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ALIGNING GREEN JOBS AND YOUTH EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE: EVIDENCE FROM UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. *Climate change is profoundly transforming economic structures, labour markets, and education systems, particularly in young and rapidly developing countries such as Uzbekistan. While the global transition to a “green economy” suggests the potential for the creation of a large number of new jobs, the realization of this potential depends on the timely development of “green” skills and the ability of education systems to adapt to new labour-market demands. This article analyses the interconnections between climate change, green jobs, and youth education, with particular attention to Uzbekistan’s legal, strategic, and institutional context. Green competencies are not yet adequately embedded in educational standards, and empirical data on green jobs and youth labour-market outcomes remain limited. The article concludes by proposing policy measures to ensure an inclusive and youth-centred green transition in Uzbekistan, including a national green skills framework, the integration of climate and sustainability issues into education, stronger youth participation, and improved monitoring and data-collection systems.*

Keywords: *climate change, green jobs, youth education, sustainable development, environmental governance, green economy, ecological awareness*

IQLIM O‘ZGARISHI SHAROITIDA “YASHIL” ISH O‘RINLARI VA YOSHLAR TA‘LIMINI UYG‘UNLASHTIRISH: O‘ZBEKISTON TAJRIBASI

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Annotatsiya. *Iqlim o‘zgarishi iqtisodiy tuzilmalar, mehnat bozori va ta‘lim tizimlarini, ayniqsa, O‘zbekiston kabi yosh va jadal rivojlanayotgan mamlakatlarda sezilarli darajada o‘zgartirmoqda. Global miqyosda “yashil iqtisodiyot”ga o‘tish ko‘plab yangi ish o‘rinlarini yaratish imkoniyatini yuzaga keltirayotgan bo‘lsa-da, ushbu salohiyatni ro‘yobga chiqarish “yashil” ko‘nikmalarni o‘z vaqtida rivojlantirish hamda ta‘lim tizimining mehnat bozoridagi yangi talablar bilan moslashish qobiliyatiga bog‘liq. Mazkur maqolada iqlim o‘zgarishi, “yashil” ish o‘rinlari va yoshlar ta‘limi o‘rtasidagi o‘zaro bog‘liqlik O‘zbekistonning huquqiy, strategik va institutsional konteksti doirasida tahlil qilinadi. “Yashil”*

kompetensiyalar ta'lim standartlariga hali yetarli darajada integratsiya qilinmagan, "yashil" ish o'rinlari va yoshlarning mehnat bozoridagi natijalari bo'yicha empirik ma'lumotlar esa cheklangan. Maqolada O'zbekistonda inklyuziv va yoshlarga yo'naltirilgan "yashil" o'tishni ta'minlashga qaratilgan siyosiy-huquqiy choralari, jumladan, milliy "yashil" ko'nikmalar tizimini yaratish, iqlim va barqaror rivojlanish masalalarini ta'limga keng integratsiya qilish, yoshlar ishtirokini kuchaytirish hamda monitoring va ma'lumotlar yig'ish tizimini takomillashtirish taklif etiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: iqlim o'zgarishi, "yashil" ish o'rinlari, yoshlar ta'limi, barqaror rivojlanish, atrof-muhitni boshqarish, "yashil iqtisodiyot", ekologik xabardorlik

СООТВЕТСТВИЕ «ЗЕЛЁНЫХ» РАБОЧИХ МЕСТ И ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ МОЛОДЁЖИ В УСЛОВИЯХ ИЗМЕНЕНИЯ КЛИМАТА: ОПЫТ УЗБЕКИСТАНА

