

BRIEFING | AUGUST 2022

# Lessons from Uzbekistan

## Addressing security concerns through civil society and government cooperation

**Uzbekistan has undergone significant political shifts since the death of long-time President Islam Karimov in 2016, moving in a general direction of reform, including the easing of repressive policies and some widening of space for civil society. However, the pace of this reform has varied, with local implementation of a range of new laws and policies facing obstacles.**

Despite important steps forward in the political, economic, labour, foreign policy and social spheres, there are worrying trends that indicate stalled efforts, top-down tendencies and a controlled style of governance. Uzbekistan stands at a critical juncture – where support for civil society, collaboration, transparency and tackling important social issues such as gender-based violence are crucial to ensure continued progress along the path towards a more open and democratic society.

This briefing presents learnings and recommendations for widening civil society space and improving relationships between government, civil society and communities. This is based on our work with partners, state bodies and communities – including conflict analysis assessments, consultations, implementation and evaluation – in the three regions of Jizzakh, Namangan and Tashkent, as well as more generalised conclusions and recommendations at the national level.

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Since 2016, the growth of civil society has gained momentum, with new organisations ready to engage government partners and communities to improve life in Uzbekistan. Because of the new and rapidly changing environment, organisations working on issues relating to peacebuilding and conflict prevention are still relatively new. According to civil society partners working in the country, peacebuilding and its associated principles are not well understood among the public, civil society and state institutions – indicating a need for growth and raising awareness in this area. But its relative unfamiliarity does not detract from its potential merits in addressing a variety of crucial issues that affect people’s lives – such as reducing gender-based violence and discrimination, ensuring safety for border communities, addressing support for violent groups, and ensuring safe and sensitive reintegration of families who have returned from abroad after participating in the activities of violent groups.

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### Supporting the reintegration of families of foreign fighters

Saferworld started its first project in Uzbekistan in 2018, funded by the United States Institute of Peace, which established community security working groups and initiatives in Jizzakh. This project was complementary to the Uzbekistan Government’s rehabilitation and reintegration programme. The reintegration of the families of foreign fighters has captured considerable attention in Uzbekistan (and beyond), with substantial government repatriation efforts since 2019 involving identifying families abroad, arranging transport back to Uzbekistan (through special operations known as Mehr, or ‘mercy’)<sup>1</sup> and providing services to aid reintegration.<sup>2</sup> Returnees – the majority of whom are women and children – face discrimination for their previous associations with violent groups and, due to the perceived unfairness of state-sponsored support, they are often treated with suspicion or resentment.<sup>3</sup> Issues related to their reintegration and relations with the rest of their communities are regularly

identified as priority concerns for communities, as reported by our partner Istiqlol Avlodi. This adds an additional layer of discrimination – women and young people are already marginalised in Uzbekistan, with women and girls impacted by harmful gender norms and barriers to education and employment. There is also discrimination and exclusion based on factors such as ethnic or religious identity. Women or young returnees can therefore face multiple forms of intersecting discrimination, making it difficult for them to access some resources (such as educational opportunities, bank loans or land for agriculture), earn a living or participate in public life. This has the potential to increase feelings of isolation and exclusion among returnees, which can result in reintegration efforts falling short and returnees moving back to support violent groups. It is at this stage that NGOs have stepped in to successfully provide additional support.



Community security working group members from Madani Maorif *makhalla* work together on compiling activities to include in an action plan in Namangan.

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## Building peace and security through support to women-led civil society organisations in Uzbekistan

Given the need for greater work with communities and to support civil society organisations (CSOs) through partnership, in 2018 Saferworld piloted a project on building peace platforms in Uzbekistan with partner Istiqlol Avlodi. This was followed by a project funded by the United States Institute of Peace from 2021–2022 that scaled up this initiative to three regions – Jizzakh, Namangan and Tashkent. The latter project supported women-led CSOs in Uzbekistan to lead on preventing conflict and addressing drivers of insecurity through collaborative platforms called community security working groups, enabling them to work with communities (particularly women and young people), local authorities and law enforcement officials to address security concerns.

Many people voluntarily joined these groups, including representatives of local government agencies, community activists (such as *makhalla* – or community – leaders), women, young people, religious leaders, minorities and the police. Through training, workshops and mentorship, we built people’s skills, including on peacebuilding concepts, community security, and gender- and conflict-sensitive approaches, and supported CSO representatives to accompany the groups in their work

to address peace and security in their communities. The locations of the community security working groups were chosen based on consultations with regional offices of partner Istiqbolli Avlod as well as local authorities, who identified needs and gaps in services and opportunities, especially for vulnerable groups.

