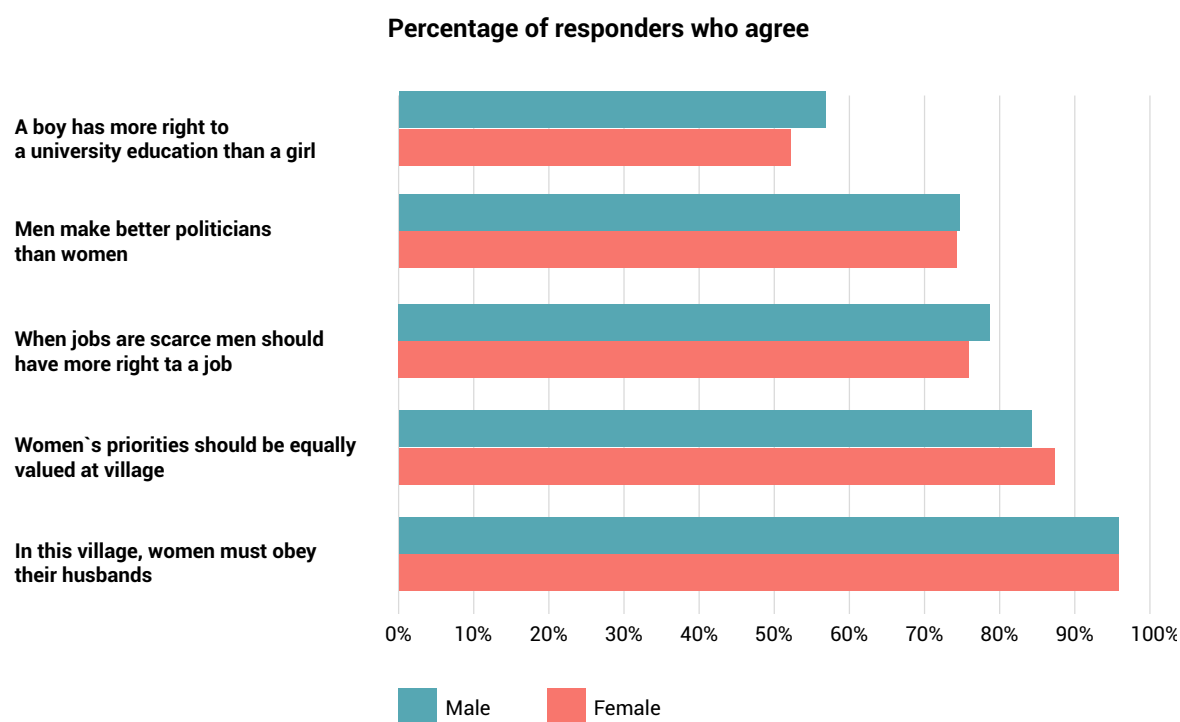
Source of data: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/UZB>.

179 UNDP Human Development Index.

Despite the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995 and enacting laws such as the 2019 Law on Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence, amendments to the Criminal Code on domestic violence, recent criminalization of domestic violence, and raising the minimum marriage age to 18, gender-based violence and strong patriarchal traditions still persist which impact women's roles in family and society. According to MICS, 3 per cent of women aged 20-24 years were first married or entered into a union before the age of 18, while there is almost no incidence of marriage/union before the age of 15 among women this age.¹⁸⁰

As discussed in Chapter 3.3, **a significant portion of the population still holds traditional views on gender roles, with 43.9 per cent of young women and 64 per cent of young men agreeing that men should earn money while women take care of the home and children.**¹⁸¹ Only 5 per cent of children aged 2-4 years are engaged with their father in activities that promote learning, in comparison with 44 per cent who are engaged with their mothers in this way.¹⁸² **Societal norms prioritize women's roles as caregivers and homemakers,** creating an enabling environment that limits their educational and career opportunities. In Uzbekistan, social surveys reveal that traditional views on gender roles are widespread across all demographics, including sex, age, and income level. These perceptions often place men in higher esteem than women, reinforcing gender inequalities and limiting opportunities for women across various aspects of life (see Graph 3.6.1.2.). Alarming, 40 per cent of women aged 15-49 justify for different reasons (please see MICS).¹⁸³

Graph 3.6.1.2. Views on women's roles, rights and treatment



Source: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, Country Gender Assessment for Uzbekistan, 2024.

180 2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS', p. 33.

181 'Youth of Uzbekistan', p. 78.

182 '2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS', p. 174.

183 Ibid. p. 246.

Some underlying factors affecting girls and women's rights realization include educational disparities that can be partially attributed to gender stereotyping in school textbooks, curricula, and teaching materials that reinforce traditional roles.¹⁸⁴ Primary school enrolment rates for girls and boys are nearly equal, but fewer girls transition to secondary and higher education due to household duties, and socio-cultural expectations. Rural schools, often under-resourced and lacking qualified teachers further exacerbate this issue, resulting in lower-quality education for girls. For instance, 88 per cent of women aged 15-49 who participated in a representative MICS survey have secondary (specialised) education, and only 12 per cent have higher education.¹⁸⁵ This educational gap limits women's ability to compete in the job market and pursue careers in higher-paying and in-demand sectors.

Representation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) highlights critical gender disparities in Uzbekistan. The share of female STEM graduates in engineering, manufacturing and construction is 17.7 per cent and 17.8 per cent in ICT programmes.¹⁸⁶ **Women and girls in Uzbekistan are significantly underrepresented in these areas, which are often associated with higher wages and better career prospects,** often working instead in sectors traditionally seen as "women's work", such as health, education, and social services.

The Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) rate indicates gender disparity in transitioning from education to the workforce. The share of young men aged 15 to 25 years who were NEET was 8.8 per cent, compared to 42 per cent of women in that age group.¹⁸⁷ This gap highlights the **significant challenges young women face in accessing further education and employment opportunities**, limiting their potential and economic independence. The NEET rate among young people with severe disabilities is 77 per cent, rising to 91 per cent among those with profound disabilities.

The immediate barriers to gender equality in employment are evident in labour force participation rates. In 2023, only 39.9 per cent of women participated in the labour force, compared to 72.8 per cent of men.¹⁸⁸ Women are often overrepresented in low-paying, unskilled, part-time, and seasonal jobs, which offer limited career advancement and financial stability. Structural causes of gender inequality encompass legal and policy frameworks that inadequately protect women's and girls' rights. Some legal barriers to women's business participation identified by the 2023 Women, Business, and the Law Index include the lack of legislation on sexual harassment in employment, and criminal penalties or civil remedies for such harassment.¹⁸⁹

Unpaid care work is another significant barrier. For example, 40 per cent of women aged 15+ years (vs. 26 per cent of men) are responsible for collecting drinking water for households. Women bear the brunt of unpaid responsibilities, including caring for young children, elderly family members, and sick relatives. This burden restricts their ability to engage in full-time employment or pursue career advancement opportunities, further entrenching gender disparities in employment.¹⁹⁰

184 ECARO Gender Section. Uzbekistan Country Gender Profile. October 2023.

185 '2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS', p. 30.

186 [UNICEF STEM4ALL](#).

187 World Bank Group, [Women, Business and the Law, Uzbekistan](#).

188 [Labor force participation rate, female \(% of female population ages 15+\) \(modelled ILO estimate\)](#) – Uzbekistan, 2023.

189 World Bank Group, [Women, Business and the Law, Uzbekistan](#).

190 '2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS', p. 251.

According to key informants, to promote gender equity in education the Government of Uzbekistan offers free higher education to girls from low-income families, and working women seeking advanced degrees. This initiative has seen a significant uptake, with more women than men pursuing higher education, and thousands of applications being made for these programmes each year. Some focused measures such as job trainings are pursued to employ more than 500,000 women in mahallas across the country. Some key informants have mentioned currently implemented ICT training programmes for girls and women, supported by international partners, that aim to empower participants by developing their skills in information technology, aligning with current industry demands. They indicated that these programmes have strong potential to increase women's employment rates, reduce NEET levels among young women, reduce early marriages, and promote economic independence through use of IT skills. Yet, the effectiveness of these measures has to be assessed.

Women and girls with disabilities experience intersecting forms of discrimination, and are disproportionately exposed to violence, exploitation and abuse. The availability of services to prevent and address violence against women with disabilities is extremely limited in Uzbekistan. Insufficient coordination and referral systems between the mahalla, health care, and social services limits the availability of information. Additionally, the absence of a strong network of organizations for women with disabilities throughout the country keeps this issue largely invisible on the national agenda. Girls with disabilities are especially at risk of not receiving education or training, and do not have the minimum digital literacy required to navigate safely on digital platforms. This not only limits their future educational and employment opportunities but also makes them vulnerable to online abuse, harassment and bullying. **Workplace discrimination and harassment, particularly against women with disabilities, hinder women's ability to thrive in their professional environments.** Reports of such discrimination highlight the need for more inclusive and supportive workplace policies and practices. In Uzbekistan, 4 per cent of women aged 15 to 39 years felt discriminated against or harassed on the basis of their disability.¹⁹¹

Uzbekistan's strategy for achieving gender equality by 2030, adopted in 2021, outlined a comprehensive action plan and established principles to advance gender equality across various sectors, including electoral rights, civil service, education, the sciences, and sports. The strategy emphasises equal rights and opportunities in the socio-economic sphere, promoting job creation, entrepreneurship, access to credit, and measures to prevent harassment and violence. It also addresses gender-related issues in family affairs, childcare, legal documentation, and gender statistics. A Gender Commission, comprising relevant stakeholders and civil society organizations, will monitor the strategy's implementation and progress to ensure its effective execution.

¹⁹¹ibid

Sub-domain 3.6.2. Disability

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

36(a) Adopt a child rights-based approach in legislation and policies regarding children with disabilities, including a definition of disability in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;

36(b) Harmonize the methodology, tools and criteria for the identification of disabilities.

Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

36(c) Strengthen support for the parents of children with disabilities by increasing the availability of community-based services, including early intervention services and home attendance by patronage nurses and social work assistants;

36(d) Ensure that children with disabilities have equal access to early childhood development and school readiness opportunities as other children;

36(e) Develop alternative family-based care options for children with special needs and disabilities, instead of placing them in Muruvvat homes;

36(f) Ensure that social sector professionals and other similar professionals who are regularly in contact with children have adequate knowledge and minimum standards of conduct, inclusive of disability.

