Analysis of standards and mechanisms of international organisations on human rights and interaction with civil society, focusing on the OECD and Central Asia

Research Note

Almaty
2025

Table of Contents

Acronyms

Acronym	Expansion
ACN	Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia
BIAC	Business and Industry Advisory Committee
CDEP	Committee on Digital Economy Policy
CSISAC	Civil Society Information Society Advisory Council
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
GPAI	Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence
HRDD	Human Rights Due Diligence
IAP	Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
MAPS	Methodology for Assessing Procurement Systems
NAP	National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights
NCP	National Contact Point
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RBC	Responsible business conduct
RIA	Regulatory Impact Assessment
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index
SIGMA	Support for Improvement in Governance and Management
TUAC	Trade Union Advisory Committee
UNCAC	United Nations Convention Against Corruption
WPRBC	Working Party on Responsible Business Conduct

I. Introduction

In the modern context, the issues of respect for human rights and ensuring the involvement of civil society in the processes of development and implementation of the state policy are becoming increasingly important not only in the political and legal, but also in the socio-economic terms. International organisations, including financial institutions and structures such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)[1], play a key role in the formation of universal standards that promote the sustainable development, transparent management, social responsibility of business and legal protection of citizens. One of the most important areas of activities of such organisations is the integration of human rights and mechanisms of engagement with civil society into the framework of international economic initiatives and commitments.

The purpose of this research note is to make the targeted review and analysis of the standards, rules, criteria and procedures applied by the OECD in terms of human rights and civil society engagement, and to examine the extent to which the standards concerned are aligned with the national frameworks of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The objectives of the research include:

- analysing the main OECD documents, rules and regulations that govern the respect for human rights and the inclusive management;
- reviewing mechanisms for the civil society involvement in policy-making within the OECD, including any formal or informal tools of interaction;
- determining the forms and scope of involvement of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the OECD initiatives, subject to statutory and programme limits;
- comparing the international standards with national realities in the three countries of concern, identifying both the results achieved and challenges remained.

For Central Asian states, which are at various stages of political and economic reforms, compliance with international standards in the field of human rights and engagement with civil society has significance not only for foreign policy but also for domestic governance. The adoption of such standards contributes to:

- the improvement of the national reform legitimacy;
- the strengthening of trust of international partners, including donors and investors;
- the expansion of opportunities for citizens to take part in decision-making;
- the prevention of human rights infringements in the context of economic activities, including investment projects, infrastructure development and natural resource management.

Furthermore, the countries of the region strive to more closely integrate with global economic institutions, including the OECD, the participation in such international initiatives requires compliance not only with economic but also with legal and humanitarian standards. In this context, the analysis of existing commitments, opportunities and gaps is timely and necessary.

The analysis is based on the comparative and structural-functional approaches with the elements of the legal and regulatory analysis. The main sources include:

- the official OECD documents (recommendations, guidelines, agendas, country programme reports, committee materials);
- the international treaties and standards recognised by the states of the region;
- the legislation and strategic documents of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Uzbekistan;
- the reports of international organisations (including the World Bank, UNDP, OSCE).

This analysis may be useful to a wide range of stakeholders, including state authorities, international organisations, research institutes, and civil society organisations (CSOs) involved in

[1] For more details please visit https://www.oecd.org/en.html

monitoring the respect for human rights and developing sustainable development and advocacy strategies. It provides government institutions with guidelines for the possible convergence with international standards and the increase of the efficiency of engagement with civil society. For CSOs, it is a tool for reasoned advocacy, more informed participation in international dialogues and national processes associated with the reforms and human rights commitments. The analysis may also serve as a basis for the further research, comparative reviews, and drafting national or regional recommendations for the institutional development in the context of the human rights and economic agenda.

II. OECD standards, rules and criteria

2.1. OECD framework and commitments on human rights and civil society engagement

Bringing together 38 countries with developed market economies and democratic institutions, the OECD plays an important role in formulating standards aimed at ensuring the sustainable and inclusive development, the rule of law, accountability and respect for human rights. Although the OECD is not a human rights organisation in the classical sense, its norms and recommendations even more often include the provisions concerning, directly or indirectly, human rights and civil society involvement.

2.1.1. Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan and civil society organisation engagement[2]

The Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan (IAP) was launched in 2003 as part of the OECD Anti-Corruption Network (ACN)[3]. The ACN is the regional initiative covering 24 partner countries, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

The IAP is a policy engagement and monitoring mechanism, wherein the countries voluntarily commit to strengthen their national anti-corruption legislation and institutions, improve practices for preventing, detecting and prosecuting corruption offences, and ensure the transparency, accountability and civil control.

The IAP process consists of:

- regular monitoring rounds;
- preparing national self-assessments, independent expert assessments and final reports;
- developing recommendations and implementation indicators;
- publishing final documents available to the public.

Notwithstanding that the IAP is not legally binding, its moral and political weight is high, its recommendations are taken into account in state strategies, as well as in reports on other international commitments (UNCAC, GRECO, SDG 16).

In 2023, the 5th round of the IAP monitoring was launched representing a significant upgrade over the previous rounds. The key features of the new methodology include:

The introduction of quantitative and qualitative indicators allows for a more objective measurement of the progress and to compare the countries with each other, and not just with their previous results.

The standardised and clearly defined benchmarks that have been developed following the extensive consultations and form the basis for standardised, consistent and transparent assessment with the greater stakeholder involvement.

The assessment by nine key areas: 1) Anti-corruption policy; 2) Conflict of interest and asset declarations; 3) Whistle-blower protection; 4) Business ethics; 5) Integrity in public procurement; 6) Independence of the judiciary; 7) Independence of the prosecutor's office; 8) Specialised anti-corruption agencies; 9) Enforcement of corruption laws.

The said methodology was tested in a pilot project that was completed in spring 2022 with the monitoring reports for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The ACN management has approved the revised methodological documents for the assessment framework

[2] Official IAP page: https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/acn-istanbul-anti-corruption-action-plan.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[3] ACN page: https://www.oecd.org/en/networks/anti-corruption-network-for-eastern-europe-and-central-asia.html

and guidelines.[4] The guide for monitoring experts is available and provides guidance on the monitoring process.[5]

As part of the 5th monitoring round, the reports were issued by the Central Asian countries covering ***Kazakhstan,***[6] ***Kyrgyzstan,***[7] ***Uzbekistan***[8] and ***Tajikistan***[9].

CSOs role. The 5th monitoring round places a particular emphasis on the involvement of CSOs:

– Consultations and participation in drafting reports. CSOs are invited to participate in drafting national self-assessments and providing alternative reports. Many CSOs in Central Asian countries regularly provide alternative reviews reflecting any non-compliance of laws with the anti-corruption standards, lack of transparency in public procurement, access to information, financial reporting, pressure on anti-corruption activists, and the lack of mechanisms to protect whistle-blowers. The references to specific CSO assessments are included in the text of the IAP monitoring reports and are taken into account when formulating recommendations, which fact strengthens the legitimacy of civil society organisations and expands their influence.

– Making part of monitoring visits. CSO representatives participate in virtual visits and discussions with experts. The OECD ACN recognises the civil society as a key player in monitoring and progress evaluation. Each country participating in the IAP is required to: 1) inform and consult CSOs when making national self-assessments; 2) incorporate information from CSOs into official responses to questionnaires; 3) organise public discussions on the progress of recommendations.

– Using reports for advocacy. Monitoring results serve as a tool for CSOs to promote reforms and increase transparency. The IAP recommendations often include provisions necessitating the participation of CSOs in developing strategies and plans, creating multi-stakeholder review board under anti-corruption agencies, and ensuring the access for CSOs to the information about corruption investigations and punishments. In many countries, this has become the basis for institutionalizing government-civil society dialogue on anti-corruption policy.

Thus, the 5th IAP monitoring round provides a unique opportunity for CSOs to actively participate in the formulation and assessment of anti-corruption policies in their countries. As for the Central Asian countries, the IAP serves as an important international "soft leverage", strengthening the position of CSOs under the conditions of limited access to formal participation.

---

[4] OECD (2023), Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan, 5th Monitoring Round: Assessment Framework: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/networks/acn/documents-(pdfs)/assessment-framework-ENG.pdf

[5] OECD (2023), Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan, 5th Monitoring Round: Guide: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/networks/acn/documents-(pdfs)/monitoring-guide-ENG.pdf

[6] Baseline Report of the 5th Monitoring Round of Anti-Corruption Reforms in Kazakhstan. Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan. Published on 20 November 2024: https://www.oecd.org/ru/publications/f4579337-ru.html

[7] Baseline Report of the 5th Monitoring Round of Anti-Corruption Reforms in Kyrgyzstan. Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan. Published on 28 November 2024: https://www.oecd.org/ru/publications/af66411a-ru.html

[8] Baseline Report of the 5th Monitoring Round of Anti-Corruption Reforms in Uzbekistan. Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan. Published on 4 December 2024: https://www.oecd.org/ru/publications/0c24d6de-ru.html

[9] Baseline Report of the 5th Monitoring Round of Anti-Corruption Reforms in Tajikistan. Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan. Published on 4 December 2024: https://www.oecd.org/ru/publications/34e6b388-ru.html

2.1.2. OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises[10]

The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (the "Guidelines") constitute the fundamental international instrument setting out the standards of responsible business conduct applicable to companies operating across borders. The modified version of the Guidelines was adopted in June 2023, replacing the previous version of 2011, aimed at strengthening the components related to human rights, climate agenda, digital responsibility and stakeholder engagement, including civil society organisations (CSOs).

The Guidelines cover a wide range of topics: human rights, employment and labour relations, environment, fight against corruption, consumer protection, disclosure of information, science and technology, taxation, etc. Despite their voluntary legal nature, the Guidelines have the high legitimacy and recognition in the international practice, being mandatory for the promotion by the OECD member states and acceding states.

Section IV 'Human Rights' contains specific obligations for companies to:

- respect for all internationally recognised human rights, including those enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,[11] the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,[12] and other treaties;

- prevent, minimise and eliminate negative impacts on human rights associated with their activities, products or services both directly and indirectly (through supply chains);

- conduct the human rights due diligence (HRDD)[13] processes comprising:

  - - the assessment of risks to human rights,
  - - the introduction of mechanisms to prevent negative impacts,
  - - the process of monitoring the effectiveness of actions adopted,
  - - the public disclosure of information;

- engage with stakeholders, including employees, local communities, vulnerable groups and civil society organisations, at all stages of impact assessment and management.

Role of CSOs. CSOs are mentioned in the Guidelines as key stakeholders with knowledge, expertise and authority to participate in the processes of assessing and preventing negative impacts of business. In particular:

- the companies are encouraged to consult with a CSO when conducting their due diligence procedures;

- CSOs are treated as possible complainants within the National Contact Point mechanism;

- the participation of CSOs is treated as a condition for accountability and transparency of the business to the society;

- CSOs are actively involved in monitoring the compliance with the Guidelines at the national and international levels.

---

[10] The text of the Guidelines (2023, in English): https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-guidelines-for-multinational-enterprises-on-responsible-business-conduct_81f92357-en.html; The official translation of the previous version of the Guidelines (2011) in Russian: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/ru/publications/reports/2011/09/oecd-guidelines-for-multinational-enterprises-2011-edition_g1g13daf/9789264203204-ru.pdf (at the moment, the new 2023 edition is only available in English, but the structure of the amendments is comparable and a translation is on the way)

[11] Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted by Resolution 217 A (III) of the UN General Assembly dated 10 December 1948: https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/declarations/declhr.shtml

[12] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Adopted by Resolution 2200 A (XXI) of the General Assembly dated 16 December 1966: https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/pactpol.shtml

[13] OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct: https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/due-diligence-guidance-for-responsible-business-conduct.htm

Therefore, the document emphasizes the importance of having an open space for the civil society and a mechanism for the participation in economic processes as a condition for the sustainable development and respect for human rights.

National Contact Points (NCPs)[14] are the unique feature of the Guidelines that aim at facilitating their practical application and resolving disputes. Each state that has acceded to the Guidelines is required to establish the NCP, a body that accepts complaints from individuals and entities, including CSOs, against alleged breaches of the Guidelines by companies.

The NCP:

- accepts complaints from affected parties (including CSOs and local communities),
- initiates the complaint processing procedure, including collection of information, consultations, mediation,
- publishes opinions and recommendations,
- assist in resolving disputes and improving company practices.

In the NCP practice the special attention is paid to the right of complainants, including CSOs, to participate and be protected against reprisals and pressure.

