

# BACKGROUND NOTE

## Embracing a Dynamic Future Monumental Shifts in Uzbek Labour Migration Policy

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recent past has seen Uzbekistan's great efforts toward regulating organised labour migration. The country concluded a number of far-reaching agreements with countries hosting large numbers of Uzbek migrant workers, thereby supporting the employment of own citizens abroad. It also prioritized efforts on creating jobs and promoting employment within the country, especially among the youth, with 2021 proclaimed "The Year of Youth Support and Health Promotion" by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Meanwhile, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the domestic workforce, including returning migrants, negatively and forced the Uzbek Government to take additional measures to provide legal and social protection to labour migrants in order to mitigate these negative consequences.

This paper summarises the latest developments in this field and actions taken by the Government, ranging from the introduction of a system of economic, financial, organisational and legal assistance for migrants to the provision of training for in-demand professions, skills and languages.

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## THE UZBEK MANDATE FOR EXPANSIVE LABOUR MIGRATION

Uzbekistan is experiencing a steady increase in population and boasts a significant labour force. As of 31 December 2020, the country's population has increased to 34.5 million, with an urban-rural ratio of 50.6 percent to 49.4 percent respectively.<sup>1</sup> In 2018, the population living below the national poverty line stood at 11.4 percent, climbing to 12-15 percent, or 4-5 million people in 2020.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the unemployment rate had risen to over 9 percent, continuing upward (to 11.1 percent) by the end of 2020.<sup>3</sup> In sum, Uzbekistan's labour force constitutes 19.1 million people, with, strikingly, around 2.5 million Uzbeks – 20 percent of the country's economically active population – working abroad.<sup>4</sup> Each year, some 600,000-700,000 people enter the domestic labour market and the country is taking active measures to develop targeted sectors and regions, with the aim of creating up to 500,000 new jobs annually. However, reaching this ambitious target would also require providing work abroad for almost 200,000 Uzbeks each year.<sup>5</sup>

Labour migration of the Uzbek population is not a new phenomenon. The previous Government attempted, albeit inactively, to regulate labour migration aiming to facilitate the socio-economic development of the country. However, the insufficient legal framework, existing bureaucratic hurdles, and the lack of bilateral and multilateral agreements on labour migration with other countries, had hampered all efforts to combat irregular labour migration. In contrast, the new Government has recognised migration issues and the various difficulties encountered by Uzbek migrant workers, increasingly playing an active role in supporting labour migrants.

Widely cited as an important factor in economic development, the past years have seen labour migration top the national agenda, with the current Government making great strides toward legalising organised labour migration and steering what has been identified as a national asset toward activities that promote socio-economic development within the country. This endeavour is based on the proven premise that labour migration, when properly organised, leads to an increase in employment and family income, an increase in skilled labour, and a decrease in labour market pressures and social tensions. During this period, many game-changing legal documents have been adopted, which are expected to help regulate and ease difficulties faced by Uzbek migrants working, or planning to work, abroad. The new measures also focus on covering travel expenses and facilitating the obtaining of permits, insurance, pensions or loans by migrants, as well as ensuring the protection of the migrants' labour rights once they depart.

## LAYING THE BEDROCK FOR EFFECTIVE LABOUR MIGRATION POLICY

The starting point for the comprehensive reforms in Uzbekistan was the adoption of the Strategy for Action on five priority areas identified for the development of Uzbekistan during the period 2017-2021<sup>6</sup>, namely: (i) improving the system of state and public construction; (ii) ensuring the rule of law and further reforming the judicial system; (iii) developing and liberalizing the economy; (iv) developing the social sphere; (v) ensuring security, inter-ethnic harmony and religious tolerance, implementing balanced, mutually beneficial and constructive foreign policy. Importantly, the fourth area of this Strategy stipulates the implementation of specific measures to increase employment, strengthen the system of social protection for citizens, and improve public health.

In order to implement the Strategy's social protection tasks, the Ministry of Labour was transformed into the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations,<sup>7</sup> and tasked with implementing new policy approaches on employment and development of the national labour market infrastructure. Under this Ministry, the Agency for External Labour Migration was established, which is entrusted with assisting Uzbek citizens in exercising their right to work abroad. It does this by effectively managing and monitoring the processes for organised recruitment, alongside preparation and implementation of adaptation measures and employment abroad. The Agency is further tasked with interacting with the competent authorities of foreign states on regulation of employment processes for Uzbek citizens abroad and protecting their labour rights.