Demand (financial access and social behavioural drivers)

36(g) Strengthen awareness-raising programmes, including campaigns, aimed at government officials, judges and law enforcement officials, lawyers, the public and families, to combat the stigmatization of children with disabilities, and to promote both their positive image as rights-holders and opportunities for them to express their views on matters affecting them, including at school.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

Officially, in 2022, 845,300 people or 2.3 per cent of the total population were recognized as persons with disabilities. The majority of persons with disabilities live in rural areas – 532,000 people with disabilities live in villages, while 313,300 live in cities. The highest rate of people with disabilities are in the Navoi (3.6 per cent) and Syrdarya (3.1 per cent) regions. In Uzbekistan, there are 142,300 children with disabilities under the age of 18.¹⁹²

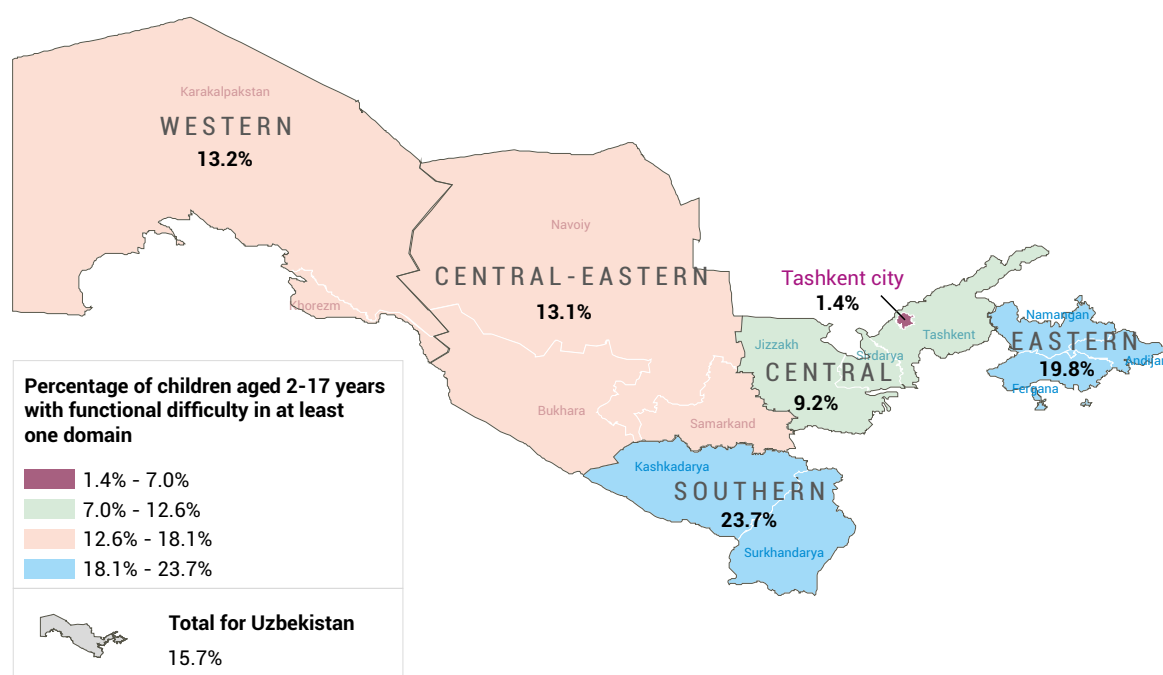
The officially reported number of persons with disabilities is likely underestimated, and does not fully capture the reality. The considerable underreporting can be attributed to several factors, including limitations in legal definitions of disability, the lack of modern assessment methodologies for groups such as children with autism, transportation

¹⁹² [World Bank presents data about persons with disabilities in Uzbekistan.](#)

costs, and the burden of preparing application documents. All these factors especially impact families in rural areas, who suffer from cultural stigmas that discourage families from registering disabilities. One of the immediate factors remains Insufficient early identification and intervention systems, and practices that often leave those with mild impairments unrecorded in official statistics.

The MICS of 2021-2022 revealed that 16 per cent of children aged 2-17 experience functional difficulties in at least one domain, with anxiety being particularly prevalent among adolescents (see Graph 3.6.2.1. below for further details on regional variations). For children aged 2-4 years, 5.2 per cent have functional difficulties, primarily in controlling behaviour (2.7 per cent) and in communication (1.8 per cent). Among children aged 5-17 years, 18.4 per cent face functional difficulties, with anxiety (12.9 per cent) and depression (3.5 per cent) being the most common issues. These findings provide a more detailed understanding of the prevalence of functioning difficulties among children.

Graph 3.6.2.1. Percentage of children aged 2-17 years with functional difficulty in at least one domain, by geo-economic regions of Uzbekistan



Source: The 2021-2022 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, in Uzbekistan.

The NASP is piloting a project to improve disability assessments by including functional and social needs evaluations alongside traditional medical assessments. This initiative initially targets adults and will later expand to children, incorporating data exchange through the Medical Commission and including paediatricians for comprehensive evaluations. The project adopts the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) standard that supports a move from a medical to a social model of disability in practice.

Uzbekistan has shown a strong political willingness to support children with disabilities in all areas of life. Uzbekistan has made significant progress in supporting persons with disabilities through key legislative and policy reforms. In 2020, the country adopted a new Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Following this, in 2021, the government

ratified the CRPD and drafted a National Action Plan to implement its provisions. From 2022 to 2024, presidential resolutions focused on social services and social protection, emphasising the transition to a social model of disability assessment and the provision of assistive technology. A major milestone was the establishment of the NASP under the President's office in June 2023, which oversees social service provision and the transition to a social model of disability assessment.

Initiatives such as establishing community-based services and daycare units in Muruvvat and homes for children with disabilities are positive steps towards creating an enabling environment. **Despite these efforts, the enabling environment to realize the rights of children with disabilities is missing crucial supports and capacities required to fully realize the objective of inclusion.**

Several underlying and immediate factors continue to impede the full realization of the rights of children with disabilities in Uzbekistan:

- **Social norms in Uzbekistan perpetuate deep-seated stereotypes and misconceptions about disabilities, often portraying individuals with disabilities in a narrow and inaccurate light.** This extreme stigma towards people with disabilities, rooted in a charity and medical approach to disability, leads to significant marginalization and isolation of children with disabilities. The dominant stereotypes and lack of public awareness contribute to the exclusion of children with disabilities from mainstream society, limiting their opportunities for social interaction, education, and personal development. This exclusion reinforces negative perceptions, leading to isolation, lower self-esteem, and diminished learning opportunities.
- Despite legislative and policy improvements, institutional gaps hinder the effective support and integration of children with disabilities. **The current legislative framework lacks comprehensive laws specifically designed to facilitate early intervention services and multidisciplinary approaches that integrate educational, social, and medical interventions, crucial for providing holistic support to children with disabilities and their families.**
- **Services for children with disabilities** are often limited and uncoordinated, making it difficult for families to navigate and access the support they need. Efforts to improve professional social services in Uzbekistan are moving in a positive direction under NASP leadership. Social workers are being hired, and social work training across various fields has been introduced at higher educational institutions, enabling provision of case-managed support for persons with disabilities at the community level. The national social protection system, however, often overlooks the additional costs faced by persons with disabilities, including high out-of-pocket expenses for assistive devices, rehabilitation, and support services.
- **Children with disabilities are disproportionately represented in residential care in Uzbekistan, with 79 per cent of institutionalized children having disabilities.** These institutions, while intended to provide care, often exacerbate vulnerabilities rather than mitigate them. Institutional settings can severely impact children's rights and well-being, leading to exclusion, exploitation, violence, and abuse. Isolation from family and community life hampers their social integration and emotional development. Moreover, the lack of individualized care and attention often results in neglect, inadequate education, and poor health outcomes, violating the rights of

these children to live in a family environment, receive proper education, and enjoy protection from harm.

- **Despite measures to promote inclusive education, described in detail in Chapter 3.2, children with disabilities in Uzbekistan face significant barriers.** The revised Education Law and new inclusive classrooms are steps forward, but inconsistencies in disability definitions, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of support for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities persists. Mainstream schools often lack assistive technologies, and many teachers are not adequately trained. Children with learning disabilities are frequently mislabelled, preventing them from accessing vocational training and higher education. Focus groups indicate poor education quality in boarding schools and significant barriers for children with hearing disabilities due to the lack of sign language proficiency among teachers. High NEET rates persist among young people with disabilities, particularly those with severe disabilities, highlighting the inadequate career counselling and low employment rates for graduates with disabilities.¹⁹³ Although there are quotas for secondary school graduates with disabilities to access higher education, many of them cannot find jobs after graduating¹⁹⁴, highlighting significant gaps in the labour markets' acceptance of persons with disabilities. Some children with disabilities who participated in focus groups mentioned that career counselling was inadequate.
- **Economic barriers faced by families of children with disabilities exacerbate the challenges faced in seeking inclusion,** especially for those from poorer wealth quintiles who struggle to access essential health and social services and supports. Economic constraints also limit their ability to provide necessary support for their children's development. Girls and women with disabilities face compounded discrimination due to both their gender and disability status, limiting their access to education, training, and employment opportunities.
- **In terms of supply,** services for children with disabilities in Uzbekistan are often limited and uncoordinated. Despite the government's commitment to disability inclusion, the availability of essential services such as early identification and intervention, inclusive education, and specialised health care remains inadequate. Many children with mild impairments are not recorded in official statistics, further limiting their access to support.
- **In terms of demand,** many parents lack the knowledge and resources needed to effectively advocate for their children's rights, significantly limiting their access to essential services and support. This gap in parental advocacy means that many children with disabilities are unable to receive necessary interventions and resources for their development. Parents often feel isolated and unsupported, struggling to find the best solutions for their children.

193 UNICEF, 'Building a national social protection system fit for Uzbekistan's children and youth' report, 2020.

194 Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023, pp. 55.

Sub-domain 3.6.3. Early childhood development

In Uzbekistan, the system for Early Childhood Development (ECD) remains significantly underdeveloped, leaving many children with mild impairments unsupported. The absence of a biopsychosocial approach applied to child health and development means health care providers often do not conduct holistic assessments of risks to children's well-being.

The enabling environment, as described in the chapter on education, is very favourable for improvements in early childhood education and care, resulting in its significant expansion to over 70 per cent of eligible children's coverage in 2023. However, it is less supportive of the implementation of comprehensive ECD, which requires integrating health, nutrition, social protection, education, and parental support services to address the diverse needs of young children.

The Early Childhood Development Index (ECDI) stands at a relatively high 82.6 per cent.¹⁹⁵ However, a stark disparity exists for children with functional difficulties, whose ECDI is only 36.3 per cent. This discrepancy underscores the need for better-targeted interventions and comprehensive support systems for children with functional difficulties who face substantial challenges that hinder their development.

Several underlying factors impede the development of ECD:

- **The underdeveloped and fragmented policy environment for ECD** lacks the processes and mechanisms to integrate health, nutrition, education, and social protection services focusing on young children and their families.
- **An underdeveloped early detection and intervention system** that lack standards for children under five with developmental risks, delays, or disabilities. This results in many children with mild impairments remaining unrecorded and unsupported.

One of the immediate factors impeding the development of ECD includes **inadequate funding for comprehensive ECD programmes integrating health, nutrition, social protection, and parental support services**. This lack of financial resources hinders the expansion and sustainability of ECD initiatives, and does not provide the needed evidence to support policy decisions on ECD policy and strategy adoption and expansion.

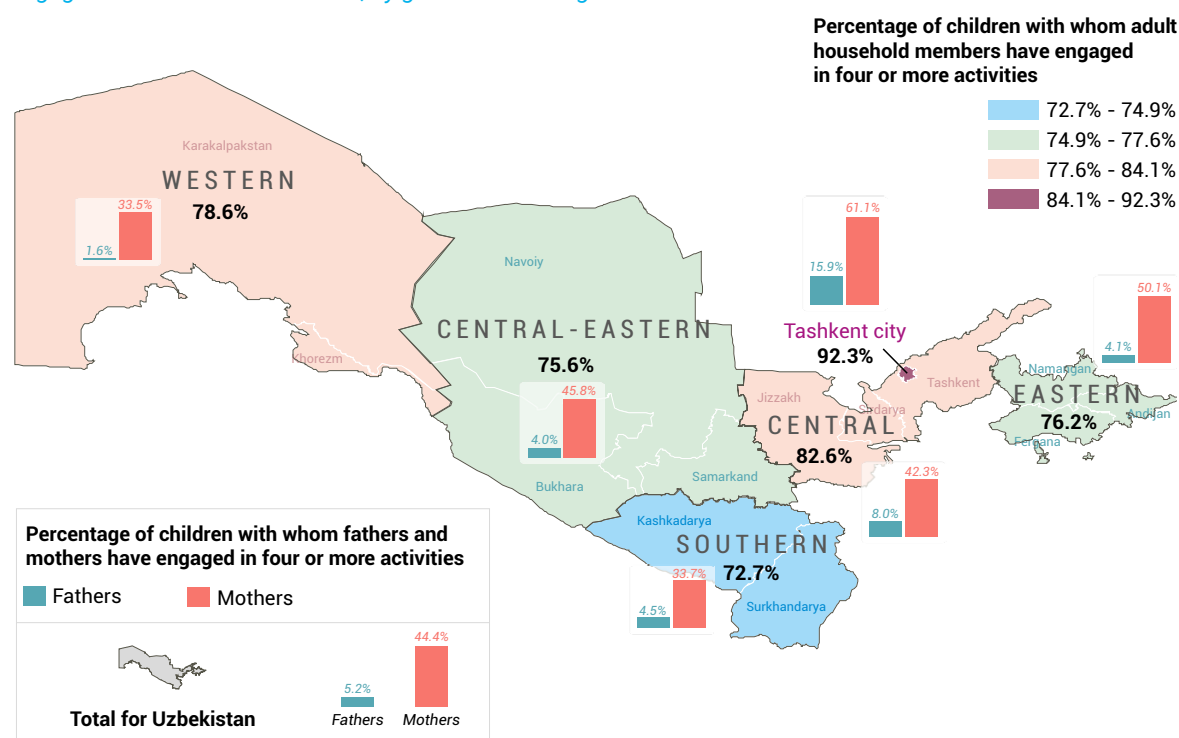
In terms of supply, comprehensive ECD programmes that integrate health, nutrition, social protection, and parental support services are unavailable. There is a significant gap in standardized procedures and accompanying manuals for ECD programmes, which hampers the consistency and quality of supports and services. The manuals for professionals involved in early identification and programming with appropriate tools are not peer-reviewed by international experts, leading to inconsistencies in diagnosis and support for families with children with disabilities.