As of April 2025, the NCP has only been created in Kazakhstan.[15]

2.1.3. OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct[16]

In 2018, the OECD adopted the Due Diligence Guidance as a practical supplement to the Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. The goal of the document is to help companies in all sectors of the economy to implement a human rights and sustainability due diligence procedure in their operational activities with the aim of minimizing the risks of negative impact on human rights, society and the environment.

The document establishes a model for a step-by-step approach to due diligence, covering the entire cycle of the interaction of business with stakeholders, from planning and risk assessments to consequences monitoring and mitigation.

The main steps of the due diligence process are as follows:

– Integrating responsible business policies into the company's internal procedures.
– Identifying and assessing actual and potential negative impacts on people and the environment.
– Taking measures to prevent and mitigate impacts.
– Monitoring the efficiency of the implemented measures.
– Communicating with stakeholders, including the disclosure of information.
– Providing access to legal remedies, where a company has caused or contributed to damage.

Relationship with human rights. The document is focused on the compliance with the standards set out in:

– the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[17],
– ILO's Fundamental Conventions[18],

---

[14] Information about the NCP operation, including countries, procedures and cases adopted: https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/ncps/

[15] For more details on the National Contact Centre of Kazakhstan please visit https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/economy/activities/6109?lang=ru

[16] The full text of the document in English (main document): https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/due-diligence-guidance-for-responsible-business-conduct.htm

[17] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted by Resolution 217 A (III) of the UN General Assembly dated 10 December 1948: https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/declarations/declhr.shtml

[18] The Fundamental Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). List of the ILO Conventions: https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/lang--ru/index.htm

– UN Guidelines on Business and Human Rights,[19]
– UN Convention against Corruption,[20]
– Paris Climate Agreement,[21] etc.

A particular emphasis is placed on the preventive approach and the duty to act in good faith to prevent violations, even if the business operates through suppliers or subsidiaries.

Role of CSOs. The Guidance clearly outlines the important and multi-layered role of CSOs in the due diligence process. In particular:

– CSOs are mentioned as key stakeholders with knowledge, expertise and resources to:
  - identify risks, particularly in vulnerable communities;
  - representing the interests of affected groups;
  - monitoring the implementation of business obligations;
  - increasing the transparency and accountability of companies.
– Companies are required to consult with CSOs at the stage of:
  - risk identification (especially for marginalised groups);
  - planning preventive measures;
  - evaluating results and feedback;
  - building remediation mechanisms.

The document expressly states that the CSOs' involvement enhances the credibility and legitimacy of due diligence processes and reduces the risk of conflict with local communities and activists.

The annexes to the Guidance contain the cases of successful CSOs' participation in building sustainable and socially acceptable business processes (e. g., in the mining sector, agriculture, textile industry, etc.).

Application and impact. The Guidance is actively used in:

– developing the national and regional due diligence laws (e. g., in Germany, France, the Netherlands, Norway, the EU);
– formulating the contractual requirements in supply chains (including the audit and disclosure requirements);
– developing the corporate ESG strategies (Environmental, Social, Governance);
– investment assessment tools (including from banks and development funds).

2.1.4. Development Assistance Committee (DAC); Human rights and civil participation standards. The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is the central body of the OECD responsible for formulating official development assistance (ODA) policies. Unlike other OECD bodies, the DAC has the explicit mandate to promote standards closely linked to human rights, democratic governance, sustainability and inclusion, including the civil society participation.

Over the past two decades, the DAC has systematically expanded the concept of quality in the official development assistance, emphasizing: 1) the priority of the inclusive, human rights-based and gender-sensitive approach; 2) the need to support democratic institutions, the rule of law, access to justice and the fight against inequality; 3) the special attention to the protection of vulnerable groups under the aid programmes.

---

[19] UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Official text in Russian (PDF): https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_ru.pdf

[20] United Nations Convention against Corruption. Adopted by General Assembly resolution 58/4 of 31 October 2003. Official text in Russian: https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/corruption.shtml

[21] Paris Climate Agreement. Official text in Russian (PDF): https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_russian_.pdf

The DAC Recommendation on enabling civil society (2021)

In October 2021, the DAC Committee approved the ***Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance***[22]**,** a key document that for the first time enshrined the international standard for creating an enabling environment for civil society organisations (CSOs) in the context of international aid. It is the first instrument in the history of the DAC dedicated exclusively to the role of CSOs.

The Recommendation calls on donor and partner countries to:

– expand the political space for civil society, including the removal of legal and administrative barriers;

– institutionalise the CSO involvement in the development and implementation of the ODA strategies;

– ensure the protection of human rights defenders and CSO representatives, who are under the threat;

– provide sustainable funding for CSOs, including local and small-scale organisations;

– recognise CSOs as equal partners with expertise, community trust, and a unique role in implementing the principle of leaving no one behind.

CSOs role within the DAC. Civil society organisations are not simply seen as recipients of support, but are recognised as: 1) holders of independent expert knowledge, especially on the human rights, gender, and humanitarian access issues; 2) active participants in monitoring and evaluating aid programmes; 3) an important source of data and feedback for donor countries and international mechanisms.

The CSO participation includes the following formats:

– the regular consultations with civil society in making the ODA strategies and country reviews;

– the participation in DAC policy groups (including through the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness platform);

– the joint development of criteria for assessing the effectiveness of aid.

Peer reviews and assessment of civil society participation*.*[23] The DAC conducts regular reviews of the donor countries' policies and practices (peer reviews), whereby it assesses the compliance with international standards, the mechanism for engagement with CSOs, measures to protect and support human rights defenders, and the consideration of civil society views in planning and implementing programmes. The results of the reviews are published openly and include recommendations for improving participation mechanisms, including on the example of partner countries in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa.

The DAC recommendations and international practice represent a valuable resource for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan with respect to the institutional and legislative development in the area of human rights and CSO participation, despite the fact that the referred countries are not members of the DAC. The potential scope includes:

- Dialogue on international aid and development. International donors, including the EU, UNDP, UNICEF, EBRD, GIZ, operate actively in the Central Asian countries – almost all of them are guided by the DAC standards when drafting their programmes. The introduction of the DAC approach may increase the efficiency of the programmes by involving local CSOs, especially in the areas of education, healthcare, digitalisation, and justice.
- Using the DAC Recommendation as an argument in advocacy. CSOs in Central Asia may use the provisions of the 2021 DAC Recommendation to: 1) promote reforms to simplify the NGO registration; 2) expand access to the state and international funding; 3) ensure participation in advisory councils under state bodies and the development of state programmes.

[22] DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance: https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5021

[23] DAC reviews (including country cases): https://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/

- Institutionalisation of the CSO participation. In the context of reforms and digital transformation, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan can introduce the practice of: 1) public consultations with CSOs in formulating national development strategies; 2) regular assessment of the environment for CSOs similar to DAC mechanisms; 3) feedback mechanisms, including online platforms.

The OECD Development Committee (DAC) has set a global standard, under which the CSO participation in development policy purports to be not only acceptable but also essential for the efficiency, sustainability and accountability.

The adoption of the 2021 Recommendation recorded the international consensus on the importance of eliminating restrictions for CSOs, preventing pressure on human rights defenders, and funding independent and local organisations.

Although the Central Asian countries are not DAC members, the practice shows that the influence of the DAC extends to partner countries, especially as part of the international aid. CSOs can use the DAC as an international norm in advocacy and expert activities. The DAC recommendations are the "soft law" tool capable of strengthening arguments in a dialogue with the state or international donors.

2.1.5. Principles of the open and inclusive governance and the role of civil society

Over the past two decades, the OECD has systematically developed and promoted standards of open government, inclusive growth and democratic accountability as integral elements of sustainable development, trust in the state and the rule of law.

The OECD documents emphasize that:

– the involvement of citizens and CSOs is the fundamental, rather than auxiliary, element of democratic governance;

– the openness of a state should be demonstrated not only in transparency, but also in the joint policy development, access to information and feedback mechanisms;

– the inclusive governance means the governance, under which all groups in society (including the vulnerable ones) have the opportunity to participate in decision-making, influence priorities and benefit from development outcomes.

The OECD ***Recommendation of the Council on Open Government*** (2017) serves as the key document dealing with the **open government**[24] issues. According to the official recommendation of the OECD Council, an open government is based on the following principles (Open Government Principles):

– Transparency – the free and timely access to information about government activities;

– Inclusiveness – the active participation of all stakeholders, including CSOs, in the development and implementation of policies;

– Accountability – having in place mechanisms for evaluation, feedback and responsibility for decisions made;

– Integrity – the adherence to the ethical standards, prevention of conflicts of interest, anti-corruption measures;

– Digital openness – the use of digital technologies to increase participation and transparency.

The principles listed above form a basis of many country programmes, including, for example, the SIGMA[25] (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management), which is the joint initiative of the OECD and the European Union aimed at supporting public administration reforms in partner countries. In Central Asia, the SIGMA actively cooperates with Kazakhstan and

[24] Recommendation of the Council on Open Government: https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0438

[25] For more details about the program please visit https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/sigma-papers_20786581.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Uzbekistan, providing analytical and methodological support in the development and implementation of reforms.

Inclusive Growth and Civic Participation. The OECD also emphasizes the importance of involving all segments of society in decision-making processes to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth. The key document in this area is the OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes (2022).[26]

Supporting Civic Space. The OECD recognises the importance of protecting and expanding civic space as a foundation for the functioning of a democratic society. To this end, the Practical Guide for Policymakers on Protecting and Promoting Civic Space (2024)[27] was developed. The Guide recognises that CSOs play a key role in monitoring the respect for rights and freedoms, and also in advancing initiatives to expand civic space.

Accountability and Democratic Governance and Democratic Governance. The OECD emphasizes the need to ensure that public institutions are accountable to citizens. The key document 'Accountability and Democratic Governance (2013)'[28] emphasizes that CSOs independently monitor the performance of state bodies and contribute to the improvement of their accountability.

Enabling Civil Society in Development. The OECD recognises the importance of creating an enabling environment for the CSOs activities in the area of development. To this end, the OECD Development Committee Recommendation on Supporting Civil Society (2021)[29] was issued.

The role of CSOs. CSOs are thus recognised in OECD documents as integral partners in building an open government. Their role includes:

- Involvement in the policy development. CSOs should have institutional access to planning processes, including through public councils, working groups, and public consultation platforms. The OECD recommendations point to the need to include vulnerable and underrepresented groups in the decision-making process.
- Ensuring public control and feedback. CSOs perform the functions of monitoring efficiency, human rights, social justice, and anti-corruption measures. They ensure the two-way communication between the state and the population, especially at the level of regions and small settlements.
- Development of digital participation. As part of the OECD initiatives on digital government, CSOs are treated as partners in the development of digital services, sources of expertise in digital rights, and facilitators of digital literacy and user engagement.

The principles of open and inclusive governance are clearly the key cross-cutting OECD standards applicable in any policy sector. CSOs play a central role as knowledge holders, representatives of public interests and a mechanism for public oversight. In Central Asian countries, the said principles can be: 1) integrated into reform programmes, 2) used in advocacy for open budgets, digital transparency and participation in law-making, 3) applied in the development of national strategies for sustainable development and digital transformation.

---

[26] OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes (2022): https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2022/09/oecd-guidelines-for-citizen-participation-processes_63b34541/f765caf6-en.pdf

[27] Practical Guide for Policymakers on Protecting and Promoting Civic Space (2024): https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/support-materials/2024/11/practical-guide-for-policymakers-on-protecting-and-promoting-civic-space_4e394a55/Civic%20Space%20Highlights%20Brochure_V2.pdf

[28] Accountability and Democratic Governance (2013): https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/accountability-and-democratic-governance_9789264183636-en.html

[29] DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance: https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5021

2.2. Human Rights Standards

2.2.1. Generally recognised standards

Although the OECD is not a human rights organisation in the strict sense, the human rights standards are the fundamental component of most of its recommendations, particularly in the areas of sustainable development, international trade, investment, development and corporate responsibility. ***The OECD's approach to human rights is based on the normative integration of the international human rights standards***. This primarily concerns:

– the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948);[30]
– the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966);[31]
– the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966);[32]
– the key conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO); [33]
– the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);[34]
– the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC);[35]
– the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC);[36]

Also, the ***OECD cooperates with the UN Global Compact***[37], a voluntary initiative for companies to commit to 10 universal principles, including human rights, labour standards, environmental standards and anti-corruption. The OECD uses these principles to assess business behaviour and develop recommendations for sustainable management.

