UZBEK FORUM
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

“IT’S IMPOSSIBLE TO REFUSE.”: STATE-IMPOSED FORCED LABOR AND EXPLOITATION IN UZBEKISTAN’S SILK SECTOR



Acknowledgements:

"It's impossible to refuse.": State-Imposed Forced Labor and Exploitation in Uzbekistan's Silk Sector

Authors: Umida Niyazova and Lynn Schweisfurth

External review: Raluca Dumitrescu, Senior Garment Coordinator and Cotton Campaign Coordinator, Global Labor Justice; Naomi Glassman-Majara, Staff Attorney, Global Labor Justice; and Allison Gill, Legal Director, Global Labor Justice.

Cover photo: Woman carrying fully formed silkworm cocoons, Marhamat district, Andijan region, May 2026. © Uzbek Forum.

This report is dedicated to farmers and rural communities in Uzbekistan who are in conditions of forced labor and exploitation in the silk sector and our team of independent monitors without whom this report would not have been possible.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Glossary 4

1. Executive Summary **5**

Key Findings 6

Key Recommendations. 7

2. Introduction **8**

3. Methodology **10**

4. Background on Silk Production in Uzbekistan **11**

4.1 Silk, a Commodity of Strategic Importance for the Uzbek Government 11

4.2 The Process of Cocoon Cultivation 13

4.3 Mulberry Production 14

5. Relevant Institutions and Contracting Parties **16**

5.1 Uzbekipaksanoat (Silk Association) 17

5.2 Agropilla 17

5.3 Silk Clusters 18

5.4 Hokimiyat, Local Authorities 19

5.5 Mahalla Institutions 19

5.6 Farmers 20

5.7 Home-based Producers (kasanachi) 20

6. Uzbekistan's International Obligations Not to Use Forced Labor **21**

6.1 Understanding State-imposed Forced Labor 22

7. Forced Labor of Cotton and Grain Farmers to Produce Silkworm Cocoons **23**

7.1 Structural Coercion: Threat of Penalty and the Vulnerability of Farmers. 25

7.1.1 Threat of Land Seizure or Denial of Water, Machinery,or Other Agricultural Inputs. 27

7.1.2 Harassment and Intimidation including Threat of Economic Penalties and Physical Violence. 27

7.1.3 The Exceptions Prove the Rule 29

7.2 Structural Involuntariness: State-imposed Quotas and Prices, Blank Contracts, Extortion, and Inability to Challenge Terms 29

7.2.1 Imposition of Production Quotas 30

7.2.2 State-set Pricing 31

7.2.3 Blank Contracts 32

7.2.4 Expenses and Hidden Costs 33

8. Structural Exploitation and Home-based Producers *(kasanachi)* **34**

8.1 Decent Work Standards. 35

8.2 Access to Land: Structural Exploitation 36

8.3 Reasons Why Home-based Producers Engage in Silk Production 37

8.4 Structural Involuntariness: High Quotas, Low Prices, and Delayed Payments. 37

8.5 Abuse of Vulnerability in Contracting 39

8.6 Unpaid Family Labor, Child Labor, and Health Hazards 40

9. Corruption and Opportunities for Enrichment **42**

10. Uzbek Silk in Global Supply Chains **43**

11. Conclusions **45**

12. Recommendations **46**

ANNEX I Legislation regulating the silk sector 2017-2025 49

GLOSSARY

Hokim - regional, city or district official

Hokimiyat - regional, city or district administration

Mahalla - formally independent local self-government bodies that, in practice, operate under the authority of district administrations.

Cluster - private companies that vertically integrate the production of raw materials such as cotton, grain or silk with processing and sometimes manufacture of finished goods.

Kasanachi - people who carry out work at home, often subsistence farmers or smallholders who produce silkworm cocoons.[1]

Mardikor - a worker who works on an informal, often daily basis without a written contract.

UZS - Uzbek Soum

1 Uzbek Forum uses the term "home based producers" to distinguish between silkworm producers whose land lease agreements include the obligation to produce cocoons, and farmers, whose land lease agreements do not. Home based producers, informally known as *kasanachi* are often subsistence farmers or smallholders who rent land plots of between 0.2 and 3 hectares from silk enterprises under the obligation to manage mulberry plantations and produce specified quotas of cocoons. By contrast, farmers, who also produce silkworm cocoons, lease land of ten hectares or more from the state for a period of up to 49 years, are under the obligation to produce a set quota of cotton and grain but not silkworm cocoons.

- 1 -

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Uzbekistan is the third largest producer of silkworm cocoons after China and India, and the world's largest producer per capita. In Uzbekistan, silkworm cocoons are grown through state-imposed forced labor of farmers and exploitation of home-based workers. In a pervasively coercive environment, the state uses coercion of predominantly cotton and wheat producing farmers and the exploitation of the rural poor to secure a steady, cheap supply of silkworm cocoons for the benefit of private companies (known as "clusters"). Global brands and retailers are at risk of sourcing Uzbek silk through manufacturers in third countries, in particular Vietnam, but also South Korea, China, Türkiye, and India.

Despite the formal privatization of the sector through the creation of silk clusters, private enterprises that process silk and export raw and (semi-)finished silk goods, management of Uzbekistan's sericulture industry is still tightly controlled by the government through quasi-state agencies. A range of former state agencies acting under national government directives and local authorities ensure compliance with government-imposed quotas and price points and leverage the weight of the state's coercive authority and administrative strength. Farmers are unable to refuse production of silkworm cocoons, choose which silk cluster they sell cocoons to, or negotiate prices.

This report documents monitoring findings of the conditions in which silkworm cocoons are produced in Uzbekistan, based on interviews conducted by Uzbek Forum for Human Rights with 85 farmers and home-based cocoon producers between 2024 - 2026, in combination with analysis of legislation, media reports and social media messages.

Uzbekistan's government arbitrarily imposes and enforces silkworm cocoon production quotas on farmers whose primary occupation is unrelated to sericulture, under threat of penalty. Cotton and grain farmers are assigned approximately two-thirds of the country's annual production quotas, but report that cocoon production is an unprofitable and labor-intensive obligation which they are unable to refuse. Farmers face a coercive environment consisting of high levels of control and wide-ranging consequences including where a failure to sign contracts for silk production or to meet production quotas can result in the termination of their land lease agreements for cotton and wheat crops–which would take away farmers' only source of income and consequently lead to their loss of livelihoods. In some cases, district governors weaponize access to water for irrigation of cotton and wheat crops as a means of coercion. Farmers are subject to effectively mandatory participation and an inability to refuse due to coercive state control over the agricultural sector that eliminates alternatives and procedurally imposes consent. The clear state involvement at all stages of silk production creates and reinforces these structural constraints that amount to state-imposed forced labor for farmers.

This coercive system, in combination with a lack of transparency and accountability, provides opportunities for personal enrichment by government officials and other actors. Monitoring findings show how in some cases, governors demand informal payments from farmers in exchange for permission not to grow silkworm cocoons or collect from farmers payments described as fines for not meeting the state-allocated quotas, however without any receipts or documentation.

In addition to cotton and wheat farmers, silkworm cocoons are also grown by home-based workers. These are smallholder farmers who typically lease between 0.2 and 3 hectares of land from silk producing enterprises (clusters) for a period of five years. Under the terms of the lease agreements, home-based producers are required to maintain mulberry plantations and deliver a specified quantity of silkworm cocoons once (sometimes twice) a year to the silk cluster from which they lease land. There are clear and pervasive decent work concerns with home-based silk production and a violation of a range of labor rights, including delayed payments, blank contracts which are withheld for "registration" by the authorities, and a lack of health and safety protections.

The home-based production system takes advantage of the structural vulnerability of home-based producers, which is the result of a combination of factors. These include limited opportunities to

access land to grow crops or raise livestock to maintain their livelihoods and a persistent social structure whereby local authorities have power over the producers' social functions and benefits. Home-based producers are placed in a position of extreme vulnerability where they are unable to challenge working conditions, choose a buyer for their cocoons or negotiate prices, as this may have significant negative impacts on their livelihoods.

1.1 KEY FINDINGS

Coercion and state involvement

- Silkworm cocoon production relies on considerable involvement of government and quasi-government agencies and officials from which privately owned silk enterprises benefit. These quasi-government agencies receive directives, funding, benefits, and appointed leadership directly from the Uzbek government.
- Cotton and wheat farmers are coerced into silk production through an arbitrary system that leverages insecure land tenure and government control over access to water, low-interest loans, machinery, and other agricultural inputs.
- Cotton and wheat farmers produce silk under an environment of surveillance and harassment, including economic penalties and physical violence. Because of the structural coercion they are facing, farmers consider it futile to challenge, either individually or collectively, the demand to produce silk.

State-set quotas and pricing

- The state sets annual mandatory production targets for silkworms, which farmers, home-based producers, and sometimes mahallas (local neighborhood councils) must fulfill and hand over to silk clusters.
- Farmers and home-based producers themselves have no influence over price-setting, nor is the price determined through competition among buyers. The procurement price for cocoons is proposed by Uzbekipaksanoat, the state-aligned Uzbek Silk Association, and approved by the government.
- Contracts reviewed by Uzbek Forum for both farmers and home-based producers did not include the price producers would be paid or the amount of production costs that would be deducted from the final payment. Many farmers and individual silk producers did not know the name of the silk cluster they are producing cocoons for, do not have copies of their contracts, and are unaware of the terms of the contract, except for the mandatory production quota.
- All of the farmers and home-based producers interviewed reported that payments for cocoons they have delivered to silk enterprises are either delayed or not paid at all. Payments also deduct the cost of materials, but the amount and process around these deductions is not communicated.

Exploitation of rural poverty - home-based producers

- The primary motivation of home-based producers to cultivate silkworm cocoons derives from access to small land plots where they are required to maintain mulberry tree plantations but can also grow their own crops.
- The allocation of hundreds of thousands of hectares of irrigated land to silk clusters for mulberry plantations maintains a level of dependency of smallholders on silk clusters for access to land. This is an important factor contributing to abuse of vulnerability and exploitation of home-based producers.

1.2. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Uzbek government should eliminate the use of coercion and state-imposed forced labor of cotton and wheat farmers to produce silkworm cocoons. It should also create the necessary conditions to enable smallholder farmers and home-based producers to improve and sustain their livelihoods through access to land and other means to earn an income.

International financial and donor institutions operating in Uzbekistan should desist from funding agricultural projects that benefit from, reinforce, or perpetuate the use of forced labor and exploitation in the silk sector and more broadly, in agriculture. They should condition the possibility of future loans or projects in the agricultural sector on the end of forced labor in the silk sector and the adoption of broader reforms to eliminate coercion and labor exploitation in the agricultural sector; and conduct meaningful stakeholder engagement with project-affected parties and civil society organizations to identify, prevent, and mitigate human and labor rights risks prior to loan approvals.

The European Union, United States, Germany, and other governments should urge the Uzbek government to implement the recommendations outlined above. In particular, in the context of political and trade relations, for example as part of the European Commission's ongoing engagement with Uzbekistan under the GSP+ Arrangement,[2] and the US government's ongoing negotiation of a bi-lateral trade agreement with Uzbekistan,[3] urge the Uzbek government to eliminate the use of state-imposed forced labor and exploitation in the agricultural sector and convey that imports of textile products is conditional on evidence that the ILO fundamental conventions are effectively being implemented in the production of those products.

Brands and retailers sourcing apparel, home textiles, and fabrics should prohibit the use of Uzbek silk in their products as long as Uzbek silk is produced with state-imposed forced labor of farmers and exploitation of rural communities. They should also convey to the Uzbek government that to encourage responsible sourcing of textile products from Uzbekistan, including products made of silk and cotton, the government should eliminate coercion, forced labor, and exploitation in agriculture, eliminate restrictions on freedoms of association and to receive and impart information, and allow unimpeded independent monitoring and reporting.

2 See Uzbekistan country page on the EU Commission's GSP Hub webpage, https://gsphub.eu/country-info/Uzbekistan, (last accessed October 1, 2026).

3 Office of the United States Trade Representative, *The United States and Uzbekistan Announce Early Harvest on Trade, Accelerate Agreement on Reciprocal Trade and Investment Talks*, June 25, 2026, https://ustr.gov/about/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2026/june/united-states-and-uzbekistan-announce-early-harvest-trade-accelerate-agreement-reciprocal-trade-and

- 2 -
INTRODUCTION

> **"Nothing has changed regarding silk. Just like in previous years, in February they summoned farmers to sign a contract for growing cocoons. The district governor said that farmers are required to hand over the cocoons; there is no other choice. For farmers who refuse to sign the contract, they send police officers after them. They threaten them—basically, they force them to hand over the cocoons by any means necessary. When you sign the contract at the Agropilla office, they check how many hectares of land the farmer has. I, for example, have 60 hectares, and they told me to raise 8 boxes (of silkworms). ...I don't know a single farmer who wants to grow cocoons, because this is the time for weeding and thinning the cotton fields—there's a lot of work to do. Farmers take the silkworm eggs because they don't want to argue and are afraid of the local authorities. Basically, nothing has changed. It's the same thing every year—farmers are forced to grow silkworms because they're dependent on the system. If they argue, they might delay giving them seeds, or they might not give them diesel. In short, don't even doubt it—it's completely coercive."[4]**

This is the second report by Uzbek Forum documenting state-imposed forced labor and exploitation in the production of silkworm cocoons in Uzbekistan, following "Silk Loop for Uzbek Farmers", published in 2015.[5] Over a decade since the publication of our previous report, the coercive environment which enables the use of state-imposed forced labor and exploitation persists in Uzbekistan, despite stated commitments by the government to reform agriculture, create sustainable employment opportunities, and promote decent work.[6]

The labor rights violations documented in this report stem from ongoing coercive state control over agriculture, combined with serious shortcomings in the rule of law and restrictions on freedom of association and expression in Uzbekistan.

Since 2017, the Uzbek government has embarked on a major economic reform program to privatize parts of the agricultural sector and promote textile production through the introduction of "clusters". These are vertically integrated companies that control various stages of cotton and silk production. Essentially, the state shifted state resources, including land and infrastructure, into private hands. Cotton and wheat farmers, who are the same farmers forced to produce silkworm cocoons, continue to lack autonomy and are placed in a very vulnerable position.[7] Home-based producers of silk, who in effect are smallholder farmers, have limited opportunities to access land to grow crops or raise livestock to maintain their livelihoods. The silk production system leverages the vulnerabilities of this group of producers to effectively force them to engage in silk production sometimes even at a loss.

The state uses a "systemic threat architecture"[8] to ensure compliance of farmers, including to produce silkworm cocoons. The state routinely uses coercion, including land seizure or threats thereof,

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4 Interview with farmer, Pop district, Namangan region, May 14, 2025. On file with Uzbek Forum.

5 *Farmers report extortion, falsification of quotas and delayed payments in Uzbekistan's silk industry*, Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, September 14, 2026: https://www.uzbekforum.org/farmers-report-extortion-falsification-and-delayed-payments-in-uzbekistans-silk-industry/

6 *Cotton Campaign Welcomes Government Commitment To Continue Engagement Towards A Sustainable Cotton And Textile Industry*, Cotton Campaign, September 23, 2024: https://www.cottoncampaign.org/news/cotton-campaign-welcomes-commitment-by-uzbekistan-government-to-work-together-towards-a-sustainable-cotton-and-textile-industry; and *Uzbek farmers strengthen skills in sustainable cotton production*, International Labour Organization, March 26, 2026: https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/uzbek-farmers-strengthen-skills-sustainable-cotton-production.

7 *"Farmers Have No Freedom": Abuse and Exploitation of Cotton and Wheat Farmers in Uzbekistan,* Uzbek Forum for Human Rights and Human Rights Watch, February 17, 2026: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/02/uzbekistan0226web.pdf.

8 *Architecture of Coercion: Conceptualizing and Measuring State-Imposed Forced Labor Based on ILO Standards*, Adrian Zenz, Journal of Human Trafficking, May 6, 2026 (p.19): https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322705.2026.2661024#abstract

harassment, physical abuse, and arbitrary detention, to enforce state-set production quotas of farmers for cotton and wheat. Farmers have very limited power to negotiate prices or choose to which cluster they sell their cotton or wheat and are constantly at risk of losing their livelihoods due to delayed or no payments by the clusters. These conditions together contribute to the systemic threat architecture, making threats of land seizure and other penalties for refusing to grow silkworm cocoons effective.

State coercion in agriculture takes place against the backdrop of ongoing restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms in Uzbekistan.[9] In the agricultural sector, both the government and clusters have engaged in surveillance, threats, intimidation, and retaliation against workers, farmers, and independent monitors reporting on labor rights violations.[10] These cases create a chilling effect and further limit farmers' and workers' ability to challenge their working conditions, including in silk production.

In 2021, Uzbekistan eliminated the use of systemic state-imposed forced labor of cotton pickers.[11] This important achievement demonstrated that reform is possible when there is political will. The elimination of systemic state-imposed forced labor in the cotton harvest was also the result of consistent action by civil society, global companies that boycotted the use of Uzbek cotton, the ILO, governments, and other international stakeholders.

This report shows that despite public sector employees no longer being forced to pick cotton or extorted for harvest expenses, the agricultural sector remains tainted by forced labor and exploitation because further reforms have not been implemented to end coercion of farmers and eliminate restrictions on fundamental labor rights and freedoms. This report serves as a resource to the said stakeholders to urge the Uzbek government to recommit to reform and end coercive and exploitative practices in agriculture, enable smallholder farmers and home-based producers to improve and sustain their livelihoods through access to land and other means to earn an income, and ensure protection and respect of labor rights are embedded in any reforms in agriculture, including economic reforms.

Further progress on these issues is essential to achieve a textile industry that complies with international standards for decent work. Such reforms will help to attract responsible sourcing by global brands and retailers, which in turn can further sustainable economic growth.

