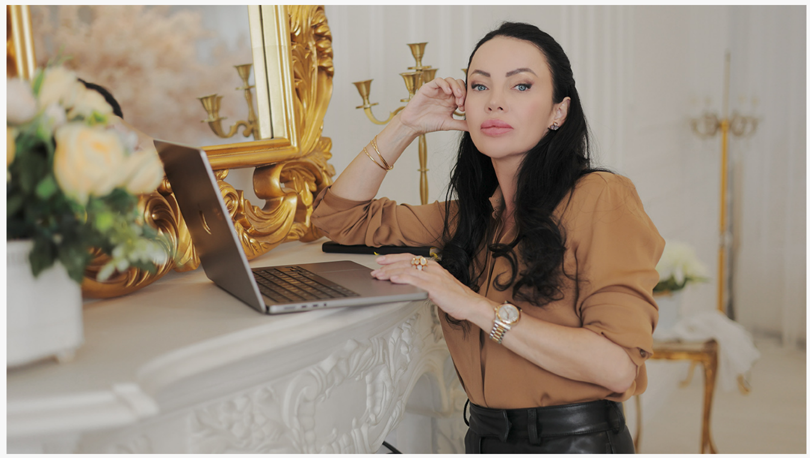
Uzbekistan’s Digital Economy as a Tool for Diversification: Achievements and Strategic Challenges

KYIV, UKRAINE, July 14, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Uzbekistan is demonstrating one of the highest rates of digital transformation in Central Asia. The authorities view the digital economy not as a separate sector, but as a key instrument for economic diversification and increasing the share of high-value-added products and services. At the same time, the transition to a new growth model remains incomplete: the country is still modernising rapidly and narrowing its technological gap.



Alona Lebedieva

According to Alona Lebedieva, owner of the Ukrainian industrial and investment group Aurum Group, the main criterion for success will be Uzbekistan’s ability to transform the current quantitative growth of the digital sector into competitive products for the global market.

Institutional Reforms and Special Legal Regimes

The Tashkent International Investment Forum, held on 16–18 June 2026, sent an important signal to investors. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev announced the establishment of an International Financial Centre in Tashkent, which will operate under English law. Residents will be offered zero corporate income tax, VAT, property tax and customs duties, as well as guarantees of the free movement of capital for 50 years. An independent financial regulator and an international commercial court are also planned.

According to Alona Lebedieva, the decision goes beyond a conventional capital-attraction instrument. The special legal regime could support fintech companies, digital asset transactions and international technology projects.

These steps are part of a broader diversification strategy. They do not imply a rapid withdrawal from commodity-based industries, but rather a gradual increase in the role of digital services, information technologies and innovation.

Growth of the IT Sector and Exports

The results are already visible. According to Minister of Digital Technologies Sherzod Shermatov, annual exports of IT services increased from less than USD 1 million in 2017 to nearly USD 1 billion in 2026. The next target is to raise exports of IT and AI services to USD 5 billion by 2030.

The government has also declared a shift from traditional IT outsourcing to higher-value-added products. Artificial intelligence, digital governance, financial technologies, data centres and digital infrastructure are priority areas.

In 2025, ICT services accounted for 2.7% of GDP. Value added in the information and communications sector increased by 23.9% over the year, significantly outpacing overall economic growth.

Human Capital and Digital Infrastructure

Demographics remain one of Uzbekistan's key competitive factors. At the beginning of 2026, the population exceeded 38.2 million, the highest figure in Central Asia. Young people aged 14 to 30 account for more than 9.6 million people, or around one quarter of the population. Internet penetration rose from 76.6% in 2021 to 94.2% in January–August 2025.

The "5 Million AI Leaders" programme is also being implemented. More than 1 million school pupils, students, teachers and civil servants have already acquired basic artificial intelligence skills.

IT Park Uzbekistan plays an important role. In the first quarter of 2026, its residents exported USD 191.8 million worth of digital services, 25% more than in the same period of the previous year. The total volume of market services reached UZS 9.4 trillion, while investment in fixed capital amounted to UZS 500.5 billion.

What This Means for Investors

For foreign investors and technology companies, the reforms provide several signals. First, an International Financial Centre operating under English law and offering 50-year tax and customs exemptions could reduce legal and fiscal risks for projects in fintech, digital assets and artificial intelligence.

Second, rapid growth in IT service exports, a young population and high internet penetration make Uzbekistan attractive for relocating development teams and establishing R&D centres. Third, the first international IPO on the London Stock Exchange demonstrates the country's intention to integrate more deeply into global financial markets.

At the same time, investors should consider that the digital services market is still developing, while project success will depend on regulation, policy predictability and access to qualified professionals.

Key Challenges

Uzbekistan's digital transformation is part of a broader regional trend in which Central Asian countries increasingly compete not only for industrial and transport projects, but also for software development centres, artificial intelligence projects and highly qualified professionals.

Despite visible progress, several strategic challenges will determine the sustainability of digital growth.

First, there is a risk of a "race for indicators", in which export volumes and the number of people trained take precedence over product quality. Moving from outsourcing to high-value-added products requires not only higher volumes, but also more complex and globally competitive solutions.

Second, a significant share of incentives is based on tax and customs exemptions. Although a 50-year horizon is attractive, long-term sustainability will depend on the state's ability to build advantages that are not based exclusively on fiscal preferences.

Third, the quality of human capital remains critical. The "5 Million AI Leaders" programme is creating a broad base of fundamental skills. However, developing world-class products requires advanced competencies in machine learning, cybersecurity, product management and regulatory law. Retaining and attracting professionals will also require better working conditions, clear career opportunities and measures to limit talent outflow.

Fourth, institutional capacity must match the country's ambitions. Establishing a financial market regulator, an international commercial court and effective mechanisms for protecting intellectual property rights are complex tasks requiring time and consistent implementation.

Finally, Uzbekistan will have to compete with more technologically advanced countries. Positioning itself as one of Central Asia's digital services hubs is possible, but it will require continuous improvement in regulation, education and the business environment.

According to Alona Lebedieva, the main test for Uzbekistan will be its ability to expand digital infrastructure, improve education and create an environment in which local and international technology companies can develop products for the global market.

Provided that the current pace of reforms is maintained and the challenges are addressed systematically, Uzbekistan has a realistic chance of strengthening its position as a regional centre for digital services. Its success will depend on institutional decisions, consistent human capital policies and the ability to turn current advantages into sustainable competitive positions.

Alona Lebedieva
Aurum Group
email us here
