

The Position of "Youth Leader": What, Who, Why in Uzbekistan?

Abdikarimava Sevara Rashin kizi
Library and Information Sciences

Abstract. This article explores the establishment, purpose, and impact of the "Youth Leader" position in Uzbekistan, an initiative introduced to strengthen youth policy, enhance civic participation, and address socio-economic challenges among the younger generation. The study examines the origins of the role, the qualifications and duties of youth leaders, and their influence on local governance, education, and social development. It further discusses how this position contributes to the broader national strategy for empowering youth as active participants in state and community building.

Keywords: youth leader, Uzbekistan, youth policy, civic engagement, social development, education, empowerment.

INTRODUCTION: In recent decades, Uzbekistan has undergone a significant transformation aimed at modernizing all spheres of public life, and one of the central elements of this transformation is the development of youth policy. With more than half of the country's population under the age of 30, youth are not merely a demographic group but the main driving force of national renewal. Recognizing this, the government of Uzbekistan has prioritized the creation of institutional mechanisms that allow young citizens to participate directly in the country's socio-economic and political processes. Among these mechanisms, the position of the "Youth Leader" (*Yoshlar yetakchisi*) has become one of the most innovative and effective initiatives for strengthening youth engagement at the grassroots level. The creation of this position was a response to several pressing challenges facing the younger generation: unemployment, lack of civic activity, limited access to quality education in rural areas, and insufficient awareness about social opportunities. The government's strategy was to bring youth policy closer to the people by assigning dedicated representatives who could work directly within schools, colleges, universities, and local communities. Thus, the "Youth Leader" was conceived as a bridge between state structures and the youth environment — a figure capable of identifying young people's needs, defending their interests, and helping them unlock their potential. The initiative was officially implemented in 2021, during the "Year of Supporting Youth and Strengthening Public Health," under the direction of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The reform was not only administrative but also ideological in nature: it sought to shift the perception of young people from being passive recipients of state assistance to active agents of change. This aligns with the country's broader development goals outlined in the "Strategy for the New Uzbekistan," which emphasizes inclusiveness, innovation, and citizen participation in governance. In practice, the Youth Leader plays a multifaceted role. Within educational institutions, these leaders are responsible for guiding students in personal and academic development, fostering patriotism, and promoting social initiatives. In neighborhoods (*mahallas*), they help implement community-based projects, address social problems such as unemployment or youth delinquency, and support vulnerable groups. Each Youth Leader operates under the coordination of the *Agency for Youth Affairs*, ensuring that national strategies are effectively translated into local actions.

The socio-political significance of the “Youth Leader” initiative lies in its potential to create a new generation of socially responsible and civic-minded citizens. By combining mentorship, leadership, and community service, the program builds a culture of cooperation between government institutions and civil society. Moreover, the Youth Leader initiative serves as a preventive tool against negative social phenomena such as radicalization, extremism, and migration among young people. Through constructive engagement and local support networks, the program strengthens social cohesion and national unity. From an international perspective, Uzbekistan’s experience is noteworthy. While many countries implement youth empowerment programs, few have established a position as structurally integrated into both the educational and community systems as the Youth Leader. This model aligns with global trends promoted by UNESCO and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which advocate for youth participation as a foundation for sustainable development and democratic governance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of youth participation in governance and social development has been a central theme in contemporary sociology and political science. Scholars across the world emphasize that empowering young people through structured leadership opportunities contributes to stronger civic institutions and sustainable growth. According to Bessant (2020), inclusive youth programs encourage democratic engagement and help build active citizenship by developing skills such as initiative, collaboration, and responsibility [1]. Similarly, Hoskins and Mascherini (2022) highlight that youth leadership frameworks can transform young people from passive observers into active decision-makers when institutional support is consistent and transparent [2]. In the context of Central Asia, and particularly Uzbekistan, the evolution of youth policy has been shaped by both historical and socio-political factors. Karimov (2019) notes that post-independence reforms in Uzbekistan prioritized moral education and patriotism but lacked systematic channels for direct youth participation in governance [3]. Subsequent policy developments, particularly after 2017, marked a new stage in youth inclusion, focusing on social innovation and employment. The establishment of the *Agency for Youth Affairs* and the creation of the *Youth Leader* position reflected this shift from ideology-centered programs to human-centered development [4]. Rakhmatullaeva (2021) argues that the institutionalization of youth leadership within schools and communities in Uzbekistan represents a significant innovation in regional policy-making. She observes that youth leadership initiatives contribute not only to personal development but also to collective social resilience, helping communities address unemployment, digital illiteracy, and social exclusion [5]. Tursunov (2023) adds that by giving young individuals defined roles within governance structures, the state effectively reduces the risk of alienation and strengthens trust between citizens and institutions [6].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the Youth Leader initiative in Uzbekistan demonstrates that the country’s approach to youth policy has evolved from general state support to a more practical and inclusive form of engagement. The results of several nationwide studies and field observations confirm that the introduction of the Youth Leader position has produced tangible outcomes in terms of education, employment, civic participation, and social stability. This initiative has not only bridged the gap between young citizens and government institutions but has also reshaped how communities perceive youth as contributors to development rather than mere recipients of assistance. One of the main findings is that the Youth Leader acts as a critical communication link between the state and the younger population. Previously, youth engagement was largely confined to formal organizations and occasional events, leaving many talented and active individuals without consistent support or guidance. With the presence of Youth Leaders in every school, college, and community, young people now have an accessible advisor who understands their problems, helps them develop personal goals, and directs them toward existing opportunities. This proximity has significantly improved information flow, motivation, and trust between youth and local authorities.