9 See generally Human Rights Watch Uzbekistan Annual Reports for 2021-2026, for example, *World Report 2026: Uzbekistan*, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/uzbekistan; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2025: Uzbekistan*, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/uzbekistan. Freedom House, an independent organization monitoring citizens' ability to exercise their fundamental freedoms, ranked Uzbekistan in 2026 as "not free", with a score of 12/100 (with 2/40 for political rights and 10/60 for civil liberties), *Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026: Uzbekistan*: https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2026

10 Examples include, *Joint Statement: Urgent Call On The IFC And The EBRD For Remedy And Accountability At Indorama Agro, Uzbekistan*, Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, April 3, 2025: https://www.uzbekforum.org/joint-statement-urgent-call-on-the-ifc-and-the-ebrd-for-remedy-and-accountability-at-indorama-agro-uzbekistan/; *Uzbekistan: Labor Rights Monitor Sharifa Madrakhimova Had Passport Destroyed, Cotton Campaign Calls For Investigation*, Cotton Campaign, June 2, 2025: https://www.cottoncampaign.org/news/uzbekistan-labor-rights-monitor-sharifa-madrakhimova-had-passport-destroyed-cotton-campaign-calls-for-investigation; *Cotton Campaign Calls For Investigation Of Attack On Uzbek Human Rights Activist Umida Niyazova*, Cotton Campaign, May 2, 2024: https://www.cottoncampaign.org/news/cotton-campaign-calls-for-investigation-of-attack-on-uzbeknbsphuman-rights-activist-umida-niyazovanbsp;

11 *Cotton Campaign Ends its Call for a Global Boycott of Cotton from Uzbekistan,* Cotton Campaign, March 10, 2022: https://www.cottoncampaign.org/news/cotton-campaign-ends-its-call-for-a-global-boycott-of-cotton-from-uzbekistan

- 3 -
METHODOLOGY

Uzbek Forum monitors interviewed 85 farmers and home-based cocoon producers in 21 districts of five regions of Uzbekistan and Karakalpakstan during the cocoon cultivation season (April - June) from 2024 - 2026.

Uzbek Forum monitors used open and closed questionnaires to collect witness testimonies and supplemented them with additional documentary evidence, including open-source publications, posts on social media and online media platforms, legal documents, and statistical data to provide a comprehensive overview of the system of silk production in Uzbekistan today. Monitors are trained in labor rights, including ILO conventions, and have longstanding experience in monitoring labor rights violations in Uzbekistan's agriculture sector.

In addition, Uzbek Forum spoke to representatives of Agropilla, a quasi-governmental organization involved in the oversight of silk production and with the managers of the two silk producing companies. All requested anonymity for fear of potential negative consequences.

On September 14, 2026, Uzbek Forum published an article based on testimonies of cocoon producers and farmers which had circulated on Uzbek media[12] which supported Uzbek Forum's monitoring findings of pressure on farmers to pay for shortfalls in quotas and falsification of official production data by local government officials.[13]

Uzbekipaksanoat, the silk association, subsequently published a response clarifying certain calculations regarding prices and production, including denying any obligations regarding 'plan fulfillment,' and expressing its willingness to investigate any individualized, substantiated claims.[14] Uzbek Forum appreciates Uzbekipaksanoat's responsiveness and openness to addressing any legal violations in the silk sector while also emphasizing, as will be established throughout, that the labor rights violations in Uzbekistan's silk sector are systematic and structural and thus require comprehensive reform to eliminate coercion of farmers rather than reviewing claims on an individual basis. Uzbek Forum provided a copy of this report to Uzbekipaksanoat for comment before publication but received no response.

12 P*illachilar norozi: mehnat bor, haq yo'q,* Ozodlik, June 15, 2026: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0KD5EmT2Ew
13 *Farmers report extortion, falsification of quotas and delayed payments in Uzbekistan's silk industry,* Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, September 14, 2026: https://www.uzbekforum.org/farmers-report-extortion-falsification-and-delayed-payments-in-uzbekistans-silk-industry/
14 Official statement by Uzbekipaksanoat, September 24, 2026: https://uzipaksanoat.uz/news/zbekipaksanoat-uiusmasining-rasmii-munosabati

- 4-
BACKGROUND ON SILK PRODUCTION IN UZBEKISTAN

4.1 SILK, A COMMODITY OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE FOR THE UZBEK GOVERNMENT

Uzbekistan is home to a rich tradition of silk production. Based on public statements and presidential decrees issued in recent years, the government of Uzbekistan views the silk sector as a strategically important industry with significant potential to generate export revenues, reduce rural poverty, and create employment through investment in domestic processing capacity and the production of higher value-added silk products, including finished silk fabrics for international markets. However, as will be discussed in this report, silkworm cocoons continue to be produced with state-imposed forced labor of farmers and the exploitation of the rural poor. Rural communities have not benefitted from the government's economic reform to integrate silk production and increase exports of silk products.

Silkworm cocoons are one of three agricultural products, along with cotton and grain, for which the government establishes de facto annual mandatory production quotas, known as "target indicators". Agriculture is one of the leading sectors of Uzbekistan's economy and just under half of the country's population lives in rural areas.[15] Despite reforms to privatize the silk and cotton sectors starting in 2017, agriculture continues to be one of the most state regulated spheres of the economy, retaining salient features of the Soviet-style command economy and mandatory state quotas. Quotas for silk production are imposed at a district level based on the size of the farms and then passed down by the local authorities to farmers or home-based producers. These centrally imposed silkworm cocoon production quotas are allocated across 150 of Uzbekistan's 162 administrative districts, and their fulfilment is mandatory for both local administrations and individual cocoon producers.



Silkworm cocoon , Marhamat district , Andijan region , May 2026 . © Uzbek Forum

A previous Uzbek Forum report from 2015 found that "[t]he government maintains total control over the silk sector."[16] Production quotas and prices were set by the government and enforced through surveillance by territorial associations of the Ministry of Agriculture called "pilla" and local government officials.[17] The previous investigation into forced labor in the Uzbek silk sector found that the

15 Trading Economics, Uzbekistan, Rural Population: https://tradingeconomics.com/uzbekistan/rural-population-wb-data.html (last accessed June 24, 2026).

16 *Silk Loop for Uzbek Farmers,* Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, (p. 4), September 12, 2015: https://www.uzbekforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Silk-Loop-for-Uzbek-Farmers.pdf.

17 *Id.* p. 5, 7-9.

government agencies exploited rural poverty and the vulnerability of small-hold farmers to force them to produce silkworm cocoons under threat and coercion.[18] Over a decade ago, farmers reported having no contracts or signing blank contracts, a practice of underpayment and nonpayment for cocoons and costs, and an environment of threats and harassment.[19]

Legislation adopted between 2023 and 2026 demonstrates that silk production continues to be governed through state-imposed production targets. Responsibility for achieving these targets is assigned to Government ministries, local administrations, and other state institutions before being passed down to semi-private agencies and the farmers and producers themselves. In March 2026, the president adopted a new decree aiming to transform the silk sector into a larger, export-oriented industry by 2030 by increasing cocoon production, expanding exports, deepening processing capacity, and creating hundreds of thousands of jobs.[20] The government set targets to increase cocoon production from 30,000 to 36,000 tons annually, raise silk exports from $120 million US to $300 million US, increase the share of deep cocoon processing to 75 percent, and create at least 500,000 seasonal and 50,000 permanent jobs each year.[21]

According to open-source data, Uzbekistan exported silk and silk-related products worth $79.4 million US in 2023 and $54.1 million US in 2024, ranking as the world's sixth-largest silk exporter.[22] According to a statement by Uzbekipaksanoat, silk enterprises exported products worth $87 million US in 2025, representing a 161 per cent increase compared to 2024, when exports amounted to just $54.1 million US.[23]



Cocoon producer bringing leaves to feed silkworms , Marhamat district , Andijan region , May 2026 . © Uzbek Forum .

18 *Id.*
19 *Id.* 7-14.
20 President of the Republic of Uzbekistan decision *On additional measures to develop the sericulture sector on the basis of a new system and strengthen the food base*, No. PP-87, March 6, 2026: https://lex.uz/docs/8076435#8079391
21 *Id.* Art. I. Deep cocoon processing is vertical production from the production of raw silk, silk floss and silk yarn, weaving silk fabric, and manufacturing finished silk products. *Id.* Annex 2.
22 OEC Trade Data, Uzbekistan: https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-product/silk/reporter/uzb (last accessed June 25, 2026)
23 Instagram post by Uzbekipaksanoat, December 30, 2025: https://www.instagram.com/p/DS5EUo8DILJ (last accessed July 7, 2026).

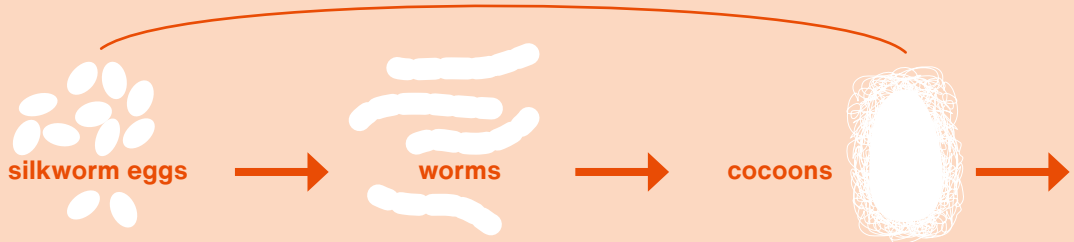
4.2 THE PROCESS OF COCOON CULTIVATION

The production season of silkworm cocoons in Uzbekistan usually lasts 25-28 days, from late April to early June. Cocoons are grown from silkworm eggs which feed exclusively on mulberry leaves, which in Uzbekistan are typically cut and carried by hand to feeding sites, a labor-intensive task that requires considerable physical effort. As they grow, silkworms produce a sticky substance in their mouths that turns into silk thread which it uses to build its cocoon.

Cocoons are usually grown in rural homes, in farm buildings, or in separate facilities close to mulberry tree plantations. Silkworms are extremely sensitive to cold, bright light, and noise and must be kept clean. As they mature, they require increasingly larger rearing spaces. Home-based producers therefore must ensure a clean environment and that a constant room temperature and humidity are maintained during the cultivation period. Silkworms require frequent feeding throughout their growth cycle.

Silk Cocoon Production

The process takes 25-28 days.
A box of eggs yields approx. 55-60 kilos of cocoons.



- Silkworms produce a sticky substance in their mouths that turns into silk thread.
- This thread forms the actual cocoon.

- Silkworms feed exclusively on mulberry leaves.
- On average, in 7 days, a single box of silkworm eggs requires an estimated 750–800 kilos of mulberry leaves.
- In the last ten days of growing silkworms with silkworms eat leaves 24 hours a day; producers must feed them throughout the day and night.

Cocoons are delivered to silk clusters. Some clusters use raw silk to produce silk yarn, fabric, or finished goods. How cocoons are processed into raw silk:

- **Stifling:** through steam, hot water, or exposure to sun, the pupa is killed and prevented from turning into a moth that would break the silk thread.
- **Soaking and softening:** cocoons are placed in hot water and the silk filament unwinds from the cocoon.
- **Reeling the silk:** strands of silk are combined to produce raw silk.

The final stage is the most labor-intensive period, as silkworms consume the largest quantity of feed during this phase. Over approximately 7–8 days, a single box of silkworm eggs, which yields approximately 55-60 kilos of cocoons, requires an estimated 750–800 kilos of mulberry leaves. Cocoon cultivation is manual, labor-intensive work and even producing one box of eggs usually involves several family members, often including children.



Preparing leaves to feed silkworms , Marhamat district , Andijan region , May 2026 . © Uzbek Forum .

A home-based producer in Furqat district in Fergana region described the process:

"Yes, it is difficult [to grow silkworms]. At the beginning it is easy. One person can collect leaves, chop them up, and feed the worms. But during the final ten days—which we call the "big period" *(katta daha)*—the worms become extremely hungry. They need to be fed at least five or six times a day. At that stage, the leaves are not picked individually. Instead, branches are cut



A box containing silkworm eggs , Marhamat district , Andijan region , April 2026 . © Uzbek Forum .



Raising silkworms , Marhamat district , Andijan region , May 2026 . © Uzbek Forum .

directly from the mulberry trees and brought in. During this period you need strong men—what we call *dastkalla*—men who are skilled at cutting branches quickly."[24]

When the cocoons are fully formed, home-based producers pluck them by hand from mulberry branches. A farmer in Uchkuprik in Fergana region explained the effort involved:

"If there are ten people in the family, those ten people will be involved, and if there are two people, it will be difficult. The last ten days of growing silkworms are a real struggle. Because the worm eats leaves 24 hours a day. During these days, neighbors are called in to help."[25]

To cultivate one box of silkworms, a space of 25-30 square meters is required. Because of the excrement produced by the worms during the process, facilities have to be thoroughly cleaned following cultivation, requiring home-based producers to renovate the rooms of their homes, adding to production costs.

4.3 MULBERRY PRODUCTION

As silkworms feed exclusively on mulberry leaves, the government has expanded mulberry plantations and set annual targets for the planting of mulberry trees.

A February 2023 Presidential decree instructed the Ministry of Agriculture to prepare legislation requiring the planting of mulberry trees around agricultural fields, thereby expanding the feed base for sericulture through regulatory measures rather than market incentives.[26] A separate decree adopted in June 2023 promoted the establishment of new silk clusters and specialized farms while providing for the allocation of approximately 105,000 hectares of land for new mulberry plantations between 2024 and 2027.[27]

Subsequent legislation further expanded state involvement. A May 2024 presidential decree set targets for increasing mulberry plantations to 160,000 hectares, planting 500 million mulberry trees, and creating up to two million seasonal jobs in the sector by 2027.[28] The decree assigned personal

24 Interview with home based producer in Furqat district, Fergana region, May 20, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.
25 Interview with farmer, Uchkuprik district, Fergana region, May 13, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.
26 Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan *On measures for the further development of the silk industry*, February 24, 2023: https://lex.uz/docs/6390425
27 Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan *On additional measures to support home-based sericulture and further expansion of the feed base for silkworm farming*, June 1, 2023: https://lex.uz/docs/6480002
28 Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan *On additional measures to accelerate the implementation of market mechanisms in the field of silkworm cultivation and sericulture*, May 3, 2024: https://lex.uz/docs/6913569

responsibility to officials for identifying land suitable for mulberry cultivation and meeting production targets. It also envisaged the recruitment, training, and employment of unemployed citizens in sericulture-related activities.

In July 2024, amendments to Article 17 of the Law on Farming introduced a requirement for farmers to plant mulberry saplings or other designated crops on agricultural land located along canals, irrigation and drainage networks, and at the edges of fields. Prior to these amendments, the Law on Farming did not contain an explicit obligation to cultivate mulberry trees.[29]

Amendments to the Law on Farming adopted in July 2024 require medium and large sized farms to plant mulberry trees along irrigation canals, collector-drainage networks and field boundaries.[30] A Presidential Decree of March 6, 2026, outlines the expansion of the feed base (mulberry leaves), construction of hundreds of new silkworm rearing facilities, and creation of seasonal employment opportunities for up to two million people.



Cocoons ready for harvest , Marhamat district , Andijan region , May 2026 . © Uzbek Forum

29 Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan *On amendments and additions to certain legislative acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan*, July 17, 2024: https://www.lex.uz/en/docs/7024035?ONDATE=18.07.2024percent2000#7025075

30 Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan *On amendments and additions to certain legislative acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan*, July 17, 2024: https://lex.uz/ru/docs/7024035

- 5 -
RELEVANT INSTITUTIONS AND CONTRACTING PARTIES

The silk processing and production in Uzbekistan is operated by private silk processing companies, also known as clusters, and with the close involvement of government bodies to guarantee a supply of cocoons, including through coercion of cotton and wheat farmers and exploitation of the rural poor. Throughout the process, the relevant agencies involved with distribution of silkworm eggs, monitoring of production quotas, collection of cocoons, and ensuring compliance are all either direct government agencies or closely aligned with the government. Quasi-state agencies are those that are effectively agents of the state despite being nominally private.[31] Alignment with the government can be seen through various elements of control or interference with a nominally independent organization's finances, priorities, leadership, internal regulations, location, or operation.[32]

There are two types of contract for silkworm cocoon production, one for farmers and one for home-based producers. The standard cocoon production contract used for farmers in 2026 illustrates the extensive administrative control that continues to characterize the sericulture sector in Uzbekistan. A farmer's contract, unlike a typical commercial agreement between a producer and a purchaser, involves five parties: a farmer, a silk cluster, the quasi-state entity Agropilla, the cocoon producer responsible for cultivating silkworms, and the hokim's assistant who is an employee of the mahalla (neighborhood council), the lowest tier of local administration.[33] A home-based producer's contract is a bilateral agreement between a home-based producer and a silk cluster. In some cases the mahalla themselves have also been assigned production quotas where they are unable to find sufficient silkworm producers.

The distribution of boxes of silkworm eggs between farmers and home-based cocoon producers appears to vary from region to region. Based on interviews conducted by Uzbek Forum and a review of regional planning documents, these differences are likely influenced by the availability of home-based producers with experience in cocoon production, local traditions of sericulture, and the number of residents who have access to suitable facilities for silkworm rearing. In areas such as Fergana and Andijan where cocoon production has historically been practiced and households have the necessary knowledge, labor, and space to raise silkworms, a larger share of production may be assigned to home-based producers. In other regions, local authorities appear to rely more heavily on farmers to meet production targets. This suggests that the extent to which cocoon production depends on farmers operating under administratively imposed contracts may vary significantly across the country, depending on the availability of skilled voluntary home-based producers.

All producers, whether farmers or home-based, are required to ensure the production and delivery of a specified quantity of cocoons, while the cluster must accept the harvest and make payment. An Agropilla agronomist is tasked with continuously monitoring the cultivation process, providing technical guidance, and overseeing compliance with prescribed cultivation standards. Hokimiyat assistants (mahalla employees) are also formally involved and are required to confirm that "the cocoon producer has adequate rearing conditions."[34]

Additionally, both farmers and mahalla, local neighborhood committees, sometimes indirectly subcontract with farm workers and rural residents who engage in cocoon production through an agreement, in part because they receive additional incentives from farmers, such as food products, cash payments, or temporary access to agricultural land.

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31 See generally, *Quasi-Governmental Entities and Legislative Power Delegations*, Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute, https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution-conan/article-1/section-1/quasi-governmental-entities-and-legislative-power-delegations (last accessed October 1, 2026).

32 See generally ILO CFA, Sixth Digest, paras. 524, 577, 589, 590, 638, 639, 641, 666, 667, 674 (discussing forms of state interference in trade union affairs), 2018: https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/percent40ed_norm/percent40normes/documents/publication/wcms_632659.pdf

33 Contracts stipulate that the farmer will officially hire a worker to produce cocoons, although in practice, the burden often falls on his family members.

34 Five-party contracts for silk cocoon production from Jizzakh and Kashkadarya regions signed in February 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.

