



**INTERNAL MIGRATION TRENDS IN UZBEKISTAN: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES, AND  
POLICY RESPONSES**

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**Abstract**

This article examines the dynamics of internal migration in Uzbekistan, focusing on its causes, consequences, and policy responses. Drawing on demographic and socio-economic trends, the study identifies the key drivers of rural-to-urban migration, including employment opportunities, educational prospects, and disparities in regional development. It also highlights the social and economic consequences of migration, such as urban overcrowding, labor market imbalances, and the depopulation of rural areas. Furthermore, the article evaluates government strategies aimed at managing internal migration, with particular attention to housing programs, regional development initiatives, and labor market reforms. By integrating statistical data with policy analysis, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of internal migration as both a challenge and an opportunity for sustainable development in Uzbekistan.

**Keywords:** Internal migration, Uzbekistan, rural-to-urban migration, regional development, labor market, urbanization, socio-economic consequences, policy responses, sustainable development.

**INTRODUCTION**

The role of internal migration in the socioeconomic development of countries has significantly increased in recent decades. While the twenty-first century is often described as the “century of global migration,” similar dynamics are observed within national borders, where internal migration reshapes labor markets, urban development, and regional demographics.[1]

Economic factors are key drivers of internal migration. In Uzbekistan, these include the search for higher-paying jobs, the lack of industrial development in many regions, and limited opportunities for self-realization in rural labor markets. Social factors also play a role, as access to better education and healthcare in urban centers serves as a strong incentive for young people and families to relocate. In addition, the rapid spread of digital technologies and improved transportation systems has facilitated the mobility of people within the country.

Demographic imbalances also strongly influence internal migration flows. Uzbekistan has one of the highest fertility rates among CIS countries, which significantly increases the pressure on the domestic labor market. Each year, hundreds of thousands of young people enter the labor force; however,



employment opportunities in rural areas, where agriculture remains the primary source of income, are insufficient. At the same time, infrastructure challenges – such as limited access to electricity, gas, potable water, and irrigation – further stimulate the movement of people from villages to cities.

As a result, Tashkent and other large urban centers attract significant inflows of internal migrants. On the one hand, migration helps to meet labor demand in construction, trade, and services, while fueling entrepreneurship and expanding the consumer market. On the other hand, the concentration of people and resources in the capital has generated significant challenges. These include overburdened infrastructure, chronic energy supply disruptions, transport congestion, housing shortages, and a worsening environmental situation. Socially, the arrival of large numbers of rural migrants has intensified competition for jobs, heightened localism (mahalliychilik), and placed additional strain on healthcare and education systems.

Thus, while migration contributes to the dynamism of urban development, its unchecked growth creates risks that can undermine both the capital's sustainability and the broader balance of regional development in Uzbekistan. Analyzing the consequences of this process is therefore essential for designing policies that ensure migration becomes a factor of inclusive and sustainable growth rather than a source of socio-economic instability. This article, to a certain extent, serves to fulfill the objectives provided for in the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. UP-158 dated September 11, 2023 "On the Strategy "Uzbekistan – 2030" [2], No. UP-162 dated October 17, 2024 "On priority measures to reform the migration management system" [3], in the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. 252 dated April 22, 2025 "On measures to further improve the system of organized employment of citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan abroad" [4], and other regulatory and legal documents in this area.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The growing challenges of internal migration have been studied by numerous scholars in the context of post-Soviet societies and, more specifically, Uzbekistan. A significant contribution comes from S.P. Bazyleva [5], who studies migration in Uzbekistan through the lens of regional inequalities. She argues that differences in economic development, infrastructure, and living standards strongly drive internal migration.

Ryazantsev S. [1] and Bozhenko V. [1], while more focused on external migration, also touch upon aspects relevant to internal mobility. Their analyses of socio-demographic groups with traditionally low mobility provide useful parallels for understanding why rural communities in Uzbekistan are now increasingly involved in migration flows. They also stress risks associated with uncontrolled migration, such as the potential rise in informal employment and pressures on urban infrastructure.

From the national perspective, studies conducted by experts of the "Development Strategy" Center, including Zh. Sharipov and R. Nuriddinov [6], propose mechanisms for regulating population movements within the country. They argue that balanced regional development policies, investment in infrastructure, and the creation of local jobs are crucial to mitigating excessive inflows into Tashkent.



