

The Republic of Uzbekistan's Experience of Cooperation with the ILO and UNICEF in the Context of Implementing the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract Drawing on institutional and comparative-historical approaches, this article analyses the experience of cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as a major mechanism for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Particular attention is given to the ILO Decent Work Country Programme for 2021–2025 and UNICEF country programmes. The article demonstrates how international partnerships contribute to achieving the national priorities of the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy, particularly in the areas of decent work, gender equality, the protection of children's rights, and human capital development. Based on an analysis of official reports and implemented practices, recommendations are formulated for further deepening cooperation during the 2026–2030 period.

Keywords: ILO, UNICEF, Sustainable Development Goals, Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy, decent work, gender equality, children's rights, international cooperation, sustainable social development.

Introduction

In a polycentric world confronted by global challenges (the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and geopolitical turbulence), international organizations are becoming key drivers of sustainable development. As T. Weiss and R. Thakur note, the effectiveness of global governance depends to a considerable extent on the capacity of United Nations specialized agencies to adapt to new realities and ensure synergy between global and national efforts.

Having adopted 16 of the 17 SDGs and approved the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy by Presidential Decree No. UP-158 of 11 September 2023, the Republic of Uzbekistan demonstrates a high degree of integration of the global agenda into national policy. This is particularly important in the context of building a social state, as enshrined in the revised Constitution of 2023. The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the mechanisms and outcomes of Uzbekistan's cooperation with the ILO and UNICEF, assess their contribution to the achievement of SDGs 4, 5, 8 and 16, and develop evidence-based recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of this partnership.

1. Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of the Analysis

The theoretical framework is based on the concepts of sustainable development (Our Common Future, 1987), global governance (Weiss and Thakur), and the ILO's social partnership model. Methodologically, the study draws on the institutional approach, analysis of official documents, content analysis of reports issued by international organizations, and comparative analysis at the national and international levels.

The empirical base includes the ILO Decent Work Country Programme 2021–2025, Better Work Uzbekistan reports, UNICEF country programmes for 2021–2025 and 2026–2030, data from the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan, official documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Labour of the Republic of Uzbekistan, as well as the results of implementing the author's proposals.

2. Legal and Regulatory Framework and Institutional Mechanisms of Cooperation

Cooperation with the ILO reached a new level following the signing of the Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) 2021–2025. The programme focuses on four priorities: improving labour legislation, eliminating forced labour and child labour, developing social dialogue, and expanding opportunities for decent employment.

The key achievements are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Key ILO Conventions Ratified by the Republic of Uzbekistan (as of 2025)

o.	ILO Convention	Year of Ratification	Principal Significance
38	Minimum Age Convention	2008	Prohibition of child labour
82	Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention	2008	Combating the worst forms of exploitation
05	Abolition of Forced Labour Convention	—	Elimination of forced labour
7, 98	Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention; Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention	Ratified	Development of social dialogue
55	Occupational Safety and Health Convention	2024	Improvement of working

			conditions
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Cooperation with UNICEF is carried out through the Country Programme 2021–2025 and the new 2026–2030 cycle. The principal areas of cooperation are the protection of children's rights, inclusive education, violence prevention, support for gender equality, and social protection for families.

The revised Constitution of 2023, the laws "On Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence" (2019) and "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men," as well as the National Programme to Enhance Women's Participation for 2022–2026, have created a solid national platform for effective cooperation.

3. Key Outcomes of Cooperation (Empirical Analysis)

3.1. Outcomes of ILO Activities

Table 2. Principal Outcomes of the Implementation of the ILO DWCP in Uzbekistan (2021–2025)

Indicator	Baseline (before 2021)	Achieved by 2025	Source
Systematic child labour in cotton production	Present	Completely eliminated	ILO, Better Work
Forced labour in the cotton sector	Significant	Eliminated (isolated cases)	ILO third-party monitoring
Share of informal employment (non-agricultural sector)	~38.4%	Reduced to 30%	DWCP reports
Women represented in management	27% (2018)	Increased to 32–35%	State Committee on Statistics
Newly ratified ILO Conventions	—	Several (including No. 155)	Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan

3.2. Outcomes of UNICEF Activities and Synergy between the Organizations

Table 3. Alignment of ILO and UNICEF Activities with Key SDGs and the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy

Organization	Main Areas	Related SDGs	Contribution to the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy	Examples of Outcomes
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ILO	Decent work, social dialogue	8, 5, 16	Human capital, gender equality	Elimination of child labour, Labour Code reforms
UNICEF	Protection of children's rights, education	4, 5, 16	Social protection, women's education	Inclusion programmes, combating violence
Synergy	Gender equality + social protection	5, 8, 4	Integrated human capital development	Joint care economy projects

Synergy between the organizations is particularly evident within the framework of the UNSDCF and joint social protection projects (ILO–UNICEF–UNDP).

4. Contribution to the Implementation of the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy (Expanded Analysis)

The Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy comprises 100 goals across five priority areas and represents a national adaptation of the global SDG agenda. Cooperation with the ILO and UNICEF plays a systemic role in this regard, providing both legal and regulatory support and practical assistance for the Strategy's implementation.

First, in the area of human capital development (SDG 4), UNICEF actively supports expanded access to quality preschool and school education, particularly in the regions. Together with the ILO, programmes are being implemented to engage women in STEM education and enhance their qualifications through grants for master's degree programmes and study at universities abroad.

Second, significant progress has been achieved in the area of gender equality (SDG 5). The 2019 laws, together with recommendations from the ILO and UNICEF, have contributed to increased economic activity among women, the development of women's entrepreneurship, and a reduction in the gender pay gap. An important element has been the introduction of decent work principles in the care economy.

Third, in the area of decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), the ILO provided decisive support for reforming labour legislation, transitioning to formal employment, and eliminating forced labour. This directly correlates with the Strategy's priorities of creating new jobs and improving living standards.

Fourth, the strengthening of peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16) is reflected in the development of tripartism (government–trade unions–employers) and the improvement of social dialogue mechanisms. The practical implementation of the author's proposals (briefing notes of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of

Uzbekistan, 2018; the Federation of Trade Unions, 2020; and the ILO Office, 2019) confirms the effectiveness of these mechanisms and their integration into public policy.

Thus, cooperation with the ILO and UNICEF not only complements national efforts but also serves as a catalyst for systemic transformation, helping to enhance Uzbekistan's international image as a country that successfully integrates global standards into national development.

5. Challenges and Prospects for Further Cooperation

Key challenges:

- Reducing the remaining level of informal employment.
- Adapting to digitalization and the green economy.
- Strengthening the monitoring and impact evaluation of programmes.

Author's recommendations:

1. Develop and sign a new ILO DWCP for 2026–2030, fully aligned with the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy and the UNSDCF 2026–2030.
2. Establish a permanent joint coordination mechanism (ILO–UNICEF–Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan) for monitoring the SDGs.
3. Expand the practice of joint projects on the care economy and women's participation in STEM.
4. Make more active use of international financing mechanisms (Uzbekistan Vision 2030 Fund).
5. Develop university-level educational programmes on the activities of international organizations (including the University of World Economy and Diplomacy).

Conclusion

The Republic of Uzbekistan's experience of cooperation with the ILO and UNICEF represents a successful model for integrating global standards into national sustainable development policy. The achievements made in eliminating child labour and forced labour, developing social dialogue, and protecting children's rights provide a solid foundation for attaining the goals of the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy. Further deepening this partnership will not only improve the population's social well-being but also strengthen the country's international standing as a responsible actor in global sustainable development.

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