5.1 UZBEKIPAKSANOAT (SILK ASSOCIATION)

The functions of Uzbekipaksanoat (Silk Association), a state-aligned body created in 2017, include regulation, carrying out government tasks to achieve established targets, pricing, determining quotas and representing the business interests of silk producing enterprises. While officially a formally independent association consisting primarily of private silk enterprises, Uzbekipaksanoat was established by presidential decree.[35] Its chair is approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and it uses state property, receives direct instructions from the state, and receives benefits and funding from the state. For example, the silk development funds that help run Uzbekipaksanoat come from government customs duties from the export of silk waste and raw silk.[36]

Uzbekipaksanoat's members include the 13 regional Agropilla silkworm cocoon harvesting units and 139 district branches (usually one for each cocoon growing district) as well as the silk-processing enterprises and the silk clusters (which are involved in at least four stages of cocoon processing). The clusters pay a membership fee of 2 percent of their revenue.

The main tasks and activities of Uzbekipaksanoat are to develop the fodder base through expansion of mulberry tree plantations; production of silkworm eggs, procurement of cocoons and their primary processing, including the placement of orders for growing cocoons; coordination of the implementation of government policies for the development of the silk industry; attracting investments from international financial institutions and donor organizations; and the promotion and expansion of markets, including export markets.[37]

5.2 AGROPILLA

Agropilla emerged from state-run enterprises known as Pilla (cocoon in Uzbek), which were responsible for organizing silkworm cocoon cultivation and operated under the supervision of state sericulture management bodies and were responsible for implementing state policies and production targets at the regional level. Although every district branch of Agropilla is formally registered as a limited liability company (LLC), it continues to perform functions that are typically associated with state administration, effectively serving as a key administrative mechanism through which national sericulture policies and production plans are implemented at the local level.

Regional and district Agropilla branches are responsible for implementing government sericulture programs including the management of mulberry tree plantations, leasing of land plots for mulberry plantations to silk enterprises, distribution of boxes of silkworm eggs, providing agronomic supervision, cultivation of silkworm seeds, monitoring of producers' compliance with contractual obligations, and monitoring the fulfilment of state production targets through supervision of collection centers where raw cocoons are received, weighed, and sorted.

Corporate records suggest that some district-level Agropilla entities are structured as joint ventures in which regional Agropilla companies hold controlling stakes, while private silk-processing enterprises hold minority shares. Agropilla district employees are paid by silk enterprises, while both agencies are simultaneously members of Uzbekipaksanoat. The district Agropillas each employ one agronomist who advises the silk enterprises, identifies home-based producers, recruits unemployed residents for cocoon production, and inspects farmers and home-based producers throughout the cocooning season.

The dual nature of Agropilla as both a commercial enterprise and a representative of government policy is particularly significant for achieving state cocoon production targets: while the company is formally registered as a commercial entity, it remains integrated into the administrative hierarchy of the

35 Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan *On Measures to Organize the Activities of the Association 'Uzbekipaksanoat'*, No. PP-2856, March 29, 2017: https://lex.uz/en/docs/3149416

36 Government Resolution *On Measures to Organize the Activities of the Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the Development of Sericulture and Karakul Sheep Farming*, No. 705, November 10, 2020: https://lex.uz/en/docs/5090474

37 The wording was adjusted after the adoption of the resolution in 2017.

sericulture sector and the government assigns Agropilla specific tasks in the implementation of government production plans. For example, in accordance with a presidential decree of 2018, all 139 Agropilla district organizations occupy premises allocated to them by the local government free of charge.[38] This creates a system in which responsibilities that would normally be associated with public authorities - including production planning, monitoring, and coordination - are exercised through corporate structures. The arrangement complicates efforts to distinguish between market-based contractual relations and administrative pressure on farmers and households involved in cocoon production.

5.3 SILK CLUSTERS

The first silk clusters were created according to Presidential Decree No. PP-4411 of July 31, 2019.[39] Clusters are silk-processing enterprises, registered as LLCs (private companies, including some financed with foreign capital), which buy raw silkworm cocoons from producers and are responsible for creating chains of deep processing of silk and creating competitive products.[40] According to Uzbekipaksanoat, as of October 2026, there were a total of 62 silk-processing entities operating in Uzbekistan.[41]

A separate decree adopted in June 2023 promoted the establishment of new silk clusters and specialized farms.[42] The decree introduced a system under which households would engage in cocoon production through cooperation with silk clusters and family-based contracts. In most districts, a single silk cluster dominates cocoon procurement, effectively operating as the sole buyer.

To obtain silk cluster status, according to Presidential decree No. PP-87 of March 26, 2026, the enterprise must perform preliminary processing (drying) of silkworms and at least one of the subsequent processing stages (raw silk, silk yarn, fabric, finished products), as well as establish a laboratory for product quality testing.[43] A silk-producing cluster may lose its status if it fails to fulfill certain conditions: making advance payments and final settlements under silkworm supply contracts within the specified timeframes; complete full processing of the purchased silkworms within a calendar year; and ensure the presence of at least four agronomists and one digitalization specialist working at the regional “Agropilla” enterprises.

Formally, silk clusters are independent, commercial non-state organizations but are closely interconnected with the state, Agropilla, and Uzbekipaksanoat. Silk enterprises and silk clusters are created by government decree, receive benefits from the government based on their membership in Uzbekipaksanoat, such as access to land for mulberry plantations or additional subsidies, and receive logistical support from Agropilla, which distributes boxes of silkworm eggs, enforces quotas, and ensures the delivery of cocoons. Silk clusters therefore operate within a highly state-subsidized environment designed to guarantee the supply of the raw material.

38 President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Resolution *On measures for the further development of the silk industry in the republic*, Art. 3, January 12, 2018: https://www.google.com/url?q=https://lex.uz/en/docs/3501058&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1783406164174867&usg=AOvVaw3a9gaEYAxPp1gticfUv_00

39 Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan *On additional measures to develop deep processing in the silk industry*, July 31, 2019: https://lex.uz/docs/4456802#4458053

40 The decree defined the types of economic activities of enterprises that can be considered as silkworm clusters: growing silkworm seedlings, breeding mulberry silkworms, preparing and spinning silk fibers, producing silk fabrics, producing mulberry tea, producing carpets and rugs, and producing ready-made clothing made of silk fabric. *Id.*

41 *“Пиллакор 1 ойда 2 млн сўмдан ортиқ даромад топмоқда”. “Ўзбекипаксаноат” уюшмаси Ўзбекистонда ипакчилик ҳақидаги мақолага раддия билдирди,* Kun.uz, April 4, 2023: https://kun.uz/kr/news/2023/04/04/pillakor-1-oyda-2-mln-somdan-ortiq-daromad-topmoqda-ozbekipaksanoat-uyushmasi-ozbekistonda-ipakchilik-haqidagi-maqolaga-raddiya-bildirdi

42 Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan *On additional measures to support home-based sericulture and further expansion of the feed base for silkworm farming*, June 1, 2023: https://lex.uz/docs/6480002

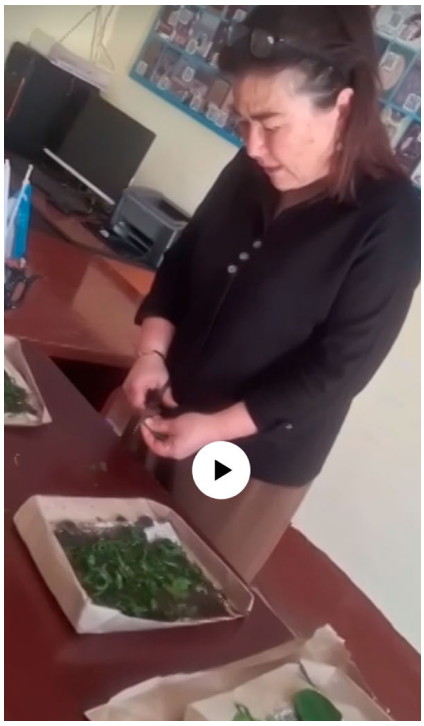
43 President of the Republic of Uzbekistan decision *On additional measures to develop the silk industry based on the new system and to strengthen the feed base*, March, 6, 2026: https://lex.uz/docs/8076435#8079391

5.4 HOKIMIYAT, LOCAL AUTHORITIES

A key role in the management of the silk industry is performed by local authorities, or hokimiyats,[44] at the district or regional level, who have a role in ensuring compliance with "target indicators" in the silk sector, including the fulfilment of cocoon production targets, the planting of mulberry trees, and job creation.[45] Hokimiyats' success in meeting these target indicators will be taken into consideration for their job satisfaction and possible promotions.[46]

In February 2023, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev issued a decree on the further development of the silk industry that linked local governments directly to the organization of cocoon production.[47] Under the decree, district and city hokims were assigned responsibility for supporting silk enterprises and ensuring the successful management of the cocoon growing season.

An assistant to the hokim is a representative of the hokim assigned to a specific mahalla, a neighborhood district. The hokim's assistant is a signatory to the farmers' silk production contracts intended to ensure compliance. This position was established on January 1, 2022. In general, the hokim's assistant is responsible for employment, poverty reduction, entrepreneurship, loans, and subsidies.



Mahalla official in Yakkabog district, Kashkadarya region April 2026. Screenshot from a video posted on the Yangiobod mahalla Telegram channel, showing a mahalla official cutting leaves to feed silkworms. The video was removed after it received media coverage.

5.5 MAHALLA INSTITUTIONS

Mahalla committees, or local neighborhood councils, are traditional social structures that have taken on increasingly formal administrative responsibilities and exercise influence over the local population through management of a range of social and political activities. Legally, the mahalla is not subordinate to the hokim, however, in practice, the hokim has the power to approve the mahalla head[48] and the hokim's assistant works directly in the mahalla and carries out the hokim's instructions.

Traditionally, hokimiyats assign mahallas the responsibility to find cocoon producers although they have no formal responsibility for cocoon production. Monitoring shows that in many districts, to varying degrees, mahalla employees were responsible for distributing and enforcing production quotas on residents by identifying and recruiting silkworm producers from among low-income residents in their district. With production quotas increasingly distributed among farmers and home-based producers, the role of mahallas in enforcing production quotas has diminished. However, in some districts, mahallas are still assigned cocoon production. Because home-based cocoon production is a burdensome process and remuneration is low, mahallas face challenges in recruiting residents to grow silkworms. In such cases, the mahalla employees have to grow the worms themselves in mahalla buildings.

44 Hokims have considerable power and administrative resources in their territories (including law enforcement, tax officials, and government inspectors) and force farmers to grow silkworm cocoons under the threat of various types of sanctions, including termination of land leases.

45 Presidential decree No. PP-87 *On additional measures to develop the sericulture sector on the basis of a new system and strengthen the food base*, March 6, 2026: https://lex.uz/docs/8076435#

46 В Узбекистане чиновников будут проверять по системе KPI, Podrobno.uz, August 14, 2026: https://podrobno.uz/cat/obchestvo/v-uzbekistane-chinovnikov-budut-proveryat-po-sisteme-kpi/

47 Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan *On measures for the further development of the silk industry*, February 24, 2023: https://lex.uz/docs/6390425

48 *The Gap Between Reform and Local Power in Uzbekistan*, Sharifa Madrahimova, The Diplomat, July 16, 2026: https://thediplomat.com/2026/07/the-gap-between-reform-and-local-power-in-uzbekistan/.

A mahalla chairperson from Nishon district in Kashkadarya region told Uzbek Forum that in May 2026 the district administration allocated boxes of silkworm eggs to all mahallas in her district. Her mahalla was allocated five boxes of silkworm eggs with a production target of approximately 270 kilos of cocoons. According to the respondent, local officials instructed all mahalla employees throughout the district to distribute the silkworm eggs among low-income households as a means of increasing their incomes. However, after visiting households throughout the mahalla [neighborhood], she found that none of the families were willing to rear silkworms. As a result, mahalla staff had to rent premises, pay extra to hire workers to rear the silkworms, search for mulberry leaves, and transport branches from distant locations. She said they finally had to purchase additional cocoons with their own funds in order to meet the assigned quota after some of the silkworms died from contaminated leaves collected from farmers' fields that had been treated with pesticides.[49]

Radio Ozodlik documented similar practices during the 2026 cocoon production season.[50] In Yakkabog district in Kashkadarya region, videos showed rooms inside mahalla buildings being cleared and used to rear silkworms because no other suitable facilities were available. Local residents also reported that district officials responsible for family and women's affairs supervised the distribution of silkworm eggs across numerous mahallas. After journalists contacted the district hokim for comment, the videos were removed from the Telegram channels of the respective mahallas.

5.6 FARMERS

Cotton and wheat farmers are assigned cocoon production quotas based on the allocation for the district and the size of the farm. The quotas are allocated from the top down in accordance with the central government's production targets through Presidential Decrees and then enforced through the hokimiyat and local government officials. Farmers are responsible for obtaining and distributing boxes of silkworm eggs to producers, providing mulberry leaves and other necessary inputs, ensuring that cocoon production complies with prescribed technical requirements, arranging delivery to the cluster, and formally employing cocoon producers for the duration of the production season. In many cases, farmers receive little or no compensation for their labor and face the threat of penalties, loss of land, or other forms of retaliation if they fail to meet production targets. Farmers have the responsibility to comply with the production quota and can then determine how to fulfill the quota whether by raising the silkworms alone, requiring farmworkers to raise the cocoons, dividing the quota amongst different producers, or outsourcing to home-based producers.

Separately, a sub-set of home-based producers are informally subcontracted by farmers to fulfill the farmers' production quotas. These home-based producers do not have separate contracts, either with the cluster or with the farmer, and their work is often called upon as part of an existing relationship and payment is sometimes made in goods such as firewood or food.

5.7 HOME-BASED PRODUCERS *(KASANACHI)*

A second group of cocoon producers consists of home-based producers *(kasanchi)* who live in rural districts and contract with silk clusters to produce a certain amount of cocoons in exchange for access to small plots of land, on which they can cultivate crops for their own use.[51] For most of the home-based producers interviewed by Uzbek Forum, the choice to grow cocoons is voluntary with the main incentive being access to land, which permits them to grow produce for their own use. Nonetheless, conditions are exploitative as the state-imposed price paid for their work is so low that they generally do not make a profit and failure to meet production quotas can result in penalties such as land lease termination or a fine.

49 Interview with mahalla chairperson, Nishon district, Kashkadarya region, July 7, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.
50 *"МФЙни бўшат, пилла боқ!" Ипак қурти боқиш кимнинг иши?*, Ozodlik, April 27, 2026: https://www.ozodlik.org/a/33743651.html
51 Presidential Decree No. PP-4567 *On additional measures to develop the forage base for silkworms in the sericulture industry,* January 17, 2020: https://lex.uz/en/docs/4704439#

- 6 -

UZBEKISTAN'S INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS NOT TO USE FORCED LABOR

Uzbekistan has ratified both ILO conventions that explicitly prohibit forced labor: Convention No. 29 (Forced Labour Convention) and Convention No. 105 (Abolition of Forced Labour Convention).[52] Uzbekistan ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1995.[53] Article 6 of the ICESCR includes "the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts." Article 7 guarantees "the enjoyment of just and favorable conditions of work" and "fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value.

Uzbekistan is party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).[54] Article 9 of the ICCPR protects the right of everyone to "liberty and security" and freedom from "arbitrary arrest or detention." The impunity with which local authorities harass, insult, physically assault farmers for failing to fulfill quotas for silkworm cocoons is a violation of this right, as well as subjecting farmers to arbitrary detention or arrest. Article 19 protects the right to "freedom of expression," including the right of farmers and others to voice their concerns publicly, and challenge non-payment of wages, contractual violations or harassment by local authorities without threat of reprisal.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) which Uzbekistan adopted in 2018, provides that states shall respect, protect and fulfill the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas related to life, liberty, and security of person; freedom of thought, opinion, and expression; freedom of association; participation in decision making; information; access to justice; safe and healthy work environment; decent income and livelihood and the means of production.[55] It affirms that farmers "shall not be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention, ...or be held in slavery or servitude"[56] and have the right "individually and/or collectively, in association with others or as a community, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms" with protection by the state from "violence, threat, retaliation or discrimination."[57] States should ensure and monitor non-state actors for compliance with labor protections, prohibit forced or bonded labor, and protect against exploitation.[58] The declaration includes the responsibility of states to "prohibit arbitrary and unlawful forced eviction, the destruction of agricultural areas and the confiscation or expropriation of land."[59]

In 2020, Uzbekistan introduced criminal liability for repeated administrative coercion to work, while the first instance of forcing an adult to perform labor remains an administrative offense. Repeat offenders may face a fine of 100–150 base calculation units, deprivation of certain rights for up to two years, or corrective labor for up to two years.[60]

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52 ILO list of ratifications, Uzbekistan: https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=1000:11200:0::NO:11200:P11200_COUNTRY_ID:103538 (last accessed, July 13, 2026).
53 UN Treaty Body Database, Ratification Status for CESCR - International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?Treaty=CESCR (last accessed July 13, 2026).
54 UN Treaty Body Database, Ratification Status for CCPR - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?Treaty=CCPR (last accessed July 13, 2026).
55 United States Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas: resolution / adopted by the UN General Assembly at the 73rd Session 2018-2019, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1661560?ln=en&v=pdf (accessed July 13 10, 2026)
56 *Id.* Art. 6
57 *Id.* Art. 8.
58 *Id.* Art. 13.
59 *Id.* Art. 17.
60 *За повторное принуждение к труду вводится уголовная ответственность,* Gazeta.uz, January 23, 2020: https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2020/01/23/labour/

6.I UNDERSTANDING STATE-IMPOSED FORCED LABOR

Forced labor is defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered themself voluntarily" and identifies several indicators that signal a person could be at risk of forced labor.[61] The ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105) prohibits states to use any form of forced or compulsory labor for purposes of economic development, among other reasons.[62] In Uzbekistan, where the government continues to maintain centralized and coercive control over agriculture and farmers, an analysis of the conditions in which farmers produce silkworm cocoons requires an examination of the role of the state and how it impacts farmers' (in)ability to refuse participation in cocoon production. The following chapter documents structural indicators of coercion and involuntariness which create an environment enabling the state to secure a steady, cheap supply of silkworm cocoons for the benefit of private silk clusters. The analysis concludes that silk in Uzbekistan is produced through state-imposed forced labor of cotton and wheat farmers for whom production of silkworm cocoons is unprofitable and who are unable to challenge mandatory quotas imposed on them by the state.

As the ILO recognized, "state-imposed forced labor operates through a pervasively coercive wider social context marked by a general lack of civic freedoms and a state apparatus that generates powerful coercive pressures."[63] This form of forced labor "creates an environment that renders its victims much less likely to speak freely", where "non-cooperation entails a systemic risk that is often more implicit than overt."[64]

The ILO has identified a set of mechanisms that are uniquely available to the state to create conditions of forced labor by utilizing "the State's distinctive apparatus for exacting work under the menace of a penalty."[65] The Uzbek government uses elements of the following mechanisms to impose forced labor on farmers in the silk sector: administrative obligations (quotas), criminal sanctions or threats thereof, financial penalties or threats thereof, withdrawal or denial of state services or property or threats thereof, psychological pressure by State authorities, and surveillance and social monitoring.

