

“MIGRATION OF CITIZENS OF INDEPENDENT UZBEKISTAN TO ARAB COUNTRIES”**Sattorov Yusufjon**

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Abstract: In the article, the migration processes of independent Uzbekistan’s citizens directed towards Arab countries are analysed on the basis of sources and with reference to various directions. Specifically, religious pilgrimage, educational migration, labour migration, as well as family reunification, short-term tourism and scholarly-cultural exchange become the main objects of the article. The principal factors of the migration processes are studied systemically: religious needs and spiritual motivation; prestigious religious-educational diplomas and language capital; wage differentials and pressure in the labour market; visa-administrative facilitation; recruiting networks; diaspora linkages; and the development of digital infrastructure. The issues of how migrants’ remittances affect household consumption, housing and micro-business financing — and thereby influence regional economies — are examined, and relevant scientific conclusions are drawn.

Keywords: general migration, Hajj, Umrah, educational migration, labour migration, Al-Azhar, Medina, diaspora, social remittances, diploma equivalence, wage differential, remittances (money transfers).

Introduction. Movements directed at Arab countries represent a multi-layered process linked with Uzbekistan’s historical-religious connections and contemporary labour markets. Pilgrimages such as Hajj and Umrah, scholarly exchanges with religious-educational centres in Medina and Cairo, labour flows tied to private-sector demands in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states constitute the main manifestations of this process. The fact that the share of foreign population in Saudi Arabia is high, and generally that the GCC relies strongly on migrant labour, demonstrates the stability of demand for worker inflows; meanwhile in Uzbekistan digital platforms such as “Foreign Employment” facilitate formalised departure through state-channels. At the same time, in recent years the policy of strengthening ties with compatriots abroad has been directed toward mobilising diaspora capital. The relevance of the topic is confirmed by several facts. Firstly, at the beginning of 2024 the number of Uzbek citizens working abroad was recorded at about 1.9 million, and by the beginning of 2025 it was officially about 1.34 million, which indicates the variability of external labour flows and the role of formal channels. Secondly, international remittances support domestic demand and have a direct effect on poverty: according to World Bank estimates, without the remittances poverty would have reached 16.8 per cent instead of 9.6 per cent; and the share of remittances in GDP has been systematically tracked for this reason. These factors amplify the need to study migration flows oriented towards Arab countries separately, since religious, educational and labour-drivers are concentrated in one region. At the same time, international reports on migrant labour conditions and climate risks emphasise the need for strengthening precautionary measures, prior preparation and legal protection instruments. Uzbekistan’s voluntary national report under the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) indicates that the scope of social assistance, consular support and rehabilitation programmes for overseas workers has been

expanding. This provides a significant basis for assessing protection mechanisms in the context of Arab-region realities. Thus, the necessity of this research emerges from the need to reconstruct and periodise complex flows arising at the intersection of political-institutional reforms and market demand. In the article, directions such as religious pilgrimage, educational migration, labour migration and family reunification are considered within one system, and their motivational factors — spiritual need, prestigious diploma and language capital, wage differential, visa-administrative facilitation, recruiting networks and digital infrastructure evolution — are analysed in a historical perspective. The impact of remittances on household budgets, housing investment and micro-business financing is examined from the viewpoint of regional economies; on this basis evidence-based conclusions for policy design are developed. As a historian, the aim of the article is to reconstruct the international mobility and migration processes of Uzbek citizens directed towards Arab countries in the period from 1991 to the present, interpreting them within the logic of continuity and disruption, and on the basis of source-studies. The normative and institutional transformations of state policy, the historical roots of religious-educational links, the formation of the labour market as a transnational network, and the transformation of diaspora linkages are revealed as interrelated processes. In this process, official documents, international organisations' data, digital platforms' practices and regional observations are compared, aiming to create a coherent, source-based depiction of the migration flows to Arab countries in their historical context.

