



4. Typology of country models for assessing NPO contribution

The contributions of NPOs in Central Asian countries are reflected through distinct institutional and operational models. These models do not determine the overall significance of the sector; rather, they illustrate which forms of NPO activity are more developed in each national context, what data are available, through which channels organisations interact with government and society, and which results are most visible. The typology is therefore intended to provide a more nuanced understanding of how NPO contributions are currently recorded and how they might be strengthened at the regional level.

KAZAKHSTAN:

A Model of Rapidly Expanding NPO–Government Partnership

Kazakhstan is distinguished by a relatively formalised system of interaction between the state and NPOs. Key mechanisms include the national NPO database, State Social Contracting, grant funding, public councils, consultation platforms, and active NPO participation in the delivery of social services. Within this model, NPO contributions are primarily reflected through expanding institutional partnerships with government, implementation of social policy, public monitoring, expert input, and support for vulnerable groups. A major strength of the Kazakh model is the presence of stable mechanisms for integrating NPOs into state programmes. At the same time, further development of assessment approaches would benefit from greater emphasis on qualitative changes in the lives of beneficiaries, rather than focusing predominantly on the volume of projects, events, and participants. NPOs in Kazakhstan also contribute significantly to improving the quality of programme delivery, strengthening local services, and building trust – factors that are increasingly important for the sustainability of the economic environment and private sector development.

KYRGYZSTAN:

A Model of Measurable Institutional Contribution

NPOs in Kyrgyzstan perform the full range of functions observed across the region, including monitoring, policy recommendations, service delivery, and filling gaps in existing systems. The country stands out, however, for the availability of quantitative indicators that allow assessment of the NPO sector's institutional contribution to the national economy. For actively operating NPOs, data exist on gross value added, share of GDP, employment, wages, tax payments, financial inflows, and procurement. This enables NPOs to be presented not only as participants in social and civic processes, but also as a recognised economic sector that generates jobs, value added, and budget revenues. Nevertheless, strong measurability of institutional contribution does not automatically translate into full public visibility. Analytical data are not systematically published, and the statutory, social, and human impacts of NPOs still require more sophisticated qualitative assessment and communication. Attitudes toward the sector also vary across government institutions. A distinctive feature of the Kyrgyz model is that NPO contributions extend beyond measurable economic footprints to include support for entrepreneurship, local infrastructure development, identification of barriers, and the creation of a more transparent and investment-friendly environment.

TAJIKISTAN:

A Model of Expert Participation with Limited Public Visibility

In Tajikistan, NPO contributions are most visible through expert participation in strategic planning, monitoring, gender policy, legal assistance, and engagement with government institutions. A particularly notable example is the involvement of NPO representatives in 14 inter-agency working groups under the National Development Council, where civil society provides expertise, alternative data, recommendations,



and feedback from local communities. Beyond consultation platforms, NPOs have played important roles as initiators or active participants in systemic change, including long-term advocacy for legislation on equal rights and opportunities, the establishment of an electronic registration system for cases of violence against women and children, efforts to combat human trafficking, promotion of biodiversity conservation, development of regional networks serving hard-to-reach communities, and support for vulnerable groups. The Tajik model is therefore best characterised not only as one of expert participation, but also as one of gradual institutional influence on legislation, data systems, inter-agency coordination, and improved access to support for vulnerable populations. At the same time, the public visibility of the sector remains limited. Digital presence is uneven, and the results of NPO activities are often known primarily to direct beneficiaries and partners rather than to the broader public. This highlights the need for stronger public communication and more systematic documentation of results.

TURKMENISTAN:

A Model of Strong Integration into Government Priorities with Limited Data Transparency

In Turkmenistan, NPO contributions are expressed primarily through participation in social protection, youth policy, culture, environmental protection, professional development, support for persons with disabilities, cooperation with local administrations, and implementation of specific government action plans. This model reflects a close alignment between public organisations and the system of state planning and delivery of socially significant objectives. The contribution of these organisations is best understood as socio-institutional rather than narrowly economic. Their importance lies in supporting vulnerable groups, strengthening social stability, mobilising civic participation, and implementing government priorities at the local level. Limited availability of macroeconomic data should not be interpreted as evidence of weak contribution; rather, it points to the need to assess impact through social and qualitative outcomes. Quantitative measurement of the sector's contribution to GDP, employment, tax revenues, and financial flows remains constrained, so much of the analysis necessarily relies on individual projects, organisational experiences, services rendered, and qualitative results.

UZBEKISTAN:

A Model of Increasing Institutionalization with Fragmented Impact Assessment

In Uzbekistan, the NPO sector (NGNPOs) is developing within a dynamic process of building legal, organisational, and financial infrastructure to support civil society. Key elements include the Ministry of Justice's NGNPO portal, government grants and social contracting mechanisms, the Public Fund under the Oliy Majlis, territorial support funds, NPO resource centres, public councils, and participation in the discussion of programmes and draft regulatory legal acts. This model reflects growing institutionalisation and expanding NPO involvement in social, cultural, educational, human rights, and other socially significant initiatives. However, assessment of long-term impact remains fragmented: registration, financing, events, and outreach activities are documented more effectively than sustainable improvements in the lives of individuals, communities, and territories.

An important dimension of NPO contribution in Uzbekistan is the enhancement of local economic conditions through infrastructure support, community participation in service management, and reduction of costs for citizens and economic actors - factors that directly influence the quality of the local investment climate. Beyond expanding support infrastructure, the Uzbek model would benefit from closing the gap between formal institutionalisation and public recognition. Many citizens still have limited awareness of NPOs and their achievements. Therefore, further development of the model requires not only continued strengthening of government support mechanisms, but also more effective public communication, accessible reporting, and clearer demonstration of the practical value NPOs create for citizens.



CONCLUSION

Central Asian countries exhibit distinct models of NPO contribution and assessment. In some contexts, the economic and statistical footprint of the sector is more prominent; in others, institutional partnerships with government, expert participation, social service delivery, work with vulnerable groups, or integration into state programmes are more visible. This typology helps avoid artificial cross-country comparisons based on a single set of criteria. Instead, it provides a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis of NPO contributions across key dimensions: the economy, public governance, social services, thematic contributions, and the qualitative characteristics of outcomes.

Table 2. Typology of Country Models for Assessing NPO Contribution

Country	Dominant Model Type	Channels and Forms of Contribution	Strength of the Model	Opportunities for Improvement
 Kazakhstan	Model of rapidly expanding NPO–government partnership	State Social Contracting, grants, public councils, and specialised social services	Sustainable mechanisms for integrating NPOs into government programmes	Shifting focus from the volume of projects and people reached to measurable changes in the lives of beneficiaries
 Kyrgyzstan	Model of measurable institutional contribution	Economic (GDP share, employment, taxes, financial flows) as well as social and governance spheres	Availability of robust data on the sector's economic footprint	Systematic publication of institutional contribution data, regular assessment of beneficiary outcomes, and greater public visibility of the sector
 Tajikistan	Model of expert participation with limited public visibility	Working groups, monitoring, gender and legal agendas, and feedback from local communities	Strong expert input into strategic planning and policy processes	Enhanced public communication of results and more systematic documentation of participation impact
 Turkmenistan	Model of strong integration into government priorities with limited data transparency	Participation in social protection, youth policy, culture, environmental protection, and government action plans	Close alignment with state programmes and implementation of socially significant tasks	Improved access to aggregated data and development of comparable quantitative indicators
 Uzbekistan	Model of increasing institutionalisation with fragmented impact assessment	NGNPO portal, government grants, social contracting, public councils, and review of regulatory legal acts	Rapid development of organisational and financial infrastructure	Systematic assessment of long-term impact beyond registration, funding, and activity monitoring



5. What constitutes NPO contribution for the purposes of this report?



DIMENSION OF CONTRIBUTION



ILLUSTRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF CONTRIBUTION



DATA SOURCES AND TYPES OF EVIDENCE



WHAT IT DEMONSTRATES



INSTITUTIONAL CONTRIBUTION

- Jobs, payroll, taxes, social contributions, financial flows, procurement, and value added.
- Statistical, administrative, and financial data
- NPOs as independent economic actors and a distinct sector of the economy



GOVERNANCE CONTRIBUTION

- Participation in decision-making, expert review of policies, citizen feedback, public monitoring, expert support, identification of systemic priorities, development of local infrastructure and services, and enhancement of predictability and transparency for business and investment
- Case studies, interviews, cooperation platform data, expert assessments, examples of improved implementation practices, and data on local infrastructure and entrepreneurship support
- NPOs as government partners and providers of practical information, contributing to a more responsive, predictable, and attractive environment for development, investment, and private sector growth



ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF STATUTORY ACTIVITIES

- Social entrepreneurship, self-employment and entrepreneurial skills development, infrastructure initiatives, and digital solutions
- Case studies, project data, and qualitative descriptions of change
- NPOs as creators of conditions for income generation, employment, and local economic development



SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION

- Social, legal, psychological, crisis-response, and rehabilitation services; reduction of access barriers and promotion of inclusive development
- Service coverage data, case studies, expert assessments, and stories of change
- NPOs as key providers of support and inclusion for vulnerable groups



THEMATIC CONTRIBUTION

- Healthcare, education, gender equality, rights protection, environmental protection, poverty reduction, local development, youth, and culture
- Country reports and case studies
- The main development areas in which NPOs are most active and visible



QUALITATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTRIBUTION

- Uniqueness, innovation, effectiveness, sustainability, and the “last-mile delivery” function of reaching remote and vulnerable groups and territories
- Qualitative analysis, case studies, and interpretation of practices
- The distinctive nature and public value created by NPOs

