

Corridors Without Coordination: Why Uzbekistan's Digital Trade Reforms Have Not Yet Produced an Integrated Export System

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Abstract

Governments across Central Asia have invested significantly in both the hardware and software of trade: railways, roads and ports, as well as digital systems. But new infrastructure does not make trade easier if exporters still face a slow and poorly connected bureaucracy, even after its procedures have been modernized and moved online.

Uzbekistan is a clear example. Studies have found that, despite significant progress, the country's trade agencies still do not share information or coordinate as well as they should. An exporter may have to give the same information to several agencies, use different online systems and wait for one approval before the next can begin, which makes costs and delivery times difficult to predict.

The Uzbek government can set detailed export targets and monitor results closely, but those top-level systems do not necessarily improve what happens to individual shipments. This is what this paper terms the dual-layer governance gap: the government monitors trade at the upper layer, while the agencies that process shipments at the lower layer still do not operate as one system.

Small businesses suffer most because they are least able to absorb delays and unexpected costs. Larger companies can hire specialists, use customs brokers and hold extra stock to protect themselves.

What the export surge does (and does not) show

Uzbekistan's opening to trade since 2017 has been substantial. Its trade-to-GDP ratio more than doubled after a flurry of reforms began, reaching 71.6 percent in 2022. In 2024, foreign

trade turnover reached \$65.9 billion, comprising about \$27 billion in exports and \$39 billion in imports. The expansion followed major policy changes: the government liberalized the foreign-exchange market in 2017 and reduced the average effective tariff rate from 15.3 percent that year to about 7.5 percent in 2020.

The headline figure needs one qualification. Non-monetary gold accounted for 27.8 percent, or about \$7.5 billion, leaving roughly \$19.5 billion in other exports. Figure 1 shows the distinction.

Figure 1. Composition of Uzbekistan’s Exports, 2024

Export measure	Value	Share of total exports
Total exports	\$27 billion	100 percent
Non-monetary gold	\$7.5 billion	27.8 percent
Exports excluding non-monetary gold	\$19.5 billion	72.2 percent

Source: Author’s calculation based on the [National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Foreign Economic Activity, January–December 2024](#).

Non-gold exports provide the more relevant comparison for this paper because gold does not pass through the same administrative chain as horticulture, processed food or manufactured goods. The issue is not whether exports have grown, but whether the system can support a broader range of products and businesses. [The World Bank reports](#) that only 6 percent of Uzbek firms export: the country has many businesses that grow produce or manufacture goods, but few sell abroad.

It should be stated at the outset that Uzbekistan has indubitably made real and significant progress in facilitating trade. This is reflected in the [OECD’s assessment of trade facilitation in Central Asia](#), which found that Uzbekistan recorded the region’s largest relative improvement in its Trade Facilitation Indicator scores between 2019 and 2022. The same report, however, identified weaknesses in the digitization and automation of trade procedures, electronic data exchange, implementation of the national Single Window and cooperation between border agencies.

A separate [OECD survey of foreign firms in Uzbekistan](#) reached a similar conclusion. The foreign firms interviewed reported logistical bottlenecks and disruptions that made international trade slow and costly. The survey was small and focused, so it offers qualitative

evidence of firms' experiences rather than a nationally representative measure of the problem.

One shipment, many gatekeepers

Digital procedures do not automatically create an integrated process. A business may still have to deal separately with customs, certification bodies, banks and other public agencies. If their systems do not exchange information, an exporter may submit the same data more than once and wait for approvals one after another, even when some checks could occur at the same time. Moving a form online saves a visit to an office; it does not make the agencies work together.

Uzbekistan has made substantial progress in digitizing trade procedures. Its customs Single Window has brought permits, electronic payments and risk management into a more automated system. But the [OECD's assessment of Uzbekistan's trade-facilitation system](#) found that integration remained incomplete and described cooperation among domestic border agencies as largely ad hoc. It called for better electronic data exchange, harmonized information requirements, compatible border systems and automated risk management across the agencies involved in border control.

That assessment does not establish that the institutions identified by the OECD remain outside the Single Window today. The official [Uzbekistan Trade Info portal](#) directs traders to the customs Single Window, electronic customs declaration, E-Transit, E-Warehouse, foreign-trade-contract monitoring and the Uzbekistan Railways Single Window. These services span the transaction, but they do not necessarily form one end-to-end interface.

The [official procedure for exporting fabrics by road](#) makes the structure concrete. An exporter must register its foreign-trade arrangements, obtain origin documents, arrange transport, submit the electronic customs declaration, complete customs clearance and pass border formalities. Together, these stages involve several institutional and digital interfaces.

The mapped procedure does not reconstruct one observed shipment or measure the delay and cost faced by an individual exporter. Nor does the available evidence show how often officials intervene manually. It does, however, show that a single transaction can pass through several administrative stages and digital interfaces. Uzbekistan does not lack digital services. What it needs is for those services to work in harmony.

From a domestic bottleneck to a corridor problem

The coordination challenge becomes harder when a shipment crosses several countries. Uzbekistan is double-landlocked, so goods must transit at least two other countries to reach a seaport. A corridor therefore depends on more than roads and railways. Customs declarations, transit guarantees and cargo information must also move between national authorities, border crossings and transport operators.

This is particularly important for the Trans-Caspian route, or Middle Corridor. [The OECD's assessment](#) identifies cumbersome border procedures, limited data exchange and weak coordination between transport modes as obstacles to reliable transit. Its conclusion is straight forward: physical investment will not deliver its full value unless border procedures and information systems improve alongside it.

