GCERF Strategy for Investment in Uzbekistan

2025-2028(4 years)

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Acronyms

CNA	Country Needs Assessment
CoP	Community of Practice
CSM	Country Support Mechanism
CSO(s)	Civil Society Organisation(s)
CT	Counter-Terrorism
EU	European Union
FPI	Service for Foreign Policy Instruments - European Union
GBSV	Gender-Based and Sexual Violence
GCERF	Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund
GCTF	Global Counterterrorism Forum
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IS, ISIS, ISIL	Islamic State (of Iraq and Syria/Levant)
IS-K(P)	Islamic State – Khorasan (Province)
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PSAT	Program Sustainability Assessment Tool
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
PVE	Preventing (*or* Prevention of) Violent Extremism
R&R	Reintegration & Rehabilitation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
ToC	Theory of Change
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCT	United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism
VE	Violent Extremism/Extremist
VEO	Violent Extremist Organisation

This document is guided by:

- The National Strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2021-2026;
- Enabling environment assessment (desk research) undertaken by independent international experts on PVE and R&R in Central Asia;
- GCERF's original "Strategy to Engage Communities and Address the Drivers of Violent Extremism (2017- 2020) and Updated Strategy for 2022–2025;
- Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) Recommendations for Funding and Enabling Community-Level P/CVE;
- Consultations with thematic and government experts in Uzbekistan;
- Consultations with donors and members of the international community: UN agencies (especially UNDP, UNICEF, UNOCT), INGOs, local CSOs working on PVE and R&R.

Executive Summary

The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) sets out its intention to implement a Country Investment Strategy in the Republic of Uzbekistan (the Investment Strategy) to support the National Strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2021-2026 and its successor document. The Investment Strategy directly aligns with the National PVE Strategy, which lays the groundwork for broader national and regional cooperation. Both strategies stress multi-stakeholder coordination, prevention through education and tolerance-building, inclusion of civil society, and tailored rehabilitation and social reintegration of vulnerable groups (youth, returnees, women), among other measures. Both frameworks highlight minors and youth as vulnerable groups and promote youth-focused education, socioeconomic empowerment, and digital literacy to prevent the spread of extremism.

GCERF will prioritise improving the rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) of people returning from Iraq and Syria; preventing vulnerable populations from becoming radicalised; and supporting people released from prison to prevent their recidivism and radicalisation. These priorities were identified through previous assessments by development agencies and an independent Country Needs Assessment (CNA) conducted by GCERF in 2025. The Strategy complements existing programming in the country, responds to gender and conflict sensitivities, seeks durable solutions, and aligns with internationally recognised good practices.

GCERF will invest in preventing violent extremism (PVE) work in communities at risk and provide them with much-needed services to promote social cohesion and more equal access to economic and social opportunities. Based on lessons learned and good practices in rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) from GCERF work over the last seven years, the Investment Strategy outlines the following specific priorities in the coming 48 months:

  i.   The rehabilitation and reintegration of women and children repatriated from Iraq and northeast Syria.
  ii.   Capacity strengthening for frontline workers, psychologists, social workers, parents, religious leaders, staff of educational institutions, and local and national authorities in medium and long-term dedicated casework and referral, stigma-free and trauma-informed support services.
  iii. Creating an enabling environment for return, rehabilitation, resocialisation, and reintegration in target communities.
  iv.   Enhance youth resilience against online radicalisation.
  v.   The resocialisation and reintegration of people formally charged with violent extremism and those exiting from prison facilities.

Table 1. GCERF's proposed approach

WHAT:

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

1. Rehabilitation and Reintegration (R&R)

Goal: To support the sustainable reintegration of women and children who have returned from Iraq and Northeast Syria.

2. Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE)

Goal: To reduce the risk of youth radicalisation and support the successful return of former VE offenders.

Through grants to local grassroots CSOs in Uzbekistan, GCERF will support:

	WHERE:
WHO:	All regions of Uzbekistan
Objectives 1-2 (R&R):	

WHO:

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 (e.g., government social workers, educators, religious leaders, healthcare providers, parents, mahalla activists)

Objectives 3-4 (PVE):
- Youth and labour migrants
- Media professionals and social media influencers
- Former offenders convicted of violent extremism (VE)
- Probation Officers

In partnership with:
- State Security Service
- Prosecutor General Office
- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of Internal Affairs
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Preschool and School Education
- Ministry of Employment
- Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies
- National Agency for Social Protection
- Committee on Religious Affairs
- Committee on Women and Family
- Agency for Youth Affairs
- Association of Mahallas
- Local community-based CSOs involved in R&R and PVE
- Regional *hokimiyats* (local government)
- International organisations and stakeholders

WHERE: All regions of Uzbekistan

HOW:

R&R

- **Objective 1: Strengthening Local R&R Capacity**
  By providing capacity building based on needs for frontline workers and community leaders, training in trauma-informed care, conflict resolution, and stigma reduction, as well as enhancing coordination among government, community groups, and civil society organisations.

- **Objective 2: R&R Support for Vulnerable Women and Children**
  By providing direct economic and educational opportunities for returnees and vulnerable community members, including vocational training, micro-grants, and apprenticeships for women, as well as extracurricular activities, scholarships, and tutoring for children, we can run public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma.

PVE

- **Objective 3: Enhance Youth Resilience Against Online Radicalisation**
  By empowering youth with digital and media literacy skills and by fostering a strong civic identity through integrating digital literacy into education, training community leaders on radicalisation risks, and creating positive multimedia campaigns with relatable role models and establishing peer mentorship networks to support these efforts.

- **Objective 4: Enhance Rehabilitation of Former VE Offenders**
  By implementing comprehensive in-prison and post-release support programmes. Through providing correctional staff with training on psychosocial interventions like CBT and offering former offenders vocational training, educational opportunities, and family reconciliation support to prevent recidivism and ensure long-term stability.

Guiding Principles

The guiding principles that have shaped GCERF's engagement to date in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan), as well as in other contexts where GCERF operates, have proven relevant and effective. Their continued applicability has been confirmed by enabling environment assessment desk research conducted in early 2025 in Uzbekistan. Accordingly, these principles will remain central to GCERF's investment strategy in Uzbekistan for the forthcoming period:

- **Promote country ownership** by convening the government, civil society, the international community, and the private sector around national priorities identified by the Government of Uzbekistan. GCERF-funded efforts will support PVE coordination at all levels to ensure programming is contextually relevant and sustainable. GCERF will continue to contribute to the implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2021-2026, and its subsequent reviewed versions.
- **Ensure gender inclusivity**, in line with the priority areas of the National Strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2021-2026, engaging girls, women, boys, and men in activities tailored to their specific, identified needs. The programme will place added emphasis on intersectionality, recognising how gender, age, religion, and socioeconomic status intersect to shape individual experiences within PVE interventions.
- **Design for sustainability and effectiveness**, with all programmes guided by the principles of scalability and replicability. These criteria will inform programme selection and strategic investment decisions.
- **Do No Harm,** apply conflict-sensitive approaches, adhering to the Do No Harm principle. This includes proactively identifying potential negative impacts,

implementing preventive measures where possible, and adopting corrective actions when necessary.[1]

- **Strengthen coordination** for improved coherence in PVE efforts across Uzbekistan. GCERF will work closely with government counterparts, donors, and current and upcoming partner programmes to ensure effective information sharing and joint planning.
- **Foster a culture of learning** by actively contributing to national, regional, and global communities of practice. This will include promoting knowledge exchange, reflective practice, and evidence-based adaptation.
- **Build local capacity** by strengthening grantees' operational, financial, and technical capabilities. This includes integrating PVE, the Theory of Change, conflict and gender sensitivity into training and implementation to enhance overall delivery and impact.
- **Align with global good practice**, ensuring all programming reflects established standards, including the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) *Recommendations for Funding and Enabling Community-Level PVE*;[2] the *Good Practices in Strengthening National-Local Cooperation in PVE*;[3] the *Good Practices on Women and CVE*;[4] and relevant guidelines from global PVE actors.[5]
- **PVE efforts must be grounded in internationally recognised norms**, including United Nations (UN) frameworks and conventions. Specifically, PVE activities must uphold international human rights and the rule of law,[6] leverage SDGs 4,5,10 and 16, focus on social, economic, political, and cultural grievances that fuel extremism[7], involve youth, women, and marginalised communities in designing and implementing PVE policies,[8] and promote narratives of inclusion, diversity, and shared values.[9]

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[1] GCERF. *GCERF's Approach to Conflict-Sensitive Programming*. December 2021.