## Supporting Uzbeks abroad

The Agency for External Labour Migration has also been given responsibility for opening representative offices in destination countries and accreditation of foreign companies for the purposes of recruiting Uzbek migrant workers. During the course of 2021, foreign representative offices are due to be opened in Istanbul, Dubai, and four Russian cities – Ekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Volgograd and Pyatigorsk. These regional representative offices are authorised to directly conclude contracts with foreign employers and subsequently send citizens abroad, cooperate with diaspora organisations abroad, and attract technical assistance funds and grants from international financial institutions and organisations for the development of organised labour migration.

A special fund to “support and protect the rights and interests of citizens engaged in labour activities abroad”<sup>8</sup> is also envisaged. It shall provide comprehensive legal, social, and financial assistance to those Uzbek citizens abroad subjected to violence, forced servitude or discrimination; labour or other rights violation; or those who have fallen into financial difficulty and are without documentation or means of subsistence. Funding should cover medical services for citizens who, while undertaking labour migration, require medical assistance due to injury or accident – or face insurmountable medical costs.

## Organising recruitment within Uzbekistan

The next step by the Government has been to allow private employment agencies to organise recruitment of Uzbeks for work abroad. Regulation of private employment agencies is now enshrined in the Law on Private Employment Agencies,<sup>9</sup> which provides for the increase and expansion of employment opportunities for citizens, both within domestic enterprises and abroad. The Law sets clear regulation on the mechanisms of interaction between public services and the private employment sector, determining the procedure and conditions for the provision of employment services, including the rights and obligations of private employment agencies, enterprises and individuals, and jobseekers.

The further Law on Amendments and Additions to the Law on Private Employment Agencies<sup>10</sup> prohibits private employment agencies from collecting money from citizens seeking to work abroad, stipulating that such fees should be collected from the employer. In accordance with the Law, contracts for provision of services should be registered in real time in the [Labour Migration database](#) of the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations. In order to increase guarantees of employment for citizens looking for work abroad, it is envisaged to conclude cooperation contracts between private employment agencies and foreign employers or partners, whereby such guarantees would be defined as a necessary precondition for engagement.

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## Further legislative support for labour migration

The latest legislation also includes various measures aimed at spurring the growth and ease of Uzbek out-migration, facilitating short-term necessities with a view to stimulating long-term growth. Concrete measures include reimbursement of transport and other costs incurred by labour migrants, financial assistance during the preparation of required documents, and provision of loans, microloans and subsidies to cover migrant life and health insurance. Further provisions relate to the organisation of short trainings on migration and labour legislation, assistance to returning labour migrants in other matters, and housing for migrant families in need.<sup>11</sup> Within a year, it is planned to allocate 3,462 apartments in dwelling houses for labour migrants who need to improve their living conditions on the basis of issuing preferential mortgage loans.<sup>12</sup>

During a speech at the Meeting of the Council of CIS Heads of State on 18 December 2020,<sup>13</sup> the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, proposed the creation, within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), of a single interstate mechanism for (reciprocal) recognition of migrants' professional competences and qualifications, and medical examinations undergone. The President's proposal to develop and adopt the Cooperation Programme on Labour Migration is yet another important initiative, designed to ensure sustainable socio-economic development in the CIS member states.

## Signing agreements

Uzbekistan is actively signing bilateral and intergovernmental agreements with countries hosting large numbers of migrant workers, embedding organised forms of cooperation and allowing support for Uzbek citizens. One such agreement was signed between the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Government of the Russian Federation<sup>14</sup> to ensure protection of the rights and legitimate interests of Uzbek migrant workers engaged in temporary labour activities on the territory of the Russian Federation. According to the statistics, of more than 2.5 million Uzbek citizens working abroad, over 1.5 million work in Russia.<sup>15</sup>

On 30 November 2020, the official opening of a representative office of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN)<sup>16</sup> took place in the Uzbek capital Tashkent, facilitated by the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the basis of the "Ishga Markhamat" ("Welcome to work") Monocentre, a multifunctional centre for employment services. The RUDN University in Uzbekistan is entrusted with implementing joint projects with the Uzbek Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations in: teaching the Russian language and conducting refresher courses for Russian language teachers; conducting pre-departure training for Uzbek citizens wishing to work in the Russian Federation; preparing and conducting examinations on the Russian language, the history of Russia, and the basic legislation of the Russian Federation as required by Russia's legal framework on employment of foreign labour.