61 ILO Indicators of Forced Labor, Revised 2025 Edition: https://www.ilo.org/publications/ilo-indicators-forced-labour-1
62 ILO C105, Art 1(b).
63 *Hard to see, harder to count: Handbook on forced labour surveys,* (third edition), 2024, p.149, International Labour Organization: https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_norm/%40ipec/documents/publication/wcms_914768.pdf
64 *Id.* pp. 149-150.
65 *Identification of State-imposed forced labour: guidance for practitioners*, ILO, (p. 16-17), May 2026: https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2026-08/Identificationpercent20ofpercent20state-imposedpercent20forcedpercent20labour.pdf.

- 7 -

FORCED LABOR OF COTTON AND GRAIN FARMERS TO PRODUCE SILKWORM COCOONS

According to a Presidential decision of March 6, 2026, approximately 65percent of the annual cocoon production of silkworm cocoons was assigned to cotton and wheat farmers.[66] Contracts for the production of silkworm cocoons are imposed on farmers without agreement or negotiation of the amount to be produced or price to be paid under threat of penalty from officials, including hokimiyats, the prosecutor offices, local departments of Agriculture, water users associations, as well as representatives of Agropilla. The threats and penalties can include termination of the farmer's land lease agreement for cotton/wheat, problems with the authorities and, in some cases, has resulted in physical violence against farmers by officials when farmers have refused to comply.[67]

The structural coercion of farmers comes through the ranges of threats and penalties and the way that the state leverages its surveillance and coercive apparatus to ensure silk production. In particular, the way the state weaponizes land tenure and access to water for cotton and wheat farmers, which can have direct and significant impacts on farmers' incomes and livelihoods, creates and abuses vulnerabilities for farmers to force participation in silk production.[68] The structural involuntariness comes through the inherent undesirability of silk production given the costs and expenses coupled with low remuneration, procedurally mandated participation through state-set quotas imposed through the government hierarchy and inability of farmers to know or negotiate any contractual terms, and pervasive oversight.[69] In particular, the ILO has identified "compulsory production quotas and procurement systems" as a violation of C29 Art. 2(1) particularly "where agricultural plans mandate cultivation of specific crops at sub-market procurement prices with no genuine freedom to choose alternative activities or buyers."[70]

On May 25, 2025, traffic police officers came to my home with a truck and confiscated my car without presenting any documents. The police officers said they had received an order from the district hokim to confiscate the car because I had not produced silkworm cocoons.

Growing silkworm cocoons is compulsory for all farmers, even though there is no legal basis for it. At the beginning of the year, I was forced to sign a contract to grow 60 kg of cocoons, which I gave to the villagers to cultivate. The cocoon growing season coincides with the busiest period of cotton cultivation, so farmers often ask the residents of the mahalla to grow the cocoons instead. I grew cocoons last year and the year before, but I never received payment from the cluster, so I told the worker who grows the cocoons that if the silk cluster does not pay the debts for previous years, then the worker can sell the cocoons at his discretion. That is why I did not hand over the cocoons to the cluster, which is a systematic debtor. My confiscated car was purchased on a credit lease. I had already paid 50 million UZS ($4,000 US) and had to pay off the loan in installments every month. After the car was confiscated, I accumulated debts for the last three months, and now the leasing company is threatening to put the car up for auction. The car was my 'arms and legs'; I used it to transport workers. My field is far away, and now I have to walk there ►

66 President of the Republic of Uzbekistan decision *On additional measures to develop the sericulture sector on the basis of a new system and strengthen the food base*, March 6, 2026: https://lex.uz/docs/8076435#8079454

67 *Farmer Beaten by Police for Refusing to Fulfill Silkworm Cocoon Quota*, Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, July 7, 2025: https://www.uzbekforum.org/farmer-beaten-by-police-for-refusing-to-fulfill-silkworm-cocoon-quota/

68 *Architecture of Coercion*, Adrian Zenz (p. 26, Table 9), May 6, 2026: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322705.2026.2661024#abstract

69 *Id.*

70 *Identification of State-imposed forced labour: guidance for practitioners* (p. 20), ILO, May 2026: https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2026-08/Identificationpercent20ofpercent20state-imposedpercent20forcedpercent20labour.pdf.



Shavkat Kudratov's car being confiscated by police , Shahrisabz district , Kashkadarya region , May 2025 . © Shavkat Kudratov .

every day. Traffic police officers came to my house without any legal basis and took my car, insulting me and saying that I could complain to anyone I wanted. How should such actions by police officers be interpreted?

Farmer Shavkat Kudratov, Shakhrisabz district of Kashkadarya region.[71]

In early 2026, the police initiated administrative proceedings against Kudratov over his social media posts and submitted the case to court. On February 10, 2026, the Shakhrisabz District Court found Kudratov guilty of violating Article 201 of Uzbekistan's Administrative Code, which concerns "violations of the procedures for organizing or holding meetings, rallies, street processions, or demonstrations", and imposed a fine of 6,180,000 UZS ($520 US).

According to the court's ruling, between June and November 2025, Kudratov posted messages in the Telegram group Respublika Fermerlari (Farmers of the Republic) that called on farmers to unite and hold a demonstration. These included: "We are cowards; we cannot unite"; "We need to hire a bus, go to the hokim's office with bloggers, and publicly shame him"; "If they come demanding that you pick cotton, be ready with a response"; and "Go to the cluster and make a scene."

In his testimony before the court, Kudratov said that he had expressed his frustration in the Telegram group because he was tired of persistent payment delays by the cluster. He maintained that his posts contained no calls for a demonstration and asked the court to overturn the ruling because his actions did not constitute an administrative offense.

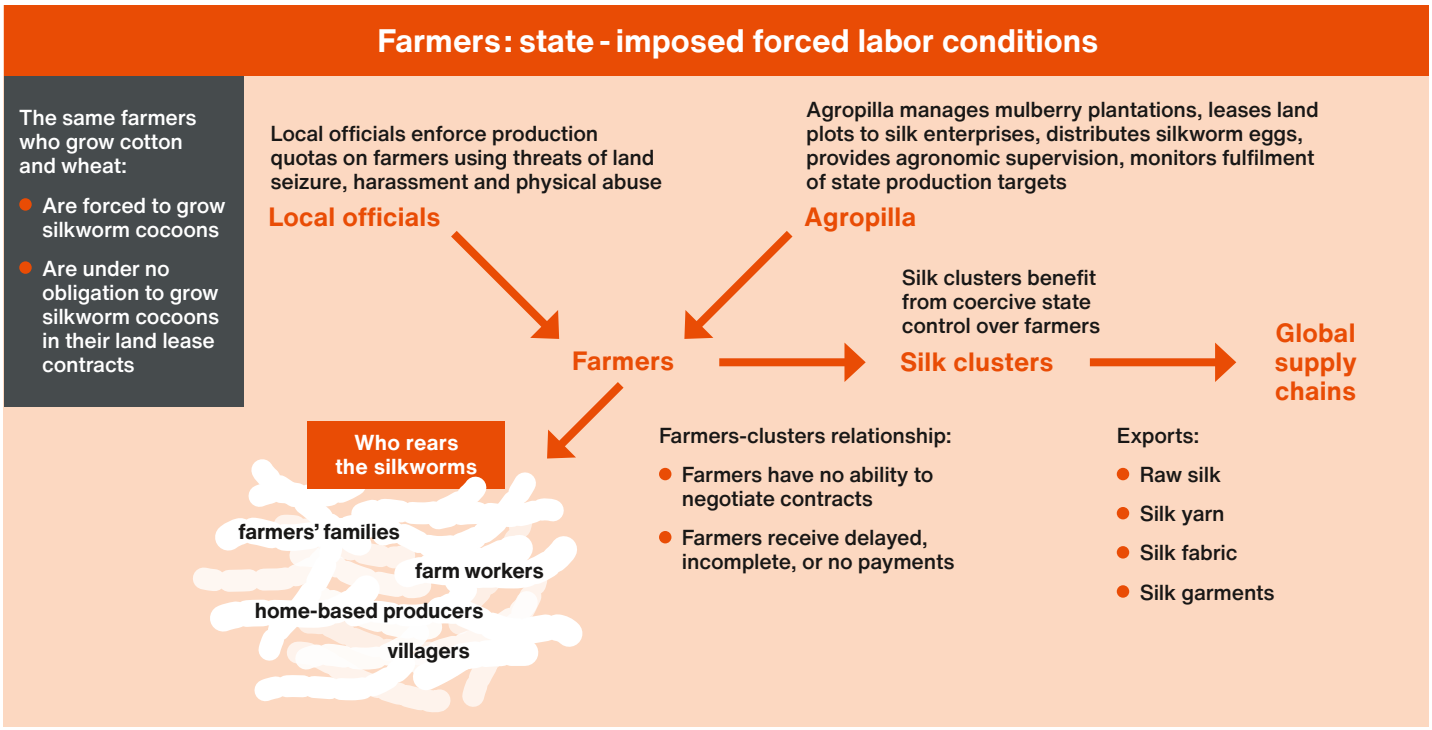
On February 24, the Kashkadarya Regional Appeals Court upheld the ruling.

71 Interview on file with Uzbek Forum.

7.I STRUCTURAL COERCION: THREAT OF PENALTY AND THE VULNERABILITY OF FARMERS

Structural coercion refers to the ways in which the state agencies and apparatus "operationalizes the 'menace of penalty' (C29) by mobilizing state power to create a pervasive and credible risk of retribution for noncompliance. It encompasses the spectrum of sanctions (legal, administrative, extrajudicial, economic), the apparatus of surveillance and discipline that makes these threats effective, and the systematic engineering and exploitation of vulnerabilities".[72] Relevant factors for structural coercion include: a pervasive coercive environment, a wide range of penalties, abuse of vulnerability, legally sanctioned compulsion, and threat credibility.[73]

All agricultural land in Uzbekistan is state-owned, and farmers can conclude a long-term lease agreement for agricultural production.[74] Cotton and wheat are two strategic crops for the government which allocates specific plots of land for growing their cultivation. Cotton and wheat farmers–who are the same farmers forced to produce silkworm cocoons–are in a very vulnerable position. The state routinely uses coercion, including threats of land seizure, harassment and physical abuse, and arbitrary detention, to enforce state-set production quotas for these crops.[75] Farmers have very limited power to negotiate prices or choose to which cluster they sell their cotton or wheat and are constantly at risk of losing their livelihoods due to delayed or no payments by the clusters.[76] These conditions together contribute to a "systemic threat architecture"[77] that the Uzbek government uses to ensure compliance of farmers, including to produce silkworm cocoons. The threats used by the state against farmers to secure silk production, including seizure of land to grow the other crops which would mean taking away farmers' sole source of income, are effective. Farmers perceive these threats as credible, given their

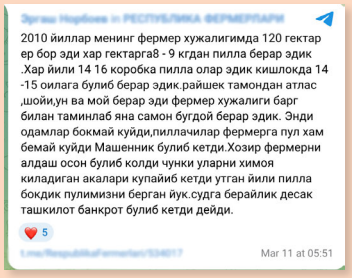


72 *Architecture of Coercion*, Adrian Zenz, (p.4), May 6, 2026: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322705.2026.2661024#abstract
73 *Id.* pp. 19-20.
74 Land Code of Uzbekistan, Art. 16, July 1, 1998: https://lex.uz/docs/152653; Law on Farming, Art. 11, October 15, 2004: https://lex.uz/docs/275195
75 *"Farmers Have No Freedom": Abuse and Exploitation of Cotton and Wheat Farmers in Uzbekistan*, Uzbek Forum for Human Rights and Human Rights Watch, February 17, 2026: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/02/uzbekistan0226web.pdf
76 Idem
77 *Architecture of Coercion,* (p 19.), Adrian Zenz, May 6, 2026: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322705.2026.2661024#abstract

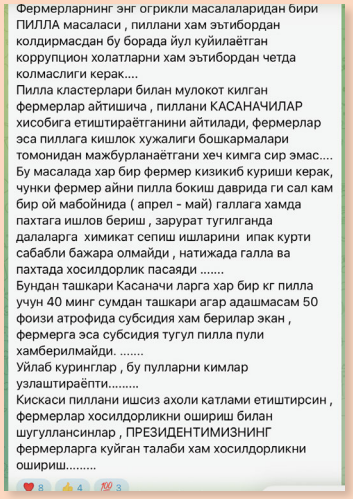
inability to operate independently or have control over their working conditions and the government's demonstrated willingness to impose sanctions, including cases in which farmers were forced to "voluntarily" relinquish all or parts of their land as punishment for failure to meet their production quotas or as part of an "optimization" process whereby land is taken from farmers and redistributed to clusters.[78]

The structural coercion of farmers comes through the ranges of threats and penalties and the way that the state leverages its surveillance and coercive apparatus to ensure silk production. In particular, the way the state leverages land tenure and access to water for cotton and wheat farmers creates and abuses vulnerabilities for farmers to force participation in silk production.[79]

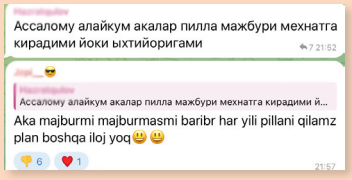
Posts by farmers on the "Respublika Fermerlari" Telegram channel



Around 2010, my farm had 120 hectares of land, and we delivered 8-9 kilograms of cocoons per hectare. Every year, we took 14-16 boxes of silkworm eggs and distributed them among 14-15 village households to raise the silkworms. Back then, the district silk enterprise provided those households with atlas and other silk fabrics, flour and cooking oil. Our farm supplied them with mulberry leaves, as well as straw and wheat. Now people have stopped raising silkworms, and the silk enterprises have stopped paying farmers. They have become swindlers. It has become easy to cheat farmers because those enterprises have more and more powerful people protecting them. We raised silkworms last year, but they still have not paid us. When we say we will take them to court, they tell us the silk cluster has gone bankrupt.
March 11, 2026

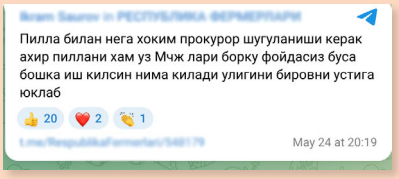


One of the most painful issues for farmers is silkworm rearing. This issue must receive attention, and the corruption taking place in this sector must also be addressed. According to farmers who have spoken to the silk clusters, the clusters say that their cocoons are produced by home-based workers. Yet it is no secret that farmers are being forced into silkworm rearing by the agricultural departments.
Every farmer should look into this issue. During the silkworm-rearing season, for almost a month in April and May, farmers cannot tend their grain and cotton crops or spray their fields with chemicals when necessary because of the silkworms. As a result, grain and cotton yields fall. In addition to receiving 40,000 soums for each kilogram of cocoons, home-based workers apparently receive a subsidy of around 50 percent, if I am not mistaken. Farmers, meanwhile, do not even receive payment for their cocoons, let alone a subsidy. Think about it: who is pocketing this money? In short, let unemployed people raise silkworms, and let farmers concentrate on increasing their crop yields. Increasing yields is also what our PRESIDENT has asked farmers to do.
October 28, 2026

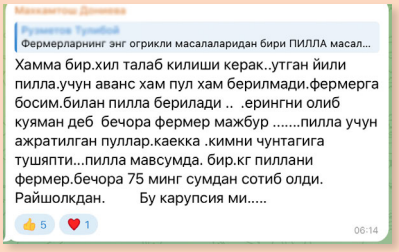


Brothers, is cocoon [production] considered forced labor or is it voluntary?

(In response) Bro, whether it's mandatory or not, we have to submit a quota every year; there's no other way.



Why are district hokims and prosecutors getting involved in silkworm rearing issues instead of doing their own jobs? There is an enterprise responsible for silk production. If these companies cannot make it profitable or manage the work, they should find another line of business. Why dump their burden on someone else?
May 24, 2026



We all need to come together and demand what we are owed. Last year, we received neither an advance nor payment for the cocoons. Farmers are pressured into taking on silkworm rearing. They threaten, "We will take your land away," so the poor farmer has no choice. Where is the money allocated for silk production going? Whose pockets is it ending up in? During the season, the poor farmer had to buy cocoons from the district silk enterprise for 75,000 soums per kilogram. Isn't this corruption?
October 28, 2026

78 See chapters Unlawful Land Seizure, Threats of Land Seizure, and Forced "Voluntary" Land Seizure in *"Farmers Have No Freedom": Abuse and Exploitation of Cotton and Wheat Farmers in Uzbekistan*, Uzbek Forum for Human Rights and Human Rights Watch, February 17, 2026: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/02/uzbekistan0226web.pdf; and *A False Sense of Legality: Compulsory Property Seizure, Land Grabbing and Forced Eviction in Uzbekistan*, Centre for Public Administration, University of Ulster et al, December 10, 2024: https://www.uzbekforum.org/civil-society-report-exposes-systematic-forced-evictions-and-land-grabbing-in-uzbekistans-development-drive/

79 *Architecture of Coercion*, Adrian Zenz, (p. 26, Table 9), May 6, 2026: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322705.2026.2661024#abstract

7.1.1 Threat of Land Seizure or Denial of Water, Machinery, or Other Agricultural Inputs

In a system where farmers are in practice subservient to the state, government officials have outsized power over farmers' means of income and farmers are under constant existential threat.[80] Insecure land tenure and limited land use rights expose farmers to abuse of power by officials which can result in the threat or reality of seizure of part of their land or arbitrary termination of their land lease and loss of livelihood.[81]

Officials have various means of exerting pressure on farmers to produce silkworm cocoons such as re-measuring land, confiscating surplus grain harvests, withholding crucial machinery, delaying payments of bank loans, as well as obstructing access to irrigation water. For example, in 2026 in Kashkadarya (Kasbi district), five farmers reported to an Uzbek Forum monitor they had not signed silk production contracts in February and therefore had not grown cocoons. In May, as punishment, the district hokim ordered that water not be supplied to these farmers' cotton fields until they signed a silk production contract. A lack of water to irrigate the cotton crop would have impacted the cotton yield significantly, further worsening the farmers' financial situation. The farmers then "accepted" to sign the contracts and produce cocoons.

