

Date: 1st October-2026

**UZBEKISTAN'S MERIT-BASED, DIGITAL-FIRST CIVIL SERVICE
TRANSFORMATION**

Muxtorov Abdurahmon Shavkatovich

WIUT PhD Candidate

Abstract. *This article examines the transformation of Uzbekistan's state civil service through merit-based recruitment, digital human-resource management and systematic professional development. The study focuses on the institutional role of ARGOS and its interconnected digital tools for recruitment, personnel administration, assessment, training and performance management. Using documentary analysis and comparative examination of reported administrative indicators for 2024–2025, the article identifies the main results of digitalisation and the institutional challenges that remain. The findings indicate that digital platforms have made recruitment more structured by enabling online applications, testing, interviews and electronic personnel administration, while also expanding access to professional training and personnel data. The study argues that technology can improve efficiency and traceability, but digitalisation alone does not guarantee merit-based outcomes. Clear competency criteria, accountability, data quality, data protection and continuous professional development remain essential. The article proposes strengthening interoperability between HR systems, improving public reporting of recruitment outcomes, developing competency-based career management, validating digital assessment tools regularly, and linking professional development more closely with performance information. The study contributes to a practical understanding of how digital HR infrastructure can support a more transparent, professional and performance-oriented civil service in Uzbekistan.*

Keywords: *merit-based civil service, digital HRM, ARGOS, public administration, open competition, personnel development, performance management, digital transformation, Uzbekistan*

Abstract. *This article examines the transformation of Uzbekistan's state civil service through merit-based recruitment, digital human-resource management and systematic professional development. The study focuses on the institutional role of ARGOS and the interconnected digital tools used across recruitment, personnel administration, assessment, training and performance management. Using comparative analysis of reported administrative indicators for 2024–2025, together with a review of national legislation, OECD assessments and international cooperation materials, the paper identifies the main results and remaining implementation challenges. The analysis shows that digitalisation has changed recruitment from a largely paper-based interaction into a structured process with online applications, testing and interviews. It has also expanded the availability of personnel data and training opportunities. Particular attention is given to the relationship between digital infrastructure and merit-based selection: technology can make procedures faster and*



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more traceable, but institutional quality still depends on clear criteria, accountability, data protection and continuous professional development. The article proposes strengthening interoperability between HR systems, improving public reporting of recruitment outcomes, expanding competency-based career development and using digital performance information more consistently. The study contributes a practical framework for understanding how digital HR reforms can support a more professional and transparent civil service.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Public administration is increasingly shaped by the quality of its human resources and by the capacity of institutions to use reliable information in everyday decision-making. In Uzbekistan, civil service reform has developed alongside wider administrative and digital reforms. The direction of change is particularly visible in recruitment, personnel administration, assessment and professional development, where procedures that once depended heavily on physical documents and separate institutional processes are increasingly organised through digital platforms. This makes the topic relevant not only from a technological perspective, but also from the perspective of institutional capacity and merit-based public employment [1; 2].

The object of this research is the modernisation of Uzbekistan's state civil service. The subject is the interaction between merit-based recruitment, digital human-resource management and professional development. The purpose of the study is to assess how the emerging digital HR ecosystem contributes to more structured and transparent personnel management. To achieve this purpose, the article identifies the main institutional components of the system, examines reported quantitative indicators, compares selected developments across 2024 and 2025, and formulates practical recommendations for the next stage of reform.

The research is also important because digitalisation should not be treated as an end in itself. An electronic vacancy portal can simplify access to a competition, while a digital assessment system can shorten processing time, but neither automatically guarantees the quality of a recruitment decision. The institutional rules behind the technology, the competence of assessors, the consistency of evaluation criteria, and the availability of feedback remain decisive. Therefore, the Uzbek experience is considered here as a combination of institutional reform and digital transformation rather than simply a technology project.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent international literature on Uzbekistan's public administration places civil service reform within a broader transition towards more strategic, professional and evidence-informed government. The OECD's Public Governance Review identifies four central areas for strengthening the civil service: establishing an effective institutional ecosystem,



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reinforcing merit-based recruitment, defining competencies across the HR cycle, and developing an effective senior civil service [2]. This framework is useful for assessing Uzbekistan because it connects recruitment with the later stages of an employee's career rather than treating selection as an isolated administrative procedure.