In terms of demand, parents are often unaware of the importance of their engagement in child development. Only 77.6 per cent of children aged 2-4 years have an adult household

¹⁹⁵ The ECDI2030 captures the achievement of key developmental milestones by children between the ages of 24 and 59 months. Mothers or primary caregivers are asked 20 questions about the way their children behave in certain everyday situations, and the skills and knowledge they have acquired. It assesses children aged 36-59 months across four domains, including literacy/numeracy, physical development, social-emotional development, and learning. See, UNICEF, The Early Childhood Development Index 2030: A new measure of early childhood development, UNICEF, New York, 2023.

member engaging in four or more activities with them, as Graph 3.6.3.1. below presents. Traditional beliefs and gender stereotypes about parenting negatively impact parents' responsiveness and demand for quality services. Many parents and caregivers adhere to outdated assumptions about the roles of fathers and mothers in child-rearing, affecting their ability to engaged in positive child-rearing practices. Notably, only 5.2 per cent of these children have their fathers engage in such activities, compared to 44.4 per cent who do so with their mothers.

Graph 3.6.3.1. Percentage of children with whom adult household members, fathers and mothers have engaged in four or more activities, by geo-economic regions and for Uzbekistan



Source: 2021-2022 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, in Uzbekistan.

Furthermore, 11.8 per cent of children under five have been left with inadequate supervision, and 4.3 per cent have been left alone in the previous week. This issue is more pronounced in the Eastern geo-economic region, where 15 per cent of children are left unsupervised, compared to just 5 per cent in Tashkent. Additionally, there is a lack of services and programmes to support parents in providing nurturing care and addressing their children's mental health needs, particularly for vulnerable families.

Sub-domain 3.6.4. Adolescents and youth up to 24 years old

UN CRC recommendations:

Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

39 (a) Adopt a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policy for adolescents, and ensure that sexual and reproductive health education is part of the compulsory school



curriculum and is targeted at all adolescents, girls and boys, with special attention given to preventing sexually transmitted infections.

Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

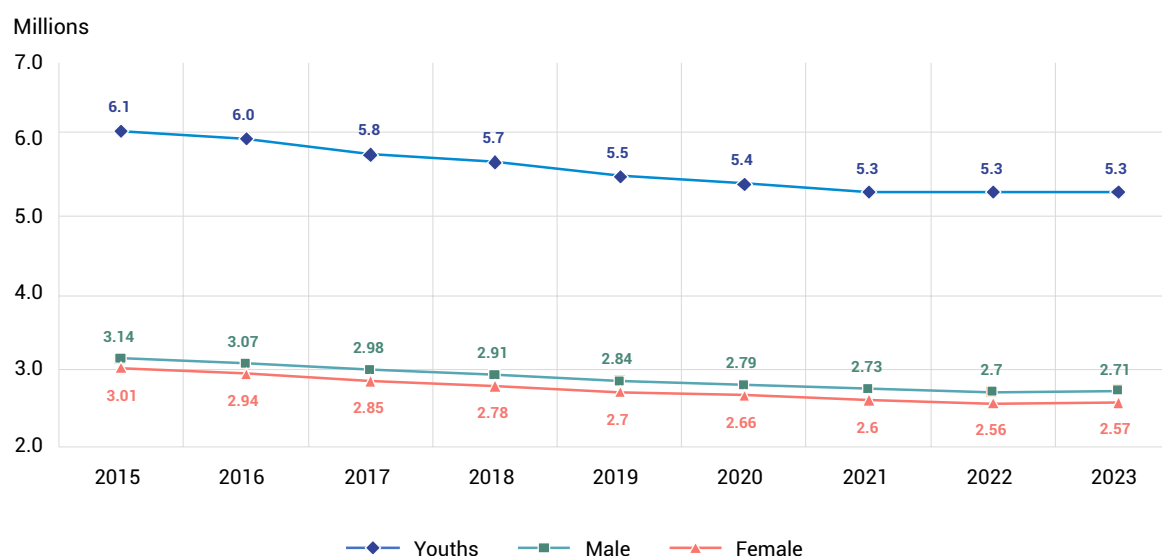
39(b) Ensure that adolescents have access to modern contraception, confidential testing and HIV treatment.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

Adolescence is a distinct phase that bridges early childhood and adulthood, characterized by significant physical, emotional, and cognitive transitions. During this period, children experience substantial brain development, which influences their emotional skills, physical abilities, and mental capacities. Research highlights that investing in adolescents yields positive economic benefits for societies, emphasizing the importance of this critical developmental stage. For Uzbekistan, supporting adolescents is essential for national prosperity, as it ensures a well-prepared and empowered future generation capable of contributing positively to the nation's growth and stability.

Adolescents aged 10-19 constitute 16.3 per cent of Uzbekistan's population, totalling 5,883,402 individuals as of 2023.¹⁹⁶ This demographic is nearly evenly split by gender, with girls making up 48.64 per cent and boys 51.36 per cent. The youth population aged 15 to 24 represents 14.7 per cent of the population in 2023, totalling 5.3 million individuals. These figures highlight the significant potential of this age group to contribute to the nation's socio-economic development. (See Graph 3.6.4.1. below.)

Graph 3.6.4.1. Youth population (aged 15 to 24) of Uzbekistan by 1 January by years and gender, in millions



Source: Calculated from data provided by the government to TransMonEE.

The enabling environment for adolescent rights realization is favourable for their increased educational attainment and improved opportunities for employment,

¹⁹⁶ Statistics Agency Under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

including ICT use, but less favourable for addressing complex intersectoral issues such as mental and reproductive health. The government has strongly committed to prioritising youth within its development agenda. Notably, the government dedicated 2021 to supporting youth and enhancing public health, and 2024 to supporting youth and business development. The national authorities emphasize modern education and securing employment for young people, evidenced by the increased number of universities and a significant rise in higher education admission quotas over the last five years. The number of higher education institutions in Uzbekistan has increased from 108 in 2019 to 199 in 2022, and the coverage of young people (aged 18 to 22 years old) with higher education has increased from 20 per cent in 2019 to 28 per cent in 2021.¹⁹⁷ Recent initiatives to bolster youth employment include wage subsidies, subsidised internships for vocational education students, concessional loans for youth-led entrepreneurial projects, and investments in youth technoparks.¹⁹⁸

The Youth Affairs Agency in Uzbekistan is implementing diverse programmes supporting youth. A comprehensive database, Youth Notebook (Yoshlar Daftari), for children and youth aged 18 to 30 enables targeted interventions, supporting applications for education, professional training, and work opportunities. Examples of said programmes include the Creative Parks¹⁹⁹ that are expected to be established across the country to foster the development of creative industry companies, such as film, photography, design, and theatre. Another example is specialized training for blind youth to foster their skill development. Special programmes for NEET youth and migration preparation initiatives equip youth with skills required for success.

Some underlying and immediate factors affecting adolescents' rights realization:

- **Social norms of acceptance of domestic violence, especially against adolescent girls,** with 8 per cent of this group reporting experiences of discrimination or harassment in the past year. Additionally, 62 per cent of children aged 10 to 14 years have experienced some form of violent discipline in the past month, indicating widespread exposure to harsh disciplinary practices.²⁰⁰
- **A notable disconnect between Uzbekistan's education system and labour market demands, leading to a skills mismatch.** Professional orientation and career counselling services in schools are scarcely available and inconsistent in quality. These services are often limited to school psychologists who conduct basic aptitude tests, rather than providing comprehensive career guidance and support. There is a lack of structured programmes and trained professionals dedicated to career counselling, resulting in many students not receiving the necessary guidance to make informed decisions about their futures. This gap in services means that many adolescents are not adequately prepared for the transition from education to employment, impacting their long-term career prospects and economic independence. Only 21 per cent of employers believe that the training provided by Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges meets industry needs, with 32 per cent finding it irrelevant and the rest considering it only partly

197 Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023, pp. 54-56.

198 World Bank, Youth employment in Uzbekistan, Opportunities and Challenges, 2021.

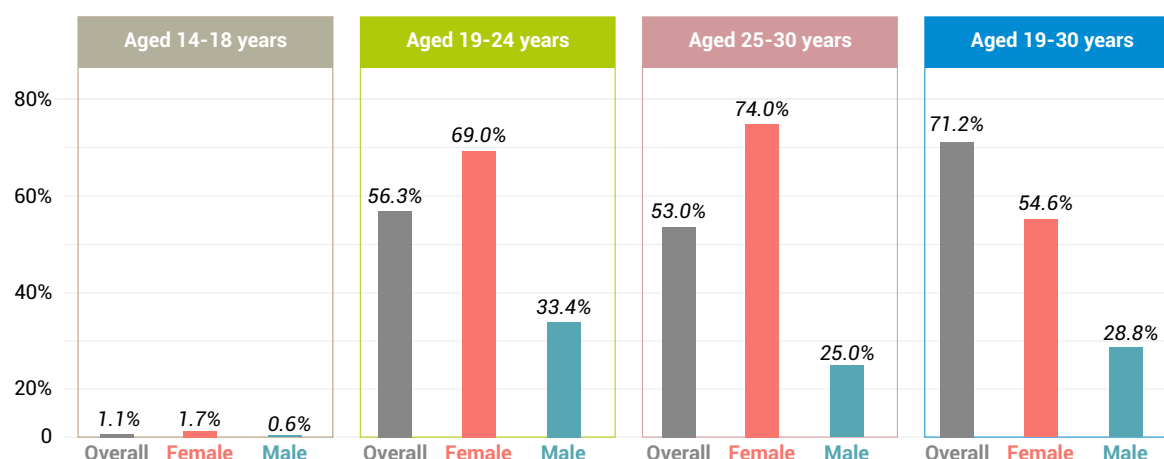
199 PR-UZ, A 'Creative Park' will be opened in Uzbekistan for the creative development of youth in the regions. (В Узбекистане откроют 'creative park' для творческого развития молодежи в регионах).

200 '2021-2022 Uzbekistan MICS', p. 246.

relevant.²⁰¹ This gap particularly affects vocational diploma holders, pushing employers towards favouring tertiary education credentials for technical roles. Skills mismatch contributes to high Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) rates. Moreover, the NEET rates stay consistently high for various youth groups, as Graph 3.6.4.2. below indicates. Youth inactivity and discouragement are prevalent due to societal norms, low wages, and scarce formal job opportunities, leading to high NEET rates.

- **Underdeveloped health and well-being support tailored for adolescents' needs.** The prevalence of mental health issues among adolescents is alarming. The highest rates of self-inflicted injuries and suicides are seen in youth aged 15 to 19 years, highlighting the need for urgent mental health interventions and support systems. In the area of reproductive health, the lack of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education in schools deprives adolescents of essential information required for their healthy development.

Graph 3.6.4.2. NEET rates by age group



Source: Youth of Uzbekistan: Challenges and Prospects, UNICEF 2020.

Sub-domain 3.6.5. Climate change and the environment

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

40. Taking note of the measures taken to protect the health of children in the Republic of Karakalpakstan and the Khorezm region, which are the most affected by the climate and environmental harm, the Committee recommends that the State party continue to monitor, mitigate and address the impact of environmental degradation and climate change on children's health and development, with particular attention given to food security, water and sanitation and access to health-care and nutrition services and programmes in the above-mentioned areas.

Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

201 Asian Development Bank, Skills development in Uzbekistan: A sector assessment, December 2022.

In Uzbekistan **the impacts of climate change are becoming increasingly evident, with significant consequences for the environment, economy, and public health. These changes pose severe risks, particularly for the country's youngest residents.** With a medium Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI) of 5.4, the second highest in the ECA region, Uzbekistan faces extreme risks from climate and environmental shocks, highlighting the urgent need for action.²⁰² Climate change could shrink Uzbekistan's economy by 10 per cent by 2050.²⁰³

Climate change and the shrinking of the Aral Sea have caused significant temperature increases in Uzbekistan, with a rise of about 1°C from 1961 to 2016 and changes in regional weather patterns, including shorter cold periods and longer periods of stable weather.²⁰⁴ **Climate-induced heatwaves is a prominent threat to children's health and well-being.** Approximately 9.6 million children or 91 per cent of Uzbekistan's child population are exposed to these heatwaves, severely impacting health and development. These heatwaves' frequency, duration, and severity are expected to increase, exacerbating the risks to children's well-being.²⁰⁵

Uzbekistan is increasingly facing significant water scarcity challenges due to climate change's impacts and the construction of the Qosh-Tepa canal in Afghanistan. This could lead to a GDP impact of 0.7 per cent and a loss of approximately 250,000 jobs in the area of crop production, particularly affecting Kashkadarya, Bukhara, Khorezm, and Karakalpakstan.²⁰⁶ Water scarcity is an urgent issue in Uzbekistan, with the country ranked 29th out of 167 in the World Resources Institute's ranking of countries suffering from water stress in 2040.²⁰⁷ Over the past two decades, water availability per capita has dramatically decreased from 3,048 cubic meters to 1,589 cubic meters, down by approximately 50 per cent. This reduction is attributed to a combination of rising temperatures, more frequent and severe droughts, and a significant decrease in precipitation, particularly snow, which is crucial for replenishing water sources. In the last decade, for example, droughts became more frequent in the summer and autumn seasons, especially in the lower reaches of the Amudarya River and in the vicinity of the former Aral Sea.²⁰⁸

Population growth is expected to drive demand for quality water from 2.3 billion cubic meters to between 2.7 and 3.0 billion cubic meters by 2030, being an 18 to 20 per cent increase.²⁰⁹ This escalating demand will significantly impact the public utilities sector, necessitating a yearly increase in water supply. Additionally, the rapid development of industry and the energy sector has intensified water demand in recent years. This water scarcity could severely affect children's health and development by limiting access

202 [The CCRI is structured according to two central pillars: 1\) Exposure to climate and environmental hazards, shocks and stresses; and 2\) Child vulnerability. Across the two categories, the CCRI brings 56 variables together to measure risk across 163 countries.](#)

203 World Bank. 'Uzbekistan - [Country Climate and Development Report](#)' (English). Washington, D.C., World Bank Group.

204 Berdimbetov, T, Buddhi Pushpawela, Nikita Murzintsev, Sahibjamal Nietullaeva, Khusen Gafforov, Asiya Turenliyazova and Dauranbek Madetov, '[Unraveling the Intricate Links between the Dwindling Aral Sea and Climate Variability during 2002–2017](#)', 2024.

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

206 UN. [Uzbekistan UN Common Country Assessment: 2023 Update](#).

207 World Resource Institute, [Ranking the World's Most Water-Stressed Countries in 2040](#).

208 Tolipov, H., Hodjimurat, Sokolov, V, [Uzbekistan country survey report draft concept for revising the national action program to combat drought and land degradation in the Republic of Uzbekistan](#), Tashkent, June 2022.

209 'Uzbekistan-Country Climate and Development Report', p. 12.

to clean water and adequate sanitation, which are crucial for their well-being and growth. Uzbekistan is modernising its irrigation systems and investing in water-saving technologies to address these challenges.

The drying of the Aral Sea, a catastrophic environmental disaster, has exacerbated the situation, creating toxic dust storms that affect both the environment and public health. The shrinking of glaciers in neighbouring countries, which are Uzbekistan's primary water sources, further aggravates this issue. According to the World Bank, by 2050, water resources in the Syrdarya basin are expected to decrease by 5 per cent and in the Amudarya basin by 15 per cent.²¹⁰

Air pollution is a growing environmental and health challenge in Uzbekistan, which ranked 20th among the most polluted countries based on annual average PM2.5 concentration from 2018 to 2022.²¹¹ In 2022, the average PM2.5 concentration in Uzbekistan was 6.7 times higher than the WHO annual air quality guideline²¹² value of 5 µg/m.³ The primary contributors to these emissions are the energy sector (76 per cent) and agriculture (18 per cent).

Children and adolescents with lung diseases such as asthma are particularly vulnerable to climate change's impacts. Moreover, the prevalence of asthma in children has been rising in areas with poor air quality. The correlation between high levels of air pollution and the incidence of respiratory diseases is well-documented. For example, children exposed to high levels of PM2.5 are more likely to experience severe asthma symptoms and hospitalizations.²¹³ From 2012 to 2021, nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions increased from 10.3 to 21.2 thousand tons per year.

Air pollution is further exacerbated by unfavourable climatic conditions, with the number of high-temperature days rising. For instance, in 2019, Tashkent experienced almost twice the norm for days with temperatures above 38°C.²¹⁴ Ground-level ozone (smog), formed when NOx and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) react under heat and sunlight, is a significant concern. The annual costs of the damage to health from ambient PM2.5 pollution in Uzbekistan, disproportionately borne by women, children, and vulnerable groups, have been estimated to be as high as 6.5 per cent of the GDP.²¹⁵

Every tenth child and adolescent in Uzbekistan suffers from respiratory diseases, with the incidence rate steadily increasing from 1,090,140 in 2019, to 1,151,115 in 2022. Children under five in the Republic of Karakalpakstan have been increasingly identified as having physical development delays, showing an upward trend compared to figures from 1998. A study examining the functional capacity of respiratory organs has revealed a decline in the average vital capacity of the lungs and muscle strength among modern school-age children in the region. This decline indicates the adverse impact of environmental factors, such as air pollution and the ecological degradation of the Aral Sea, on children's health and physical development.²¹⁶ In Tashkent, the incidence

210 World Bank, [Uzbekistan, Climate Change Knowledge Portal](#).

211 IQAir, [World's most polluted countries & regions](#).

212 WHO, [Health and environment scorecard Uzbekistan](#).

213 Provenzano, S., Roth, S. & Sager, L. [Air Pollution and Respiratory Infectious Diseases](#). Environ Resource Econ 87, 1127–1139 (2024).

214 UNFCCC, '[Updated Nationally Determined Contribution: Republic of Uzbekistan](#)', 2021.

215 'Uzbekistan-Country Climate and Development Report', p. 12.

216 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.

of respiratory diseases is twice the national average, likely due to high nitrogen dioxide levels exceeding maximum permissible concentrations from 2018 to 2022. The World Bank estimates that rising incidences of waterborne and heat-related illnesses could lead to a 0.6–1.2 per cent increase in mortality by 2050.²¹⁷

Uzbekistan is actively addressing climate change through implementing a combination of national strategies, renewable energy projects, energy efficiency programmes, sustainable agricultural practices, and international cooperation. It has signed an Updated National Plan to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions in 2021. This plan aims to achieve a 35 per cent reduction in CO₂ emissions per unit of GDP by 2030, compared to 2010.²¹⁸

By 2030, Uzbekistan's clean energy plan aims to have increased the share of renewables to 25 per cent of the energy mix. Over 10 years the government plans to commission 5,000 megawatts (MW) of new solar capacity, and 3,000 MW of wind power plants.²¹⁹ Significant projects include large-scale solar power plants and wind farms.²²⁰ Modernizing energy infrastructure is a priority, with upgrades to power plants and transmission networks. The Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change has developed a roadmap for immediate measures to improve air quality, including expanding the air quality monitoring network and enforcing stricter regulations on polluting industries.

While the enabling environment is broadly favourable to address climate change and involve youth in climate action, significant investments and continuous work are needed to make these efforts sustainable and impactful. Several key initiatives demonstrate this commitment:

- Uzbekistan was the first country in the post-Soviet space to sign the Declaration on Children, Youth, and Climate Action on 17 November 2022, marking a significant step towards involving young people in climate action. This initiative emphasizes the importance of involving young people in climate policy-making and action. The primary goal is to ensure that the voices of children and youth are heard and considered in the national climate agenda.
- The Greening Education Partnership (GEP) initiative which aims to accelerate climate change education and the greening of schools and communities, fostering a more sustainable future. Some strategies include supporting schools with adopting sustainable practices such as waste reduction, energy efficiency, and the use of renewable resources and teacher's specialised training to effectively deliver environmental education.
- National and regional strategies on promoting sustainable development culture and engaging children and youth in the climate agenda aim to cultivate a culture of sustainable development among the young population. These strategies focus on educating children and youth about sustainability, and encouraging their active participation in environmental initiatives. Some elements including sustainability

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

218 [The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Nations, Uzbekistan's contribution to the global fight against climate change](#), 2024.

219 USAID, [USAID Supports the Modernization of Uzbekistan's Energy Sector](#).

220 IEA, [A solar energy roadmap for Uzbekistan by 2030](#).

and climate education have been integrated into school curricula across Uzbekistan, alongside engaging youth in hands-on sustainability projects. These include tree-planting campaigns, recycling drives, and clean-up activities.

Uzbekistan's young people are deeply concerned about climate change and its already visible impacts. They anticipate that these changes will significantly affect their lives over the next decade. Among the top concerns expressed by respondents of a survey conducted in 2022 are increasing water scarcity, adverse impacts on human health, and worsening desertification.²²¹

Several underlying factors related to climate change affect children's rights realization:

- While Uzbekistan has made strides in developing climate-related policies, they often **lack coherence and integration across different sectors**, reducing their overall effectiveness.
- **Economic dependency on agriculture** and natural resources makes it highly susceptible to climate-induced disruptions, affecting livelihoods and food security.
- **Environmental degradation**, particularly the Aral Sea disaster, has long-lasting impacts on public health and ecosystems, further complicating current efforts to combat climate change.
- **Disparities in using clean energy** exist between urban areas such as Tashkent, which have made significant strides in adopting clean technologies, and rural areas that are lagging behind. This highlights the need for equitable energy policies.

Some immediate factors threatening children's health and well-being include:

- The public's limited awareness and understanding of the impact of climate change and environmental degradation is a significant barrier to effective climate action.
- The social protection system is not adequately equipped to handle the shocks and threats posed by climate change. The regulatory framework for addressing environmental and climate issues is weak and poorly enforced, limiting the effectiveness of existing measures. Institutional capacity and coordination are also limited, with significant gaps in standards for climate-resilient infrastructure, particularly in schools.

²²¹ UNDP, [Awareness of youth in Uzbekistan about climate actions and statement on youth views on contributions to combat climate change](#), Tashkent – 2022.

Sub-domain 3.6.6. Disaster, conflict and displacement

UN CRC recommendations:



Enabling environment (legislation, policy, resources, coordination, data)

44(a) Establish a national system for international protection, including for children, with safeguards against arbitrary detention, deportation and refoulement;

44(b) Prohibit all detention of children for migration-related reasons, including of unaccompanied children;

44(c) Recognize and provide legal status to refugees and asylum-seeking families, including children;

44(e) Consider ratifying the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol;

50(b) Prohibit and criminalize the recruitment or use of children in hostilities by non-State armed groups;

50(c) Establish extraterritorial jurisdiction over offences under the Optional Protocol and eliminate the double criminality requirement;

50(d) Establish mechanisms for the early identification of asylum-seeking and refugee children from conflict areas, collect disaggregated data on such children, and strengthen the physical and psychological support provided to them;

50(e) Enact legislation criminalizing the export and/or transit of arms and/or military assistance to countries where children may be involved in armed conflict.

