



EVOLUTION OF LEGAL MIGRATION GOVERNANCE AND MOBILITY REGULATION: POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEKISTAN

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 30 th October 2025 Accepted: 28 th November 2025	Migration governance and the regulation of population mobility have become important elements of modern state policy in the context of increasing global migration flows. This article examines the evolution of legal migration governance and the development of migration policy in Uzbekistan. The study focuses on the institutional and legal mechanisms regulating entry and exit processes, as well as the transformation of migration management in recent years. Based on the analysis of national legislation and policy reforms, the article identifies key stages in the development of migration regulation. The findings suggest that Uzbekistan has gradually strengthened its legal and institutional framework for managing migration processes, aiming to ensure orderly mobility while supporting socio-economic development and international cooperation in migration governance.

Keywords: Legal migration governance, migration policy development, population mobility regulation, migration management, institutional reforms, Uzbekistan.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, international migration has become one of the most significant global phenomena shaping economic, social, and political processes worldwide. The rapid growth of cross-border mobility has encouraged many states to develop comprehensive migration governance systems aimed at regulating legal migration and ensuring the orderly movement of people across national borders. Migration governance today includes a wide range of policy instruments such as visa regimes, border management systems, labor migration regulation, and institutional mechanisms designed to facilitate legal mobility while protecting national interests [1].

At the same time, the development of effective migration policies has become an important element of modern state governance. Governments increasingly view migration not only as a demographic or economic issue but also as a strategic component of national development and international cooperation. Effective migration governance contributes to labor market stability, economic growth, and stronger cooperation between states in managing migration flows [2].

International organizations emphasize that well-regulated legal migration frameworks are essential for ensuring safe, orderly, and regular migration processes. Institutional migration management systems help states balance migration opportunities

with national security considerations and socio-economic development priorities [3].

Uzbekistan, located in the strategically important region of Central Asia, has undergone significant transformations in its migration governance system since gaining independence. Over the past decades, the country has introduced a number of legal and institutional reforms aimed at improving migration management, simplifying entry and exit procedures, and strengthening the regulation of migration processes. These reforms reflect broader global trends in migration governance and demonstrate the growing importance of effective migration policy within national development strategies [4].

The purpose of this article is to analyze the evolution of legal migration governance and the development of migration policy in Uzbekistan, focusing on the institutional and regulatory mechanisms that shape the management of population mobility.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of migration governance has become an important topic in international relations and political science literature. Researchers emphasize that migration governance includes a system of institutional, legal, and policy mechanisms through which states regulate migration flows and manage cross-border population mobility. In this context, migration policies are increasingly viewed as an



integral part of national development strategies and international cooperation frameworks [5].

Scholars note that legal migration governance plays a crucial role in ensuring orderly and regulated migration processes. According to Betts, migration governance involves the coordination of national policies, international norms, and institutional arrangements that aim to balance economic needs, labor market demands, and security considerations [6]. These mechanisms include visa regimes, border control policies, labor migration regulations, and bilateral or multilateral agreements between states.

Another important direction in migration research focuses on the relationship between migration policy and global governance. Many scholars argue that migration policies are increasingly shaped by international institutions and global policy frameworks. In particular, international organizations such as the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration promote policy approaches aimed at ensuring safe, orderly, and regular migration processes at the global level [7].

Recent academic studies also highlight the importance of institutional reforms in migration governance systems. Researchers emphasize that many countries have been modernizing their migration policies in response to globalization, increasing international mobility, and labor market changes. These reforms often involve improving legal frameworks, strengthening migration management institutions, and expanding international cooperation mechanisms [8].

Overall, the existing literature demonstrates that migration governance is a complex and multidimensional policy field that requires coordination between national institutions, legal frameworks, and international policy mechanisms. Understanding these theoretical approaches provides an important foundation for analyzing the evolution of migration governance and migration policy in Uzbekistan.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze the evolution of legal migration governance and mobility regulation in Uzbekistan. The research focuses on examining how migration policies and institutional mechanisms have developed over time and how they influence migration management within the broader framework of international migration governance.

The methodological approach of the study is based on *policy analysis and legal-institutional analysis*. These approaches allow the research to examine the transformation of migration governance through legislative reforms, institutional changes, and policy

initiatives adopted by the government of Uzbekistan [9]. The study also considers the role of international migration norms and global governance frameworks that influence national migration policy development.

The research applies a *historical-institutional approach*, which helps to analyze the gradual development of migration governance structures in Uzbekistan from the early years of independence to the present period. This approach allows for identifying the key stages of policy evolution and the institutional reforms aimed at regulating labor mobility and protecting the rights of migrants [10].