[2] GCTF. *GCTF Recommendations for Funding and Enabling Community-Level PVE*. September 2023. Available at: GCTF FundEnable Recommendations _ENG.pdf

[3] GCTF. *Memorandum on Good Practices in Strengthening National-Local Cooperation in Preventing Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism*. September 2020. Available at: https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/2020/GCTF%20Memorandum%20on%20Good%20Practices%20on%20Strengthening%20NLC%20in%20P/CVE.pdf?ver=2020-09-29-100315-357

[4] GCTF. *Addendum to the GCTF Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism*. 2019. Available at: *https://www.thegctf.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=jA1tbXKhobE=&portalid=1*

[5] IOM and UNHCR. *Serving and Protecting Together. IOM/UNHCR Framework of Engagement*. Jun 2022. Available at: https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/unhcr/2022/en/103897

[6] *UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (A/RES/60/288), Pillar IV*. September 2006. Available at: https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/60/288

[7] *UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2016)*. February 2016. Available at: https://docs.un.org/en/A/70/L.41

[8] *UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (Youth, Peace, and Security)*. December 2015. Available at: https://press.un.org/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm

[9] *Human Rights Council Resolution 30/15*. October 2015. Available at: https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/RES/30/15

GCERF Positioning

Rationale

The emergence of violent extremist groups in Central Asia coincided with the Soviet Union's collapse, fuelled by weakened social services and political and economic exclusion. In the early 2010s, armed groups in Syria – often including veterans of the 1990s conflict migration – targeted Uzbek migrants who had left their home country due to lack of educational and job opportunities. Many were drawn to these groups not for their ideology, but for the perceived political alternatives they offered and the limited prospects available at home or in exile.[6]

Around 2000 individuals with ties to Uzbekistan have taken part in conflicts in Syria and Iraq.[7] While no terrorist attacks were recorded in Central Asia in 2024 and 2025, the involvement of Central Asian nationals in attacks abroad has increased, notably including the 2024 Moscow attack (Tajikistan citizens involved).[8] Radicalisation is particularly active in countries where Uzbek citizens seek employment, like Russia, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, and are disconnected from their home communities.

Uzbekistan has emerged as a regional leader in the voluntary repatriation of its citizens from conflict zones in Northeast Syria and Iraq. Between 2019 and 2021, the government conducted five "Mehr" humanitarian operations, successfully repatriating a total of 531 individuals. Of these, 381 were children and more than 120 were women; around 30 were adult men.[9] These repatriations brought back citizens who had been detained or displaced in the aftermath of military operations against ISIS, primarily in detention camps managed by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) or held by local authorities in Iraq. Uzbekistan has led a successful approach to R&R through the *mahalla* (community-level self-governance) system, which sustains and creates positive, trustful community networks instead of isolating returnees in closed institutions.

Following consultations with UNICEF, UNDP, and the UNOCT, with the financial support of the European Union, Uzbekistan developed and implemented a comprehensive rehabilitation programme to ensure access to educational, medical, and social services for returnees. This effort was based on a holistic state approach involving political, legal, financial, and organisational measures, which enabled over 60 families and 180 children to receive assistance with documentation and guardianship, while women who had committed minor offences, such as illegal border crossing, were granted amnesty. The "My Family" approach ensured that repatriates spent minimal time in closed facilities and were quickly integrated into families and communities, with the *mahalla* institution playing a key role in supporting

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[6] Country Needs Assessment (CNA) in Uzbekistan, 2025. See Annex 1 for summary.

[7] Soliev, Nodirbek. "Tracing the fate of Central Asian fighters in Syria." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 4 (2021), p. 126.

[8] Tucker, Noah, and Edward Lemon. "A 'Hotbed' or a Slow, Painful Burn? Explaining Central Asia's Role in Global Terrorism." In *CTC Sentinel* (July/August 2024), p. 20.

[9] NCHR presents Uzbekistan's experience in the repatriation of its citizens - Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

their adaptation and family reunification. Medical and psychological assistance was provided through a month-long rehabilitation course at the "Buston" sanatorium, where various conditions were treated and 88 free-of-charge surgeries were performed. The education system responded flexibly by establishing mobile preschool and school classes within the sanatorium, led by experienced educators and psychologists, with children later integrated into local schools and kindergartens. Socio-economic support included one-time financial aid, housing, renovation of homes, vocational training, and preferential loans for business projects. The "UN and EU – Support for the Repatriation of Central Asian Citizens from Syria and Iraq" initiative has contributed to enhancing the professional development of personnel involved in rehabilitation work.

Currently, Uzbekistan is implementing the *Action Plan for 2022–2025 on Social Integration and Rehabilitation of Returnees from Armed Conflict Zones*, which was approved by the Deputy Prime Minister on 5th September 2022. The main areas of focus include increasing the effectiveness of educational processes, developing deradicalisation programmes, and conducting regular psychological counselling.

However, GCERF consultations with practitioners and stakeholders revealed gaps and opportunities that exist in supporting the R&R of returned citizens to the country. It is necessary to update approaches and improve methods for the rehabilitation and reintegration of women and children, as repatriates today face new challenges and evolving needs. Some have returned with serious injuries, and approximately 8 to 10 per cent require prosthetic and orthopaedic products. In addition, many need complex medical procedures and long-term treatment, particularly for cardiovascular and endocrine conditions. Developing educational and sports infrastructure is essential, especially in the regions where repatriates live, as around 70 per cent of returnees are children. Professional development programmes for social workers, psychologists, and other specialists involved in rehabilitation and reintegration must be expanded to ensure effective support. It is also important to increase the number of entrepreneurship development programmes and provide greater access to additional and vocational education for repatriates. These measures are crucial for improving their socio-economic prospects, as the absence of a stable income significantly heightens the risk of social and family instability.

GCERF has a proven track record in R&R, with related programmes funded in 14 countries, including Kyrgyzstan (since July 2024), as well as in the Sahel, Iraq, Yemen, and Western Balkans (Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia).[10] This positions GCERF well to support grassroots, community-based civil society in Uzbekistan. Building on Uzbekistan's leadership in repatriation, GCERF can complement efforts by tailored, needs-based interventions aligned with the National Strategy and Action Plan. These efforts aim to address the root causes of conflict-zone departures, reduce recidivism and stigma, and foster a supportive environment for community-based reintegration.

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[10] One GCERF-funded project in Kosovo found that 86% of community members believed returnees were integrating successfully. In another, 92% of returnee children were reported to be socialising positively and behaving well with their peers. Additionally, 95% of parents and caregivers felt confident in their ability to support their children's reintegration.

At the same time, the country needs assessment and numerous consultations with stakeholders revealed that prevention remains essential, along with the rehabilitation and reintegration of former violent extremist prisoners. GCERF brings valuable experience in R&R of former offenders and prison deradicalisation work, for instance, from Mali, where GCERF supports former VE prisoners in developing prosocial and vocational skills.

The research also found that online radicalisation in Uzbekistan is characterised by the targeting of youth through manipulative extremist content delivered mainly via social media and encrypted messaging platforms. Extremist groups, including Islamic State affiliates like the Islamic State Khorasan-Province (ISKP), use multilingual propaganda in Uzbek and other regional languages to recruit and radicalise vulnerable individuals. This content exploits young people's search for identity, belonging, and purpose, accelerating their radicalisation process sometimes within weeks. The online environment facilitates exposure to a mix of religious, political, and conspiratorial narratives, blurring conventional labels and strengthening ideological flexibility among recruits.

Based on the above key priorities and opportunities for PVE and R&R in Uzbekistan were prioritised (see Annex 1).

GCERF's added value

GCERF offers a uniquely tailored contribution to Uzbekistan's R&R landscape by addressing mental health, socioeconomic, educational, and social cohesion challenges faced by returnees and their communities. As an apolitical global fund with a strong track record of community-based programming in complex environments, GCERF is well positioned to maintain, complement and reinforce national efforts.

GCERF's added value lies in its ability to fund capacity building of community-based CSOs while building bridges with national and local authorities. Drawing on its experience across contexts such as the Western Balkans and Kyrgyzstan, GCERF brings tested models for trauma-informed care, vocational reintegration, child-focused educational support, and stigma reduction through inclusive community engagement. Informed by consultations and evidence, its approach centres on strengthening local frontline workers' capacity — training psychologists, social workers, parents, teachers, mahalla committees — while enabling government–civil society collaboration.

By investing in locally grounded, context-sensitive, and sustainable responses, GCERF-funded interventions will fill critical gaps in Uzbekistan's current R&R and PVE system: expanding trauma care where few professionals exist, supporting social workers, improving returnee livelihoods, and reducing reoffending risk through post-release reintegration programming. Its focus on early prevention, especially in the online space, data-driven monitoring, and national ownership ensures that solutions are sustainable, scalable, and aligned with Uzbekistan's National Strategy and top security priorities.