In implementing the ***2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*** (Agenda 2030)[38] and the ***Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)***[39], the OECD views human rights as an integral component of sustainability and an "invisible axis" running through all 17 goals.[40]

The OECD emphasizes:

---

[30] Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted by Resolution 217 A (III) of the UN General Assembly dated 10 December 1948: https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/declarations/declhr.shtml

[31] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Adopted by Resolution 2200 A (XXI) of the UN General Assembly dated 16 December 1966: https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/pactpol.shtml

[32] International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Adopted by Resolution 2200 A (XXI) of the UN General Assembly dated 16 December 1966: https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/pactecon.shtml

[33] Fundamental Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). List of ILO Conventions: https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/lang--ru/index.htm

[34] Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Adopted by Resolution 34/180 of the UN General Assembly dated 18 December 1979: https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/cedaw.shtml

[35] Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adopted by Resolution 44/25 of the UN General Assembly dated 20 November 1989: https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/childcon.shtml

[36] United Nations Convention against Corruption. Adopted by Resolution 58/4 of the UN General Assembly dated 31 October 2003. Official text in Russian: https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/corruption.shtml

[37] Official resource of the UN Global Compact: https://unglobalcompact.org/

[38] Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: https://sdgs.un.org/en/2030agenda

[39] Official resource on the Sustainable Development Goals: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/ru/about/development-agenda/

[40] OECD Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development: https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/policy-coherence-for-sustainable-development.html

– the need to institutionalise the principle of “leaving no one behind” as the exercise of the rights of vulnerable groups;

– the link between human rights and inclusive growth, including through access to education, health care, justice and protection from discrimination;

– the importance of citizen and CSO participation in the assessment and monitoring of national sustainable development strategies.

2.2.2. International cooperation and Official Development Assistance (ODA). The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) treats human rights as an integral part of the assessment, planning and implementation of international aid. At the systemic level, this means that:

– human rights are recognised not only as the value basis of the ODA (official development assistance), but also as a functional criterion for its effectiveness;

– aid programmes must be accountable to the people of recipient countries, especially vulnerable groups;

– donors have a duty to do no harm and to take into account any potential negative impact of projects on human rights.

These principles are embedded in the DAC recommendations, country reviews and impact assessment guidelines. The central document is the Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance[41]. This document for the first time enshrined the international standards, under which donors are required to protect and expand civic space, cooperate with CSOs as equal participants and involve CSOs in assessing the effectiveness of aid.

One of the DAC's human rights activities is to support structures capable of protecting, promoting and implementing human rights at the national level. This includes:

- reforming the ombudsman offices (institutional independence, mandate, accessibility);
- assisting in the judicial system modernization and independence enhancement;
- programmes to strengthen civil society and legal advocacy NGOs, including through technical, organisational and financial assistance;
- creating alternative dispute resolution mechanisms targeting vulnerable groups (e. g. women, migrants, people with disabilities).

The OECD stresses that any support programme should be accompanied by an analysis of potential risks to human rights. This is particularly important in “sensitive” sectors: 1) infrastructure (resettlement, environmental impacts, labour rights), 2) digitalisation (data collection, monitoring, digital divide (gap)), 3) legal reform (criminal prosecution, judicial independence).

The DAC also calls on donors to use human rights as an assessment lens from project planning onwards, to include HRIA (Human Rights Impact Assessment) in standard toolkits (similar to gender and environmental analysis) and to consult with CSOs and affected communities as key sources of impact information.

The DAC conducts regular peer reviews of donor countries, where the human rights are treated as an indicator of compliance with effective aid policies. The key questions are as follows:

- Do donors support human rights in recipient countries?
- To what extent are mechanisms for the protection and promotion of rights included in their strategies?
- Do they engage with local CSOs, vulnerable groups and independent institutions?

[41] DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance: https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5021

The peer review reports often contain specific recommendations for strengthening the human rights component of aid, including increasing direct support for human rights projects, developing mechanisms for local participation, and ensuring inclusiveness.

The DAC recognises that sustainable human rights cannot be realised without a strong, independent and protected civil society. In this regard, the ODA policy includes provisions for direct funding of CSOs, including small and local organisations working with marginalised groups, the creation of flexible support mechanisms that are not limited to project grants (e. g., institutional funding, core support) and recognition of CSOs as full-fledged partners, and not just implementers of the donor agenda.

2.2.3. Cross-sectoral integration of human rights into the OECD activities. The OECD views human rights as a cross-cutting principle, integrated into all key areas of its work. It is not a separate "functional sector", but the basic framework for assessing the fairness, effectiveness and sustainability of any policies – from education to anti-corruption mechanisms.

Education: access, equality, quality. In education, the OECD uses human rights as a framework for assessing the accessibility and inclusiveness of education systems, taking into account the following standards:

– UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960),[42]
– Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 28–29),
– ICESCR (Articles 13–14) .

For these purposes, the OECD uses the instruments, such as:

- PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment)[43], an international comparison of the quality of education, taking into account gender, socio-economic barriers and inclusiveness;
- OECD Education Policy Outlook[44], a series of country reviews that analyse the implementation of the right to education, including the participation of vulnerable groups;
- Pre-school, technical and digital education efforts focused on equal opportunities.[45]

Digital Transformation: Privacy, Inclusion, Digital Rights. The OECD digital agenda is based on human rights, in particular:

– the right to privacy and protection of personal data (in accordance with Article 17 of the ICCPR);
– the right to access information and technology;
– non-discrimination and digital equality.

The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework emphasises[46] that digital solutions should be accessible to all, take into account cultural, linguistic and physical barriers, and not reinforce discrimination.

The OECD AI The Principles (2019)[47] are the first intergovernmental standard in artificial intelligence (AI). They promote the development of innovative, trustworthy AI that respects human rights and democratic values. Being adopted in 2019 and updated in 2024, they consist of

---

[42] Convention against Discrimination in Education. Adopted on 14 December 1960 by the General Conference of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation at its eleventh session: https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/educat.shtml

[43] Program for International Student Assessment (PISA): https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/pisa.html

[44] Education Policy Outlook: https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/education-policy-outlook.html

[45] Directorate for Education and Skills: https://www.oecd.org/en/about/directorates/directorate-for-education-and-skills.html

[46] The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-oecd-digital-government-policy-framework_f64fed2a-en.html

[47] AI principles: https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/ai-principles.html

five value-based principles and five recommendations that provide practical and flexible guidance to policymakers and AI stakeholders.

The activities under the G20/OECD Toolkit on Digital Inclusion[48] include the principles for the accessibility of digital services for older people, women, people with disabilities and residents of rural areas. The OECD is developing the Digital Inclusion Dashboard, where the countries assess how the digital infrastructure and services are accessible for all social groups.[49]

Anti-corruption: access to justice, whistle-blower protection, transparency. The OECD views anti-corruption not only as a matter of good governance, but also as a prerequisite for realising human rights – in particular the rights to a fair trial, equality before the law and access to information.

The OECD uses the following instruments:

– OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials (1997);[50]

– OECD Anti-Corruption Network (ACN), covers Eastern Europe and Central Asia;

– Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan, contains recommendations on ensuring legal space for CSOs, protecting whistle-blowers, and preventing abuses in public procurement;

– Public Sector Integrity. A Framework for Assessment[51], emphasizes the link between transparency, accountability and human rights.

Business and Human Rights: Due Diligence and Remediation Human rights issues are integrated into the OECD standards on corporate responsibility, in particular the previously mentioned Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (2023) and the Due Diligence Guidance.[52] These documents require that companies:

- respect all internationally recognised human rights;
- identify, prevent and eliminate violations of rights related to their activities, suppliers and business partners;
- collaborate with affected parties and CSOs;
- ensure access to legal remedies, including mediation through the NCP.

The OECD stresses that human rights must be taken into account in supply chains, investment policies, financing, and the activities of state-owned enterprises.

In developing the Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and other policies, the OECD has made direct reference to the UN Guidelines on Business and Human Rights[53], building them into tools on due diligence, stakeholder participation, risk assessment and access to remedy.

Although, the OECD does not directly develop National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights (NAPs),[54] the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and Due Diligence Guidance have become the basis for the preparation of NAPs in dozens of countries. These documents are often cited alongside the UN Guidelines on Business and Human Rights as complementary sources of standards. National Action Plans are the policy documents developed by governments to

---

[48] G20 Compendium on the Use of Digital Tools for Public Service Continuity: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/g20-compendium-on-the-use-of-digital-tools-for-public-service-continuity_6f800fd5-en.html

[49] Resource: https://www.oecd.org/digital/

[50] Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions (Istanbul, 21 November 1997): https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31117932&pos=4;-108#pos=4;-108

[51] Public Sector Integrity. A Framework for Assessment: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/public-sector-integrity_9789264010604-en.html

[52] See Sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3.

[53] UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Official text in Russian (PDF): https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_ru.pdf

[54] National action plans on business and human rights: https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-business/national-action-plans-business-and-human-rights

implement international standards on human rights and business, systematize the efforts of the state, business and civil society, and address gaps in legislation and practice.

NAPs typically include: 1) due diligence commitments; 2) access to remedy measures; 3) systemic reforms (procurement, litigation, corporate governance); 4) stakeholder participation, including CSOs.

In all countries that have developed NAPs (34 to date), CSOs have been actively involved in national consultations, in working groups and multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms, and in the preparation of shadow reports and assessments of the implementation of NAPs.

According to the OECD recommendations, the CSO participation is required to be:

- institutionalised (e. g., through permanent advisory boards);
- representative (including vulnerable groups and regions);
- transparent (the results of consultations must be public).

The establishment of a NAP could become a platform for institutionalising the CSO involvement, an opportunity to systematise public and private sector advocacy efforts, and a progressive step towards the closer alignment with the OECD and UN standards.

***

It is therefore clear that the OECD integrates human rights as a building block of analysis and assessment across policy sectors. This approach is based on universal standards and is often accompanied by a detailed guidance on the inclusion of CSOs. The OECD integrates human rights standards cross-cuttingly across all policy areas, from economic reforms to international aid. Civil society organisations are seen as essential partners in realising human rights through participation, monitoring, feedback and advocacy.

The analysis also shows that CSO engagement is not considered an add-on by the OECD, but an integral part of effective and legitimate policies, from international aid to corporate responsibility. The following core principles are reflected in most of the OECD’s key recommendations, strategies and instruments:

– CSO participation in policy development, implementation and monitoring (including mandatory consultations and shadow reports);

– support for CSOs through direct funding, protection of human rights defenders, removal of regulatory barriers;

– institutionalisation of dialogue, including through working groups, platforms and peer review processes;

– using CSO data and expertise as a source of independent assessment and public legitimacy.

Thus, the engagement with civil society is a cross-cutting norm of the entire OECD normative architecture. For the Central Asian countries, this opens up not only opportunities, but also arguments in favour of legislative and institutional strengthening of the role of CSOs at the national level. It also opens up opportunities to strengthen national reforms based on the international framework, use OECD sectoral assessments to monitor the implementation of human rights and argue for the participation of CSOs in various areas of state and investment policy. The OECD recommendations can be effectively used as a soft law in countries striving to align with international standards, including the Central Asian countries.

III. Mechanisms for civil society participation in the OECD

3.1 Structural mechanisms

The OECD ensures the participation of stakeholders – businesses, trade unions, academia and CSOs – through dedicated consultative mechanisms as well as regular public consultation and dialogue processes. This participation is not a formal add-on but an institutionalised component of the OECD's governance system.

3.1.1. BIAC – OECD Business and Industry Advisory Committee[55] is the official channel for interaction between the business community and the OECD. The BIAC brings together national business associations of member countries, provides expert analysis, position papers and comments on draft standards and represents business in the OECD working bodies, including the Corporate Responsibility Committee, DAC, and the Taxation and Investment Committees. The BIAC represents the interests of the business community, not CSOs, and does not interact with CSOs directly in an institutional form. BIAC does not include CSOs in its structure, does not have joint platforms or working bodies with CSOs. There are no formal mechanisms within BIAC to take into account the position of civil society. Its focus is on protecting the interests of business, especially transnational companies, in the process of developing OECD norms and standards. However, there are several important points of contact that are worth knowing, especially in the context of business and human rights, ESG standards and responsible business policies.

Potential avenues for dialogue via shared processes could involve:

Joint participation in OECD discussions and consultations. The BIAC and CSOs can participate in the same sessions, for example: 1) the week-long meeting on responsible business practices (OECD RBC Week)[56], 2) public hearings on the reform of the OECD Guidelines, 3) dialogues organised by the Working Party on RBC[57], where the BIAC, TUAC and CSO representatives participate concurrently. In such formats, the BIAC represents the interests of businesses, and CSOs represent the interests of employees, consumers, affected communities and human rights defenders.