In addition, the study utilizes *comparative policy analysis* to evaluate Uzbekistan's migration governance mechanisms in relation to international migration management practices. By comparing national migration policies with global governance principles and international policy frameworks, the research identifies both the strengths and limitations of Uzbekistan's current migration regulation system [11].

The empirical basis of the study includes analysis of *national legislation, government strategies, policy documents, and international migration reports*. Key policy documents examined in the research include migration-related laws, presidential decrees, and government resolutions that regulate labor migration and mobility governance in Uzbekistan [12]. In addition, reports from international organizations and research institutions are used to provide broader analytical perspectives on migration governance reforms.

The analytical framework of the study focuses on three main dimensions:

1. The evolution of migration legislation and institutional frameworks in Uzbekistan;
2. The development of migration governance mechanisms regulating labor mobility;
3. The interaction between national migration policies and international migration governance principles.

This methodological framework enables a comprehensive analysis of migration governance reforms in Uzbekistan and provides insights into how legal and policy mechanisms shape migration management in the country.

Evolution of Migration Governance in Uzbekistan

The development of migration governance in Uzbekistan has evolved significantly since the country gained independence in 1991. In the early years of independence, migration management largely relied on administrative mechanisms inherited from the Soviet institutional system. During this period, migration



regulation was primarily focused on internal population registration and administrative oversight, rather than on the development of comprehensive migration governance frameworks addressing international labor mobility [13].

As economic restructuring and labor market transformations intensified during the late 1990s and early 2000s, labor migration began to emerge as an increasingly important socioeconomic phenomenon. A growing number of Uzbek citizens sought employment opportunities abroad, particularly in countries such as Russia, Kazakhstan, and South Korea. These trends prompted the government to gradually develop policy instruments aimed at regulating external labor migration and improving institutional coordination in migration management [14].

During the following decade, migration governance in Uzbekistan continued to evolve through the introduction of new legal mechanisms and institutional reforms. Government institutions responsible for labor migration management were strengthened, and regulatory frameworks began to incorporate measures designed to protect migrant workers and facilitate organized labor mobility. This period marked the transition from purely administrative control toward a more structured migration governance system that attempted to balance economic needs with regulatory oversight [15].

A major turning point in Uzbekistan's migration governance occurred after 2016, when broader political and economic reforms led to significant changes in migration policy. The government introduced a number of initiatives aimed at modernizing migration management, improving the legal protection of migrant workers, and expanding international cooperation in labor migration governance. These reforms also sought to simplify migration procedures, strengthen institutional coordination, and promote safer and more regulated labor mobility [16].

Overall, the evolution of migration governance in Uzbekistan demonstrates a gradual shift from restrictive administrative practices toward a more policy-oriented and institutionally coordinated migration governance model. This transformation reflects the growing recognition of migration as an important component of national socioeconomic development and international mobility management.

Legal and Institutional Framework of Migration Regulation

The legal and institutional framework regulating migration in Uzbekistan has undergone significant transformation over the past decades. Migration

governance in the country is currently based on a combination of national legislation, presidential decrees, government resolutions, and institutional mechanisms designed to regulate labor mobility and protect the rights of migrant workers. These legal and policy instruments aim to establish an organized system of migration management while addressing the socioeconomic challenges associated with large-scale labor migration [17].

One of the key elements of migration governance in Uzbekistan is the development of a national legal framework regulating external labor migration. Over time, the government has adopted several legislative acts that define the rights and obligations of migrant workers, establish mechanisms for the recruitment and employment of Uzbek citizens abroad, and regulate the activities of intermediary agencies involved in labor migration processes. These legal measures were designed to reduce irregular migration risks and ensure safer migration channels for Uzbek citizens seeking employment abroad [18].

Institutionally, migration governance in Uzbekistan is implemented through several state bodies responsible for migration regulation and labor mobility management. A central role in this system is played by the *Agency for External Labor Migration*, which operates under the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction and coordinates policies related to organized labor migration, employment abroad, and protection of migrant workers' rights. The agency also facilitates cooperation with foreign employers and supports legal employment opportunities for Uzbek citizens in destination countries [19].

In addition to national institutions, Uzbekistan has increasingly strengthened its cooperation with international organizations involved in migration governance. Collaboration with international partners contributes to improving migration management practices, developing legal migration channels, and strengthening mechanisms aimed at protecting migrant workers. Such cooperation also supports policy reforms that align national migration governance mechanisms with international migration management standards [20].

Overall, the legal and institutional framework of migration regulation in Uzbekistan demonstrates the country's efforts to establish a more structured and coordinated migration governance system. Through the development of national legislation, institutional reforms, and international cooperation, Uzbekistan continues to strengthen its capacity to regulate labor mobility while ensuring the protection of migrant workers and promoting safer migration processes.