Their findings underline the importance of coordinated state strategies to manage migration flows safely and productively.

Other studies in the field of internal migration are presented in the following table.

**Table 1. Studies in the field of internal migration in Uzbekistan.**

Author(s) / Study	Main Claims / Findings	Source / Publication
<b>Huichen Gao &amp; Shijuan Wang</b>	Conducted a bibliometric review of research on rural-to-urban migrants. They mapped research themes, countries, urbanization levels, and trending topics. Their study highlights that key areas of focus include health, quality of life, and social integration of migrants.	"The Intellectual Structure of Research on Rural-to-Urban Migrants: A Bibliometric Analysis", Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health, 2022. (mdpi.com)
<b>S.P. Bazyleva</b>	In "Modern Migration Processes in the Context of Regional Contradictions on the Example of Uzbekistan", Bazyleva studies migration in Uzbekistan through the lens of regional inequalities. She argues that differences in economic development, infrastructure, and living standards strongly drive internal migration.	RUDN Journal of Public Administration, 2018. (journals.rudn.ru)
<b>Sayfullaev Nosirovich Siddik</b>	In "Statistical Analysis of Migration Processes of the Population in the Republic of Uzbekistan", Sayfullaev provides a quantitative analysis of both internal and external migration processes: dynamics, migration balance, and trends. This offers a statistical foundation for understanding the scale and direction of migration in Uzbekistan.	Academia Repository, 2023. (academiarepo.org)
<b>Dilnoza Tuxtamuratova</b>	In "Territorial and Socio-Demographic Analysis of Urbanization Processes in Uzbekistan", Tuxtamuratova emphasizes that urbanization is growing under the influence of rural-to-urban migration as well as reforms, investments, and infrastructure development. The article analyzes population distribution by region and demographic characteristics of urbanization.	Journal of Applied Science and Social Science, 2025. (in-library.uz)
<b>Study: "Transformation of Socio-Cultural Factors Impacting on the External Labour Migration in Uzbekistan"</b>	This paper focuses on socio-cultural rather than purely economic drivers of migration. Covering the period 2006–2019, it argues that migration has become increasingly "feminized" and "youth-oriented." Social expectations, gender roles, and cultural change play an important role in migration decisions, alongside economic motivations.	Prostranstvennaâ Èkonomika / DOAJ. (doaj.org)



At a broader methodological level, comparative research on urbanization in developing countries provides relevant insights for Uzbekistan. For instance, scholars analyzing rapid rural-to-urban migration in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa note that uncontrolled internal migration often leads to overcrowded cities, environmental degradation, and worsening inequality. These parallels suggest that Uzbekistan may face similar risks if proactive measures are not taken.

Despite the growing body of research, there remain gaps in understanding the specific socio-environmental consequences of internal migration in Uzbekistan. In particular, the impact of migration on energy infrastructure, road congestion, and environmental sustainability requires deeper scholarly attention. This indicates the need for further comprehensive studies aimed at evaluating both the positive and negative effects of internal migration within the unique demographic and economic context of Uzbekistan.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In conducting this study, a combination of qualitative and analytical methods was employed. The methods of observation and comparison were used to examine the dynamics of migration flows and to identify similarities and differences in the socio-economic conditions influencing them. In addition, the methods of analysis and synthesis were applied to systematize theoretical concepts and empirical findings related to labor migration.

Furthermore, the study makes use of the statistical method, which enabled the processing and interpretation of demographic and labor market data obtained from national and international sources. The comparative-historical method was also applied to trace the evolution of internal migration trends in Uzbekistan.

The theoretical significance of the research lies in substantiating the necessity of conducting targeted marketing studies to identify in-demand professions abroad and the corresponding expected wages, as well as in emphasizing the importance of strengthening the role of regional administrations (khokimiyats) in the effective organization of labor migration.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Economic factors continue to serve as the primary driver of internal migration in Uzbekistan. More than half of the country's population resides in rural areas, where agriculture remains the dominant source of income. However, labor demand in this sector is structurally limited, often seasonal, and vulnerable to climatic conditions such as water scarcity and soil degradation. As a result, opportunities for stable and well-paid employment are scarce. Moreover, wages in the agricultural sector are substantially lower than those offered in urban industries and the service economy, creating a significant income gap between rural and urban populations. This disparity strongly motivates rural residents, particularly young people, to seek employment in cities. In addition, the ongoing modernization of agriculture, including the introduction of new technologies and mechanization, has further reduced the need for manual labor in villages, indirectly accelerating the outflow of the workforce to urban centers. The concentration of investment, infrastructure, and industrial enterprises