These developments are due to be further bolstered by the opening of a representative office of the Russian passport and visa service in Uzbekistan, with this office expected to provide services for preparation, registration and issuance of permits for temporary labour activities. According to the Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs, there are currently 600,000 undocumented Uzbeks residing in that country, whom are seeking to avoid deportation and a subsequent entry ban. Within a relatively short period, 421,000 citizens have been deported to Uzbekistan and are thus not entitled to return to Russia.<sup>17</sup>

In April 2019, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan paid a state visit to Uzbekistan for the signing of a bilateral agreement on protection of the labour rights of Kazakh citizens working in Uzbekistan, with full reciprocity for citizens of Uzbekistan working in Kazakhstan.<sup>18</sup>

On 25 February 2020, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed among the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Republic of Korea, and the Financial Corporation “Probest” to create favourable conditions and ensure the safety and health of Uzbek citizens engaged in temporary labour activities in Korea, and students studying in the country.<sup>19</sup>

## Boosting labour market information and skills

As mentioned, the Government has launched the online database [LaborMigration.uz](https://labormigration.uz)<sup>20</sup> – which provides information on the rules of stay, working conditions, and social and housing provisions in the prospective country of employment. The legal aspects of concluding employment contracts with foreign employers and the financial support measures provided for in the legislation are also covered. Registered labour migrants who find themselves in a difficult situation abroad can also use the [LaborMigration.uz](https://labormigration.uz) portal to apply for assistance from the Agency for Labour Migration. At the time of writing, over 230,000 people are registered in the database, with services rendered covering a total of 182,857 cases.

Creating jobs and promoting employment, especially among the youth, has been identified by the Government as a way of ensuring adequate employment within Uzbekistan, as the profile of the typical migrant is under 30, from a rural area, married, and educated to at least (completion of) secondary education. It is therefore important for Uzbekistan to boost job creation at home, in line with the current supply of skills, as well as supporting the development of skills to match prevailing demand. To this end, a complex of measures has been developed, and is now being implemented, to create new jobs, train (and retrain) professional personnel, foster entrepreneurship, provide suitable infrastructure, and allocate additional plots of land for low-income groups. The Ministry of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction is a key actor in this expansion, having been created specifically to regulate the processes aimed at poverty reduction.<sup>21</sup>

## Leveraging the youth population

With a view to reducing the outflow of human capital experienced during the past decades, enabling young people to boost their competencies, allowing them to contribute and benefit from an economically viable and legally supportive environment, and ensuring their full participation as active citizens, represent key aims of Uzbek policy on labour migration. A recent development has been the signing of the Presidential Resolution “On Additional Measures Aimed at Attracting Entrepreneurship”,<sup>22</sup> wherein the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations was duly instructed to organise “Ishga Markhamat” Monocentres, vocational training centres, and short-term vocational training courses by 1 January 2021. The Ministry thus organises, on an ongoing basis, training for citizens in various professions, while imparting the basics of entrepreneurship and foreign languages in high demand. These activities are carried out with the involvement of various (non-state) vocational education institutions. The Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations is also charged with issuing [skills passports](#) recognised in Uzbekistan and other countries to graduates who have successfully passed examinations, creating a Unified Register of Graduates containing only individuals with confirmed qualifications.

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As noted, the Government has placed youth employment at the top of the agenda, seeking to improve the pool of professional skills in accordance with labour market demand, and provide decent work based on the wishes and needs of the country's rapidly growing youth population. This is done on the understanding that investing in skills development can improve the employability of graduates, enhance the quality of available jobs, help improve the competitiveness of specific sectors, and reduce socio-economic inequality.

President Mirziyoyev, during an address to the *Oliy Majlis* (Parliament),<sup>23</sup> stated that "it is necessary to educate personnel of a new formation, who will be initiators of reforms, who will have a strategic vision, deep knowledge and high qualifications". With this aim to the fore, the Agency for Youth Affairs and the Interdepartmental Council for Youth Issues have been established. Youth parliaments have also been created in the *Oliy Majlis* and the Youth Academy under the Ministry of Innovative Development. Moreover, 2019 saw 5,722 public, private and family kindergartens established, increasing, over the course of just one year, preschool coverage from 38 percent to 52 percent nationwide. In 2020, the coverage of young children with preschool education reached 60 percent, the number of kindergartens increased and exceeded 14,000. Nineteen new higher educational institutions have also been opened, including nine branches of well-known foreign universities. The year 2019 also saw 146,500 students admitted to Uzbek universities – accounting for over 20 percent of secondary school graduates, compared to 9.1 percent for 2018. The proportion of school graduates in higher education reached 25 percent in 2020<sup>24</sup> – with levels of between 50 percent and 60 percent on the horizon.