Lessons Learned and Good Practices

GCERF has ensured quantitative and qualitative monitoring and evaluation of the last five years of R&R and PVE programming in GCERF partner countries. Efforts include rigorous monthly activity monitoring by National Advisors; quarterly monitoring by the GCERF Secretariat; external baseline, midline, and endline evaluations; and independent third-party monitoring. The main findings and lessons learned from GCERF expertise, as well as country needs assessment and consultations with stakeholders in Uzbekistan, include:

Rehabilitation & Reintegration (R&R)

- **Reintegration is most effective when grounded in positive community support networks.** Central Asia's experience shows that R&R efforts succeed when rooted in strong, trusted networks of care. Families, counsellors, and community-based organisations have been essential in helping returnees feel safe, supported, and reintegrated. In Uzbekistan, civil society organisations have adapted existing models of psychosocial care to serve returnees, particularly those without family support. These relationships foster a sense of belonging — seen not just as service provision, but as returnees being embraced as inseparable members of society.
- **Capacity and referral services:** Social workers in Uzbekistan supported by UNCEF doing direct case management for returnees are equipped with tools to measure needs and progress. This represents significant progress and is a critical tool for individual case management, but an external assessment measuring against goals agreed upon by all stakeholders with key results shared and gaps in service provision, will help to direct additional resources and capacity building where it is most needed.
- **R&R work needs to be complemented with PVE**. R&R without addressing the drivers of radicalisation risks re-radicalisation and community resistance. PVE efforts create an enabling environment for successful reintegration, particularly of women, children, and youth.
- **Trained local practitioners are best placed to support returnees and should be retained.** Uzbekistan has developed strong, locally informed reintegration models through CSO partnerships. These should be preserved and replicated as external funding declines, especially to support early intervention and post-prison support.
- **Reintegration support depends on better trauma-informed approaches tailored to local realities.** Despite positive reintegration outcomes, in Uzbekistan, long-term trauma remains a serious challenge, especially among adolescents. Practitioners need more accessible, context-sensitive training — most have not received clinical instruction, and some past trainings assumed prior knowledge or ignored linguistic and cultural contexts.
- **Locally owned, flexible definitions of success improve reintegration outcomes and resource allocation.** Clear, shared definitions of success — without becoming rigid benchmarks — can help coordinate limited resources and prioritise the most vulnerable returnees. Locally developed indicators strengthen arguments for continued support and ensure beneficiaries don't fall through the cracks.
- **Multi-sectoral and dedicated casework is essential for returnees and can benefit entire communities.** Returnees face multifaceted challenges best addressed through coordinated case management. Similar to refugee resettlement or child

welfare approaches, community-based networks can fill systemic gaps. Caseworkers must adapt support over time, especially as children transition to adolescence and face new risks and needs.

- **Social worker training is a national priority, and reintegration actors can help fill the gap.** The Uzbek government has scaled up social work roles through the managerial team known as "mahalla seven"[11], but lacks trained professionals. Returnee support organisations are well-positioned to help train new hires and guide vocational pathways to build long-term capacity.
- **Peer-led mental health support is effective and scalable in under-resourced settings.** Successful models from Tajikistan show peer support groups can identify mental health needs early and connect individuals to services, even where clinical resources are limited. This model could be adapted for returnees in rural areas.

Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE)

- **Effective prevention means tackling root causes (injustice, marginalisation, etc.).** Simplistic views linking extremism solely to religious ideology miss deeper drivers. Programmes should address root causes like trauma, social exclusion and injustice. Youth and migrants – of all genders – are key target groups.
- **Communities can tackle extremism drivers better than top-down, securitised approaches alone.** Community-based grassroots CSOs already address core PVE issues — rights, equality, and inclusion. Engaging them as genuine partners strengthens trust, access, and relevance. Care must be taken to avoid stigmatising them as government proxies or foreign agents.
- **Early signs of radicalisation need community-based responses.** Probationary approaches are a step forward, but harsh restrictions still risk worsening radicalisation drivers. Establishing trusted, non-punitive community referral networks enables early, constructive interventions and fosters cooperation from families and communities.
- **Defining who is at risk at the beginning of a programme is a critical component of design.** Although definitions of "at risk" vary, clear community-informed criteria are essential for activity design and outcome evaluation. These definitions should consider multidimensional, local factors linked to VE vulnerability.
- **Livelihoods and income-generating activities should focus on specific risk groups** that lack livelihood skills that entail vocational skills, life skills, entrepreneurship and employability skills that help individuals earn a sustainable income, either through employment or self-employment. Targeting those particularly at risk can generate a far larger impact than targeting 'young people' or 'women' in general.
- **Investing in digital literacy is essential to countering online radicalisation**, which is currently on the rise in Central Asia. Alternative messages and the informed use of AI and digital technology can increase the scope and reach of prevention efforts.

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[11] Initially composed of five members — chairperson, *hokim* (head of the local executive authority) assistant, women's activist, youth leader, and prevention inspector — the *mahalla* traditional institution structure was expanded in the 2023 reform to include a tax inspector and a social worker. This structure came to be known as the *mahalla seven*, reflecting its broader mandate and enhanced capacity to resolve social and administrative issues at the community level.

- **PVE is a long-term investment to build local capacity.** GCERF's model in Uzbekistan reflects a phased, sustainable approach with a strong emphasis on building local systems for R&R and prevention. The aim is a smooth exit that leaves behind resilient local structures.

Context and Drivers of Violent Extremism in Uzbekistan

The Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) continues to attract returning fighters from Syria and Iraq.[12] Extensive research demonstrated that VE in Uzbekistan must be understood within the broader historical, political, and social context of the post-Soviet transition and regional instability in Central Asia. Since gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has experienced various incidents of political violence and radicalisation, both shaped by internal grievances and influenced by external conflict dynamics. Understanding the drivers of VE requires distinguishing between domestic pressures that fuel discontent and the influence of transnational ideologies and conflicts that attract marginalised individuals. The discourse increasingly reflects global trends of populist, anti-liberal sentiment rather than direct calls to violence or recruitment.

Understanding the motivations behind mobilisation to Syria and Iraq is key to designing effective R&R responses. Contrary to assumptions that link women's travel to Syria solely with ideological conviction, evidence from returnee support programmes in Uzbekistan and in the region suggests that fewer than 20% of women were motivated by religious or political ideology. Instead, most women experienced coercion, manipulation, family pressure, or sought protection, economic support, or family reunification in the face of local insecurity or instability. These women, and their children, were exposed to sustained violence, trauma, and control under extremist groups, many of which also functioned as criminal enterprises engaging in human trafficking, forced marriage, sexual violence, and child recruitment. As such, their needs are complex and extend far beyond conventional deradicalisation frameworks.

Internal Drivers of Violent Extremism

Political factors
Following independence, Uzbekistan's approach to political and religious expression was shaped by the imperative to preserve national unity, social cohesion, and public safety during a time of significant regional and institutional transition. In this context, religiously inspired political movements were viewed with caution, and policy responses often emphasised security and precaution.[13] Today, there is growing recognition of the

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[12] Lucas Webber and Cat Cadenhead, Islamic State Khurasan Province's International Expansion and Growing Online Activities, Tech Against Terrorism Analysis, in *Global Terrorism Index 2025* (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2025), p. 74.

[13] Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. (2023). Religious Policy in Uzbekistan. https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/religious-policy-in-uzbekistan

importance of fostering inclusive political participation and enabling constructive engagement with religious and community actors.[14]

Socioeconomic disparities and youth disempowerment
Economic frustration, unemployment, and limited access to quality education—particularly in rural and underserved regions—contribute to widespread frustration among youth and marginalised populations.[15] In the absence of meaningful livelihood opportunities or upward mobility, extremist ideologies may offer a compelling sense of identity, justice, and purpose. Labour migrants, returnees, and young people disconnected from school or work are particularly vulnerable.

Psychosocial Vulnerability and Unaddressed Trauma
Many individuals—particularly citizens repatriated from conflict zones—have endured profound trauma resulting from violence, abuse, and forced displacement.[16] As Uzbekistan undertakes structural reforms of its mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) systems, access to trauma-informed care remains limited, especially at the community level. This gap increases the risk of emotional withdrawal, behavioural difficulties, and, in some cases, susceptibility to radicalisation as a means of coping with unresolved psychological distress.[17]

Fragmented Social Support and Service Gaps
Returnees and other vulnerable individuals, including migrant workers, often lack access to coordinated, person-centred services. Navigating disconnected legal, health, and educational systems without guidance can deepen frustration and exclusion. In many areas, informal or unregulated networks step in to fill service gaps—some of which may promote ideological agendas that contribute to radicalisation.[18]

Gender Inequality and Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

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[14] UNDP (2016). *Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity.* https://www.undp.org/publications/preventing-violent-extremism-through-inclusive-development-and-promotion-tolerance-and-respect-diversity

[15] Global Policy Institute. (2025). The Rising Tide of Extremism: Why Central Asian Youth Are Drawn to Terrorist Groups- An Inside Mind Theory. https://globalpi.org/research/the-rising-tide-of-extremism-why-central-asian-youth-are-drawn-to-terrorist-groups-an-inside-mind-theory/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[16] UNICEF. (October 2019) Returning of repatriated families to normal life. https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/normal-life-for-repatriated

[17] UNOCT & UNICEF (2022). *Handbook on Children Affected by the Foreign-Fighter Phenomenon.* https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/0918_ftf_handbook_web_reduced.pdf

[18] UNRCCA. (2024). UNRCCA, UNOCT, OSCE and Government of Uzbekistan organizes the first meeting of the working groups of the Regional Expert Council on Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returnees. https://unrcca.unmissions.org/unrcca-unoct-osce-and-government-uzbekistan-organizes-first-meeting-working-groups-regional-expert

Entrenched patriarchal norms and persistent gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) further weaken protective factors against violent extremism [19] Women and girls facing abuse, early marriage, or exclusion may view extremist narratives as offering structure, meaning, or escape.[20] Adolescent girls without family support, particularly orphans, are especially vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation.