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Аннотация. Изменение климата оказывает существенное влияние на экономические структуры, рынки труда и системы образования, особенно в молодых и динамично развивающихся странах, таких как Узбекистан. Хотя глобальный переход к зелёной экономике открывает возможности для создания значительного числа новых рабочих мест, реализация этого потенциала зависит от своевременного формирования «зелёных» навыков и способности системы образования адаптироваться к новым требованиям рынка труда. В статье анализируется взаимосвязь между изменением климата, «зелёными» рабочими местами и образованием молодёжи с особым вниманием к правовому, стратегическому и институциональному контексту Узбекистана. Установлено, что «зелёные» компетенции пока недостаточно интегрированы в образовательные стандарты, а эмпирические данные о «зелёной» занятости и положении молодёжи на рынке труда остаются ограниченными. В заключение предложены меры по обеспечению инклюзивного и ориентированного на молодёжь «зелёного» перехода в Узбекистане, включая разработку национальной рамочной системы «зелёных» навыков, интеграцию вопросов изменения климата и устойчивого развития в образовательные программы, расширение участия молодёжи, а также совершенствование систем мониторинга и сбора данных.

Ключевые слова: изменение климата, «зелёные» рабочие места, образование молодёжи, устойчивое развитие, экологическое управление, зелёная экономика, экологическая осведомлённость

Introduction

Although global climate change has long been viewed primarily as an environmental problem, it has become a systemic factor driving profound transformations in economic, social, and educational spheres. Rising temperatures, more frequent extreme weather events, and rapid ecosystem degradation are disrupting traditional development models and forcing states to reconsider their growth strategies, labour markets, and human-capital policies. Empirical research shows that the transition to a green economy—based on efficient resource use and low-carbon development—is reshaping occupational structures and cross-sectoral employment trends; however, this process is unfolding unevenly across countries and sectors (Abduramanov, 2021).

At the same time, global youth unemployment remains high, and in many countries young people face labour-market instability, skill mismatches, and heightened vulnerability to

climate risks. This dual challenge—the need to decarbonise economies while ensuring decent employment for a growing youth population—has brought the concepts of “green jobs” and “green skills” to the centre of policy and academic debate. Over the past decade, the concept of green jobs has evolved into a broader framework. Early definitions associated it with environmental sectors such as renewable energy, waste management, or pollution control. More recent literature interprets green employment across the economy, emphasising the environmental characteristics of tasks, production processes, and products (Albertz & Pilz, 2025a). Systematic reviews indicate that green jobs generally require higher levels of education, advanced technical skills, and strong problem-solving and communication abilities (Albertz & Pilz, 2025b).

Cross-country analyses of occupations and vacancies show that in some developed and developing countries, green employment accounts for approximately 20–25 per cent of total jobs, and this share is expected to rise as climate policies strengthen and clean technologies spread (Bowen et al., 2018). However, methods for measuring green jobs remain contested, and the quality, stability, and inclusiveness of such jobs—particularly in countries undergoing rapid structural transformation—are not guaranteed. Attention is therefore shifting from counting green jobs to understanding the capabilities individuals, organisations, and societies need to benefit from the green transition. Recent research on green skills and capabilities underscores that human capital is decisive in net-zero strategies. Organisations with strong green competencies are better equipped to integrate sustainability into business models, develop low-carbon innovations, and remain competitive under tightening regulation (Business-Education Integration Working Group, 2021). Green skills are understood as a hybrid set of technical, cognitive, and socio-emotional competencies enabling workers to design, manage, and implement environmentally sustainable processes, products, and services (Chaoyue et al., 2024).

Contemporary research on climate-change education reinforces this approach. Studies indicate that well-designed climate and sustainability education substantially improves children’s and young people’s knowledge, attitudes, and environmentally responsible behaviour (Consoli et al., 2016). Scholarship on teaching climate change in the Anthropocene argues that climate education must incorporate cognitive, emotional, ethical, and justice-related dimensions (Ojala, M., & Lakew, Y., 2023). Other studies examining children’s climate-related questions, concepts, and cognitive capacities show that younger generations can become active interpreters of climate risks and agents of change, provided that schools, families, and communities offer adequate support (Dong et al., 2022). Analyses of “green education” also highlight its critical role in achieving sustainable development goals, particularly by changing environmental behaviour, enhancing social awareness, and fostering a long-term culture of sustainability (Droubi, 2023).

