



UZBEKISTAN AND THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION: YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes Uzbekistan's accession process to the World Trade Organization (WTO) from the perspectives of economic transformation, legal-institutional adaptation, and mobilization of youth potential. Based on official statistical data for 2025-2026, the study highlights the relationship between foreign trade dynamics, service exports, the digital economy, and youth participation. The article substantiates the role of youth in the WTO accession process through scientific-analytical activities, innovative entrepreneurial initiatives, export-oriented startups, and the adoption of international standards. Furthermore, existing challenges are identified, and practical recommendations aimed at strengthening youth participation are proposed.

Keywords: World Trade Organization, Uzbekistan, transformation, youth, foreign trade, export, digital economy, international standards, innovative entrepreneurship.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, integration into the international trade system is one of the key factors ensuring the openness, competitiveness, and sustainable development of the national economy.[1] The World Trade Organization is currently the main international institution that establishes multilateral trade rules, and membership requires states to ensure transparency of tariff and non-tariff measures, alignment of technical regulations, sanitary and phytosanitary standards, protection of intellectual property rights, and harmonization of state support with international obligations.

Although Uzbekistan's WTO accession process began in 1994, negotiations have entered a qualitatively new stage since 2020.[2] In recent years, consistent reforms have been implemented, including liberalization of foreign trade, simplification of customs and tax procedures, abolition of export subsidies and certain exclusive rights, and alignment of technical regulation systems with international standards. These changes demonstrate that WTO accession is not merely a foreign trade issue but a transformational process closely linked to economic governance, education, innovation, and human capital development.

In this process, youth emerge as a strategic resource. As of January 1, 2025, the number of young people aged 14-30 in Uzbekistan reached 9,630,556, accounting for 25.7% of the total population.[3] This means that one in four citizens directly belongs to the youth category, and their knowledge, skills, and initiatives play a crucial role in increasing national competitiveness during the transition to a WTO-compliant economic system.

Uzbekistan's WTO accession negotiations have intensified in recent years. According to official data, during 2023-2025, the process of liberalizing trade policy, aligning trade rules and standards with international norms, and increasing transparency in foreign trade regulation mechanisms has accelerated.[4] As of December 1, 2025, Uzbekistan has approached the finalization of market access negotiations with the majority of WTO members, while the number of working party meetings increased from 6 to 11.

The scope of negotiations includes agricultural support, customs and fiscal regulations, technical regulations, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, as well as conditions for access to service markets. In 2025, more than 10 new regulatory legal acts were adopted in accordance with WTO

requirements, and 54 documents were harmonized with international standards, demonstrating Uzbekistan's practical steps toward institutional adaptation.[5]

The conclusion of bilateral negotiations with the European Union on October 24, 2025, regarding access to goods and services markets also represents a significant diplomatic achievement. This agreement will define tariff commitments and service-related concessions to be reflected in the future WTO accession protocol.[6]

Foreign trade indicators are essential for understanding the economic substance of WTO accession. According to preliminary data from the State Statistics Committee (January 21, 2026), Uzbekistan's foreign trade turnover in 2025 reached USD 81.2 billion, representing a 20.7% increase compared to 2024.[7] Exports amounted to USD 33.8 billion, while imports reached USD 47.4 billion.[8] The trade balance remained negative, at approximately USD 13.5 billion.

Although export growth exceeded import growth rates, the absolute dominance of imports maintains a negative trade balance. This indicates the need to diversify exports, increase the share of high value-added products, expand service exports, and establish production systems compliant with international standards.

Table 1⁹**Comparative Dynamics of Foreign Trade Turnover by Year**

Indicator	2023	2024	2025	2025/2024 growth
Foreign Trade Turnover, million USD	63 528,6	67 238,4	81 166,8	+20,7%
<u>Exports, million USD</u>	24 869,5	27 270,1	33 812,3	+24,0%
Imports, million USD	38 659,1	39 968,3	47 354,5	+18,5%
Trade Balance, million USD	-13 789,6	-12 698,2	-13 542,2	—

As evidenced by the table, although the growth rate of exports exceeds that of imports, the absolute dominance of import volumes continues to maintain a negative trade balance. This situation highlights the necessity for Uzbekistan to diversify its export structure, increase the share of high value-added products, expand service exports, and develop production systems aligned with international standards.

In 2025, Uzbekistan conducted trade with 210 countries. Major trade partners included China, the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and the Republic of Korea. This geographical diversification creates new opportunities for exporters in the post-WTO accession phase, while simultaneously increasing the demand for highly qualified specialists in product quality, certification, logistics, legal compliance, and international marketing.

The role of youth in adapting to WTO requirements manifests in three directions:

First, through scientific and analytical potential, conducting research on trade policy, tariffs, non-tariff measures, customs procedures, intellectual property, and international standards.