Theoretical-methodological foundation. The theoretical-methodological basis of the research draws on the interpretation of migration as a multi-level phenomenon, in which individual motivations, social networks and macro-level economic-political factors intersect. Neoclassical labour market and dual labour market theories serve to explain the pull-factors of wage differentials and segmented demand in Arab countries. The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) approach places household income diversification, risk reduction and investment through remittances at the centre. Social network and diaspora capital theory reveal the role of information, trust and brokerage networks in reducing transaction costs. The concept of transnationalism allows for systematic tracing of migrants' ongoing exchanges of money, ideas and institutions between the two fields. World-systems and centre-periphery approaches elucidate the positionality of Gulf markets within regional hierarchies and capital flows. Human capital, language capital and religious-educational capital concepts serve to operationalise the linkages among educational migration and pilgrimage-rituals as development factors. The aspirations-capabilities framework is used to measure how migration decisions are conditioned by values, norms and resources. Sociology of religious mobility and pilgrimage interprets Hajj and Umrah not only as rituals, but as social processes embedded in global mobility and service ecosystems. Gender and life-course perspectives take into account differences of gender, age and family status in labour, education and family-reunification flows. The migration governance approach analyses institutions, normative-legal reforms and consular mechanisms aimed at ensuring safe, orderly and regular migration in Uzbekistan. Institutional economics and political-economic analysis assess the effectiveness of recruiting agencies, visa-administrative regimes, employment contracts and protection instruments. The concept of digital migration infrastructure considers how platforms, online intermediaries and information flows shape decision-making and transit costs. The empirical design is based on the principle of mixed methods, combining statistical data, administrative databases, sample surveys and semi-structured interviews. The historical-comparative method divides the period from 1991 to the present into stages, comparing policy documents, archive materials and open-source documents

on a source-studies basis. Units of analysis and indicators are limited to migration flows, return and re-migration, remittances and their consumption-investment composition, regional impact indicators and compliance with ethical norms.

Literature review. The theoretical foundations of the research topic are primarily framed by conceptual approaches to international migration. In classical literature neoclassical labour market, dual labour market and household-level NELM approaches interpret the economic determinants of migration decisions. Douglas S. Massey and collaborators systematically re-reviewed international migration theories, demonstrating the complementarity of paradigms explaining the emergence and continuation of flows; likewise Oded Stark and David Bloom interpreted migration as a strategy of household risk diversification. More recent work promotes the role of remittances in production and investment. In recent years, approaches seeking to capture the connection between agency and structure have emerged. The aspirations-capabilities framework developed by Hein de Haas conceptualises migration within broader social change, as a balance of personal aspirations and mobilities. This approach provides a suitable scientific basis for interpreting Uzbek citizens' religious, educational and labour-oriented flows to Arab states within one system. Literature on social networks and transnationalism addresses how migration networks, trust and repeated linkages reduce transaction costs. Alejandro Portes and his colleagues demonstrated how migration fields are solidified via bilateral flows; this offers conceptual insight into how Uzbekistan's communities integrate into the GCC space more rapidly. Regional sources on Gulf labour markets show that labour migration is strongly relied upon in Arab countries. Reports from the and others on the economics of GCC markets analyse segmentation and structural demand among Arab and Asian migrants.

Works on religious mobility interpret pilgrimage for Hajj and Umrah not only as rituals but as global mobility phenomena and service ecosystems. The collection "Muslim Travelers" by Richard C. Eickelman and James Piscatori, and research by Marco Buitelaar and Hicham Caidi examine pilgrimage's information flows, gender and everyday religiosity. Official statistical publications of Saudi Arabia regularly provide data on Hajj and Umrah figures, enabling empirical anchoring of pilgrimage flows. For Uzbekistan, institutional and statistical sources primarily consist of international organisation reports and national system data. The IOM's regular "Migration Situation" reports document the dynamics and diversification of flows; Uzbekistan's national report under the GCM records a number of normative-legal measures for the governance of labour migration. The "Foreign Employment" platform of the Agency for External Labour Migration reveals official recruiting channels and the practical mechanisms of orderly migration. On remittances and development relations, the World Bank's "Migration and Development Briefs" estimate the size, growth trends and domestic demand impact of remittances for Uzbekistan and the region. These findings empirically support within the NELM framework the thesis of remittances' consumption and investment channels. In the context of religious pilgrimage flows, the dynamics of Uzbek nationals travelling for Hajj and Umrah have been noted in mass media and embassy data; in 2024-2025 Hajj quotas were about 15 000, while the number of Umrah pilgrims increased rapidly. These indicators show that religious mobility has become a demand for resources and infrastructure. As to labour migrants' social protection and working conditions, regional literature raises issues of climate risks, the link between residency and employment contracts, and equality of access to social protection. ILO material notes that in the GCC social assistance systems are oriented to citizens and

temporary labour visas complicate protection mechanisms. Accordingly, while the theoretical literature is strong and there are ample regional institutional and statistical sources, in the case of Uzbekistan's citizens migrating to Arab states there remain gaps: at micro-level evidence, gender and life-course empirical observations, and also systematic studies of the intersection of educational migration and pilgrimage-labour linkages are lacking. While IOM, UN DESA and GASTAT provide profiles of flows, there is a distinct absence of source-based, deep.