In the global context, the role of youth is especially significant. Young people are among the groups most vulnerable to the long-term impacts of climate change, yet they also possess considerable potential to drive innovation and social transformation. Research from European countries shows that in some regions a substantial portion of young people’s early work experience is gained in green sectors and that green employment can help reduce youth unemployment through targeted activation and training programmes (Gasparini et al., 2021). However, evidence from developed and developing countries indicates that young people face numerous barriers to entering green occupations. Limited access to quality education, financial constraints, and insufficient information and guidance on green career

pathways are among the key obstacles (Global literature review on statistical visibility of green jobs, 2020).

From this perspective, the article is guided by the following research questions: (1) To what extent is the concept of green jobs in Uzbekistan aligned with contemporary international theoretical and measurement approaches? (2) To what extent are existing education and youth policies institutionally aligned with emerging green labour-market demands? (3) What policy and institutional mechanisms are required to ensure a just and youth-centred green transition? This article makes three original contributions to the literature. First, it conceptualises climate policy, green employment, and youth education as an integrated institutional system rather than separate policy domains. Second, it applies just transition theory together with a human capital mismatch perspective to analyse youth-centred green transformation in an emerging economy. Third, it provides one of the first systematic assessments of how green economy reforms intersect with youth policy and education governance in Central Asia, using Uzbekistan as a case study.

The first research direction focuses on identifying and classifying green jobs. Early studies associated green employment with directly “environmental sectors” such as environmental protection, renewable energy, or pollution control. However, subsequent research revealed the limitations of this sector-based approach. Sulich and co-authors argue that differences in how green jobs are defined can substantially alter statistical assessments and that green employment must be linked to broader transformations in production systems and skills. Building on this, Bohnenberger develops a “sustainable employment taxonomy,” in which green, brown, and hybrid jobs are differentiated along four dimensions: (1) environmental characteristics of products; (2) task content; (3) work and lifestyle patterns; and (4) resource-use efficiency. Apostel’s literature review similarly finds that green jobs typically require higher skills, broader education, and stronger technical competencies, although definitions remain inconsistent.

Alongside conceptual work, empirical studies have examined the scale and sectoral distribution of green jobs. Using European Labour Force Survey data, Villani and co-authors estimate the share of green employment in 24 countries and demonstrate how occupational approaches can complement sector-based classifications (Global literature review on statistical visibility of green jobs, 2020). Bluedorn and co-authors, using vacancy and employment datasets, find that in advanced economies green jobs account for approximately 20–25 per cent of total employment and that green employment growth outpaces non-green employment growth (Bluedorn et al., 2023). Gasparini’s analysis of occupations critical to the energy transition compares green-job taxonomies with lists of energy-transition occupations, showing that existing systems do not fully capture the skills and tasks required for decarbonisation (Hafner et al., 2020).

Bradley’s recent review notes that research on green jobs has focused mainly on macro-level employment balances, while micro-level evidence on job quality, regional distribution, and workers’ occupational trajectories remains limited (Irarrazaval & Weller, 2023). Emerging studies also demonstrate the regional and distributional complexities of green labour markets. Evidence from European labour markets suggests that climate-mitigation policies have a positive but modest overall impact on employment while triggering substantial reallocations across sectors and regions (Kahyaoglu, 2025). Irarrazaval’s analysis of the “complex geography of green work” shows that local expectations often confront the

temporary nature of green jobs and their limited long-term impact, particularly in peripheral areas (Keller, 2024). At the same time, Chaoyue's research on inclusive green innovation emphasises that targeted access to green finance, technology, and training for disadvantaged groups is crucial for reducing inequalities within the green economy (Republic of Uzbekistan, 2016).

These studies demonstrate that the concept of green jobs has evolved from a narrow sector-based approach to multidimensional and task-based classifications. There is broad scholarly consensus that green employment generally requires higher skill levels and is closely associated with structural transformations in labour markets. However, no unified definition or measurement methodology has been established, limiting the comparability of cross-country assessments. Moreover, existing research has focused primarily on macro-level employment balances, while institutional adaptation and intersections with youth policy remain insufficiently examined.