In the Jizzakh region, we chose communities based on our previous pilot project from 2018–2019, in which we helped to establish two community security working groups to tackle locally identified problems. We chose Pakhtakor because of its multi-ethnic community, reliance on labour migration, lack of infrastructure and high levels of crime. By contrast, Zarbdor is largely monoethnic, but a large proportion of the population work abroad in Russia. In Namangan, consultations indicated that the neighbourhood of Madanii Maorif should be a priority, due to restrictive gender norms, poor economic conditions, and high levels of stigmatisation and conservatism. In the Tashkent region, we chose the community of Boghiston due to its remote location, lack of infrastructure, and its limited access to services and opportunities to pursue interests or skills within the community.

# Conflict analysis of community challenges

Project partners Istiqlol Avlodi and Istiqbolli Avlod carried out conflict analyses in each of the selected communities. We identified the problems outlined below from discussions with local authorities, community security working groups and community representatives.

**Domestic violence and harmful gender norms:** In all project regions, harmful gender norms were seen as a major driver of violence within and outside families. Violence is often perpetrated by husbands or male partners against wives or partners, or by members of the extended family against women. Our discussions with communities highlighted how this was influenced by gender norms: men are expected to be the breadwinners of the family and women are expected to be homemakers, and deviations from these strong norms can lead to psychological or physical violence. Women are often deprived of educational opportunities and employment, and may therefore be more economically dependent on men and less able to walk away from abusive environments.

As a result of men often falling short of these norms as they are unable to find employment, participants highlighted that many men increasingly end up going abroad to find work in Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates or, to a lesser extent, South Korea. These long-distance relationships often generate problems of their own – for example, men often remarry or have relationships abroad, which can lead to divorce or abandonment of women back home, who must raise children on their own without financial support. Some women – who are now forced to earn an income, take care of the home and raise the children – are consequently unable to take an active role in their children’s upbringing, which can have knock-on effects for children who might face difficult home situations or a lack of guidance or educational opportunities. Wives and mothers sometimes gain the respect of their extended families if they secure educational or work opportunities and can contribute to the family budget, but again prevailing gender norms can make this difficult.

Men who do return home often face questions around their roles as breadwinners and heads of the family if they are unable to find work, given the limited work opportunities. To fulfil these societal expectations, they might turn to other means of income generation – for example, through engaging in criminal activity, which undermines security for the wider community.

People in Namangan and Jizzakh said that widows face further discrimination – they are economically dependent on men and are forced to take on the roles of men without the necessary qualifications or experience.

## Project partners

### Center for Socio-economic and Legal Support

**Istiqlol Avlodi** is an NGO based in Jizzakh province, which has been operating since 2003. Its areas of work include human trafficking, social and economic issues, legal education, human rights, health, education, advocacy, and improving people’s livelihoods through the implementation of programmes.

### Republican Social Information Center Istiqbolli

**Avlod** (which is a network including but separate from Istiqlol Avlodi) was established in 2001 and is one of the country’s leading anti-trafficking NGOs. It also works on safe migration, preventing violent extremism, HIV/AIDS prevention, youth leadership and volunteering, and the protection of children’s rights.

Many must turn to low-wage, seasonal field work, where they face additional insecurities. Women whose husbands have died receive less sympathy or support from their communities, in contrast to men whose wives die – men receive more support from the community and from family members in raising children as well as finding a new wife. Divorced women who appeal to the *khakimiyat* (governor’s office) for alimony or other services may be ignored due to their gender identity and lack of knowledge about their rights.

Those we spoke with highlighted the importance of working with religious leaders (*imam khatib* or *biobotuns*) on these harmful gender norms, as well as with the Ministry for the Support of Makhalla and Elder Generations (the ministry in charge of supporting local neighbourhood and elder councils), to hold discussions about the importance of non-violent relationships and respect for women.