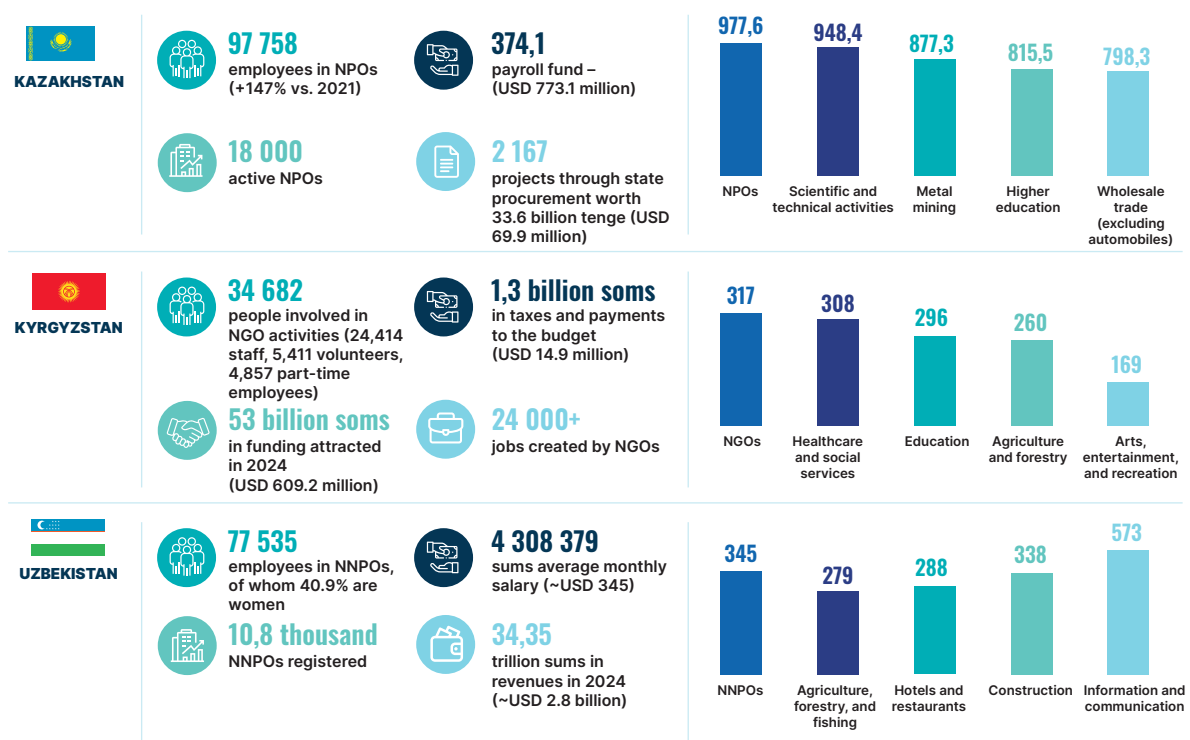


6. Institutional contribution of NPOs: the sector as an economic actor.

The institutional contribution of NPOs should be examined separately from their substantive and statutory contributions to development. In this section, NPOs are analysed not primarily as service providers or participants in reform processes, but as a formalised sector of the economy. This perspective focuses on their role as employers, taxpayers, and participants in economic circulation — generating jobs, paying wages, contributing taxes and social payments, attracting financial resources, and procuring goods and services. In essence, the section assesses the “gross” economic footprint of the NPO sector.

6.1. NPOs as Employers

The most visible manifestation of NPOs’ institutional contribution is their role as employers. Across the region, the non-profit sector has emerged as a significant source of professional employment, economic activity, and turnover. In several countries, NPOs now function as major employers in the social sphere, delivering expert services, project management, education, legal aid, support for vulnerable populations, and local community development.



EMPLOYMENT IN THE NGO SECTOR PER 100,000 POPULATION (2024)



NGOs AS TAXPAYERS AND PARTICIPANTS IN THE BUDGET SYSTEM

NGOs pay taxes and social contributions, returning resources to the economy and the budget

In Kyrgyzstan, NGO tax payments are comparable in volume to individual nationwide taxes

NGOs reduce the burden on the budget by supplementing state services and initiatives

The NGO sector is a real economic actor with a growing contribution to the countries’ development



NGOs in Central Asia are not only providers of social services but also an important sector of the economy: they create jobs, pay taxes, attract investment, and contribute to the sustainable development of the region.



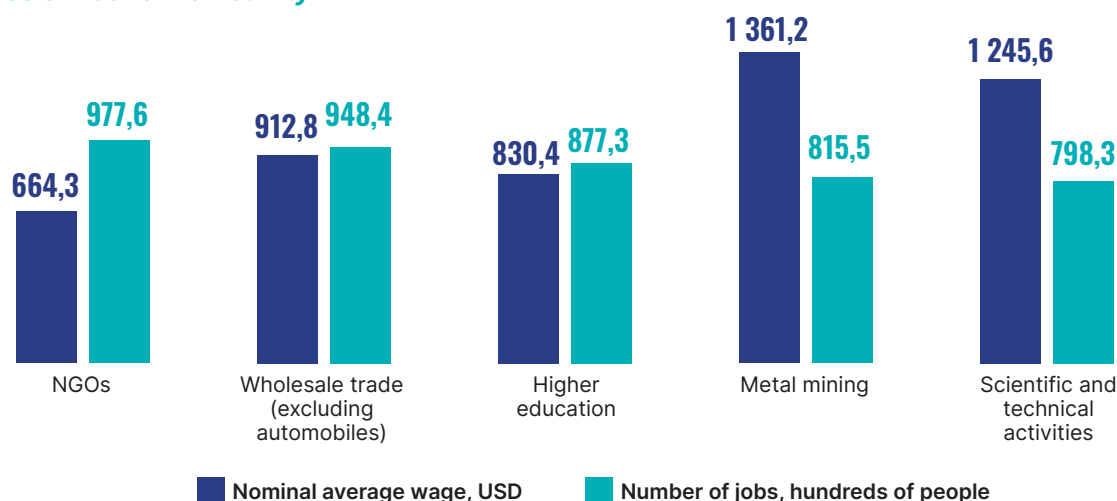
NPOs in Central Asia:

Contribution to Development, Governance and Sustainability

In Kazakhstan, the average number of employees in NPOs rose from **39,532** in 2021 to **97,758** in 2024. Of these, **87,039** were employed in urban areas and **10,719** in rural areas. Over the same period, the average monthly wage increased from KZT 109,496 (USD 228) to KZT **318,853** (USD 664). Consequently, the estimated annual payroll for the sector reached under OKED 94.99.0 approximately KZT **374.1 billion** (USD 773.1 million) in 2024, up from KZT **51.9 billion** (USD 108.1 million) in 2021. Although the broad nature of the OKED classification and the impossibility of fully excluding non-relevant entities impose certain methodological limitations, these figures nonetheless underscore the substantial scale of economic activity generated by NPO employment.

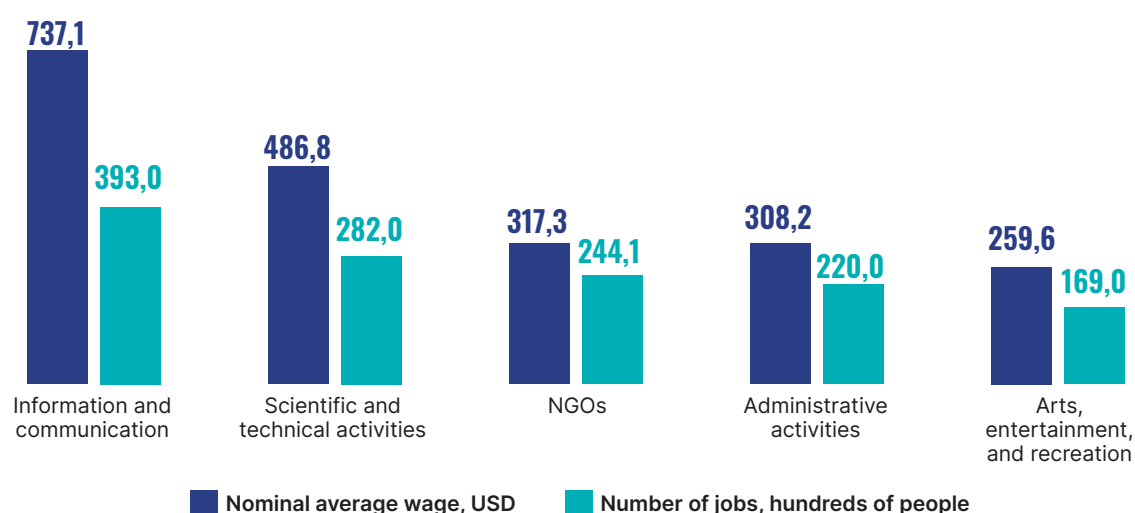
In Kyrgyzstan, data from the National Statistical Committee for 2024 indicate that actively operating NPOs employed an average of **24,414** staff members, including **14,158** women. In addition, the sector engaged **4,857** external part-time workers and **5,411** unpaid volunteers, bringing total involvement to **34,682** individuals. The average monthly wage stood at KGS 27,605 (USD 317), a level comparable to those in healthcare, education, agriculture, and forestry. These statistics affirm the position of NPOs not merely as elements of civic infrastructure but as a meaningful segment of the labour market.

Figure 4. Comparison of the Institutional Contribution of NPOs in Kazakhstan with Selected Types of Economic Activity



Sources: Country report; Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024; "Number of Employees and Wages by Form of Ownership in the Republic of Kazakhstan".