External Drivers of Violent Extremism

Radicalisation Abroad and Conflict-Driven Migration

The majority of Uzbek citizens who became involved in violent extremist groups did so after leaving the country, often as labour migrants or displaced individuals seeking opportunity or safety abroad.[21] Uzbeks in labour migration abroad often face exclusion, marginalisation, illegal residence and employment, overexploitation, securitisation, financial debt, and lack of access to both secular and religious education.[22] One of the most common approaches to recruiting Uzbek migrants involves offering financial incentives — small payments or material support — and exposing individuals to ideological guidance.[23] These individuals often lack integration into host societies and remain vulnerable to recruitment by groups promising identity, justice, and agency. Available research on mobilisation to violent extremism, patterns of arrests on extremism charges, and life pathway interviews with returnees all suggest that youth and labour migrants (both men and women) are broadly demographic categories vulnerable to mobilisation. Many were radicalised in transit or destination countries, particularly in conflict-affected regions such as Syria and Iraq.[24] These experiences expose individuals to trauma, coercion, or recruitment by transnational extremist networks, creating challenges upon return to Uzbekistan.

Online Extremist Narratives and Transnational Propaganda

Extremist groups and ideologues—often based outside Uzbekistan—have adapted their messaging to appeal to Central Asian audiences through digital platforms.[25] Online content promoted by ideologically aligned actors often frames Uzbek state structures as illegitimate or repressive and proposes alternative governance based on rigid interpretations of religion. These messages, while sometimes subtle or non-violent in tone, can influence at-risk individuals and normalise distrust of national institutions.

Regional Instability and Cross-Border Influence

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[19] UN Women. Women and Violent Extremism in Europe and Central Asia. (2017). https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/10/women-and-violent-extremism-in-europe-and-central-asia

[20] OSCE (2020). *Gender Mainstreaming in PVE in Central Asia*

[21] BBC. (2017). Why Uzbek migrants are being radicalised. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41834729

[22] Mohammed S. Elshimi, with Raffaello Pantucci, Sarah Lain, and Nadine L. Salman, *Understanding the Factors Contributing to Radicalisation Among Central Asian Labour Migrants in Russia* (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies and Search for Common Ground, 2018).

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Tucker, Noah. "Foreign Fighters, Returnees and a Resurgent Taliban", *Security and Human Rights* 32, 1-4 (2022): 69-82, doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-bja10010.

[25] News Mention: How ISIS-K is Redefining International Terrorism in the Digital Age. (2025). https://techagainstterrorism.org/in-the-news/how-isis-k-is-redefining-international-terrorism-in-the-digital-age

Uzbekistan's geographical proximity to regions experiencing persistent conflict and instability — most notably Afghanistan — creates exposure to cross-border ideological, human, and material flows.[26] Porous borders can be exploited by extremist networks for the distribution of radical literature or the movement of foreign fighters. Regional unrest can also amplify perceptions of insecurity and contribute to feelings of solidarity with broader transnational causes.

Global Grievances and Identity-Based Mobilisation

Transnational narratives about the oppression of Muslim communities globally are often leveraged by extremist actors to cultivate a sense of injustice, victimhood, and religious obligation.[27] These narratives may resonate with individuals who already feel marginalised and can be particularly influential when combined with localised grievances or personal experiences of exclusion.[28]

Diaspora Influence and VEO-Adjacent Messaging

Segments of the Uzbek diaspora, particularly those who have relocated to countries with limited integration support or exposure to extremist ideologies, may act as conduits for radical messaging. In some cases, religious influencers living abroad promote moral conservatism or ideologies that, while not explicitly violent, undermine inclusive discourses and promote rigid identity boundaries that can contribute to radicalisation over time.[29]

Addressing these external drivers requires international cooperation, investment in digital literacy and counter-narratives, and strengthened systems for the reintegration and psychosocial support of returnees. Regional dialogue, border management, and information-sharing mechanisms must be coupled with community-level resilience-building to ensure that external influences do not undermine national peace and security.

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[26] European Parliament. (2023). https://techagainstterrorism.org/in-the-news/how-isis-k-is-redefining-international-terrorism-in-the-digital-age

[27] Janybek kyzy, Myrzaiym. "Central Asia Fears Israel-Gaza War Could Fuel Radicalisation." CABAR.asia, October 26, 2023. https://cabar.asia/en/central-asia-fears-israel-gaza-war-could-fuel-radicalisation.

[28] Khurshid, I. Emergence of Terrorism in Central Asia: Roots, Drivers, and Implications. International Center for Peace Studies, 26 November 2024. https://www.icpsnet.org/issuebrief/emergence-of-terrorism-in-central-asia

[29] Heathershaw, J. and Lemon, E. How can we explain radicalisation among Central Asia's migrants? openDemocracy, 2 May 2017. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/can-we-explain-radicalisation-among-central-asia-s-migrants/

Country Portfolio Objectives & Priority Programming Areas

GCERF aims to strengthen community resilience and prevent violent extremism by supporting comprehensive rehabilitation, reintegration, and prevention programmes for vulnerable returnees and at-risk groups, including youth, migrants and former offenders convicted of violent extremism. This will be achieved through the key objectives.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration (R&R)

Objective 1: Strengthening Local Capacity for Community Resilience and Sustainable Reintegration (R&R) of Returnee Women and Children from Iraq and Northeast Syria

Enhance government and community-based mechanisms for R&R by leveraging best practices to address the medium- and long-term needs of returnee women and children from Iraq and Northeast Syria, in their reintegration journey.[30]

Strategy 1: Enhance Capacity for Coordinated Support
Bolster the professional skills of frontline workers and key community stakeholders by building on existing government-led case management and R&R mechanisms. Ensure all individuals possess the updated skills needed for effective case management and sustained support, strengthening local capacity for long-term R&R.

Objective 2: R&R Support for Returnee Women and Children from Iraq, Northeast Syria and Most Vulnerable Women and Children in the Immediate Community

Address the medium- and long-term needs of returnees and their communities by building on existing government-led mechanisms. Reduce socio-economic vulnerability and provide direct support to individuals, ensuring durable reintegration and fostering resilient communities.[31]

Strategy 1: Boost Economic Stability and Social Integration of Returnee Women and Children from Iraq, Northeast Syria
Build on the initial reintegration phase by providing vocational, educational, and entrepreneurial opportunities. This will reduce socio-economic vulnerability and foster durable social integration, which contributes to lasting stability and indirectly addresses the root causes of social instability

Strategy 2: Deliver Child-Centric Support for Returnee Children and Most Vulnerable Children in Immediate Community
Supplement government-provided systems with flexible and inclusive learning environments to ensure the long-term well-being of repatriated children. Promote their long-term development and successful social integration.

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[30] [31] Financed through EU/FPI in collaboration with Hedayah and the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IIJ).

Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE)

Objective 3. Enhance Youth Resilience against Online Radicalisation

Proactively engage Uzbek youth to resist extremist ideologies by empowering them with critical thinking skills and media and digital literacy, fostering a strong sense of civic identity, and equipping them to navigate and resist online radicalisation. (This objective falls under investment Scenario 2 and is subject to funding availability).

Strategy 1: *Direct Youth Empowerment and Positive Engagement*
Provide youth with the tools to critically evaluate online content and engage them through positive, relatable narratives, identify propaganda, and understand the tactics used for online radicalisation.

Strategy 2: Develop and Disseminate Alternative Narratives and Positive Role Models
Creating compelling awareness campaigns that address root causes of violent extremism, emphasising family values, cultural heritage, and opportunities for positive engagement with peers, parents and communities. These campaigns should be delivered through various channels, including online platforms, youth-friendly media, and community initiatives, featuring diverse and relatable role models.

Strategy 3: Empower Community and Youth Leaders as Agents of Prevention
Train local mahalla activists, educators, youth workers, religious leaders, and community leaders in root causes of radicalisation and violent extremism and to engage with youth effectively. These leaders will be equipped to facilitate discussions, provide mentorship, and implement life skills programmes that build family and social cohesion and offer positive pathways for youth development and empowerment, both offline and online.

Objective 4: Enhance Rehabilitation of Former Offenders in Correctional Facilities and Post-Release Reintegration Support

Develop and implement comprehensive prevention and rehabilitation programmes within correctional facilities to address extremist ideologies, promote mental well-being, and prepare former offenders for successful reintegration into society. (This objective falls under investment Scenario 2 and is subject to funding availability.)

Strategy 1: Implement Comprehensive In-Prison PVE Programmes
Develop and deliver tailored programmes within correctional facilities to address extremist ideologies and underlying psychological vulnerabilities. This approach provides a holistic foundation for disengagement from VE.

Strategy 2: Facilitate Pre-Release Planning and Reintegration Pathways
Prepare former offenders for a successful and safe return to society, thereby preventing recidivism and supporting long-term stability.