### Norms restricting girls’ access to higher education

**and employment:** People – particularly in Jizzakh – said that education is often discouraged or is inaccessible for young girls, which corresponds to parents’ expectations for their children (where boys’ education is prioritised). Girls who challenge this face a backlash in society, which can include violence or other forms of discrimination. Girls are discouraged from seeking employment; the only exception to this are jobs considered ‘suitable’ – which are generally related to nursing or other caretaking, as they can use these skills in domestic life. In Boghiston, Tashkent region, there is only one school and not enough teachers. The only way to access higher education is to



Members of the community security working group in Boghiston, Tashkent region, stand outside a resource centre.

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travel nearly two hours to Tashkent city, and because of this, some girls stay away from home for long periods of time. This places an additional barrier on girls who are therefore unable to attend school because they are unable to travel long distances or do not feel safe to do so, or their family have concerns about them travelling.

### Poor media literacy among men and boys:

The consultations also raised the problem of poor media literacy (a lack of critical thinking skills regarding media or an inability to detect fake information) among young men and boys in Jizzakh. Participants noted that women and girls were less susceptible due to scrutiny from parents and older brothers, who would often monitor their online activity. Meanwhile, men and boys had greater freedom to surf the internet and often encountered material that called for violence or pushed for more traditional or conservative norms in society.

### Low legal literacy among service providers and the public:

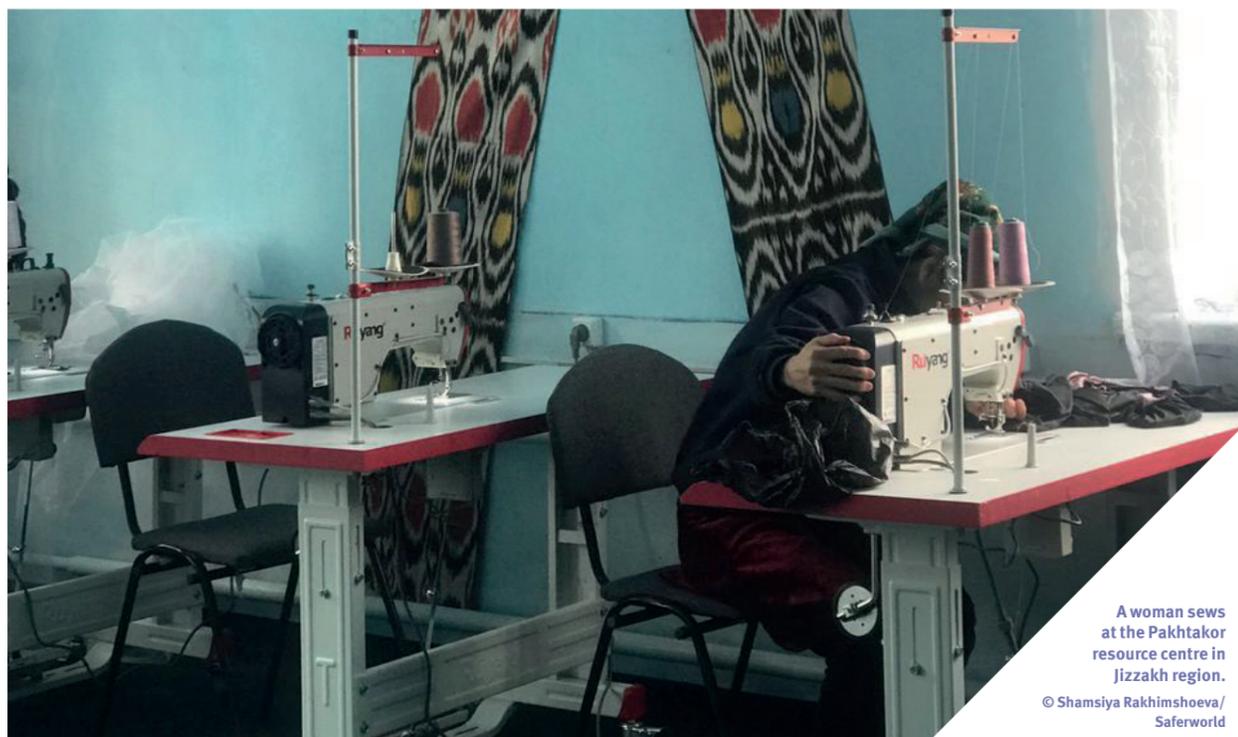
Participants, particularly in Namangan, said that a lack of understanding of or respect for laws among both service providers and the public leads to a range of problems, including corruption and ineffective responses to crime or violence. This was said to start in secondary school, where limited information on such topics is provided, and where corruption is instilled from an early age; for example, students sometimes have to pay for good grades. Several examples illustrate this point: a husband took out a loan in the name of his wife – after they divorced and he left for Russia, she found out she had a huge debt to repay. In another example, a university student was forced to pay his teacher to receive good grades, despite demonstrating his knowledge and aptitude, reinforcing the idea that money ‘solves everything’ in society. The same applies to employment, where applicants must pay the organisation or agency they are applying to in order to get onto the career ladder – solidifying inequality, injustice and grievances.