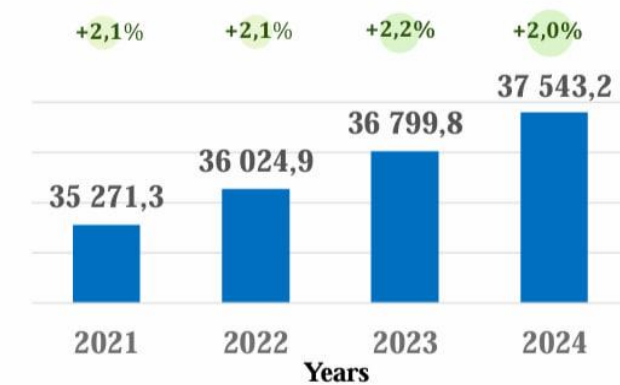


in major cities, particularly Tashkent and regional capitals, reinforces these trends, making economic inequality between regions one of the most significant push-and-pull factors of internal migration.

The permanent population as of January 1, 2025, was 37,543.2 thousand people, comprising 18,904.5 thousand men and 18,638.7 thousand women. The population was divided into urban and rural areas, with 19,135.8 thousand people residing in urban areas and 18,407.4 thousand people residing in rural areas (Table 2).

**Table 2. Number of the permanent population of the Republic of Uzbekistan and its distribution as of January 1, 2025, thousand people [7]**

Years	Distribution of the permanent population, thousand people		Distribution of the permanent population, in percent	
	urban	rural	urban	rural
2021	17918.3	17353.0	50.8	49.2
2022	18335.7	17689.2	50.9	49.1
2023	18768.5	18031.3	51.0	49.0
2024	19135.8	18407.4	51.0	49.0



Subsequently, an analysis of the economic factors influencing internal migration is provided. The following table presents the key economic indicators that have an impact on internal migration (Table 3).



**Table 3. Employment in Agriculture in the Republic of Uzbekistan as of January 1, 2025, thousands of people**

Chart Title	Data	Key Insight
<b>1. Rural Population Share Over Time</b>	In 2021, rural residents made up about 49.2% of Uzbekistan's population, and by 2024 their share had only slightly decreased to 49.1%. In 2025, the population reached 37.5 million, with approximately 19.1 million living in urban areas and 18.4 million in rural areas – nearly an even split of 51% urban and 49% rural.	Shows gradual urbanization / slow decline in rural share.
<b>2. Employment in Agriculture as a % of Total Workforce</b>	In 2023, around 13.9% of Uzbekistan's workforce was employed in agriculture, compared to 31.5% in 1991, highlighting a significant long-term decline. [8]	This reveals a structural decline in agriculture's ability to absorb labor, supporting limited opportunities in rural/agricultural sectors.
<b>3. Average Monthly Wages by Region (2024-2025)</b>	In 2024, the national average monthly wage in Uzbekistan was about 5.36 million UZS. The highest salaries were recorded in Tashkent city (9.07 million UZS) and Navoi region (6.77 million UZS), while the lowest were in Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya, averaging around 3.78–3.81 million UZS. [9] By the first half of 2025, the national average had risen to 5.98 million UZS, with Tashkent city leading at 10.14 million UZS, followed by Navoi at 7.49 million UZS and Tashkent region at 5.67 million UZS, while wages in most other regions remained significantly lower. [10]	Large regional wage disparities.
<b>4. Per Capita Income by Region</b>	In the first quarter of 2025, per capita household income was highest in Tashkent city at about 15.86 million UZS, followed by Navoi (9.45 million UZS), Bukhara (6.36 million UZS), and Tashkent region (6.16 million UZS). The lowest incomes were recorded in Namangan (3.97 million UZS), Surkhandarya (4.08 million UZS), and Karakalpakstan (4.12 million UZS). [11]	These pronounced income disparities across regions are further reinforced by wage statistics.
<b>5. Average Wage Growth over Time</b>	Between 2023 and 2024, the national average monthly wage in Uzbekistan increased from about 4.56 million UZS to 5.36 million UZS, reflecting a growth of roughly 17.5%. Regionally, wage growth was strongest in Tashkent city at around 20–21%, while other regions also experienced double-digit increases, though at a slower pace. [12]	Wages in Uzbekistan are rising, but the growth is uneven. Because many rural and less developed regions start from a much lower baseline, regional inequalities remain substantial despite overall increases.