Conflict or dialogue through NCPs (National Contact Points). As part NCP procedures (to handle complaints against companies for non-compliance with the OECD Guidelines), CSOs often act as complainants and companies – as respondents. The BIAC is generally critical of the expansion of CSO rights in these mechanisms, but is involved in discussions on the procedures. Informal contacts sometimes occur, for example in countries where BIAC and CSOs are part of

[55] Official resource: https://www.biac.org

[56] The information is available at https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/global-forum/#:~:text=As%20part%20of%20the%20OECD,on%2014%2D15%20February%202023

[57] The information is available at https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/OECD-working-party-on-responsible-business-conduct.pdf

national advisory councils on corporate responsibility (as in Germany[58], the Netherlands[59], France[60]).

Interaction through the UN Global Compact or international alliances. Some BIAC members also participate in the UN Global Compact or the BHR initiative of the WEF (World Economic Forum), where CSOs and businesses are forced to interact. The issues concerning due diligences, ESG, or human rights in supply chains can be discussed on such platforms.

3.1.2. TUAC – OECD Trade Union Advisory Committee.[61] TUAC is an international trade union organisation with consultative status with the OECD. It represents the interests of workers and the trade union movement in the activities of the Organisation. TUAC brings together 59 national trade union centres in OECD countries, representing over 66 million workers. TUAC actively participates in OECD Council meetings at ministerial level, committees and working parties, making proposals on employment, social policy, education, sustainable development and other issues. The organisation promotes decent work, social protection and collective bargaining as the basis for the inclusive and sustainable economic growth. TUAC also cooperates with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and others, coordinating trade union input into the G7 and G20 processes. The organisation has access to over 60 OECD bodies, including committees and working parties, where it represents the views of workers. The organisation issues statements and recommendations, participates in consultations and makes proposals on various aspects of OECD policy.

While TUAC represents the interests of trade unions, it actively engages with CSOs, particularly in the following areas:

Responsible Business Conduct. TUAC works with organisations such as OECD Watch[62] to monitor compliance with the OECD Guidelines and improve CCP mechanisms.

Digital Transformation and Workers' Rights: As part of policy discussions on the digital economy and artificial intelligence, TUAC engages with CSOs to ensure that workers' rights are protected in the context of digitalisation.

Sustainable Development and Climate Policy: TUAC and CSOs jointly advance the just transition agenda towards sustainable economy, emphasizing the need to take regard to the workers' interests in the climate policy.

---

[58] In Germany, there is a National CSR Forum at the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS), a multi-stakeholder body that advises the government on corporate social responsibility issues. It includes representatives from business, trade unions, civil society and academia. BIAC is represented through national business associations, and CSOs participate through various non-governmental organisations. URL: https://www.csr-in-deutschland.de/EN/Business-Human-Rights/NAP/About-the-NAP/Development-of-the-Action-Plan/development-of-the-action-plan-art.html

[59] In the Netherlands, the government, business associations, trade unions and CSOs jointly develop and implement the International Responsible Business Conduct (IRBC) Agreements. These agreements aim at promoting human rights and sustainability in global supply chains. They include the participation of BIAC through national business associations and the active participation of CSOs. URL: https://www.ser.nl/-/media/ser/downloads/engels/2014/international-responsible-business-conduct.pdf

[60] In France, the National Contact Point (NCP) for the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises includes representatives from government, business and civil society. In addition, France Stratégie, the strategic think tank of the Prime Minister, organizes multi-stakeholder consultations, including BIAC and CSOs, on sustainability and corporate responsibility. URL: https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/France-NCP-Peer-Review-2018-EN.pdf or https://www.strategie.gouv.fr/en/nous-connaitre/about-france-strategie

[61] Official resource: https://www.tuac.org

[62] Official resource: https://www.oecdwatch.org/

3.1.3. Civil society advisory and expert groups. Although the OECD does not have a single standing body on civil society, unlike BIAC and TUAC, the mechanisms for CSO participation are built at the level of working groups, programmes and thematic committees, including:

Working Party on Responsible Business Conduct (WPRBC).[63] CSOs are involved in the development and revision of the OECD Guidelines for MNEs, the preparation of due diligence guidance and review of country practices.

The Civil Society Dialogue on Development Cooperation (under DAC)[64] holds regular dialogues with CSOs, especially from recipient countries, with a particular focus on human rights, participation of vulnerable groups, and protection of human rights defenders.

Supporting civic space.[65] The expert and advocacy groups are involved in reviewing the openness of public administration and the state of civic space.

The Civil Society Information Society Advisory Council (CSISAC)[66] is the official advisory body representing civil society in the work of the OECD Committee on Digital Economy Policy (CDEP). Established in 2008, CSISAC ensures the participation of CSOs in the development of OECD policies related to the digital economy and the Internet. CSISAC's functions include 1) providing analytical materials and advice on issues of digital rights, privacy, data security and inclusion, 2) participating in working groups such as the Security and Privacy in the Digital Economy (SPDE), where issues of cryptography, critical infrastructure protection and identification are discussed, 3) organising consultations and dialogues between the OECD and civil society representatives to form more informed and acceptable policies.

OECD. AI Network of Experts (ONE AI)[67] is an informal group of experts created to provide policy advice on artificial intelligence. The network includes representatives from governments, business, academia and civil society. The role of civil society in ONE AI is to: 1) participate in the development and implementation of the OECD Principles on AI, adopted in 2019, which emphasize the importance of inclusivity, transparency and accountability in the use of AI, 2) provide expert assessments and advice on issues of trust in AI, ethics, human rights and social justice, 3) promote international cooperation and information exchange on AI policy issues.

Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI)[68] is an international initiative supported by the OECD that aims to advance the responsible and human-centred use of AI. The GPAI brings together experts from government, industry, academia and civil society.

Civil society participation in the GPAI is ensured through: 1) contributing to the development of policies and guidelines for the responsible use of AI, taking into account human rights and democratic values, 2) participating in working groups such as Responsible AI, Data Governance and Future of Work, where key challenges and opportunities related to AI are discussed, 3) promoting inclusivity and diversity in the development and deployment of AI technologies.

3.1.4. Public consultations, expert discussions and participation in monitoring. The OECD actively involves civil society organisations (CSOs) in the development, review and monitoring of its policies and standards. This involvement takes place through:

---

[63] UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights: https://www.ohchr.org/ru/business/un-working-group-business-and-human-rights

[64] Framework for Dialogue between the DAC and Civil Society Organisations: https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC(2018)28/FINAL/EN/pdf

[65] Civic Space: https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/open-government-and-citizen-participation/civic-space.html

[66] Civil Society Information Society Advisory Council: https://csisac.org/about.php

[67] OECD Working Party on Artificial Intelligence Governance (AIGO): https://oecd.ai/en/network-of-experts

[68] Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI): https://oecd.ai/en/about/what-we-do

– ***Public consultations*** are announced online with open access to draft documents. Comments are accepted from all interested parties. The positions of civil society are taken into account when finalizing documents.

– ***Expert discussions*** include round tables with CSOs, including stages of policy implementation (implementation reviews), surveys and thematic interviews conducted by the OECD Secretariat, webinars and peer learning sessions learning sessions), where OGOs share their practices. The most striking examples are as follows:

- Global Forum on Responsible Business Practices Responsible Business Conduct[69] is an annual event that brings together governments, businesses, trade unions and civil society to discuss responsible business conduct. The forum promotes international dialogue and the effective implementation of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.
- Monitoring under the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan (IAP). CSOs[70] participate in monitoring the implementation of anti-corruption reforms in the countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The fifth monitoring round envisages the participation of civil society in the discussion and adoption of monitoring reports.
- Investment Policy Reviews.[71] The OECD conducts reviews of countries' investment policies, where CSOs can participate in discussions and provide feedback. Such reviews help improve the investment climate and take into account the interests of different stakeholders.

3.1.5. Participation of CSOs in National Contact Points (NCPs). NCPs are established by countries that have joined the OECD Declaration on International Investment to promote and implement the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. One of the key functions of NCPs is to consider complaints (specific circumstances) submitted by affected parties, including representatives of civil society. In many countries, NCPs include CSO representatives as permanent members or observers, which enhances accountability, transparency and credibility of their work (e. g., France[72], the Netherlands[73], Norway and Denmark[74], Canada[75]).

***

The analysis thus demonstrated that the CSO participation in OECD activities is institutionalised, but remains multi-format and flexible. The OECD does not have a single centralised structure for civil society, such as BIAC for business or TUAC for trade unions. However, it does build mechanisms for engagement with CSOs through advisory councils, expert groups, public consultations and monitoring processes.

It is important that the role of CSOs in the OECD goes beyond consultative ones – they are recognised as equal participants in the development, evaluation and monitoring of policies. In a

[69] For more information, please visit https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/global-forum/

[70] For more information, please visit https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/acn-istanbul-anti-corruption-action-plan.html

[71] For more information, please follow the link https :// www . oecd . org / en / publications / oecd - investment - policy - reviews _19900910. html

[72] The French NCP has a tripartite structure, with representatives of the state, business and civil society participating on an equal footing. URL: https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/France-NCP-Peer-Review-2018-EN.pdf

[73] The membership includes representatives of human rights CSOs and trade unions. The NCCP organizes round tables with the participation of all stakeholders. URL: https://www.oecdguidelines.nl/ncp

[74] CSO participation is institutionalised. NCPs are required to consult with civil society representatives when considering cases.

[75] The NCP includes representatives of human rights and labour organisations. The country also has a separate ombudsman mechanism for responsible business, where civil society plays an observer and advisory role. URL: https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/ncp-pcn/index.aspx?lang=eng

number of areas – corporate responsibility, anti-corruption policy, digital rights, access to justice – the OECD directly calls the participation of civil society a necessary condition for effectiveness.

For Central Asian countries, the OECD mechanisms are both an international platform and a lever for domestic advocacy. Even without full membership in the OECD, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are involved in anti-corruption initiatives (IAP), digital and governance reforms (through SIGMA), investment climate assessments, participation in multilateral forums and thematic platforms.

For CSOs from the region, this creates opportunities to represent the interests of communities in the international arena, use OECD standards and recommendations as arguments in national policies, initiate the creation of NCPs, promote openness, inclusiveness and accountability, and strengthen dialogue with business and government based on OECD principles.

The emerging practice of "flexible institutionalisation" of CSO participation in the OECD could serve as a model for other international platforms.

The OECD approach to civil society participation is based on the principles of inclusiveness, transparency and equal access to information, but is tailored to each specific policy sector. This makes it particularly relevant for countries with political systems in transition, where formal mechanisms for participation are still weak, but where international standards can provide a framework for a domestic reform.

IV. Legal and institutional framework for cooperation between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan and the OECD

Cooperation between the Central Asian countries and the OECD is developing within the framework of a flexible and multi-level model, which involves both the participation in individual thematic initiatives and the inclusion in OECD recommendations, reviews and committees. Although neither Kazakhstan, nor Kyrgyzstan, nor Uzbekistan are full members of the organisation, each of them has the official status of a partner country (key partner/enhanced engagement country) or a participant in specific mechanisms. This cooperation covers the areas such as anti-corruption policy, investment, corporate governance, public administration, digitalisation, and the development of civil society.

For the countries of the region, the OECD is becoming not only a source of standards and analytical products, but also a platform for institutional dialogue, allowing national reforms to be aligned with international best practices. In some cases, the cooperation with the OECD influences the formation of the domestic agenda of legislative and administrative reforms. The Republic of Kazakhstan demonstrates the particularly active engagement with the organisation.

4.1. Kazakhstan

4.1.1. Country Programme. Kazakhstan is the most active country in the region for engagement with the OECD. In 2015, Kazakhstan and the OECD signed ***the Agreement on the Implementation of the OECD Country Programme***, covering the period 2015–2018.[76] The Agreement became a unique example of in-depth engagement, within which Kazakhstan voluntarily assumed obligations to implement OECD standards and recommendations in a number of key areas, from anti-corruption policy to human capital development.

This document confirms the consent of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan to implement the Country Program with the OECD, signed on 23 January 2015 in Davos, and defines the state bodies responsible for its implementation. The programme covers key areas of reform, including anti-corruption policy, investments, public administration and human capital development.[77]

Among the most significant forms of engagement ***are the participation in the OECD Investment Committee and the accession to the Declaration on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises*** (1976, as amended)[78]. This provided ***Kazakhstan with access to the National Contact Point (NCP) mechanism and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises***.