### High costs of weddings and events leading to discrimination and psychological violence (in Namangan):

Over the past 20 years, weddings and traditional ceremonies have become pageants, where each family tries to ‘outdo’ others, leading to a spiral of spending – starting with the dowry and covering the lavish events themselves – that can leave families in debt and economically insecure. In Namangan, participants noted that the men who are responsible for these expenses often take on extra work, including by going abroad to earn more money. This is reinforced by strong pressure to put on an expensive wedding that earns the respect of the community. Gifts are interpreted in the same way – with people feeling obliged to give expensive gifts to demonstrate respect, putting them in precarious financial positions. For those getting married, dowries have become more public affairs – with communities judging the amount demanded or paid, which can affect the positions of those involved in their neighbourhoods or wider communities.

### Lack of employment opportunities:

In Boghiston, Tashkent, respondents mentioned that a driving force behind conflict is high unemployment. This can result in conflict in the home, including domestic violence, due to men being unable to fulfil social expectations of ‘providing’ for their families, psychological pressures, or families being together in close quarters at all times. It can also lead to greater vulnerability to participate in violent groups (either at home or abroad, where migrants often travel in search of work). Men usually travel to bigger cities or to Russia to seek employment, while women are particularly vulnerable as they are forced to stay home and raise children due to a scarcity of childcare services. The nearest kindergarten to Boghiston is in the next village, which requires additional transport expenditure that not everyone can afford. The economic situation was compounded by COVID-19, which meant severe restrictions on travel, limited access to goods and resources, and a drastic change in everyday life that resulted in psychological and physical violence.



A woman sews at the Pakhtakor resource centre in Jizzakh region.

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## Dilfuza's story: overcoming discrimination in Pakhtakor

In Jizzakh, community security working groups decided to support the Dilorom and Oybek communities – especially women – from the Zarbdor and Pakhtakor districts, to reduce psychological pressures and improve their prospects and autonomy. Action plans were geared towards influencing or challenging gender norms that drive violence and gender discrimination in society. The groups trained women in skills that would be useful for and relevant to the local context (for example sewing, as most available jobs are in the crafts sector), and also conducted awareness campaigns on gender norms and women's rights, including advocacy around women's employment opportunities in sectors that are not traditionally seen as 'women's roles'. The aim was to help women become more economically independent and to challenge some of the harmful norms in their communities.

Dilfuza was one member of the community who was identified as being someone who could benefit from extra community support. In 2009, Dilfuza's husband was convicted of participating in the activities of banned movements. "For ten years, I took care of all household chores and took care of my three children," she said. "I worked everywhere – at a cotton factory, in a kitchen, as a farmer's hand."

In 2019, a few years after President Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power, her husband was pardoned. "[The President] told the country to include citizens who had been convicted, as well as their families, in community life." But the situation didn't get easier for Dilfuza and her

family, as they continued to deal with discrimination and suspicion.

"Our family was treated like criminals," she recalled. "People avoided me and didn't invite me to events like weddings. It felt like people were putting up walls everywhere, so I started to withdraw from them. I didn't want to go out." She felt that her children also had no prospects and would be stigmatised for much of their lives. When staff from Saferworld's partner Istiqlol Avlodi visited her house several times, they saw that the children were reluctant to go out.

The community security working group decided to reach out. They explained who they were and how they could help her. Dilfuza slowly began to trust them and speak more openly about the challenges she was facing. After consulting with her, the group also began to speak with neighbours and the wider community about the importance of tolerance and acceptance. "The working group invited me, my husband and the children to various events in the neighbourhood," Dilfuza said. "During the pandemic, they helped arrange treatment for me and helped buy essential goods. Last year, I participated in seminars and events organised by the working group in our neighbourhood. I started to feel less shy about being around people. The working group also sent my children to summer camps, which they enjoyed. They have changed a lot, too. People look at me a lot less as a criminal – they see that I am a human being and that my family is a part of this neighbourhood."

