

Project on strengthening tailings safety and the prevention of accidental water pollution in Uzbekistan and beyond in Central Asia



Introduction and background

Beneficiary and target groups

As a result of mining activities in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries, large amounts of hazardous waste are generated, which are generally stored in tailings management facilities (TMFs). TMFs can pose high risks to societies and the environment, especially if poorly constructed or maintained. Their safe management is critical for preventing TMF failures and their disastrous consequences.

Uzbekistan faces particular challenges with uranium tailings, many of which are located in the vicinity of residential areas and susceptible to risks posed by natural disasters. Given their proximity to earthquake lines, landslide areas and water streams, a tailings accident could cause accidental water pollution, including with transboundary effects, and result in severe soil and water contamination.

Moreover, responsibilities for ensuring industrial safety and the prevention of accidental water pollution from TMFs are often spread across different competent authorities, thus requiring well-functioning inter-institutional coordination and cooperation. This is a challenge for many Central Asian countries.

To this end, the project aims to strengthen tailings safety and the prevention of accidental water pollution in Uzbekistan and beyond in Central Asia, incl. their engagement in related global processes. It will enhance Uzbekistan's expert and institutional capacity on the safe management of TMFs and improve related transboundary cooperation both at the subregional and river-basin levels.

The main beneficiary of the project is **Uzbekistan**, namely its competent authorities and operators.

Other Central Asian countries will also benefit from the project through its subregional activities.

Partnerships with other relevant international and regional organizations (e.g. UNDP, UNDRR, UNEP, IWAC, WIC, OECD, OSCE) are also pursued in the project's implementation.

The project supports the application of available guidance, such as the [UNECE Safety guidelines and good practices for tailings management facilities](#), a related checklist methodology (incl. Tailings Risk Index) and the [Online Toolkit and Training for Strengthening Mine Tailings Safety](#) (incl. an [animated video](#)).

The project also builds on the results of previously implemented UNECE projects on strengthening the safety of mining operations, in particular of TMFs, in [Kazakhstan](#) (2017-19) and [Tajikistan](#) (2019-21). It also seeks synergies with the on-going UNECE [Project on supporting countries of Central Asia in strengthening the safety of mine tailings](#) (since 2020).



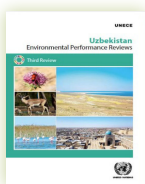
Key activities

Project results

The two-year project will be implemented in 2021-23. Its key activities are:

- Establishment of an inter-institutional working group on tailings safety and the prevention of accidental water pollution, including the conduct of an initial meeting
- On-site training in Uzbekistan (with participation of other Central Asian countries) to apply the [UNECE Safety guidelines and good practices for tailings management facilities](#) and a related checklist methodology
- Sharing experience with other Central Asian countries on strengthening mine tailings safety, notably in the Syr Darya river basin

The project also supports Uzbekistan in implementing its recommendations from the [3rd Environmental Performance Review \(EPR\)](#), notably 15.5 (a) to (c) on the Industrial Accidents Convention, and the related EPR Action Plan for the Convention.



UNECE builds on the experience gained both by the Industrial Accidents Convention in implementing similar tailings projects in Central Asia and the Water Convention in the establishment of National Policy Dialogues (NPDs) on integrated water resource management and water supply and sanitation in Central Asia, in order to make use of synergies between the two processes.

The project supports Uzbekistan in implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction for 2015-30 and the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular [SDG 6](#) and [SDG 9](#).



The expected project results are:

- Improved knowledge and use of existing good practices and tools to safely manage mine tailings, developed by UNECE or partners, such as the [Safety Guidelines and Good Practices for Tailings Management Facilities](#), the [decision 2020/1 on strengthening mine tailings safety in the UNECE region and beyond](#), the [Checklist methodology](#) and the [Global Industry Standard for Tailings Management](#)
- Improved institutional coordination and established/enhanced cooperation mechanisms between authorities at the national and local levels, and between authorities and industry in Uzbekistan
- Improved subregional / transboundary cooperation on mine tailings safety and the prevention of accidental water pollution, including at the river basin level in Central Asia
- Strengthened implementation of the UNECE Industrial Accidents and Water Conventions, incl. enhanced capacity to accede to the Industrial Accidents Convention, in order to enhance water management and to reduce related risks, and other relevant policy recommendations, in particular the UNECE [EPRs](#) for Central Asia
- Enhanced engagement of Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries in global processes related to mine tailings safety, notably at UNEP in the framework of [UNEA-5.2](#) (Nairobi, 28 February - 2 March 2022) and [UNEA-6](#) (Nairobi, 26 February - 1 March 2024)

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