Supply (adequately staffed services, facilities, information, commodities)

44(d) Facilitate access for asylum-seeking and refugee children to education, health care and social services.

Demand (financial access and social behavioural drivers);

50(a) Strengthen awareness-raising measures regarding the Optional Protocol and children's rights that are aimed at children, their families and all professionals working with or for children.

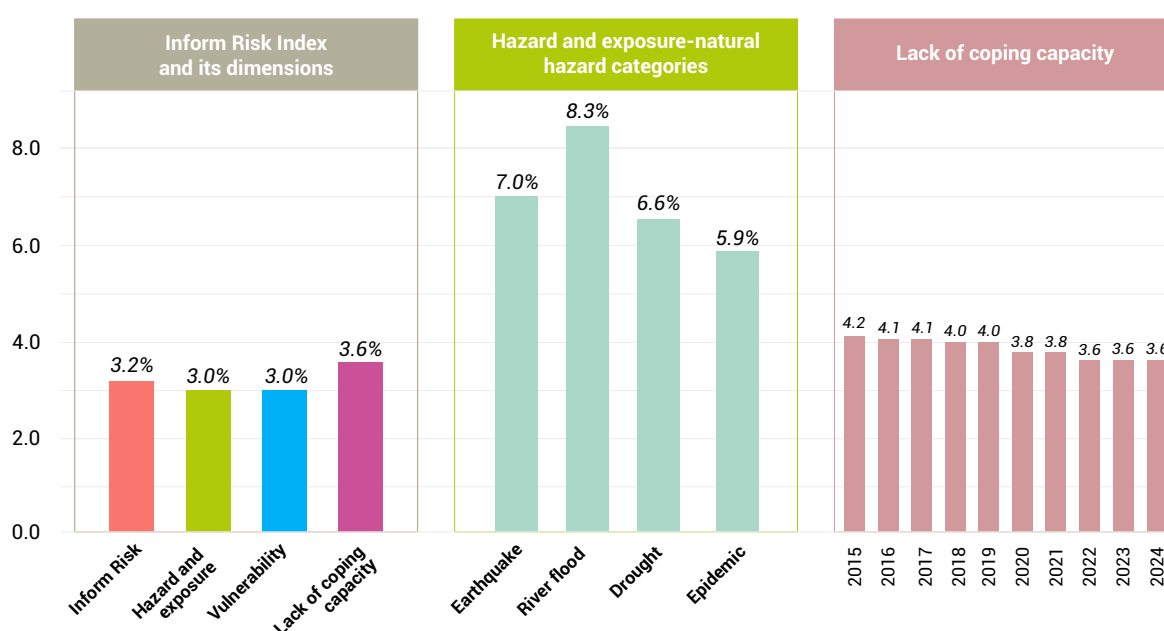
Source: Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan, a country heavily reliant on agriculture and natural resource extraction, is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. This vulnerability affects its environment, economy, and public health, with children being among the most impacted. Uzbekistan ranks as a medium-risk country on INFORM's Global Risk Index, a global open-source risk assessment for humanitarian crises and disasters, with a score of 3.2 out

of 10.²²² Despite this ranking, the country faces significant threats from river flooding, earthquakes, droughts, and epidemics.²²³

The INFORM index identifies the risk of river flooding in Uzbekistan as being high, with a score of 8.3 out of 10, followed by earthquakes with a score of 7 out of 10 (see Graph 3.6.6.1. below). The index records continuous improvements in state coping capacity from 4.7 in 2021 to 4.4 in 2024 (the higher score indicates limited coping capacities).²²⁴ Disaster risk reduction is a key focus, with efforts being made to build earthquake-resistant schools and hospitals, improve flood defences, and ensure proper urban planning. Early warning systems for natural disasters are being developed for timely evacuations and preparedness.

Graph 3.6.6.1. INFORM's Global Risk Index and its dimensions for Uzbekistan for 2024 – hazard and exposure by natural hazard category for 2024 – lack of coping capacity by time



Source: EC, DRMKG-INFORM, Uzbekistan.

The drying of the Aral Sea, being one of the most severe environmental disasters in recent history, has led to toxic dust storms that severely affect respiratory health, particularly that of children. These dust storms have resulted in vast expanses of exposed lakebeds, and destroyed local ecosystems. Children's developing bodies are particularly at risk from these toxic exposures, which can lead to chronic respiratory conditions and other health issues.

Uzbekistan, while relatively stable, occasionally experiences natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts, and floods which can disrupt communities and significantly impact children and young people. For instance, heavy rainfall in the Samarkand and Jizzakh regions in April 2022²²⁵ caused damage to infrastructure, homes, and schools,

²²² Inform climate change, Quantifying the impacts of climate and socio-economic trends on the risk of future humanitarian crises and disasters, October 2022.

²²³ [Inform Risk](#), Uzbekistan.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Richard Davies, '[Uzbekistan – Deadly Floods and Mudflows Strike After Torrential Rain](#)', 22 April 2022.

affecting access to education and health care for many children. The government's response has included emergency relief and rehabilitation efforts.

According to key informants, Uzbekistan has made significant strides in advancing its Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) initiatives with a particular focus on children, especially those with disabilities. Key informants report that extensive studies have been conducted in high-risk regions, resulting in recommendations that ensure the perspectives of these vulnerable groups are included in new policy documents. One notable effort is the development of training modules aimed at supporting persons with disabilities during disasters.

Despite the clear risks and vulnerabilities, there is a positive enabling environment for addressing disaster risks. The government actively engages with global frameworks and initiatives, aligning its efforts with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. This framework emphasises comprehensive strategies, community involvement, and the use of technology to strengthen disaster preparedness. Some key actions focused on children in implementing the framework include conducting regular practical training sessions in schools and integrating DRR concepts into the school curriculum, thereby teaching children about various types of disasters, safety protocols, and the importance of preparedness.²²⁶ Uzbekistan's participation in the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) activities highlights its efforts to improve data collection and analysis, which are crucial for crafting effective policies.

Although DRR education is included in schools and community programmes, practical training is inconsistent. This includes teaching children about local risks and emergency responses in an age-appropriate manner to ensure they know how to protect themselves and react during disasters. There is also a need to make safer school buildings and child-friendly public spaces resilient to disasters, ensuring children's environments are secure even in adverse situations.

To ensure all children including those with disabilities have access to early warning systems and essential information, accessible information dissemination methods are being developed. Engaging tools like animation videos and distance training programmes are being created to educate children on DRR in an engaging and accessible manner.

Ongoing security threats in Central Asia, exacerbated by the situation in Afghanistan, remain a concern, with persistent drug flows including that of opiates and synthetic drugs. Despite Afghanistan's 2022 opium ban, the uncertainty surrounding farmers' adherence to the ban, or the potential return to poppy cultivation, poses risks for the drug situation in Uzbekistan and the region as a whole.²²⁷ The rise in methamphetamine trafficking adds further security concerns. The Afghan conflict has led to significant movements of Afghan families, with Uzbekistan being a key country in Central Asia that could experience increased pressure on its borders. These dynamics can strain local resources and infrastructure, and potentially impact social stability. The unstable security environment and drug trafficking could expose children to violence, exploitation, and substance abuse.

²²⁶ [Strategy for Achieving the Sendai Framework for DRR \(О мерах по реализации «Сендайской рамочной программы по снижению риска бедствий на 2015-2030 годы» в Республике Узбекистан\).](#)

²²⁷ Uzbekistan UN Common Country Assessment: 2023 Update.

The government has actively worked to mitigate these risks by maintaining a neutral stance and focusing on diplomatic efforts to ensure regional stability and cooperation. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has prioritised improving relations with neighbouring countries, including engaging in dialogue and cooperation with Afghanistan. Uzbekistan has hosted multiple rounds of peace talks involving Afghan Government representatives and Taliban officials, demonstrating its commitment to fostering peace and stability in the region.

In terms of displacement, with the fall of the National Government and the takeover by the Taliban, the situation in Afghanistan remains fragile and continues to deteriorate rapidly. The influx of people now stranded in Uzbekistan has created significant challenges in providing adequate protection and support, especially for children. Further information on the children of Afghan families stranded in Uzbekistan can be found in Chapter 3.3.5.

Recommendations

The main recommendations based on this chapter's analysis include:

- **Eliminate discriminatory stereotypes and promote gender equality.** It is recommended to develop a comprehensive strategy to eliminate gender discriminatory stereotypes in terms of familial and societal roles, including nationwide media campaigns and community engagement initiatives targeting community leaders, educators, and the general public via the involvement of CSOs and religious leaders. Promoting the equal sharing of domestic responsibilities through awareness programmes and supportive policies will ensure a balanced approach to gender roles. It is advisable to ensure that educational reforms should encourage girls to pursue non-traditional careers. The Ministry of Health is advised to improve access to health care for girls and women, strengthen sexual and reproductive health education, and enhance mental health support for women and girls.
- **Enhance inclusion of children with disabilities.** Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy and action plan to enhance the inclusion of children with disabilities that would cover a wide range of areas in addition to inclusive education. Legislation and policy should be reviewed to ensure its compliance with the CRPD. It is strongly recommended to conduct household surveys, based on the ICF, and continue exploring the feasibility of using ICF in determining disability status. This strategy may include an early detection and intervention model tailored to the national context, drawing on international best practices. It is recommended to align the strategy with the inclusive education reforms underway and cover improved access to rehabilitation and specialized social services for children with disabilities. It is strongly advised to include mahalla authorities into supporting families of children with disabilities to address the complex needs of families. Continuous training systems for parents and improved outpatient medical services are needed. Professional standards for school psychologists should be developed, and their skills should be enhanced.

There is a need for transitioning to an intervention and referral system that is based on the human rights model of disability, as well as a more holistic and integrated approach to service provision for children with disabilities and their families. Some

children with disabilities who participated in focus groups recommended extending the duration of digital skills training programmes for children with visual and hearing impairments, providing personal computers or access to computer labs for practice, and ensuring that training includes comprehensive, hands-on experience to solidify their new skills. It is also recommended to promote employment for persons with disabilities through scholarships, adaptive technologies, career counselling, and encouraging employers to hire them with necessary workplace accommodations.

- **Develop a comprehensive, costed, and fully funded ECD strategy.** This strategy should be based on a systematic, concerted approach addressing all determinants of system change with extensive stakeholder involvement. It is strongly recommended to conduct testing, costing and documenting of various ECD options to identify those most relevant to the realities of Uzbekistan's ECD model. The government is advised to establish a system of community outreach, developmental screening, and referrals to ensure timeliness and evaluations for children with developmental delays or disabilities. The NASP is advised to implement a case management approach to enhance service delivery and collaboration among social workers, ECD professionals, and other experts.
- To support the realization of adolescents' rights, it is recommended to **enhance the relevance of the school curriculum to align with the country's sustainable development ambitions.** This includes developing comprehensive career counselling services that facilitate the school-to-work transition, particularly for girls. The government is strongly advised to enhance mental health and reproductive health support tailored to adolescents' needs. Implementing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education in schools will equip adolescents with essential knowledge for their healthy development. Some key informants and children with disabilities recommended creating more opportunities for professional development, sports, and extracurricular activities tailored for adolescents with disabilities.
- **Strengthen and integrate climate-related policies across sectors, ensuring coherence and effectiveness.** It is recommended to further expand public awareness through education and community programmes, focusing on the impacts of climate change and the importance of sustainable practices. Expanding renewable energy adoption, particularly in rural areas, will reduce disparities and enhance resilience. The government is advised to improve the social protection system to make it shock-responsive to better support vulnerable populations, especially children. Finally, it is strongly advised to foster youth engagement in climate action through initiatives such as the Declaration on Children, Youth, and Climate Action, and the Greening Education Partnership, in order to empower the next generation to actively participate in creating a sustainable future.
- Given Uzbekistan's vulnerability to natural disasters and their significant impact on children, it is recommended to **enhance existing Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)** efforts. This includes expanding and standardizing DRR education in school curricula and community programmes, and establishing consistent, age-appropriate practical training on local risks and emergency responses. Improving early warning systems and accessible information dissemination for all children, including those with disabilities, will enhance this preparedness. The government is advised to prioritize

the resilience of school buildings and public spaces to withstand disasters, in order to secure safe environments for children.