Overall, the evidence indicates that internal migration in Uzbekistan is largely driven by economic disparities. Higher wages and more stable employment opportunities in urban centers such as Tashkent and Navoi exert a strong pull on rural residents, whereas the agricultural sector – employing only 13.9% of the workforce – provides limited and unstable prospects due to seasonality and climate-related risks. Sharp regional inequalities in both wages and per capita incomes further reinforce this trend, with poorer regions like Namangan and Surkhandarya lagging far behind urban centers. Migration statistics confirm the pattern: in 2024, nearly three-quarters of recorded inflows were from rural to urban areas, underscoring the central role of economic inequality in shaping internal migration.

Social factors also play a significant role in shaping internal migration flows. Cities provide access to higher-quality education, modern healthcare services, and broader cultural opportunities, making them especially attractive to young families who seek better living conditions and prospects for their children. Moreover, urban centers often offer greater opportunities for professional development, career mobility, and social integration compared to rural areas.

Another important aspect is the “information factor”: the rapid spread of the Internet, social media, and mobile communication has increased awareness among rural residents about job opportunities, educational programs, and living standards in the capital and other large cities. The availability of information not only reduces the uncertainty and risks associated with relocation but also strengthens the aspirations of younger generations to move in search of better prospects.

At the beginning of the 2024/2025 academic year, the Republic of Uzbekistan had 222 operating higher education institutions. Compared to the 2020/2021 academic year, this represents an increase of 95 institutions, or 74.8%.

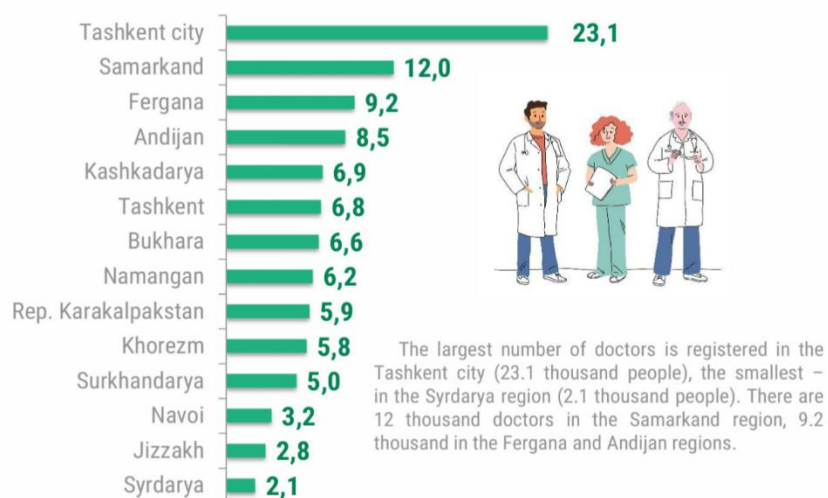
	Number of higher education institutions, total	of which: non-governmental higher educational organizations
<b>Rep. Uzbekistan</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>99</b>
Rep. Karakalpakstan	12	2
<i>regions:</i>		
Andijan	10	3
Bukhara	13	8
Jizzakh	5	2
Kashkadarya	11	5
Navoi	4	2
Namangan	8	2
Samarkand	14	1
Surkhandarya	7	2
Syrdarya	3	-
Tashkent	16	6
Fergana	13	3
Khorezm	8	3
Tashkent city	98	60

**Figure 1. Distribution of the number of operating higher education institutions by region (at the beginning of the 2024/2025 academic year, units) [13]**



The largest number of operating higher education institutions was noted in Tashkent city (98 units), Tashkent (16 units) and Samarkand (14 units) regions, and the lowest figures were recorded in Syrdarya (3 units), Navoi (4 units) and Jizzakh (5 units) regions. The largest share of higher education institutions is concentrated in the capital. Various sources indicate that Tashkent has approximately 98 institutions. This confirms the strong centralization of higher education in the capital city. In practice, the overwhelming majority of universities are located in cities as well as in regional and district centers, providing students living in cities with greater opportunities to access quality education. In small villages, there are virtually no independent universities; instead, rural areas are typically represented by colleges, branches, or educational units rather than full-fledged universities.