Figure 5. Comparison of the Institutional Contribution of NPOs in Kyrgyzstan with Selected Types of Economic Activity

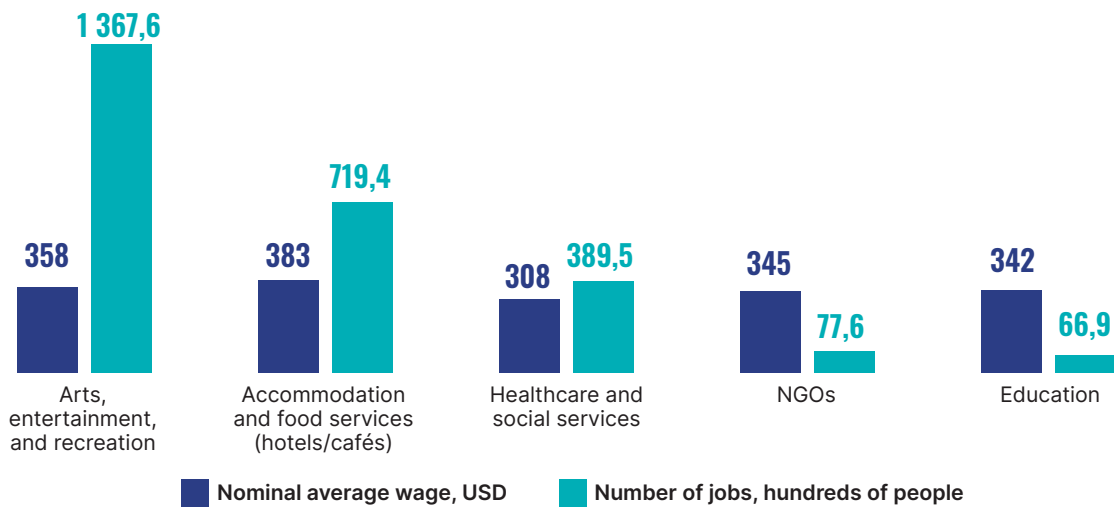




In Uzbekistan, non-governmental non-profit organisations (NGNPOs) employed 77,535 people in 2024, of whom 31,740 (40.9 %) were women. The average accrued nominal monthly wage reached UZS 4,308,379 (approximately USD 345). This level of employment and remuneration enables NGNPOs to be viewed not only as components of civic infrastructure but also as a significant segment of the national labour market.

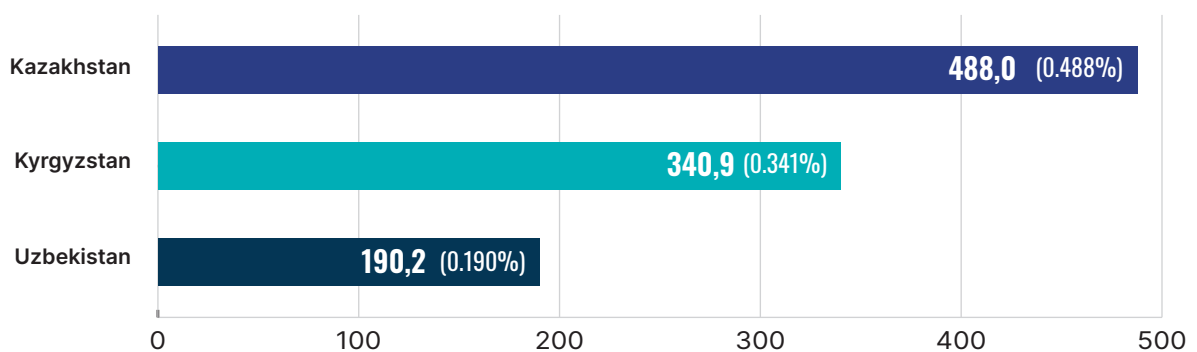
It is also instructive to examine the sectoral contribution of NPOs to employment relative to total population (Figure 7). On this measure, Kazakhstan demonstrates the strongest contribution, with NPO employment accounting for nearly 0.5 percent of the total population.

Figure 6. Comparison of the Institutional Contribution of NPOs in Uzbekistan with Selected Types of Economic Activity



Source: National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Figure 7. Employment in the NPO Sector as a Share of the Total Population, 2024 (per 100,000 Citizens)



Source: Calculated on the basis of official data from the national statistical authorities of Central Asian countries:

Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the Beginning of 2024, https://stat.gov.kz/api/iblock/element/157662/file/en/?utm_source=chatgpt.com;

National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, open data "Resident Population at the Beginning of the Year," https://stat.gov.kg/ru/opendata/category/39/?utm_source=chatgpt.com;

National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Resident Population at the Beginning of 2024 by Region, <https://stat.uz/en/press-center/news-of-committee/49356-hududlar-kesimida-2024-yil-boshiga-doimiy-aholi-soni-3>



6.2.NPOs as Taxpayers and Participants in the Public Finance System

A further dimension of NPOs' institutional contribution lies in their role as taxpayers and contributors to public revenues. This aspect is especially significant in countering the prevailing view of NPOs as mere recipients of grants and budgetary support. Evidence from the country studies demonstrates that NPOs collectively constitute substantial payers of taxes and mandatory social contributions, thereby returning a meaningful portion of the resources they mobilise to the national economy and the public finance system.



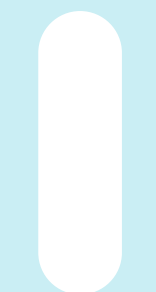
EXAMPLE

Kyrgyzstan: Significant Budget Contributions Comparable to Certain Nationwide Taxes

In 2024, actively operating NPOs in the Kyrgyz Republic contributed approximately KGS 1.3 billion (nearly USD 15 million) to the national budget. This amount is comparable to the total national revenue from several individual budget sources, including the patent-based tax (KGS 1.3 billion / USD 15 million), the land tax (KGS 1.5 billion / more than USD 17 million), and non-tax revenues from the lease of state property (KGS 1.8 billion / nearly USD 21 million). Such comparisons illustrate that the NPO sector functions not

Figure 8. Payments Made by NPOs in Kyrgyzstan to the State Budget Compared with Selected Sources of Government Revenue (USD)

21 000 000



State property
lease

17 000 000



Land tax

15 000 000



Patent-based tax

15 000 000



NGO tax payments

Source: State Tax Service under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic.

At the same time, access to comprehensive tax data on NPOs remains limited even in countries with relatively developed institutional accounting systems. In Kazakhstan, for instance, the State Revenue Committee was unable to provide aggregated data on tax revenues from NPOs at either national or regional levels owing to confidentiality restrictions. Similar constraints were encountered in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

In Tajikistan, a financial analysis of a sample of 69 organisations in 2024 recorded a total turnover of TJS 53.3 million (nearly USD 6 million), of which approximately TJS 4 million (more than USD 440,000) was paid to the national budget in the form of income and social taxes. While this sample cannot be extrapolated to the sector as a whole, it nevertheless highlights a structurally important dynamic: a portion of the resources mobilised by NPOs is converted into wages, tax payments, and social contributions within the domestic economy, thereby supporting both employment growth and public revenues.



6.3. NPOs as Producers of Value Added

A key macroeconomic indicator of the institutional contribution of NPOs is their contribution to gross value added (GVA) and, by extension, gross domestic product (GDP). Economically, NPOs generate value added through the delivery of services, expert outputs, social programmes, and other activities that draw upon labour, managerial expertise, infrastructure, equipment, and intermediate goods and services. Even when a substantial share of NPO outputs is provided free of charge or on preferential terms, their activities still produce measurable sectoral output. The difference between this output and intermediate consumption constitutes gross value added. Accordingly, the contribution of NPOs to GDP should not be regarded as an incidental by-product of commercial activity, but rather as the result of deliberate creation of public-benefit services and products that carry tangible economic value.

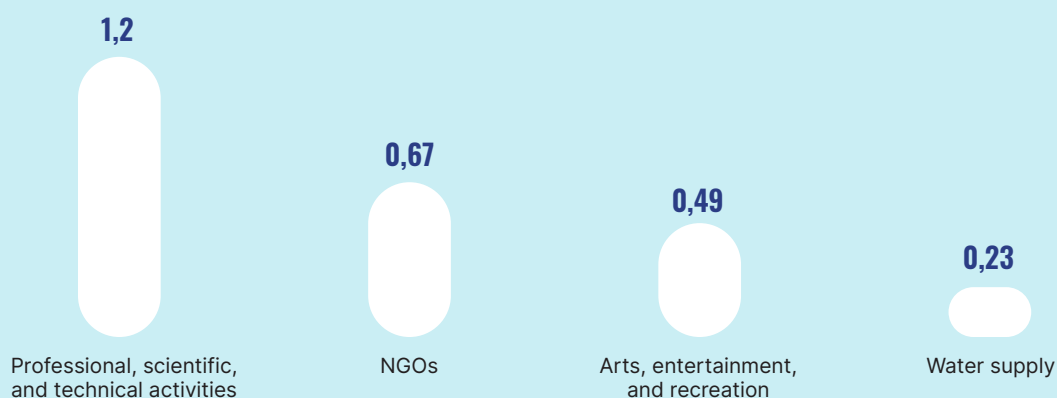


EXAMPLE

Kyrgyzstan: Gross Value Added Comparable to Certain Economic Sectors

In 2024, actively operating NPOs in Kyrgyzstan generated gross value-added exceeding KGS **10 billion** (nearly USD 115 million). Their share in the country's nominal GDP reached **0.67 percent** - a notable figure that is comparable to several established sectors, including water supply (0.23 %), arts, entertainment and recreation (0.49 %), and professional, scientific and technical activities (1.2 %). At the regional scale of Central Asia, the NPO sector, despite its relatively low public visibility, thus registers an economic contribution equivalent to entire categories of economic activity.

Figure 9. Contribution of NPOs in Kyrgyzstan to Gross Value Added Compared with Selected Economic Sectors, Percent



Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Such granular statistics are not yet available for all countries in the region. Nevertheless, where data permit the calculation of sectoral gross value added, NPOs emerge as visible and quantifiable participants in the economy. In the absence of such data, their institutional contribution tends to be underestimated and is captured only indirectly through indicators of employment, financing, project implementation, grants, and tax payments.