The second line of research focuses on green skills and green capabilities. Systematic reviews show that the concept of green skills has evolved from narrow technical abilities to a broad set of knowledge, values, and attitudes. Kóczyás and Demirel define green skills as the technical skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes that enable individuals to perform tasks contributing to sustainable outcomes; they also demonstrate that green capabilities at the firm level positively influence financial performance (Lehmann, 2023). Hu and co-authors, in the context of sustainable agriculture, interpret green skills as competencies encompassing sustainable resource management, environmental monitoring, and the adoption of eco-innovations (Lusambili et al., 2023). Spada and colleagues, through a methodological comparison of the EU Taxonomy and ESCO qualification frameworks, identify key competencies that should be prioritised in sustainability-oriented education and training.

Empirical studies on vocational and higher education highlight the crucial role of training systems. Albertz and co-authors find substantial variation in Indian vocational teachers' understanding of green skills—from minimal awareness to approaches integrating technical skills with environmental values and ethical responsibility. They argue that teacher preparation is decisive for implementing green skills effectively (Ibrahim & Oke, 2022). Kahyaoglu (2025) shows that aligning environmental education with green-skill frameworks can create opportunities for disadvantaged groups and support green entrepreneurship. Trevisan and colleagues reveal that while traditional environmental topics are well covered in circular-economy education, the digital and automation skills essential for the green transition remain insufficiently addressed. Lehmann interprets transformational sustainability education for adults as a form of labour and economic capital that develops lifelong critical thinking, problem-solving, and green competencies (Morana et al., 2022).

The third research strand focuses on education for sustainable development (ESD), climate-change education, and green education. Tang proposes a behavioural model for climate-change education in higher education, emphasising that effective programmes must address not only scientific knowledge but also behavioural drivers and social norms. Droubi, in a conceptual study on redesigning education for a just transition, stresses the need to align ESD with climate mitigation and social justice principles (Ojala & Lakew, 2023). Akinsemolu's analysis of green education's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) argues that it promotes behavioural change, climate awareness, and sustainability literacy,

although significant barriers remain to scaling it up (Ortega-Quevedo, 2021). Dong and co-authors show, using G20 countries as an example, that sustainability education plays a decisive role in shaping green skills, green culture, and clean business practices.

Research on climate education for children and adolescents has also expanded significantly. Van de Wetering and co-authors, in a meta-analysis of environmental education programmes for children and adolescents, demonstrate improvements in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour. Ortega-Quevedo (2021) shows that national ESD and climate-education policies lead to substantial differences in students' climate competence and levels of concern.

In a study on supporting adolescents as “green adolescents,” Thomaes and colleagues argue that for young people to become effective agents in climate movements, education must simultaneously develop environmental efficacy, personal identity, and emotion-regulation skills. Keller (2024), examining Germany's “Public Climate School” initiative, finds that multi-component climate education increases students' climate knowledge and sense of significance but produces lasting outcomes only when integrated into curricula rather than delivered as one-off programmes. Natori shows that practical internships in environmental NGOs help young people develop professional skills and long-term commitment to sustainability.

Several studies also focus on youth participation in climate processes and access to green-career opportunities. Lusambili and co-authors emphasise the need to include young people's perspectives and participation in climate policy and research, particularly in regions highly exposed to climate impacts. Munthali's study of the forestry sector finds that green public works programmes can substantially improve youth well-being when aligned with education, training, and support systems. Suryawan and colleagues, examining youth readiness for the “green-blue” labour market in mangrove conservation, highlight that developing talent and competencies is essential for preparing young people for nature-based occupations. Sulich's research on entry pathways into green professions shows that young people's decisions to choose green careers depend on labour-market prospects, personal values, and the extent to which green occupations are made visible—both symbolically and practically—within career-guidance systems.

Main part

This study employs a qualitative, document-based research design integrating normative-legal analysis with an integrative review of international and national literature on climate change, green jobs, and youth education. This approach is appropriate for two purposes: (1) synthesizing the expanding conceptual and empirical literature on green employment and green skills; and (2) examining how international approaches intersect with Uzbekistan's constitutional, legal, and policy context. Recent reviews on green jobs, green skills, and climate-responsive education have similarly applied document-based methodologies focused on identifying, selecting, and synthesizing textual sources rather than collecting original empirical data.