Turning to the healthcare system, the total number of physicians in the Republic of Uzbekistan amounts to 105.7 thousand, of whom 53.1 percent (56.1 thousand) are women and 46.9 percent (49.6 thousand) are men. The highest concentration of medical professionals, both male and female, is found in Tashkent, where 23.1 thousand physicians are employed. This distribution is largely explained by the availability of medical education, advanced healthcare infrastructure, and broader professional opportunities in the capital. By contrast, the lowest number of physicians is recorded in the Syrdarya region. Nevertheless, this indicator has been showing steady growth year by year.



**Figure 2. Distribution of doctors of all specialties by region (as of January 1, 2024, thousand people) [14]**

According to statistics, the majority of medical professionals, clinics, and hospital facilities are concentrated in the urban centers of the republic, whereas remote and rural areas continue to face a shortage of qualified personnel and adequate healthcare infrastructure.

Demographic trends reinforce this process: in rural areas, where fertility rates remain relatively high, young families with multiple children increasingly view migration to urban centers as a strategy to secure better education and healthcare for their offspring, thereby intensifying the flow of internal



migration. However, such movements also generate challenges. The concentration of population in major cities leads to overcrowding of schools and universities, long waiting times in hospitals and clinics, and growing pressure on housing and urban infrastructure. These negative effects highlight the importance of balanced regional development to prevent excessive population concentration in metropolitan areas.

Demographic factors exert significant pressure on Uzbekistan's labor market. The country consistently records the highest fertility rates among CIS states: in 2024, the birth rate stood at 24.9 per 1,000 people, nearly three times higher than in Russia (9.6) and more than double that of Armenia and Moldova (12.4 each). As a result of this demographic trend, the labor force is expanding rapidly. Each year, over 600,000 young people enter the labor market, and projections indicate that by 2030, this number could reach 1 million annually. Such rapid growth far outpaces the economy's ability to generate sufficient employment opportunities, particularly in rural regions, where agriculture remains the dominant sector but demand for labor is limited and wages are significantly lower than in urban industries and services. Consequently, a large share of young people view migration to Tashkent and other major cities as the only viable strategy to secure employment and improve their living standards. According to the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction, as of mid-2024, unemployment in Uzbekistan reached 5.8% of the economically active population, but this figure is much higher among rural youth. The demographic imbalance between a rapidly growing working-age population and insufficient job creation serves as a key driver of internal migration flows.

The mass influx of people into the capital produces both positive and negative consequences.

On the positive side, internal migration plays a crucial role in meeting the labor demand in construction, trade, and the service sector. According to the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction, more than 40% of new jobs created in Tashkent in recent years have been filled by internal migrants. The arrival of young people stimulates the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, broadens the consumer base, and strengthens the domestic market. Migration also contributes to urban economic dynamism by increasing the supply of skilled and semi-skilled workers, which, in turn, attracts investment into the capital.

However, the negative consequences are much more tangible. While migration supports labor supply in key urban sectors, it also creates imbalances. The oversaturation of low-skilled labor leads to wage stagnation in construction and services, reducing income growth for both migrants and local workers. Informal employment is another issue: according to the World Bank, up to 40% of jobs in Uzbekistan are in the informal sector, with migrants forming a large share. This deprives the state budget of tax revenues and leaves workers without social protection, pensions, or health insurance. Moreover, the demand for housing and consumer goods rises sharply, fueling inflation in urban markets, especially in rent and food prices.

The rapid population growth in Tashkent places an enormous strain on infrastructure. Transport is one of the hardest-hit sectors: despite the expansion of metro lines and the increase in public bus fleets, passenger demand continues to outpace supply. As a result, traffic congestion remains severe, with average commuting times in Tashkent increasing by 25% over the past decade. Utilities are under



similar stress: water consumption in Tashkent has risen to nearly 1 billion cubic meters per year, creating shortages in peripheral districts and exacerbating pressure on already limited water resources. Healthcare services are also unevenly distributed — while the capital has the largest number of physicians in the country, the growing migrant population increases patient loads, resulting in overcrowded clinics and longer waiting times.