Geographic and Institutional Scope

While there are no publicly available data pinpointing particularly vulnerable regions in Uzbekistan to violent extremism, areas with higher rates of mobilisation and detention of banned religious and extremist groups are often considered susceptible. GCERF has selected the following geographic locations for programming based on the feedback from key stakeholders at the Country Support Mechanism and the review of existing data on the concentration of repatriated citizens and the incidence of violent extremism.

GCERF proposes a nationwide rollout of its programming on the rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) of returnees and the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) across all 14 administrative regions of Uzbekistan, including the Republic of Karakalpakstan, Tashkent city, and 12 provinces. This comprehensive geographic coverage is both a strategic imperative and a practical necessity, based on a combination of risk exposure, reintegration needs, and opportunities to enhance national resilience.

While border regions are often viewed as higher risk due to cross-border movement and illicit trafficking of extremist materials, the drivers of radicalisation are complex and manifest across the entire country. Socioeconomic exclusion, poor access to services, marginalisation of youth and women, and exposure to online extremist narratives are not limited to peripheral areas. Urban centres and rural communities alike face unique vulnerabilities that, if unaddressed, could become fertile ground for radicalisation.

Additionally, repatriated citizens from conflict zones have been resettled in diverse regions, not only in the east or along borders. A localised R&R response would risk reinforcing disparities and undermining equitable reintegration, especially for vulnerable individuals requiring long-term psychosocial, legal, educational, and livelihood support.

Mahallas
Uzbekistan has adopted a distinctive approach to R&R that effectively utilises the ancient institution of the mahalla (neighbourhood council), which plays a significant role in supporting the successful R&R of women and children returnees, demonstrating innovative strategies and offering valuable lessons for broader international application.

Recent reforms have revitalised Uzbekistan's mahalla system to address modern-day challenges. In December 2023, the Association of Mahallas of Uzbekistan was established, bringing together 9,452 mahallas and strengthening their role as a vital bridge between citizens and the state.[32]

The mahalla institution has been actively supporting the reintegration of returnees by encouraging their participation in community traditions, celebrations, weddings and funerals. Some stakeholders have recommended expanding support to under-resourced

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[32] United Nations. (2024). Common Country Analysis Uzbekistan.
https://uzbekistan.un.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/Common%20Country%20Analysis%20Uzbekistan.pdf

mahallas by providing educational materials and sports equipment, and by organising sporting events and art workshops for youth and repatriated children. These activities would help returnees rebuild trust, self-worth, and a connection with their communities.

Mahallas are also implementing proactive conflict prevention initiatives to ensure fair and transparent resource distribution, reducing the risk of tension. Their support spans multiple areas: psychological monitoring, including regular assessments of family wellbeing and early intervention; financial support through employment assistance and entrepreneurship development tailored to individual capacities and market needs; vocational training linked to local economic demand; and social integration via access to benefits and inclusive community engagement. Uzbekistan's experience demonstrates that community-led, holistic reintegration through the mahalla system can be both effective and low-risk.

GCERF programming will focus on targeted mahallas in the home communities where the most vulnerable returnee women and children are concentrated, while also building the capacity of frontline workers, as these environments provide the most effective entry points for delivering community-based casework.

Schools

Priority will be given to schools located within the home communities of child returnees, particularly in mahallas identified as having higher concentrations of vulnerable youth and reintegration challenges. Selecting schools with existing links to community structures, such as mahalla committees and local organisations, enhances the sustainability and impact of interventions.

Demographic Focus

Vulnerable women and children returnees from Northeast Syria and Iraq

Women Returnees

Some returnee women continue to live with unaddressed psychological distress, and survey data show that up to 50% may be at risk of developing serious mental health issues such as PTSD or depression.[33] While many adult returnee women have adapted to their new roles in society, they continue to face significant economic barriers. Some have remarried or sought to remarry as a means of gaining social stability, yet this process can introduce new vulnerabilities. In contexts where legal and religious norms around marriage diverge, women are sometimes pressured by family or economic necessity into informal marriages (e.g., *nikoh*) that lack legal protection. These arrangements can be unstable and often leave women with additional children to support, but without access to child support, inheritance, or legal recourse. Moreover, the stigma associated with being a returnee, a widow, a

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[33] Razdykova, G., Tucker, N., Ellis, H., Orell, R., Birman, D., & Weine, S. M. (2024). *Operation Jusan in Year 4: Understanding and Addressing Present and Future Needs*. CREST (UK). https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/operation-jusan-in-year-4/

divorcee, or a single mother often compounds the challenges they face when seeking employment or housing. In many cases, economic insecurity intersects with social pressure, leading women to make high-risk decisions to relieve their families of financial burden. Lessons from other countries in the region show that such vulnerabilities are best addressed through long-term, trust-based relationships with caseworkers who can provide timely interventions, connect women to appropriate services, and offer viable alternatives when informal arrangements break down.

<u>Children Returnees</u>
In Uzbekistan have generally been well supported through the education system, and the Ministry of Education regularly monitors their academic performance using standardised tools. However, educational indicators such as enrolment, attendance, and test scores do not always capture the full complexity of a child's experience. While most children are reintegrating successfully, some — particularly those who returned unaccompanied or with significant educational gaps — face serious barriers. These may include learning difficulties, psychological trauma, or developmental delays, and in some cases, unreported absenteeism or early dropout due to family pressure to marry, especially among girls. Anecdotal evidence from the region suggests that school staff may feel pressure to embellish performance metrics or underreport dropout rates, particularly for vulnerable girls in guardianship arrangements. While Uzbekistan appears to have managed these risks more effectively than some neighbours, continued vigilance and independent monitoring are needed to ensure no child falls through the cracks. Dedicated caseworkers who can coordinate between families, schools, and health services are critical for identifying evolving needs and responding early to signs of distress or neglect. Moreover, reinforcing protective environments—both at school and within extended families—can help prevent secondary harm and enable children to thrive academically and socially. Children, especially those returning without a parent or who were placed in extended family care, have faced inconsistent support and are at higher risk of falling through systemic gaps.

Community and family members in targeted *mahallas*
In Uzbekistan, the longstanding institution of the mahalla, complemented by the "My Family" approach, offers a uniquely effective framework for reintegration, as it fosters positive and trust-based community organisations essential for sustainable social inclusion. Community-based organisations, such as Barqaror Hayot, have placed particular emphasis on supporting families acting as guardians to vulnerable children—especially orphans and those born to mothers serving sentences in Iraqi prisons—who often face profound challenges. These children frequently lack connections to their biological relatives, complicating initial rehabilitation efforts. Furthermore, host families may be unprepared emotionally and lack the necessary skills to care for and educate these children adequately. Recognising these complexities, targeted support has been prioritised for such families to address both social and emotional needs comprehensively. Consultations with stakeholders have underscored the urgent need to reduce stigma within communities, emphasising that equipping community leaders with training in trauma care, conflict resolution, mentoring, and radicalisation awareness is vital. Complementary campaigns and community events aimed at promoting tolerance and cohesion are also crucial to creating a supportive environment for returnees.

Frontline workers

Frontline workers play a pivotal role in the successful R&R of returnees. Community imams, as trusted religious leaders, have a unique capacity to engage with returnees on moral guidance, helping to promote peaceful and inclusive discourses aligned with community values. Probation officers play a vital role in monitoring and supporting returnees during their transition back into society, ensuring compliance with legal frameworks while facilitating access to social and vocational services.

However, practitioners frequently face challenges including insufficient supervision, professional burnout, and limited access to formal mental health referral pathways. This is particularly acute in rural and under-resourced regions where specialised support remains scarce or entirely absent. Moreover, without proper support and capacity-building, the effectiveness of frontline workers in managing the complex and multifaceted needs of vulnerable returnees is compromised. Strengthening the capacity of these professionals is therefore essential to building a robust local response to R&R and PVE. Professional development tailored to SMART case management and referral, trauma-informed care, conflict resolution, and awareness of root causes of radicalisation equips frontline workers with the knowledge and skills required to manage the multifaceted challenges faced by returnees and the frontline workers themselves.

Youth under 30 years old

Youth are a crucial demographic for PVE efforts in Uzbekistan due to a combination of socioeconomic vulnerabilities and their high engagement with digital platforms. Youth unemployment and limited educational and economic opportunities can create feelings of disenfranchisement, making them susceptible to extremist narratives that promise a sense of purpose, identity, and belonging. Extremist groups exploit this disillusionment by using platforms like Telegram to disseminate propaganda and recruit, effectively creating online echo chambers that accelerate the radicalisation process.[34] Given that youth under 30 represent a significant portion of the population and are often the most frequent perpetrators of extremism-related crimes in the country, a demographic focus on this group is essential for building long-term community resilience and preventing social instability.[35]

Former offenders convicted of violent extremism

According to official statistics, Uzbekistan has significantly reduced its overall prison population — from approximately 44,000 in 2014 to 22,867 by the end of 2020, marking an almost 50 per cent reduction in six years.[36] The National Strategy, adopted in 2021, highlights the pardoning of over 2,000 individuals who had served prison sentences for offences

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[34] Foreign Policy. (2020). Jihadist Networks Dig In on Social Media Across Central Asia. https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/11/11/online-extremism-central-asia-islamic-state-terrorism/

[35] Karavanserai. (2023). Uzbekistan steps up efforts to curb online extremist ideology. https://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2023/06/06/feature-01

[36] World Prison Brief releases data on the number of convicts in Uzbekistan's prisons. Kun.uz, 25 October 2021. https://kun.uz/en/87757688#!

related to extremism or terrorism, with more than 1,500 released from places of deprivation of liberty.[37] This Strategy explicitly recognises the importance of preventing the spread of extremist ideologies within the penitentiary system and calls for strengthening preventive measures, including improving penitentiary practices and supporting reintegration.