[76] Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 27 April 2015 No. 334 "On the Execution of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development on the project "Collaboration through the Global Connections Program". URL https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P1500000334

[77]For the additional information about the Cooperation Programme please visit the official OECD website at https://www.oecd.org/ru/publications/pe_ce64361b-ru.html

[78]OECD Declaration on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises: https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0144

4.1.2. Kazakhstan has acceded to the following separate Recommendations of the OECD Council:

1. ***The Recommendation on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions***[79] was adopted by the OECD Council in 2009 as a follow-up to the Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials. Kazakhstan has expressed political support for the Recommendation through its participation in the Anti-Corruption Network (ACN) and the Istanbul Action Plan, as well as in preparation for possible accession to the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention. ACN reviews highlight the need to improve Kazakhstan's criminal legal framework, strengthen the liability of legal entities and protect whistle-blowers. The Recommendation is seen as a benchmark in reforming anti-corruption legislation and business ethics.

2. ***The Recommendation on Public Sector Governance***[80] provides a comprehensive approach to building ethical, accountable and transparent public administration. Kazakhstan was the subject of the OECD Public Governance Review[81] and the Civil Service Review (2018)[82], which highlighted:

• the need to increase trust in state authorities,
• the implementation of accountability standards,
• the development of an anti-corruption compliance system in the public sector,
• the role of an independent ombudsman institution.

3. ***Recommendations on innovation policy and digital transformation***[83]. Kazakhstan participated in the Innovation Policy Review (2017)[84] and the report "Improving the Framework

---

[79] OECD Recommendation for Further Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions: https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0378

[80] OECD Recommendation on Public Integrity and Public Sector Governance: https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0435

[81] Towards a More Effective, Strategic and Accountable State in Kazakhstan. OECD Public Governance Reviews . 5 December 2017: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/towards-a-more-effective-strategic-and-accountable-state-in-kazakhstan_9789264284005-en.html This review analyses the public administration reforms undertaken by the Government of Kazakhstan and assesses their impact on the effectiveness, strategic capacity and accountability of the state. Particular attention is paid to strategic planning, policy and programme evaluation, risk management, decentralisation, functional reviews, privatisation and oversight of state-owned enterprises.

[82] OECD (2018), Benchmarking Civil Service Reform in Kazakhstan, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD. Paris: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2018/06/benchmarking-civil-service-reform-in-kazakhstan_g1g876f7/9789264288096-en.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com
This report provides a comparative analysis of civil service reforms in Kazakhstan, comparing human resource management practices with trends in OECD countries. The review covers aspects, such as workforce planning, appraisal systems, career development and leadership in the public sector.

[83] OECD Recommendations on Innovation Policy and Digital Government: 1) https://www.oecd.org/gov/digital-government/policy-framework/ 2) https://www.oecd.org/innovation/inno/oecd-reviews-of-innovation-policy-kazakhstan-2017-9789264270008-en.htm

[84] OECD Reviews of Innovation Policy: Kazakhstan 2017: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-reviews-of-innovation-policy-kazakhstan-2017_9789264270008-en.html This review provides comprehensive assessment of Kazakhstan's innovation system, including an analysis of science, technology and innovation policies. The report examines achievements, challenges and offers recommendations for improving the country's innovation policy.

Conditions for Digital Business Transformation in Kazakhstan " (2023)[85], within the framework of which:

• an assessment of the potential for digitalisation of services was given,

• the need for citizens to participate in the development of digital solutions (e- participation) was emphasised,

• emphasis is placed on the inclusiveness of digital transformation.

The national programme "Digital Kazakhstan" (2018)[86] contains certain provisions that are consistent with OECD recommendations: 1) development of open data, 2) e-government, 3) automation of services taking into account human rights and privacy.

4.1.3. Active participation in the OECD Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ACN) and the Istanbul Action Plan against Corruption. Kazakhstan has completed five rounds of monitoring aimed at increasing transparency, ensuring the accountability of state authorities and combating conflicts of interest. The country has completed five rounds of monitoring [87]aimed at increasing transparency, ensuring accountability of public authorities and combating conflicts of interest. The main stages of Kazakhstan's monitoring under the Istanbul Action Plan included:

– First Round (2004–2007): Assessment of the initial state of anti-corruption policies and institutions.

– Second Round (2008–2012): Analysis of progress and identification of new challenges.

– Third Round (2013–2015): In-depth assessment of the implementation of recommendations and the effectiveness of measures.

– Fourth Round (2016–2019): Focus on implementing anti-corruption strategies and institutional reforms.

– Fifth Round (2023–2024): Assessment in nine key areas, including policy, prevention and prosecution of corruption.

4.1.4. Regular participation in OECD thematic reviews. Kazakhstan regularly participates in OECD thematic reviews, many of which cover issues important from the perspective of human rights, access to information, inclusiveness, open governance and the fight against corruption. These reviews not only serve as an external assessment of reform progress, but also formulate recommendations to improve government engagement with society and raise accountability standards. In addition to the previously mentioned thematic reviews,[88] Kazakhstan has participated in a number of the following thematic reviews:

1. ***The review of SME and Entrepreneurship Policy in Kazakhstan (2018)***[89] was conducted as part of the OECD project on enhancing small and medium enterprise (SME) policy in Kazakhstan. It represents the structured assessment of existing programmes, legal framework and institutional

[85] OECD (2023), Improving the Framework Conditions for Digital Business Transformation in Kazakhstan, OECD Publishing, Paris: file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/6b6e7aa8-ru.pdf

[86] State Program "Digital Kazakhstan". Approved by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated December 12, 2017 No. 827: https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/mdai/documents/details/220

[87] All reports on Kazakhstan are available on the official OECD website: https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/acn-istanbul-anti-corruption-action-plan.html

[88] See Section 4.1.3 of this Analysis.

[89] Review of Small and Medium Enterprise Policy: SME and Entrepreneurship Policy in Kazakhstan (2018): https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/sme-and-entrepreneurship-policy-in-kazakhstan-2018_9789264301450-en.html

support for SMEs in the context of international standards and inclusive economic growth goals. At the same time, the report has key findings and aspects related to human rights and inclusion. For example, the review highlights the need to ensure the non-discriminatory access to opportunities for all SMEs – including access to finance, public services and infrastructure – with a particular focus on vulnerable groups, such as female entrepreneurs, youth and residents of rural areas. The report notes the underrepresentation of women in SMEs and suggests measures to increase their participation through training, mentoring and targeted financial support. The OECD recommends strengthening transparency and participation by developing mechanisms for consultation with business associations and civil society organisations by engaging them in policy development and monitoring. The importance of predictability and fairness in the application of legislation to SMEs, including protection from arbitrariness, access to justice and the fight against corruption, is also emphasised. This review is important not only for the development of the business environment, but also for the formation of a favourable human rights context in the area of economic freedoms and equal access.

2. ***OECD Investment Policy Reviews: Kazakhstan (2017)***[90] provides a comprehensive assessment of the investment climate in Kazakhstan, including an analysis of the legislation, institutional arrangements and practices that influence the attraction of foreign direct investment. Although the review does not formally focus on human rights, its content consistently reflects the key elements of responsible business conduct: predictability of legislation, access to justice, impact assessment, public participation and protection of vulnerable parties. This allows it to be included in the body of OECD reviews relevant to assessing Kazakhstan's progress in the area of human rights in investment policy.

3. ***National Contact Point for Responsible Business Conduct Peer Reviews :Kazakhstan (2024)***[91] assesses the performance of the National Contact Point (NCP) of Kazakhstan in promoting the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. The report analyses the institutional structures, procedures for handling specific cases and efforts to promote responsible business conduct. For example, the report highlights that since 2021, the NCP of Kazakhstan has received seven specific cases, indicating an increase in its visibility and credibility as an out-of-court dispute resolution mechanism. However, the lack of clear procedures and transparency in handling these cases may limit the effectiveness of the NCP in ensuring access to justice for affected parties. The Kazakhstan NCP is actively engaged in promoting the OECD Guidelines for Responsible Business Conduct through seminars and roundtables. However, the involvement of CSOs in the design and implementation of promotional activities remains limited, reducing the potential for raising awareness and engaging various stakeholders. The report also makes recommendations to strengthen the role of the NCP in promoting human rights and responsible business conduct. In particular: 1) ensure representation of all stakeholders, including trade unions, in the structure of the NCP; 2) return to consensus-based decision-making procedures to ensure impartiality; 3) develop clear and transparent procedures for handling specific cases with the participation of all parties; 4) actively involve CSOs in promotional activities and the development of strategies to advance the Guidelines; 5) ensure that the information about the activities of the NCP is available to the general public.

[90] OECD Investment Policy Reviews: Kazakhstan 2017: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-investment-policy-reviews-kazakhstan-2017_9789264269606-en.html

[91] National Contact Point for Responsible Business Conduct Peer Reviews: Kazakhstan 2024: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/national-contact-point-for-responsible-business-conduct-peer-reviews-kazakhstan-2024_9090c11f-en.html

4. ***The Review of Corporate Governance of State-Owned Enterprises in Kazakhstan (2024)***[92] assesses the corporate governance system of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in Kazakhstan in line with the OECD Guidelines on Corporate Governance of SOEs[93]. The document reflects international standards of accountability, transparency and respect for human rights in the public sector of the economy. The report emphasizes that sustainable and responsible governance of SOEs is impossible without the introduction of institutional accountability mechanisms, ensuring openness of information and respect for social and labour rights, especially in relation to workers and local communities affected by SOE activities. Key recommendations include measures to introduce responsible business conduct standards in the activities of SOEs, develop codes of conduct, strengthen independent oversight and legal predictability. Particular emphasis is placed on the need for structured participation of CSOs in the process of monitoring, assessing the impact of SOE activities and in the development of policies affecting the rights of stakeholders. Such an approach is directly consistent with the human rights agenda and strengthens the principles of democratic accountability in public asset management.

5. ***The Responsible Business Conduct Review in Kazakhstan (2014)***[94] was one of the first comprehensive international studies devoted to the analysis of corporate responsibility in the country. The document includes an assessment of the degree of implementation of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, paying special attention to compliance with labour and environmental standards in the activities of private and state-owned companies. The report also examines barriers to more transparent and ethical business practices, including a weak regulatory environment, limited accountability of companies, and low awareness of international obligations. Key recommendations include the need to strengthen mechanisms for interaction between the state, business, and civil society organisations (CSOs), especially in the process of discussing and implementing RBC standards. The review emphasizes the relevance of developing and adopting a national action plan on business and human rights, which meets global trends in corporate accountability and sustainable development. The document also raises questions about the need for systematic work to improve the ethical culture in the business environment and the introduction of human rights impact assessment mechanisms. Despite the age of the report, many of its recommendations remain relevant for Kazakhstan to this day.

4.1.5. Kazakhstan's partnership in the SIGMA initiative: public administration reform and the rule of law. The SIGMA initiative, a joint OECD-EU programme, has become an important area of Kazakhstan's cooperation with international partners in the area of public administration reform. Within the framework of this partnership, comprehensive assessments of key elements such as strategic planning, policy coordination, civil service, procurement system and the rule of law were carried out.[95] The particular attention was paid to the effectiveness of the

---

[92] OECD Review of the Corporate Governance of State-Owned Enterprises in Kazakhstan. 15 February 2024: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-review-of-the-corporate-governance-of-state-owned-enterprises-in-kazakhstan_082c508b-en.html

[93] OECD (2024), OECD Guidelines on Corporate Governance of State-Owned Enterprises 2024, OECD Publishing, Paris: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/ru/publications/reports/2024/06/oecd-guidelines-on-corporate-governance-of-state-owned-enterprises-2024_68fa05cd/9cba536b-ru.pdf

[94] Responsible Business Conduct in Kazakhstan (2014): https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2014/01/responsible-business-conduct-in-kazakhstan_82ea603b/5a30f157-en.pdf

[95] They include : OECD Public Governance Reviews Towards a More Effective, Strategic and Accountable State in Kazakhstan:

implementation of public strategies, the coherence of actions of different levels of government and the introduction of principles of effective, public-interest-oriented management. In the area of civil service, procedures for the selection, promotion and assessment of personnel were analysed, with an emphasis on increasing professionalism, transparency and ethical sustainability.