- **Address climate change and advance disaster risk reduction.** To effectively address climate change and advance disaster risk reduction in Uzbekistan, it is recommended to implement a comprehensive strategy. This may include strengthening regulatory frameworks to support sustainable practices and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, promoting clean energy adoption through incentives and subsidies, and launching public awareness campaigns to foster sustainable lifestyle choices. It is recommended to create platforms for children and youth participation, and their crucial involvement in decision-making processes.
- Additionally, it is vital to develop a shock-responsive social protection system to support residents in high-risk zones, and provide temporary aid during droughts, floods, and other hazardous events. It is recommended to address environmental degradation in areas like the Aral Sea region, strengthen adaptation measures, and enhance institutional capacity with child-centric approaches. Mobilizing climate finance through innovative mechanisms and engaging the private sector will provide the necessary resources for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction projects, effectively building a sustainable and resilient future for Uzbekistan's people, including children, women, and people with disabilities.

A woman wearing a white hijab and a white long-sleeved shirt is seated in a black motorized wheelchair. She is positioned in the foreground, looking towards the left. Behind her, several rows of people are seated in a large, formal lecture hall or auditorium. The room features wooden paneling, tufted cream-colored chairs, and wooden desks. The people in the background are dressed in formal attire, including suits and blouses. The overall atmosphere is professional and academic.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The SitAn findings confirm substantial progress made by Uzbekistan over the last five years in advancing the rights of children and adolescents. It also identifies areas where improvements are needed, as summarised in Table 4.1. below.

Table 4.1. SitAn 2024 summary table: Achievements and areas for improvement in children and adolescents' rights realization

Achievements	Areas for improvement
HEALTH AND NUTRITION	
Improvement in universal health coverage: Uzbekistan's Universal Health Coverage Index ranking increased by 20 points since 2000, reaching a score of 75 in 2021, highlighting improved accessibility and quality of primary health care for children and mothers. Introduction of state health insurance: A state health insurance programme was launched in 2021. It aims to increase life expectancy from 74.4 years in 2023 to 78 years by 2030, focusing on primary health care to benefit children and mothers. Expansion of perinatal centres: In 2022, Uzbekistan opened 46 inter-district perinatal centres, addressing increasing childbirth complications, and improving care for mothers and newborns. Uzbekistan has achieved a 98 per cent antenatal care coverage rate at the primary health care level, indicating significant progress in delivering maternal health services. Increased human papillomavirus vaccination (HPV) coverage: The HPV vaccine was introduced into the national immunization plan in 2019, achieving a 94 per cent first-dose coverage among girls aged 12–14 years, and contributing to better health outcomes for young females.	Gaps in health care financing: Despite plans to double health care financing by 2030, the share of the public health budget has declined from 13.5 per cent in 2020 to 10.7 per cent in 2024, with over 60 per cent of health care spending coming from out-of-pocket payments, affecting accessibility for children and mothers. Disparities in health care access: Significant disparities exist across socio-economic groups, with the lowest quintile having 55 per cent unmet health needs, compared to 37–38 per cent in higher quintiles. Neonatal mortality remains a significant concern: 57 per cent of under-five deaths are occurring within the first 28 days of life, highlighting the need for improved early-life medical interventions. Gaps in childhood vaccination coverage: Despite high reported vaccination coverage, approximately 9,000 zero-dose children still remain, with notable gaps in the timeliness of follow-up doses. Decline in exclusive breastfeeding rate by 25 per cent since 2017: Only 25 per cent of infants aged 0–5 months are exclusively breastfed, despite supportive legislation.

Achievements	Areas for improvement
Consistently high child immunization rates: A successful vaccination campaign halted a measles outbreak in 2021 and 2022 among children aged 0–14 years, showcasing the importance of sustained immunization efforts. Reduction in child malnutrition: A comprehensive School Feeding Programme was prioritised, with a Presidential Decree in 2023 allocating 2.3 trillion Uzbek soums to provide free meals to all primary school students. Stunting among children under five decreased from 13.2 per cent in 2012 to 6.9 per cent in 2022, and the prevalence of overweight children also declined. The prevalence of wasting among children stands at 2.4 per cent, considered very low by global standards. Investment in modernizing health information systems: Efforts are underway to develop robust health information systems to improve data collection, monitoring, and analysis.	Limited knowledge about HIV/AIDS: Only 10 per cent of young women aged 15–24 years have comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS, with even lower figures among those aged 15–19 years, indicating a need for better reproductive health education and services. Significant gaps in mental health and psycho-social support services: There is a lack of integration between mental health services in schools and primary health care, with new mental disorder cases among children rising from 79 per 100,000 in 2019 to 81 per 100,000 in 2022. Road safety: The number of fatalities and injuries from road accidents, particularly among children and adolescents, remains high, requiring urgent action. WASH Infrastructure: Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure in schools and health facilities need additional investment to ensure safe and adequate conditions.
EDUCATION, LEISURE, AND CULTURE	
High investments in educational infrastructure: There are plans to construct over 370 new schools by 2026, as part of the New Uzbekistan Vision to address the rising student population and plans to create over 620,000 preschool places and 1.2 million general secondary education places by 2026. Legislative reforms: Adoption of the 2020 Education Law and subsequent policies laid a strong foundation for inclusive education, guaranteeing eleven years of free, compulsory	Limited capacity in education sector policy planning: Insufficient adoption of result-based education financing negatively impacts the effective and efficient implementation of education reform. Significant regional disparities in preschool attendance: Regional preschool enrolment rates range from 71.9 per cent in Tashkent city, to 47.7 per cent in the Kashkadarya region. Inconsistent implementation of inclusive education practices: While progress has been made, challenges

Achievements	Areas for improvement
education and promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. There has been adoption of inclusive education definitions in the law 'On Education', and approval of a comprehensive road map for inclusive education by a Presidential Decree, as well as expansion of inclusive classrooms. High education participation rates: Primary school enrolment was 99 per cent over 2021-2022, showing high participation rates in early education stages. Preschool enrolment increased from less than 30 per cent in 2017 to over 73 per cent in 2024, with nearly 2 million children benefiting from early education programmes during the 2022-2023 period. Increased digital learning and ICT access: 94 per cent of schools have internet access, and 47 per cent are equipped with computers for educational purposes, demonstrating technology integration in education.	remain in implementing truly inclusive education practices, particularly for children with disabilities, with there being issues in terms of physical infrastructure, learning materials, and teacher capacities. Limited quality of education: Despite increased investments, the quality of education (particularly in terms of foundational skills and competencies) remains a concern, as indicated by Uzbekistan's below-average rankings in the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Limited use of digital learning: National standards and specifications for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) laboratories do not meet 21st century requirements, resulting in low availability of digital learning for education, impacting learning outcomes and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) results. Gaps in teacher quality and training: The quality of teachers is hindered by outdated training programmes and a lack of effective practicum opportunities, affecting overall educational outcomes.
FAMILY ENVIRONMENT, AND PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE AND HARMFUL PRACTICES	
Legislative reforms: Amendments to the Criminal and Administrative Liability Codes in April 2023 criminalised domestic violence and introduced additional protective measures for children and women. In August 2024, the 'Law on protecting children from all forms of violence' was approved by the Senate.	Lack of formalised inter-agency collaboration and comprehensive data collection mechanisms to effectively monitor and address violence against children: Sector-specific standard operating procedures (SOPs) and the Inter-Agency SOP on Child Protection are still pending approval.

Achievements	Areas for improvement
Establishment of the National Agency for Social Protection (NASP) in June 2023: This agency has centralised and enhanced child protection services, streamlined social welfare functions, and introduced a structured approach to child protection. The NASP is recruiting 4,800 para-professional social workers, 2,352 social work assistants, and 1,866 employees for district-based 'Inson' centres. Reduction in residential care: Uzbekistan closed 23 orphanages in the past two years, transitioning 2,448 children to family and community-based care. Repatriation and reintegration: Uzbekistan has shown leadership in repatriating and reintegrating children and women from conflict zones, providing comprehensive support services and avoiding institutionalization to reduce stigma. Progress in addressing child labour: Uzbekistan has eradicated systemic child labour from its cotton sector, receiving international recognition for these efforts. In October 2022 Labour Code introduced stricter restrictions on child labour, aligning with international laws.	Deeply rooted local customs, religious influences, and strong patriarchal traditions: These norms continue to perpetuate early marriage and violence against children and women. Gaps in inclusive and family-based care: Children with disabilities are overrepresented in residential care, with 79 per cent of all children in residential care having a disability. Family support and reintegration services are underdeveloped, and family and community-based alternative care options are scarce. Systemic challenges affect children and adolescents in conflict with the law in Uzbekistan: The lack of specialized bodies and justice professionals hinder the implementation of child-sensitive procedures, and there has been a failure to address the unique needs of children in conflict with the law. There is a lack of quality data evidence to understand the factors driving the rise in child crime rates. Child labour remains a pervasive issue in non-cotton sectors and informal employment: According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) 2021-2022 survey, 21 per cent of children aged 5-17 are engaged in child labour. Children in Afghan families face significant barriers to accessing essential services due to their legal status: The non-ratification of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the absence of a comprehensive national asylum system in Uzbekistan create significant legal and economic challenges for Afghan citizens, particularly children, hindering their ability to secure registration, proper visas, and access to essential services such as housing, nutrition, and health care.

Achievements	Areas for improvement
PARTICIPATION AND CIVIL RIGHTS	
Legislative improvements: In 2018, Uzbekistan amended its legislation to guarantee birth registration for all children. Since 2023, a remote registration service accessible via the Unified Portal of Interactive Public Services allows parents to obtain birth certificates free of charge through a QR code. According to recent data, 100 per cent of children under five have their births registered, reflecting effective implementation of birth registration policies. Youth participation initiatives: Established in 2019, the Youth Parliament provides a platform for adolescents and youth to voice their opinions and influence policy decisions. Citizenship Law for Stateless Persons: The 2020 Citizenship Law has enabled thousands of stateless persons to gain citizenship, reducing statelessness and improving access to rights and services. Digital education focus: The 'Digital Uzbekistan – 2030' strategy focuses on youth and adolescents, integrating ICT into education and expanding internet connectivity, particularly in rural areas. Uzbekistan recognises the growing concern of cyberbullying and emphasises the need for comprehensive cyber safety education.	Challenges for stateless and refugee children: Despite progress made, stateless children and children of individuals in need of international protection face significant obstacles in obtaining legal identities due to the lack of a systematic government approach and reliable data. National legal framework protects the confidentiality of adoption: It prevents adopted children from accessing information about their biological parents, leading to emotional and psychological challenges. Deeply entrenched cultural norms prioritize obedience over independent thought: They hinder meaningful participation for children and adolescents, particularly at the local level. Inadequate platforms for genuine youth-led participation, often dominated by adult agendas. Digital divide: Despite advancements, there are persistent disparities in ICT access and usage, especially among girls and children in rural areas, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to close the digital gap.
POVERTY AND ADEQUATE STANDARDS OF LIVING	
Social protection reforms: The adoption of the National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) in 2022 has set medium- and long-term objectives to enhance social protection.	Underdeveloped grievance redress mechanism: The absence of a dedicated grievance redress mechanism tailored for social protection forces vulnerable families

Achievements	Areas for improvement
These include ratifying maternity protection, expanding social insurance coverage, and establishing a social protection floor. Implementation of the Single Registry: Since its nationwide implementation in late 2020, the Single Registry has streamlined access to social protection, simplifying the application process and ensuring consistent eligibility assessments. The Single Registry now covers 336,000 families as of 2023, demonstrating its scalability and effectiveness during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. Significant reduction in child poverty: The child monetary poverty rate in Uzbekistan decreased significantly from 21.5 per cent in 2021 to 13.7 per cent in 2023. The number of children living in poverty dropped from 2.66 million in 2020 to 1.8 million in 2023, reflecting the effectiveness of social protection measures.	to use general channels like the President's Portal. Given that 3.1 million children are receiving benefits, the lack of a specialized grievance system can exacerbate their vulnerabilities. Fiscal constraints on social protection expansion: Despite the government allocating 19.2 trillion soums (6.8 per cent of the total budget) for social protection in 2023, with 12.3 trillion soums going to child allowances and material assistance, the limited fiscal space constrains the expansion of these programmes. As a result, the number of children receiving child benefits decreased from 4.8 million to 3.1 million in the first quarter of 2024. Regional disparities in child poverty rates: These reflect diverse socio-economic conditions across the country. Disparities in WASH access: Significant disparities persist, with 26 per cent of households still lacking drinking water on their premises. As for schools, 13 per cent lack proper water services. These disparities particularly affect rural schools, where only 71 per cent have basic water services compared to 83 per cent in urban areas. Underdeveloped social protection during crises: The social protection system lacks readiness for emergencies, relying on ad hoc decisions rather than established procedures. This was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where despite the Single Registry's capabilities, the absence of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) led to delays in aid delivery.