The concentration of population and industry in Tashkent worsens the ecological situation. Vehicle emissions, industrial output, and high population density have caused air pollution levels to exceed WHO norms by 2–3 times during peak months. This aggravates respiratory illnesses, especially among children and the elderly. Waste management is another critical issue: the volume of solid waste generated in Tashkent has doubled over the past 15 years, while recycling systems remain underdeveloped, leading to unsustainable landfill expansion. Natural dust storms, common in Uzbekistan, combine with anthropogenic emissions to create dangerous smog episodes that reduce overall quality of life in the city.

The rapid influx of newcomers often leads to challenges in social integration. Migrants from rural areas face difficulties adapting to the pace and culture of urban life, sometimes experiencing discrimination or exclusion in the labor and housing markets. Increased pressure on schools, kindergartens, and hospitals strains social services. Competition for jobs intensifies, especially among young people, fueling underemployment and contributing to rising dissatisfaction. Sociologists also note a rise in localism (“mahalliychilik”), where informal networks based on regional origin dominate access to opportunities, deepening social fragmentation. This sometimes results in tensions between different regional groups, undermining social cohesion.

## CONCLUSION

Given the growing scale of internal migration and the disproportionate concentration of flows into Tashkent, Uzbekistan requires a comprehensive strategy that balances economic development, infrastructure expansion, and social inclusion. International experience, particularly the recommendations of the World Bank, UNDP, and the International Labour Organization (ILO) [15,16,17], can serve as a guiding framework.

### 1. Economic policies.

**Decentralization of industry and investment.** The World Bank emphasizes the importance of *polycentric development*, where economic activity is distributed across multiple urban centers rather than concentrated in a single capital. For Uzbekistan, this means stimulating job creation in regional hubs such as Samarkand, Namangan, and Nukus through tax incentives, industrial parks, and special economic zones.

**Support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).** According to UNDP, SMEs are the backbone of inclusive economic growth. Expanding microfinance programs, grants, and vocational training in rural regions can provide income-generating opportunities and reduce the push factor of migration.



**Formalization of employment.** The ILO highlights that informal work undermines labor rights and state revenues. Simplified taxation systems and legal incentives for businesses to register migrant workers would strengthen social protection and increase fiscal stability.

## **2. Infrastructural policies.**

**Balanced urban development.** World Bank urbanization studies stress that unbalanced growth in capitals creates “urban primacy” and weakens national resilience. Investments in housing, transport, and healthcare in regional centers can reduce excessive migration to Tashkent.

**Affordable housing programs.** UN-Habitat underscores the role of accessible housing in sustainable urbanization. Expanding public–private partnerships in housing construction would ease pressure on the capital’s rental market, which has grown by nearly 30% between 2020 and 2024.

**Smart transport planning.** The World Bank recommends integrated public transport strategies for fast-growing cities. Expanding metro and suburban rail systems, coupled with eco-friendly buses, would reduce congestion and pollution in Tashkent.

## **3. Environmental policies.**

**Sustainable resource management.** According to UNDP, water scarcity in Central Asia is among the most critical environmental risks. Investment in modern irrigation, leak reduction in municipal systems, and awareness campaigns are vital to balancing urban and rural water use.

**Air quality improvement.** WHO and World Bank studies show that urban air pollution reduces life expectancy. Transitioning to electric buses, strengthening vehicle emission standards, and expanding green zones could mitigate the worsening air quality in Tashkent.

**Waste management reform.** UNDP pilot projects in Uzbekistan demonstrate the success of recycling initiatives in reducing landfill waste. Expanding such projects nationwide would improve ecological resilience.

## **4. Social policies.**

**Migrant integration programs.** UNDP stresses the importance of inclusion policies for internal migrants, including training in digital literacy, access to labor rights information, and housing support.

**Equal access to education and healthcare.** The World Bank identifies *human capital investment* as a prerequisite for sustainable migration management. Building new schools, kindergartens, and clinics in fast-growing districts is essential to avoid overburdening social services.

**Reducing localism (mahalliychilik).** Studies by ILO and UNDP highlight that regional favoritism undermines labor mobility and social cohesion. Promoting transparent hiring processes and merit-based recruitment can help integrate migrants and reduce tensions.

By aligning national migration policies with international best practices, Uzbekistan can transform internal migration from a challenge into a driver of sustainable development. A strategy based on **polycentric growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability** – as advocated by



the World Bank, UNDP, and ILO – will ease urban congestion in Tashkent, strengthen regional economies, and create a more balanced and resilient society.

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