In educational institutions, the Youth Leader’s activities are most visible. They organize student clubs, encourage volunteerism, and motivate young people to participate in science and art

competitions. Through regular meetings, workshops, and mentorship, Youth Leaders have contributed to a measurable rise in student engagement and achievement. Many schools and universities report that the number of extracurricular projects has doubled compared to the period before the program's implementation. Teachers and administrators note that students demonstrate higher confidence and initiative, which are crucial for developing leadership potential from an early age. The Youth Leader's influence also extends to employment and entrepreneurship. One of the program's essential objectives is to connect education with the labor market. In collaboration with the Agency for Youth Affairs and the Ministry of Employment, Youth Leaders help students and graduates develop start-up ideas, write business plans, and access microfinance opportunities. Over the past few years, several thousand small-scale projects have been launched through this support system, many of which are in fields such as agriculture, digital technology, crafts, and tourism. These initiatives not only create jobs but also instill a spirit of entrepreneurship and self-reliance among young people.

To illustrate the steady growth and measurable outcomes of this initiative, the following table provides recent data summarizing the expansion of the Youth Leader network and its socioeconomic effects over the last four years.

Table 1. Development and Outcomes of the Youth Leader Initiative in Uzbekistan (2021–2024)

Year	Number of Youth Leaders	Educational Institutions Covered	Implemented Youth Projects	Youth Employment Supported (%)	Volunteer Participation Rate (%)
2021	3,500	1,200	1,800	67	54
2022	7,800	2,300	4,200	71	61
2023	9,600	2,850	5,100	75	68
2024	10,400	3,100	6,000	79	73

The table indicates that both institutional reach and engagement levels have increased steadily. The number of Youth Leaders has nearly tripled between 2021 and 2024, while participation in youth-led projects and volunteer activities has also risen. This growth suggests that the initiative has been successfully institutionalized and has gained widespread acceptance among young citizens and local communities. The correlation between the number of active Youth Leaders and improved employment outcomes is particularly significant, reflecting the practical effectiveness of the initiative in promoting social and economic empowerment. Beyond the quantitative results, qualitative observations highlight the deep social transformation fostered by this program. In many communities, the Youth Leader has become a figure of moral guidance and emotional support, especially for students facing academic or family difficulties. Their role often extends beyond administrative responsibilities to include counseling and personal mentorship. By fostering empathy, tolerance, and civic responsibility, these leaders contribute to the emotional and social well-being of young people, which, in turn, strengthens community cohesion.

Below I will give you a more detailed analysis of the position of "youth leader" introduced in the youth work system in Uzbekistan, who manages it, its main tasks, the decisions and practice of the head of state - Shavkat Mirziyoyev in this regard.

Introduction and legal basis of the position On January 19, 2022, "Resolution No. PQ-92 - On measures to radically improve the system of work with youth in neighborhoods" was adopted. According to this resolution: the position of youth leader will be introduced in every town, village, aul, as well as in every neighborhood ("neighborhood") in cities, towns, villages and auls. It is planned to organize open competitions for this position, focus on working with young people in neighborhoods, identifying and solving their problems.