The research design combines normative-legal (doctrinal) analysis, thematic content analysis, and comparative institutional policy analysis. It is integrative because it synthesizes international academic literature with national legal and strategic documents. The normative-legal component interprets constitutional provisions, statutory acts, and policy frameworks through doctrinal legal reasoning. Thematic analysis identifies key concepts, institutional linkages, and recurring patterns, while the comparative dimension evaluates national

developments against international theoretical frameworks, including just transition theory and human capital mismatch perspectives.

The data-collection process followed defined procedures for searching, selecting, and compiling relevant information. International academic databases and institutional repositories were consulted, including ScienceDirect, PubMed, ResearchGate, the JRC Repository, and the databases of the ILO and UNESCO. Searches used keywords such as “green jobs,” “green skills,” “climate-change education,” “youth employment,” and “just transition.” Sources were screened on the basis of titles and abstracts. Materials not directly relevant to the research questions were excluded, including engineering-focused technical studies, opinion pieces lacking clear methodology, and environmental reports unrelated to education or labour markets.

The document-based design was selected because much of the relevant evidence in climate policy, the green economy, and youth education is contained in legal instruments, policy documents, institutional reports, and academic literature. Qualitative analysis also enables examination of conceptual linkages, the evolution of key ideas, and relationships between policy and legal norms. In addition, this approach is well suited to comparing international frameworks with national legal and institutional developments.

Document selection followed predefined inclusion criteria (Table 1), with particular attention to legally binding national documents and internationally recognised policy reports published between 2015 and 2024. This systematic approach was intended to enhance transparency, consistency, and replicability in the selection and analysis of sources.

Table 1

Document Selection Criteria

Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
International policy documents	UN, ILO, OECD, World Bank reports (2015–2024)	Opinion pieces, non-official documents	Global policy benchmarks
National legislation	The Constitution, laws, and Presidential decrees	Draft documents	Legal binding force
National strategies	Green economy strategy, youth policy strategy	Sectoral sub-regulations without climate reference	Policy integration relevance
Academic sources	Peer-reviewed articles (Scopus/Web of Science indexed)	Non-reviewed publications	Scientific reliability

In this study, three categories of criteria were selected to assess youth preparedness for the green economy, the development of green skills, and the responsiveness of the education system to climate change (Table 1). These categories enable the evaluation of educational and institutional policies targeting young people, as well as the extent to which competencies required for green jobs are being developed.

Knowledge and Climate Literacy (Climate & Green Knowledge). This category includes basic scientific literacy related to climate change, including physics, ecology, and the carbon cycle; knowledge of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); understanding of the green economy, green jobs, and decarbonization processes; awareness of environmental risks and climate adaptation and mitigation strategies; and the ability to search for, filter, and analyze relevant information from diverse sources.

Table 2
Criteria for Assessing Youth Preparedness for the Green Economy and the Effectiveness of Climate Education

Knowledge	Methodological (Green Skills)	Readiness (Agency)
Climate literacy	STEM-based green competencies	Psychological readiness for green careers
Knowledge of the SDGs	Integration of sustainability into education	Openness to innovation
Green economy basics	Problem-solving and systems thinking	Climate engagement
Information literacy	Practical “green” skills	Emotional resilience

In this study, three categories of criteria were selected to assess youth readiness for the green economy, the development of green skills, and the responsiveness of the education system to climate change (Table 2). These categories make it possible to evaluate the effectiveness of educational policies targeting young people, as well as the extent to which competencies required for green jobs are being developed. Uzbekistan’s laws and policy documents were interpreted using a doctrinal (legal-analytical) approach and compared with international discourse.

This section does not present original statistical modelling. Instead, it provides contextual statistical evidence to illustrate global structural trends relevant to the research questions.

International statistical data reveal the structural tension between expanding education systems, persistent youth unemployment, and growing opportunities in green employment. Current estimates suggest that more than 200 million students are enrolled in higher education worldwide, a figure that may double by 2030, while approximately 70–75 million young people remain unemployed (Tang, 2022). At the same time, modelling by international organizations indicates that the global transition toward a low-carbon, resource-efficient economy by 2030 could generate tens of millions of new jobs, particularly in renewable energy, green construction, transport, sustainable agriculture, and environmental services, provided that the necessary skills and enabling policies are in place (Thomaes et al., 2023).

