

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Current State and Prospects of Youth Innovation Activity in Uzbekistan

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Abstract

This article examines the current state, key achievements, and prospects of youth innovation activity in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Particular attention is given to government policies and programs aimed at fostering an innovation-driven economy and supporting youth entrepreneurship, including the national development strategy Uzbekistan–2030.

The study highlights the role of youth as a critical component of the country's human capital and analyzes their participation in scientific and technological projects, startup initiatives, and international educational programs. Statistical data are presented to illustrate the development of the national startup ecosystem, the growth of venture investment, the expansion of the IT sector, and the increasing number of young professionals engaged in innovative activities.

The paper also examines existing support mechanisms such as grants, accelerators, technology parks, educational reforms, and international partnerships. At the same time, several structural challenges limiting youth innovation activity are identified. The findings suggest that consistent government support, the development of an advanced educational environment, and expanded international cooperation create favorable conditions for building a sustainable innovation ecosystem in which youth serve as the primary driver of technological and economic progress in Uzbekistan.

KEY WORDS

Innovation activity, youth, startup ecosystem, innovation economy, human capital, technological entrepreneurship, public policy, digital economy, venture investment, IT sector, innovation ecosystem, Uzbekistan.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary knowledge-based economy, youth innovation activity has become an increasingly important driver of national economic development. Young people represent a significant source of intellectual potential, creativity, and adaptability, enabling societies to respond effectively to rapid technological and economic change.

In Uzbekistan, the promotion of youth innovation has become

a central component of state development policy aimed at building an innovation-driven economy and ensuring sustainable national growth. Several strategic documents have been adopted in recent years, including the Innovation Development Strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2022–2026 and the national development strategy Uzbekistan–2030, both of which emphasize the importance of supporting talented youth and strengthening their innovative capacities

[1;2].

Young people in Uzbekistan demonstrate a strong interest in science, technology, and entrepreneurship. Their growing participation in research projects, startup initiatives, and international educational programs indicates a gradual expansion of the country’s innovation potential. In addition, the increasing number of Uzbek students enrolled in leading global universities reflects a broader trend toward the internationalization of education and knowledge exchange [3].

Given the rapid pace of digitalization and increasing global competition, youth innovation activity is becoming a crucial resource for sustainable economic development. With more than 60 percent of the population under the age of 30, Uzbekistan possesses a substantial demographic advantage that can significantly contribute to the formation of a knowledge and technology-based economy. Consequently, national policy increasingly focuses on creating favorable institutional and economic conditions that enable young people to participate in innovation processes actively.

1. Current State of Youth Innovation Activity.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has made significant progress in promoting youth innovation through a range of national initiatives and policy measures [2]. Innovation activity among young people has been identified as one of the priority

directions of the country’s long-term development strategy.

Within the framework of the Uzbekistan–2030 development strategy, youth are regarded as a key driver of innovation and entrepreneurship. Government institutions at various administrative levels are tasked with supporting talented young individuals and facilitating their participation in innovation processes.

The state program implementing the Uzbekistan–2030 Strategy includes measures aimed at supporting youth entrepreneurial initiatives and innovative projects across all regions of the country [2;4]. In accordance with the Presidential Decree of February 16, 2026 (No. UP-21), several quantitative targets have been established for the period up to 2030:

- increasing the number of startup projects to 5,000;
- attracting up to USD 2 billion in venture investment to the national startup ecosystem;
- commercializing 2,000 innovative ideas developed by young entrepreneurs;
- enabling approximately 400 startup projects to enter international markets;
- creating more than 20,000 new jobs in the innovation sector.

Table 1. Dynamics of the Startup Ecosystem Development.

Indicator	2017	2024	2025 (7 months)	Target by 2030
Number of startups	<50	>600	>700	5,000
Attracted investment	< \$10 million	~ \$70 million	\$264 million	\$2 billion
Commercialized ideas	—	~300	~500	2,000
Projects entering international markets	isolated cases	~50	~80	400
Jobs created	—	~5,000	~8,000	20,000

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the Ministry of Digital Technologies of the Republic of Uzbekistan, IT Park Uzbekistan, and analytical materials from Startup Genome, 2024–2025 [3; 5; 6].

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrate the rapid expansion of Uzbekistan’s startup ecosystem. In 2017, fewer than 50 startup projects were registered in the country, with

total investment volumes below \$10 million. By 2024, however, the number of startups had exceeded 600 and attracted investments reached approximately \$70 million.

The year 2025 marked a particularly significant acceleration in ecosystem development. During the first seven months alone, total startup investments reached \$264 million—substantially exceeding previous annual indicators. At the same time, the number of commercialized innovative ideas increased to around 500, while approximately 80 projects successfully entered international markets.

These developments indicate the gradual formation of an institutional infrastructure supporting innovation and entrepreneurship, including technology parks, business incubators, acceleration programs, and government-supported initiatives. The positive dynamics are also reflected in socio-economic indicators, particularly the growth of employment in the startup sector, which reached approximately 8,000 jobs.

Overall, Uzbekistan is actively working toward establishing a national innovation system based on scientific progress and the effective development of human capital.