Achievements	Areas for improvement
CROSS-CUTTING	
Increase in access to higher education for youth: The number of higher education institutions in Uzbekistan increased from 108 in 2019 to 199 in 2022. As a result, the enrollment of young people (aged 18-22) in higher education rose from 20% in 2019 to 28% in 2021, enhancing opportunities for adolescents to further their education and improve their career prospects. National strategy for disability inclusion: The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2021, followed by the National Action Plan, demonstrates Uzbekistan's commitment to advancing the rights and inclusion of children with disabilities. This includes a shift towards a social model of disability, focusing on functional and social needs assessments in addition to medical evaluations. Integration of climate education: Climate education has been integrated into the school curriculum, aiming to educate children about sustainability and involve them in environmental protection activities, thereby promoting their right to a healthy environment.	Gender disparities affecting adolescent girls: A significant portion of the population still holds traditional views on gender roles, with 43.9% of young women and 64% of young men agreeing that men should earn money while women take care of the home and children. The Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) rate for young women aged 15-24 is 42%, compared to just 8.8% for young men. This disparity highlights major barriers for adolescent girls in accessing education and employment opportunities, which must be addressed to achieve gender equality. Underreporting and support for children with disabilities: Official figures indicate that 142,300 children under 18 are recognized as having disabilities. However, underreporting, due to inadequate early identification systems and cultural stigmas, likely means many children with disabilities are not receiving the support they need, limiting their rights to education, healthcare, and inclusion. Lack of comprehensive early childhood development (ECD) programs: Comprehensive ECD programs that integrate health, nutrition, social protection, and parental support services are unavailable. This gap can be attributed to an underdeveloped and fragmented policy environment for ECD, as well as a lack of early detection and intervention systems with established standards for children under five who are at risk of developmental delays or disabilities. Impact of air pollution on children's health: Uzbekistan's high levels of air pollution, with PM2.5 concentrations

Achievements	Areas for improvement
	6.7 times higher than World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines in 2022, are linked to rising rates of respiratory diseases among children. The incidence rate of respiratory diseases in children increased from 1,090,140 in 2019 to 1,151,115 in 2022, posing a serious threat to their health and development. Climate change and its impact on children's rights: Climate change poses significant risks to children in Uzbekistan, particularly due to increasing heatwaves and water scarcity. Currently, 91% of children are exposed to heatwaves, which threatens their health and overall well-being.

4.1. Key strategic findings

In Uzbekistan, various socio-economic, cultural, and structural factors drive inequalities that significantly impact children's and young people's rights. These disparities create barriers to well-being and development, particularly for the most vulnerable populations.

Socio-economic factors: Income inequality is a primary driver of disparities among children, with 1.8 million living in poverty in 2023. Economic differences between urban and rural areas contribute to significant income gaps. Families facing economic hardship often prioritize immediate needs over long-term investments into their children's education, health, and nutrition. Consequently, children from low-income families are more likely to drop out of school, lack access to medical care, and suffer from poor health and educational outcomes.

Cultural and social norms: Deep-rooted patriarchal values exacerbate inequalities, particularly for girls and adolescent girls. These norms prioritize boys' education and career advancement, while girls often bear extensive domestic responsibilities, limiting their educational and professional opportunities.

Structural determinants: Access to quality education and health care remains unevenly distributed. Rural schools lack infrastructure, resources, and qualified teachers, leading to lower educational attainment. Similarly, rural health care facilities are under-resourced, resulting in higher risks of malnutrition, preventable diseases, and inadequate medical care for children.

Vulnerable groups: Inequalities are particularly severe for children with disabilities, children from low-income families, and girls. Social stigma, lack of specialised services, and inadequate infrastructure limit access to education and health care for children with disabilities. Economic instability and inadequate social protection restrict access to essential services for low-income families, leading to poor health, low educational attainment, and increased risks of child labour. Gender discrimination, early marriage, and lack of educational support create significant barriers for girls and young women.

Age-specific impacts:

- Early Childhood (0 to 5 years): Limited access to early childhood education and health services, combined with poor maternal health, results in high rates of malnutrition, preventable diseases, and developmental delays.
- School-Age Children (6 to 14 years): Quality of education, economic pressures to work, and social norms negatively affect job prospects, particularly among girls and children from low-income families.
- Adolescents (15 to 18 years): Lack of vocational training and social norms regarding women's employment reduce employment opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.

The SitAn finds that the realization of children's and adolescents' rights is affected by complex challenges such as demographic trends, parent(s) migration, climate change, and environmental degradation that require comprehensive cross-sectoral measures involving diverse partners to be addressed. Weak civil society and limited opportunities for public participation also negatively affect the realization of children's rights.

Uzbekistan has shown a strong political commitment to advancing the rights of children and adolescents, having improved its legislative framework, and introduced several related policies and programmes. These national programmes aim to accelerate the implementation of child rights and mitigate disparities between social groups. The SitAn has identified specific barriers and gaps that have to be addressed to enable all children, including those in vulnerable groups, to realize their rights, which are listed and discussed below:

- **Some deeply embedded social norms are not conducive to advancing children's rights.** Such beliefs include those that disability is a "defect" that has to be corrected, cured or rehabilitated, or acceptance of corporal punishment and violence against children and women.
- **Flaws in the policy cycle** include:
 - Legislative and policy frameworks may be well developed and aligned with international conventions and commitments, but compliance remains inconsistent and insufficiently monitored and reported.
 - Policies are not adequately funded to support implementation. Responsibilities and funding mechanisms for central and local authorities are often not clearly outlined, particularly in terms of providing social services. Although in some instances such variability results from local innovations and solutions addressing specific local circumstances, it also creates accountability challenges.

- Implementation monitoring is inconsistent, and it is often unclear why existing legislation and policies do not achieve their targets. The reasons for this may be different, and include inadequate implementation, poor timing, improperly selected target groups, insufficient funding, and other factors.
 - Limited cross-sectoral interventions addressing such complex issues as inclusion of children with disabilities, addressing the mental health needs of adolescents, and youth employment. There is evidence of partnerships at the levels of ministries and regional and local providers, but they are often inconsistent.
- **Mahalla authorities may not have sufficient capacity to develop and implement solutions that address the needs of children and adolescents that they are responsible for under legislation.** This situation can be partially attributed to the limited authority provided to local public administration, misalignment of responsibilities among the central, regional and local governments and service providers such as mahallas and social services, lack of or limited capacity of public administrations at the local level, and inadequate funding. As a result, access to quality health care, ECE and social services vary dramatically across the country.
 - **Limited availability of statistical data,** disaggregated by sex, age, disability and other relevant factors, prevents assessing the numbers of vulnerable groups of children and adolescents, the extent of their vulnerabilities, and key bottlenecks they face. Data on the actual numbers of children involved in labour, and numbers of children and adolescents subjected to violence, child marriages, sexual violence, abuse and exploitation, are all either limited or not available. As a result, there is no quality data available to ensure policies and interventions are well-targeted, effective and monitored.
 - **The capacities of educators, health care professionals, social workers, and other professionals who support children and adolescents vary.** Some capacity gaps identified by the SitAn include limited educators' knowledge and skills in supporting the inclusion of children with disabilities or adolescents experiencing mental health challenges, insufficient skills of multiple professionals to identify signs of abuse and violence inflicted on children and adolescents, and limited numbers and capacity of social workers to focus on preventing such violence and abuse.
 - **Insufficient focus on prevention across all sectors.** The state authorities are not proactive, for example, in identifying victims of domestic violence, and they register them only when the child or adult impacted files a complaint with state authorities.
 - **Insufficient attention is paid to vulnerable groups of children.** Although the ministries identify some vulnerable groups, a lack of consistent cross-ministerial definitions and prioritization undermine the development of holistic, integrated approaches promoting the human rights of children and adolescents.
 - **Inadequate application of individualised support approaches across all sectors,** especially when challenges faced by children and families are becoming more complex.
 - **The untapped potential of children and adolescents who want to participate more in country and community life.** Children and adolescents want to participate more in

their country and community, as evidenced by the views of focus group participants, identifying and responding to the actual needs and concerns of children rather than the needs assumed by adults. Still, the mechanisms for children's participation are underdeveloped, and children and adolescents are often ignored.

This SitAn has identified a number of vulnerable groups of children and adolescents, with the causes of their deprivation presented in Table 4.2. below.

Table 4.2 Groups experiencing deprivations and their causes

Achievements	Areas for improvement
HEALTH AND NUTRITION	
Children from poor households	Insufficient health care financing leads to over 60 per cent of health care spending being out-of-pocket, imposing significant financial risks and limiting access to necessary services.
Mothers and children affected by lack of mothers' autonomy in reproductive health care decisions	Dominant social norms, lack of awareness, and insufficient access to and use of contraceptive methods postpartum significantly contribute to short birth-to-pregnancy intervals among women in Uzbekistan.
Children dying from preventable causes	The late detection of communicable and non-communicable diseases during antenatal care is influenced by suboptimal organization and cultural factors.
Children exposed to climate change and negative environmental impacts	Significant impact of climate change on child health, particularly in Karakalpakstan, with a rise in congenital anomalies and exacerbation of health risks due to natural disasters like earthquakes and flooding.
Children and adolescents affected by road accidents	High number of road accidents and fatalities, with traffic accidents being the leading cause of death for individuals aged 5 to 29 years.
Children are at risk of having congenital defects	Continued occurrence of consanguineous marriages.

Achievements	Areas for improvement
Children missing out on immunization	Despite the high reported vaccination coverage, approximately 9,000 zero-dose children remain due to vaccine hesitancy, poor communication from healthcare workers, and difficulties in maintaining the vaccine cold chain.
Children who do not benefit from exclusive breastfeeding	Limited enforcement of breastfeeding legislation, low self-efficacy of parents/ mothers, and self-reported insufficient milk by mothers are in most cases behavioural factors contributing to nutrition and breastfeeding practices.
Women of reproductive age and pregnant women who experience anaemia	The steady increase in anaemia among pregnant women and infants in Uzbekistan is primarily due to inadequate nutrition and iron deficiency.
Adolescent girls in Uzbekistan who face serious nutritional challenges experience a triple burden of malnutrition: undernutrition, hidden hunger (lack of essential vitamins and minerals), and being overweight	Inadequate intake of essential nutrients like iron, vitamins A and B12, and folate.
Children not receiving adequate, quality school meals	Lack of a clear implementation strategy and a comprehensive needs assessment, which undermines the effectiveness of policy measures.
Adolescents who do not have access to quality mental health support	Lack of integration between mental health and psychosocial support (PSS) services in schools and the primary health care system, combined with insufficient coordination among various entities providing mental health services, leads to significant gaps in delivering comprehensive care to children and adolescents in Uzbekistan.