6.4. NPOs as a Channel for Mobilizing and Redistributing Financial Resources

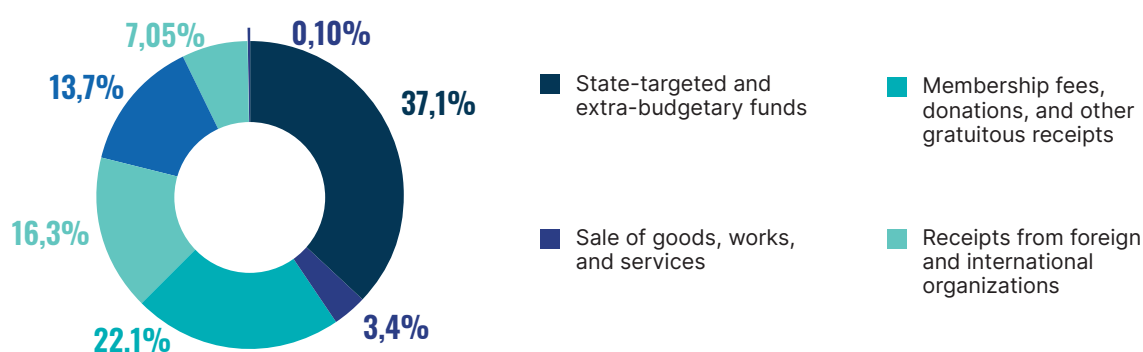
The institutional role of NPOs is further evident in their capacity to mobilise and redistribute financial resources toward social programmes, procurement of goods and services, engagement of experts and contractors, service development, and direct support for beneficiaries. By performing this redistribution and delivery function, NPOs channel resources from government, donor, private, and community sources into areas of acute social need, particularly support for vulnerable groups, crisis response, rehabilitation, access to justice, inclusive education, local service provision, and rural development, where conventional financing mechanisms often lack sufficient reach, targeting, or sustainability.

In Kazakhstan, the income structure of NPOs is notably diversified. State social contracting, amounting to approximately KZT **33.5 billion** (USD 70 million), accounts for only around 9 % of the sector's total payroll, underscoring the substantial contribution of international funding (KZT **27.2 billion** / approximately USD 60 million) and other sources. At the same time, the marked increase in funding for state social contracting in 2024 - despite only moderate growth in the number of projects - signals growing governmental trust in NPOs' ability to implement larger-scale social services and development initiatives.

In Kyrgyzstan, the income structure similarly reveals that the NPO sector is not wholly reliant on foreign grants. Significant resources derive from domestic donations, sponsorship, budget support, membership fees, and paid services. Total financial inflows to the sector in 2024 reached approximately KGS **53 billion** (more than USD 609 million), of which the core group of NPOs analysed in this study received KGS **14.2 billion** (approximately USD 161.7 million). The composition of these revenues was as follows: sponsorship and donations - KGS 8.3 billion (USD 95.4 million), or **59 %**; foreign technical assistance and grants - KGS 2.7 billion (USD 30.5 million), or **19 %**; sales of goods and services - **KGS 0.4 billion** (USD 4.5 million), or **3 %**; budget support - **KGS 0.2 billion** (USD 1.8 million), or **1 %**; membership fees - **KGS 0.1 billion** (USD 1.1 million), or less than **1 %**; and other sources - **KGS 2.5 billion** (USD 28.3 million), or **18 %**.

In Uzbekistan, the dominant source of NGNPO revenues consists of targeted state and extra-budgetary funds, which accounted for **38.4 %** of total income. Over the past seven years, the state budget has allocated UZS **718 billion** (nearly USD 60 million) to support civil society institutions - twelve times more than during the 2008–2016 period. In the last three years alone, territorial funds have financed **1,600** projects worth UZS **83 billion** (nearly USD 7 million). Concurrently, the notable share of membership fees, donations, and other gratuitous contributions (**22.9 %**) illustrates that the sector combines institutional reliance on public financing with a meaningful base of voluntary solidarity and philanthropy.

Figure 10. Structure of NGNPO Revenues in Uzbekistan, 2024 (%)





6.5. NPOs as Consumers of Goods and Services

The institutional contribution of NPOs extends beyond employment and taxation. As active consumers of goods and services, NPOs also stimulate demand for small and medium-sized enterprises and generate multiplier effects within local economies. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in project implementation. The organisation of seminars, training sessions, consultations, focus groups, roundtables, and public events necessitates procurement of venue rental, transportation, catering, printing, equipment, consumables, communication services, and expert support.

NPOs predominantly source these inputs from SMEs—including hotels, catering firms, transport companies, office suppliers, landlords, and equipment providers—thereby creating secondary economic activity. Even when the primary purpose of a project is social, educational, or rights-oriented, its execution generates tangible demand in the domestic economy. In this respect, NPOs function not only as mobilisers of resources but also as redistributors of those resources through extensive networks of suppliers, contractors, and service providers.



CONCLUSION

The institutional contribution of NPOs in Central Asian countries manifests primarily in the sector's role as an autonomous economic actor. NPOs create employment, generate payroll funds, pay taxes and social contributions, mobilise public, donor, and private resources, procure goods and services, and—in some cases—develop fee-based services, social enterprises, and other income-generating activities.

This contribution is most clearly visible where official or aggregated statistical data are available. Kyrgyzstan offers a robust example of measuring gross value added and the sector's share in GDP; Kazakhstan illustrates dramatic growth in employment, wages, and state social contracting; Uzbekistan demonstrates an institutionally developed system of government support coupled with substantial employment; Tajikistan provides partial but instructive assessments of turnover and tax payments based on organisational samples; and Turkmenistan reflects an environment in which institutional contributions are captured mainly through individual projects, organisations, and income-generating initiatives.

The overarching regional conclusion is that NPOs make a substantial economic contribution, yet its visibility remains uneven across national statistical systems. Greater recognition of this role therefore requires not only continued emphasis on their social value but also the strengthening of regular statistical accounting for the sector, including employment, financial flows, tax payments, gross value added, volunteer labour, and procurement of goods and services.

In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, national statistical agencies have already introduced tourism satellite accounts—an analytical instrument that supplements the core System of National Accounts (SNA) by providing detailed, sector-specific classifications and indicators while remaining fully consistent with overarching standards. A logical next step in the development of the SNA would be the introduction of similar satellite accounts for the non-profit sector.

A consolidated table of country-level indicators reflecting the institutional contribution of NPOs across the region is presented in Annex 3 of this Report.



7. NPO contributions to the quality of governance, the investment climate, and conditions for private sector development.

An important dimension of NPO activity in Central Asian countries lies in their capacity to enhance the quality of governance. Through applied expertise, systematic monitoring of programme implementation, transmission of grassroots feedback, and direct engagement with communities and economic actors, NPOs help refine policy design and improve local development conditions. By maintaining continuous dialogue with citizens, local governments, and businesses, they provide nuanced insights into how decisions function in practice, identify remaining infrastructure and institutional gaps, highlight underserved groups and territories, and signal where adjustments are required. In this way, NPOs serve as active participants in building a more predictable, transparent, and attractive environment for entrepreneurship, investment, and private sector development. Their role is especially valuable in contexts where governance systems need reliable local-level data, trusted channels to beneficiaries, specialised knowledge, and flexible mechanisms for policy delivery.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF NGOS TO GOVERNANCE QUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT CONDITIONS



Participation in Decision-Making

NGOs link state programs to the real needs of people.



Expertise

NGOs help develop laws, programs, and service standards.



Feedback

NGOs identify barriers, "invisible" problems, and issues in services.



Public Monitoring

NGOs increase the transparency, targeting, and quality of program implementation.



Dialogue Platforms

Public councils, working groups, and social procurement create a permanent channel of interaction.

KEY EXAMPLES BY COUNTRY



KAZAKHSTAN

State social contracting, public councils, monitoring of anti-flood measures in Atbasar.



KYRGYZSTAN

Expertise for regional development programs 2025–2030; Council for Persons with Disabilities.



TAJIKISTAN

NGOs participate in 14 interagency working groups under the National Development Council.



TURKMENISTAN

NGOs participate in national action plans and disaster risk reduction.



UZBEKISTAN

NGOs participate in public monitoring and the promotion of regulatory decisions.



Through local data, community trust, and practical experience, NGOs help the state improve the environment for development, investment, and private initiative.

7.1. NPOs as Participants in Public Decision-Making and Reform Implementation Cycles

Across the region, NPOs are integrated, albeit to varying degrees, into public decision-making and reform processes. They align their activities with national priorities, participate in joint programmes, supply information on population needs, provide expert analysis, and monitor implementation outcomes. Their value extends beyond individual project execution: they help bridge strategic policy documents and government programmes with the lived realities and needs of citizens.



In Kazakhstan, NPO participation in public policy is institutionalised through state social contracting, grant programmes, public councils, and specialised social services. These mechanisms enable NPOs to deliver socially significant services and address gaps affecting vulnerable groups. In Kyrgyzstan, NPOs contribute through joint discussion platforms, advisory support to government and local self-government bodies, needs assessment, monitoring of government decisions, and participation in state social contracting. In Uzbekistan, NGNPOs are actively involved in the implementation of social, cultural, educational, and human rights initiatives. They receive support via government and territorial mechanisms and participate in public councils and programme discussions. In Tajikistan, NPOs engage in strategic planning and monitoring through inter-agency working groups. In Turkmenistan, public organisations support the implementation of government programmes in social protection, youth policy, environmental protection, and assistance to vulnerable groups.