A separate area of cooperation was the diagnostics of the public procurement system – from the standpoint of its transparency, competitiveness and compliance with international standards, including the prevention of corruption risks. In the context of the rule of law, the assessments touched upon not only the formal institutions of justice, but also the practical aspects of ensuring the rights of citizens, access to judicial protection and the independence of the judiciary. These reforms are inextricably linked with the agenda of human rights and responsible business conduct: strengthening transparency and accountability in the administrative system creates conditions for fair regulation, protection of workers' rights, fair competition and trust in institutions.

The SIGMA programme also emphasises the importance of active civil society participation in public administration modernisation processes.[96] Kazakhstan was recommended to involve civil society organisations more widely in policy development, consultations, monitoring of reform implementation and assessment of the quality of services provided. Thus, interaction within the SIGMA framework promotes institutional convergence with the best international practices, where public administration standards are directly related to human rights, the rule of law and public participation in decision-making.

4.1.6. The Impact of OECD Standards on Reforms (Analysis of Rhetoric and Substantive Components)

OECD standards have become a source of legitimisation and direction for Kazakhstan's reforms in public administration, anti-corruption policy, justice and economic regulation. In many official documents of Kazakhstan (strategies, concepts, reports), the rhetoric has changed towards the use of such concepts as:

- good governance,
- stakeholder engagement,
- inclusiveness
- regulatory impact assessment (RIA)
- open government
- citizen engagement
- access to information
- transparency
- accountability to society
- prevention of human rights infringements in business.

---

https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2017/12/towards-a-more-effective-strategic-and-accountable-state-in-kazakhstan_g1g8378b/9789264284005-en.pdf;
OECD Public Governance Reviews Benchmarking Civil Service Reform in Kazakhstan: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2018/06/benchmarking-civil-service-reform-in-kazakhstan_g1g876f7/9789264288096-en.pdf ;
OECD Public Governance Reviews Public Procurement in Kazakhstan. REFORMING FOR EFFICIENCY: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2019/12/public-procurement-in-kazakhstan_00ebe4c7/c11183ae-en.pdf

[96] Reforming Kazakhstan Progress, Challenges and Opportunities: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2018/04/reforming-kazakhstan_c71ae50f/18ba0d60-en.pdf

Furthermore, under the influence of the OECD, Kazakhstan strengthened the national discourse on the need for the rights impact assessment, the role of civic monitoring and social expertise, especially in the context of public services, justice, public procurement and corporate responsibility.

In general, the conducted assessments led to the adoption or amendment of a number of current laws and strategic documents, such as the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Access to Information", the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Public Councils", the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Combating Corruption", the amendments to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Public Procurement", and many others.

In its engagement with the OECD, Kazakhstan has demonstrated the gradual formation of voluntary commitments in the areas of human rights, the rule of law, and engagement with civil society organisations (CSOs). Although these commitments are not legally binding, they are reflected in strategic documents, national initiatives, and reporting on the implementation of international standards.

Kazakhstan has voluntarily joined a number of OECD instruments and initiatives that involve respecting and promoting standards in the field of human rights and public participation. An example is accession to the Declaration on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises, which entails an obligation to follow the OECD Guidelines for MNEs, including provisions on human rights, labour standards, anti-corruption measures and stakeholder engagement.

Kazakhstan also became a participant in the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan, under which the country assumed specific anti-corruption commitments over five rounds of monitoring. Some of these commitments concern transparency, accountability, access to justice, and protection of whistle-blowers' rights — that is, they directly relate to international human rights standards.

Under the SIGMA initiative, Kazakhstan has agreed to external assessments in sensitive areas such as the rule of law, judicial independence, transparency in procurement and civil service ethics – which also includes the introduction of standards consistent with democratic values and public accountability standards.

Within the framework of the Country Programme (2015–2018), which became a unique format of interaction between Kazakhstan and the OECD, significant attention was paid to reforms affecting human rights in the institutional dimension. The following priorities were identified in the strategic areas of cooperation: 1) improving anti-corruption policy, 2) reform of the civil service, 3) reform of the legal system and administrative justice, 4) transparency in public administration and access to information.

While the language did not always refer directly to "human rights", it essentially addressed guarantees of fair governance, equal access to services and procedural fairness, consistent with international human rights standards.

The OECD also consistently promotes the principles of participation, inclusion, gender equality, non-discrimination and accountability in its recommendations for the implementation of policies in the areas of SMEs, corporate governance, public procurement and justice, which are reflected in national regulations and programmes.

4.1.7. Role and participation of CSOs. To a large extent, the participation of CSOs in the process of interaction between the OECD and Kazakhstan is reduced to two key roles:

1. ***Membership*** of Kazakhstan ***in the National Contact Point*** (NCP) for Responsible Business Conduct. Being established in accordance with the OECD Guidelines for Multinational

Enterprises, the NCP includes two representatives of civil society in its structure.[97] According to the information on the official website of the Kazakhstan government,[98] the NCP is a collegial advisory body that makes decisions on the considered appeals on violations of the provisions of the OECD Guidelines. In its activities, the NCP engages with all stakeholders, including the business community, trade unions and other representatives of civil society, as well as authorised government agencies when considering appeals on violations of the OECD Guidelines and making an objective decision on them. Thus, the participation of CSOs in the NCP ensures inclusiveness and transparency in the process of considering appeals and contributes to the promotion of standards of responsible business conduct in Kazakhstan.

2. ***Participation of Kazakhstan CSOs as informants in OECD review and monitoring processes***. The preparation of the majority of OECD analytical and thematic reviews on Kazakhstan is based on the principles of inclusiveness and reliability, which implies large-scale consultations with national stakeholders, including representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs). In this process, CSOs act not just as respondents, but as full-fledged informants and experts providing high-quality data, alternative assessments and shadow analytics necessary for an objective picture of the state of reforms.

This approach is particularly evident in the framework of the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan, implemented within the OECD Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ACN). During each of the five monitoring rounds since 2004, Kazakhstan human rights organisations, anti-corruption CSOs, research centres and representatives of independent media have provided the OECD with additional information on the implementation of anti-corruption strategies, cases of pressure on whistle-blowers and human rights defenders, as well as restrictions on access to information and civic oversight.

For example, in the Fourth Monitoring Round (2016–2019), the Kazakhstan report referenced shadow reports and expert comments prepared by Kazakhstan CSOs. These materials helped show that despite the existence of formal anti-corruption bodies, there are no sustainable safeguards for safe reporting of corruption, and citizen participation in budget and procurement oversight remains limited.

Also, during the Fifth Monitoring Round (2023–2024), the CSO representatives were involved as sources of information on practices of observing the rights of complainants, transparency of investigations, and public participation. A number of organisations (in particular, those involved in the protection of workers' rights, anti-corruption expertise of legislation, and freedom of information) presented alternative assessments and cases not reflected in the official government reporting. The OECD's final review of the NCP in Kazakhstan (2024) also mentions cases and comments provided by human rights and trade union organisations.

This practice of engaging with CSOs helps to enhance the credibility and representativeness of OECD reviews, increases pressure on governments to take into account alternative views, and creates space for international advocacy and solidarity on issues of civic participation, human rights and good governance.

---

[97] Order of the acting Minister of National Economy No. 196 dated 26 July 2024 “On certain issues of the functioning of the National Contact Centre for Responsible Business Activities”: https://eri.kz/documents/OECD/NKC/PRIKAZ_NKC_rus.pdf

[98] See: https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/economy/activities/6109?lang=ru

4.2. Kyrgyzstan

Despite the absence of a formal country programme with the OECD (similar to Kazakhstan's Country Programme), the Kyrgyz Republic maintains consistent cooperation with a number of the OECD institutions and actively participates in regional and sectoral initiatives. This engagement covers key areas of public administration, the rule of law, competitiveness assessment, anti-corruption policy, and civil society engagement.

4.2.1. Participation in the SIGMA programme. Kyrgyzstan is included in the SIGMA initiative. Within its framework, assessments were conducted for the country and recommendations were developed in the following areas: 1) strategic and budget planning, 2) civil service efficiency and human resource management, 3) public procurement and the fight against corruption, 4) administrative procedures and public service delivery, 5) the rule of law and institutional accountability. These processes particularly emphasised the importance of involving civil society organisations in the assessment and monitoring of reforms, strengthening public feedback, as well as transparency and participation in the process of rule-making and policy implementation. At the time of preparation of the analytical note, public analytical reports of SIGMA concerning the Kyrgyz Republic were not posted on the official platform sigmaweb.org; the country's participation in the programme was confirmed in separate OECD and EU documents.

4.2.2. OECD Anti-Corruption Network and the Istanbul Action Plan. Since 2003, the Kyrgyz Republic has been participating in the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan, a regional OECD initiative implemented within the Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ACN). Within the framework of this programme, the country has completed four rounds of monitoring and participated in the fifth round (2023–2024).

The 1st monitoring round (2005–2007) was based on self-assessment of participating countries and analysis of their anti-corruption legislation and institutional framework.[99]

The 2nd monitoring round (2008–2012) included a more in-depth analysis, including expert visits to countries and an assessment of the implementation of the first-round recommendations. New recommendations were developed to improve anti-corruption policies.

The 3rd monitoring round (2013–2015) focused on assessing progress in implementing previous recommendations and analysing new challenges in the fight against corruption.

The 4th monitoring round (2016–2019) focused on the practical application of anti-corruption measures and their effectiveness.[100] In-depth studies were conducted in sectors with a high risk of corruption.

The 5th monitoring round (2023–2024) introduced a new methodology based on the system of indicators and assessment in nine key areas. The fifth-round report on Kyrgyzstan was published in November 2024 and contains the detailed analysis of the current state of anti-corruption policy in the country.[101] The report notes that despite the formal existence of the State Strategy for

---

[99] The reports of this period are available at the official website of the OECD: https://www.oecd.org/en/networks/anti-corruption-network-for-eastern-europe-and-central-asia.html

[100] Anti-Corruption Reforms in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Progress and Challenges, 2016-2019: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/anti-corruption-reforms-in-eastern-europe-and-central-asia_9e621f2f-en.html

[101] Baseline Report of the Fifth Round of Monitoring of Anti-Corruption Reforms in Kyrgyzstan. The Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/baseline-report-of-the-fifth-round-of-monitoring-of-anti-corruption-reforms-in-kyrgyzstan_187f45b3-en.html

Combating Corruption and Eliminating Its Causes in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2021–2024,[102] its implementation faces a number of challenges, including insufficient coordination between government agencies and limited participation of civil society. The fifth monitoring round notes that the CSO participation in the development and implementation of the anti-corruption policy was limited, which reduces the effectiveness and transparency of the reforms.

4.2.3. Statistical system reviews and development monitoring. The Kyrgyz Republic actively cooperates with the OECD in developing statistical systems and promoting open governance principles:

1. ***Gender statistics and equality***. The OECD actively works to monitor progress in the field of gender equality through initiatives such as the Social Institutions and Gender Equality Index (SIGI)[103]. This index measures discrimination against women in social institutions in 179 countries, including Kyrgyzstan. The Social Institutions and Gender Equality Index (SIGI) is an official OECD initiative and is part of the OECD Development Centre's portfolio of programmes and research. The SIGI[104] index assesses the extent to which laws, social norms and traditions limit women's rights, freedom and opportunities. It is not only published under the auspices of the OECD, but is also actively used as a reference in the development of gender policies, including analysis within country reviews and sustainable development programmes.

In 2019, the OECD published a regional report on Eurasia[105], which analyses the levels of discrimination in social institutions in 12 countries in the region, including the Kyrgyz Republic. The report covers four key areas: 1) discrimination in the family, 2) restrictions on physical integrity, 3) limited access to productive and financial resources, 4) limited civil liberties. According to the report, the level of discrimination in social institutions in Kyrgyzstan is assessed as low, which indicates progress in the field of gender equality.

In 2023, the OECD released the global SIGI report[106], which provides updated data and analysis on discrimination in social institutions around the world. The report highlights that despite progress, significant challenges remain in the area of gender equality, especially in the context of global crises.

For a more detailed analysis of data for countries, including Kyrgyzstan, the OECD provides an interactive dashboard,[107] where it is possible to view indicators on various aspects of gender equality.

