



Migration Profile

UZBEKISTAN

A. Executive summary

Uzbekistan is a country in Central Asia, a former member of the Soviet Union from which it gained independence in 1991. The country is landlocked, bordering Kazakhstan to the North and West, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the East, and Afghanistan and Turkmenistan to the South. Its territory covers 440,400 km² and comprises 12 regions and an autonomous republic (Karakalpakstan). The capital city is Tashkent. A member of the UN, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the OSCE, Uzbekistan has the largest population in Central Asia. Its 33,580,650 inhabitants (2019) live mainly in the South and East of the Country and represent approximately half of the region's total population.

According to official estimates, Uzbeks are the major ethnic group (83.8%), followed by Tajiks (4.8%), Kazakhs (2.5%), Russians (2.3%), Karakalpaks (2.2%), Kyrgyzs (1.7%), and others (around 5%) including Armenians, Ukrainians, Azeri, Uighurs, Koreans, Turkmens, and Jewish. The official language is Uzbek, spoken by most of the population, followed by Russian, which serves as the inter-ethnic language that is most often used in daily life, especially in large urban centres and in most of the activities of business and government. Among the languages spoken by the minorities, Tajik has a great importance.

Most of the Uzbek population is Muslim (80%) and a small minority of the population (8%) follows the Russian Orthodox Church, while Catholics make up only 1%.

Rich in coal, oil and natural gas deposits that have not completely been explored yet, Uzbekistan is one of the world's leading producers and exporters of cotton. The territory of Uzbekistan features large deserts, steppes, and inhabitable mountains; protected areas cover 4.6% of the country. The Western region is dominated by the arid steppe of Kyzylkum that extends as far as the Aral Sea, while the autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan occupies much of the plains area around the Aral Sea.

Uzbekistan is currently experiencing a high level of constant internal migration from its rural to its urban areas. This is mainly for employment or educational reasons. As far as emigration is concerned, the main destinations of approximately 70% of migrant workers leaving Uzbekistan are the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan.

In 2018, the number of internally displaced people in Uzbekistan totalled 79,942. This figure is expected to triple, however, to reach an estimated 200,000, as the situation of the Aral Sea continues to cause new climate refugees.

According to data from the State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan (UZSTAT), the total number of Uzbek citizens who migrated abroad in 2017 was 6.8 million; this figure doubled to 13.8 million in 2018. More than half (58%) of them were men (an estimated 8 million) and 42% were women (5.8 million). The Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States were the main destination for 14.2 million people as 7.1 million moved to Kazakhstan, 3.1 million moved to Kyrgyzstan and 3.5 million moved to the Russian Federation, an, while 531.000 people (4%) migrated to Korea, Turkey, China, the United States and Germany.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Uzbekistan is a country in Central Asia and a former member of the Soviet Union, from which it gained independence in 1991. The country borders Kazakhstan to the North and West, with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the East, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan to the South. It has no sea access. Its territory covers 440,400 km² and comprises 12 regions and an autonomous republic (Karakalpakstan). Tashkent is the capital. The country's per-capita GDP is US\$5,600.

A member of the UN, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the OSCE, Uzbekistan has the largest population (33,580,650) in Central Asia. Data from 2019 indicate that most of its inhabitants live in the South and East of the Country, and make up approximately half of Central Asia's total population. In the past, this former member of the Soviet Union was one of the poorest republics in the area, with most of its population engaged in cotton production and living in small rural communities. A large share of the population still lives in the countryside and depends on farming for its livelihood. Rich in unexplored coal, oil and natural gas deposits, Uzbekistan is one of the world's leading producers and exporters of cotton.

According to official estimates, Uzbeks are the main ethnic group (83.8%), followed by Tajiks (4.8%), Kazakhs (2.5%), Russians (2.3%), Karakalpaks (2.2%), Kyrgyzs (1.7%), and other ethnic groups (about 5%) such as Armenians, Ukrainians, Azeri, Uighurs, Koreans, Turkmens, and Jewish. The official language is Uzbek and is spoken by most of the population, while Tajik takes on great importance among the languages spoken by the minorities. Russian is the inter-ethnic language and is used extensively in daily life, together with Uzbek, especially in large urban centres and in most business and governmental activities.