Uzbekistan has also become the 83<sup>rd</sup> member of World Skills International (WSI)<sup>25</sup> – an international non-profit movement aimed at increasing the prestige of professions, and the status and standards of vocational training around the world. Participation in WSI activities is opening up new opportunities and prospects for Uzbekistan, particularly in regard to youth employment.

## Measures to spur economic growth

Spurring the country's advance, the Asian Development Bank provided a loan of \$93 million to help enhance competitiveness in Uzbekistan and boost inclusive growth, through improving market-relevant skills development among young people and jobseekers.<sup>26</sup> The [Skills Development for a Modern Economy Project](#) seeks to develop a skilled workforce in: construction; textiles and garments; information and communication technology; agribusiness and food processing; and machinery repair and maintenance. At least 60,000 people, including 48,000 jobseekers and 500 people with disabilities, will benefit from the project. The project will also benefit industries seeking skilled workers and returning migrants who pursue reskilling or recognition of prior learning in the target sectors.

Various measures to restore economic growth in 2020–2021 and continue the systemic structural reform of the economy are being implemented to bolster key sectors, further upgrade the banking system, increase investment, and improve competition and industrial policy. This is being undertaken alongside the stimulation of domestic demand and reduction of poverty through employment and increasing income, while expanding the measures in place to provide financial support for start-ups.<sup>27</sup> Due to the challenge posed by rising poverty levels, and aiming to ultimately reduce labour migration, specific ministries and agencies have been tasked with developing the Poverty Reduction Strategy for the Republic of Uzbekistan covering the period to 2030. It is planned to develop indicators for monitoring the implementation of national sustainable development goals, the potential of the national economy and the tasks carried out on the basis of the poverty reduction program and international experience; to determine the driving forces of the economy; and to forecast economic growth and job creation.

## Placing labour migration at the centre of government strategy

One of the most significant steps taken by the Government has been the embedding of a system of safe, orderly and legal labour migration,<sup>28</sup> entailing:

- Approval of action plans (in effect from 1 January 2021) establishing compulsory professional education and foreign language instruction for citizens migrating for labour purposes; issuing migrants with internationally recognised certificates confirming their professional qualifications; and providing financial and social support for labour migrants in a difficult situation abroad. The plans also expand the practice on attaining life and health insurance for migrants, and reintegration of persons returning from labour migration – ensuring employment, professional development and stimulating entrepreneurial initiative, among other features.
- In order to ensure prompt dissemination of information in the field of external labour migration, official information channels of the Agency for External Labour Migration have been launched online via social networks (Telegram, Facebook).
- As of 1 January 2021, the implementation of temporary labour activity abroad through organised labour migration corresponds to the types of activities (work, services) which self-employed persons can engage in. A further initiative, based on Article 369 of the Tax Code,<sup>29</sup> sees self-employed persons exempt from personal income tax, and able to (voluntarily) pay social tax into the national pension fund.
- Plans have been initiated to launch a call centre, via an online platform and operating on the territory of Russia, to provide legal assistance to migrants.
- Migrants who return from abroad and register in the unified database outlined above have the right to UZS 2.2 million (approx. EUR 175) in subsidies, intended to pay the first three months' rent on commercial premises (from the date of registration as a self-employed entrepreneur).

As regards implementing the focus on compulsory professional education, the 13 “Ishga Markhamat” Monocentres, 30 vocational training centres, 11 short-term vocational training courses and 136 vocational training courses for the citizens in mahallas (local communities) have been tasked to this end. Expectations for 2021 are running high, with targets set out to:

- *Train* 70,000 Uzbek citizens in professions and foreign languages.
- *Send* 144,000 citizens abroad for temporary work in an organised manner.
- *Provide* employment for 148,000 returning labour migrants.
- *Deliver* targeted assistance to family members of 120,000 returned labour migrants.

In order to regulate relations in the field of employment, the Law on Employment of the Population<sup>30</sup> has been adopted, with a separate chapter covering issues related to self-employed persons. Therein are set out important criteria for gaining self-employed status and the specific tax regime applied (i.e. income received through labour activity is not included in total income, and only social tax is paid to the off-budget pension fund).