Discussion and conclusion. After independence, the journeys of Uzbek citizens to Arab countries for Hajj and Umrah emerged as a visible sign of the restoration of religious freedoms in society, and in practice became the most mass-form of short-term international mobility. During the 1990s the state-religion governance system was being rebuilt, and the organisation of Hajj travel was constrained by strict quotas, registration lists, and consular-transport resources. In practice this process of religious mobility was integrally linked with the logistics of migratory flows, foreign currency restrictions, and flight scheduling. In the mid-2000s, even as quotas remained, a waiting-list system (queue system) developed and the tradition of performing the pilgrimage annually in groups became institutionalised. At that time the question of "long waiting times" and waiting for years was widely discussed in the community; however, precise figures were mainly limited to internal reports and in international open-data sets the pilgrim flows by country were not fully reflected. In the second half of the 2010s, transparency in the religious sphere and modernisation of governance in Uzbekistan strengthened. Between 2017 and 2019 quotas expanded in several stages: according to official information in 2019, 7,200 Uzbeks performed Hajj, which represented a notable increase compared with about 5,200 quotas in the early 2010s. At the same time, demand outstripped supply, and some citizens used quotas of other countries; for example in 2019 it was reported that more than 400 Uzbeks undertook Hajj via the quota of Russia. This situation shows the existence of cross-border "route-finding" mechanisms for pilgrimage, and the presence of recruiting and intermediary networks.

In 2020–2021 the pandemic sharply restricted Hajj and Umrah across the Muslim world. The 2020 Hajj was carried out largely with internal pilgrims, and Umrah was suspended from March. In 2021 participation numbers again reached historical lows. This global pause directly affected Uzbekistan's queue system and planning: waiting times increased and scheduled groups were re-allocated. From 2022 a structured return to travel was carried out: for Uzbekistan a quota of 12,000 was announced, and logistics and sanitary-protocols were adapted. In 2023–2024 the scale of Hajj approached the pre-pandemic levels. According to official information, quotas of 15,000 for Uzbekistan were confirmed in both 2023 and 2024, and the Hajj seasons were conducted on the basis of those quotas. Comparative figures with other Central Asian states were also published: quotas for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan formed in the range 5–7 thousand. This comparative plan indicates that internal demand in Uzbekistan is considerably higher. The 2025 Hajj globally ended with about 1.67 million pilgrims, a decrease relative to 2024; this decline was explained by extreme heat, price pressures, and strict control of unauthorised pilgrims. These factors underscore the increasing role of security and preliminary medical advice in the preparation of groups from Uzbekistan. The Umrah flows developed their own distinct dynamic. With the expansion of e-visa and tourist regimes, the increase in charter and scheduled flights, and the reduction in cost of the service-chain, after 2022 the scale of Umrah performed by Uzbeks rose sharply. At the end of 2024, Uzbek media, citing the Saudi Arabian embassy in Tashkent, reported that 461.5

thousand Uzbeks had performed Umrah, and that this figure placed Uzbekistan among the world's top ten countries for Umrah pilgrimage. This figure indicates the massification of short-term religious mobility, and the digitisation of logistics and visa-processes facilitated individual initiative. At the same time, seasonal fluctuations in Umrah flows, peaking before holidays and during vacation periods, were observed.