7.1.2 Harassment and Intimidation including Threat of Economic Penalties and Physical Violence

State officials play an active role in surveilling, harassing and exerting psychological pressure as a reminder of the state's authority in the production of silk. The hokimiyats and law enforcement agencies - such as the prosecutor's office and the police (acting on the hokim's orders) are involved in exerting administrative, physical, and psychological pressure on farmers.

Numerous accounts from farmers indicate a recurring practice of using administrative and law enforcement to enforce silkworm cocoon production quotas. In the cases described, farmers reported that local authorities compelled them to sign contracts and meet quotas through threats of inspections, financial penalties, legal action, and loss of their land.

In an appeal dated April 29, 2024, farmers in Kamashi district, Kashkadarya region, reported being forced to produce silkworm cocoons despite specializing in cotton and wheat cultivation. According to the farmers, the district hokim, district prosecutor, and head of the district police department were involved in this coercion.[82]

Farmers in Kattakurgan district, Samarkand region, reported similar pressure in April 2024. They wrote that, on the district hokim's orders, the head of the district police department summoned farmers who had not collected silkworm eggs to the police station and pressured them to raise silkworms.[83]

In June 2025, farmers in Akdarya district, Samarkand region, reported daily meetings and demands to fulfil cocoon production quotas. In an audio message published by local media, Obod Shodmonov, the deputy district hokim responsible for agriculture, instructed the Quarantine Inspection to inspect farms that had failed to meet their quotas and demanded that the farmers pay tax at three times the normal rate. In another message, he ordered farmers who had not fulfilled their quotas to report to the cocoon processing facility that evening.[84]

Most farmers said that refusing to grow cocoons is fraught with "problems with the hokimiyat". The threat of reprisal and the loss of land through land lease termination can be carried out by the authorities under any pretext. Some farmers also spoke of a possible "loss of benefits", which are traditionally disbursed by mahallas (neighborhood committees) which also participate in the organization of cocoon production.

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80 *"Farmers Have No Freedom": Abuse and Exploitation of Cotton and Wheat Farmers in Uzbekistan*, Human Rights Watch/Uzbek Forum, February 17, 2026: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/02/uzbekistan0226web.pdf

81 *Khorezm Farmer Appeals Confiscation of 129 Hectares Amid Continuing Concerns Over Land Rights*, Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, June 9, 2026: https://www.uzbekforum.org/khorezm-farmer-appeals-confiscation-of-129-hectares-amid-continuing-concerns-over-land-rights/; Id., pp. 40-45.

82 Sizdan Telegram channel, April 29, 2024: https://t.me/sizdantelegram/46070

83 Sizdan Telegram channel, April 30, 2024: https://t.me/sizdantelegram/46080

84 Effect.uz YouTube channel, June 4, 2025: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIKB4ty6icY

According to one farmer, “If you don’t take them [silkworm eggs], they’ll keep calling and calling until you hand over a few boxes. If you don’t take them, it’s as if you’re opposing state policy.”[85]

One farmer from Kashkadarya region told monitors:

> **“I got a call from the hokimiyat telling me to go pick up the larvae. Whether you want to grow cocoons or not, you have a quota, you have to meet it. If I don’t meet the quota, the local police officer will come to my house every day, demanding that I ‘meet’ the quota. The officer doesn’t want this either; he’s also sent by the district administration to the farmers, saying it’s the governor’s [hokim’s] request, so it must be done..... They won’t leave you alone until you hand over those damn cocoons.”**[86]



Farmer Sirojiddin Qurbonov reported that police beat and handcuffed him for refusing to produce silkworm cocoons . He said he was taken to the hokimiyat where he was forced to sign a contract with a silk cluster . Kamashi district , Kashkadarya region , May 2025 . © Ozodlik .

The arbitrary abuse of power by local officials can also extend to the use of violence. In a particularly brutal case, a farmer in Kamashi district in Kashkadarya region was handcuffed and beaten by police officers for refusing to comply with the order to fulfill his silkworm cocoon quota.[87]

In another documented case, the deputy hokim of Dekhanabad pressured a farmer into paying a bribe to release him from the obligation to fulfill quotas for silkworms, although the scope of the research for this report did not include investigating specific cases or other allegations of bribery.[88]

85 Interview with farmer, Yakkabog district, Kashkadarya region, May 15, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.
86 Interview with farmer, Kasbi district, Kashkadarya region, April 19, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.
87 *Farmer Beaten by Police for Refusing to Fulfill Silkworm Cocoon Quota*, Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, July 7, 2025: https://www.uzbekforum.org/farmer-beaten-by-police-for-refusing-to-fulfill-silkworm-cocoon-quota/
88 *Деҳқонобод тумани ҳокими ўринбосари қамоққа олинди*, Kun.uz, June 13, 2025: https://kun.uz/kr/news/2025/06/13/dehqonobod-tumani-hokimi-orinbosari-qamoqqa-olindi

7.1.3 The Exceptions Prove the Rule

State-imposed forced labor is a structural phenomenon such that the few farmers in unique situations where they are able to challenge the imposition of the unwanted labor of silk production help emphasize the fact that the ability to escape this obligation is rare. Uzbek Forum interviewed a few farmers who stated that they refused to produce cocoons on the grounds that they are under no legal obligation to do so. Despite threats and pressure from district authorities, they continue to assert their rights, while recognising that such resistance may entail negative consequences. Nonetheless, these farmers often said they were the only ones in their district with the unique ability to challenge the obligation of silk production based on individual characteristics.

In one case, a farmer explained that his principled refusal to engage in cocoon production was one of the factors that led to a confrontation with local authorities, who subsequently attempted to terminate his land lease. The farmer ultimately succeeded in defending his rights to the land in economic court. However, only a small number of farmers appear willing to engage in open confrontation with the authorities.[89]

Another farmer from the Andijan region said that, starting in 2025, he refused to sign a contract to produce silkworm cocoons because this obligation is not provided for in his land lease agreement. He emphasized that he can afford to refuse because "the local authorities have nothing against me" and that he complies with crop allocation requirements, grows only cotton and grain, has no tax debts and is not concerned about inspections for irregular use of his land. However, he pointed out that there are not many farmers in a position to do the same.[90]

7.2 STRUCTURAL INVOLUNTARINESS: STATE-IMPOSED QUOTAS AND PRICES, BLANK CONTRACTS, EXTORTION, AND INABILITY TO CHALLENGE TERMS

Structural involuntariness looks at the way the state forces participation by eliminating alternatives or "how the state systematically dismantles the substantive freedoms of targeted populations. It focuses on the impossibility of refusal, examining how the state mandates participation, controls mobility, and eliminates viable livelihood alternatives."[91] Structural involuntariness factors include: socio-political unacceptability or inherent undesirability of the work, elimination of alternatives, abuse of vulnerability to eliminate alternatives, and procedurally mandated participation.[92]

The structural involuntariness comes through procedurally mandated participation through state-set quotas imposed through the government hierarchy, the inherent undesirability of silk production given the costs and expenses coupled with low remuneration, and inability of farmers to know or negotiate any contractual terms, as well as pervasive oversight.[93] Indicators of involuntariness are also tied to the lack of viable alternatives, the inability to escape, and the lack of access to judicial recourse.[94] Another important element that contributes to involuntariness is the inability to challenge the terms and conditions imposed by the state. In Uzbekistan, farmers have very limited power to negotiate prices, choose which cluster they sell to, or enforce their contracts.[95] In several cases, farmers attempted to exercise their right to freedom of association and join together into cooperatives to process and sell their crops on the domestic commodity exchange in Uzbekistan, as an alternative to growing products for clusters. However, documented cases show that local authorities interfered with farmers' attempt to organize cooperatives, including authorities seeking legal action to shut cooperatives down.[96] Farmers are also legally obligated to be dues-paying members of the state-aligned Farmers' Council, which the

89 Interview with farmer, Kushkupir district, Khorezm region, June 17, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.
90 Interview with farmer, Pakhtaobod district, Andijan region, June 12, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.
91 *Architecture of Coercion,* (p 4.), Adrian Zenz, May 6, 2026: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322705.2026.2661024#abstract
92 *Id.* 21.
93 *See id.* p. 26, Table 9.
94 *Id.*
95 *"Farmers Have No Freedom": Abuse and Exploitation of Cotton and Wheat Farmers in Uzbekistan*, Human Rights Watch and Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, February 17, 2026: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/02/uzbekistan0226web.pdf
96 *Id.* pp 59-80.

Uzbek government established in 2012. Interviews with farmers found that the Council did not help support farmers raising their collective issues.[97]

Farmers' inability to challenge their conditions is further exacerbated by a repressive environment where restrictions on fundamental freedoms and human rights persist. Despite what appeared to be an opening for human rights activism and freedom of expression in the aftermath of the elimination of systemic forced labor of cotton pickers in 2021, the environment for freedoms of expression and associations has worsened in recent years. While the situation varies by region and context, in general, intimidation and pressure on independent labor rights monitors, as well as attacks on human rights activists, bloggers, and other independent voices as they report on rights violations and corruption—in particular, if directly engaging with international human and labor rights organizations—have escalated.[98] These cases create a chilling effect on farmers and signal that challenging conditions imposed on them by the state is not only futile, but it can be met with harsh retaliation.

7.2.1 Imposition of Production Quotas

The imposition of quotas, mandatory sale of silk only to state designated buyers, and the imposition of procurement prices that do not accurately reflect production costs and make it unprofitable for farmers to grow silkworm cocoons are all indicators of structural involuntariness.[99]

Uzbekistan's central government imposes silkworm cocoon production targets allocated to all districts of the country, based on the size of their farms. These district quotas are then allocated to farmers, home-based producers, and mahallas in line with the characteristics of the districts and regions. These quotas have steadily risen over the years as the government aims to increase its production targets. For example, according to the Fergana Region Sericulture Development Program for 2026, local authorities plan to distribute 46,500 boxes of silkworms, of which 13,100 are allocated to farmers and 33,400 to home-based cocoon producers.[100] Together, these producers are expected to generate approximately 2,800 tons of cocoons. In addition, producers are expected to receive 41.7 billion UZS (approximately $3.5 million US) in government subsidies.

According to another document, signed by the head of Agropilla in Khorezm region, in 2024 farmers were assigned 58percent of the region's cocoon production quota.

Farmers are forced to sign a contract at the beginning of the year to produce a certain amount of cocoons, calculated according to the size of the farm and based on state-set production quotas that are allocated throughout all districts. A farmer from Yangibazar district in Khorezm region told monitors:

> **"The district hokimiyats handle this; they have deputies for agriculture. They set a quota of 10 kilos of cocoons per hectare. Previously it was 3 kilos per hectare; year after year they raise the quota without any justification. You probably see for yourself that laws have recently been passed to take land away from farmers for various reasons. To avoid conflict with the authorities, we were forced to sign a contract and must deliver 900 kilos of cocoons—that's for 90 hectares of land. But it's impossible to grow that many cocoons. We agreed, however, because they could take our land away under various pretexts. For farmers who grow cotton and grain, silkworm cocoons are an additional burden."[101]**

97 Presidential Decree *On additional measures for the implementation of a modern organizational system and financial support for the activities of owners of household lands and dekhkan farms*, February 14, 2025: https://lex.uz/ru/docs/7391806; *Farmers Have No Freedom": Abuse and Exploitation of Cotton and Wheat Farmers in Uzbekistan*, (pp. 69-71), Human Rights Watch and Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, February 17, 2026: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/02/uzbekistan0226web.pdf

98 *World Report 2026: Uzbekistan*, Human Rights Watch: https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/uzbekistan; *World Report 2025: Uzbekistan*, Human Rights Watch, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/uzbekistan.

99 *Architecture of Coercion*, Adrian Zenz, (p. 26, Table 9), May 6, 2026: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322705.2026.2661024#abstract

100 Document on file with Uzbek Forum.

101 Interview with farmer, Yangibazar district, Khorezm region, May 10, 2025. On file with Uzbek Forum.

Notably, these quotas do not take into consideration the availability of adequate facilities, supply of mulberry leaves or an adequate workforce with the necessary skill and availability to dedicate the time needed to produce the cocoons over a period which usually lasts 25 - 28 days. A farmer in Kamashi district who had been assigned a quota of 240 kilos of cocoons said, "I don't have any mulberry trees; I have to look for them everywhere. We haven't planted any mulberry trees lately because there's no water. In Kamashi, there are very few mulberry trees."[102]

7.2.2 State-set Pricing

While the Uzbek government has adopted some decrees that, if effectively implemented, would allow farmers to refuse cocoon production and would ensure a steady increase in procurement prices, the state continues to unilaterally impose unreasonably high quotas and set procurement prices without any consultation with producers. Farmers and other cocoon producers have no influence over the purchase price of cocoons as they are only verbally informed of a purchase price that had been unilaterally determined. Farmers told Uzbek Forum monitors that the contracts they signed contained no prices for the cocoons they are expected to produce and assumed that the price would be set "from above".

In February 2024, the government announced a gradual transition to market-based pricing in Uzbekistan's silk sector.[103] As an initial step, the state-set purchase price of cocoons was increased by 25 percent, cocoon producers became eligible for subsidies and were exempted from personal income tax in order to strengthen their financial incentives.

In the second stage, beginning in 2025, the state was expected to discontinue the practice of setting cocoon prices, assigning districts to specific silk clusters, and requiring farmers and home-based producers to sell their cocoons exclusively to designated clusters. Instead, cocoons would be sold either under contracts negotiated freely between producers and buyers or through commodity exchanges, allowing prices to be determined by market forces rather than administrative regulation. The reforms were presented as part of a broader effort to modernize cocoon production based on the experience of China and Vietnam and to improve the economic viability of sericulture.

In its official statement dated September 24, 2026, Uzbekipaksanoat stated that the average recommended procurement price for live cocoons for the 2026 season was 40,000 UZS per kilo.[104] According to official estimates, a producer raising a single box of silkworms and delivering 60–65 kilos of cocoons can earn between 6.5 and 7 million UZS (approximately $540 US - $580 US) during a production cycle.[105]

However, according to farmers, even low-income households are unwilling to rear silkworms because the income does not compensate for the month of almost continuous labor required from several family members: "A family rearing two boxes of silkworms would earn around five million Uzbek soums (approximately $400 US), whereas the same five family members could earn approximately 15 million soums (approximately $1,240 US) over the same period by working as daily laborers".[106] The vast majority of the farmers interviewed by Uzbek Forum do not consider the price set for cocoons to be fair and said that cocoon production was not profitable for them.

In many cases, farmers complained that they do not get paid on time for cocoons and some said that they had not been paid in years. In numerous interviews, farmers told monitors that payments were made the following year, when boxes of caterpillars were distributed for the next production season. For example, one farmer said:

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102 Interview with farmer, Kamashi district, Kashkadarya region, May 15, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.
103 Official Telegram channel of the President's Press Secretary: https://t.me/Press_Secretary_Uz/3831 (last accessed, June 22, 2026).
104 Statement of Uzbekipaksanoat, September 24, 2026: https://uzipaksanoat.uz/news/zbekipaksanoat-uiusmasining-rasmii-munosabati
105 Statement of the Fergana Regional Hokimiyat, May 12, 2026: https://gov.uz/oz/ferghana/news/view/164502?utm
106 Interview to Radio Ozodlik, farmer Adhamjon Mamajonov from Namangan region.

> **"I only recently, in April [2026], received payment for the cocoons I turned in last year. They paid me about 2.5 million UZS (approximately $210 US) for 110 kg; the payment for cocoons is very low. They deduct for seeds but never report how much they deduct. And I probably spent more than that on these cocoons."**[107]

7.2.3 Blank Contracts

The state takes advantage of farmers' vulnerability by having them sign blank contracts which leaves them without the basic knowledge of the requirements nor any way to challenge the conditions. Dozens of farmers told Uzbek Forum that they are usually summoned to a meeting at the hokimiyat where the hokim orders them to sign a contract with a representative of a silk enterprise to produce cocoons. Most farmers and cocoon producers interviewed by Uzbek Forum reported that they did not have copies of their signed contracts, did not know the name of the silk enterprise they were producing for, and did not know the price they would be paid.

The vast majority of farmers interviewed by Uzbek Forum said that they had signed a blank contract that contained only a production quota and then had to give both copies of the contract to the cluster or an Agropilla representative for "registration" with the hokimiyat.

> **"I have a land lease agreement for growing cotton and wheat, but not for cocoons. But every year they force me to sign a contract for growing cocoons. I sign and stamp an empty contract, which does not specify the price. I am only told the number of kilos of cocoons I have to hand over. The contract is drawn up with the district cluster by order of the hokimiyat. They do not give me a copy of the contract. I do not refuse because I am afraid. ... I have drawn up a contract for 80 kilos, which will be more than one box of eggs. I don't have mulberry trees. We collect mulberry leaves in the village, beg from neighbors and those who have mulberry trees."**[108]

Analysis of 2026 contracts for farmers and other producers reviewed by Uzbek Forum found that several key provisions had been left blank, including the quantity of silkworm eggs to be supplied, the amount of advance payments, the total contract value, the deadline for final payment, as well as the schedules for the delivery of silkworms and cocoons. Despite the absence of these essential terms, the contract nevertheless imposes significant obligations on producers and provides for financial penalties in the event of non-compliance.

The contracts establish financial liability for failure to meet production obligations. In case of the failure to deliver the required quantity of cocoons, a farmer is required to pay a penalty equal to 25 percent of the value of the undelivered production, in addition to compensating the cluster for losses and lost profits. Additional penalties apply for late delivery. On paper, the cluster bears similar liability for refusing to accept cocoons or delaying payments. However, producers without contracts were unaware of production deadlines, penalties for failing to meet them, and other contractual obligations, limiting their ability to understand and defend their rights in disputes with clusters or local authorities, such as late or non-payment. Moreover, according to some farmers, the price for growing cocoons is so negligible it is not worth the effort of trying to raise a complaint with the authorities. Nonetheless, farmers are often forced to sign contracts with the same cluster year after year. A farmer from Kamashi district told Uzbek Forum monitors:

> **"I didn't sign a contract, I don't know the price—probably 24,000 per kilo—but they only pay after a year. But I didn't receive payment for last year."**[109]

107 Interview with farmer Yakkabog district, Kashkadarya region, June 4, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.
108 Interview with a farmer in Ellikalla district, Karakalpakstan, April 2, 2024. On file with Uzbek Forum.
109 Interview with farmer, Kamashi district, Kashkadarya region, May 15, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.