National innovation competitions and forums organized in Tashkent attract thousands of young researchers and developers. Winners receive financial grants as well as opportunities to implement their projects in practice. In cooperation with international organizations—including the United Nations and the European Union—innovation hubs and laboratories are being established to provide young people with access to modern technological infrastructure.

These centers offer advanced equipment such as 3D printers, robotics platforms, prototyping facilities, and programming environments, allowing young innovators to develop practical engineering solutions.

Furthermore, Uzbekistan currently ranks first in Central Asia in terms of the number of students admitted to the world’s top 500 universities, highlighting the country’s growing educational potential.

2. Key Achievements of the Youth Innovation Ecosystem.

Young people in Uzbekistan are increasingly involved in

diverse innovation activities, ranging from technological and engineering projects to social entrepreneurship initiatives. Many of these initiatives focus on solving practical challenges related to digital transformation, environmental sustainability, agricultural technologies, and social development.

A solid foundation for practical training is being established through university laboratories, collaborative projects with industrial enterprises, internships, and accelerator programs. These initiatives significantly improve the preparedness of young specialists to meet the demands of modern labor markets and entrepreneurial environments.

Over the past several years, youth innovation activity has demonstrated steady growth. By mid-2025, the total volume of venture investments in youth-led startup projects had reached approximately \$145 million, with projections suggesting that this figure could exceed \$1 billion in the coming years [3;6].

This trend reflects both increasing investor interest and the effectiveness of government policies aimed at developing venture financing mechanisms and startup support programs.

Young people in Uzbekistan also actively participate in international academic and technological initiatives, including international competitions, educational exchanges, and internships at leading universities.

During a meeting between the President of Uzbekistan and representatives of youth on February 24, 2026, several important indicators were highlighted:

- more than 3,500 students are currently studying at leading international universities, including institutions ranked among the global top 100;
- 63 startup projects developed by young Uzbek entrepreneurs have successfully entered markets in the United States, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates;
- more than 60% of the country’s population is under the age of 30 [7].

Table 2. Youth and Human Capital Indicators

Indicator	Value
Population under 30	~60%
Number of IT companies	>2,000

Indicator	Value
Employment in IT sector	~30,000
Young IT specialists	>70,000
Students studying abroad	~3,500
Planned IT jobs	300,000

Currently, more than 2,000 IT companies operate in Uzbekistan, providing employment for around 30,000 professionals, while over 70,000 young specialists are engaged in the IT sector independently.

Strategic development plans aim to increase IT exports to \$5 billion and create 300,000 jobs in the IT sector, which will significantly expand opportunities for young professionals.

3. Prospects for the Development of Youth Innovation Activity.

The prospects for youth innovation activity in Uzbekistan appear highly promising. To foster a new generation of innovators and entrepreneurs, the government is gradually integrating entrepreneurial education into the national education system.

Starting from the 2026–2027 academic year, entrepreneurship

and startup idea generation courses will be introduced in general secondary schools across the country.

At the university level, students increasingly have access to innovation infrastructure, including:

- startup clubs,
- business accelerators,
- research laboratories,
- technology parks.

Annual competitions for innovative projects encourage young people to develop practical solutions to real-world problems. Winning projects receive grants, loans, and venture financing.

Support programs such as Digital Startups and the Youth Venture Fund provide early-stage financing, including grants of up to \$10,000 and investments or loans of up to \$20,000.

Table 3. Startup Ecosystem Development Model (2026–2030)

Stage	Level	Support Mechanism
1	School	Entrepreneurship education and idea generation
2	University	Startup clubs and accelerators
3	Incubation	Grants up to \$10,000
4	Scaling	Venture investments \$20,000+
5	Export	Entry into international markets

These measures demonstrate a systematic approach to building a national innovation ecosystem that supports startups at all stages—from idea generation to commercialization and global market expansion.

4. Challenges and Limitations.

Despite significant progress, several challenges continue to constrain the full realization of youth innovation potential.

First, early-stage startup financing remains limited, making it

difficult for many young entrepreneurs to commercialize innovative ideas.

Second, the development of innovation infrastructure remains uneven, with most technological resources concentrated in major urban centers. This limits access for young innovators from rural and regional areas.

Third, many young entrepreneurs lack competencies in project management, marketing, and international business development. Technical expertise alone is often insufficient for successfully scaling innovative products in competitive global markets.

Addressing these challenges requires further improvements in institutional regulation, financial support mechanisms, and educational programs aimed at developing entrepreneurial competencies.

CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this study indicates that youth innovation activity in Uzbekistan is developing rapidly and gaining increasing institutional support. Government initiatives aimed at promoting technological entrepreneurship, attracting investment, and strengthening educational infrastructure are contributing to the formation of a dynamic innovation ecosystem.

The country's demographic structure—characterized by a large proportion of young people—creates significant opportunities for the development of a knowledge-based economy. With consistent policy implementation and expanded international cooperation, Uzbekistan has the potential to establish a competitive national innovation system capable of generating globally oriented technological enterprises.

In this context, youth will play a decisive role as the primary driver of technological transformation, economic modernization, and long-term sustainable development in Uzbekistan.

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