THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN NAVOI REGION DURING THE YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract

This article examines the development of youth entrepreneurship in the Navoi Region during the years of independence through the analysis of historical and statistical sources. It explores the legal and institutional foundations for the development of small business and private entrepreneurship in the region, as well as the government's reform agenda, investment policy, and mechanisms designed to promote youth participation in entrepreneurial activities. The study also evaluates the contribution of state programs, including “Youth – Our Future” (Yoshlar – kelajagimiz), “Every Family Is an Entrepreneur” (Har bir oila – tadbirkor), and the “Youth Register” (Yoshlar daftari), to youth employment and entrepreneurship development, drawing on official statistical data. The findings demonstrate that the Navoi Region's industrial potential, favorable investment climate, and comprehensive state support system have served as key drivers of youth entrepreneurship, providing a strong foundation for its sustainable development.

Keywords: Navoi Region, youth entrepreneurship, small business, private entrepreneurship, public policy, investment, employment, Youth Register, Youth – Our Future, economic reforms.

During the years of independence, the implementation of market-oriented economic reforms in Uzbekistan positioned the development of small business and

private entrepreneurship as one of the key priorities of the country's economic policy. These reforms were designed to expand the role of the private sector in the economy, create new employment opportunities, enhance workforce participation, and foster the emergence of a class of private property owners. In particular, the active involvement of young people in entrepreneurial activities has become an important driver of economic growth, the commercialization of innovative ideas, and the socio-economic development of the country's regions.

Given that young people constitute a substantial proportion of Uzbekistan's population, promoting youth employment and increasing their economic participation have become central priorities of state policy. Accordingly, throughout the years of independence, the government introduced a comprehensive set of legal and regulatory instruments, state programs, and institutional mechanisms aimed at supporting youth entrepreneurship. Notable initiatives include “Youth – Our Future” (Yoshlar – kelajagimiz), “Every Family Is an Entrepreneur” (Har bir oila – tadbirkor), the “Youth Register” (Yoshlar daftari), and the “Youth: 1+1” program. These initiatives have provided financial and organizational support for young entrepreneurs while promoting the development of modern vocational skills and entrepreneurial competencies.

In this context, the Navoi Region represents a particularly significant subject of academic inquiry. The region's abundant mineral resources, large industrial enterprises, free economic zones, favorable investment climate, and relatively high proportion of young people create substantial opportunities for entrepreneurial development. In recent years, the systematic reforms implemented to promote small business and private entrepreneurship, support youth business initiatives, and expand youth employment have produced tangible socio-economic outcomes, further strengthening the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The Navoi Region is one of the most resource-rich regions of Uzbekistan, distinguished by its strategic geographical location, substantial industrial capacity, and well-developed economic infrastructure. Geographically, the region forms part of the Zarafshan Oasis and encompasses a significant portion of the Kyzylkum Desert as well as the Nuratau Mountain Range. As an administrative-territorial unit, the region was initially established on 20 April 1982, abolished on 6 September 1988, and subsequently re-established on 28 June 1992 pursuant to a resolution of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The region possesses abundant reserves of uranium, gold, marble, bentonite, phosphorite, basalt, and other mineral resources, making it one of the country's leading mining and industrial centers. Consequently, major industrial enterprises—including Navoi Mining and Metallurgical Company (NMMC), Navoiyazot JSC, and Qizilqumsement JSC—operate in the region, playing a significant role not only in Uzbekistan's industrial sector but also within the economies of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This strong industrial base has contributed substantially to the development of the economic infrastructure necessary for the expansion of small business and private entrepreneurship.

The region's demographic potential also constitutes an important driver of economic development. As of 1 January 2025, the population of the Navoi Region reached 1.095 million. Approximately 60 percent of the population is under the age of 30, representing nearly 656,800 young people. This demographic structure further underscores the importance of promoting youth participation in economic activities, particularly entrepreneurial ventures.

In recent years, promoting entrepreneurship—especially the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)—has become one of the priority areas of regional economic policy. In this regard, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's visit to the Navoi Region on 13 March 2019 marked an important milestone. During a meeting

with regional officials, strategic priorities were outlined for the comprehensive development of the region, the creation of a favorable business environment, and the transformation of the Navoi Region into an export-oriented center of innovation and high-technology industries. During the visit, it was announced that a development program comprising 511 investment projects, with a total value of UZS 26.368 trillion for the 2019–2020 period, had been prepared. The implementation of these projects was expected to attract USD 1 billion in foreign direct investment and external financing while creating 17,400 new jobs.

The implementation of these investment projects, together with the government's efforts to improve the business climate, has contributed to the steady growth in the number of entrepreneurial entities operating in the region. As of 1 January 2018, there were 7,788 registered small business entities in the Navoi Region, accounting for 40.3 percent of the region's Gross Regional Product (GRP). The sector employed 254,500 people, representing 60.3 percent of the economically active workforce. Of these, 206,900 were self-employed entrepreneurs, while 46,700 were employed by small enterprises and microfirms.

By the end of 2023, the number of active business entities in the region had exceeded 25,000, nearly 8,000 of which had been established by young entrepreneurs. This trend demonstrates the steadily increasing participation of young people in entrepreneurial activities across the region. The achievement of these outcomes has been strongly supported by targeted government programs specifically designed to promote youth entrepreneurship.

A significant institutional milestone was the introduction of the Youth Register (Yoshlar daftari) under Presidential Resolution No. PQ-5071 of 13 April 2021. This initiative established an effective mechanism for promoting youth employment, encouraging entrepreneurial participation, and supporting youth business initiatives. Through this system, the needs of unemployed, socially vulnerable, and aspiring

young people are assessed individually, enabling them to receive concessional loans, subsidies, grants, and other forms of financial assistance.

Particular emphasis has also been placed on financial support for young entrepreneurs through dedicated government programs. Under the Youth Business Program, concessional loans of up to UZS 100 million have been provided for a period of seven years, including a two-year grace period. Furthermore, the First Step into Business initiative has assisted numerous young people in establishing their own enterprises. According to official statistics, thousands of young entrepreneurs benefited from these preferential financing schemes between 2021 and 2024, enabling them to launch new businesses. These initiatives have contributed not only to improving youth employment but also to expanding young people's economic participation and income-generating opportunities.

The education system has likewise assumed an increasingly important role in fostering youth entrepreneurship. Higher education institutions across the region have established business incubators, innovation centers, and specialized entrepreneurship education programs aimed at developing students' entrepreneurial competencies. Through training courses, seminars, mentoring initiatives, and practice-oriented projects, young people are acquiring the knowledge and practical skills required to establish and manage modern business enterprises.

Overall, the favorable investment climate, strong industrial base, comprehensive government reforms, and targeted youth support programs implemented in the Navoi Region have created a robust legal, economic, and institutional framework for the sustainable development of entrepreneurship, particularly youth entrepreneurship. These measures have made a significant contribution to job creation, income growth, and the development of a more competitive regional economy.

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