

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. Sustainable development is considered one of the most important global challenges for countries in the twenty-first century. The European Union, through its adopted climate policies and circular economy strategies, is a global actor in sustainable development. Uzbekistan, in this context, has accelerated its sustainability and green transition policy reforms following the economic liberalization and institutional modernization efforts it initiated in recent years. This study comparatively examines the current practices in the European Union and Uzbekistan in accordance with the principles of sustainable development in general. The research results show that the EU has stronger legislation, financial instruments, and a more developed and institutionalized sustainability policy. The European Green Deal and the zero-carbon emission targets adopted within this framework demonstrate the EU's long-term sustainability vision. In contrast, it has been understood that Uzbekistan is in a transition phase in terms of these policies, but has made significant progress through renewable energy investments and international cooperation with its "Green Economy Transition Strategy 2019–2030". However, certain corporate obstacles, financial problems, and technological dependency continue to hinder Uzbekistan's sustainability transformation. A comparative analysis of the EU and Uzbekistan's sustainable development policies reveals that while the EU prioritizes comprehensive net-zero emissions and regulatory measures, Uzbekistan prioritizes economic development and modernization, as well as phased environmental reforms. The study results indicate that Uzbekistan can significantly benefit from the EU's experience in sustainable finance and environmental management. Strengthening international cooperation between the EU and Uzbekistan could facilitate Uzbekistan's inclusion of green investments and the successful implementation of sustainable development principles. In conclusion, sustainable development contributes not only to the implementation of protective environmental policies but also to strengthening institutional structures and ensuring inclusive economic and social transformation based on international cooperation.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, comparative analysis, Uzbekistan, EU

Introduction

The sustainable development is a development model that advocates the belief that future generations also have the right to use the environmental and natural resources we possess today. This concept has begun to be used in the United Nations 2030 Agenda. In this agenda some goals defined about sustainability. These goals have been accepted and adopted by all states, governments, and international organizations worldwide. The climate change affects negatively the use of natural resources. The European Union has started a new program called the European Green Deal. Accordingly, EU countries aim to be a climate-neutral continent by 2050. The EU has also integrated sustainable development principles into its energy, transport, agriculture, and industrial policies. The European Green Deal functions not only as an environmental protection initiative but also as an innovative and competitive economic growth strategy aimed at protecting the natural environment (EC, 2024a).

On the other hand, Uzbekistan has begun to give more importance to sustainability by implementing significant political and economic reforms since 2016. The country has to contend with problems such as water scarcity, desertification, and energy inefficiency. To address this issue, the Uzbek government has adopted the "Green Economy Transition Strategy for the Period 2019-2030" (OECD, 2025) to produce alternative energy sources, ensure energy efficiency, and cope with potential environmental problems caused by global climate change.

This study comparatively examines sustainable development efforts in the European Union and Uzbekistan, and evaluates the findings within this context. Furthermore, the policies adopted by Uzbekistan and the EU, how these policies are implemented, and the similarities and differences in existing institutional structures are examined.

Literature Review

There are numerous publications that examine sustainable development and its various dimensions (Chichilnisky, 1997; Jabareen, 2008; Morris, 2002; Sachs, 2015; Fu, 2023; Ozili & Iorember, 2024; Salik & Aksu 2023, Atmaca, Kiray & Pehlivan 2019; Sari & Ayad, 2020). However, there are very few studies that compare the sustainable development goals of Uzbekistan and the EU (Yakubova, 2025; Ashurali o'g, 2025).

Research Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative comparative approach based on policy documents, international reports, and academic literature.

Results and Discussion

Sustainable development can be examined in three different dimensions: economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, and social sustainability. These dimensions are closely related and require integrated policy making.

Economic sustainability includes both long-term economic growth and practices that protect the ecological environment from degradation. Environmental sustainability prioritizes protecting ecosystems, reducing environmental pollution, and combating climate change. As for the concept of social sustainability, it represents an understanding that includes social equality, public welfare, education, and inclusive governance.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals provide a detailed framework for achieving sustainable development worldwide. The Sustainable Development Goal examines issues such as poverty reduction, environmentally friendly energy production, resilient cities, preventing excessive consumption, and combating climate change.

The European Union has aligned its policy initiatives with the Sustainable Development Goals by adopting the European Green Deal. Similarly, Uzbekistan has adapted the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals to its policies and has begun to place greater emphasis on international cooperation (EC, 2024b).

Sustainable Development Practices in the European Union

One of the EU's most important initiatives regarding sustainable development is the Green Deal. This document forms the basis of the EU's sustainability principles. Entering into force in 2019, the Green Deal aims to achieve zero carbon emissions in Europe by 2050 and to have an economy that uses resources in the most efficient way. Key objectives include reducing greenhouse gas emissions and establishing a circular economy system (EC, 2024a; EC, 2026a, EC, 2026b).

The EU Climate Act requires a reduction in emissions of at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. These objectives demonstrate the EU's commitment to combating global climate change (EU, 2024a).