Recent Policy Reforms and Mobility Governance in Uzbekistan (2016–2024)

Since 2016, Uzbekistan has undertaken significant reforms aimed at modernizing migration governance and improving the regulation of labor mobility. These reforms were initiated as part of broader socioeconomic and institutional transformations intended to strengthen state governance, promote employment opportunities, and enhance the protection of citizens working abroad. Migration policy during this period increasingly shifted toward facilitating legal labor mobility while reducing the risks associated with irregular migration [21].

One of the key priorities of recent migration reforms has been the development of mechanisms that support organized labor migration. The government introduced new programs aimed at expanding legal employment opportunities for Uzbek citizens in foreign labor markets, particularly in countries such as the Russian Federation, South Korea, Japan, and several European states. These initiatives were designed to improve the institutional coordination of migration processes and ensure safer migration channels for labor migrants [22].

Another important direction of migration policy reform has been strengthening institutional support for migrant workers. Government agencies responsible for labor migration management have expanded their functions to include pre-departure training programs, legal assistance services, and employment facilitation mechanisms. These measures are intended to increase migrants' awareness of legal migration procedures and reduce vulnerability to exploitation and irregular migration practices [23].

In addition to domestic policy reforms, Uzbekistan has intensified its international cooperation in the field of migration governance. Bilateral agreements on labor migration and employment cooperation have been concluded with several destination countries, creating institutional frameworks that regulate the recruitment, employment conditions, and social protection of Uzbek migrant workers. Such agreements also contribute to improving the transparency and effectiveness of labor migration management systems [24].

Overall, the migration governance reforms implemented since 2016 reflect Uzbekistan's efforts to develop a more comprehensive and modern migration policy framework. By strengthening legal migration channels, expanding institutional support mechanisms, and deepening international cooperation, the country has taken important steps toward improving mobility governance and enhancing the protection of migrant

workers in the context of increasing global labor mobility.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of migration governance development in Uzbekistan demonstrates that the country has gradually transitioned from a predominantly administrative migration management system to a more structured policy-oriented governance framework. This transformation has been closely connected with broader economic reforms, labor market dynamics, and the increasing importance of international labor mobility for national socioeconomic development.

The evolution of legal and institutional mechanisms regulating migration reflects the government's recognition of migration as both a socioeconomic necessity and a policy challenge. In particular, the reforms implemented since 2016 indicate a strategic shift toward facilitating legal labor migration while strengthening institutional support mechanisms for migrant workers. Such reforms aim not only to regulate migration flows but also to maximize the developmental benefits of migration for both migrants and the national economy [25].

At the same time, several challenges remain within Uzbekistan's migration governance system. These challenges include improving coordination between state institutions involved in migration management, strengthening the protection of migrant workers' rights in destination countries, and expanding legal migration opportunities in diversified international labor markets. Addressing these issues requires further policy innovation and continued international cooperation in the field of migration governance [26].

From a broader international relations perspective, Uzbekistan's migration policy reforms can also be interpreted as part of the country's efforts to integrate more actively into global mobility governance structures. Strengthening cooperation with international organizations and destination countries contributes to the development of a more balanced and effective migration management system aligned with international migration governance standards [27].

CONCLUSION

This study examined the evolution of legal migration governance and mobility regulation in Uzbekistan, focusing on the development of national migration policies and institutional mechanisms regulating labor mobility. The analysis demonstrated that migration governance in Uzbekistan has undergone significant transformation since independence, evolving from a system primarily based on administrative control to a



more comprehensive policy framework addressing the challenges and opportunities associated with international labor migration.

The findings indicate that recent reforms have played an important role in strengthening legal migration channels, improving institutional coordination, and expanding support mechanisms for migrant workers. In particular, policy initiatives implemented since 2016 have contributed to modernizing migration governance structures and enhancing the role of migration policy within the broader framework of national socioeconomic development.

Nevertheless, further improvements remain necessary to ensure the long-term effectiveness of migration governance in Uzbekistan. Future policy efforts should focus on strengthening institutional capacity, improving international labor migration agreements, and expanding mechanisms for protecting migrant workers' rights abroad. Such measures will contribute to the development of a more sustainable and balanced migration governance system capable of addressing the complexities of global labor mobility.

Overall, the evolution of migration governance in Uzbekistan illustrates the growing importance of migration policy within the country's broader development strategy. Strengthening legal migration governance and mobility regulation will remain an essential component of Uzbekistan's engagement with global migration processes and international labor mobility systems.

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