EXAMPLE

Kazakhstan: State Social Contracting and Public Councils

In Kazakhstan, cooperation between the state and NPOs is grounded in well-established institutional mechanisms, including state social contracting, grant programmes, public councils, and joint working groups. These mechanisms enable NPOs to participate systematically in the implementation of social initiatives, the delivery of public services, the discussion of socio-economic issues, and the provision of feedback on government decisions. As a result, NPO engagement has become significantly more regular, structured, and institutionalized.



EXAMPLE

Tajikistan: NPO Participation in Strategic Planning

In Tajikistan, NPO involvement in 14 inter-agency working groups under the National Development Council marks a shift from ad-hoc project interaction toward more systematic integration into the governance cycle. NPOs assist the state in identifying optimal solutions, refining the legal framework, and mitigating risks more effectively. The Energy Association of Tajikistan, for instance, has played a prominent role in developing the regulatory framework for green energy, advocating for feed-in tariffs for renewable sources, and contributing to international expert reviews of the Rogun Hydropower Plant. Other organisations support the development of the digital ecosystem and IT academies, women's entrepreneurship, access to green finance, and the modernisation of textile clusters.



EXAMPLE

Turkmenistan: Expertise and Participation in the Development of National Action Plans

In Turkmenistan, public associations are recognised as expert partners and co-developers of key public policies. Organisations such as “Ynam,” “Yenme,” and “Mashgala” participate in the Working Group on the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons, while “Keýik Okara” contributes to consultations on the National Action Plan for Gender Equality. These cases illustrate a transition from consultation to joint planning, whereby the practical experience of NPOs is directly embedded in high-level strategic documents.



EXAMPLE

Uzbekistan: NPOs (NGNPOs) as Initiators of Regulatory and Programmatic Reforms

In Uzbekistan, NPOs increasingly act not only as implementers of social and educational projects but also as contributors to the public policy agenda. The Association of Persons with Disabilities of Uzbekistan, for example, spearheaded the development of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, an initiative that subsequently gained full government support. Similarly, the “Umidvorlik” Centre advanced the concept of inclusive education, which was later incorporated into state education policy. The advocacy work of the Association of Volunteers of Uzbekistan also contributed to the adoption of the Law on Volunteering. These examples demonstrate that NPOs in Uzbekistan function as important bridges, translating the needs and proposals of vulnerable groups into concrete government programmes, regulatory reforms, and institutional innovations.

7.2. NPOs as Sources of Expertise for Public Policy Decisions

One of the principal functions of NPOs is to supply policy expertise grounded in direct, practical engagement with people, communities, and specific problems, complemented by in-depth knowledge of international experience. This expertise differs markedly from conventional departmental analysis: it emerges from sustained, informal, and granular contact with beneficiaries, a nuanced understanding of target-group behaviour, and hands-on experience in implementing solutions at the local level.

NPOs contribute to the drafting of regulatory acts, government programmes, action plans, methodologies, service standards, and monitoring tools. Their input is especially valuable when policy must reflect the realities of groups that are rarely present in official consultations—persons with disabilities, survivors of violence, rural women, migrants, youth, older persons, undocumented individuals, children, and families in difficult circumstances.



EXAMPLE

Kyrgyzstan: Contribution to the Development of Targeted Regional Development Policy

The Public Association “Development Policy Institute” provided expertise during the preparation of the State Programme for Comprehensive Socio-Economic Development of Regions for 2025–2030. Its contribution facilitated a shift toward integrated territorial planning, the identification of priority areas, the use of spatial data, and a better balance between national objectives and local community interests. The Institute’s involvement ranged from developing the Concept of Coordinated Regional Planning and supporting new territorial planning approaches to refining methodologies for Socio-Economic Development Programmes (SEDP) and designing a support programme for high-mountain, remote, and border territories. It also developed a Territorial Vulnerability Index as a tool for more targeted state support.



EXAMPLE

Tajikistan: Promotion of Legislation on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities

In Tajikistan, the Coalition of Women's Organizations played a sustained role in advancing legislation on equal rights and equal opportunities. Its activities included expert analysis of draft laws, organisation of public hearings, engagement with government institutions, and alignment with international commitments. This case illustrates how NPOs can act not merely as advocates but as substantive participants in the legislative process.



EXAMPLE

Turkmenistan: Participation in National Action Plans

Public organisations in Turkmenistan actively contribute to the development and implementation of national action plans. The public association "Ynam" participates in anti-trafficking initiatives, while "Keýik Okara" supports the gender equality agenda and assistance to vulnerable families. In these instances, NPO contributions combine practical field experience, specialised expertise, and direct involvement in policy formulation on sensitive social issues.



EXAMPLE

Uzbekistan: NPO Contribution to Reforming Legislation on Domestic Violence

Over several years, Uzbek NPOs, including the initiative Nemolchi.uz, crisis centres, and civic activists, conducted awareness campaigns, documented cases of violence, provided support to survivors, and prepared detailed legislative proposals. Through collaborative efforts involving government institutions, parliament, and civil society, Uzbekistan introduced administrative and criminal liability for domestic violence in 2023 and strengthened protection mechanisms for victims.

7.3. NPOs as Channels of Feedback from the Population

The quality of public governance hinges on the reliable flow of information about how decisions function in practice. NPOs strengthen this feedback loop because they maintain access to groups and territories that often remain distant from official channels. They document barriers to service access, participation in support programmes, and interaction with local authorities and social institutions. In this intermediary role, NPOs translate individual experiences, local problems, and recurrent obstacles into structured proposals, analytical insights, public discussions, and programme adjustments. This function is especially critical for vulnerable populations who may face mistrust, stigma, geographic remoteness, or administrative hurdles when engaging directly with state institutions.



EXAMPLE

Turkmenistan: Identifying Local Problems and Working with Vulnerable Groups

At the local level, public organisations in Turkmenistan identify community needs, explain government initiatives, and support groups with limited access to official information channels, including persons with disabilities, survivors of violence, older persons, and individuals requiring legal or psychological assistance.



EXAMPLE

Tajikistan: River Basin Women's Forums

In Tajikistan, the “River Basin Women's Forums” established by the NPO “Association Woman and Society” in the Syr Darya and Kofarnihon river basins provide a permanent dialogue platform. The forums systematically document the views of women water users and channel them directly to the Ministry of Energy and Water Resources, enabling more responsive and context-sensitive water resource management.



EXAMPLE

Uzbekistan: Public Monitoring of Local Budgets

In Kashkadarya Region, local NPOs and civic activists carried out public monitoring of the “Initiative Budget” and “Mahalla Budget” programmes across 12 mahallas in 2026. Through site visits, document analysis, and beneficiary interviews, they identified shortcomings including poor construction quality, absence of sidewalks and drainage systems, restricted access to project documentation, and cases of formally completed projects with significant defects. This monitoring illustrates how NPOs can serve as effective channels of citizen feedback for improving local budget policy and implementation.

Such feedback enables the state to better understand which decisions are perceived as accessible and effective, which measures require adaptation, where information gaps exist, and which groups remain excluded from standard programmes. This function is critical not only for social policy but also for economic development. Through NPOs, government bodies gain timely insights into the local performance of services, persistent infrastructure gaps, and the barriers faced by households, entrepreneurs, and communities. This feedback improves the quality of governance decisions and helps create a more supportive environment for private initiative.



7.4. Public Monitoring and Accountability

NPOs enhance the quality of governance through public monitoring of programme implementation, participation in policy discussions, and independent assessment of reform outcomes. This contribution carries both social and economic significance: it helps detect implementation failures before they become systemic, reduces the risk of purely formal execution, increases transparency, and provides an additional mechanism for verifying real-world application of government measures. Such oversight is particularly valuable in sectors where the quality of implementation directly influences living standards, entrepreneurship, service sustainability, and the investment attractiveness of territories.

In Kazakhstan, public councils and expert platforms offer institutionalised avenues for NPO participation in policy discussions and public oversight. In Uzbekistan, public monitoring takes the form of observation, public discussions, expert review of draft regulatory acts, and public hearings. In Kyrgyzstan, NPOs engage in monitoring government decisions, promoting openness and accountability, and addressing issues related to social services, access to justice, gender equality, and local development. In Tajikistan, their monitoring role is reinforced through inter-agency working groups and reviews of strategic document implementation. In Turkmenistan, beyond standard administrative reporting, NPO monitoring is most prominent in civil defence, emergency response, and disaster risk reduction.



EXAMPLE

Kazakhstan: Public Monitoring of Flood Prevention Measures in Atbasar

A compelling illustration is the work of the public association “Angel” in Atbasar, Akmola Region. Following severe floods in 2009, 2014, and 2017 and the perceived inadequacy of preventive measures, the organisation launched systematic public monitoring of flood-protection decisions. Its activities encompassed independent analysis of hydrological processes on the Zhabay River, collection and verification of hydrological data, expert assessment of flood causes, and sustained communication with residents and government bodies. To strengthen the evidence base, “Angel” formed a broad coalition involving researchers from Shokan Ualikhanov Kokshetau University, a Member of Parliament, media outlets, and international mechanisms, including the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee.



EXAMPLE

Kyrgyzstan: Monitoring the Procurement and Distribution of Medicines

In Kyrgyzstan, NPOs monitor the procurement and distribution of medicines - an area where timely and reliable supply is critical for vulnerable populations. Their involvement complements official oversight by incorporating direct feedback from patients and service providers, enabling earlier detection of supply disruptions and gaps in access.



EXAMPLE

Turkmenistan: Monitoring in the Area of Emergency Situations

Under the coordination of the State Commission for Emergency Situations, the National Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan serves as an effective bridge between government services and communities. Its focus lies less on formal control and more on independent vulnerability assessments and grassroots feedback gathered through volunteer networks and community committees.