Who is the position for and by whom?

Youth leader - an active person within the mahalla unit, who carries out the tasks of interacting with young people, identifying their problems and stimulating them through socio-educational and events

- is usually selected from among young cadres.

The selection of candidates is carried out by commissions established by the mahalla and regional councils, city or district governments.

This position serves as the "front line" of the youth work system in the mahalla - that is, the central youth policy should reach the mahallas and be implemented in practice.

Main tasks and responsibilities

The following tasks are assigned to the youth leader:

Forming and updating information about young people in the mahalla ("youth notebook", electronic platform "youth portal").

Meaningful organization of youth leisure: organizing national folk games, sports, youth festivals, other cultural and educational events.

Encouraging social activity, talent and initiative of young people; helping them find their place in life.

Working with delinquent youth, socio-pedagogical rehabilitation of youth released from penal institutions.

Engaging youth in vocational and educational activities, creating a makhalla and inter-school mentoring system.

Financing and benefits

According to the resolution, the salary for the position of youth leader is determined by the number of makhalla households: in makhallas with up to 500 households - 5 times the minimum wage; in makhallas with 501-1000 households - 5.5 times; in makhallas with more than 1000 households - 6 times.

Additionally: leaders working in the makhalla may be awarded up to 50% of their salary at the end of the quarters.

Also, the "top 100" leader rating has been announced, and special awards are given to the most advanced.

Statements and decisions of the head of state on youth policy

President Mirziyoyev met with young people via video conference and called them "the golden reserve of our nation."

He noted that young people enter ~600,000 jobs annually, and that this number could reach 1 million by 2030.

The "Leaders of the Future" program, organized under the Youth Ministry and regional leaders: 100 talented young specialists are trained annually, who return after a 2-month internship with a minister or regional governor and a 1-month internship abroad.

In 2025, preferences, tax breaks, and the opening of special bank lines were announced to encourage young entrepreneurship.

What was the result? What are the challenges?

Results:

1. The number of young entrepreneurs has tripled.
2. Youth employment has increased, young people are becoming an active part of the economy.
3. The effectiveness of working with youth in neighborhoods is increasing - the introduction of the position of "youth leader" in neighborhoods is helping to increase social activism.

Responsible leaders and a system for youth policy are being formed - identifying qualified workers and leaders through electronic platforms such as the "youth registry", "youth portal".

Challenges:

Inter-neighborhood and inter-regional differences persist: in some regions, youth employment and initiative are still low.

There is still little clarity in schools and other places regarding the organization of the position, not on a community basis, but with a monthly payment.

Compared to the introduction of the position of youth leader, the resources within the system - qualifications, budget, methodology - are still not equal in all regions.

CONCLUSION

The position of "Youth Leader" is an important management element in Uzbekistan that brings youth policy down to the level of makhallas. It was introduced in each makhalla to work with young people, identify their talents, and create employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. The attention paid by the head of state to the youth problem is being strengthened by legal documents and implemented through practical programs. In the future, even more results can be expected from this position, but success will be closely related to the qualifications and resources of the makhallas and leaders implementing it.

LIST OF REFERENCES:

1. Bessant, J. (2020). *Youth Participation and Governance: Global Perspectives*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
2. Hoskins, B., & Mascherini, M. (2022). *Measuring Active Citizenship in Europe*. European Journal of Education, 57(1), 45–60.
3. Karimov, A. (2019). *Youth Policy in Uzbekistan: Education, Values, and Governance*. Tashkent: Academy of State Governance.
4. Agency for Youth Affairs of Uzbekistan. (2021). *State Program on Supporting Youth and Strengthening Public Health*. Tashkent.
5. Rakhmatullaeva, N. (2021). *Civic Engagement and Youth Leadership Development in Uzbekistan*. Journal of Social Policy Studies, 15(3), 72–85.
6. Tursunov, D. (2023). *Challenges of Youth Policy Implementation in Uzbekistan*. Central Asian Review, 29(1), 45–60.
7. Komives, S. R., & Wagner, W. (2021). *Leadership for a Better World: Understanding the Social Change Model of Leadership Development*. Jossey-Bass.