Achievements	Areas for improvement
Adolescents living with HIV who cannot realize their human rights	Legal and policy barriers preventing adolescents from accessing HIV prevention services without parental consent hinder timely medical care and effective treatment, exacerbating the stigma and discrimination they face in social, educational, and health care environments.
EDUCATION, LEISURE, AND CULTURE	
Children with disabilities and special education needs	The support for the medical model of disability and reliance on specialised schools in Uzbekistan, coupled with insufficient infrastructure and trained educators, hampers the effective implementation of inclusive education despite recent policy advancements.
Children unable to access early childhood education	Traditional norms and socio-economic barriers limit girls' participation in early childhood education. Limited availability of alternative forms of preschool education, such as public-private partnerships and family-type provisions, in remote areas.
Children out of school	Insufficient inclusive practices and inadequate educational quality, coupled with socio-economic pressures. The majority of children out of school are children with disabilities. Due to financial constraints, families may need children to work instead of attending school. Prevailing norms prioritize marriage over education for girls in some families. Lack of proper water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities in schools especially affect girls during menstruation.
Ethnic minority children, such as Tajik, Russian, Karakalpak, and Lyuli/Roma children	Despite curricula being available in multiple languages, various factors lead to lower school attendance rates. Further evidence needs to be collected to assess specific barriers these groups face in terms of accessing quality education.

Achievements	Areas for improvement
FAMILY ENVIRONMENT, AND PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE AND HARMFUL PRACTICES	
Children and adolescents exposed to violence	Entrenched social and gender norms and socio-economic challenges drive the pervasive use of violent discipline methods. Additionally, significant underreporting and cultural acceptance of domestic violence, along with a lack of comprehensive child protection protocols, hinder efforts to address and mitigate violence against girls, boys, and women.
Children experiencing family separation, including children with disabilities	Limited awareness of the negative impacts of institutional care and economic hardships contribute to high rates of child-family separation, exacerbated by insufficient community-based support and outdated medical advice. The lack of effective gatekeeping mechanisms further hinders efforts to prevent unnecessary placements of children in residential care.
Children victims or witnesses of crime	Lack of important legal safeguards in line with international justice for children standards and insufficient psychosocial support services contribute to deprivations faced by child victims and witnesses. There is a lack of trained social workers, inadequate protocols for child protection, and limited access to free legal aid.
Children in conflict with the law	Systemic challenges include a lack of specialised justice professionals and insufficient child-sensitive procedures. Inadequate data collection, insufficient legal assistance for children, and limited support from social workers and school-based psychologists all hinder effective interventions and comprehensive support for at-risk children. There is a lack of diversion and a limited number of alternatives to deprivation of liberty, in line with standards of international justice for children.

Achievements	Areas for improvement
Girls who marry early	Despite legislative efforts and recent government initiatives to reduce child marriage, deeply rooted local customs, religious influences, and strong patriarchal traditions continue to perpetuate this practice in some areas of Uzbekistan.
Children primarily from poor households are engaged in labour in non-cotton and informal sectors	Regulatory oversight remains insufficient in some sectors, where children face hazardous conditions.
Children repatriated from conflict zones	Lack of continuous support to children and their families by social workers and service providers.
Children in Afghan families who are in need of support	The non-ratification of international conventions on refugees and migrants, and the financial burdens of visa renewals and registrations, significantly hinder Afghan individuals in need of international protection in Uzbekistan from accessing essential services. This instability particularly affects children, limiting their access to education and health care, and compromising their overall development and well-being.
PARTICIPATION AND CIVIL RIGHTS	
Children of individuals in need of international protection and stateless children face significant challenges, albeit for different reasons.	Legal and bureaucratic barriers that limit their access to essential services like education and health care. These challenges are compounded by their uncertain legal status, which exacerbates vulnerabilities.
Adopted children who do not have access to information on their biological parents.	The legal framework enforces strict adoption secrecy to protect the privacy of adoptive families, driven by cultural norms and the desire to prevent social stigma.
Children with disabilities face numerous barriers that significantly hinder their participation in various activities.	The lack of inclusive infrastructure, accessible communication tools, and sufficient NGO support significantly restricts physical access, information accessibility, and advocacy opportunities.

Achievements	Areas for improvement
Children from low-income families.	Economic hardships that prioritize immediate needs over education and social engagement perpetuate cycles of poverty and exclusion.
Ethnic minority children.	Discrimination and cultural biases that prevent equal participation in educational and social activities.
Girls and young women.	Discriminatory gender norms and traditional cultural expectations restrict girls and young women's opportunities for civic activities and leadership roles, often confining them to domestic responsibilities that limit their participation in community and social activities.
Girls and adolescent girls.	Girls and adolescent girls in Uzbekistan use the Internet significantly less than boys, while gender stereotypes in ICT professions and limited opportunities further exacerbate this digital and professional disparity.
Children and adolescents residing in rural areas.	Challenges in accessing ICT education due to poorer computer facilities, fewer qualified trainers, weaker internet connections, and significant differences in ICT skill levels among rural-based trainers compared to urban areas like Tashkent.
Children who fall victim to cyberbullying and cybercrime.	Increased internet usage and the anonymity of online platforms make children vulnerable to cyberbullying and cybercrime.
POVERTY AND ADEQUATE STANDARDS OF LIVING	
Children in regions with high levels of monetary poverty.	Differences in income generation between urban and rural areas, over-dependence on agriculture, adverse climate conditions, and geographic isolation. Lack of region-specific social protection programmes tailored to each region's unique conditions and requirements.

Achievements	Areas for improvement
Children experiencing multidimensional poverty.	Inadequate access to safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, and proper heating and housing conditions significantly affect children's health and living standards. Underdeveloped cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms and individualised family-focused support systems hinder the effective delivery of integrated services and targeted interventions.
Children and adolescents living in rural areas with limited access to WASH.	Significant disparities in water and sanitation infrastructure between urban and rural schools, with only 65 per cent of rural schools having essential water services compared to 88 per cent in urban areas, contribute to lower attendance and higher absenteeism, particularly among girls, due to inadequate facilities.
Children and adolescents living in areas with poor medical waste management.	Poorly managed medical waste near health care facilities exposes children and adolescents to hazardous materials, infectious agents, and toxic chemicals, increasing their risk of diseases, injuries, and long-term health issues caused by environmental contamination and harmful emissions.

4.2. Key strategic and cross-sectoral recommendations

Many specific recommendations are covered in their respective chapters. However, the following strategic and cross-sectoral recommendations aim to address overarching challenges and enhance the framework supporting children's rights in Uzbekistan.

Improve national policy making, implementation, and reporting. National partners are advised to improve the policy cycle to address issues critical to realising children's rights. This includes a comprehensive approach to problem identification, analysis of alternative methods, development of risk management strategies, and clear indicators to measure policy effectiveness. Policies supporting children should have clearly defined targets, delivery timetables, roles and responsibilities, and allocated resources (including financial, training and infrastructural resources).

Enhance data quality and availability. Improving the quality and availability of statistical and administrative data, including disaggregated data, is crucial for effective policy development, monitoring and evaluation. In Uzbekistan, official statistics and administrative data should be embedded in the policy cycle to advance children's rights and adjust policies as needed. To achieve this, the use of disaggregated data should be mandatory in the policy cycle, increasing the demand for high-quality data. Additionally, clear and consistent definitions and methodologies for administrative data collection should be developed for the vulnerable groups of children identified in this report.

Increase budget allocations for child rights, and advance public finance reforms.

Increasing budget spending on health and social and child protection, with a particular focus on children and adolescents, is essential. Supporting public finance management reform and results-based budgeting can help link policy decisions to budgeting and ensure targets related to children's rights are well-resourced and monitored in conditions of budget deficit. It is strongly recommended that participatory budgeting be expanded to allow NGOs and the public to set priorities for government expenditure, enhancing the relevance and impact of policies.

Address stigma and negative social views. Addressing deeply rooted stigma and negative social views on vulnerable groups of children is crucial for their inclusion. In Uzbekistan, this includes changing opinions on the medical model of disability, mental health needs, and tolerance of violence against children. It is recommended to implement awareness campaigns and educational programmes to promote the inclusion and acceptance of vulnerable groups, prioritising children with disabilities. It is advisable to embed social behaviour change (SBC) interventions targeting specific behaviours and attitudes, using evidence-based methods to influence social norms and behaviours with regards to girls and women, children with disabilities, and children with HIV.

Improve cross-sectoral coordination. Strengthening cross-sectoral coordination and management mechanisms is vital to support children, especially those facing multiple deprivations. It is strongly recommended that all relevant ministries and agencies conduct joint mapping to identify service gaps and enhance collaboration across the social protection, justice, education, and health sectors. Developing inter-ministerial case management guidelines, including assessment protocols, joint case management procedures, and reporting mechanisms, is strongly advisable.

Expand decentralization efforts. Properly planned and executed decentralization can improve resource allocation and service provision for vulnerable children, by bringing decision-makers closer to residents. In Uzbekistan, developing effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at the mahalla level, and empowering mahalla officials to address specific local problems, is strongly recommended. Local public servants can timely identify and support the most vulnerable children and their families, to reduce risks of child abandonment, or support the inclusion of children with disabilities.

Strengthen the role of NGOs/CSOs. Facilitating the Involvement of NGOs in policy development, monitoring children's rights, and service delivery is crucial. It is strongly recommended that mechanisms for active societal Involvement be institutionalised and that public administrators' capacity to work with civil society and the private sector be strengthened to enhance participatory approaches to policymaking. NGOs can be engaged in piloting new interventions, and national and local authorities can provide grants to support vulnerable groups, such as child victims of domestic violence. Some key informants and participants in discussions emphasised the need for greater NGO involvement in drafting and examining laws related to child rights. They proposed introducing alternative drafts, mandating public examinations by NGOs, and organising contests between state bodies and NGOs to implement child protection projects.²²⁸

²²⁸ Proposals put forward by participants in the seminar-training on the topic 'Participation of civil society/NGO representatives in the implementation of the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the general comments of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child'.

Individualize services for children and their families. Promoting 'individual action plans' that consider children's age, skills, family circumstances, special needs, and other important characteristics is essential. Developing a cross-sectoral model of individualised support that will include multi-disciplinary teams is recommended.

Increase children's awareness of their rights. Raising awareness among children and adolescents about their rights and the mechanisms established to ensure these are met is vital. Despite efforts made in this direction, currently not all children and adolescents know their rights. Using digital platforms for awareness-raising and partnering with adolescents as role models to champion their rights is advisable. Some recommendations from children and adolescents have included organising trainings for parents on child upbringing, monitoring school textbooks, and creating videos to inform parents about children's rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and belief.

Promote vulnerable groups' involvement in decision-making. It is crucial to ensure that children and adolescents, especially from vulnerable groups, have the competence and confidence required to influence decisions affecting their lives. Supporting adolescents using modern technologies to have their voices heard in national-level decision-making fora, can help enhance their participation. It is important to ensure that the voices of vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities, are included in policy and programme development.

Address gender disparities affecting women and girls in Uzbekistan through applying a comprehensive approach. It is crucial to increase women's labour force participation, through implementing skills development programmes for girls, promoting entrepreneurship opportunities, and expanding access to affordable childcare and parental leave. Improve girls' education by addressing gender stereotypes in curricula, continuing to provide scholarships, and raising community awareness about the importance of girls' education to address gender norms. Strengthen the legal and policy environment for gender equality, and address violence against women and girls through implementing public awareness campaigns, strengthening services for survivors, and enhancing law enforcement's capacity to respond to violence. These priorities must incorporate cross-cutting issues to engage the most marginalized and invisible groups, such as women and girls with disabilities, especially those from rural areas.

Improve support for children with disabilities through integrated social service provision, and improving disability-inclusive infrastructure and access to community care, support services, and assistive technology. Transition to a social model of disability assessment and determination. Social protection policies must account for the varied and significant costs incurred by families, providing targeted support for assistive devices, therapies, and environmental adaptations. Support the establishment and empowerment of OPDs and self-initiative parents' groups for advocating for and representing children with disabilities. Combat negative social norms and discrimination, and focus on building the relevant capacity of duty bearers and the media. Focus particularly on women and girls with disabilities, ensuring they have access to rights-based services.



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