EXAMPLE

Uzbekistan: Public Monitoring of Public–Private Partnership Projects

In Kashkadarya Region, the Yuksalish Movement, together with local NPOs, activists, and experts, conducted public monitoring of public–private partnership (PPP) projects. The exercise revealed the absence of open tenders for certain initiatives, shortcomings in inclusiveness, delays in subsidies, insufficient investor commitments, and limited transparency regarding social obligations. Findings were formally submitted to local authorities and relevant agencies to inform corrective measures. This case underscores the capacity of NPOs to strengthen accountability and transparency in infrastructure project implementation.

A persistent regional challenge is that the existence of participation platforms does not automatically ensure real influence on decisions. Improving governance quality therefore requires systematic tracking not only of NPO participation but also of the subsequent fate of their proposals: which recommendations were considered, accepted, rejected, or modified, and on what grounds.

7.5. Platforms for Cooperation and Joint Solutions

Across Central Asia, various platforms for state – NPO cooperation are gradually taking shape: public councils, inter-agency working groups, civic forums, expert platforms, state social contracting mechanisms, grant programmes, consultations, public hearings, and joint action plans. While these platforms vary in status and influence, their collective value lies in institutionalising regular interaction. In their absence, cooperation often remains dependent on personal relationships, isolated projects, or the initiative of individual officials. Where permanent platforms exist, it becomes possible to address issues systematically, engage diverse NPO constituencies, compare proposals, and ensure meaningful feedback.



EXAMPLE

Kazakhstan: Coordination Council under the Ministry of Culture and Information

In Kazakhstan, the development of platforms for interaction and dialogue is closely linked to the onNPOing transformation of coordination mechanisms between the state and NPOs during 2025–2026, most notably through the establishment of the Coordination Council under the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This permanent mechanism facilitates structured dialogue on civil society development, state support instruments, social contracting, grant funding, and NPO involvement in addressing socially significant issues.



EXAMPLE

Kyrgyzstan: Council on the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities under the Cabinet of Ministers

In Kyrgyzstan, a well-established platform is **the Council on the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities** under the Cabinet of Ministers. This permanent advisory body unites relevant ministries, local self-government bodies, and civil society organisations to advance inclusion and social protection. It reviews draft laws and programmes, consolidates proposals from NPOs and citizens, formulates recommendations for the executive branch, and can establish specialised working groups.



EXAMPLE

Uzbekistan: Public Councils as Platforms for Cooperation

In Uzbekistan, public councils, working groups, and public hearings serve as key venues for state–NPO interaction. Particularly notable is the anti-corruption domain, where NPOs hold representation on the National Anti-Corruption Council and constitute the majority in the Public Council under the relevant agency.

From the perspective of the investment climate and private sector development, the value of these platforms lies not only in their existence but in their capacity to narrow information asymmetries between the state, local communities, businesses, and development actors. When platforms effectively incorporate practical signals regarding infrastructure quality, service accessibility, organisational barriers, and the specific needs of entrepreneurs, NPO contributions transcend formal public participation and become a direct factor in improving the overall development environment.



CONCLUSION

The contribution of NPOs to strengthening state institutions and improving governance quality in Central Asia is realised through several interconnected functions: participation in decision-making, alignment with national priorities, implementation of joint programmes, provision of expert support, public monitoring, citizen feedback, and engagement in structured dialogue platforms. These functions position NPOs as important actors within national development systems, especially in domains where governments require beneficiary trust, specialised expertise, granular local information, and flexible implementation approaches.

Further enhancement of this contribution depends on the willingness of governments across the region to move beyond merely recording NPO participation toward rigorous assessment of its effectiveness. This necessitates systematic tracking of NPO recommendations, timely feedback on their consideration, establishment of long-term partnership mechanisms, development of robust results indicators, and fuller recognition of NPOs as valuable sources of practical intelligence on the needs of people, communities, and territories.



8. NPO Contribution to Economic Development

The economic contribution of NPOs extends well beyond their institutional role as employers, taxpayers, and participants in financial flows. Of particular significance is the value generated through their core statutory activities: developing economic skills, supporting entrepreneurship and self-employment, creating jobs for vulnerable groups, improving local services and infrastructure, promoting social entrepreneurship, and engaging communities in practical development challenges. In this capacity, NPOs help create enabling conditions for economic activity among individuals and communities, especially where access to labour markets, capital, knowledge, infrastructure, and administrative support remains constrained. For poor households, women, youth, persons with disabilities, rural residents, and small entrepreneurs, such assistance often represents a critical bridge from reliance on aid to the acquisition of skills, income generation, stable employment, and active participation in the local economy. Across the region, this contribution manifests in two principal dimensions: expanding economic opportunities for individuals and improving the broader conditions for economic activity at the community and territorial levels.

Economic development constitutes a prominent area of NPO work. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, approximately **25 %** of NPO projects focus on poverty reduction and the expansion of economic opportunities. Yet conventional indicators capture only part of the impact. A substantial share of economic value materialises downstream through beneficiaries' increased incomes, self-employment, small business formation, and broader economic activity—outcomes that are inherently difficult to measure using standard statistical tools.

8.1. Social Entrepreneurship and Inclusive Development

NPO involvement in social entrepreneurship represents a powerful instrument for inclusive development. By integrating into economic activity those individuals for whom the conventional labour market remains inaccessible, NPOs address structural barriers faced by persons with disabilities, women in difficult life circumstances, rural residents, unskilled youth, migrants, and low-income households. NPOs support this integration through vocational training, mentoring, workplace adaptation, establishment of production facilities, organisation of fee-based social services, provision of equipment, and assistance with start-up initiatives.



EXAMPLE

Turkmenistan: Production-Based Employment for Persons with Disabilities

In Turkmenistan, the vocational and production enterprises of the Societies of the Blind and the Deaf provide employment and labour rehabilitation for more than 400 persons with visual and hearing impairments. Additionally, an adapted greenhouse operated by the Centre for Support of Persons with Disabilities generates further job opportunities for this group. These initiatives demonstrate that NPO-led social entrepreneurship and production activities can simultaneously fulfil economic, rehabilitative, and social integration functions. Beneficiaries gain not only material support but also the opportunity to engage in meaningful work, generate income, and sustain active social participation.

In Tajikistan, certain NPOs have begun transitioning toward partial self-financing through the provision of paid social services and the production of goods. Beyond reducing organisational dependence on external grants, this approach generates employment and new forms of economic activity for vulnerable groups. In a context of declining donor funding, such models help sustain essential social services while simultaneously creating pathways to labour market participation for those requiring targeted support.



EXAMPLE

Kazakhstan: Labour Integration and Social Production

In Kazakhstan, social entrepreneurship is manifested in labour integration initiatives and support for individuals in difficult life situations. The DOS Centre, for example, creates jobs for persons with disabilities through an inclusive vehicle service station and wheelchair production. In Aktau, crisis centres for women have developed their own production activities, thereby enhancing the financial sustainability of services and providing meaningful employment for women in need of support. In these cases, the economic impact arises from the synergistic combination of social assistance, professional adaptation, and the successful transition of beneficiaries toward independent income generation.

8.2. Development of Entrepreneurship, Self-Employment, and Economic Skills

Barriers to economic activity frequently stem not only from lack of capital but also from deficits in business skills, financial literacy, market knowledge, legal understanding, digital competencies, and access to mentorship. Consequently, a vital dimension of NPO economic contribution lies in the development of entrepreneurship, self-employment, and economic capabilities among diverse population groups, extending beyond vulnerable communities alone. NPOs work with aspiring and established entrepreneurs, youth, women, rural residents, small enterprises, and the unemployed, offering knowledge, consulting services, mentorship, digital tools, and start-up support. Across Central Asia, they translate the broad concept of entrepreneurship into practical, accessible formats, including training programmes, consulting, mentoring, incubation support, and assistance during the critical early stages of business development. Much of the resulting economic value materialises after project completion, as trained individuals generate sustained income, launch enterprises, and expand economic activity.



EXAMPLE

Kyrgyzstan: Support for Women's and Youth Entrepreneurship

In Kyrgyzstan, agro-centres have been established in partnership with the Ministry of Science, Higher Education and Innovation and regional universities. By the end of 2024, one NPO alone had created **6** agro-centres across **6** regions, each training approximately **800** beneficiaries annually. NPOs are also developing a network of educational centres for young people under 36, equipping future and current farmers with entrepreneurial and practical skills. More than a dozen NPOs actively promote women's entrepreneurship through mentoring, training for existing and aspiring women entrepreneurs, start-up support, introduction of youth to business fundamentals, and specialised programmes in tourism, financial literacy, business strategy, and legal assistance. Mentoring and coaching, often delivered remotely and in partnership with regional women's entrepreneur associations, have proven especially effective in helping women overcome both psychological and organisational barriers to business creation and growth.



EXAMPLE

Turkmenistan: Digital Literacy for Rural Women

In Turkmenistan, **450** rural women completed digital literacy courses organised with the participation of the public association “Yenme”. This example is particularly relevant to the section on entrepreneurship and economic skills, as it illustrates how NPOs can significantly expand rural women's access to basic digital competencies. These skills are rapidly becoming an essential prerequisite for self-employment, micro-enterprise development, the effective promotion of goods and services, and more active participation in the contemporary economy.

A notable regional trend is the establishment of entrepreneurship support centres with NPO assistance. These centres are being developed not only in urban centres but also in rural communities. Staffed by specialists in legal, financial, marketing, and communication aspects of business, they transform entrepreneurial support into a permanent, locally accessible service. In Kyrgyzstan, for instance, such centres now operate in five regions of the country.

Overall, NPOs function as practical intermediaries for economic knowledge in contexts where government programmes may be too general and commercial consulting remains out of reach for many aspiring entrepreneurs, rural residents, and small-scale initiatives. The resulting economic outcomes include greater self-reliance, improved decision-making, creation of new income streams, and broader participation in local economies.