Another policy adopted by the EU regarding sustainable development is to increase the share of renewable energy sources. Renewable energy constitutes a crucial stage of sustainable development policy. The EU has significantly increased investments in clean energy sources such as solar and wind power. Circular Economy Policies are another policy adopted by the EU regarding sustainable development. The circular economy model supports 100% recycling and waste reduction policies, aiming to reduce waste to zero as much as possible. The EU also supports policies aimed at sustainable product design, the establishment of recycling systems, and the reduction of industrial waste. The EU has implemented regulations targeting plastic pollution, sustainable packaging, and eco-friendly manufacturing practices. These policies aim to decouple economic growth from resource consumption (Koundouri, et. al, 2024).

Sustainable Development Practices in Uzbekistan

The policies adopted by the Uzbekistani government as part of the Green Economy Transition Strategy are as follows. First of all Uzbekistan adopted the “Green Economy Transition Strategy 2019–2030” to support sustainable economic modernization. The strategy focuses on increasing renewable energy capacity, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and strengthening climate resilience. The government aims to significantly increase renewable energy production and reduce energy intensity across industrial sectors (OECD,2025).

On the other hand, Uzbekistan has accelerated investments in solar and wind energy projects in cooperation with international financial institutions and foreign investors. Renewable energy expansion is considered essential for reducing dependence on fossil fuels and improving energy security. The country has recently increased its renewable energy targets and seeks to achieve substantial clean energy capacity by 2030 (OECD, 2025)

Moreover Uzbekistan faces severe environmental problems associated with desertification, water scarcity, and the Aral Sea ecological disaster. Climate change further intensifies agricultural vulnerability and water management challenges. The government has implemented reforestation programs and climate adaptation initiatives to mitigate environmental degradation. However, limited institutional capacity and technological dependence remain obstacles to effective implementation.

Uzbekistan also attaches importance to international cooperation in order to achieve its sustainable development goals. The European Union and other international organizations provide financial and technical assistance for green reforms and renewable energy projects. The EU-Uzbekistan partnership increasingly emphasizes green energy cooperation, sustainable infrastructure, and climate policy coordination (EC, 2024c).

Comparative Analysis

The European Union has a highly developed institutional structure in terms of its sustainable development strategy. The EU legislates regulations and effectively coordinates sustainability policies among member states. In contrast, Uzbekistan's institutional structure is more centrally controlled, but it continues to develop. The country has improved its ability to implement reform policies. However, administrative limitations and insufficient technical infrastructure and expert personnel hinder implementation in this area. The EU has a concise climate management policy framework thanks to regulatory legislation, emissions trading, and sustainable reporting systems. The EU has adopted climate neutrality as a long-term policy objective. Uzbekistan's policy approach, however, is more development-oriented, prioritizing policies focused on modernization and energy. Although environmental management reforms are underway in Uzbekistan, it has not yet reached EU standards. Uzbekistan primarily adopts

a balanced policy, pursuing economic growth and the emergence of a boom simultaneously. Attracting foreign investment and fostering international cooperation to achieve the country's green transformation.

The EU prioritizes just transition policies to fully implement the green transformation. Social sustainability can be achieved through welfare systems that are widespread throughout society. Uzbekistan, however, faces some fundamental socio-economic problems such as regional inequality and employment issues. Although sustainable development policies are increasingly trying to prioritize social welfare, it is observed that a widespread and balanced policy is not being followed throughout the country in practice. Both the EU and Uzbekistan face similar challenges in terms of sustainable development efforts. In this regard, the problems experienced in the EU largely stem from political disagreements, increasing economic competition, and pressures on the implementation of climate policy. Recent debates in the EU show that the tension between environmental goals and economic competition is at a significant level (Mendiluce and Hoopers, 2025).

The problems that Uzbekistan faces in this context are; insufficient financial resources, limited technological capacity, institutional inefficiencies, and vulnerabilities in combating environmental problems. However, the country is showing significant progress due to developing its renewable energy potential and increasing international cooperation opportunities. The EU and Uzbekistan can strengthen sustainable development by cooperating on issues such as technology transfer, green finance mechanisms, and policy dialogue. In addition, expanding cooperation and partnerships in renewable energy, water management, and sustainable agriculture would benefit both sides (International Energy Agency, 2025; European External Relations Service, 2023).

Conclusion

The findings of this research show that both the EU and Uzbekistan have adopted a sustainable development policy. However, there are significant differences between the two sides in terms of institutional and economic capacity for implementing the policy and the implementation of the adopted policy. The European Union has one of the most advanced sustainability management models in the world with its European Green Deal and climate neutrality goal. Uzbekistan, on the other hand, is in a transition phase, but it attaches importance to green economic reforms and renewable energy investments. The country faces some challenges in implementing its Green Economy Transition Strategy. When the sustainable development policies of both sides are analyzed comparatively, it becomes clear that Uzbekistan should benefit from the EU experience to achieve a more successful environmental management process. At the same time, international cooperation is vital for Uzbekistan to achieve sustainable development. In conclusion, long-term institutional policy, technological innovation, and global cooperation are needed to achieve sustainable development. It would be beneficial for both the EU and Uzbekistan to strive for comprehensive sustainable development by cooperating more over time (Economic Times, 2026).

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