The OECD review also reports that Uzbekistan's civil service employed approximately 94,000 people at the time of its assessment and notes the need for a coherent institutional centre for strategic HR management [2]. These observations support the importance of ARGOS and related systems, while also indicating that institutional coordination remains an ongoing task. The literature therefore presents digitalisation as a tool that should be embedded in a broader HR architecture.

International cooperation provides another perspective. GIZ materials on good governance in Uzbekistan describe work related to citizen-centred public services, capacity building and the use of information technology in governance [4]. The 2025 UN Public Service Forum, held in Samarkand, likewise placed digital transformation, innovation and institutional capacity among the central themes of public administration development [3]. Together, these sources suggest that digital public administration is increasingly evaluated through its contribution to institutional effectiveness and service quality.

The present article differs from these broader assessments by concentrating on the practical relationship between the digital HR ecosystem and merit-based civil service recruitment. Rather than examining reform only through legal or institutional design, it brings together recruitment indicators, assessment efficiency, training, personnel data and performance management. This integrated perspective makes it possible to identify both measurable progress and areas where digital tools still require stronger institutional support.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study uses a qualitative and quantitative mixed approach. First, documentary analysis was applied to national legislation, official government materials, ARGOS-related information and international assessments. Second, comparative analysis was used to examine selected indicators reported for 2024 and 2025. Third, system analysis was applied to map the relationship between the main digital platforms and stages of the employee lifecycle. Finally, synthesis was used to formulate recommendations based on the combined findings.

The quantitative component relies primarily on the indicators presented in the conference source material and official institutional sources. The figures are interpreted as reported administrative indicators rather than as independent estimates produced by the author. Where the available data are not directly comparable across years, the article avoids constructing a growth rate and instead discusses the scope and direction of change. This approach reduces the risk of drawing conclusions from incomplete or differently defined datasets.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1. Institutional architecture of the digital HR system



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ARGOS occupies a central position in Uzbekistan's civil service HR architecture. The agency's role is connected with the development of unified approaches to personnel management, while its digital ecosystem covers several stages of the employee lifecycle. The importance of this structure lies in the possibility of moving from separate administrative records towards a more continuous information flow: a candidate enters through recruitment, is assessed, may enter the personnel reserve, receives training and can later be evaluated through performance-management mechanisms.

The vacancy platform provides the public entry point to the recruitment process. According to the data presented in the source material, 35,214 competitions were announced in 2024, attracting more than 1.1 million candidates, with 18,813 candidates hired. In 2025, the source reports approximately 4,000 competitions, more than 118,000 candidates and 1,737 appointments [1]. These figures should be read in the context of the different reporting periods and datasets; nevertheless, they demonstrate the scale at which digital recruitment mechanisms have been used.

Table 1. Selected indicators of the digital recruitment and HR ecosystem

Indicator	2024	2025
Competitions announced	35,214	~4,000
Candidates applying	1,100,000+	118,000+
Candidates hired	18,813	1,737
Organizations connected to HRM	2,534	—
Civil servants with digitized records	94,000	—
Training participants	76,713	4,002 (Samarkand region)

Source: compiled from ARGOS-related indicators presented in the conference source material [1]. The values are reproduced as reported and are not recalculated by the author.