Although official data on returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) remains limited, public records show that individuals returning from conflict zones — including Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan — have received significant prison sentences under terrorism charges. In 2018, local media reported that a Ferghana district court sentenced an Uzbek national who had returned from Syria and was allegedly planning an attack abroad to 15 years in prison.[38] Another individual, reportedly recruited by a terrorist group and who had escaped detention in Turkey, received a 10-year sentence upon return to Uzbekistan.[39] These cases illustrate the continuing relevance of this demographic in national security and reintegration strategies.

GCERF consultations with stakeholders consistently emphasise the importance of engaging newly released former offenders convicted of violent extremism and terrorism to reduce the risk of radicalisation. This requires a holistic, preventative approach that addresses key drivers such as stigma, economic marginalisation, unresolved trauma, and social disconnection.

Theory of Change (ToC)

All grants funded under this strategy will be aligned with the country-level Theory of Change (ToC), which allows GCERF to evaluate the cumulative effect of its programming. All proposed grantee programming should be able to be reflected in the ToC and should use a selection of the country-level indicators included below.

Problem statement
Uzbekistan has demonstrated a comprehensive and proactive approach to the repatriation and reintegration of over 530 individuals from Syria and Iraq through its "Mehr" humanitarian operations since 2019. The ongoing implementation of the 2022-2025 Action Plan acknowledges evolving challenges, particularly complex medical and orthopaedic needs among 8-10% of returnees, the necessity for enhanced educational and sports infrastructure in regions of high returnee concentration, and the need to expand professional development for specialists, alongside increased entrepreneurship programmes to mitigate the risk of social instability due to a lack of stable income.

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[37] lex.uz (2021). On approval of the National Strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan on countering extremism and terrorism for 2021 — 2026. https://lex.uz/docs/5491628

[38] Soliev, Nodirbek. (2021). Tracing the Fate of Central Asian Fighters in Syria: Remainers, Repatriates, Returnees, and Relocators. Perspectives on Terrorism. 15. 125-140.

[39] *Ibid.*

Women, children, and families undergoing reintegration from Iraq and Northeast Syria or individuals released after convictions related to violent extremism often experience severe, untreated trauma and general mental health burden. However, they do not always report mental health issues and do not get treatment in the country with a limited mental health system that counts only about 0.08 psychologists per 100,000 residents and lacks child-centred counselling services. This situation leaves social workers overstretched and incapable of addressing the burden. Furthermore, being faced with limited availability of vocational training, seed capital, and difficulties accessing decent employment has meant that many of such households experience reduced income, factors that have been repeatedly identified by local social workers as increasing the risk of recidivism. Some child returnees are faced with significant language barriers, resulting in poor educational outcomes. Public opinion surveys show trust in former VE offenders remains lower than in other ex-offenders, fuelling stigma that potentially impedes their reintegration.

Digital connectivity now adds a new layer of risk: with internet penetration above 85 percent, some VE actors routinely circulate Uzbek-language propaganda on Telegram and other platforms[40], which the OSCE monitoring warns of "radicalisation to violence in the online space"[41], and prompting a media-literacy initiative in 2023. Within the penitentiary system, there are warnings of a heightened risk of recruitment by extremist networks, underscoring the need for comprehensive rehabilitation and post-release follow-up.

Response
These intertwined mental health, socioeconomic, educational and attitudinal challenges create a complex ecosystem in which sustainably preventing recidivism and re-radicalisation requires coordinated and culturally acceptable support across multiple sectors. GCERF therefore, under different funding scenarios conceptualising its response, in line with the two key objectives on R&R and PVE;

Rehabilitation and Reintegration (R&R) (Objectives 1 and 2)

IF GCERF funds CSOs to expand community-based services via training frontline responders in trauma counselling and non-stigmatising outreach, ensuring that existing or additional services serve returnees and other vulnerable residents in equal measure;

IF GCERF, through its local partners, support integrated livelihood initiatives preceded by context-based needs assessment, vocational training, entrepreneurial capacity building, and public-private apprenticeships complemented with targeted mentorship;

IF GCERF supports CSOs and educational stakeholders to deliver extracurricular activities, accelerated learning, and mentorship programmes, while strengthening school

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[40] Pannier, B. (2024, November 19). Countering a "Great Jihad" in Central Asia. Foreign Policy Research Institute. https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/11/countering-a-great-jihad-in-central-asia/
[41] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. (2024, November 13). 2023 annual report on the implementation of the 1994 Declaration on measures to eliminate international terrorism: Legal and political framework (13 November 2024). https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/9/580564.pdf

psychologists to provide needed services to help children reintegrate into schools and with peers;

IF GCERF, through its partners, strengthens the capacity and collaboration of trusted community actors and local information networks and media to lead inclusive, stigma-reducing engagement processes that fosters collective prevention to violent-extremist influence within targeted areas;

Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) (Objectives 3 and 4)

IF GCERF facilitates CSO partnerships with relevant stakeholders within the education sector to embed media and PVE digital literacy into the education curriculum along with structured capacity building for teachers, community and religious leaders on the contextual factors of radicalisation and violent extremism;

IF GCERF supports the implementation of comprehensive community prevention efforts comprising of; a. community-wide campaigns aimed at disseminating alternative narratives and strengthening the need for peaceful coexistence and b. training and equipping youth representatives to become agents of change, implementing initiatives that foster linking[42] and bridging capital. [43]

IF GCERF supports local CSOs and media partners to co-develop and deliver digital literacy programmes, including training youth, community influencers, and platform moderators in identifying and reporting extremist content in online spaces and builds capacity of civil society and government actors to monitor, analyse and respond to evolving online propaganda;

IF GCERF partners with justice and religious authorities to strengthen risk assessment, rehabilitative dialogue and post-release livelihood support for former detainees, and tailored training on PVE risk factors, analysis of intelligence data and referral pathways for prison psychologists, and officials;

IF GCERF finances a cascade training and referral system in which experienced social-service actors and CSOs jointly learn PVE risk factors, case-management skills and cross-sector referral protocols, and then meet regularly with government representatives to coordinate and implement follow-up

AND if the following assumptions are true during the investment cycle:

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[42] Linking capital refers to how individuals to institutions and authorities such as their trust in law enforcement or government agencies (Grossman et al. 2022)
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330701237_Understanding_Youth_Resilience_to_Violent_Extremism_A_Standardised_Research_Measure_FINAL_RESEARCH_REPORT
[43] Bridging capital is the representation of social interactions and relationships across different groups of people (Lampere-Englund et al. 2025)
https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1537492/full#ref11

- National authorities and regional government actors continue to approve civil-society participation in rehabilitation and reintegration, keep prison access protocols in force, and maintain the 2024 NGO-friendly amendments.
- Experienced social workers, psychologists, teachers, imams, parents and probation officers remain available for cascade mentoring, mobile outreach and prevention programme as data-sharing agreements let them coordinate cases safely.
- GCERF's local partners operate under economic conditions (inflation, labour demand) predictable enough for micro-loans, stipends, apprenticeships and other livelihood interventions to deliver real value.
- There are no major extremist incidents, public-health emergencies or social backlash that disrupts community trust in returnees or movement of staff.

THEN,

The following outcomes are likely to be achieved:
- Strengthened, nationally coordinated reintegration service-chain capacity, with frontline actors and CSOs applying harmonised case-management protocols.
- Improved psychosocial well-being among vulnerable women returnees and their children, supported by nationally endorsed community-based mental health tools and practitioner training.
- Enhanced economic resilience of women returnees and their households, evidenced by stable earnings above the subsistence line and access to follow-on financing for business growth
- Improved educational reintegration and peer acceptance of returnee pupils backed by system-wide resource allocation for catch-up learning and supportive school personnel, all within a community-wide ecosystem with favourable public attitudes toward returnees.
- Reduced risk of radicalisation in digital spaces, evidenced by completion of market-relevant vocational, mentorship and life-skills programmes by former violent extremism offenders and increased proficiency of community members in identifying and countering extremist content in digital spaces.

RESULTING in a high-level impact:

At the end of the investment period, Uzbekistan's national and community systems are empowered with skilled frontline and civil-society actors, trauma-responsive services, inclusive economic and educational opportunities and resilient prison to community transition enable former offenders, their families and neighbours to live safely and productively together, thereby sustaining low recidivism and strengthening society-wide resilience to violent extremism.