Contracts must be registered with the district agriculture department and signed with the participation of the hokim's assistant who certifies that the cocoon producer has suitable conditions for silkworm rearing. Disputes are subject to review by economic courts, while exemptions from liability on force majeure grounds require approval from special commissions established under local administrations. However, filing complaints with economic courts is an expensive and time-consuming process for farmers and it provides no guarantee of effective remedy. In several cases where farmers had sued clusters in economic courts to compel clusters to pay them the money they owed for cotton and wheat, while some courts have ruled in farmers' favor, clusters have not abided by the court rulings.[110]

7.2.4 Expenses and Hidden Costs

In practice, cocoon producers receive less than the established price because costs are deducted from the total payment for cocoons. All cocoon producers, farmers and home-based producers alike, are required to bear the costs for the silkworm eggs, the equipment necessary for cocoon production as well as costs associated with rearing facilities such as electricity, heating, and the transportation of mulberry leaves for feeding and cocoons to collection points. Contracts usually do not state the amount of these costs so that producers have to accept the deductions the cluster makes after they have produced and delivered the cocoons. This provides clusters with an opportunity to impose arbitrary deductions, with farmers carrying the burden to challenge this through expensive proceedings in economic courts.

Among the added costs of cocoon production is the availability of mulberry leaves. Some farmers explained that their own mulberry trees were inappropriate for feed as they had been sprayed with pesticides and would poison the silkworms, forcing them to source from elsewhere.

In addition, farmers have to pay for the cutting and transportation of mulberry branches and fuel for heating the premises where the cocoons are being cultivated. Farmers are forced to divert their time, workers, and material resources away from field work for their main activities, usually cotton and wheat growing. The lack of basic resources, including mulberry leaves, sufficient irrigation and suitable facilities for farmers to produce cocoons are major contributing factors to the lack of profitability of cocoon production.

110 *"Farmers Have No Freedom": Abuse and Exploitation of Cotton and Wheat Farmers in Uzbekistan*, Human Rights Watch and Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, February 17, 2026: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/02/uzbekistan0226web.pdf

- 8 -

STRUCTURAL EXPLOITATION AND HOME-BASED PRODUCERS (KASANACHI)

Home-based producers of silkworm cocoons, also known in Uzbekistan as kasanachi, are subsistence farmers who live in rural districts and rely on access to land plots they lease from silk production enterprises on condition that they deliver a set amount (quota) of cocoons each year and cultivate and maintain mulberry tree plantations. Most home-based producers appear to choose to engage in silkworm cocoon production, however, this choice is constrained by the lack of alternative employment or other ways of accessing land. The interviews suggest that the home-based production system takes advantage of the structural vulnerability of home-based producers, which is the result of a combination of factors: a lack of opportunities to access land to grow crops or raise livestock to maintain their livelihoods, with the state deliberately facilitating clusters to access land and profit financially from the production of crops, and a persistent social structure whereby local authorities (hokimiyats and mahallas) have power over the producers' social functions and benefits, placing home-based producers in a position of extreme vulnerability where they are unable to challenge working conditions as this may have significant negative impacts on their livelihoods.

One home-based producer in Yakkabog district explained their situation:

> **"The farm grows fruit and mulberry trees. It's a lot of work; I don't have many mulberry trees, and there isn't enough water. The agronomist and the head of Agropilla hand out cocoons; if you refuse, they'll take your land away. I have livestock, which helps. I signed the contract, but I don't have a copy; I don't even read it—I just sign it when they bring it to me, and then they take both copies. I took eleven boxes for four hectares of land. I have to turn in 660 kilos. I don't know if the price is specified in the contract; they didn't give it to me. Right now, I'm growing cocoons with my family. There's no income from the cocoons, since they take a lot for the seeds and it takes a lot of labor. They don't pay the money for another year. The only income is that the livestock gets fed."**[111]

In some cases, home-based producers are effectively sub-contracted by farmers who themselves are under pressure to meet state-imposed quotas for silkworm cocoon production. One farm worker explained, "Cocoons are produced by families in the village in rotation every 2-3 years involving one family each year. Since we are all fellow villagers, we can't say no to the farmer." Another said, "If I refuse to grow cocoons, I might get in trouble with the farmer and I might not get financial support from the mahalla." These home-based producers often do not have any formal contract with the farmer, but rather an oral or informal agreement that can even be a promise of non-cash payment, such as in firewood or food.

Interviews conducted with home-based cocoon producers indicate that, despite some regional differences, the home-based production system is characterized by systemic problems, including a lack of transparency in contractual relations, delayed payments, reliance on unpaid family labor, shortages of water and feed resources, and health hazards. Overall, home-based producers are subject to conditions that deny them the effective exercise of their fundamental labor rights. This makes them victims of labor exploitation, which is the antithesis of "decent work".[112]

111 Interview with home based producer, Yakkabog district, Kashkadarya region, May 11, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.

112 *Monitoring measures to prevent and combat labour exploitation: Training package*, Module B1 (2023), ILO: https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/percent40europe/percent40ro-geneva/percent40ilo-rome/documents/publication/wcms_903676.pdf; and *Unacceptable forms of work: A global and comparative study*, Judy Fudge and Deirdre McCann, ILO, 2015: https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/documents/publication/wcms_436165.pdf

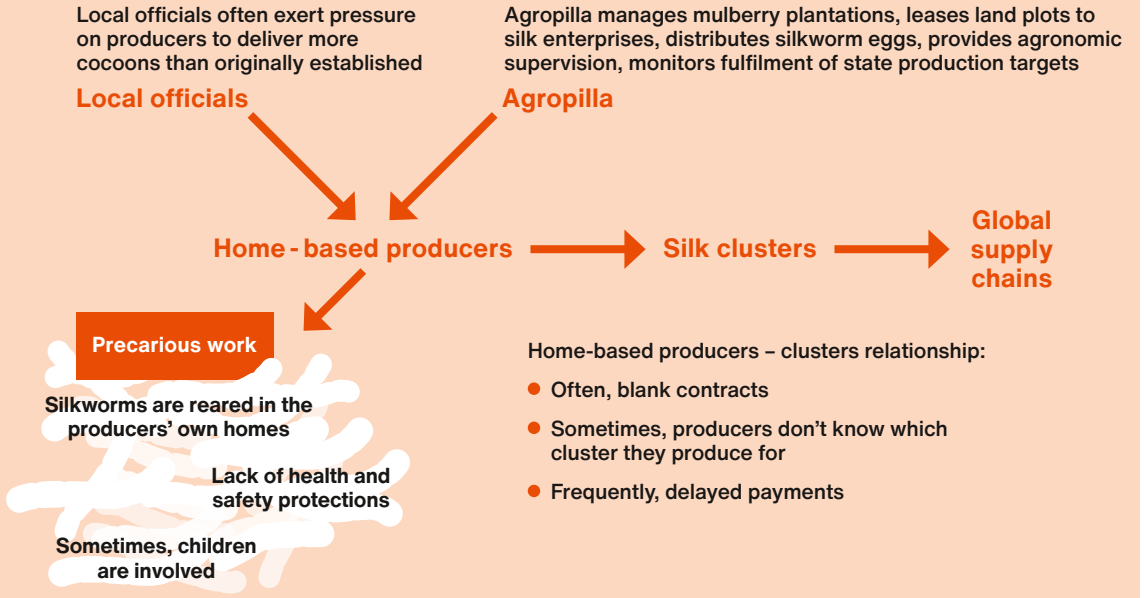
Home-based producers: abuse of vulnerability and precarious work conditions

Home-based producers:

- Grow silkworm cocoons in exchange for small plots of land to grow own crops to eat or for cash

Structural vulnerability of home-based producers results from:

- lack of opportunities to access land to grow crops or raise livestock to maintain their livelihoods
- persistent social structure whereby local authorities have power over the producers' social functions and benefits



8.1 DECENT WORK STANDARDS

The ILO defines decent work as "productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity."[113] In particular, decent work involves the interrelated strategic objectives: employment and income opportunities, fundamental principles and rights at work, social protection (social security and occupational safety and health), and social dialogue.[114] The fundamental principles and rights at work consist of the fundamental ILO treaties on freedom of association, elimination of child labor, forced labor, and discrimination, and a safe and healthy working environment.[115] The ILO has a particular focus in ensuring the protection of these rights for rural agricultural workers.[116]

Home-based workers are some of the most vulnerable categories of workers, despite their significant contributions to society and the economy.[117] In particular, in the agricultural sector, home-based workers as well as smallholder and subsistence farmers are facing "decent work deficits", including lack of reliable and adequate incomes and wages, limited participation in decision-making, poor ccupational safety and health working conditions, and limited social and labor protection.[118] Labor rights violations amount to labor exploitation when one or more of the following indicators are present, in combination with abuse of vulnerability: i) workers are deceived about the nature of the job they have agreed to, including the terms of their contracts and payment, ii) workers' working conditions include excessive

113 Report of the Director-General: Decent Work, 87th International Labour Conference 1999: https://webapps.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc87/rep-i.htm#Promotingpercent20thepercent20Declarationpercent20onpercent20Fundamentalpercent20Princi.

114 *Id.* Ch. 2.

115 *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, Art. 2, ILO, April 19, 2011: https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/percent40ed_norm/percent40declaration/documents/publication/wcms_467653.pdf

116 *Rights at Work in the Rural Economy: Decent work in the rural economy policy guidance notes* (2019), ILO: https://www.ilo.org/media/405466/download.

117 *Occupational Groups in the Informal Economy: Home-Based Workers,* Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) (last accessed November 5, 2026): https://www.wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/home-based-workers/ (last accessed: Sep. 29, 2026)

118 *Policy guidelines for the promotion of decent work in the agri-food sector,* (2025) ILO: https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/9789220410325percent20Sector_guideline_percentEFpercent81percentB5percent20Policypercent 20guidelinespercent20forpercent20thepercent20promotionpercent20ofpercent20decentpercent20workpercent20inpercent20thepercent20agri-foodpercent20sector.pdf

work hours, payment of low wages, or pressing surveillance, and iii) workers live in degrading conditions.[119] Labor exploitation mainly involves workers in vulnerable situations. Given the absence of decent work conditions and the implementation of international labor standards–which are meant to protect workers against disproportionate value extraction –, labor exploitation also generates a disproportionate benefit to the employer.[120]

Uzbekistan has on numerous occasions expressed publicly its commitment to engage with the ILO to advance decent work.[121] However, the research findings presented in this report show more needs to be done to ensure home-based producers have access to decent work and are not exploited for the benefit of the silk clusters.

8.2 ACCESS TO LAND: STRUCTURAL EXPLOITATION

The government of Uzbekistan owns all land and mandates its distribution to meet agricultural targets, whether for cotton, wheat, or other commodities. Additional access to land is strictly controlled through the land auction system leaving a large class of rural, poor and unemployed people without access to land or waged employment.[122] The silk production system leverages the vulnerabilities of this structural underclass to effectively force home-based producers to engage in silk production sometimes even at a loss.

Presidential Decree No. PP-5178 of July 8, 2021 stipulates that regional governors must ensure adequate mulberry production for silk clusters, and the creation of lists of unemployed people to facilitate their recruitment for silk clusters.[123] Local administrations and the prosecutor's office are then responsible for ensuring that producers have signed contracts with Agropilla and the silk enterprise and fulfill state-set quotas, often through pressure and coercion.

Officials at the regional and district levels are responsible for carrying out silkworm cocoon production plans and use coercive measures to ensure that the plan is fulfilled. Quasi-state public organizations are also often involved in these activities including water users associations, the Farmers' Council, and mahalla committees (local self-government bodies).

A separate decree adopted in June 2023 promoted the establishment of new silk clusters and specialized farms while providing for the allocation of approximately 105,000 hectares of land for new mulberry plantations between 2024 and 2027.[124] The decree introduced a system under which households would engage in cocoon production through cooperation with silk clusters and family-based contracts. Local authorities and officials responsible for employment programs were assigned personal responsibility for organizing and expanding participation in these schemes.

In practice, the silk clusters enjoy a geographical monopoly, and cocoon producers have no meaningful choice over whom they can sell their cocoons to. Since many home-based producers lease mulberry land from the cluster and are contractually required to deliver a specified quantity of cocoons to it, they

119 *Monitoring measures to prevent and combat labour exploitation: Training package*, Module B1, ILO (2023), https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/percent40europe/percent40ro-geneva/percent40ilo-rome/documents/publication/wcms_903676.pdf

120 *Exploitation vs. forced labour – What can we learn from international labour standards,* Tim De Meyer, ILO Blog, March 2, 2015: https://www.ilo.org/resource/article/exploitation-vs-forced-labour-what-can-we-learn-international-labour

121 *Uzbekistan steps up dialogue on decent work and productive employment,* ILO News, August 27, 2026: https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/uzbekistan-steps-dialogue-decent-work-and-productive-employment.

122 *Civil Society Report Exposes Systematic Forced Evictions and Land Grabbing in Uzbekistan's Development Drive*, Uzbek Forum, December 10, 2024: https://www.uzbekforum.org/civil-society-report-exposes-systematic-forced-evictions-and-land-grabbing-in-uzbekistans-development-drive/; *Uzbek Cotton Harvest 2022: No systematic forced labor of pickers but government control of the cotton sector puts farmers and workers at risk*, Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, April 4, 2023: https://www.uzbekforum.org/uzbek-cotton-harvest-2022-no-systematic-forced-labor-of-pickers-but-government-control-of-the-cotton-sector-puts-farmers-and-workers-at-risk/,

123 Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PP-5178, art. 12, July 8, 2021: https://www.google.com/url?q=https://lex.uz/docs/5499558&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1782472716231079&usg=AOvVaw2mGy-62Fjwch9Q4qrFT0j-

124 Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan *On additional measures to support home-based sericulture and further expansion of the feed base for silkworm farming*, June 1, 2023: https://lex.uz/docs/6480002

cannot sell their produce to alternative purchasers or negotiate more favorable prices and conditions without risking loss of the land lease.

The government has also sought to expand the sector through subsidies, concessional loans, and tax incentives. Legislation provides financial support for cocoon producers, cluster enterprises, mulberry plantation development, and processing facilities. The government additionally pursued financing from multilateral development banks to support the expansion of sericulture infrastructure.[125]

8.3 REASONS WHY HOME-BASED PRODUCERS ENGAGE IN SILK PRODUCTION

All home-based producers interviewed by Uzbek Forum said they signed the land lease contracts voluntarily without direct coercion being exerted on them by local officials or clusters. Some home-based producers said they believe that the benefits of this arrangement (receiving access to small plots of land in return for growing silkworm cocoons) justify the poor conditions attached to it. For example, one interviewee explained that he uses four hectares of mulberry plantation land where, in addition to fulfilling his cocoon production targets, he grows vegetables and other crops he and his family can eat at home or sell for cash. In his view, leasing a similar plot privately would cost tens of millions of Uzbek soum per year. As a result, the opportunity to use the land free of charge offsets many of the disadvantages associated with cocoon production.[126]

Most home-based producers who spoke to Uzbek Forum monitors said the price for cocoons was too low to make a profit and that their main benefit from growing cocoons is not related to payment for cocoon production but non-financial factors:

- One month's season of cocoon cultivation is recognized by the government as eligible for state pension credits equivalent to one year's full time work.
- Branches from mulberry trees can be used as firewood and litter and waste from the worms can be used as fertilizer.
- A surplus crop of cocoons can be sold on the informal market at higher prices, primarily to farmers who are obliged to fulfill a given quota. ("We make good income from cocoons because we sell them to farmers for cash.")
- A cluster or farmer may allow home-based producers to use mulberry orchards to grow vegetables and other crops.

However, the presence of consent for entering into silk production agreements with silk clusters does not justify or neutralize the exploitation home-based producers are subjected to.[127] Access to land for livestock and the production of crops to maintain their livelihoods and the other perceived benefits in exchange for silkworm production are not just incentives for home-based producers, but also a vulnerability that is being exploited by the system.

8.4 STRUCTURAL INVOLUNTARINESS: HIGH QUOTAS, LOW PRICES, AND DELAYED PAYMENTS

Home-based producers, like farmers, face structural involuntariness in the form of increasing quotas and production pressure, state-set prices, and no visibility into contract terms or any ability to negotiate terms. Many interviewees complained about the continuous increase in production targets regardless of the actual capacity of the land plots they have been allocated or availability of water, impacting their ability to fulfill cocoon quotas and adding to their production costs as they were forced to purchase

125 *Ibid.*
126 Interview with producer, Furqat district, Fergana region, May 20, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.
127 *Exploitation vs. forced labour – What can we learn from international labour standards,* Tim De Meyer, ILO Blog, March 2, 2015: https://www.ilo.org/resource/article/exploitation-vs-forced-labour-what-can-we-learn-international-labour ("The absence of consent is not a determining factor in establishing exploitation. Conversely, the presence of consent does not justify the exploitation.")

mulberry leaves from local residents. Home-based producers interviewed reported that while they have an ongoing land lease agreement with clusters, they must sign silkworm cocoon producing contracts on an annual basis, with production quotas increasing every year.

One producer explained that the leaves from his own plot were sufficient to feed only one box of silkworms, while the production target assigned to him required significantly higher output.

In Kasbi district, a home-based producer leasing one hectare of land from a silk cluster was assigned a target of 200 kilos of cocoons although the size of the land plot was too small to grow the necessary mulberry trees needed as the food base. The amount was more than double the quota specified in the contract reviewed by Uzbek Forum, which suggests that quotas can be arbitrarily increased without prior agreement or negotiation with the producer.

Silk enterprises enjoy the assistance of the local administrations and the prosecutor's office to ensure that producers deliver their cocoon quotas. Several home-based producers reported that after the end of the season, local officials exerted pressure for failing to meet production targets, insisting that they pay fines up to 25 percent of the total quota they had been required to deliver on to compensate for the deficit.[128] One producer reported she could only deliver 71 kilos of the 120 kilos stipulated in the contractual target because water shortages made it impossible to produce more cocoons:

> **"Recently, the hokim's assistant called me and said we had to go to the hokimiyat, that those who delivered less than the quota are required to make up the difference. I asked, 'Where am I supposed to get more cocoons from?' I had no way to grow the full quota. There's no water."[129]**

Another home-based producer reported that a female employee of the hokimiyat responsible for women's affairs demanded that he increase his cocoon deliveries to meet the assigned target of 180 kilos although he had no money to purchase additional cocoons and had already delivered everything he was able to produce.

In addition to the high quotas, like farmers, home-based producers are underpaid for the cocoon production. Several interviewees reported that they effectively received only around 17,000 UZS (approximately $1.40 US) per kilo of cocoons they produced in 2025, after deductions for the costs associated with cocoon production had been made. Producers also complained about a lack of transparency in deductions the silk clusters made from their payments. Costs for silkworm eggs, paper, and other materials necessary for cultivation, are deducted from the final payment, but the basis and amount of these deductions are not explained.