Regional projects have begun to address the problem. The [CAREC Advanced Transit System and Information Common Exchange](#) (CATS/ICE) is being piloted by Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan to support electronic data exchange between customs administrations. Uzbekistan has also connected its customs system to the international [eTIR](#) system. These initiatives must ensure that information entered in one part of a corridor can be recognized and used in the next; a faster railway has limited value if a shipment reaches the border before its documents do.

Who owns the platform

Private participation in digital trade infrastructure is not itself a problem. A provider may offer technical expertise, financing and faster implementation than the state could provide alone. The test is whether the public authority retains effective control over essential data and can connect, modify or replace the system without becoming dependent on one supplier.

Uzbekistan's proposed E-Logistics national digital platform makes the issue immediate. In June 2026, the government [announced the project as a public-private partnership](#). It is intended to digitize freight documents, automate data exchange with customs and transport-control authorities and provide end-to-end cargo tracking. The project is still at the procurement stage, so it is not evidence of vendor lock-in. It is an opportunity to prevent that problem before the contract and technical architecture are fixed.

Lock-in arises when essential data, software or technical documentation cannot be transferred or connected to other systems. Uzbekistan's [Interagency Integration Platform](#), which uses open-source technology, shows that dependency is not inevitable. Contracts for future trade platforms should guarantee data access, compatible formats, adequate technical documentation and a practical route to another supplier.

The dual-layer governance gap

The [Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy](#) set a target of 15 percent annual growth in exports excluding gold, with responsibility assigned to the Ministry of Investment, Industry and Trade. It also sought to increase the number of exporting enterprises and the share of finished and semi-finished products in exports. These targets require a wider range of firms and products to reach foreign markets.

A [presidential review of investment, industry and exports in January 2024](#) reported that goods exports had not grown in 2023 and had declined in two major industries and four regions. It also identified inadequate work to secure recognition of Uzbek certificates abroad and incomplete use of phytosanitary permissions already obtained for agricultural exports.

One finding of the presidential review makes the problem of coordination particularly clear. While certificates and permits required for exports of food, fruit and vegetables had already been digitized, border controls were still divided among four separate agencies. The government decided to transfer the relevant border-control functions to the Customs Committee.

This is the dual-layer governance gap in practice. At the strategic level, the government sets export targets and assigns responsibility for results. At the operational level, a shipment still passes through institutions with separate procedures and information systems. Information flows upward to central monitoring, but coordination does not flow downward with equal force. The system is integrated at the level of observation, but not at the level of execution.

The review does not prove that fragmented border controls caused the lack of export growth in 2023. External demand, production, logistics and market access also affect exports. It does, though, show that weak export performance coexisted with divided operational responsibility and that consolidation formed part of the response. Officials responsible for shortcomings in investment, trade and technical regulation were removed, while ministers and deputy regional governors were to be assessed against performance indicators.

The lesson is not that every export-related function belongs in one agency. Customs, phytosanitary protection, food safety and technical regulation serve different purposes. The task is to organize their data, procedures and accountability around the full export transaction. Putting a certificate online helps, but making every institution recognize and act on the same information is the deeper reform.

Who pays

Each repeated submission, separate approval and delay adds to the cost of exporting. Goods may remain in storage, transport operators may charge for waiting time, exporters may miss delivery windows and manufacturers may have to slow production while they wait

for imported components. The problem is not only the delay, but the uncertainty it creates about the final cost and delivery date.

The burden is not evenly distributed. Large companies can employ customs specialists, use brokers, hold additional stock and absorb storage charges. Smaller firms have less room for error. OECD research shows that trade costs weigh more heavily on firms that trade less often, use smaller consignments and lack specialized staff. One unexpected cost can remove the profit from an order.

Uncertainty also pushes firms toward familiar products, customers and routes. Uzbekistan's objective is not simply to raise the value of exports, but to allow a larger quantity and more diversified type of businesses to sell abroad. New corridors may carry more goods without spreading the benefits of trade if only established exporters can navigate the administrative system.

The Signpost

Uzbekistan's next test is whether its digital trade system can support non-gold exports and more firms. The next phase should connect existing systems, not launch more isolated platforms.

First, the Customs Committee should make automated risk decisions transparent and reviewable. When an authorized official changes a decision, the system should record the reason for audit. Border agencies should coordinate risk-based controls so that one shipment does not face the same assessment from the beginning at each agency.

Second, every shipment should have one electronic record. Exporters should enter the basic information once, while customs, certification bodies, banks and logistics providers retrieve what they need and add their decisions to the same record. Agencies need not use identical software, but they must use common data formats and secure connections.

Third, governments and development partners should apply the same test to every regional or donor-funded platform. Before financing starts, they should specify which national systems it will connect to, what data it will exchange, who may alter it and who will maintain it after the funding ends.

Fourth, public authorities should contract for exit. If the government hires a private company to build a computer system, it should plan for the possibility that it may

want to replace that company later. The contract should ensure that the government keeps its data, receives clear instructions on how the system works and can hand the system to another company without rebuilding everything from scratch. And officials should compare lifetime costs, not only initial price and delivery speed.

Finally, monitoring must lead to action. If central data reveal persistent delays, a named institution should investigate within a fixed period and review the relevant process, data requirements or staffing. Uzbekistan already monitors export performance from the center. The harder task is to give agencies clear responsibility for fixing failures along the route.

These reforms would turn digitization from a collection of online procedures into a predictable end-to-end process. Future corridor investment should be judged by whether more firms can move goods through the institutions that govern them.

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