Metrics for Measurement

Outcome Area	Metric for measurement
Outcome 1: National level functioning R&R system	• % of frontline actors certified to a common case-management standard (checklist aligned with the Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Case Management & Child Protection/Gender-Based Violence (CP/GBV)) • % of institutional actors reporting better collaboration between different institutions in the context of R&R and PVE • % of civil society organisations that reported that their relationship with the government in the area of R&R has improved **Output indicators** # of government frontline workers trained on R&R through trainings # of government frontline workers who received ongoing mentoring on R&R # of national and local government stakeholders and CSOs trained on case management
Outcome 2: Clinically significant mental wellbeing	• Mean change in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) severity (PCL-5 for adults; Child PTSD Symptom Scale for 8-17 yrs).[44] **Output indicators** # of returnees and their families provided with various psychosocial interventions aimed at improving mental health status
Outcome 3: Income above subsistence & access to follow-on finance	• % of participants with earnings ≥ State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics regional living-wage line (proxy of World Bank "adequate employment" metric) • Ability to recover from stress and shock index.[45] **Output indicator** # of returnees and their families who have received capacity development or vocational training
Outcome 4: Returnee pupils promoted & feel accepted within a broader society of acceptance towards returnees and their families	• Lower-secondary completion/promotion rate for returnee pupils, disaggregated for returnee/at-risk students. • % learners scoring ≥ "medium belonging" on the OECD *PISA Student Life-Satisfaction / Sense-of-Belonging* sub-scale (translated & contextualised to the Uzbek context) • % of community members who support returnees and their families living in their neighbourhood • % of returnees who report feeling fully accepted, useful, and safe within their community, measured by the IRS-6 former offenders' Readiness for Social Reintegration Scale.[46]

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[44] The American Psychiatric Association (APA)/VA gold-standard trauma scales.
[45] https://www.fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/paragraphs/documents/FSIN_TechnicalSeries_5.pdf
[46]https://migrantprotection.iom.int/en/resources/guideline/monitoring-and-evaluation-tools-return-and-reintegration-programmes

	Output indicators # of returnee children who received educational/ extracurricular support as a result of the project # of individuals reached by awareness or media campaigns # of people trained on various life skills interventions # of people who participate in cultural and sports activities # of local and religious leaders reached with various activities to facilitate the reintegration process # of journalists trained on communications for R&R
Outcome 5: Prevention of risks of radicalisation in prisons, online spaces and communities	% of VE former offenders completing a market-relevant vocational and mentorship training after release % of community members capable of identifying 3 out of 5 false or misleading extremist statements[47] % of community members who trust their neighbours[48] % of community members who do not support the use of violence to achieve personal, political and social goals **Output indicators** # of VE former offenders reached with integrated livelihood interventions # of community members participating in various activities aimed at strengthening capacity to counter online radicalisation
Cross-cutting indicator	Number of unique persons reached as a result of GCERF's investment in the country Programme sustainability potential index, measured with the PSAT tool[49]

Impact Indicator: Resilience to violent extremism index, measured using the Building Resilience Against Violent Extremism (BRAVE)[50] measure or another equivalent index, such as Activism and Radicalism Intention Scales (ARIS)[51] and Sympathy for Violent Radicalisation Scale (SyfoR).[52]

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[47] Measured using brief vignettes, to be developed hitherto grants baseline assessment.

[48] To be measured with Bogardus social distance scale.
 https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/social-sciences-and-humanities/prejudice-theory-bogardus-and-social-distance)

[49] Washington University in St. Louis. (2025). Program Sustainability Assessment Tool. Retrieved July 22, 2025, from https://sustaintool.org/

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Country Alignment and Coordination

GCERF has partnered with Hedayah and the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IIJ), with the financial support of the European Union, to support the Government of Uzbekistan's PVE and R&R programmes, and to effectively collaborate with all stakeholders to achieve shared objectives. Alignment and coordination with the Government's Strategy for PVE and CT, as well as with programmes implemented by other donors and CBOs, are ensured through the following mechanisms and roles:

GCERF National Advisor. A local National Advisor based in Tashkent plays a key role in strengthening coordination and consultation with in-country donors and other stakeholders.

Country Support Mechanism (CSM). The CSM was established jointly by GCERF and the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan (ISRS) in April 2025. Its membership list is attached. The CSM serves as an active coordination platform with broad and balanced participation from national institutions, community-based organisations, and international partners.

The CSM includes representatives from the State Security Service, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the General Prosecutor's Office, the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies, the Committee on Women and Family, the Committee on Religious Affairs, the Youth Affairs Agency, the Mahalla Association, the National Social Protection Agency, the European Union and GCERF, among others.

Several international organisations have been invited to participate as observers, including the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

A representative of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan (ISRS) has been appointed as the Chair of the CSM for GCERF. ISRS is responsible for forming and convening the CSM during its initial phase and may continue to coordinate inter-agency engagement as the mechanism evolves. The Chair leads and facilitates dialogue among CSM members, GCERF, and international donors.

Funding and Investment Scenarios

	Scenario 1	Scenario 2
Level of funding	up to **2**M USD	up to **4** M USD
Geographic Locations	All the Uzbekistan regions	
Interventions	1. **R&R:** Build on existing R&R best practices and strengthen local capacity to deliver tailored assistance for sustainable reintegration of vulnerable women and children returnees. 2. **R&R:** Support the R&R of vulnerable women and children returnees through specialised services and community-based initiatives, economic empowerment and inclusive child-focused services, and accessible educational, extracurricular and recreational infrastructure.	1. **R&R:** Build on existing R&R best practices and strengthen local capacity to deliver tailored assistance for sustainable reintegration of vulnerable women and children returnees. 2. **R&R:** Support the R&R of vulnerable women and children returnees through specialised services and community-based initiatives, economic empowerment and inclusive child-focused services, and accessible educational, extracurricular and recreational infrastructure. 3. **PVE:** Digital literacy, life skills, development of alternative narratives and online campaigns 4. **PVE**: Deliver mentorship programmes, provide mental health support, offer vocational training, and facilitate post-release reintegration of newly released offenders.
Demographic focus	• Vulnerable women and children returnees from Northeast Syria and Iraq • Community, parents and family members in targeted *mahallas* • Other vulnerable women, children and youth in targeted communities • Frontline workers (social workers, health workers, teachers, psychologists, imams, probation officers)	• Vulnerable women and children returnees from Northeast Syria and Iraq • Community, parents and family members in targeted *mahallas* • Other vulnerable women, children and youth in targeted communities • Frontline workers (social workers, health workers, teachers, psychologists, imams, probation officers) • Youth and migrant workers • Former offenders convicted of VE and terrorism

ED.08.25/DEC.02/DOC.01/Annex A

Entry, Transition and Exit strategy

Entry rationale

The GCERF 2025 Strategy outlines the criteria that guide decisions to initiate programming in specific countries and communities: [53]

There is a commitment by the national government and approval by the GCERF Governing Board

The Government of Uzbekistan invited GCERF for an introductory meeting in the capital city, Tashkent, in September 2023, and has been engaging with GCERF since then. In the summer of 2024, GCERF returned to Tashkent at the Government's invitation. In the same period, the GCERF Governing Board approved Uzbekistan as a partner country and requested the GCERF Secretariat to manage the process of the Republic of Uzbekistan joining the Board, as well as to support the development of a Country Support Mechanism (CSM). In November 2024, the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and GCERF signed a Memorandum of Understanding. The establishment of the CSM was completed in May 2025. These steps reflect a firm ongoing commitment from the Government of Uzbekistan, fulfilling this entry criterion.

There is an adequate funding commitment to allow GCERF to launch a meaningful and sustainable intervention

Funding is currently secured for Scenario 1 of the investment strategy in Uzbekistan (see "Funding and Investment Scenarios").

There is a strategic logic, for example, expanding GCERF's presence across a particular region or sector

With Kyrgyzstan investment having started in July 2024, Uzbekistan represents a second stage of the GCERF strategic expansion and scaling up into Central Asia. GCERF's engagement aims to support the Uzbekistan successes of R&R of vulnerable women and children returnees from Iraq and northeast Syria, and advance PVE efforts to address root causes, enable timely responses, and build lasting early prevention capacities.

Transition & Exit criteria

GCERF 2025 Strategy determines that its support to a country is no longer required when the GCERF model — locally driven, community-focused PVE practices integrated with national-level policies — has been successfully embedded in domestic responses; or local actors have demonstrated the capacity to build community resilience and implement effective PVE programmes independently. In addition, a transition may be triggered by consistently low performance, or a lack of engagement and support from state or non-state partners.

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[53] *GCERF Strategy 20*25, p. 15, available at GCERF-Strategy-2025-English.pdf

The GCERF 2025 Strategy has been designed with a strong emphasis on sustainability and capacity building to enable transition from Uzbekistan after the end of the investment period. This includes strengthening capacities at both national and local levels and preparing stakeholders to sustain and transfer knowledge. GCERF's investment in Uzbekistan aims to ensure durable support structures for PVE and R&R efforts, and to empower national actors to respond effectively to future challenges.

To assess the relevance and continuation of in-country support (across all portfolios), GCERF has identified the following criteria:

Ineligibility: The country is no longer eligible for GCERF funding — due to a lack of need, feasibility, or a change in Official Development Assistance (ODA) status.