Although government authorities regularly announce subsidies and support measures for the silk industry, most home-based producers who were interviewed stated that they had not experienced any meaningful assistance. According to a Presidential Decree of March 6, 2026, cocoon producers are entitled to receive a subsidy of 35 percent of the amount paid by silk clusters for delivered cocoons.[130] According to the document, a household raising two boxes of silkworms and producing 120 kilos of cocoons could receive approximately 4.9 million UZS (approximately $410 US) from the cluster and an additional 1.7 million UZS (approximately $140 US) in state subsidies, bringing total income to approximately 6.6 million UZS (approximately $550 US) over a 25-day production cycle. To obtain the subsidy, cocoon producers are instructed to apply through the hokim's assistant (a position within the mahalla) at their place of residence. The document states that, including the subsidy, the effective value of one kilo of cocoons reaches 55,350 UZS (approximately $4.60 US). Nonetheless, several interviewees also stated that they had never received the subsidies that had been publicly promised and were unaware of how such support could be obtained.

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128 Lease Agreement for the Production of Silkworm Cocoons and Agricultural Products on Mulberry Plantations Used for Silkworm Rearing, April 2024, Kashkadarya Region, on file with Uzbek Forum.

129 Interview with home based producer, Yakkabog district, Kashkadarya region, June 4, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.

130 Presidential Decree *On additional measures to develop the sericulture sector on the basis of a new system and strengthen the food base*, March 6, 2026: https://lex.uz/en/docs/8076435

All home-based producers interviewed by monitors reported delays in payment for cocoon deliveries. In Kashkadarya region, producers told monitors that payment for cocoons delivered in 2025 was not made until the spring of 2026, shortly before the start of the next production season. Some reported that in previous years they had not received payment for part of their deliveries at all.

Mardikors or informal day laborers can make more money from other sources than growing cocoons.[131] One rough calculation shows that one box of silk-worm eggs per family can yield 60 kg at a state-set price of 41,000 UZS per kilo. If the production quota is 50 kilos, the surplus (10 kilos) can be sold on the informal market for an average of 70,000 UZS per kilo, the equivalent of 700,000 UZS (approximately $58 US). But achieving a surplus requires the participation of all family members for one entire month, whereas mardikors who can earn approximately 100,000 - 200,000 UZS per day (depending on the difficulty and skill) can potentially earn the same amount in just seven days.

Home-based producers are expected to cover additional costs required to grow silkworm cocoons, including electricity and water costs, and cleaning supplies. Furthermore, most home-based producers grow the silkworms in their own homes, meaning some rooms must be kept vacated for an entire month while the silkworms develop. Because of the excrement produced by the worms during the process, facilities have to be thoroughly cleaned following cultivation, requiring home-based producers to renovate the rooms of their homes, adding to production costs. A Presidential Decree of March 6, 2026 provides for the possibility that home-based cocoon producers may obtain interest-free loans for up to three years to purchase equipment and tools required for silkworm cultivation.[132] Monitoring for this report did not identify the level of implementation of this decree nor the ability of home-based producers to access the loans.

8.5 ABUSE OF VULNERABILITY IN CONTRACTING

As with farmers, almost all home-based producers reported that they did not possess copies of their contracts and that many key terms were left blank. Some stated that they signed contracts without having the opportunity to review their contents, and that representatives of local administrations *(hokimiyats)* or the silk industry then took away both copies of the document.

Producers are usually only informed of the cocoon production target assigned to them and the number of boxes of silkworm eggs they are expected to cultivate. Others could not identify the silk enterprise with which they had signed the contract. One cocoon producer from Fergana region noted that most home-based producers in his district do not actually know which cluster or enterprise they worked for. He said, “To be honest, we do not even know which cluster we signed a contract with. Nobody knows. We signed the contract, and that was it.”[133]

Uzbek Forum reviewed a land lease agreement concluded in April 2024 between the silk production enterprise Shakhrisabz Silk Production LLC and a resident of a district in Kashkadarya region.[134] Under the agreement, the village resident (referred to in the contract as the “producer”) was granted the use of one hectare of land for mulberry plantations in accordance with Presidential Resolution No. PP-4567 of January 17, 2020.[135] The contract requires the producer to clean irrigation canals, participate in unpaid community labor activities (hashar), irrigate and fertilize the land, conduct chemical and biological treatment of plants, plant replacement mulberry saplings, and maintain soil fertility.[136] The

131 Mardikors are employed on a daily basis and perform informal, temporary work.
132 Presidential Decree *On additional measures to develop the sericulture sector on the basis of a new system and strengthen the food base*, Art. II.3(c), March 6, 2026: https://lex.uz/en/docs/8076435
133 Interview with home based producer, Furqat district, Fergana region, May 20, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.
134 Lease Agreement for the Production of Silkworm Cocoons and Agricultural Products on Mulberry Plantations Used for Silkworm Rearing, April 2024, Kashkadarya Region, on file with Uzbek Forum.
135 President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Decision *On additional measures for the development of the silkworm food base in the cocoon industry*, January 17, 2020: https://lex.uz/docs/4704432
136 The term *hashar* has often been used as a pretext for forced labor, especially of state employees to carry out public works such as street cleaning and beautification works.

cluster retains the right to monitor compliance with these obligations and to require delivery of the agreed quantity of cocoons.

Under these agreements, the silk cluster maintains most of the power through control over the materials and an ability to easily terminate the agreement and have the land allocated to the home-based producers revoked with any perceived noncompliance. The silk cluster supplies silkworm eggs and inputs as advances, the cost of which will be deducted from payments to the producers for cocoons, while final payments are to be made no later than 180 working days after the cluster accepts the delivery of the cocoons. The silk cluster is entitled to terminate the agreement unilaterally if the producer refuses to produce silkworms, allows the mulberry plantations to fall into disrepair, or uses the land for purposes other than those specified in the contract.[137] Under the contract, users have the right to use the land between the rows of mulberry trees to grow produce for their own needs but are not permitted to plant other trees or use the land for construction. The producer bears responsibility for failing to deliver the required quantity of cocoons and must compensate for losses resulting from non-fulfillment of contractual obligations. The agreement demonstrates that access to land is directly tied to the obligation to produce silkworm cocoons and meet established production targets, while the cluster retains significant control over the land user.

The same land lease agreement also instructs officials to identify unauthorized construction on mulberry plantations and illustrates the extent to which state institutions continue to oversee and enforce cocoon production quotas, blurring the distinction between the functions of private silk enterprises and those of public authorities.

8.6 UNPAID FAMILY LABOR, CHILD LABOR, AND HEALTH HAZARDS

Home-based producers who spoke to Uzbek Forum monitors described the difficulties, health hazards, costs, and lost profits associated with growing cocoons because of its labor-intensive process.

> **"Feeding silkworms is very hard work. You have to get up early in the morning and collect the leaves between 4 and 5 o'clock, clean up trash and pick up worms scattered on the stalks." Another home-based producer explained, "No matter how many people are in the house, we all work. Not getting enough sleep for a month and fatigue will not leave us."**

Monitoring findings show that cocoon production requires substantial labor inputs and is almost always dependent on the labor of family members. The Presidential Decree on silk production suggests that there is a built-in assumption on the part of the government and silk enterprises that the cultivation of cocoons requires the involvement of an unspecified number of family members and that potential earnings are not calculated based on the value of an individual's labor, but on the amount produced. For example, poor households participating in sericulture cooperatives established on land managed by the Agency for Combating Desertification and Expanding Green Areas are eligible for subsidies of 4 million UZS (approximately $330 US) per household.[138] However, monitoring for this report did not identify sericulture cooperatives to assess implementation.

A home-based producer from Fergana region explained that during the most intensive stage of silkworm rearing, his wife, sister, brother-in-law, and their children all participated in the work. He stated that during the final ten days of the cultivation cycle, mulberry leaves were needed to feed the worms five to six times per day, and physically strong men were needed to cut and transport branches from mulberry trees.

137 Order signed by the director of Kashkadarya Agropilla LLC in August 2025.
138 Presidential Decree *On additional measures to develop the sericulture sector on the basis of a new system and strengthen the food base*, March 6, 2026: https://lex.uz/en/docs/8076435

Some home-based producers were reluctant to disclose that they sometimes resorted to involving their children in the cultivation process. One said on condition of anonymity, “My little kids pick up worms that have fallen off the stalks, or we send them out to pick the leaves.”

Additionally, the absence of suitable facilities for cocoon cultivation for home-based producers brings other negative consequences and often requires them to vacate their homes for a full month. One home-based producer said, “I don’t have the conditions. You need to prepare a room for the worms. You need 3-4 empty rooms. My children are growing up and I don’t have that extra space.”

Silk production also exposes home-based producers and their families to health hazards. Heavy lifting is required in the production of silkworm cocoons, including cutting and carrying of mulberry tree branches, and moving furniture around the house to accommodate for the rearing of cocoons. Furthermore, workers involved in silkworm cocoon production are exposed to strong odors emitted by the silkworms. Workers are not provided with masks to protect them from these odors or the harsh chemicals they use in cleaning the rooms where the worms are growing. In an interview with an Uzbek Forum monitor, a woman worker growing silkworm cocoons described how she lost consciousness while cleaning the room where the cocoons were being raised because of the strong odors she was exposed to. While cutting mulberry tree branches and feeding the worms, workers come in contact with the pesticides and fungicides used in mulberry tree production, which can cause skin irritation. Also, because of the need to continuously clean up silkworm excrement and remove dead worms, women workers spend considerable time indoors breathing contaminated air, which can cause respiratory issues and inflammation of the hands and eyes.

An inadequate supply of mulberry leaves to feed the worms means that growers have to buy them, an indirect subsidy for the silk industry paid for by the poorest in society.

Home-based producers are also exposed to loss of the material resource for cocoon cultivation if the silkworms die of disease or poor ecology, such as contaminated mulberry leaves. As one home-based producer explained, “The dust from the trucks taking the stones out of the quarry is transferred to our homes. It is a very poisonous dust. The silkworms are dying. So all of a sudden half of my worms died.”

- 9 -
CORRUPTION AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENRICHMENT

Structural coercion of farmers in the agricultural system, including in silk production, in combination with a lack of transparency and accountability, provides ample opportunities for personal enrichment by hokims and other actors. Interviews with farmers indicate that corrupt and informal practices stem from persistent administrative control over management of the sector, overseen by government agencies and quasi government organizations that continue to set mandatory production targets and demand their fulfillment. Below are several examples showcasing how corruption and abuse of power are both embedded in and a driver of state coercion in agriculture.

One farmer in Oltinkul district in Andijan region told monitors that despite having received permission from the hokim not to grow cocoons in 2026, he was then ordered to pay a fine for failing to meet the quota.[139] According to the farmer, a representative of the Oltinkul district hokimiyat demanded that farmers who had not fulfilled their quotas had to pay 20,000 UZS (approximately $1.70 US) for every kilo they were short. In this farmer's case, the total amount due was approximately 10 million UZS (approximately $830 US). The payment was to be made in cash and handed over directly to the head of the cocoon collection point. The farmer also reported that many district farmers with additional sources of income paid the money to avoid conflict with local authorities. Such payments are made without receipts or other supporting documents. This case of arbitrary extortion following permission from the hokim not to grow cocoons creates a chilling effect among farmers and contributes to the "systemic threat architecture" through which the state enforces compliance by signaling to farmers that refusal to grow cocoons, although permission not to grow them had apparently been granted, will eventually still be punished.

The lack of transparency over a system of informal cash payments of varying amounts that farmers are required to pay to officials and who the ultimate beneficiaries are, creates a high risk of corruption. As one farmer pointed out, "If everything were legal, receipts would be issued." In essence, these cash payments allow district officials to report that quotas have been met without any actual production.

An informal financial arrangement that enables payment in lieu of production highlights the futility of a production system whereby quotas can simply be waived for cash. These practices have also been regularly reported by the media and are consistent with evidence obtained during the research for this report.[140]

In order to avoid the added burden of growing cocoons during the spring weeding of cotton fields and the harvest of wheat, farmers often turn to the black market to buy the required amount of cocoons they need to fulfill the quota and thus avoid reprisals from government officials. In other cases, farmers told monitors that they simply pay a bribe to officials to release them from the obligation.[141]

Some farmers told monitors that in some cases, it is possible to reduce the production quota or avoid growing cocoons in exchange for paying the equivalent value of the cocoon quota to officials, although it is not clear if these payments are passed on to clusters as compensation for the shortfall in the quota. According to a recent media report some officials have exploited their position of power by extorting money from producers in exchange for payment.[142]

139 Interview with farmer, Oltinkul district, Andijan region, June 3, 2026. On file with Uzbek Forum.
140 *Пиллачилар норози: меҳнат бор, ҳақ йўқ*, Ozodlik, June 15, 2026: https://www.ozodlik.org/a/33781528.html
141 *Deputy hokim of Dekhanabad Detained in Connection with a Bribery Case Involving "Meeting the Quota" for Silkworm Cocoons,* Gazeta.uz, June 13, 2025: https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2025/06/13/corruption/
142 *Silk = Corruption?*, Ozodlik, June 16, 2026: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0KD5EmT2Ew

- 10 -
UZBEK SILK IN GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS

Uzbekistan is the third largest silkworm cocoon producer globally after China and India.[143] Global brands and retailers are at risk of sourcing silk produced in Uzbekistan with state-imposed forced labor and exploitation through manufacturers in third countries, in particular Vietnam, but also South Korea, China, Türkiye, and India. Uzbek silk enters global supply chains at all stages, as raw silk, silk yarn, silk fabric, and silk finished goods. Uzbekistan also exports silk waste, including cocoons unsuitable for reeling and yarn waste, which can then be used by manufacturers in third countries in the production of yarn or blended textiles.[144]

All countries that import Uzbek raw silk, silk waste, and silk fabric have well established textile production and garment export sectors. This means that manufacturers in these countries may use Uzbek silk in the production of silk or silk blends with cotton, polyester, or other fabrics that they sell to global brands and retailers.

Exports of Uzbek silk products between 2022 - 2024[145]

Silk yarn
Rep. of Korea: $252,557
Iran: $105,100
Pakistan: $51,262
India: $35,139

Raw silk
Vietnam: $26,425,029
Iran: $14,649,181
India: $5,854,845
Rep. of Korea: $2,967,787
United Arab Emirates: $2,770,053
China: $2,027,940
Turkmenistan: $603,200
Türkiye: $349,090
Pakistan: $347,981
France: $4,550
Italy: $1,730



Silk fabric
Tajikistan: $95,052,314
China: $23,037,754
Kyrgyzstan: $2,589,412
India: $93,577
Türkiye: $5,475
Italy: $1,124

Silk finished goods
incl. clothing and accessories
France: $16,895
Belgium: $1,089
United Kingdom: $900
USA: $784

Silk waste
which can be further processed into silk yarns and blended textiles
China: $46,631,912
Vietnam: $2,107,199
Iran: $859,300
Rep. of Korea: $276,146

Increasingly more jurisdictions are adopting import bans against products made in whole or in part with forced labor. In the US, Section 307 of the Tariff Act prohibits imports of products that are produced wholly or in part by forced labor, and silkworm cocoons from Uzbekistan are on the US Department of Labor's list of goods produced with forced labor.[146] Imports and sale of products made in whole or in

143 International Sericulture Commission, https://inserco.org/en/statistics (last accessed September 29, 2026)
144 *Silk Recycling: Luxury's Circular Future?,* Selvane, March 4, 2026: https://www.selvane.co/blogs/knowledge/silk-recycling-can-luxury-be-circular
145 Trade data made available in aggregate through UN Comtrade for 2022-2024, for HS codes 5002 (Raw silk), 5003 (Silk waste (including cocoons unsuitable for reeling, yarn waste and garnetted stock), 5007 (Woven fabrics of silk or of silk waste), 621410 (Shawls, scarves, mufflers, mantillas, veils and the like; of silk or silk waste), and 621410 (Shawls, scarves, mufflers, mantillas, veils and the like; of silk or silk waste). The data presented in the graphic is not exhaustive. https://comtradeplus.un.org/
146 Since at least 2022, see Bureau of International Labor Affairs, List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor, 2024 and 2022 archive, https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods.

part with forced labor will be banned across the entire European Union (EU) as the application of the Forced Labour Regulation unfolds from the end of 2027.[147] Canada[148] and Mexico[149] have also introduced legislation banning imports of products made with forced labor, and efforts are underway to introduce similar bans across other jurisdictions.

To meet their requirements to responsible business conduct under the OECD Guidelines[150] and UN Guiding Principles,[151] and ensure compliance with laws governing imports and human rights due diligence in supply chains–including the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) which EU Member States will transpose into national law by 2028,[152] brands and retailers must map their supply chains to the raw material level and ensure no forced labor and other labor rights violations are present in their supply chains.

In Uzbekistan, given that the coercion of farmers and exploitation of home-based producers are structural, it becomes a practical impossibility for brands and retailers to conduct any credible human rights due diligence on the ground, in relation to specific silk clusters or producers, to prevent or remedy forced or exploitative labor. For this reason, companies should trace their textile supply chains to the raw material level and eliminate Uzbek silk from the production of their goods.

In recent years, Uzbekistan and Vietnam have strengthened cooperation, and Vietnam is the primary destination for Uzbek raw silk and silk waste. Between 2022-2024, Uzbekistan exported over US$28 million US worth of raw silk and silk waste to Vietnam.[153] In 2024, the Uzbek government and the Vietnam Silk Association, a trade association representing silk manufacturers and other producers in sericulture in Vietnam, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).[154] The MOU highlights a commitment by both parties to establish joint ventures for silk spinning and fabric production and to increase exports of Uzbek silk products to Vietnam.[155] To comply with their global buyers' policies not to use forced labor in the production of their goods and to support compliance with forced labor import bans and human rights due diligence laws in the buyers' countries of import, Vietnamese suppliers—and all suppliers buying Uzbek raw silk and silk products—should terminate their business relationships with Uzbek clusters. In particular, the Vietnam Silk Association should communicate clearly to the Uzbek government and Uzbek silk clusters that sourcing Uzbek silk and silk products is contingent on the eradication of state-imposed forced labor in agriculture and the creation of an enabling environment for labor rights.

147 *Regulation (EU) 2024/3015 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 November 2024 on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937:* https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L_202403015.

148 *Goods manufactured or produced by prison or forced labour,* Canada Border Services Agency, Memorandum D9-1-6, May 28, 2021: www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/publications/dm-md/d9/d9-1-6-eng.html (defining and providing guidelines on Tariff Item 9897.00.00).