2. ***Green growth indicators***. The development of green growth indicators for the Kyrgyz Republic was carried out within the framework of the implementation of the National Sustainable

[102] State Strategy for Combating Corruption and Eliminating Its Causes in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2021-2024: https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/430235/edition/1042429/ru
[103] Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI): https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/social-institutions-and-gender-index-sigi.html
[104] SIGI is managed by the OECD Development Centre : https://www.oecd.org/en/about/directorates/development-centre.html
[105] SIGI 2019 Regional Report for Eurasia: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/sigi-2019-regional-report-for-eurasia_f6dfa21d-en.html
[106] Social Institutions and Gender Index. SIGI 2023 Global Report. GENDER EQUALITY IN TIMES OF CRISIS: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/07/sigi-2023-global-report_a65d7f7f/4607b7c7-en.pdf
[107] Social Institutions & Gender Index Dashboard: https://www.oecd.org/en/data/dashboards/social-institutions-gender-index.html

Development Strategy for 2013–2017[108], with the technical and methodological support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the OECD. The indicators were developed with direct reference to the OECD Green Growth Measurement Framework, an internationally recognised[109] system used by the OECD to assess countries' progress towards sustainable and inclusive economic development. The Kyrgyz national set of indicators[110] was adapted using the OECD structure, concepts and methodology, taking into account regional realities and in active consultation with OECD and UNDP experts. The OECD was one of the key partners in preparing the report, and the proposed indicators were synchronised with the global SDG agenda, including goals 7, 9, 12 and 13. Thus, Kyrgyzstan's "green growth" indicators represent a localised adaptation of the international OECD model, demonstrating both institutional and substantive alignment with the organization's approaches to sustainable development.

4.2.4. Participation of the Kyrgyz Republic in the EU4Energy programme. Kyrgyzstan participates in the multilateral EU4Energy initiative, which is implemented with the support of the European Union, the OECD and the International Energy Agency (IEA). The goal of the programme is to promote sustainable, transparent and accountable energy policies in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Within the framework of this programme, Kyrgyzstan receives technical support for reforming the energy sector, including:

- development of a regulatory framework in the field of energy security,
- improvement of management and regulation mechanisms,
- increasing the transparency of tariff policy and expanding access to high-quality energy services.

The programme takes into account not only infrastructural and economic aspects, but also the values of democratic governance, including accountability, open data, stakeholder participation (including civil society), and the principles of environmental and social sustainability.

The report prepared within the framework of this programme is a roadmap for strengthening the security of the energy system of Kyrgyzstan, based on the principles of energy efficiency, digital modernisation and institutional sustainability[111]. The report emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to reforming the energy sector of Kyrgyzstan, starting with the formation of a transparent and coordinated energy strategy and improving institutional governance mechanisms, including coordination between government agencies, regulators and energy companies. In technical terms, the emphasis is on strengthening the reliability of the energy system through the introduction of digital solutions and automation to prevent accidents. Particular attention is paid to issues of social sustainability - ensuring equal access to energy services, especially for vulnerable groups, and taking into account social factors when forming tariff policies

[108] National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Kyrgyz Republic for the period 2013-2017. As amended by the Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic of 27 September 2013 UP No. 194: https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/61542/edition/473771/ru

[109] OECD Green Growth Studies Green Growth Indicators 2014: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2014/06/green-growth-indicators-2014_g1g3042b/9789264202030-en.pdf

[110]GREEN GROWTH INDICATORS IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/kg/SD_indicators_eng.pdf See also : https://stat.gov.kg/media/publicationarchive/e80eea9a-1b7d-4ce1-90b4-0258c89d6475.pdf and https://mineconom.gov.kg/froala/uploads/file/5f5a43d96204573bbfbe943643296b8ca9519347.pdf

[111]Strengthening Power System Security in the Kyrgyz Republic: Roadmap. Published: OECD/IEA, 2022: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/strengthening-power-system-security-in-kyrgyzstan_2b21a7d5-en.html

and modernizing infrastructure. Finally, the report emphasizes the priority of environmental sustainability through the active introduction of renewable energy sources, emission reduction and compliance with climate goals, making the energy transformation part of a broader sustainable development strategy. Although the report does not explicitly use the term "human rights", its content includes respect for the rights to access basic services, fairness of tariff policy, and public involvement in decision-making processes. This is consistent with international standards in the field of corporate social responsibility (including the UN and OECD Guidelines on RER), as it addresses:

- the right to access energy as an element of a decent standard of living;
- the requirement for transparency and public participation, including consultation with consumers;
- principles of non-discriminatory access to services and information, including rural and remote regions.

4.2.5. Public procurement and public finance management. The Kyrgyz Republic actively participates in international initiatives to improve the efficiency and accountability of public procurement. One of the key steps along that path was the application of the MAPS methodology (Methodology for Assessing Procurement Systems)[112], developed with the participation of the OECD, the World Bank and other international partners. The methodology is recognised as a universal tool for assessing the maturity, transparency and effectiveness of national procurement systems and is widely used to develop reforms that are consistent with best global practices. The MAPS methodology is closely linked to the work of the OECD and was developed in partnership with the latter as part of efforts to promote transparency, efficiency and accountability in public financial management. The OECD is actively involved in updating and disseminating the methodology and in ensuring the comparability of assessments across countries. Moreover, the MAPS principles are consistent with key OECD standards in the areas of open governance, anti-corruption and responsible business conduct.

The assessment of the public procurement system in Kyrgyzstan[113] has identified a number of significant aspects that are directly related to respect for human rights and the principles of responsible business conduct. In particular, emphasis was placed on the need to ensure transparency and open access to information at all stages of the procurement cycle - from planning to contract execution. The report emphasizes that openness of tender information promotes public engagement, reduces corruption risks and creates conditions for fair competition, including the participation of small and medium-sized businesses, civil society organisations and independent observers. The importance of institutional reforms aimed at increasing accountability and creating effective control mechanisms was also emphasised. In particular, recommendations include the development of a contract execution monitoring system, the introduction of codes of ethics for procurement process participants, and strengthening the role of anti-corruption institutions and financial audit. These measures are important not only for economic efficiency, but also for protecting the rights of all stakeholders - suppliers, citizens and government agencies.

The report pays special attention to the involvement of civil society. It is noted that an effective procurement system is impossible without the participation of CSOs, especially at the stage of

---

[112] MAPS methodology: https://www.mapsinitiative.org/

[113] World Bank report on the assessment of the public procurement system of the Kyrgyz Republic (using the MAPS methodology): https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/486081468266454750/kyrgyz-republic-public-procurement-system-assessment-using-the-oecd-dac-world-bank-methodology

public control over the execution of large contracts, monitoring transparency and responding to potential abuses. It is recommended to institutionalize the participation of CSOs in the planning and evaluation of procurement policies, including public consultations and dialogue platforms.

4.2.6. Regular participation in OECD thematic reviews. In addition to the previously submitted reports, the OECD has prepared a number of other country reviews on the Kyrgyz Republic, covering various areas affecting human rights:

1. ***Social Protection System Review (2018)***.[114] Social Protection System Review of Kyrgyzstan analyses the structure and effectiveness of the social protection system in the country. Particular attention is paid to pension provision, social assistance, and labour market programmes. The report emphasizes the need to adapt the system to challenges such as informal employment and migration.

2. ***Water policy reform***.[115] As part of the Water Policy Reform Initiative in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, the OECD is supporting Kyrgyzstan in developing sustainable water management strategies. The focus is on integrated water resources management and improved water supply and sanitation.

3. ***Educational Policy and PISA Results***. The 2010 Review[116] analyses the results of Kyrgyzstan's participation in the 2006 international PISA study. The document examines the reasons for students' low results and offers recommendations for improving the quality of education.

4. ***Access to green finance***. The report "Access and Use of Green Finance in the Kyrgyz Republic: Household Survey Data"[117] presents the results of a survey of 1,000 households conducted in 2019. The study revealed low levels of awareness of green financial products and highlights the need to develop financial literacy and accessibility of green financial instruments.

5. ***Responsible Business Conduct in the Public Sector (2022)***.[118] The OECD conducted a review of responsible business practices in the public sector of Asian countries, including Kyrgyzstan. The report examines measures to implement responsible business principles in the activities of state-owned enterprises. Particular attention is paid to issues of respect for human rights, anti-corruption practices and environmental responsibility.

6. ***Review of anti-corruption reforms in transition economies (2020).***[119] In its Anti- Corruption Reforms in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the OECD analyses the progress of anti-corruption reforms in countries in the region, including Kyrgyzstan. The document provides an assessment of the implementation of recommendations from previous monitoring rounds and highlights key achievements and challenges in the fight against corruption.

---

[114] Social Protection System Review of Kyrgyzstan (2018): https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/social-protection-system-review-of-kyrgyzstan_9789264302273-en.html

[115] More information on water policy reforms: https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/water-policy-reforms-in-eastern-europe-the-caucasus-and-central-asia/water-policy-reforms-in-kyrgyzstan.html

[116] Reviews of National Policies for Education: Kyrgyz Republic 2010. Lessons from PISA (Russian version): https://www.oecd.org/ru/publications/reviews-of-national-policies-for-education-kyrgyz-republic-2010_9789264123311-ru.html

[117] Accessing and Using Green Finance in the Kyrgyz Republic. Evidence from a Household Survey: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/accessing-and-using-green-finance-in-the-kyrgyz-republic_6233a44f-en.html

[118] Responsible Business Conduct in the State-Owned Enterprise Sector in Asia Stocktaking of National Practices: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2022/01/responsible-business-conduct-in-the-state-owned-enterprise-sector-in-asia_f59c035a/a68d9977-en.pdf

[119] Anti-corruption Reforms in Eastern Europe and Central Asia Progress and Challenges, 2016-2019: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2020/09/anti-corruption-reforms-in-eastern-europe-and-central-asia_b433c079/9e621f2f-en.pdf

4.2.7. The role of civil society in cooperation mechanisms. CSOs play an active and recognised role in Kyrgyzstan's cooperation with the OECD. This role is manifested both in the institutionalised formats (for example, within SIGMA and ACN) and through participation in consultation processes and the preparation of alternative assessments.

As part of the monitoring of anti-corruption policies under the Istanbul Action Plan (IAP), Kyrgyz human rights and anti-corruption organisations provide shadow reports and independent comments on the official position of the state. This allows OECD experts to compare official statements with independent assessments and take into account real challenges, including access to information, the risk of reprisals against whistle-blowers, and limitations of civil control.

In the context of the SIGMA initiative, Kyrgyz CSOs are involved in assessing the quality of public services, procurement procedures and appeal mechanisms. The SIGMA methodology emphasizes the need to involve civil society in the processes of rule-making, verification of the effectiveness of reforms and development of recommendations. In some cases, SIGMA reports contain links to information provided by Kyrgyz NGOs, including analytical reviews and field monitoring data.

In addition, CSOs are actively involved in the discussion of public procurement reforms, both through consultations and contract monitoring. The MAPS methodology used in Kyrgyzstan requires the mandatory inclusion of civil society representatives in the process of assessing the maturity of the procurement system, as well as in the analysis of the transparency and accountability of tender procedures.

Thus, civil society participation in OECD mechanisms goes beyond formal consultations. It includes institutionalised and flexible formats of participation that facilitate a more accurate assessment of the progress of reforms and the promotion of standards of accountability, transparency and human rights. The established practice of "embedded participation" of CSOs in international assessments can serve as a model for institutional strengthening of the role of civil society within a country.

4.3. Uzbekistan

4.3.1. Uzbekistan's participation in the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan. Since 2010, Uzbekistan has been an active participant in the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan, implemented within the framework of the ACN. To date, Uzbekistan has passed all stages of the assessment and participated in the fifth monitoring round, covering the period 2023-2024.

The monitoring covers nine key areas of anti-corruption policy, including the development and implementation of national anti-corruption strategies, the prevention of corruption in the civil service system, control over the declaration of income and property, criminal prosecution of corruption offences, the protection of whistle-blowers, as well as the participation of civil society and independent monitoring of reforms.

The fifth round provided a comprehensive analysis of Uzbekistan's efforts to improve anti-corruption legislation and create new institutions. The report, published by the OECD in 2024[120], noted positive steps in adopting new strategic documents, intensifying the work of anti-corruption bodies, and expanding accountability mechanisms. At the same time, the report contains specific

[120] Baseline report of the fifth round of monitoring of anti-corruption reforms in Uzbekistan. Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan (2024): https://www.oecd.org/ru/publications/0c24d6de-ru.html

recommendations to strengthen the independence of the judiciary, introduce systemic mechanisms for the protection of whistle-blowers, and institutionalize civil society participation in the implementation and monitoring of anti-corruption programmes. These areas are recognised as critical to ensuring the sustainability of reforms and compliance with international standards, including the OECD Guidelines and ACN recommendations.

