



THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN: GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION, ADMINISTRATIVE-TERRITORIAL DIVISION, POPULATION AND CLIMATE

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Abstract: The Republic of Uzbekistan, a doubly landlocked country in the heart of Central Asia, occupies a strategically vital position that has shaped its history, economy and society for millennia. Covering an area of 448,978 km², it is bordered by five nations and is the only country in the world whose every neighbour is also landlocked. This article provides a comprehensive overview of Uzbekistan's geographical location and relief, its current administrative-territorial structure (12 regions, one autonomous republic and the capital city), demographic dynamics (population exceeded 37 million in 2025), ethnic and urban–rural distribution, and its sharply continental arid climate. The interrelationship between these factors continues to influence water management, agricultural productivity, urbanisation trends and sustainable development strategies in one of the fastest-growing nations in Central Asia.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, Central Asia, doubly landlocked, geography, administrative divisions, Karakalpakstan, population growth, demographics, continental climate, Aral Sea crisis, Fergana Valley



Introduction

Located at the crossroads of the ancient Silk Road, the Republic of Uzbekistan is the demographic and geographic centre of gravity of Central Asia. With geographic coordinates roughly between 37° and 46° N latitude and 56° and 74° E longitude, Uzbekistan is the most populous country in the region and one of only two doubly landlocked countries on Earth (the other being Liechtenstein). Its neighbours are Kazakhstan to the north and northwest, Kyrgyzstan to the northeast, Tajikistan to the southeast, Afghanistan to the south, and Turkmenistan to the southwest.

The country's landscape is dominated by vast deserts (notably the Kyzylkum), fertile intermontane valleys (especially the Fergana Valley), and mountain systems in the east belonging to the Tian Shan and Gissar-Alay ranges. Two major rivers – the Amu Darya and Syr Darya – historically fed the Aral Sea, but intensive Soviet-era irrigation has reduced the sea to less than 10 % of its former size, creating one of the planet's worst environmental disasters.

Uzbekistan's modern administrative structure, population growth rate of approximately 1.9 % per year, and extreme continental climate continue to define both the challenges and opportunities facing the country as it pursues ambitious economic and social reforms in the 2020s.

1. Geographical Position and Physical Geography

Uzbekistan spans 448,978 km², stretching 1,425 km west to east and 930 km north to south. Its relief can be divided into three major zones:

- The Ustyurt Plateau and the Kyzylkum Desert cover about 60 % of the territory in the west and centre.



- The broad alluvial plains and fertile loess foothills of the Fergana Valley, Chirchik-Angren Valley, and Zeravshan Valley host the majority of the population and agriculture.
- The eastern and southeastern mountain ranges (Western Tian Shan, Turkestan, Gissar, and Pamir-Alay systems) rise to the country's highest point – Khazrat Sultan (4,643 m) on the border with Tajikistan.

The country has no direct access to the ocean, making it dependent on transit agreements for international trade. However, its central location places it at the heart of emerging transport corridors such as the China–Central Asia–Europe railway and the Trans-Afghan railway projects.

2. Administrative and Territorial Division

Since the latest reforms of 2023–2024, Uzbekistan consists of:

- 12 regions (viloyatlar): Andijan, Bukhara, Fergana, Jizzakh, Namangan, Navoi, Kashkadarya, Samarkand, Sirdarya, Surkhandarya, Syrdarya, Tashkent Region, and Khorezm.
- 1 autonomous republic: Karakalpakstan (Qoraqalpog‘iston Respublikasi), with its capital in Nukus.
- 1 city with region-level status: Tashkent (the national capital).

These 14 primary units are subdivided into 175 districts (tumans) and 1,189 rural and urban communities (as of 2025). Karakalpakstan, occupying 37 % of the country's territory (166,590 km²), enjoys considerable autonomy under the Uzbek Constitution, including its own parliament (Joqarg‘i Kenes) and legislation, while remaining an integral part of Uzbekistan.



3. Population and Demographic Trends

As of 1 December 2025, Uzbekistan's population is estimated at 37,053,428 inhabitants (State Statistics Agency of Uzbekistan & Worldometer live data), making it the 40th most populous country globally and by far the most populous in Central Asia.

Key demographic indicators (2024–2025):

- Annual growth rate: ~1.9 %
- Total fertility rate: 2.95 children per woman (2024 estimate)
- Median age: 29.6 years
- Urbanisation rate: 50.7 % (2025) – Tashkent city alone has ~3 million residents

- Population density: 87.4 persons/km² (highest in Fergana Valley: >700 persons/km² in Andijan Region)

Ethnic composition (2024 census preliminary data):

- Uzbeks – 84.5 %
- Tajiks – 4.8 %
- Kazakhs – 3.0 %
- Russians – 2.1 %
- Karakalpaks – 2.0 %
- Tatars, Koreans and others – 3.6 %

The country maintains a very youthful population structure, with 28 % under 15 years of age and only 6.8 % over 65, providing a substantial demographic



dividend but also placing pressure on education, employment and urban infrastructure.

4. Climate

Uzbekistan possesses one of the most extreme continental arid climates on Earth (Köppen: mainly BWk – cold desert and BSk – cold semi-arid).

Characteristic features:

- Average July temperature in Tashkent: +33–36 °C; in Termez: +38–41 °C (absolute maxima exceed +49 °C)
- Average January temperature: –1 to –3 °C in the north, +2 to +4 °C in the south (minima reach –38 °C in Ustyurt)
- Annual precipitation: 100–200 mm in plains, up to 600–800 mm in mountain foothills
- Sunshine duration: 2,800–3,200 hours per year
- Sharp daily temperature amplitudes (up to 25–30 °C in spring and autumn)

The ongoing desiccation of the Aral Sea has worsened dust and salt storms, increased continentality, and contributed to soil salinisation affecting millions of hectares of farmland. Climate-change projections (World Bank Climate Knowledge Portal, 2024) forecast a further rise of 2–3.5 °C by 2050 and a 10–20 % decline in precipitation in most regions, intensifying water-security challenges.

Conclusion

Uzbekistan's geographical centrality, youthful and rapidly growing population, clearly defined administrative structure, and extreme continental climate together form both the foundation of its development potential and the source of its most pressing challenges. The country's double landlocked status is increasingly offset by



massive investments in rail and road infrastructure, while demographic growth offers a large labour force and domestic market. However, sustainable management of scarce water resources, adaptation to climate change, and balanced regional development remain critical priorities for the coming decades. Successfully addressing these intertwined geographical and demographic realities will determine whether Uzbekistan can fully realise its ambition to become Central Asia's leading economic and cultural hub in the 21st century.

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