In the Hajj and Umrah processes, governance and digital infrastructure were modernised step-by-step. In 2023–2025 in Uzbekistan the “Hajj and Umrah Unified Portal” was launched: applications, document-checks, queue-management and transparency elements were transferred to digital channels. Participants can now register via the Single Interactive State Services Portal and via hajj-umra.gov.uz; these processes organise communication with pilgrims, document preparation and the medical examination stage. The implementation of the digital system reduced outdated paperwork, and served to lower the risk of intermediary networks on social media and informal “queue-sales”. From a historical sequence standpoint, the period 1991–2016 is characterised by a relatively centralised organisational model, whereas from 2017 the subsequent phase is distinguished by expansion of regional quotas, standardisation of service-packages, and extension of the logistics chain via specific agreements with passenger-carriers. Although the quota was increased in 2019, the community's demand was proven to be even higher. The pandemic acted as a “floating pause” over this dynamic: travel costs and trust fell temporarily, but the rapid recovery after 2022 was seen particularly in the Umrah segment. The 2024 results indicate that Umrah, being cheaper, faster and more favourable for family-oriented planning, saw diversification of the pilgrim profile by age, social status and region. Global security and health issues did not fail to influence this migration mobility. In the 2024 Hajj season, high death numbers caused by extreme heat, attempts at unauthorised pilgrimage, and associated risks emphasised that for each group travelling to this region, pre-travel awareness, insurance, daily schedule and rest regime must become mandatory protocols. Saudi Arabia in 2025 took strict measures not to admit unauthorised pilgrims to Mecca. Such factors also deliver informed conclusions for internal Uzbek governance: strengthening information campaigns on visas and permits, standardising transport-logistics arrangements for heat-adaptation (water, cooling, medical monitoring) are urgent.

The Hajj/Umrah economy is expanding both in Uzbekistan and in Saudi Arabia through the services sector. For groups departing from Uzbekistan, aviation, tour-operators, medical check-ups, currency and payment services, insurance, and even language-translation markets have formed around them. On the Saudi side, the hospitality industry, internal transport, guide-services, pilgrimage infrastructure (metro, buses, camps) are improving year by year. The annual Hajj statistical collections of General Authority for Statistics – Saudi Arabia (GASTAT) regularly document the global dynamics of this system. Even so, Umrah statistics by country are not always successfully parsed. For this reason, the 461.5 thousand figure for Uzbekistan in 2024, announced by media based on diplomatic sources, indicates the need for methodological alignment between national registers and Saudi statistical sets for academic research. In the historical continuity of 1991–2025 the general landscape implies that the international mobility of pilgrims from Uzbekistan to Hajj and Umrah can be divided into three major phases. First, the period of the 1990s and early 2000s with a limited but stabilising model; second, the 2017–2019 period of expanded quotas, increased openness, and rising demand; third, the 2020–2021 global pause and then the 2022–2025 phase of rapid recovery and transition to digital governance. The numerical rise in Hajj from 7,200 in 2019 to 15,000 in 2023–2024 and the

near-half-million figure in Umrah in 2024 confirm this periodisation in figures as well. All these processes indicate that alongside spiritual need and moral motivation, the facilitation factors of visa-ease, digital application systems, aviation infrastructure and global climate risks are significant conditions.

From the legal and institutional perspective, the unified electronic registration and application system introduced in 2023–2025, along with consular-medical assistance protocols, simplified the pre-departure phase for pilgrims. In the process of selecting citizens, transparency in registration, queue monitoring and standardisation of payment procedures played an important role. Historically speaking, from the late 1990s the experience of registration and grouping, combined with the digital age governance from the early 2020s, produced a mechanism approaching international standards. As a result, the migration-logistics of Hajj and Umrah departures became more consistent, and safety and health requirements gained more institutional basis. In conclusion, between 1991 and 2025 the international mobility of Uzbek citizens connected with Hajj and Umrah was characterised by evolutionary growth, the impact of global shocks, and transition to digital governance. The available figures show that in Uzbekistan demand has been consistently high, Hajj quotas expanded after 2019, and by 2024 the Umrah flows had become massively popular. This historical continuity creates the necessary context for comparative analysis in subsequent sections of labour, educational and family-reunification flows. In the initial years of independence, Uzbek citizens' education-oriented travel to Arab countries was concentrated primarily on religious-scientific directions. At the end of the 1990s and during the 2000s the Al-Azhar University complex in Cairo and the Islamic University in Medina provided primary institutions for Uzbek students to study Arabic, fiqh, hadith and other Islamic sciences. Although statistical registration of flows in this period was incomplete, the institutional sources emphasise that centres such as Al-Azhar and Medina functioned as global platforms admitting hundreds of nations' students. For example, the Islamic University (Medina) has an international student body of more than 170 nationalities and has launched thousands of scholarships. This, in turn, implies that from Uzbekistan over 900 students in religious-educational directions studied abroad in the 1990–2010 period. From the second half of the 2010s, alongside strengthening of political-institutional openness, cooperation in higher education with Arab states began to systematise. In 2018 following the signing of several documents between Uzbekistan and Egypt, the memorandum of cooperation with Al-Azhar expanded; by 2019 the planned cooperation directions between Al-Azhar and Uzbek scientific centres began to include language, methodology and source-studies. By 2024–2025 there were “more than ten” active agreements between Uzbek and Egyptian tertiary institutions, mechanisms established for training Arabic-language teachers and attracting high-qualified specialists from Egypt. These processes created two opportunities for Uzbek students: studying in Egyptian universities and the reverse flow of specialists from Egypt into Uzbek programmes. At the same time, in 2021 a notable normative shift in state policy on religious education was introduced, and the procedure requiring the recommendation of the Committee for Religious Affairs for Uzbeks' admission into the Al-Azhar system was instituted. The goal of this regulation was to strengthen quality control of overseas religious education, introduce transparent selection by direction, and ensure security standards. After that, in 2024 a new memorandum with Egypt was signed confirming institutional foundations for legal, transparent channels for Uzbek youth to receive religious education in Egypt. From a historical perspective this stage may be described as the “institutional filtering and direction” period of religious-educational migration. In the Gulf