## Zulfiya's story: escaping violence in Jizzakh

"I was two years old when my mum and I travelled to Iraq to see my father," said Zulfiya, a 20-year-old woman who in 2019 returned to Uzbekistan under the humanitarian operation *Mehr-2*. "He was a strong believer, and was a member of different violent groups. My mother and I had to live in a war zone for most of my childhood. In 2009, my father was killed in battle. My mum married another man and my younger brother was born. But soon after, our house was bombed and my stepfather died. All of us were injured."

In 2019, Zulfiya heard about Uzbekistan's efforts to repatriate its citizens who had been living abroad, and decided to return home. "I returned to my homeland, but my mother and brother stayed behind in Iraq. Mum is in prison, while my brother is at an orphanage – no one knows where."

Zulfiya continued to face difficulties after returning to her home district in Jizzakh. She married an older man through '*nikah*' (a religious or traditional marriage ceremony), who had promised her a fresh start. "But it did not happen, because life became worse after marriage," she said. "He was abusive physically and psychologically."

Through the local community security working group in Zarbdor, Zulfiya found out about a shelter run by Istiqlol Avlodi, which could provide her with a place to stay while escaping an abusive situation and getting back on her feet. "I decided to run away from my husband and asked to stay temporarily in the shelter."

She stayed at the shelter for over three months, receiving psychological support as well as vocational training at the local monocentre (a centre set up as part of a government initiative to strengthen employability). She also received support and advice from the staff at the shelter on reintegrating into society. Her husband came looking for her several times but was turned away by the shelter staff.

The shelter was a temporary solution for Zulfiya, but one that came at a crucial time in her life. She said that she wants to help others in similar situations. She worked with Istiqlol Avlodi to identify people who were imprisoned abroad, and who could be brought back as part of future humanitarian operations.



A mosque located near the centre of Jizzakh city.

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## Naima's story: empowering women through financial independence in Namangan

The community security working group in Namangan decided to provide targeted support for vulnerable families in the community – including those whose relatives had joined or supported violent groups abroad – while also tackling restrictive norms, increasing legal awareness and providing skills for women to become more financially independent.

Naima is divorced, and has a young son. She was left without work following her separation from her husband. Due to a lack of income, she was forced to return home to live with her parents, who themselves faced a difficult financial situation – her father had problems with his eyes that prevented him from working, while her mother didn't have a source of income. They were worried they would not be able to support two additional people in their household. Naima's father didn't want his daughter to look for work due to his belief that this was a man's role, and because of concerns over the reputation of his daughter and the rest of the family. He was worried that neighbours would see his daughter going out every day, and that rumours would start to circulate about what she was doing and where she was going.

The community security working group in Namangan had previously taken part in trainings on gender and on resolving conflicts. Using some of the approaches they had learnt, they began working closely with Naima and her parents, talking through the importance of women being able to support themselves. The group met with her father over the course of several weeks, listening to his concerns and discussing potential solutions. Eventually, Naima's father agreed to his daughter getting a job, with the support of the community security working group,

at a commercial sewing company. When the members of the group checked in with her later, they found that she had gained confidence and had a better position economically, socially and psychologically. She had started to accept personal orders from neighbours and community members who saw the high-quality crafts she was producing as part of her new work. She felt her circle of friends had expanded and that she had become a respected voice. She was also able to support her parents financially.

"[Before], she had fallen into depression," said Naima's mother. "She did not talk to anybody and did not want to go out. She felt vulnerable and isolated herself because of her status as a divorced woman. Later, she recognised that she should not feel ashamed and that she could work and earn money herself. This totally changed things for her."

The community group's reputation increased in people's estimation (as well as with the local authorities), with more people beginning to turn to the group for aid and consultations. The increased success and recognition in Namangan led the group to conduct a survey among the community to determine their greatest needs – and, as a result, put forward an application to the Oliy Majlis (the parliament) to request an additional UZS100,000,000 (approximately USD\$9,100) in funds for young people to address domestic violence and harmful gender norms. "This request was unusual for me," said Rano Nuriddinova, Director of Istiqbolli Avlod's Namangan branch. "Usually people request material and technical support, but this time community activists wanted to focus on raising awareness of social issues."