4.3.2. Investment policy and corporate governance. Uzbekistan is gradually strengthening cooperation with the OECD in the area of investment policy and corporate governance. Although the country is not yet a party to the OECD Declaration on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises, Uzbekistan has shown a strong interest in relevant standards through its participation in regional initiatives and policy reviews in transition economies.

In 2023, the OECD published the analytical report "Business Climate Analysis in Uzbekistan",[121] which examines the key areas of economic reform, challenges and prospects for private sector development, as well as proposals for improving the investment climate in the country. The document is important in the context of assessing the conditions for responsible business conduct and the implementation of socially oriented economic reforms. The report emphasizes that since 2017, Uzbekistan has been implementing a large-scale programme of market reforms aimed at reducing the role of the state in the economy and increasing the importance of the private sector. Notable successes have been achieved in liberalising foreign trade, currency regulation and privatisation, which has had a positive impact on the resilience of the economy in the context of regional and global crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical instability. However, the report notes that the private sector still faces serious institutional and regulatory barriers. The OECD stresses the need for continued reforms in areas such as removing administrative barriers, promoting competition, expanding access to finance, improving dispute resolution mechanisms and legislative predictability. These measures are important not only for attracting investment, but also for creating an environment conducive to respect for human rights in business activities.

The report places particular emphasis on digital transformation and sustainable development. The OECD notes that success in these areas depends on the availability of appropriate infrastructure, digital skills and transparent standards, as well as the ability of the private sector to develop innovative solutions in cooperation with government and society. The focus is therefore on inclusion, equal access and environmental responsibility of business – key principles of responsible business conduct (RBC).

The report contains a number of recommendations for the government of Uzbekistan, including strengthening anti-monopoly policy, developing logistics infrastructure, supporting small and medium-sized businesses, and introducing transparency mechanisms in regulating business activities. All of these measures are seen as an integral part of efforts to create an open, fair, and rights-based business environment.

Although the country has not yet participated in a country review of investment policy[122] or corporate governance in the format of a separate OECD report, ongoing cooperation allows us to speak about approaching the relevant framework standards.

4.3.3. Regular participation in OECD thematic reviews. In recent years, Uzbekistan has significantly expanded the range of its interaction with the OECD through participation in regional

[121] Analysis of the business climate in Uzbekistan: https://www.oecd.org/ru/publications/84ffe567-ru.html
[122] Investment policy overview for the region: https://www.oecd.org/investment/eurasia.htm

and sectoral initiatives covering public administration, anti-corruption, sustainable development and infrastructure:

1. One of the most important steps was the Uzbekistan's participation in the first comprehensive ***OECD Public Governance Review: Uzbekistan***, published in 2024.[123] The document records the progress in the areas, such as strategic planning, RIA development, digitalisation and transparency of public services, as well as citizen engagement and support for gender equality. The OECD emphasizes the need to strengthen interagency coordination, improve policy assessment, and institutionally strengthen the governance system.

2. The special attention in respect of the cooperation between the OECD and Uzbekistan is paid to the issues of sustainable development. As part of joint work with the Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the ***monitoring of the "green" growth indicators*** was conducted.[124] The assessment included an analysis of the use of natural resources, ecosystem impacts and institutional frameworks aimed at greening the economy. The work made it possible to propose mechanisms for integrating environmental standards into the national economic strategy.

3. Uzbekistan also ***participates in the Sustainable Infrastructure Programme in Asia (SIPA)***,[125] implemented by the OECD. The programme promotes the introduction of international standards for sustainable financing of infrastructure projects, the development of transparent and accountable mechanisms for the implementation of major initiatives, and the promotion of responsible business standards in the construction and logistics sectors.

4.3.4. Prospects for participation in SIGMA. Uzbekistan is not a formal participant in the SIGMA initiative (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management), implemented jointly by the European Union and the OECD. However, the country has demonstrated a sustained interest in the SIGMA principles and recommendations in the context of ongoing reforms in public administration, the rule of law, civil service reform and increasing the transparency of state institutions.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has taken a number of steps that are conceptually aligned with the SIGMA assessment areas. These include institutionalizing regulatory impact assessment (RIA),[126] developing e-services,[127] adopting open governance and digital transformation strategies,[128]

---

[123] OECD Public Governance Reviews Uzbekistan. TOWARDS A MORE MODERN, EFFECTIVE AND STRATEGIC PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/11/oecd-public-governance-reviews-uzbekistan_65bf7710/2f36d8ec-en.pdf

[124] The presentation of the report "Monitoring the progress of Uzbekistan on the path of "green" growth" took place: https://www.imv.uz/en/news/category/yangiliklar/post-1675

[125] More details: https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/sustainable-infrastructure-programme-in-asia/uzbekistan.html

[126] Institutionalisation of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA): confirmed in the OSCE/ODIHR report. FOLLOW-UP ASSESSMENT OF THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN: https://legislationline.org/taxonomy/term/25855

[127] Development of e-services: recorded in the OECD report on digital skills. Digital Skills for Private Sector Competitiveness in Uzbekistan: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/05/digital-skills-for-private-sector-competitiveness-in-uzbekistan_8f1719a7/6c54f447-en.pdf

[128] As reported in the Public Governance Reviews Uzbekistan. TOWARDS A MORE MODERN, EFFECTIVE AND STRATEGIC PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/11/oecd-public-governance-reviews-uzbekistan_65bf7710/2f36d8ec-en.pdf

reforming the procurement system, and improving administrative procedures.[129] Despite the lack of a formal SIGMA assessment, reports from international partners, including the World Bank,[130] note convergence of Uzbekistan's approaches with OECD recommendations in the area of good governance.

Moreover, Uzbekistan regularly participates in OECD regional dialogues on public administration issues, including topics, such as administrative reforms, open data, digital participation, and improving the quality of public services.[131] These discussions, which involve the representatives of the SIGMA countries, facilitate the transfer of experience and the exchange of best practices.

Thus, although Uzbekistan has not been formally assessed under the SIGMA methodology, institutional shifts in governance aimed at transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement provide the basis for potential future participation in this initiative. Joining SIGMA would allow the country to systematically assess the effectiveness of ongoing reforms and receive technical support to bring national institutions in line with best governance standards.

4.3.4. Human Rights and Civil Society Commitments. Civil Society Engagement. Although Uzbekistan has no formal legal commitments to the OECD in the area of human rights, cooperation with this organisation in various initiatives in practice includes elements of human rights standards and creates space for the promotion of human rights and civil society participation. Three forms of commitment and influence can be conditionally distinguished.

1. **Voluntary commitments under the OECD projects**. Although Uzbekistan has not signed any OECD declarations or recommendations directly related to human rights, the country de facto assumes certain obligations by participating in a number of projects and initiatives. These include, first of all, monitoring within the framework of the Istanbul Action Plan (including an assessment of the independence of courts, protection of whistle-blowers, and participation of CSOs), as well as reviews of public administration, digitalisation, anti-corruption policy, and sustainable growth. Thus, participation in these initiatives implies taking responsibility for the implementation of standards of transparency, non-discrimination, inclusiveness, and accessibility.

2. ***Inclusion of human rights issues in country programming documents***. In the analysis of OECD country and thematic reports on Uzbekistan, one can identify a stable presence of issues that comply with human rights standards. These are primarily topics such as equal access to public services, ensuring the participation of vulnerable groups, supporting inclusive business, protecting the rights of consumers and workers, and openness of government data and policies. Even if the term "human rights" is not used often, the structural elements of these standards are actually built into the programme documents and analysis methodologies.

3. ***The impact of OECD standards on reforms***. Regulatory impact assessment (RIA) mechanisms, the introduction of digital government, reform of the public procurement system, and

---

[129] Confirmed in the report on anti-corruption reforms. Anti-corruption reforms in Uzbekistan 4th round of monitoring of the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2019/03/anti-corruption-reforms-in-uzbekistan_c913fdbb/46942986-en.pdf

[130] See the World Bank's report on helping Uzbekistan undertake a historical social and economic transformation: https://projects.worldbank.org/en/results/2024/07/16/helping-uzbekistan-undertake-a-historic-social-and-economic-transformation

[131] For example, the report 'Open Government for Stronger Democracies: A Global Assessment' highlights the alignment of Uzbekistan's initiatives with the open government principles. See the publication: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/open-government-for-stronger-democracies_5478db5b-en.html

the development of transparency in the public sector are all processes conceptually designed in accordance with the OECD framework. The official rhetoric and content of key strategic documents of Uzbekistan (including the strategy for sustainable development, public sector reform, and modernisation of digital platforms) largely repeat the approaches and lexicon of the OECD. This is confirmed by publications of the World Bank, UNDP, and a number of OECD reports on Uzbekistan's progress in specific sectors. Thus, we can talk about the conceptual and substantive impact of OECD standards on the country's institutional reforms.

While there is no institutionalised mechanism for civil society participation in cooperation with the OECD, positive trends have been observed in this direction in recent years. Civil society is actively involved in the processes of monitoring anti-corruption reforms, digital governance and open data.

Within the framework of the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan, civil society in Uzbekistan is involved in monitoring anti-corruption reforms. The latest OECD report notes that the monitoring group is grateful to representatives of Uzbek non-governmental organisations for open and constructive discussions during the visit to the country and during two rounds of bilateral consultations.[132]

In March 2023, Tashkent hosted a training session organised by UNODC, OECD and a regional NGO aimed at strengthening civil society capacity in Central Asia within the framework of anti-corruption reform review mechanisms.[133]

V. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 General conclusions

The analysis of the OECD standards and the OECD engagement with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan reveals that the Central Asian countries are gradually integrating key elements of the OECD framework into public governance, anti-corruption policy, digital transformation and promotion of the corporate social responsibility. While none of the countries is an OECD member, the monitoring mechanisms, thematic reviews, and participation in regional initiatives facilitate the voluntary adoption of transparency, accountability and inclusiveness standards.

5.2. Assessment of compliance with and adherence to OECD standards

All three countries demonstrate the partial, but increasing, institutionalisation of OECD standards. The principles of transparency, RIA, accountability and anti-corruption policies have been covered at most, while the human rights issues are represented less consistently, in the literal sense, remaining a challenge to be integrated into national agendas and documentation. However, the principles of inclusion, access, equality and participation have been already built into framework documents and policies.

5.3. The role of civil society

The civil society plays a key role in the adaptation and monitoring of OECD standards in the region. In all countries of the region, CSOs are involved in alternative information (including shadow reports), consultative processes and promoting the CSR, open governance and anti-

[132] Baseline report of the fifth round of monitoring of anti-corruption reforms in Uzbekistan. Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan (2024): https://www.oecd.org/ru/publications/0c24d6de-ru.html

[133] UNODC, OECD and Regional Dialogue Jointly Strengthen Anti-Corruption Capacities of Civil Society in Central Asia: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/ngos/regional-dialogue.html

corruption agenda. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, CSOs are seen to be increasingly involved in partnership processes, while in Uzbekistan this process is at an early stage.

5.4. Country findings

1. ***Kazakhstan*** demonstrates the highest level of institutional convergence with the OECD: participation in the Country Programme, official accession to the recommendations of the OECD Council, the functioning of the NCP, regular thematic reviews. OECD standards actively influence reforms in public administration, fight against corruption, digital government and CSR.
2. ***Kyrgyzstan*** participates in a number of regional initiatives, including the Istanbul Action Plan, statistical and infrastructure projects, and has received support from SIGMA. Despite institutional limitations, the country is guided by the OECD best practices in open governance, anti-corruption accountability, and CSO participation.
3. ***Uzbekistan*** has demonstrated rapid convergence with OECD standards as part of the reforms of the last decade. The focus on digitalisation, anti-corruption, sustainable development and infrastructure is combined with the elements of RIA, development of open government and support for human rights. OECD reports are starting to impact significantly the rhetoric and content of the country's strategic documents.

5.5. Recommendations

1. For countries in the region:

- To deepen institutional forms of cooperation with the OECD (Country Programme, SIGMA, thematic reviews).
- To continue to implement RIA, open budget, digital participation and policy evaluation with CSOs.
- To establish or strengthen mechanisms for ongoing dialogue with civil society in the context of reviews and implementation of OECD recommendations.
- To raise the profile of human rights in national strategies, including access to justice, non-discrimination and transparency.

2. For the OECD and partners in the region:

- To support thematic initiatives with a focus on human rights, inclusion and citizen engagement.
- To strengthen the civil society participation component in monitoring and evaluation programmes.
- To expand the availability of country data and overviews in national languages.
- To promote inter-country dialogue and regional platforms for sharing experiences within Central Asia.