8.3. Infrastructure and Service Projects Influencing Economic Conditions

NPO involvement in infrastructure and service projects contributes to economic development by identifying community needs, mobilising partners and resources, organising citizen participation, supporting the management of new services, and aligning infrastructure solutions with local development goals. For entrepreneurs, farming households, and communities, the relevant infrastructure extends beyond roads, water, energy, and communications to encompass access to information, organisational support, stakeholder trust, and the capacity to manage services sustainably. In this domain, NPOs help alleviate infrastructure bottlenecks, attract external resources, build local management capabilities, and thereby improve key elements of the territorial investment climate.



EXAMPLE

Uzbekistan: Water Supply as an Element of the Local Investment Climate

In Uzbekistan, the Republican Centre for Support and Development of Living Conditions of the Population “Taraqqiyot” implemented a rural development model centred on the creation of autonomous drinking water supply organisations. The initiative delivered measurable results for both social welfare and local economic conditions. Reliable access to clean water reduces household expenditure, improves the operation of schools, kindergartens, and social facilities, strengthens the resilience of rural settlements, and fosters a more predictable environment for economic activity. As a result, more than 170,000 rural residents gained access to clean drinking water, 43 decentralised water supply systems were constructed, and over 850 kilometres of networks were installed. Significantly, 33 systems were transferred to community management through local NPOs, converting one-time infrastructure delivery into a sustainable model of local service governance.



8.4. Local Economic Activity and Community Development

NPOs contribute to local economic development by assisting communities in identifying needs, organising collective action, managing local resources, attracting financing, and sustaining newly established services. This role is especially critical in rural, remote, and less-developed areas, where economic activity is often limited by inadequate infrastructure, scarce information, poor service accessibility, and weak representation of residents' interests in decision-making.

In these settings, NPOs act as facilitators of local change. They help convert fragmented community needs into coherent projects, funding applications, programmes, partnerships, and practical solutions. At the community level, their economic contribution strengthens collective capacities to set priorities, coordinate joint efforts, mobilise resources, manage services, and engage effectively with local authorities and self-government bodies. This work builds an organisational foundation for sustained local development and enhances the resilience of community-led economic initiatives.



EXAMPLE

Tajikistan: Regional CSO Networks and Hard-to-Reach Communities

In Tajikistan, regional civil society organisation (CSO) networks in Khatlon, Sughd, and the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast deliver assistance, knowledge, and practical approaches to hard-to-reach communities. Drawing on extensive experience with international partners and local populations, these networks support the implementation of national measures while advancing grassroots development. They play a vital role in preventing the loss of expertise and operational capacity in areas where access to services, information, and economic opportunities is severely constrained.



EXAMPLE

Кыргызстан: помощь местным властям в улучшении инвестиционного климата

In Kyrgyzstan, NPOs actively assist district administrations in developing territorial investment profiles and marketing materials, including place branding. They also facilitate the creation of business interaction platforms and organize festivals of local producers as well as investment forums. In addition, NPOs contribute to the improvement of local infrastructure and services, often in close partnership with local self-government bodies. Their initiatives typically include the design of sector-specific economic programmes, the identification of donor financing, and the practical implementation of projects aimed at strengthening food security, enhancing public services, and creating more favourable conditions for economic activity.

The “Taraqqiyot” model in Uzbekistan (discussed earlier) further illustrates that local economic development depends not only on physical infrastructure but also on robust institutional arrangements for its management. Transferring water supply systems to community-based management through local NPOs has enhanced self-reliance and embedded practical experience in governing services that directly influence quality of life and rural economic conditions.



8.5. Innovations and Digital Solutions with Economic Impact

For NPOs, innovation primarily means the ability to adapt solutions rapidly to the specific needs of particular groups or territories. While government programmes typically involve lengthy preparation, formal procedures, and large-scale administrative rollout, NPOs can initiate smaller-scale pilots—such as new service models, training programmes, mentoring schemes, digital tools, production facilities, or local partnerships. Successful pilots can later be scaled up through state programmes, social contracting, business partnerships, donor support, or organisational expansion. **For regional analysis, the innovative contribution of NPOs to economic development may be grouped into four broad categories:**

- Employment and skills innovations — new models of training, mentoring, career guidance, IT skills development, and labour-market integration for persons with disabilities, women, youth, and other groups requiring additional support.
- Entrepreneurial and production model innovations — novel approaches to self-employment, social entrepreneurship, small-scale production, service initiatives, and start-ups, including training, mentoring, equipment provision, market access, and job creation.
- Technological and digital innovations — e-commerce platforms, remote mentoring, digital literacy programmes, assistive technologies, and digital tools for support, monitoring, and service coordination.
- Environmental and resource-efficiency innovations — green solutions, climate adaptation measures, and energy- and resource-saving practices that lower costs, increase territorial resilience, and open new pathways for local development.

From an economic perspective, these innovations generate several important effects. First, they expand access to employment and self-employment opportunities for individuals who face barriers to entering conventional labour markets. Second, they reduce the costs of obtaining knowledge, services, and consultations through digital and remote formats. Third, they help transform social services into more sustainable support models, including training programmes, production initiatives, assistive technologies, and social entrepreneurship. Fourth, they strengthen local economic resilience by promoting resource efficiency, environmental solutions, shared services, and the development of local capacities.



EXAMPLE

Kazakhstan: ITeachMe and ITMLab as a Transition from Digital Learning to Inclusive Technologies

The ITeachMe Public Foundation in Kazakhstan has evolved from a local initiative into a comprehensive educational platform dedicated to building digital competencies among persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. Its programmes cover SMM, digital marketing, graphic design, copywriting, video editing, and digital communications, integrating professional and soft skills. Over five years, the platform has trained more than **1,500** graduates, implemented over **35** educational and social projects, and achieved a **90 %** employment rate among completers. The foundation subsequently launched ITMLab, an assistive technology incubator that unites developers, designers, and users to create prototypes such as smart glasses for the blind and sensory interfaces. In 2025, **10** developer teams each received grants of KZT **600,000** (USD 1,250), with final presentations held at Astana Hub. This trajectory illustrates how NPOs can effectively link inclusion, digital skills development, employment, and technology entrepreneurship.



In Kyrgyzstan, innovative NPO practices in the economic sphere include digital literacy training, e-commerce support, remote mentoring, and novel vocational models. Examples range from training low-income households to list guesthouse services on Booking.com, providing remote mentoring to women entrepreneurs in the regions, developing IT skills among youth with disabilities, to building capacity among entrepreneurs and consultants through regional support centres. These initiatives expand access to markets, knowledge, and mentorship for populations and territories that conventional business support systems often fail to reach.



CONCLUSION

The contribution of NPOs to economic development in Central Asian countries lies in creating enabling conditions for employment, self-employment, entrepreneurship, sustainable services, local infrastructure, and community-based economic activity. This contribution differs fundamentally from the sector's institutional role. The focus here is not primarily on jobs or tax payments generated within NPOs themselves, but on the downstream changes experienced by beneficiaries, local communities, vulnerable groups, and territories as a result of NPO interventions.

Regional practice reveals several consistent patterns. In Kyrgyzstan, NPOs emphasise entrepreneurial, financial, and digital skills, self-employment support, and local infrastructure. In Kazakhstan, prominent areas include social entrepreneurship, labour integration of persons with disabilities, and employment creation for women in crisis situations. In Uzbekistan, a strong example is community-managed rural water supply. In Tajikistan, contributions appear through social entrepreneurship, expert networks, and support for hard-to-reach communities. In Turkmenistan, income-generating enterprises and vocational-production models for persons with disabilities are especially significant.

A defining feature of this contribution is that much of its economic impact materialises beyond the lifespan of individual NPO projects. An organisation may deliver training, establish a service, support a social enterprise, or introduce community management of infrastructure, yet the primary results—new employment, increased incomes, reduced costs, greater household resilience, and enhanced community self-reliance—emerge later and often endure independently.



9. Social Contribution of NPOs and Ensuring Access to Services

For many individuals, the value of NPOs begins with the practical possibility of obtaining assistance in situations that cannot easily be resolved independently or through standard administrative channels. These situations frequently involve domestic violence, disability, lack of identity documents, poverty, migration-related risks, social isolation, serious illness, legal vulnerability, or family crises. In such cases, NPOs transform an individual's need into a structured pathway to support — from initial contact and consultation through to access to services, rights protection, document restoration, rehabilitation, crisis intervention, or integration into the broader social support system.

The social role of NPOs is particularly vital for groups whose circumstances are compounded by institutional distrust, stigma, limited awareness, geographic remoteness, dependence on family members, low legal literacy, or insufficient personal resources. Operating close to people's lived realities, NPOs are often better positioned to address problems holistically, encompassing legal, psychological, safety, documentation, income, housing, health, family, and public service dimensions.

9.1. Social Assistance and Specialized Services

NPO-provided social services are distinguished by their focus on highly individualized needs that demand trust, professional specialization, and continuity of support. Unlike standardised mass programmes, NPO services typically address complex situations requiring a coordinated sequence of interventions: initial consultation, comprehensive needs assessment, referral to specialists, assistance with state institutions, family support, rehabilitation, and long-term follow-up.





Across Central Asia, NPOs deliver a wide range of social, rehabilitation, counselling, educational, medico-social, psychological, and humanitarian services. Their role is particularly prominent for groups for whom services may exist formally but remain practically inaccessible without additional facilitation. NPOs act as effective intermediaries, explaining rights, assisting with documentation, accompanying beneficiaries through bureaucratic processes, facilitating referrals, and maintaining communication with families, communities, and government bodies.