Members of a community security working group in Namangan discuss future plans for their resource centre.  
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Shavkat Nishonov, chairperson of the community security working group in Boghiston, Tashkent region, discusses infrastructure improvement works with other members as part of their action plan.

© Maftuna Nuhridinova

## Shavkat's story: advocating to the authorities for safer communities in Boghiston

Based on an analysis of local problems, the community security working group in Boghiston, Tashkent region, chose to tackle the issue of the economic dependence of women by building skills and providing employment opportunities. They worked with the families of participating women to mitigate any backlash and to ensure buy-in from relatives. The group decided to involve the local authorities as well, to promote entrepreneurship and economic growth for women and their families.

Boghiston is a small, remote community with limited connection to the outside world. This has resulted in a lack of development in terms of infrastructure and livelihoods opportunities. Community members reported being consulted in the past by CSO staff members on how to solve issues, but they felt that there wasn't sufficient follow-up. When our partner Istiqbolli Avlod first consulted with the community in Boghiston, they were met with resistance and scepticism. However, Shavkat Nishonov – the head of the Boghiston community who was selected as the head of the community security working group – convinced others that the possible benefits would outweigh another potential disappointment. "This project is really timely and very much needed for this community as we face all sorts

of challenges," he said. "These needs range from infrastructure and employment to learning facilities."

Around the same time, Boghiston was included in a list of communities that would receive investment under the government programme 'Obod Makhalla' ('prosperous neighbourhood'). This happened as the community security working group was taking part in project trainings on community security, gender-sensitive conflict analysis and advocacy with authorities. Using these approaches, Shavkat took the community's concerns straight to the authorities involved in *Obod Makhalla* – in this case, the tourist police – to allocate funds for electricity and street lighting repairs in the town. Shavkat also pushed for the allocation of funds for irrigation canals and repairs to the school library where young people could meet.

It had been a long time since any such works had been carried out in Boghiston, but as a result of Shavkat's advocacy, the main road was asphalted and small side roads were paved, allowing cars to pass more easily and reducing the risk of accidents and mudslides. New irrigation canals reduce the risk of flooding in spring and autumn from heavy rains, while the street lights reduce crime after dark.



Community security working groups from the project regions meet with government officials, civil society organisations and authorities at a national conference in Tashkent.  
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## Conclusion and recommendations

Uzbekistan has made great strides in creating space for a more open society and listening to the needs of its people, with progress made towards economic, labour, foreign policy and social reforms. But greater consultation with communities is essential in continuing to make progress towards a more peaceful and inclusive country, where citizens feel heard and concerns are addressed before they turn into grievances that lead to conflict. The government, starting with President Mirziyoyev, has indicated that community security should form a major pillar of the country's development and future trajectory, with several decrees and policies being put in place to encourage progress in this area – including on a more inclusive approach to providing community security.<sup>4</sup> But implementation at different levels of government remains a challenge. If civil society has more space to operate – with cooperation from the government – organisations could play a crucial role by acting as a bridge with society. In contexts where CSOs can carry out their work unimpeded and with government support – such as this project, where community security working groups were supported by local authorities – they can enjoy close and trusting relationships with people, gain a deep understanding of problems and propose innovative solutions. Peacebuilding provides tools and approaches to identify and address the underlying drivers of conflict and insecurity, including joint problem-solving by communities and authorities, and analysing conflict drivers to design interventions to address them. But there are few organisations operating in the country that have

experience in this area, and awareness of such concepts remains low.

To address this gap – a lack of familiarity among civil society, the public and state institutions in Uzbekistan of peacebuilding and its principles – we have made the following recommendations. These are based on the outcomes of the conflict analysis outlined in this briefing, and on our experience of implementing the community security project with partners Istiqlol Avlodi and Istiqbolli Avlod in communities in Jizzakh, Namangan and Tashkent.

**1.** Government institutions at all levels should recognise the important role that civil society plays in addressing people's day-to-day concerns, and should actively seek to cooperate more deeply. Many of the tensions that could lead to conflict or unrest can be addressed before they escalate, through local-level initiatives carried out by community-led platforms which cooperate with government structures. Local authorities and civil society should work together on joint plans of action and facilitate dialogues, including support for collaborative platforms like community security working groups or, where they do not exist, the creation of new ones. Government support can also include funding for civil society or community-led initiatives, as well as regional exchanges with neighbouring Central Asian countries.

