

Analysis of Youth Policy Effectiveness in The Context of Mahalla Development: The Uzbekistan Experience (2017–2026)

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Received: 09 March 2026; **Accepted:** 29 March 2026; **Published:** 25 April 2026

Abstract: This article analyzes the effectiveness of youth policy implemented in the Republic of Uzbekistan during 2017–2026 within the context of mahalla (community-level self-governance) development. The research objective is to evaluate the role of the mahalla system in identifying and resolving youth-related issues, and to develop evidence-based recommendations for centering the youth factor within the framework of the 2026 “Year of Mahalla Development and Society Advancement.” The study employs a descriptive-analytical approach based on official statistical data, regulatory and legal documents, and government program analyses. The findings demonstrate that over the past eight years, youth entrepreneurship has tripled, higher education enrollment has increased from 9% to 42%, and the number of unemployed youth has been halved. However, at the mahalla level, critical issues including youth mental health, digital literacy, and career guidance continue to require systematic, institution-level solutions.

Keywords: Mahalla, youth policy, employment, entrepreneurship, demographics, social development, Uzbekistan, community governance.

Introduction: The Republic of Uzbekistan is characterized by a distinctly youthful demographic profile: of the country's 38.1 million population, 55 percent are under the age of 30. This demographic indicator signifies that the nation's economic growth, social stability, and future prospects are directly contingent upon the effectiveness of its youth policy. The mahalla — a traditional community-level institution — has served for centuries as one of the foundational pillars of Uzbek society, functioning as a social school that transmits values, customs, and upbringing from generation to generation.

The designation of 2026 as the “Year of Mahalla Development and Society Advancement” underscores the imperative to transform the mahalla from a mere

administrative unit into the primary arena for shaping youth destinies, education, and the resolution of social problems. Listening to and understanding the new generation — a generation growing up in a digital world, coming of age amid rapid information flows — and detecting their needs at an early stage represents the most urgent challenge facing the mahalla today.

Among today's youth, two diametrically opposed tendencies are observable. On one hand, there are talented, proactive young people studying abroad, launching startups, and achieving success in science, sports, and the arts. On the other hand, there are those trapped in unemployment, spending their time aimlessly, adolescents becoming excessively dependent on the internet and social media, and young people experiencing social instability as a consequence

of migration or family problems.

At the mahalla level, youth problems manifest in the following areas:

- insufficient employment opportunities and income sources;
- uncertainty in education and career selection — the state of “not knowing what to become”;
- lack of meaningful leisure activities and inadequate sports and cultural facilities;
- vulnerability to information attacks and radical ideologies;
- children left unsupervised due to family conflicts, divorces, and the consequences of labor migration.

The objective of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of youth policy implemented in Uzbekistan during 2017–2026 within the context of the mahalla system, and to develop scientifically grounded recommendations for centering the youth factor within the framework of the “Year of Mahalla Development and Society Advancement.”

The research tasks include:

1. analyzing the legal and institutional framework of youth policy;
2. evaluating quantitative indicators in the areas of youth employment, education, and entrepreneurship;
3. examining the role of the mahalla system in identifying and resolving youth problems;
4. developing practical recommendations for strengthening youth policy at the mahalla level.

METHODS

The study adopted a descriptive-analytical approach. Data were primarily collected from secondary sources, namely official statistical reports, regulatory and legal documents, and government programs.

The following sources were utilized in this research:

- Presidential Decrees and Resolutions of the Republic of Uzbekistan (14 laws, over 30 Presidential Decrees, and over 60 resolutions during the period 2017–2025);
- approximately 100 Government resolutions;
- data from the Statistics Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan;
- reports from the “Youth Notebook” (Yoshlar daftari) funds;
- statistics from the “Hope of the Nation” (El-yurt umidi) Foundation;

- youth and mahalla-related data from Presidential Addresses to Parliament.

The following analytical methods were employed in the data analysis: comparative analysis (evaluating the dynamics of indicator changes across the 2016–2025 period), document analysis (examining the impact of the regulatory framework on youth policy), and contextual analysis (assessing the role of the mahalla system in youth policy). Quantitative indicators were presented in tabular and comparative formats.

RESULTS

During the period 2017–2025, a robust legal and institutional framework for youth policy was established in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Over this period, 14 laws, more than 30 Presidential Decrees, over 60 Presidential Resolutions, and approximately 100 Government resolutions were adopted. As a result, over 200 preferential benefits and opportunities were created for young people.

A comprehensive, integrated system encompassing youth at all levels of governance was established — a system without precedent in the world. “Youth Notebook” (Yoshlar daftari) funds were created in every district and city. At the mahalla level, the “mahalla seven” (mahalla yettiligi) initiative and youth leader activities were launched, specifically targeting the identification and resolution of youth problems. Through this system, approximately UZS 2 trillion in funding was allocated to support youth, assisting 1.5 million young people in finding their place in life.

A total of UZS 13.5 trillion in preferential loans was directed toward the entrepreneurial projects of 600,000 young people. Over the past eight years, the number of young entrepreneurs has tripled, with youth now constituting approximately 40 percent of all business entities. In 2025 alone, an additional USD 400 million was allocated to support youth entrepreneurship.