Specialised services frequently emerge in domains where conventional systems lack sufficient flexibility or expertise. These include:

- support for children with autism;
- services for persons with disabilities;
- crisis assistance for survivors of violence;
- support for care leavers from residential institutions;
- hospice care;
- assistance for people with rare diseases;
- services for older persons;
- legal-psychological support for migrants.

In these areas, NPOs accumulate deep practical knowledge derived from daily engagement with beneficiaries and their families.

Such assistance is valuable to governments because it addresses demand for highly individualised, continuous support, thereby reducing the number of people who fall outside formal systems due to procedural complexity, lack of information, or reluctance to seek help. For families and communities, it often represents the first step toward restoring resilience and alleviating social tensions.



EXAMPLE

Kyrgyzstan: Semi-Residential Social Services

In Kyrgyzstan, non-state providers - predominantly NPOs - deliver **72 %** of semi-residential social services. These include development centres for children with disabilities, crisis centres, socio-medical and socio-psychological support centres, day centres for older persons, and other forms of assistance to vulnerable groups. This distribution underscores the systemic importance of NPOs in providing flexible, high-impact services that require close and sustained engagement with beneficiaries.

9.2. Supporting Vulnerable Groups and Reducing Barriers to Access

Vulnerability often arises from intersecting factors such as poverty, disability, violence, age, migration status, lack of documentation, social stigma, geographic remoteness, or dependence on family members. In such contexts, the formal availability of services does not guarantee actual access.

NPOs reduce these barriers through personalised, trust-based support that is particularly critical for individuals who are hesitant to approach state institutions or uncertain about how to navigate them.

NPO social assistance typically involves a coordinated sequence of interventions—problem identification, counselling, accompaniment, advocacy, rehabilitation, and follow-up—carried out in close cooperation with authorised state bodies and in accordance with established protocols and standards.



The complexity of many life situations makes this role especially visible. A survivor of violence may simultaneously need shelter, legal protection, psychological support, medical care, child protection, and income restoration. A person with a disability may require rehabilitation, physical accessibility, educational access, legal safeguards, and shifts in family or community attitudes. NPOs are often uniquely positioned to integrate these elements into coherent, practical pathways.



EXAMPLE

Tajikistan: Introduction of Digital Tools to Protect the Rights of Women and Children

In Tajikistan, a coalition of public associations, in partnership with the Committee on Women and Family Affairs, developed and introduced a national electronic system for registering cases of violence against women and children. The system has been rolled out nationwide, with substantial numbers of civil servants and social workers trained in its use. This initiative demonstrates how NPOs not only deliver direct assistance to survivors but also build technological infrastructure for improved state monitoring and response.

Psychological support holds intrinsic value, as many beneficiaries seek assistance while experiencing crisis, fear, confusion, or prolonged emotional distress. For individuals affected by violence, exploitation, family conflict, serious illness, discrimination, or social isolation, it provides a safe space for dialogue, helps mitigate the effects of trauma, and restores their capacity for independent decision-making. When combined with legal, social, and medical assistance, psychological support makes the overall response more comprehensive and increases the likelihood of successfully overcoming crisis situations.

In Uzbekistan, NPOs provide legal and psychosocial support to women, persons with disabilities, children, low-income families, and other vulnerable groups. In the disability sector, these organisations play a key role in shifting from charity-based approaches to rights-based ones. They promote access to employment, stronger engagement with employers, and fuller participation of persons with disabilities in public life.



EXAMPLE

Turkmenistan: Anti-Trafficking Hotline

The public association “Ynam” in Turkmenistan has operated an anti-trafficking hotline for over 15 years, providing consultations to more than 10,000 people. Combining informational, legal, and advisory support, the hotline identifies exploitation risks and facilitates referrals to further assistance. Its sustained operation highlights the importance of trusted, rapid-response mechanisms for sensitive issues.



EXAMPLE

Tajikistan: Anti-Trafficking Hotline

The Umed network, uniting more than 20 organisations in Tajikistan, has integrated the ‘voice from remote villages’ into the work of the Inter-agency Working Group on Combating Trafficking in Persons. The qualitative change is evident in the significantly strengthened cooperation between law enforcement agencies and civil society, which has rendered state action plans more targeted and effective in preventing the risks of migrant exploitation.



EXAMPLE

Uzbekistan: Inclusive Employment through the IshPlus.uz Platform

The NGNPO Sharoit Plus promotes the economic integration of persons with disabilities through the IshPlus.uz platform, launched in 2021. The platform offers consultations, training, and job placement for jobseekers while assisting employers with inclusive recruitment practices. In its first six months, the platform facilitated employment for more than 130 persons with disabilities.

9.3. Crisis and Rehabilitation Services

Crisis and rehabilitation services provided by NPOs are particularly important because they address situations requiring urgent, confidential, and highly specialised assistance. These may include violence, human trafficking, family crises, loss of identity documents, disability, serious illness, addiction, conflict with the law, homelessness, or other circumstances demanding immediate intervention and sustained recovery support.

Crisis assistance is inherently sensitive. It requires not only professional expertise but also trust, safety, rapid response capacity, flexibility in non-standard situations, and the ability to coordinate multiple forms of support. NPOs frequently serve as the first point of contact for individuals seeking help.

Rehabilitation services, by contrast, operate over a longer horizon. They assist individuals in restoring skills, health, independence, social connections, and the capacity to study, work, or participate fully in community life. For children with disabilities, survivors of violence, or people facing complex life circumstances, rehabilitation typically demands continuous support, family involvement, and adaptive service delivery aligned with the individual's pace of recovery.

This work is also significant for social protection systems. It helps identify gaps in standard services, tests more targeted support models, and provides governments with evidence on which forms of assistance require long-term financing or institutionalisation.



EXAMPLE

Kazakhstan: Civic Solidarity and Crisis Response

The “Oxygen SOS” initiative in Taraz emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic in response to oxygen shortages and healthcare system overload. Volunteers delivered oxygen cylinders, medicines, and food to older people, individuals with limited mobility, and families in self-isolation.

After the acute phase, the initiative formalised as a public association and expanded its work across Zhambyl Region. It now supports persons with disabilities, low-income families, children from private orphanages, and older persons, while also participating in emergency response, including assistance during winter snowstorms on highways. This case illustrates the capacity of NPOs and volunteer initiatives to mobilise local resources rapidly and strengthen community resilience in crisis situations.



EXAMPLE

Kyrgyzstan: Crisis Centres for Survivors of Domestic Violence

The majority of crisis centres for survivors of domestic violence in Kyrgyzstan were established and are operated by NPOs. These centres provide temporary shelter, psychological support, social assistance, and help in accessing protection mechanisms. Government support through state social contracting enables NPOs to apply their specialised capacity in an area that demands high levels of confidentiality and expertise.



EXAMPLE

Uzbekistan: Crisis Assistance for Women Affected by Violence

The NGNPO “Rahmdillik,” led by Bibisora Aripova, was among the first crisis centres in Uzbekistan for women experiencing domestic violence. The centre has grown from four to approximately 50 places for women and children, offering temporary shelter along with medical, psychological, legal, and social support. More than 1,000 women have completed rehabilitation programmes that include vocational training, craft skills development, and support for self-employment.

In Kazakhstan, NPOs deliver crisis and specialised assistance to survivors of domestic violence, families in difficult circumstances, children with autism, care leavers, older persons, and hospice patients. These services require individualised needs assessments, multidisciplinary approaches, and sustained engagement with beneficiaries and families.

In Turkmenistan, public organisations provide sign language interpretation, rehabilitation, and employment adaptation support for persons with disabilities.

9.4. Changes in Beneficiaries’ Opportunities and Quality of Life

The ultimate social contribution of NPOs is reflected in tangible improvements in people’s lives: restored safety, access to rights, better health, reduced isolation, acquired skills, greater independence, expanded social networks, and increased community participation.

For many beneficiaries, NPO support serves as a pivotal entry point to lasting change. Legal counselling may restore documents or entitlements; psychological assistance may help overcome crisis; rehabilitation may increase independence for a child or adult with a disability; and training with ongoing support may open pathways to employment, education, or social integration.

Such changes are often gradual. A single service rarely resolves an entire problem, yet sustained, trust-based engagement combined with linkages to public systems can fundamentally alter an individual’s or family’s trajectory. Assessing this contribution therefore requires attention to the quality and depth of change rather than solely the volume of services delivered.

The social contribution of NPOs is inherently difficult to capture through a single set of indicators, as service coverage does not always reflect the depth of change in beneficiaries’ lives. Nevertheless, quantitative indicators remain valuable for understanding the scale of NPO activities. They reveal the number of people receiving consultations, services, or support, as well as the number of service centres established, specialists trained, volunteers engaged, jobs created, and operational facilities.



Different types of quantitative data are available across the region. Some indicators measure direct beneficiary outreach, others reflect service infrastructure, and still others capture staffing and volunteer capacity. Although these data are not always comparable across countries, they clearly demonstrate that the social contribution of NPOs has both practical significance and measurable dimensions.



CONCLUSION

The social contribution of NPOs in Central Asian countries is grounded in the practical provision of assistance, services, and protection for individuals facing vulnerability, risks, rights violations, or limited capacity to seek support independently. NPOs help transform personal problems into concrete solutions: consultation, access to services, documentation, protection, rehabilitation, safe accommodation, or integration into the social assistance system.

Regional practice reveals several consistent characteristics of this contribution. It is targeted, addressing the specific life situation of the individual. It is comprehensive, combining legal, psychological, social, rehabilitation, and advisory support. It is trust-based, operating effectively in sensitive and crisis contexts.

It is measurable in terms of outreach, though its deeper impact lies in improvements to people's quality of life, independence, and security.

Further strengthening of this contribution requires sustainable financing, formal recognition of specialised services within state systems, expanded social contracting mechanisms, qualitative assessment of outcomes, and more systematic integration of proven NPO models into national social policy.