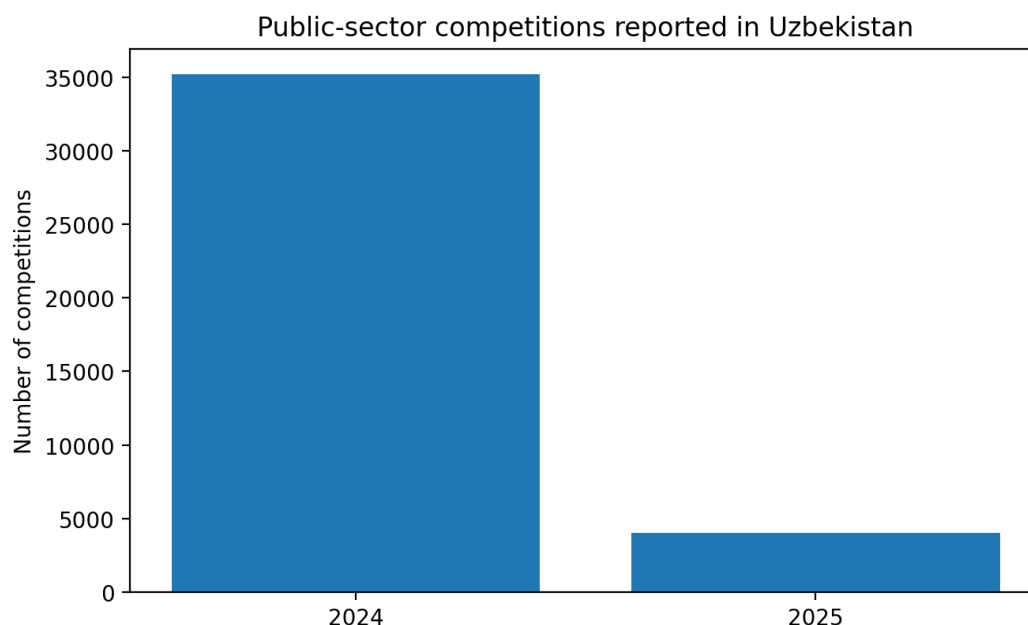


Figure 1. Reported number of public-sector competitions, 2024 and 2025

4.2. Digitalisation across the employee lifecycle

The HR ecosystem extends beyond vacancies. The HRM platform is designed to digitise personnel documentation, while assessment tools are used to evaluate candidates' knowledge and generate additional information for decision-making. The personnel reserve system supports the identification and preparation of candidates for senior positions, and the education platform provides retraining and professional development. A performance-management platform further connects HR administration with measurable work outcomes.

This architecture is significant because fragmented digital tools can reproduce fragmentation if they do not communicate with one another. The value of the ecosystem therefore depends on interoperability, data quality and common definitions. A candidate's recruitment record, training history, competencies and performance information become more useful when they can support decisions at different stages of the career cycle. The OECD's emphasis on integrating competencies into the HR cycle is particularly relevant in this context [2].

4.3. Merit-based recruitment and transparency

One of the clearest institutional changes is the formalisation of recruitment stages. Current public-sector recruitment information describes a process that includes checking qualifications, testing and interviewing, with electronic submission of documents and publication of competition information [6]. The use of structured stages does not eliminate all risks, but it creates a clearer procedural framework within which decisions can be monitored.

Transparency is also strengthened when candidates can follow the progress of their applications and when interview requirements are made publicly available. For example, official recruitment guidance published by government bodies refers to randomised interview questions and electronic document submission, while the current vacancy portal provides a centralised entry point for public-service competitions [6; 7]. These mechanisms

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can reduce unnecessary administrative barriers and make the recruitment process easier to understand for applicants.

Inclusion is another relevant dimension. The conference source reports that in 2024 competitions were organised for more than 8,850 vacant positions specifically for persons with disabilities, with 3,398 individuals employed [1]. Such data indicate that digital recruitment can also serve inclusion objectives when accessibility and equal opportunity are deliberately incorporated into the system.

4.4. Assessment efficiency and the role of technology

The use of digital assessment is one of the most visible examples of efficiency gains. The source material reports that assessment time per candidate decreased from an average of approximately seven hours to around 80 minutes after the introduction of digital solutions and artificial intelligence [1]. The reduction is substantial in operational terms because assessment capacity is an important constraint when large numbers of candidates participate in competitions.

At the same time, speed should not be confused with quality. An assessment system is useful only when the competencies being measured are relevant to the vacancy and when the results are interpreted consistently. Artificial intelligence can support processing and standardisation, but institutional responsibility for the design of assessment criteria and the final recruitment decision remains essential. For this reason, the next stage of digital reform should focus not only on faster testing but also on validation, explainability and periodic review of assessment instruments.