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## COVID-19 MEASURES

The global Coronavirus pandemic has affected all areas of the world economy, not least labour migration, forcing millions of migrants to adapt to the prevailing conditions. More jobs are therefore needed to absorb those who return to their home country, with returnees likely re-entering the local labour pool and raising the overall unemployment rate. The challenge that has now been set by events unforeseen is to rapidly accommodate these returnees into the domestic workforce, benefiting from the resources, human and otherwise, garnered abroad – while avoiding repeated out-migration. If navigated skilfully, what in the short term has manifested in a challenging shift in the Uzbek labour market may ultimately represent a significant boon for the country at large. COVID-19 has brought with it an opportunity for returnees to not only use skills acquired, but also knowledge and savings – to start businesses or invest in domestic entrepreneurial activities.

In navigating the short-term challenges, large-scale anti-crisis measures have been taken by the Government to stimulate employment, preserve jobs and income, ensure safety and health in the workplace, and prevent discrimination and social exclusion. On the initiative of the President, the Anti-Crisis Fund was created with a pool of UZS 10 trillion (EUR 780 million), alongside the Charity and Support Fund for Poor Families.<sup>31</sup>

During the pandemic, Uzbek labour migrants have been provided with consulting and legal services, social assistance, and financial support. Repatriation assistance was extended to those who fell into a difficult situation abroad, as well as practical assistance on collecting wages and compensation from employers. In order to promptly respond to appeals from unemployed labour migrants, two websites – [Birgamiz.com](http://Birgamiz.com) and [Anketa.migration.uz](http://Anketa.migration.uz) – were created, as well as a dedicated hotline and Telegram channel for those seeking support. Based on official statistics, about 498,000 labour migrants returned to Uzbekistan, finding themselves with no fixed income.<sup>32</sup>

Over the first half of 2020, the responsible labour authorities provided employment promotion services to 826,000 unemployed citizens:

- Over 33,000 families were helped via a mechanism that subsidises low-income families, developing household plots and creating agricultural cooperatives.
- A total 3,000 unemployed people were employed through subsidies for the development of entrepreneurship.
- Some 37,000 unemployed received unemployment benefits.
- Nearly 43,000 returning labour migrants were provided with employment assistance, legal services or financial assistance.<sup>33</sup>

## Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on the labour market

Quarantine measures aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 have had a significant impact on the labour market. In June 2020, the Republican Research Centre for Employment and Labour Protection under the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations conducted a sociological survey across 101 Uzbek cities and districts, using a methodology developed on the basis of recommendations from the International Labour Organization (ILO). The survey covered 490 self-governing bodies of citizens, 4,900 households, and 25,900 individuals. The results of the study showed that the unemployment rate among the economically active population had reached 13.2 percent (by comparison, this figure for the same period

in 2019 was 9.1 percent). The total number of unemployed thus amounted to 1.94 million and, strikingly, the unemployment rate for those aged 16 to 30 years stood at 20.1 percent.<sup>34</sup>

Having become a member of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in November 2018, autumn 2020 saw the launch of the regional project “Mitigation of the Socio-Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Migrants and Communities”, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.<sup>35</sup> The goal of the project is to help reduce the negative socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants and communities, including through assisting the return and reintegration of vulnerable migrants and helping the Central Asia states and the Russian Federation to solve the operational tasks of managing labour migration during a global pandemic.

In this vein, the Government of Uzbekistan and the leaders of the Uzbek diaspora in Russia will work together to solve the problems of labour migrants. Held in online format, a recent conference gathered representatives from the Uzbek Cabinet of Ministers, government departments and diplomatic missions with leaders from over 70 diaspora Uzbek associations in Russia. The aim of the meeting was to discuss ways of resolving concerns from Uzbeks on working and residing in Russia, with a particular emphasis on navigating the restrictions then in place due to COVID-19.<sup>36</sup>

## SHORT AND MID-TERM GOALS

On 7 August 2020, the Minister of Employment and Labour Relations, Nozim Khusanov, reported to the Senate on the work carried out since the beginning of 2019.<sup>37</sup> In his speech, the Minister placed an emphasis on taking the following steps:

- Lessons learned during the COVID-19 crisis would serve as the basis for future work by the Ministry on developing the National Employment Strategy of Uzbekistan, which should consolidate into one key document the various efforts that have been, and which continue to be, made throughout the country. The Strategy will be a significant policy document covering the period to 2030.
- Strengthening of the capacity of the employment services should continue, bolstered by the introduction of additional instruments for stimulating demand for labour resources.
- Systematic work should be ensured to help the employment of youth, including in rural areas, and among graduates of higher and secondary specialised educational institutions.
- Information on available vacancies should be widely disseminated in accordance with current labour legislation requirements.
- The quality of training courses in the ministry system should be improved in order to meet prevailing requirements.