Value added and complementarity: GCERF's approach continues to add value and complement national efforts and donor-supported PVE initiatives.

Grantee performance: Quarterly grant performance assessments allow the Secretariat to evaluate improvements in grantee capacity and determine when support is no longer necessary.

Government support: The GCERF model has been adopted by government actors, and the CSM functions as a sustainable platform for community-led PVE coordination.

Donor support: GCERF donors remain interested in supporting work in the country, considered alongside the other indicators.

Outcomes and impact: Programming continues to contribute meaningfully to GCERF's stated objectives at the country level.

Policy development: A clear national PVE policy is in place — or under development — and there is increased openness to civil society participation in PVE efforts.

An exit strategy should be developed collaboratively with the partner country to enable the progressive handover and assumption of responsibility over time. Following the conclusion of GCERF grants, there should be a demonstrated political and financial commitment from national stakeholders to continue supporting community-based prevention efforts. At the end of the current strategy period, GCERF will conduct a joint evaluation with relevant stakeholders to assess progress against established criteria and to determine both the need for and the feasibility of continued support.

Capacity Building, Learning, and Sustainability

Tailored Capacity Building for Local CSOs
Capacity building of local civil society organisations and existing community structures (mahalla institutions) will be a key aspect of upcoming GCERF-supported programmes. A capacity assessment and building tool will be developed to evaluate the current capacities of CSOs and community structures and provide them with tailored training and on-the-job support. GCERF plans to collaborate with UN agencies and international partners such as the EU, the U.S., and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to assess current capacities and develop a capacity-building tool. The capacity-building assessment is an ongoing process. GCERF will review the quarterly narrative and financial reports of grantees and the quarterly monitoring visits of the GCERF advisor to assess progress.

Thematic and Technical Training
GCERF will facilitate capacity building for its grantees and sub-grantees by linking global, regional, and national experts to local practitioners and actors in interactive workshops. Trainings cover both thematic and technical topics. Depending on grantee need, this can include communications, security and risk analysis and mitigation, programme management, finance and compliance, and monitoring and evaluation, as well as thematic trainings such as root causes or local drivers to violent extremism, mental health and psycho-social support, stigma-free service provision, developing proposals using the Theory of Change among others. GCERF will also roll out a digital literacy in P/CVE training programme that will be made available to grantees in Uzbekistan.

GCERF plans to offer grantees in Uzbekistan at least 2-3 thematic trainings during their first year of implementation. Given the lack of focus on the prevention of violent extremism, GCERF will likely start grantees off with some general training in PVE, conflict sensitivity, and gender inclusivity.

Global and Thematic Knowledge Sharing
In addition to training, GCERF also organises global and thematic Communities of Practice (CoPs) where GCERF partners from the region will meet either online or in person to share challenges, lessons learned and good practices. CoPs sometimes take the form of training as mentioned above or are more reflective workshops to learn from and build on each other's work in the region or on a particular theme.

Annexes

Annex 1. Summary of the Country Needs Assessment
Annex 2. Country Support Mechanism (CSM) Current Structure

Annex 1. Summary of the Country Needs Assessment

Beginning 2025, GCERF commissioned a country needs assessment to evaluate Uzbekistan's ongoing efforts and needs in reintegrating women and children returnees from Northeast Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, as well as in PVE. The aim of the report was to inform the current investment strategy and guide GCERF's future programming in Uzbekistan by identifying key needs and opportunities, as well as areas where GCERF can bring added value through its experience and approach.

Executive summary

Uzbekistan has emerged as a global leader in the repatriation and reintegration of women and children from the Syrian conflict. Through Operation Mehr and follow-up efforts, the country has demonstrated that reintegration can be achieved safely and effectively. However, independent needs assessments and interviews with practitioners reveal that many returnees face ongoing and complex challenges, especially related to physical and psychological trauma. While significant progress has been made in short-term support, a shift is needed towards long-term, tailored assistance. Sustaining existing capacity, reducing stigma, strengthening trauma-informed mental health services, and expanding community-based support systems are essential. In parallel, efforts to prevent violent extremism must be restructured to address social vulnerabilities rather than focus on ideology.

Purpose, methodology, and scope

This desk research by an independent international expert group on R&R and VE in Central Asia draws on interviews with practitioners, returnees, case workers, and civil society actors across Uzbekistan undertaken over the years and finished at the beginning of 2025. It reviews progress since the initial repatriation efforts and evaluates the evolving needs of returnees in the country, particularly in the areas of mental health, social reintegration, and protection. In May 2025, the research was complemented by key informant interviews with respondents from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies, the Association of Mahallas, the Republican Centre for Social Adaptation of Children, civil society organisations such as Barqaror Hayot, Intilish, Istiqbolli Avlod, Istiqlol Avlodi / Dialog and UN agencies.

Key findings

Returnees continue to face persistent physical and psychological health challenges. Many returnees suffer from untreated injuries, mental health and chronic illnesses. Between 8–10% require prosthetics, surgeries, or long-term treatment. Psychosocial problems—including PTSD, anxiety, and depression—are prevalent due to violence experienced or

witnessed. Practitioners report that local systems lack the expertise to manage complex trauma, especially among children.

Children exhibit developmental delays and face gaps in educational support. Children returning from Syria often exhibit delayed cognitive and emotional development due to prolonged deprivation and trauma. While some support exists, it is not sufficiently adapted as children move from early to later stages of development, such as adolescence and secondary education.

Economic barriers and social tensions hinder livelihoods. Returnees face social and economic barriers that affect reintegration. Many lack access to steady income or meaningful work opportunities. In some cases, perceptions that returnees receive unfair benefits (e.g. housing) have created tensions with host communities.

Family and community support remain insufficient for long-term reintegration needs. Family and community-based reintegration has largely succeeded in the initial phase. However, families often lack the resources or skills to support complex long-term needs. In some areas, community acceptance is undermined by stigma and misinformation. The desire of returnees to "blend in" sometimes leads to disengagement from necessary support services.

Inconsistent protection and casework increase returnees' vulnerability. There have been instances where returnees required emergency intervention due to psychological crises. Without consistent casework or referral systems, some individuals have fallen through the cracks, heightening their vulnerability.

Returnees are widely stigmatised. Returnees are often stigmatised as "former terrorists", regardless of individual circumstances. Myths about preferential treatment exacerbate resentment. Stigma discourages returnees from engaging with available services, complicating efforts at follow-up support.

Shared trauma increases the risk of radicalisation. Many issues facing returnees — such as trauma, violence, and economic insecurity — are shared by others in their communities. These overlapping challenges increase the risk of marginalisation, social breakdown, and potential mobilisation into VE groups.

Practitioner capacities and gaps. CBOs, such as Barqaror Hayot and Dialog, have been instrumental in delivering reintegration support. Social workers trained through UNICEF-supported programmes have provided vital services. However, many of these efforts are now at risk due to the withdrawal of international funding. Practitioners lack adequate supervision, experience burnout, and have no formal mental health referral networks. In many rural or under-resourced areas, specialist support is simply unavailable. A recent pilot in coordinated casework showed strong outcomes but now faces closure without renewed funding.

Recommendations

Sustain current infrastructure. Protect the progress made by CSOs and local actors by ensuring the continuity of funding. Expand their mandates to include early intervention in radicalisation and support for individuals leaving incarceration.

Expand trauma-informed mental health services. Provide advanced training for practitioners in trauma care, particularly those working with adolescents. Develop specialist referral networks across national and regional levels.

Define goals and metrics. Develop clear indicators of success for reintegration and psychosocial recovery. Use them to guide triage, monitor progress, and advocate for continued support.

Update needs assessments. Conduct a new, multi-dimensional needs assessment using updated tools and indicators to capture changes in returnee circumstances.

Scale up coordinated casework. Build on the success of pilot programmes by institutionalising coordinated case management systems. Ensure adaptability as returnees' needs evolve over time.

Build capacity for suicide prevention. Address urgent gaps in suicide prevention training, especially for youth in communities with known vulnerabilities. Build national expertise using international models adapted to local needs.

Improve practitioner support and networks. Create peer support systems and formal supervision structures for frontline workers. Establish pathways for escalation and referral to specialist services.

Restructure PVE programming. Base PVE efforts on evidence rather than ideology. Focus on at-risk groups such as migrants, survivors of violence, and former convicts. Programmes should go beyond awareness-raising to include vocational training, counselling, and peer support initiatives.

Annex 2. Country Support Mechanism (CSM) Current Structure

Number of Representatives	Member
Chair	
1	Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies (ISRS) under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
Vice-Chair	
1	Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies (ISRS) under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
Partner Country Government Agencies	
1	State Security Service
	General Prosecutor's Office
1	Ministry of Internal Affairs
1	Ministry of Justice
1	National Social Protection Agency
1	Committee on Women and Family Affairs
1	Committee on Religious Affairs
1	Youth Affairs Agency
1	Mahalla Association
Donors	
1	Delegation of the European Union to Uzbekistan
1	GCERF
International Organisations (nonvoting members – observers)	
	UN Office of Counterterrorism (UNOCT)
	UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
	UN Development Programme (UNDP)
	UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)
	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)
	German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ)

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