region, from the late 2010s and during the 2020s new platforms for international student recruitment emerged. In Saudi Arabia in 2022 the “Study in Saudi” portal was launched, and official reports indicated that more than 50,000 international applicants registered; this direction facilitated entry into bachelor’s and master’s programmes including not only religious-scientific fields but also engineering, IT and health science. In the mid-2020s Saudi universities began to offer fully-funded grants and simplified visa processes to foreign students, which indicates that Uzbek students expanded not only in religious but also technical and social science fields in Arab countries. In the Qatar direction, in 2024 official reports noted that an initial group of Uzbek students arrived at Lusail University, and that special quotas for Uzbek nationals in Qatari universities were being raised — a sign that new regional nodes of educational migration are being formed. These developments, in addition to the traditional Egypt and Saudi directions of 1990–2010, signalled diversification in the 2020s. The United Arab Emirates as a regional “education hub” has strengthened since the 2010s; in UNESCO and other international monitoring reports the UAE and Qatar are cited among countries with high shares of international students, explained by expansion of the private tertiary sector, English-language programmes and increasing numbers of inter-campus collaborations. This context means for Uzbek students that a combination of religious-secular orientations has emerged in the Arab world, although precise national-level figures remain limited.

Domestic changes also altered the conditions of external education migration. From 2017 in Uzbekistan there has been an increased emphasis on integrating higher education internationally, opening international branches within the republic and expanding admission quotas. By 2023–2025 materials note that the number of students increased 2.7-fold in ten years and nearly 30 international branch campuses operate. While these internal factors in the short term created a partial “substitution effect”, in fields such as Arabic language, Islamic studies and Oriental studies the prestige of Arab countries as places of education remained.

From a macro-indicator perspective, Uzbek overseas student numbers in 2021 were about 85.9 thousand, and by early 2023 had reached 150.5 thousand. In the first eight months of 2025 the top ten destinations remained neighbouring and large economies (Tajikistan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Korea, Turkey); though Arab countries did not enter the top ten, the niche directions specialising in religious and Arabic-language programmes remain stable. Thus between 1991 and 2025 the geography of education migration expanded, but the Arab-direction remained stable mainly as a quality-specialised segment. By way of conclusion: the years 1991–2010 were a period of concentration around “classic” religious-educational centres (Egypt and Saudi Arabia); 2010–2019 signalled the strengthening of institutional cooperation, memoranda and academic exchange which took education migration into a reinforced institutional stage; from 2021 onwards selective admission mechanisms and transparent channels for education emerged, and from 2022–2025 diversification via new platforms and quotas in Saudi Arabia and Qatar was observed. Growth in the domestic higher education system increased competitive environment and redirected external education migration toward “specialised and quality-oriented directions”. Thus for Uzbek citizens education migration to Arab countries became a route combining deepening of the religious-scientific heritage, accumulation of Arabic-language capital and access to global labour markets through modern English-language programmes. After independence the labour-oriented migration of Uzbekistanis to Arab countries gradually formed, as an institutional infrastructure and regional demand evolved. The Arab states, especially the GCC countries, have long relied on migrant

labour in services and construction sectors; as of 2019 there were about 24.1 million migrant workers in the region, representing more than 41 % of the employed workforce — a structural demand which also created entry channels for Uzbeks. The 1990s and early 2000s were a relatively limited period for labour migration in the Arab direction. Consular links, language capital, recruiting networks' weakness and transport-logistics constraints held back the volume of flows. At the same time, the presence of emerging jobs in construction and domestic service segments in GCC markets prepared entry points for Uzbeks. From the mid-2000s as the services sector and large infrastructure projects expanded in the Gulf, regional demand solidified; this process triggered the need for improved labour migration statistics and governance mechanisms in Arab states.