The territory has large inhabitable areas: deserts, steppes and mountains. In fact, the Western part of the country is dominated by the arid steppe of Kyzylkum that extends as far as the Aral Sea. The autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan contains much of the plains area surrounding the Aral Sea. The main waterways are the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers. Protected areas make up 4.6% of the country.

Most of the Uzbek population is Muslim (80%) and 8% of the population follow the Russian Orthodox Church, while Catholics make up approximately 1%.

II. International and Internal Migrants

Roughly 70% of the workers who migrated from Uzbekistan chose the Russian Federation as their destination (Moscow and Saint Petersburg primarily) and also Kazakhstan. For many years, Uzbek migrant workers were the largest group of workers in Russia's labour market. This is unlikely to change, considering how large the Russian labour market is for Uzbek citizens. According to 2017 World Bank estimates, 81% of the male migrant workers and 67% of the women from Uzbekistan worked in the Russian Federation, followed by Kazakhstan (12% and 10% respectively) and Turkey (3% and 18%).

One of the main characteristics of Uzbekistan is its population's high growth rate. Indeed, the labour force grows at a rate of 350,000 to 370,000 people each year. Moreover, work and education draw many rural residents to the cities every day, especially Tashkent and Andijan. The city of Andijan, for instance, home to several industries, has a population of 624,000 people that reaches 1 million during the day. Thus, daily migration influences the employment rate and culture of rural residents, besides improving the ties between rural and urban communities.

In addition, data analyses show that the ratio between internal and external migrants is slowly changing in Uzbekistan. If in 2010, around 15% of migrants wanted to migrate *from* Uzbekistan, in 2016 most of them wanted to migrate *within* the national borders. In 6 years, the economic conditions of some regions in the country have changed so much that migrants now choose other regions of Uzbekistan for employment.

According to August 2019 statistics from the General Department of Migration and Registration of Citizenship of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the number of citizens of other countries and stateless people who obtained permits to stay in Uzbekistan was 5,788, an increase from 3,849 in May, 4,254 in June and 4,995 in July of the same year. In 2019, the number of citizens of other countries and stateless people who obtained a temporary residence permit reached 269,894 people.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

According to data from the State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan (UZSTAT), the total number of Uzbek citizens who emigrated in 2017 was 6.8 million, and in 2018 it was 13.8 million. Of these, 58% (approximately 8 million) were men and 42% (some 5.8 million) were women. The Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States were the main destination for 14.2 million people, followed by Kazakhstan chosen by 7.1 million, Kyrgyzstan chosen by 3.1 million, and the Russian Federation chosen by 3.5 million. Korea, Turkey, China, the United States and Germany were the destinations chosen by 531,000 migrants.

Among the main reasons for migration there are family reunification (58%) and working abroad (42%).

Numerous young, skilled and highly educated people leave Uzbekistan, which has a considerable impact on the nation's capital and several other main cities. However, most emigrants do not possess higher education qualifications and 40% of them work in the

building sector, 20% in production, and the remaining 40% in the catering, cleaning, transportation, production and retail sectors.

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees)

In 2018, there were a reported 79,942 internally displaced people in Uzbekistan. This number is expected to reach 200,000 people, as the situation of the Aral Sea continues to cause new climate refugees.

The Aral Sea has dried up over the years and has now turned into a desert of sand and harmful salts, measuring 40,000-50,000 square kilometres. Hundreds of thousands of the almost 2 million inhabitants that live in the Karakalpakstan region, home to the Karakalpak national minority, have already left the area, after the Aral Sea basin dried up. Multinationals started to grab the vacated land. Fishing, once the primary source of the region's economy, has today been overtaken by cotton, rice and melon production.

According to the latest data (2020) of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), the dam collapse at the Sardoba reservoir in May on the Uzbek shore of the Syr Darya river caused severe floods in Uzbekistan and neighbouring Kazakhstan. Consequently, more than 70,000 people were evacuated from 22 Uzbek villages, and over 50 were injured. A strong storm caused heavy rains in Bukhara, damaging more than 5,000 buildings.

In 2018, there were 13 refugees from Afghanistan and only 1 from Azerbaijan. Approximately 100,000 people are considered stateless, but only 50,000 of them will be granted Uzbek citizenship because of a new law that came into force on 1st April 2020. In addition, between 2014 and 2019, Uzbek citizenship was conferred on 23,022 people.

