

BACKGROUND

Uzbekistan remains a relatively stable country, ranking 90th on the 2025 Global Terrorism Index. While domestic terrorist activity is low, the country faces potential threats from ISIS-Khorasan, active in neighbouring Afghanistan. The group has targeted Central Asian populations and seeks to expand its influence in the region.

Uzbekistan has pioneered successful, community-based short-term repatriation and reintegration of its citizens from conflict zones in Northeast Syria and Iraq. Between 2019 and 2021, the government conducted five “Mehr” humanitarian operations, successfully repatriating 531 individuals. The comprehensive rehabilitation programme ensured that repatriates spent minimal time in closed facilities and were quickly integrated into families and communities. The mahalla institution played a key role in supporting the adaptation and family reunification of returnees.

Despite these achievements, significant opportunities and gaps remain in ensuring long-term reintegration of women and children, as repatriates today face new challenges and evolving needs. Building on Uzbekistan’s leadership in repatriation, GCERF can complement efforts by tailored, needs-based interventions aligned with the *National Strategy on Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2021–2026* and the *2022–2025 Action Plan on Social Integration and Rehabilitation of Returnees from Armed Conflict Zones*.

Uzbekistan became a GCERF’s partner country* in summer 2024, supported the establishment of the Country Support Mechanism, chaired by the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies in April 2025 and finalised the Country Investment Strategy for 2025–2028 in August 2025. Uzbekistan advanced new GCERF programming through the launch of Expressions of Interest on Rehabilitation and Reintegration and Prevention of Violent Extremism, accompanied by information sessions for civil society organisations on requirements and consortium-based grant-making. During the fourth quarter, shortlisted partners progressed to due diligence and co-creation of project proposals with close coordination with the EU, UNICEF and the Country Support Mechanism.

GCERF’S INVESTMENT STRATEGY IN UZBEKISTAN

GCERF offers a uniquely tailored approach to Uzbekistan’s R&R landscape by addressing mental health, socioeconomic, educational, and social cohesion challenges faced by returnees and their communities. This approach focuses on strengthening local frontline workers’ capacity — training psychologists, social workers, parents, teachers, mahalla committees — while enabling government and civil society collaboration. GCERF’s strategy in Uzbekistan prioritises the following:

- improving the rehabilitation and reintegration of people returning from Iraq and Syria;
- preventing vulnerable populations from becoming radicalised; GCERF will help expand trauma-informed care in areas with limited professional support, strengthen the capacity of social workers, reduce stigma and improve livelihoods for returnees, with implementation beginning in 2026.

*Partner countries are those in which GCERF funds civil society organisations to implement initiatives aimed at preventing violent extremism.



WHAT

The programme focuses on two key directions to strengthen community resilience:

- Rehabilitation and Reintegration (R&R):**
To support the sustainable reintegration of women and children who have returned from Iraq and Northeast Syria.
- Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE):**
To reduce the risk of youth radicalisation and support the successful return of former VE offenders.

WHERE

All regions of Uzbekistan

WHO

Investment strategy objectives 1–2 (R&R):

- Women and children repatriated from Iraq, Northeast Syria
- Vulnerable women, children and youth in the immediate communities, where returnee women and children reside
- Community and family members in targeted mahallas
- Frontline workers (government social workers, educators, religious leaders, healthcare providers, parents, mahalla activists)

Investment strategy objectives 3–4 (PVE):

- Youth and labour migrants
- Media professionals and social media influencers
- Former offenders convicted of violent extremism
- Probation officers

GCERF AND UZBEKISTAN: PATHWAY TO PARTNERSHIP



GCERF'S VALUE PROPOSITION

GCERF'S UNIQUE MODEL OF INVESTMENT PRIORITISES:

Community ownership and localisation: We invest in trusted grassroots civil society organisations that prioritise the needs and grievances of communities most affected by violent extremism. Many of these organisations have never received international funding before.

Sustainability: Our programmes involve all groups of society and strengthens trust between government, civil society and community members to build stronger, more resilient societies. This ensures that initiatives and structures continue to be relevant and effective.

Robust monitoring and evaluation processes: Our multi-layered monitoring and evaluation system, operating locally and globally, provides continuous feedback on programme effectiveness, identifies areas for improvement, and ensures objectives are consistently met.

Knowledge sharing: Our global network of civil society organisations working on PVE facilitates the exchange of good practices and lessons learned, fostering collaboration and enhancing the effectiveness of interventions. We also share our experiences through our participation in various conferences, publishing of articles and research papers in reputed journals to advance the understanding of PVE.

Capacity strengthening: We strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations to manage large-scale grants and implement effective initiatives, while also enhancing government capacity to develop comprehensive, holistic strategies to prevent violent extremism.