In the 2010s internal policy shifts and external cooperation turned flows into a regulated phase. In Uzbekistan institutional reforms in labour migration governance were implemented and state-organised channels and digital services were gradually introduced; in the package of proposals submitted to the President in 2024 measures such as simplifying processes, strengthening legal protection and improving monitoring were specifically enumerated. In the same year a mechanism of monthly subsidies up to 500,000 UZS for compatriots working abroad was also initiated. These measures aimed to reduce the share of informal channels and broaden coverage of official contracts and insurance. The pandemic of 2020–2021 delivered a shock across the region: many migrants returned, new dispatches were temporarily suspended, and labour markets in Arab states recorded this slowdown; from 2022 the phased recovery is visible, with priority in routes depending on state-agreements. In 2022–2025 Uzbeks' entry into Arab labour markets diversified in quality. A government-to-government agreement with Qatar signed on 6 June 2023 and ratified 13 January 2024 envisaged organised recruitment, quotas and collaboration via the recruitment company Jusoor for sectors such as tourism-hospitality, IT and engineering. In addition, at the end of 2024 agreements were announced with the UAE to recruit highly qualified specialists under structured frameworks. By 2025 the Saudi intention to expand recruitment of Uzbeks for seasonal work in construction, engineering and Hajj-season slaughter services was reported in the press. This trajectory indicates that labour migration is consolidating on the foundation of “contracts, quotas and inter-governmental cooperation”. In the broader context of external migration scale: in 2023 the number of labour migrants was estimated at “just over 2 million”, whereas by end 2024 this was announced as 1.35 million. Thus, although the overall number has declined, in the Arab direction structured arrangements, established recruitment and direct employer contracts are increasing. These changes indicate that against the background of political-security, transport and currency-flow shifts, a model of “smaller volume but more regulated and oriented to professional segments” is strengthening.

Labour policy in receiving countries also influences the quality of flows. In Qatar in 2020–2022 reforms dismantling the kafala system, instituting minimum wages, reducing exit-permit requirements and allowing job-change were implemented; from November 2020 to August 2022 more than 348 000 job-change applications were approved. These legal changes reduce the “dependency” level of migrants and intensify contract competition. In Saudi Arabia internal labour market reforms and digitisation of the domestic service segment via the Musaned platform are active. Via this system foreign worker recruitment, contract management, wage tracking and renewals are standardised. Digitisation increases transparency on one hand, and on the other demands stronger monitoring mechanisms to reduce intermediaries and informal payments. For Uzbeks directed to Arab labour markets, typical segments are construction,

hospitality-services, logistics and domestic services. Here the wage differential, stable demand and information exchange via social networks emerge as key pull factors; however climate risks, working conditions and implementation differences remain pressing issues. ILO regional reports emphasise that in Arab states collecting labour-migration statistics and governance indicators remains a complex task, and thus building a reliable evidence-base for policy design is essential.

The macroeconomic consequences of labour migration manifest through remittances. In the World Bank's 2024 "Migration and Development Brief" it was noted that global remittances slowed slightly in 2023, and growth is expected to accelerate in 2024. For Uzbekistan remittances play a significant role in household consumption and small business financing; thus extending official-contract and payment-discipline channels is a priority for economic stability. In historical continuity then, three phases emerge: first phase (1991–2010) when the Arab direction was limited and more "observational"; second phase (2011–2019) when institutions and recruitment networks solidified and organised mechanisms emerged in many directions; third phase (2020–2025) when after the pandemic recovery, inter-governmental agreements, digital platforms and legal reforms produced qualitative diversification. Qatar's reforms expanded legal doors for labour mobility, agreements with the UAE and Qatar opened paths for skilled segments for Uzbeks, and Saudi plans for seasonal work signal new opportunities in short-term labour segments. At the same time the decline to 1.35 million external workers at end-2024 signals that flows are being redistributed by quality and geography. Consequently, between 1991 and 2025 labour migration to Arab countries for Uzbekistan has emerged as a direction characterised by "strong market demand, changing legal regimes, but increasingly connected organised channels". At the policy level, enhancing subsidies, control and consular support, monitoring reforms in receiving states and specifically working via digital recruitment platforms will remain key tasks going forward.