The Minister further stated that the entrusted tasks on regulating labour migration and organising recruitment for work abroad have been fulfilled at a level that is *not* satisfactory. The Minister drew particular attention to the fact that the share of organised labour migration in general labour migration stood at an average of only 9 percent during the period covered.

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During the 3rd meeting of the EU-Uzbekistan Subcommittee on Development Issues, the Minister put forward areas for potential bilateral cooperation between Uzbekistan and the European Union, within the framework of the new programme cycle of the European Commission for 2021-2027<sup>38</sup>:

- Further development of the vocational training system with the possibility of implementing the experience of the dual vocational training system for high-demand specialisations.
- Improvement of the activities of the State Labour Inspectorate, ensuring effective implementation of international norms and standards in the field of labour.
- Increased digitalisation of the services provided by employment promotion centres, ensuring effective remote support to citizens.
- Implementation of mechanisms for the organised contracting of Uzbek citizens for temporary work abroad through appropriate agreements on labour migration with EU countries.
- Development and implementation of joint programmes to support and expand employment opportunities, including training in entrepreneurial skills, developing collective forms of employment, and improving employment services.

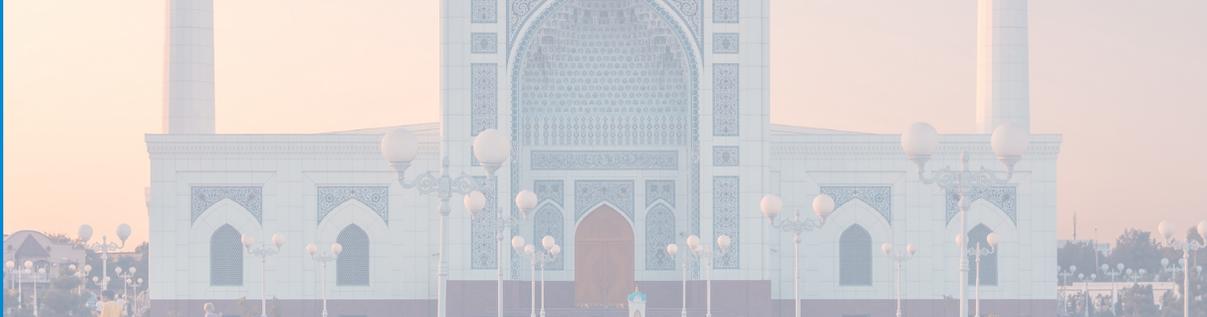
## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recently adopted legislative acts and documents outlined in this paper provide a powerful impetus to implementation of the Strategy for Action on supporting employment of citizens outside of Uzbek borders, as well as reintegration upon return. These developments should help to implement comprehensive measures aimed at increasing the incomes and living standards of Uzbek labour migrant families, by promoting solutions to issues they may be facing – improving housing conditions and ensuring employment of able workforce.

As stated by the Minister of Employment and Labour Relations, a great deal has been done to improve the country's legislative base. However, the practical implementation leaves much to be desired. **If the new legal tools are to produce the intended impact, some important issues need to be foreseen**, while making efforts to reduce the number of labour migrants and ensure that their rights are observed while abroad:

- The newly established **Ministry for the Mahalla and Family Support**<sup>39</sup> has been entrusted with closely cooperating with citizen self-governance agencies to improve the social and spiritual atmosphere within families and mahallas; ensuring employment of women, improving working conditions, strengthening the role and importance of citizen self-governmental bodies in society, and increasing their status in regard to handling the day-to-day issues of the local population. Therefore, **it is vital to involve the Ministry and Mahalla Committees in working with the population** to explain what has been achieved on labour migration thus far and the government plans in this area. Such outreach should highlight: the benefits provided, and the support received, by migrants and their families; the advantages of legal migration – and the disadvantages of illegal migration; and which documents are required for legal employment. It should be widely communicated that the Government provides professional education and language training courses, and support and assistance in registration through the LaborMigration.uz database.