As a result of systematic efforts to ensure youth employment, despite a 17 percent increase in the overall population compared to 2016, the number of unemployed youth decreased twofold.

The higher education enrollment rate among youth increased from 9 percent in 2017 to 42 percent. The number of higher education institutions grew from 77 to 212. Over the past eight years, UZS 1.7 trillion in preferential education loans were provided to 151,000 young people. Tuition fees totaling UZS 332 billion were covered by the state for 110,000 students from disadvantaged families registered in the “Youth Notebook.”

In order to expand educational opportunities for

women, the state began covering tuition fees at the master’s degree level. As a result, the number of women pursuing master’s-level studies increased eleven-fold.

Over the 25 years prior to 2016, 800 talented young

people had the opportunity to study at prestigious universities abroad on state scholarships. In contrast, over just the past seven years, the “Hope of the Nation” (El-yurt umidi) Foundation enabled three times as many — 2,300 young people — to pursue education abroad.

Table 1. Key Youth Policy Indicators (2016–2025)

Indicator	Baseline (2016–2017)	Current Status (2025)
Higher education enrollment rate	9%	42%
Number of higher education institutions	77	212
Share of young entrepreneurs	~13%	~40%
Number of unemployed youth	Baseline level	Decreased by half
Study abroad (state-funded)	800 (over 25 years)	2,300 (over 7 years)
Preferential education loans	—	UZS 1.7 trillion (151,000 youth)
Entrepreneurship loans	—	UZS 13.5 trillion (600,000 youth)
Women in master’s programs	Baseline level	Increased 11-fold

DISCUSSION

The results presented above demonstrate that youth policy in Uzbekistan has undergone a qualitative transformation to a new stage in recent years. The increase in higher education enrollment from 9 percent to 42 percent, the growth of the youth share among business entities to 40 percent, and the twofold reduction in unemployed youth represent significant positive changes.

Particularly noteworthy is the direct assistance provided to 1.5 million young people through the “Youth Notebook” system, with UZS 2 trillion allocated in funding — evidence that the institutional approach has yielded tangible practical results. The threefold increase in the number of young people studying abroad through the “Hope of the Nation” Foundation represents a critical step toward building intellectual capital.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has consistently emphasized the mahalla not merely as a system of local self-governance, but as a unique community institution that unites the people, nurtures youth, and strengthens

social solidarity. Within the framework of the “Year of Mahalla Development and Society Advancement,” it is essential to strengthen the mahalla as the lowest, most responsive, and most targeted tier of youth policy implementation.

However, a number of unresolved issues persist at the mahalla level. Youth mental health, digital literacy, career guidance, and the systematic mechanisms for working with NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) youth have not yet been fully established. The mahalla must evolve from a passive administrative body into an active “first analytical platform” capable of early detection of youth problems and timely orientation toward solutions.

As this study relies primarily on secondary data and official statistics, the actual situation at the mahalla level may not be fully captured. The personal experiences and perspectives of young people were not directly examined. Future research would benefit from the application of qualitative methods, including interviews and focus group discussions, to provide a more nuanced understanding of grassroots-level

dynamics.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, significant achievements have been made in the field of youth policy in Uzbekistan during 2017–2025. The legal framework has been strengthened, an institutional system has been established, and education and entrepreneurship indicators have improved markedly. However, mechanisms for early identification and resolution of youth problems at the mahalla level require further refinement and development.

First, a comprehensive “youth map” should be created in every mahalla. This map should contain precise data on the number of students, university attendees, unemployed individuals, returnees from labor migration, and NEET-category youth in each locality, along with systematically maintained records of their interests and career aptitudes.

Second, the “Youth Center” or “Youth Room” in each mahalla should be transformed into a genuinely active platform. These spaces should host vocational mini-trainings, IT and language courses, reading clubs, psychological counseling sessions, and discussions on digital literacy and the responsible use of artificial intelligence.

Third, the mahalla should serve as a “micro-incubator” for young entrepreneurs. Through partnerships with banks, sponsors, and foundations, microfinancing mechanisms and mentorship programs for youth business ideas should be established. This approach will foster the emergence of youth who are not merely “job seekers” but “job creators.”

Fourth, the mahalla should function as a school of upbringing and dialogue. Regular discussions, open conversations, “dream mapping” sessions, and “question-and-answer evenings” organized with the participation of community elders, psychologists, youth leaders, and parents will facilitate the early identification and resolution of youth problems.

The foundation for advancing society and achieving upper-middle-income country status lies at the nexus of the mahalla and its youth. When a mahalla is at peace, young people feel safe and valued. When young people are at peace, their full potential is unlocked, and society as a whole benefits. If each mahalla can produce at least a few new young entrepreneurs, if concrete roadmaps are developed for those youth who have yet to find their path, and if vibrant, open cultural and educational spaces are created for young people, then 2026 will truly be etched in the history of the New Uzbekistan as the year in which society was elevated through its mahallas and its youth.

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