Empirical labour-market studies refine these projections by examining the current scale and characteristics of green employment. Analyses based on labour-force and vacancy data from Europe and other advanced economies show that “green jobs” already account for a substantial share of total employment and that this share has steadily increased (Trevisan et al., 2022). Depending on definitions and country coverage, green employment is estimated to constitute between one-fifth and one-quarter of all jobs, whereas the share of “brown” or high-emission jobs remains considerably lower. Systematic reviews of sectors such as forestry and hospitality reveal substantial variation in contract types, working conditions, and decent-work indicators. These findings underscore that green-transition policies must be carefully designed to provide stable and attractive employment opportunities for young people (United Nations Population Fund, 2021).

Recent macro- and micro-level analyses further clarify the relationship between environmental policy and labour-market dynamics. Evidence suggests that well-designed green-transition measures tend to have a positive, or at least neutral, impact on overall employment while contributing to structural shifts toward higher-skilled occupations (Vona

et al., 2018). Several studies identify the “skill-biased” effects of environmental regulation: demand increases for highly skilled labour in green and “greening” occupations, whereas low-skilled workers may face displacement risks unless supported through targeted retraining and social-protection mechanisms.

National Indicators for Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan’s quantitative profile reflects global structural tensions to some extent, while also being shaped by distinctive demographic and institutional characteristics. The country has one of the youngest populations in the region, with an average age of approximately 27.6 years, and nearly half of Central Asia’s population resides in Uzbekistan. Over the past six years, substantial investment in human capital has expanded educational coverage: preschool enrolment increased from roughly one-quarter of the relevant age group to well over two-thirds, while the number of preschool institutions rose from around 5,200 to more than 29,000. Participation in higher education increased from approximately 9 per cent to about 38 per cent of school graduates, while national targets envision universal preschool coverage and access to higher education for every second graduate by 2030.

These trends indicate a rapidly expanding pipeline of educated youth, providing an important foundation for developing green skills and supporting green employment. However, Uzbekistan currently lacks detailed official statistics on the number and sectoral distribution of green jobs. This is partly due to the absence of a formal distinction between green and non-green employment in national occupational classifications. Consequently, national quantitative analysis relies on indirect indicators, including employment levels in environmentally relevant sectors such as energy, construction, agriculture, transport, and environmental services, as well as data on implementation of the green-economy strategy and investments in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and green infrastructure.

Overall, these trends point to a potential “window of opportunity”: Uzbekistan’s expanding education system and youthful demographic structure create significant potential for preparing a new generation for green occupations. However, in the absence of dedicated national data on green jobs, assessing how this potential can be realized depends largely on qualitative analysis of the policy-legal framework and educational reforms.

International literature interprets green employment as both an economic opportunity and a governance challenge. Recent systematic and empirical reviews show that green jobs are not limited to narrow “environmental sectors”; depending on how environment-related functions and sustainability outcomes are defined, they span manufacturing, construction, transport, services, and agriculture. Sustainability-oriented employment taxonomies distinguish between green, mixed, and brown jobs based on the environmental attributes of products, the nature of tasks, and the sustainability of work processes. These classifications also demonstrate that many occupations can be “greened” through retraining, technological upgrading, and regulatory incentives rather than being replaced.

Within this debate, youth are emerging as a particularly important group. Case studies of green-employment preparation programmes targeting disengaged young people show that such programmes can provide effective pathways into employment, although barriers remain regarding job quality, stability, and complementary support services. Sector-specific reviews highlight the importance of decent-work elements—wages, occupational safety, opportunities for participation, and career advancement—in making green jobs attractive and sustainable for young people.