In the early years of independence, Uzbek citizens' migration mobility to Arab states was visible mainly through religious pilgrimage and education flows; family reunification, short-term tourism and scholarly-cultural exchange were limited, bounded by consular regimes and transport-logistics constraints. In the late 1990s to early 2000s, the sponsorship (kafala) practice and strict professional-income demands in Gulf states complicated family movement for labour migrants; short-term tourism did not expand widely due to rigid visa regimes, limited flights and high service costs. Therefore, this period can be described as the "institutional caution" phase, during which inter-societal connections were mostly via official delegations and cultural events.

From the second half of the 2010s, Uzbekistan's external openness policy, the expansion of airline networks and the introduction of digital services in receiving states created new opportunities. In the UAE the liberalisation of family-sponsorship rules was a turning point: from 2019 onwards residents could sponsor close family members regardless of profession if they earned monthly 4,000 AED or 3,000 AED and provided official housing. These changes simplified the formal channel for family-reunification and stabilised migrant-families' living strategies. In Qatar, during 2023–2024 visa-requirements for family residence were clarified: public-sector workers must have housing or minimum salary 10,000 QAR; in private sector specialised positions and fixed salary thresholds were defined. These criteria act as socio-economic filters for family movement, but at the same time create a clear legal channel for

reunification. In Saudi Arabia via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs platform the “Family Visit” service was fully online, and procedure for first-degree relatives’ applications was standardised. This digital transformation accelerated formalisation in practice and reduced the need for informal intermediaries. Short-term tourism flows changed sharply after 2019. Saudi Arabia’s introduction of e-tourist visa in September 2019 created a new reality in the regional tourism market; after the pandemic pause the programme was modernised, and in 2025 it was reported that e-visa access for Uzbeks was reopened. This, of course, preserved Umrah as a distinct religious mobility segment, but also activated tourism, kin-visits and short-term scholarly-cultural visits.

In terms of practical scale, the UAE became a key centre for short-term tourism. According to the Uzbekistan State Statistics Agency, during 2023 some 131,589 Uzbek citizens travelled to the UAE for tourism. The Dubai Economy & Tourism department recorded that in 2023 the city received 17.15 million international visitors, and the increase in flows from Uzbekistan was widely reported in national media. In 2024 the number of Uzbeks travelling abroad for tourism sharply increased: between January and May about 2.2 million citizens travelled abroad for tourism. These figures show that short-term tourism is directly connected with aviation networks, visa-ease and competition in the services market. Regional policy landscape also creates favourable conditions for tourism flows. In 2025 the planned introduction of a single GCC tourist visa (Shengen-style) will facilitate chain routes (Dubai-Doha-Riyadh) among short-term destinations. Such a regime not only simplifies tourism but also facilitates kin-visits and participation in short-term events (conferences, exhibitions). Thus the narrow-scope visits of 1991–2010 have by the mid-2020s under the influence of regional integration and digital services become mass short-term trips. In the field of scholarly-cultural exchange from the 2010s onward cooperation based on memoranda expanded. In 2023–2025 Uzbekistan’s Foundation for the Development of Arts and Culture signed cooperation memoranda with the UAE’s Ministry of Culture and the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture & Tourism; planned initiatives include joint exhibitions, residencies, practical programmes and Islamic heritage projects under the Al-Burda grants. In Qatar from 2023 a bilateral cultural cooperation memorandum was initiated and in 2024 formal visits created structured meeting systems. In 2024 with Egypt four documents were signed covering science, arts and culture — another pillar of Uzbek engagement with the Arab world. All these developments elevated scholarly-cultural exchange from “delegations-centre cooperation” to “project-institutional platforms” stage.

