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Transformation of the Social Structure in A Renewing Uzbekistan

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Abstract: Since the launch of wide-ranging political and economic reforms in 2017, Uzbekistan has been experiencing one of the most rapid social restructurings in post-Soviet Eurasia. Accelerated GDP growth (6.5 % in 2024), steady poverty reduction (national rate down from 17 % in 2021 to 11 % in 2023), and ambitious gender-equality legislation are simultaneously eroding Soviet-era hierarchies and giving rise to a more diversified class system. This article analyses the drivers, manifestations, and contradictions of that transformation, drawing on the latest data from the World Bank, IOM, and domestic statistical releases.

Keywords: Social mobility, regulation, education policy, labor market, equality, digital access, social protection.

Introduction: Uzbekistan's "renewal" (yangilanish) agenda—formalised in the 2022-26 Development Strategy—positions inclusive growth and a "social state" at the centre of nation-building. The government's stated objective is to reach upper-middle-income status by 2030, a target that presupposes not merely faster GDP expansion but a qualitatively different social structure. We treat social structure as the patterned configuration of socio-economic strata, gender and generational roles, and spatial settlement regimes. Following Bourdieu, economic, cultural, and social capitals interact to produce class positions, while modernisation theory suggests that industrialisation, urbanisation, and human-capital deepening propel stratification away from status-based hierarchies toward occupation- and income-based classes.

Economic liberalisation and growth

Growth momentum – Real GDP expanded by 6.5 % in 2024, the fastest in Central Asia for a second straight year, as manufacturing and ICT offset a weaker cotton harvest.

Privatisation 2.0 – A new Law “On Privatisation of State Property” (LRU-907, in force since May 2024) clears legal bottlenecks, while a National Investment Fund (managed by Franklin Templeton) began bundling \$1.7 bn of state stakes for IPOs in 2026.

Digital champions – Uzbekistan’s first tech unicorn Uzum posted FY-2024 net income of \$150 m, up 50 % y-o-y, with 40 % of the population using its e-commerce/fintech ecosystem—evidence of an emergent, innovation-led private sector.

Poverty-reduction and social-protection policy

Falling poverty – The upper-middle-income (UMIC) poverty rate dropped from 13.4 % (2023) to 10.9 % (2024), driven by wage growth and targeted transfers.

From Poverty to Prosperity programme – Launched in late 2024, the flagship plan aims to lift 500 000 people out of poverty in 2024 and 1 million in 2025 through cash benefits, micro-loans, and active-labour-market measures.

Social-benefit digitalisation – A nationwide Single Registry now automates eligibility checks and payments for low-income families; a pilot “social card” will consolidate benefits and free transport by July 2025.

Demography, mobility and migration

Urban pull – IOM tracking shows internal migration outflows of 51 400 people (Q2 2024) from rural to urban centres, feeding labour demand in construction and services.

Labour export – Russia still absorbs the bulk of Uzbek workers (≈ 1.75 m in 2024, +143 000 y-o-y), though Kazakhstan’s share is rising. Remittances remain a crucial equaliser for rural households.

Return migration – About 115 000 migrants came back between Jan–May 2024, adding to urban job-seeker

pressure and shifting skills homeward.

Gender-equality reforms

Legal leap-frogging – With four major reforms in 2023–24, Uzbekistan ranked among the top-5 global improvers in the World Bank’s Women, Business and the Law 2024 index.

Political representation – Women now hold 38 % of seats in the Legislative Chamber (up from 32 % in 2020) following a statutory 40 % candidate quota.

Institutional backing – The inauguration of a UN Women country office on 27 May 2025 signals sustained multilateral support for the 2030 Gender Strategy and the NAP-1325 action plan.

Together these macro-drivers—market-oriented growth, targeted social spending, high mobility, and gender-focused reforms—are recalibrating Uzbekistan’s class structure and social geography at an unprecedented pace.

Uzbekistan’s social structure is in the midst of a rapid, state-steered metamorphosis: poverty is receding, a multi-layered middle class is emerging, and women’s public roles are expanding. Yet deep regional divides, informality, and debt exposure threaten the inclusiveness and sustainability of this trajectory. The coming decade will hinge on whether reforms can institutionalise new rights and opportunities before external shocks or governance deficits re-entrench old hierarchies. For scholars, Uzbekistan offers a fertile laboratory for studying how late-industrialising states can engineer social mobility while navigating the middle-income trap.

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