- **The Agency for External Labour Migration should have a communication channel with migrant workers**, for receiving feedback (and complaints) on the employment undertaken – or this issue could be included into the existing database. Moreover, **wide communication by private employment agencies should be carried out** online, through social networks and Telegram channels, and provide information on potential foreign employers and labour demands.
- **A broad selection of opportunities should be provided for young people** to obtain foundational technical, digital, innovation and entrepreneurial skills in order to successfully enter the labour market. Enhanced computer skills education should be extended and use and scope of the internet explained. Such initiatives should be extended widely to those residing in remote rural areas, youth from low-income families, and young people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.
- **Various sociological surveys should be initiated** to monitor the dynamics of economic, political and social indicators related to migration. The surveys could study the factors and causes of labour migration by regions; help determining destinations and forms of migration; assess working conditions of labour migrants; identify channels how labour migrants find work proposals. They could feed into a national information database on labour migration; identify the main factors that determine the exact jobs most frequently carried out by migrants abroad, especially women and youth; identify the main problems and shortcomings faced especially by young people; prepare recommendations on the regulation of labour migration. The surveys could be further used to investigate the causes and consequences of migrants' movements, as well as to describe recent flows and to estimate certain types of movement, thereby helping to improve labour migration statistics, reflecting, the demographic characteristics of migrants as well as their working and living conditions. It is impossible to determine the positive or negative consequences of labour migration without having reliable information about the number and composition of the migrants and the relevant economic indicators. Such surveys should also involve the civil society and international organizations in order to get richer and more detailed data.
- **Private employment agencies and the Agency for External Labour Migration need to organise, control and ensure the protection of migrants' rights** upon arrival to the country of destination. There have been many complaints about employers not fulfilling contractual conditions. The communication with the labour migrants employed abroad through private employment agencies would be overly helpful. The launch of a dedicated section for filing complaints against abusive employers within the online database [LaborMigration.uz](https://labormigration.uz) could be complemented through the possibility of consulting lawyers on possible remedies. Moreover, a rating system of existing employers could ensure improvements for the future. Finally the active use of social media such as Facebook and Telegram could support the monitoring of related issues.
- **Both the demand-side and supply-side labour market challenges should be assessed** in order to help support private sector growth and productivity, enhance worker employability, and address the skills gap. Measures addressing the demand-side could be mobilised to spur economic growth and livelihood development. On the supply-side, similar tools should be used in educational development programming.
- **Data collection** from private employment agencies, job seekers and training providers could help in assessing the existing labour market needs abroad. The collected data could contribute to improving the supply of the skills needed and overall recruitment



process (e.g. through targeted job advertisements in relevant online platforms). The data could also enhance the assistance provided for signing of employment contracts and in explaining the obligations of the parties. Meanwhile, a continuous analysis of existing vacancies could improve the assessment of present and future labour market demands and of the respective skills needed. Whereas encouraging job seekers to register at [LaborMigration.uz](https://labormigration.uz) could further enrich the available evidence, partnerships with employers could help accelerating the information flow and actual placement of migrant workers.

- According to Central Bank statistics, cross-border remittances to Uzbekistan amounted to USD \$5.44 billion during the period January-November 2020. The share of all international money transfers shows that 72% are made in the Russian Federation.<sup>40</sup> In Uzbekistan, most returned migrants spend their savings mainly on holding social events, weddings, buying, building and renovating housing, and purchasing other commodities. In order to diversify the range of this expenditure and encourage returning migrants to remain in the country, **the Agency for External Labour Migration should undertake more active organisation of trainings in the regions/rural areas**; on how to start a business and develop business ideas and plans, spurring returnee involvement in private business and entrepreneurship.
- Labour migration brings many positive aspects; the attainment of qualifications, business experience and experience in a given profession, etc. Workers return to their country more prepared for future undertakings, either as an employee or an entrepreneur, and this presents good opportunities to develop the economy. However, for this development to ultimately materialise, it is necessary to create conducive conditions within Uzbekistan. Otherwise, returned migrants will again leave the country to work abroad. Thus, informing citizens about employment opportunities within their own country/community is crucial, reaching the worker before they decide to (re)migrate. **Information on the demand for labour in domestic factories, and farming and non-farming enterprises should be provided**, as citizens are not always aware of the opportunities available. Such information should be better communicated and vocational training organised for those considering migration, especially women with children.

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