Finally, according to the 2018 UN statistics, 3,139 Uzbek citizens applied for asylum in the United States, 1,409 in Sweden, 709 in Turkey, 455 in Israel and 232 in Germany., UNHCR Asia Central reported only 14 asylum seekers in Uzbekistan in 2019

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

According to the "Trafficking in persons report 2020" of the United States Department of State, Uzbekistan does not yet comply fully with the minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking, though it is making significant efforts to do so. In 2019, there were 95 reported victims of human trafficking, 89 of whom were victims of sexual exploitation. While most of the victims were exploited abroad, 15 endured exploitation within the country. The report highlights that Uzbekistan's efforts include steps to end to the systematic mobilization of students, teachers, and health care personnel for the annual cotton harvest, and granting international, third-party observers unimpeded access for monitoring purposes. According to 2017 data from Uzbek Ministry of Internal Affairs, out of 501 victims of human trafficking, 303 were women, 198 were men, and there 61 children. In 2018, the victims included 147 women, 103 men and 41 children. In 2019, the victims of human trafficking included 87 women, 3 men and 35 children.

In July 2019, a Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Additional measures to further improve the system of combating trafficking in persons and forced labour",

entered into force. It transformed the Interdepartmental Commission of the Republic for Combating Human Trafficking into a National Commission under the guidance of the President of the Senate. The Commission comprises two sub-committees chaired by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Employment respectively. Regional commissions were created in each of the Country's regions and a national *rapporteur* was eventually appointed.

In August 2020, the country's 2008 law on human trafficking was amended as new concepts, preventive measures, and a procedure to identify victims of human trafficking (including minors and their rights), were introduced. While listing the main policy lines in this sector, the law provides a specific definition of the status of the National and Territorial Commissions for combating human trafficking and forced labour, as well as the powers of the Council of Ministers. The relevant government agencies include the General Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations. A new chapter on human trafficking prevention was introduced in the legislation, with measures ranging from ongoing monitoring and awareness raising campaigns on dangerous situations to the development and implementation of educational programs in public and private educational establishments. The Ministry of Internal Affairs will create a unified database for human trafficking crimes, with information on traffickers, victims and the various types of exploitation.

The new law introduces a two-stage procedure to identify the victims of human trafficking. In the initial identification phase, information is gathered, studied and assessed to determine the status of alleged victims of trafficking. In the second phase, a final decision is made whether to grant the individual the official status of victim. A person receives the status of alleged victim of trafficking based on the initial investigation and within a maximum of 5 days from the date of first contact with the competent authorities. During that limited time, the alleged victim is entitled to temporary accommodation, medical, psychological and other support, as well as an interpreter. The person is then given 30 days for psycho-physical recovery and to decide whether or not to cooperate with law enforcement agencies on the case.

When individuals are granted the status of victim of human trafficking they are entitled to rehabilitation and social integration programs, according to the outcome of the final investigation carried out by the Territorial Committee. The decision to recognise a minor (16 and under) as a victim of trafficking is made independently, without the individual needing to consent. If the person is over the age of 16, the investigation is carried out following a request by a legal representative and/or a representative of the protection authority, with the victim's voluntary consent and the compulsory participation of a psychologist.

VI. National legal framework

Migration and citizenship issues are governed by the General Department of Migration and Registration of Citizenship of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The national framework comprises the following measures:

- Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan (1992)

- Law on citizenship (1992) (last amended in 2020)
- Decree-law on the procedure of entrance, departure, stay and transit of citizens of other states and stateless persons in the Republic of Uzbekistan of 1996 (last amended in 2019)
- Decree-law on the Agency for External Labour Migration of 2003
- Anti-trafficking Law of 2008 (last amended in 2020)
- Regulation on the procedure for granting political asylum in the Republic of Uzbekistan of 2017.

Uzbekistan has ratified neither the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees of 1951 nor the related New York Protocol of 1967. Consequently, there are no legal and administrative norms governing the status of refugees in the country. UNHCR is nevertheless offering its full support to the Uzbek Government to ratify these two international tools and develop an appropriate legal framework for the country.

According to data provided in August 2020 by the Uzbek Government to the UNHCR, in 2019 alone, 6,318 stateless people obtained Uzbeki citizenship, making it the highest yearly naturalization rate in Central Asia. According to the UNHCR, the new law on citizenship that entered into force in Uzbekistan on April 1st 2020, will not only introduce simplified naturalization procedures but will also benefit all stateless persons who acquired a permanent residence permit before January 1st 1995. This will grant citizenship status to approximately 49,228 people, approximately half of Uzbekistan's stateless population. The same procedures will also apply to the children of the beneficiaries of this new regulation.