Research on green skills and capabilities underscores that education and training

systems must respond proactively to labour-market dynamics. Recent reviews show that organizational green capabilities are central to integrating sustainability into business strategies, transitioning to low-carbon technologies, and maintaining competitiveness. Studies examining the labour-market effects of environmental regulation reveal that green-transition processes increase demand for high-level competencies and advanced problem-solving skills, making education and training systems adapted to new occupational profiles essential. At the same time, meta-analyses of green labour markets emphasize that youth-specific and regional analyses remain limited, particularly in developing and transition economies. This gap is especially relevant to Central Asia and Uzbekistan.

Climate-Responsive Education and Youth Agency

The second strand of literature examines how education systems respond to climate change and sustainable-development objectives. Recent quantitative and qualitative studies on climate education for adolescents show that well-designed interventions enhance climate knowledge, strengthen cognitive adaptability, and increase readiness for pro-environmental behaviour, particularly when programmes integrate cognitive, emotional, and participatory elements. Research on climate competence among younger children, including analyses of their climate-related questions, shows that young learners express significant concern about the environmental future and that political frameworks and school practices influence their understanding and sense of agency.

In higher and vocational education, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is increasingly viewed as a means of developing sustainability competencies, including systems thinking, critical reflection, collaboration, and futures literacy, which are essential for transformative economies. Behavioural models of climate education suggest that climate literacy alone is insufficient; curricula must bridge the gap between knowledge and behaviour through practice-oriented and community-based learning.

Recent research on circular-economy education and green-skills programmes finds that many courses remain heavily focused on narrow technical competencies, such as product design, recycling, and waste management, while paying insufficient attention to digital, social, and transversal skills crucial for green labour markets, including collaboration, creativity, systemic innovation, and entrepreneurship. Studies of business and management programmes incorporating ESD concepts show that such programmes can help prepare future corporate-sustainability professionals, yet challenges remain in integrating labour-market perspectives, employability pathways, and just-transition considerations.

Against this international background, Uzbekistan's legal and policy architecture stands out in several respects. The renewed Constitution contains provisions on environmental protection, environmental rights, intergenerational justice, and guarantees relating to a safe ecological environment. At the same time, the Constitution recognizes a system of continuous education, defines multiple types and levels of education, guarantees free general secondary and primary vocational education, and declares general secondary education compulsory. It also guarantees young people the right to compete on an equal basis for state-funded admission to higher education, an important safeguard for talented youth from low-income families.

The Strategy for Transition to a Green Economy 2019–2030 identifies priority areas such as green energy, green construction, green transport, sustainable agriculture, waste management, and ecotourism, indirectly embedding green-employment objectives within these sectors. The classification of green occupations currently used in national discussions—

covering green industry, green construction, renewable energy, biofuel production, green transport, organic agriculture, housing and communal services, and landscape design—corresponds closely to sectoral taxonomies of green jobs identified in international research on sustainable employment.

In the field of youth policy and education, the Law on Youth Policy defines youth as citizens aged 14–30 and guarantees their rights to education, employment, and participation in social life. A broad range of incentive mechanisms—including state awards, additional advantages for admission to higher education, differentiated contracts, and targeted social support—is intended to expand access and recognize high-performing youth. These measures are broadly consistent with international evidence emphasizing the importance of targeted preparation and incentive programmes for guiding disengaged youth toward green occupations, while also highlighting the need to ensure job quality and stability.

At the same time, qualitative analysis reveals several gaps and tensions. Conceptually and statistically, green jobs are not yet fully “visible.” Although green employment is referenced in strategies and high-level policy discourse, there is no dedicated law on green employment, and green occupations have not been formally integrated into the national occupational classification. This complicates the development of accurate statistics, monitoring frameworks, and targeted programmes, a challenge also identified in international studies of green labour markets.

This statistical invisibility reflects broader institutional-capacity constraints. The absence of a formal classification of green occupations within the national occupational framework complicates data collection, monitoring, and policy targeting. Moreover, no dedicated inter-ministerial coordination mechanism currently ensures systematic alignment between green-economy objectives, labour-market regulation, and education reform.