Second, through innovative entrepreneurship, creating export-oriented goods and services.

Third, through digital solutions such as electronic certification, logistics management, and data analysis, facilitating access of local producers to international markets.[10]

Table 2¹¹

**Key Indicators of Uzbekistan's Service Exports and Trade Relations in the WTO
Context (2025)**

Direction	Indicator 2025 Value	Significance in the WTO Context
<u>Trade relations geography</u>	210 countries	Market diversification and new requirements for exporters
<u>Service exports</u>	USD 9,760.4 million	Expansion of digital services, tourism, and transport exports
<u>Share of service exports</u>	28,9%	Potential for high value-added services
<u>Telecommunications, computer and information services</u>	9.4% of <u>service exports</u>	Promising sector for young IT specialists and startups

Under WTO conditions, economic competitiveness is primarily determined by the quality of human capital.[12] The high proportion of youth in Uzbekistan provides a demographic advantage. At the beginning of 2025, youth aged 14-30 accounted for 25.7% of the population, emphasizing the need to directly link youth policy with economic transformation. The “New Uzbekistan Youth - 2030” strategy also prioritizes employment, entrepreneurship, quality education, foreign languages, vocational training, and mechanisms for open participation.

The digital economy plays a crucial role in Uzbekistan's WTO preparation. Compared to traditional goods exports, digital services offer lower logistics costs, higher value-added, and greater flexibility.

In January-May 2025, IT Park Uzbekistan admitted 636 new resident companies, 284 of which were export-oriented and 117 were foreign enterprises. These companies operate in IT services, BPO, service solutions, gaming, and creative technologies.[13]

By autumn 2025, an additional 470 companies joined the ecosystem, including 267 export-oriented and 158 foreign-invested enterprises. These companies plan to provide over USD 70 million in export services by the end of 2026, strengthening youth participation in global service markets.[14] For young entrepreneurs, the WTO process is not only a set of legal obligations but also a source of new business opportunities. For example, digital platforms for exporters (“one-stop-shop”), certification guidelines, market analysis tools, logistics cost comparison systems, and mobile applications explaining customs procedures can be developed.

A number of systemic challenges persist in Uzbekistan's WTO accession process. First, not all domestic producers possess sufficient knowledge of international technical regulations, certification procedures, and sanitary and phytosanitary requirements. Second, small business entities have limited expertise in legal, marketing, and logistics aspects necessary for entering export markets. Third, the incomplete integration of digital trade infrastructure and data systems slows down export processes. Fourth, the practical experience of youth in international trade law, trade diplomacy, and standardization remains insufficiently developed.

Addressing these challenges requires the systematic integration of youth participation. It is advisable to expand practical modules on WTO regulations and international trade policy within higher education institutions, involve students in real export projects, and establish programs such as the ‘School of Exporters’ and ‘Young Trade Advisors.’ Furthermore, multidisciplinary teams



объединяя students from IT, economics, law, and logistics fields can develop practical solutions to facilitate local enterprises' access to international markets.[15]

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. It is necessary to introduce the subject “WTO Rules and International Trade Policy” in higher education institutions based on practical case studies, including the analysis of real examples related to tariffs, non-tariff measures, technical regulations, and trade in services.
2. It is advisable to expand grant programs for young researchers aimed at studying the sectoral impacts of WTO accession. In particular, priority should be given to sectors such as agriculture, textiles, the food industry, IT services, and logistics.
3. It is essential to develop a digital platform for young entrepreneurs and startup founders to assess export readiness. The platform may provide interactive guidance on certification procedures, customs documentation, international standards, pricing mechanisms, and market demand.
4. It is important to train young specialists in WTO-compliant standardization and certification, and to link them with enterprises through practical internship programs.
5. Establishing a “Young Export Advisors” program through cooperation among IT Park, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, higher education institutions, and export support organizations will strengthen Uzbekistan’s preparedness for the post-WTO accession period.

CONCLUSION

Uzbekistan’s accession to the World Trade Organization represents a profound transformational process aimed at developing the national economy on the basis of international rules, open competition, and transparent institutional governance. The increase in foreign trade turnover to USD 81.2 billion in 2025, a 24% growth in exports, the expansion of service exports to USD 9.76 billion, and the rapid development of the digital services market further enhance the economic significance of WTO membership for Uzbekistan.

In this process, youth are not merely passive observers but active participants in transformation, creators of innovative solutions, and carriers of a new economic mindset. Their scientific research, startup initiatives, application of digital technologies, and adoption of international standards contribute significantly to Uzbekistan’s effective integration into the global trading system. Therefore, the systematic support of youth potential, equipping them with international trade competencies, and their involvement in real export projects should be considered a key prerequisite for national development within the WTO accession framework.

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