Over the past three years, Uzbekistan conferred nationality on some 10,000 stateless people by amending its birth registration practices. It introduced universal birth registration, including for children born to undocumented parents, and launched a nationwide campaign to identify and register all cases of unregistered births. Currently, there are 97,346 registered stateless people in Uzbekistan. The widespread statelessness in the country and the surrounding region is largely due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the formation of new Independent States, which meant that hundreds of thousands of people in Central Asia became stateless. While many were able to confirm or acquire the nationality of the successor states, others became stranded across newly established borders, with invalid Soviet passports or without means to prove their place of birth or residence.

VII. Main Actors

The State

In 2017, the country's internal migration policy was reformed with a view to relaxing the rules preventing the departure of citizens from Uzbekistan, such as the need for a departure visa. After January 1st 2019, migrants no longer need an authorization to travel abroad. The Uzbek Government has also begun negotiations with the Russian Federation for the joint establishment of a migration centre in Uzbekistan.

In 2003, the Agency on Foreign Labour Migration was established to improve the labour infrastructure of Uzbek citizens working abroad and to prevent irregular migration. The Agency also carries out the following activities:

- development and implementation of international cooperation projects in the field of labour migration
- collaboration with the relevant authorities of other countries
- assistance to Uzbek citizens abroad in search of jobs
- labour coordination of Uzbek citizens abroad and foreign citizens in the Republic of Uzbekistan
- cooperation with foreign companies employing foreign labour
- issuance of licences to companies to attract foreign workers
- issuance of permits to citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan to work abroad.

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church instituted ecclesiastical districts in the country only recently, following the nation's independence in 1991. In 1994, an Apostolic Nunciature was established in Uzbekistan and on September 29th 1997, Pope John Paul II established a *sui iuris* mission with jurisdiction over the entire Uzbek territory. The *sui iuris* mission then became an Apostolic Administration in 2015. The Catholic presence is maintained by five parishes in the country's five major cities: Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Urgench and Fergana. The pastoral care of the 5,000 Catholics present on the territory is entrusted to the Order of Friars Minor Conventual. On June 1st 2019, Pope Francis established the Apostolic Administration of Kazakhstan and Central Asia for the Faithful of Byzantine Rite with a see in Karaganda, and jurisdiction on the territory of Uzbekistan. The Order of Saint Teresa of Calcutta (Missionaries of Charity) is also active in Uzbek territory and engages in social and charitable work. Uzbekistan has diplomatic relations with the Holy See, but no permanent Apostolic Nuncio. The Apostolic Nuncio to the Russian Federation also serves as the Apostolic Nuncio to Uzbekistan.

Caritas Uzbekistan is active nationally, with an office in Tashkent and in four other parishes in Samarkand, Bukhara, Urgench and Fergana. Caritas Uzbekistan is affiliated with Caritas Internationalis and Caritas Asia and receives the support of the global network of international Catholic agencies. Among its activities, it assists children and the elderly with access to medication, it manages a canteen for the poor, the sick and the most vulnerable, and also organises extracurricular activities to promote social skills and sport activities among children.

International Organizations

The UNHCR and the IOM are active on the Uzbek territory. The UNHCR supports the efforts of Uzbekistan to prevent and eradicate statelessness through a global campaign, #Ibelong, that aims to eliminate statelessness by 2024. The IOM provides assistance for the

repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of trafficking and other vulnerable migrants from Uzbekistan.

Other Actors

In 2008, a Trafficking Rehabilitation Centre to provide medical, legal, social and psychological assistance was opened with the support of State funds. In its 12 years of activity, the Centre has assisted over 3,000 people, and as many as 70% of them have been supported in job placement assistance, 12% in vocational training and 10% have received assistance to start a business. The Centre's services include a telephone hotline for combating human trafficking and forced labour. The Social Information Centre "Istikbolli Avlod" operates 9 regional offices in Tashkent, Namangan, Nukus, Urgench, Bukhara, Andijan, Samarkand, Gulistan and Karshi. Each office runs a telephone hotline staffed by legal consultants who provide free assistance concerning human trafficking issues.

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GENERAL DEPARTMENT OF MIGRATION AND REGISTRATION OF CITIZENSHIP OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

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