**2.** Local authorities should work with these collaborative platforms to jointly develop and implement action plans that address identified problems at the local level. The process of jointly working on such plans can build trust with communities, and the results can have a strong positive impact on people's daily lives.

**3.** Authorities and civil society should cooperate to conduct regular gender-sensitive and inclusive consultations with communities, such as through 'accountability days' where they listen to the concerns of communities and report back on their own initiatives to tackle community problems – seeking linkages and opportunities for collaboration.

**4.** Support for vulnerable groups, especially women, girls and returnees, can go a long way to reducing the impact of violence. Many of the community security working groups we worked with on this project focused on women's financial independence, which can help women leave abusive or violent environments when needed, or to overcome other barriers due to restrictive gender norms. However, consultations before such initiatives should be conducted with community representatives to mitigate risks or backlash. Discussions and sensitisation of the wider community around gender norms can help increase acceptability from relatives and neighbours of women studying or working in areas typically considered to be 'off limits', and can reduce risks of resentment – for example of men who may feel they are excluded from such support or that outside values are being imposed. The focus does not need to be only on women's equality, but also on the pressures associated with masculinities that can lead to violence committed by men.

**5.** Shelters need more resources and support to ensure they can respond to cases of domestic violence or to help vulnerable families to escape dangerous situations. These shelters benefit greatly from psychological specialists and social workers who can work with women or vulnerable groups such as returnees or other victims of violence. These mental health experts often need further training on psychological first aid and on working with trauma.

**6.** International donors and organisations (and government institutions where applicable) should seek to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement and local institutions on a range of tools that can help them engage more effectively with communities. For example, this could be through trainings at police academies, or through ad hoc trainings with *makhallas* or other local bodies on gender and conflict sensitivity, the community security and community policing approach, dialogue, conflict analysis and action plan development. International donors and organisations can also facilitate exchanges with other

countries to share learnings and challenges – including from neighbouring countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which have undergone similar efforts.

**7.** When it comes to violent groups, it is important to ensure that responses are sensitive to the context and do not make the problem worse. The focus should be on the root causes – such as exclusion, marginalisation, lack of justice or other grievances – that can lead to support for violent groups. Examples of responses from authorities in many countries, especially those that take a narrow focus on strong religious beliefs or other factors, have shown that often these types of responses deepen feelings of isolation or stigmatisation that drive support for violent groups in the first place. It is important to partner with civil society and inclusive collaborative groups that have a range of voices, to advance plans to address the core drivers of violence.

**8.** Government institutions and donors should continue to invest in community structures – both through the provision of material support (such as equipment and facilities) and skills-building exercises aimed at sustaining future work. For example, this could be related to advocacy skills so that community representatives can lobby local bodies for funds to continue their work and sustain collaborative platforms in their communities.

**9.** Media – which has the potential to improve or worsen conflict dynamics – can play an important role in providing well-rounded and fact-checked information on some of the problems faced by society, as well as facilitate discussions on solutions. As such, it is crucial for the government to continue to provide space for the media to openly highlight people's concerns, as well as for international donors to provide support, such as conflict-sensitive training or best practice exchanges.

**10.** The government should actively involve international organisations – such as international NGOs and intergovernmental organisations – in the development of mechanisms for implementing the 'community security' concept recently signed by the President. Such organisations can also help strengthen coordination between relevant groups, including civil society, international organisations and government structures.

### Notes

- 1 Газета.uz (2021), 'Более 90 женщин и детей возвращено из Сирии', 30 April (<https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2021/04/30/mehr-5/>)
- 2 Farrell W, Burnashev R, Azizi R, Babadjanov B (2021), 'Processes of Reintegrating Central Asian Returnees from Syria and Iraq', United States Institute of Peace, July.
- 3 Orozobekova C et al. (2021), 'The Repatriation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Women and Children from Syria and Iraq: The Experiences of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan', Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations, June.
- 4 For example, see the President's decree on the realisation of the concept of community security: Указ Президента Республики Узбекистан (2021), 'О мерах по утверждению и реализации концепции общественной безопасности республики Узбекистан'.



## About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent, not-for-profit international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives in countries and territories across Africa, Asia and the Middle East. We work in solidarity with people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe in a world where everyone can lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from fear and insecurity.

Cover photo: Members of a community security working group in Pakhtakor discuss their partnership plans at a resource centre.

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