Family reunification and short-term visit-driving bilateral visa regimes also developed rapidly. Since 1 January 2023 Uzbekistan introduced a 30-day visa-free regime for Saudi citizens; since 5 June 2023 the same for Qatari citizens. In 2025 the visa-free regime for citizens of Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman extended Uzbekistan’s policy of simplifying personal exchanges with Gulf states. Such decisions operate in two directions: they encourage tourism and family visits from Arab states to Uzbekistan, and also facilitate short-term visits by Uzbek citizens to those states. The pandemic (2020–2021) created a “pause” across all three directions: many family-visa applications were delayed, short-term tourism ceased, and cultural events shifted online. From 2022 the recovery phase began and during 2023–2025 via digital services, online application platforms and new agreements flows began to surpass pre-pandemic levels. The rapid and large-scale recovery in Dubai and the UAE exemplifies this; Saudi Arabia’s e-visa ecosystem, launched in 2019, further expands openness. These chain changes favour stable living strategies

for family-reunification, and ease regional routing for short-term tourism. In summary, between 1991 and 2025 processes of family-reunification, short-term tourism and scholarly-cultural exchange of Uzbek citizens in Arab countries manifested a three-phase dynamic: first (1990–2000s) a cautious institutional phase; second (2010s) gradual expansion under digital services and visa-ease; third (2022–2025) rapid recovery post-pandemic, visa-free regimes and cultural memoranda underpinning systematic growth. Figures confirm this picture: 131.6 thousand Uzbeks travelled to the UAE in 2023, Dubai received a record 17.15 million visitors in 2023, Uzbek outbound tourism reached 2.2 million between January–May 2024, and visa-free regime activations with Saudi Arabia and Qatar in 2023–2025 indicate that these directions are entering the logic of regional integration and digital governance. In the future the planned single GCC tourist visa is expected to give a new impulse to short-term flows, and create greatly eased logistics for family visits and cultural events.

Conclusion. The following conclusion synthesises the processes of religious, educational and labour migration of Uzbek citizens towards Arab countries, aligning both theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence. Within the scope of this research—limited to migration flows, return and re-migration, remittances and their consumption–investment composition, as well as adherence to ethical norms—it has been confirmed that migration decisions are formed at the intersection of economic motives, social networks and institutional opportunities. Neoclassical and New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) approaches explain the impact of risk diversification and income differentials, while the “aspiration-capability” framework illustrates how personal aspirations and mobilities are balanced amid social change; social network theory demonstrates how transaction costs are reduced and rapid integration in the GCC space facilitated. In the religious mobility segment, recent years have seen that the form of Umrah — being relatively cheaper, faster and conducive to family planning — has led to a marked diversification of pilgrim profiles by age, social status and region; digital registration and service systems have supplanted older paper-based procedures, and improved governance of the process. At the same time, the extreme heat of 2024, attempts at unauthorised pilgrimage and associated security risks highlight the necessity of making health-care protocols, insurance and logistic adaptations mandatory; the 2025 strict control measures taken by Saudi Arabia underscore the critical importance of information-campaigns for potential pilgrims. Although the services ecosystem around pilgrimage is expanding on both the sending and receiving sides, fragmentation of statistics remains a strategic planning challenge. In the labour migration direction, wage differentials, stable demand and information exchange via networks appear as key pull factors; yet climate risks, working conditions and implementation disparities remain pressing issues. Given persistent difficulties in regional data-collection and policy evidence-base, it is imperative to expand reliable data-bases and implement monitoring mechanisms aligned with international standards. Remittances play a significant role in household consumption and small-business financing in Uzbekistan; thus directing them through official channels and strengthening contractual compliance and payment discipline emerge as priority avenues for macro-economic stability. From a periodisation perspective, the Arab-destination migration of Uzbeks can be divided into: (1) 1991–2010 – a cautious and limited phase; (2) 2011–2019 – a phase where institutions and recruitment networks became consolidated; (3) 2020–2025 – the post-pandemic recovery phase, featuring inter-governmental agreements and digital platforms and high-quality diversification. During this process, the introduction of national service portals, Hajj/Umrah platforms and regional quota-management mechanisms increased transparency and diminished the risk of informal intermediation. In sum, Uzbek

migration flows towards Arab countries are stable, yet segmented: religious pilgrimage is becoming mass via rapid digitisation and service-ecosystem improvements; in labour migration new opportunities are emerging via legal reforms and international cooperation. If improvements are made in data quality, climate and labour safety, prevention of unauthorised flows and formalisation of remittances, migration governance will be able to maximise socio-economic benefits while reducing risk exposure.

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