

**SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP IN UZBEKISTAN:
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH ASIAN COUNTRIES****Akhmadaliev Sevinchbonu**

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Social partnership, civil society, social protection, trade unions, labor relations, tripartite collaboration, NGOs.

ABSTRACT

Social partnership - the structured collaboration between the state, employers, and civil society organizations - is a critical element of contemporary socio-economic governance. In Uzbekistan, post-independence reforms have focused on strengthening labor relations, social protection, and state-society collaboration. This article analyzes the legal and institutional framework, practical implementation, and challenges of social partnership in Uzbekistan. It also presents examples from other Asian countries, highlighting similarities and differences. Moreover, the article provides recommendations to enhance social partnership mechanisms in Uzbekistan.

Social partnership facilitates dialogue and cooperation between the government, employers, and employees (or civil society organizations). It aims to ensure employment, strengthen social protection, and align policy with local needs. Across Asia, this concept manifests in diverse forms, with some countries having well-developed systems and others in formative stages.

Since independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has transitioned from a soviet-style system to a market economy while promoting civil society. The adoption of the Law on Social Partnership in 2014 marked a significant step in institutionalizing these collaborations. This article examines Uzbekistan's social partnership system and compares it to other Asian countries.

Social partnership is a system of structured interaction among government bodies, employers, trade unions, and civil society institutions aimed at socio-economic development, labor relations, social protection, and safeguarding citizen rights.

The Law on Social Partnership (2014) formally codifies the concept, defining it as "the interaction of state bodies with NGOs and civil society institutions in developing socio-economic programs, regulations, and decisions affecting citizen rights and interests." Additional legal instruments include the Civil Society Development Concept (2021-2025) and updated labor legislation. These frameworks support collaboration between the state and civil society. There are several practical examples such as The World Bank-supported "INSON" project (2024) allocated \$100 million to strengthen social protection and establish over 50 social service centers across regions. Furthermore, Trade unions and NGOs in programs like the "Women's Register" have expanded their role in protecting workers' rights and participating in policy consultations.

Comparative analysis with select Asian countries illustrates both opportunities and areas for improvement. In Malaysia, tripartite collaboration between the government, employers, and workers has facilitated initiatives such as the Progressive Wage Model, alongside efforts to extend social protection to migrant workers. However, gaps persist in union recognition and bargaining power. South Korea demonstrates a highly institutionalized model, where mechanisms like the Labor Foundation facilitate robust dialogue between social partners, integrating responsible business conduct and international labor standards into domestic practice. Both cases highlight the importance of institutional maturity, broad stakeholder engagement, and alignment with global norms for effective social partnership.

When compared to these Asian examples, Uzbekistan exhibits a developing but promising model. The country has successfully expanded social partnership beyond labor relations to encompass civil society and inter-ethnic engagement. Nevertheless, the depth of influence and decision-making power of non-state actors remains limited relative to countries with more mature systems. Lessons from Malaysia and South Korea suggest that strengthening civil society capacity, enhancing tripartite mechanisms, integrating international labor and human rights standards, and ensuring inclusion of vulnerable groups can significantly enhance the effectiveness of Uzbekistan's social partnership framework.

To advance this agenda, Uzbekistan could focus on several strategic areas: enhancing the capacity and independence of NGOs and trade unions; promoting transparency and accountability within participatory mechanisms; broadening the scope of social partnership to include environmental, social, and economic governance; and aligning domestic policies with international standards of decent work and responsible business conduct. By tailoring best practices to its socio-political context, Uzbekistan can gradually transition from formal consultation processes to deeper, meaningful engagement with social partners, thereby fostering inclusive development and strengthening civil society participation. South Korea's Economic, Social, and Labor Council (ESLC) exemplifies an advanced social partnership system, facilitating government-employer-employee dialogue. Similarly, the mechanisms for state-civil society or employer-employee collaboration exist in South Korea and it is focused on labor relations and social protection. Accordingly, South Korea has highly developed representation and independence for unions and associations, but Uzbekistan's mechanisms are newer and evolving. Moreover, South Korea emphasizes industrial transition and work-life balance, whereas Uzbekistan emphasizes civil society development and social protection.

Across Asia, social partnership systems vary widely. For instance, collective bargaining coverage is about 2% in India and 33% in the Philippines, highlighting challenges similar to those in Uzbekistan regarding informal sector inclusion and representation.

Uzbekistan's social partnership framework is growing institutionally and legally. The 2014 law, active civil society involvement, and international projects indicate progress. However, system depth, coverage, and independence remain developing. Comparison with Asia shows Uzbekistan has potential to strengthen representation, include informal sectors, and improve monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

To strengthen social partnership in Uzbekistan, several strategic measures are recommended. Firstly, enhancing trade union and employer representation is essential. This can be achieved through targeted training programs and institutional support that build

organizational capacity and autonomy. Secondly, expanding engagement to include the informal sector such as small businesses, seasonal workers, and marginalized groups will ensure that social partnership mechanisms are more inclusive and representative. Thirdly, the development of robust monitoring and evaluation systems is necessary to track outcomes, assess effectiveness, and promote transparency in decision-making. Fourthly, Uzbekistan can benefit from studying and adapting successful international models, particularly from countries like South Korea and Japan, tailoring best practices to local socio-economic conditions. Finally, strengthening local councils and commissions will facilitate more effective collaboration between government bodies and civil society organizations, ensuring that policies and initiatives reflect the needs and interests of the population.

In conclusion, social partnership is vital for socio-economic development, social protection, labor relations, and civil society participation in Uzbekistan. Legal foundations, pilot projects, and international collaborations demonstrate progress. However, coverage, independence, and depth require further development. Regional experience suggests that institutional strength, representation, informal sector inclusion, and continuous monitoring are key for success. Targeted reforms can make Uzbekistan's social partnership more effective and inclusive

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