Despite expanded enrolment and growing programme diversity, climate change, ESD, and green skills have not yet been systematically integrated across all levels and subjects of the education system. International experience shows that fragmented integration weakens climate education and the connection between ESD and employability outcomes. In practice, curriculum integration remains uneven across subjects and educational levels. Teacher-training standards, assessment mechanisms, and career-guidance systems are not yet systematically aligned with green labour-market demands. As a result, formal references to sustainability in strategic documents do not automatically translate into coherent skills-formation pathways for youth.

Finally, although youth participation in environmental volunteering and climate-related initiatives is active in Uzbekistan, mechanisms for formal recognition—such as academic credit or preferential consideration in university admissions or employment—remain insufficiently developed. This does not fully correspond with international literature emphasizing the need to give young people both a “voice” and a “hand” in climate action, thereby strengthening agency through participation, recognition, and solidarity. The lack of formal recognition mechanisms, including credit systems, employability incentives, or structured pathways from volunteering to employment, limits the institutionalization of youth agency. International literature suggests that participation becomes transformative when it is linked to recognized credentials and labour-market value.

In recent years, greater attention has also been paid to environmental standards in workplaces, including the creation of green jobs and enhancement of employers’ social responsibility. Uzbekistan has adopted its Strategy for Transition to a Green Economy, while

broadier climate action is expected to create substantial new employment opportunities. Green jobs are forms of employment that contribute to environmental sustainability and help address climate-change challenges. They are typically associated with sectors seeking to reduce environmental impacts, conserve resources, and develop a more sustainable, low-carbon economy. Such employment exists across numerous sectors and includes work supporting renewable energy, environmental protection, agriculture and industry, tourism, resource efficiency, and environmentally sustainable production.

Although this study does not employ a fully mixed-methods design in the strict statistical sense, the combined use of quantitative indicators and qualitative document analysis enables an interpretation based on “integrated evidence.” On the one hand, Uzbekistan’s demographic and educational trends—the rapid expansion of preschool and higher education, its youthful population structure, and the country’s strategic commitment to green growth—create favourable conditions for developing a new generation equipped with green skills. On the other hand, international empirical research warns that unless skills systems and labour-market institutions are deliberately aligned with just-transition goals, including targeted support for at-risk youth, the green transition may reproduce or exacerbate existing inequalities.

The analysis indicates that Uzbekistan currently stands at a strategic turning point. If ongoing legal and educational reforms are complemented by (1) a clearer conceptual and statistical framework for green employment, (2) systematic integration of climate and sustainability competencies across all levels of education, and (3) institutionalized mechanisms for youth participation in climate and environmental action, the country can transform its youthful demographic potential and expanding education system into a powerful driver of green employment and sustainable development. Conversely, if these linkages remain weak, a significant share of young people—despite rising levels of education—may be unable to fully benefit from the opportunities created by the global green transition.

Conclusion

This study makes three specific contributions to the literature on green transition, youth, and education. First, it develops an integrated analytical framework linking climate policy, green employment, and youth education as a unified institutional system. Rather than treating these domains separately, the study demonstrates how labour-market transformation, human-capital formation, and sustainability governance interact structurally within an emerging economy.

Second, the article provides one of the first systematic regional analyses for Central Asia, using Uzbekistan as a case study. While international scholarship has extensively examined green jobs and green skills in advanced economies, evidence from transition and post-Soviet contexts remains limited. This study addresses that gap by situating Uzbekistan’s green-economy reforms within global debates on just transition and skill-biased structural change.

Third, the research identifies a policy–implementation gap within the national framework. Although Uzbekistan has established a strong constitutional and strategic basis for green development and youth advancement, institutional coordination, statistical visibility of green jobs, and systematic curriculum integration remain incomplete. This policy gap constitutes a central practical constraint to a youth-centred green transition.

The findings suggest that demographic potential and educational expansion alone do not guarantee successful green-labour-market outcomes. Institutional alignment between climate strategy, occupational classification, education reform, and youth policy is decisive. Without

such coordination, the structural tension between expanding education systems and evolving green labour markets may persist.

Overall, the study contributes conceptually through framework integration, regionally through Central Asian evidence, and policy-analytically through the identification of implementation gaps. These contributions provide a foundation for future empirical research and the development of more coherent, youth-centred green-transition strategies.

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