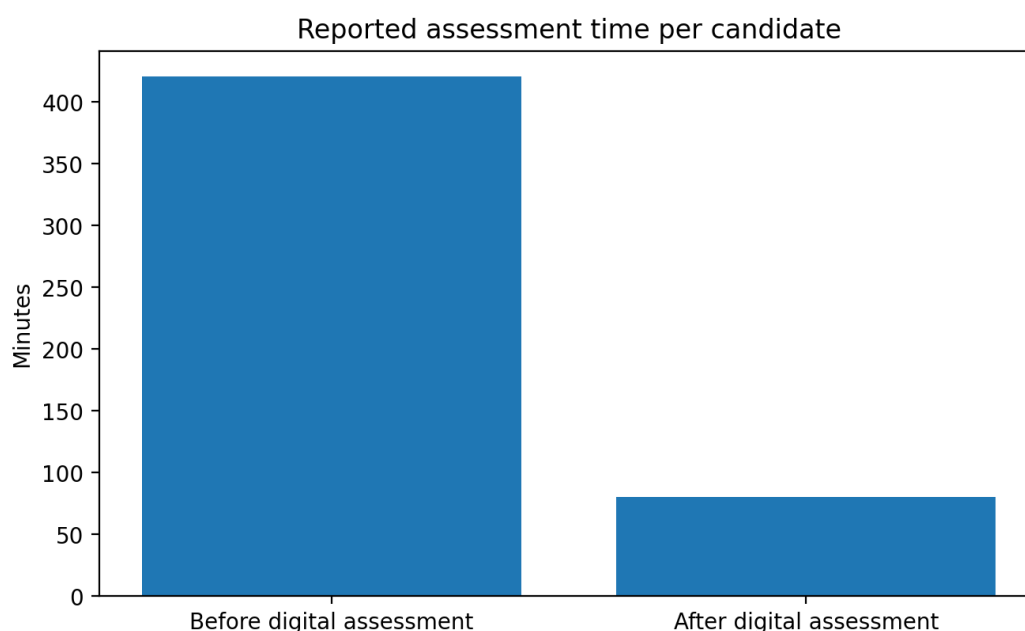


Figure 2. Reported change in assessment time per candidate

4.5. Professional development and leadership capacity

A merit-based civil service requires more than an open entry process. Once employees are recruited, institutions need mechanisms for developing competencies and preparing future leaders. The reported ecosystem includes distance-learning programmes, specialised leadership initiatives and a national personnel reserve. In 2024, the source material reports

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76,713 civil servants participating in 129 training courses and 39 express training sessions [1].

International exposure also forms part of the broader capacity-building approach. The conference source describes internships and training involving partners from Turkey, Hungary, Germany and China, alongside cooperation with GIZ and UNDP [1]. Such programmes can transfer practices and professional networks, but their long-term value depends on whether acquired knowledge is incorporated into domestic institutions. A structured post-training evaluation and knowledge-transfer mechanism would therefore strengthen the return on international capacity-building investments.

4.6. International cooperation and external assessment

Uzbekistan's civil service transformation has developed alongside international engagement. The 2025 UN Public Service Forum in Samarkand brought together public administrators, academics and international organisations to discuss digital transformation, innovation and public-service delivery [3]. The event illustrates the growing importance of digital governance as a shared international policy issue rather than a purely national administrative matter.

The OECD's 2024 Public Governance Review provides a useful external assessment of Uzbekistan's civil service reform. It recognises the scale of the reform agenda while identifying institutional coordination, merit-based recruitment, competency management and senior civil service development as areas requiring continued attention [2]. This combination of progress and continuing challenges is important: successful digitalisation should be measured not only by the number of online services or connected organisations, but also by the quality of recruitment decisions, career development and public-sector performance.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis shows that Uzbekistan's civil service is moving towards an integrated model in which recruitment, personnel administration, assessment, professional development and performance management are increasingly supported by digital systems. The most important change is therefore not the introduction of individual platforms in isolation, but the gradual construction of a common HR architecture. The reported indicators demonstrate that this architecture is already operating at significant scale.

At the same time, the evidence suggests that digital infrastructure alone cannot complete the reform. The OECD's assessment and the institutional information reviewed in this study point to the continuing importance of strategic HR coordination, competency management, senior leadership development and transparent recruitment [2]. Future reforms should consequently combine technological improvement with stronger organisational standards.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed: (1) strengthen interoperability between ARGOS-related HR systems so that information can follow the employee lifecycle without unnecessary duplication; (2) publish clearer aggregate statistics on vacancies, applicants, assessment outcomes and appointments, with consistent definitions



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across reporting periods; (3) introduce regular independent validation of digital assessment tools and competency frameworks; (4) connect training plans more directly with identified competency gaps and performance results; (5) strengthen accessibility standards for applicants with disabilities; and (6) establish systematic post-training and international-exposure evaluation so that acquired knowledge is transferred into institutional practice.

The Uzbek experience demonstrates that merit-based recruitment and digital HR management are mutually reinforcing when technology is designed around clear institutional rules. The next stage of reform is likely to depend less on adding separate digital services and more on improving interoperability, data quality, competency-based career management and accountable use of information. In this sense, the central measure of digital civil service reform is not simply whether a procedure has become electronic, but whether the resulting system helps public institutions select, develop and evaluate people in a more consistent and transparent manner.

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Note: In-text citations are numbered to correspond with the reference list. Quantitative indicators are presented as reported in the cited institutional materials; no unsupported estimates have been added.