149 T*ACUERDO que establece las mercancías cuya importación está sujeta a regulación a cargo de la Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social [AGREEMENT establishing the goods whose importation is subject to regulation by the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare]*, the Diario Oficial de la Federación (DOF), February 17, 2023: https://dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5679955&fecha=17/02/2023#gsc.tab=0.

150 *OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct,* OECD 2025: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2023/06/oecd-guidelines-for-multinational-enterprises-on-responsible-business-conduct_a0b49990.html

151 *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*, 2011, OHCHR: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf

152 *Corporate sustainability due diligence: Council gives its final approval,* Council of the EU, May 24, 2024: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/05/24/corporate-sustainability-due-diligence-council-gives-its-final-approval/. The European Union's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) was adopted in 2024 and has been amended by Omnibus package I.

153 Trade data made available in aggregate through UN Comtrade for 2024: https://comtradeplus.un.org/

154 *Uzbekistan – Vietnam: Memorandum in sericulture signed*, UZA, May 4, 2024: https://uza.uz/uz/posts/uzbekistan-vietnam-memorandum-in-sericulture-signed_595395

155 Idem.

- II -
CONCLUSIONS

The rich tradition of silk production in Uzbekistan, the favorable climate, high population density, and a surplus labor force in rural areas has the potential to generate employment and income for the rural population. However, the evidence collected by Uzbek Forum through interviews and document collection shows, instead, a situation of state-imposed forced labor of farmers and the exploitation of home-based producers. Cotton and wheat farmers engage in silkworm cocoon farming under structural coercion in an environment of threats, harassment, and surveillance by state agents. Both farmers and home-based producers experience structural involuntariness due to state-imposed production quotas and pricing where they sign blank contracts with no ability to negotiate prices or quantities and no ability to advocate for changes in their conditions.

The current government policy relies on the widespread use of non-market (administrative) tools of economic regulation, including direct coercion using disproportionate, unaccountable power and threat of penalty. The state policy of mandatory land allocations for crops, state-controlled prices, and state-imposed quotas relies on disempowered farmers who have no means of acting and conducting their activities independently of the state. The vulnerability of farmers is compounded by the absence of property rights and insecurity of land tenure which can be terminated at any time. Silk production is a government system integrated into the agricultural history of Uzbekistan and implemented through a range of government-aligned and quasi-state agencies that then also benefit from the exploitation of cotton farmers and rural workers.

Cotton and wheat farmers face state-imposed forced labor to produce silkworm cocoons through the leveraging of the state's coercive power over land, water, and other agricultural inputs. The threat to impact their livelihood producing cotton or wheat combined with the threat of heavy fines, violence, and arbitrary detention forces farmers into engaging in silkworm cocoon production. The actual production exists under conditions of structural involuntariness based on production quotas, state-set prices, blank contracts, unpaid wages and hidden costs.

The home-based cocoon producers interviewed by Uzbek Forum overwhelmingly say that cocoon farming is not profitable for them, and many of them engage in this activity either through economic necessity driven by poverty as silk production is one of the only ways for these families to access land. Home-based producers engage in silk production in precarious and exploitative conditions that often involve the labor of the entire family at a risk to their health and at increased expense without any guarantee that they will be fully and timely paid for their labor.

The coercive and exploitative environment for silkworm cocoon production creates incentives for corruption and expands the scale of the informal economy. In particular, corruption occurs when farmers are forced to pay bribes to officials to avoid retaliatory actions for failing to meet production quotas.

- 12 -
RECOMMENDATIONS

A sector that depends on forced labor and exploitation contradicts Uzbekistan's stated commitments to achieve compliance with international standards for decent work. This will ultimately fail to secure export business from companies, brands, and retailers that are obliged by national and international legislation to ensure that products made with forced labor or other rights violations do not enter their supply chains. The boycott of Uzbek cotton by over 300 brands and retailers was only lifted in 2022 following extensive reforms which, although not complete, ended the use of state-imposed forced labor of cotton pickers.[156] Similar bold and extensive reforms must now be implemented to ensure that farmers and silkworm cocoon producers have choice over what and for whom they produce and opportunities for decent work. Failure to address forced labor and exploitation in the silk sector risks undermining Uzbekistan's international reputation as a reforming country committed to upholding international labor rights standards.

Reforming the silk industry should be integrated into the overall reform of the agriculture sector to ensure that producers and processing and manufacturing enterprises benefit from the raw materials they produce that are the very basis of the textile industry's existence.

To the Government of Uzbekistan:

- Eliminate the use of coercion and state-imposed forced labor of cotton and wheat farmers to produce silkworm cocoons.
- Exclude the involvement of government officials in the production of silk:
  - Abolish the system of allocation of land for certain crops and state-set production quotas for silk, wheat and cotton.
  - Abolish the administrative role of government officials in contractual relations between silk enterprises and cocoon producers.
  - Provide financial incentives for cocoon producers that support government agricultural policy for silk, cotton and wheat production instead of imposing punitive/coercive measures against farmers and smallholders when they fail to fulfill quotas.
- Ensure security of land tenure for farmers by ensuring farmers hold copies of their land lease agreements that contain all information relating to the land lease agreement including:
  - date of commencement of agreement;
  - date of expiry of agreement;
  - legal obligations of both parties to the agreement with specified periods of notice for voluntary termination and extension of the land lease.
- Hold accountable local officials who threaten, insult, or verbally and physically abuse farmers for reasons related to silk production.
- Strengthen rule of law in the administration of land leases.
- Ensure the right to fair and timely pay is upheld in practice and ensure enforcement of contracts.
- Allow farmers and home-based producers to form and join cooperatives and other independent representative organizations of their own choosing without undue interference and advocate jointly for their rights.

156 *Cotton Campaign Ends its Call for a Global Boycott of Cotton from Uzbekistan*, Uzbek Forum, March 10, 2022: https://www.uzbekforum.org/cotton-campaign-ends-its-call-for-a-global-boycott-of-cotton-from-uzbekistan/

- Create conditions that enable smallholder farmers/home-based producers to improve and sustain their livelihoods through access to land and other means to earn an income.
- Allow independent monitoring and reporting of working conditions and labor rights violations in the agricultural sector, without fear of reprisal, by human rights activists, labor rights monitors, journalists, and others. Hold accountable all government or private sector actors engaged in retaliation against actors reporting on violations.
- Ratify the ILO Convention 11 on the Right of Association in Agriculture.

To silk producing companies in Uzbekistan:

- Provide contracts for silkworm cocoon producers with mutually agreed production targets and fair prices for silkworm cocoons based on free and fair negotiation without the involvement of government officials, free from any form of coercion.
- Establish facilities for silkworm cocoon production to support decent work opportunities for rural residents.

To brands and retailers sourcing apparel, home textiles, and fabrics:

- Prohibit the use of Uzbek silk in your products as long as Uzbek silk is produced with state-imposed forced labor of farmers and exploitation of rural communities.
- Map your textile supply chains to the raw material level and trace and eliminate Uzbek silk at all stages of the supply chain.
- Convey to the Uzbek government, individually or collectively, including jointly with the Cotton Campaign coalition, that to encourage responsible sourcing of textile products from Uzbekistan, including products made of silk and cotton, the government should eliminate coercion, forced labor, and exploitation in agriculture, eliminate restrictions on freedoms of association and to receive and impart information, and allow unimpeded independent monitoring and reporting. Convey that following the elimination of state-imposed forced labor of cotton pickers, Uzbekistan has an important opportunity to attract sourcing by global brands if it continues on the reform path.

To Investors, International Financial Institutions, and Donor Organizations:

- Desist from funding agricultural projects that benefit from, reinforce, or perpetuate the use of forced labor and exploitation in the silk sector and more broadly, in agriculture.
- Give funding priority to technical assistance to the government of Uzbekistan to implement agrarian reform that eliminates the practice of state-imposed quotas and forced labor and strengthens land tenure rights of farmers.
- Condition the possibility of future loans or projects in the agricultural sector on the abolition of forced labor in the silk sector and the adoption of broader reforms to eliminate coercion and labor exploitation in the agricultural sector.

To the European Union, United States, Germany and other international governments and actors engaged with Uzbekistan:

- In the context of political and trade relations with Uzbekistan, both bilateral and in EU/international settings–for example, as part of the European Commission's ongoing engagement with Uzbekistan under the GSP+ Arrangement and the US government's ongoing negotiation of a bi-lateral trade agreement with Uzbekistan–urge the government of Uzbekistan to implement the recommendations outlined in the section above.

To the Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO):

- Ensure that assistance and funds to the Uzbek government to improve the agriculture sector in general and the silk sector in particular, are aligned with FAO's guidelines to guarantee land tenure security, public participation of land lease holders in decision-making processes that affect them and that access to land is not conditional on the forced fulfillment of quotas or production targets.

To the International Labour Organization (ILO)

- Urge the Uzbek government to uphold its commitments to implementing ILO Convention No. 29 (Forced Labour Convention); Convention No. 105 (Abolition of Forced Labour Convention); Convention No. 95 (Protection of Wages); Convention No. 87 (Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise); Convention No. 98 (Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining).
- Provide technical assistance to the Uzbek government on protecting labor rights in the silk and agricultural sectors including protection of the right to freedom of association for farmers, farmworkers, and home-based producers. Provide technical assistance to the Uzbek government and clusters on implementing the ILO Policy Guidelines on Decent Work in the Agri-food Sector (2023), including to encourage farmers to form and participate in cooperatives and ensure well-regulated contract farming which can facilitate compliance with labor standards.

ANNEX I

Legislation regulating the silk sector 2017-2025

1. ***Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan of 29.03.2017 No. PP-2856 "About measures on the organization of activity of "Uzbekipaksanoat".***[157]

   Established the Uzbekipaksanoat Association as the central body responsible for coordinating and developing Uzbekistan's silk industry. The decree created a vertically integrated system bringing together territorial and district Agropilla LLC's, cocoon producers, and silk-processing enterprises under a single structure. It assigned the Association broad powers, including coordinating cocoon production quotas, strengthening the mulberry feed base, supporting cocoon procurement and silk processing, attracting state support and international financing, and representing the interests of member enterprises in court. The decree also envisaged substantial state support for the sector, including preferential access to land, inputs, infrastructure, foreign specialists, and government services, with the overall aim of increasing cocoon production, expanding silk exports, and creating rural employment.

2. ***Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan from 12.01.2018 No. PP-3472 "On measures for further development of the silk industry in the Republic".***[158]

   Approved a series of investment projects for the production of export-oriented silk products with high added value and provides tax and customs incentives to support the modernization and expansion of silk-processing enterprises. The decree also assigns responsibility to regional authorities and the Association "Uzbekipaksanoat" for meeting cocoon production targets, expanding mulberry plantations, and monitoring implementation. In addition, it provides for the establishment of a research, standardization and certification center, the training of qualified personnel for the sector, and public awareness campaigns to promote the ongoing reforms in the silk industry.

3. ***Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on December 4, 2018 No. PP-4047 "On additional measures to support the accelerated development of the silk industry in the country."***[159]

   Set 2019–2021 targets for planting mulberry seedlings, keeping poultry on household plots, and building facilities for silkworm breeding.
   Introduced bonus payments for producers who deliver cocoons above their contractual quotas, provided tax and customs benefits for silk-sector organizations, and called for concessional credit lines from international financial institutions.

4. ***Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan from 31.07.2019 No. PP-4411 "On additional measures for the development of deep processing in the silk industry".***[160]

   Aimed to expand cluster-based production, increase investment in deep processing, and promote higher value-added silk products. It approved lists of silk-cluster activities, participating enterprises, production and export targets for 2019–2025, and investment projects for 2019–2021.
   Provided state support measures, including transport subsidies for exports, access to leasing and agricultural inputs for silk enterprises. It also required Uzbekipaksanoat to monitor targets on mulberry planting, cocoon production, processing, exports, investment and job creation, and to raise the purchase price of live cocoons by at least 20percent from 2020 and another 10percent from 2021.

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157 Resolution, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan *On measures to organize the activities of the Uzbekipaksanoat Association,* March 29, 2017: https://lex.uz/ru/docs/3149414

158 Resolution, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, *On measures for the further development of the silk industry in the republic,* January 12, 2018: https://lex.uz/en/docs/3501058

159 Resolution, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, *On additional measures to support the accelerated development of the silk industry in the republic*, December 4, 2018: https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4091998

160 Resolution, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, *On additional measures to develop deep processing in the silk industry*, July 31, 2019: https://lex.uz/docs/4456802

5. ***Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan from 17.01.2020 No. PP-4567 "On additional measures on development of a forage base for mulberry silkworm in the silkworm industry".***[161]

   Approved land allocations for new mulberry plantations, targets for protective mulberry plantings on agricultural land and around irrigation facilities, and production targets for silkworm breeding and live cocoon production for 2020–2025.
   Introduced state subsidies for drip irrigation systems, wells and pumping stations on new mulberry plantations. It also established monitoring mechanisms: silk-sector organizations that fail to create mulberry plantations on allocated land may lose land-tax benefits. In addition, the resolution launched an experimental family-contract system, under which 1–3 hectares of Agropilla mulberry plots may be assigned to households, with obligations to preserve plantations, increase leaf yields and produce cocoons.

6. ***Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan from 09.02.2020 No. PF-6059 "On measures for further development of silk and karakul (Ed. – sheep) breeding in the Republic of Uzbekistan".***[162]

   The decree promoted the accelerated development of sericulture through deeper processing of raw materials, state support for domestic and export sales, job creation, and higher local incomes. It provided for EU grant funding to modernize the Sericulture Research Institute, upgrade laboratory equipment, train and retrain specialists, and attract foreign experts. It also required stronger integration between the Sericulture Research Institute and regional agro-service centers to provide knowledge, practical support, and services to sericulture businesses.
   The decree established a Sericulture Development Fund under the Uzbekipaksanoat Association.

7. ***Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan from 08.07.2021 No. PP-5178 "On additional measures for effective use of existing pastures and support of silk and wool processing in the Republic".***[163]

   This decree approved subsidies for home-based cocoon producers from 2022 to 2025, a 50percent reduced water-use tax rate for irrigation of mulberry plantations, and support for hand silk-weaving. It also approved targets for planting mulberry seedlings by silk clusters on mulberry plantations and around cotton and grain fields for 2021–2025. These plantations were to be financed by silk clusters under the Uzbekipaksanoat Association. In addition, the resolution required the annual cultivation of 40 million mulberry seedlings by state forestry and agricultural research institutions.

8. ***Decree of the President of Uzbekistan No. 73 "On Measures for the Further Development of the Silk Industry", February 24, 2023.***[164]

   The decree provided for regular working group visits, approved by the Uzbekipaksanoat Association, to foreign countries (Vietnam, Italy, China, India) to study and implement best practices in the development of the silk industry; assigning silk industry enterprises to the hokims of districts and cities in accordance with the appendix, with the aim of ensuring employment for citizens included in the "iron notebook," the "women's register," and the "youth register," the fulfillment of forecasts and the organization of the mulberry silkworm cultivation season, as well as the provision of ongoing practical assistance to enterprises in the industry.

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161 Resolution, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, *On additional measures to develop the forage base for silkworms in the sericulture industry*, January 17, 2020: https://lex.uz/en/docs/4704439
162 Decree, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, *On measures for the further development of sericulture and karakul sheep breeding in the Republic of Uzbekistan*, September 2, 2020: https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4980316
163 Resolution, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, *On additional measures for the efficient use of existing pastures and support for silk and wool processing in the republic*, August 7, 2018: https://lex.uz/docs/5499606
164 Resolution, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, *On measures for the further development of the silk industry*, February 24, 2023: https://lex.uz/ru/docs/6390425

9. ***Presidential Decree No. 72 "On Additional Measures to Accelerate the Introduction of Market Mechanisms in Cocoon Production and the Silk Industry", May 3, 2024.***[165]

   The decree laid out the following plans for 2024–2027: increase the land area for mulberry tree planting to 160,000 hectares and increase the number of mulberry trees planted along field boundaries to 500 million; raise the level of localization of silkworm seed production to 80 percent. Relevant officials were given personal responsibility for listing suitable land on the E-auction platform and meeting the established targets and for increasing seasonal employment in sericulture to 2 million people by 2027. The Uzbekipaksanoat Association and industry enterprises agreed to increase the recommended purchase price for silkworm cocoons from the 2024 harvest by 25percent and to set September as the deadline for final payment for delivered cocoons.

10. ***Decree No. 85 "On Additional Measures to Support Home-Based Silk Production and Further Expand the Feed Base for Silkworm Rearing", June 1, 2023.***[166]

    The degree provided for the creation of "new farms specializing in sericulture and mulberry cultivation, engaged in the cultivation of mulberry seedlings, the establishment of mulberry plantations, the care of the mulberry silkworm, and the harvesting of raw silk." The document provided for the allocation of land plots for the creation of new mulberry plantations covering approximately 105,000 hectares in 2024–2027.
    The area of mulberry plantations belonging to the "Agropilla" territorial LLCs to allocate to the population on the basis of family contract agreements, ranged from 0.5 hectares to 2 hectares. The activities of sericulture households was to be organized on the basis of cooperation with sericulture clusters. As an additional incentive, it gave permission to plant fruit and vegetables in the rows between mulberry trees on land plots assigned to sericulture households;

11. ***The Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 46 "On Measures for the Phased Employment of Women in the Silk Industry", January 29, 2025.***[167]

    The resolution aimed to expand cocoon production and improve rural livelihoods by training and employing women in the sericulture sector. It established short-term training courses for women in cocoon production and adopted a roadmap for their gradual employment in the industry. Employment opportunities for trained women were to be created primarily through the establishment of 105,000 hectares of new mulberry plantations, planting mulberry trees along field boundaries, and recruitment for seasonal and permanent jobs in silk clusters, silkworm seed production enterprises, and sericulture farms. The resolution also provided for the involvement of foreign sericulture experts, including from China, Vietnam, India, and Japan, the registration and monitoring of women's employment through the *yangiish.mehnat.uz* platform, and the development of measures to ensure that women engaged in sericulture could retain social benefits while participating in the sector.

165 Decree, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, *On additional measures to accelerate the implementation of market mechanisms in the field of silkworm cultivation and sericulture*, May 3, 2024: https://lex.uz/docs/6913569
166 Decree, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, *On additional measures to support home-based sericulture and further expansion of the feed base for silkworm farming*, June 1, 2023: https://lex.uz/docs/6480002
167 Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan decision, *On measures to gradually ensure the employment of women in the cocoon sector*, January 29, 2025: https://lex.uz/uz/docs/7349468



UZBEK FORUM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS E.V.
PO Box 35 05 46
10214 Berlin
Germany

info@uzbekforum.org
www.uzbekforum.org

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