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Information Environment Mapping in **Central Asia:**

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan,
Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan



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Information Supply and Demand in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, information supply is constrained by state media control, restrictive laws and crackdowns targeting influential media outlets, surveillance, and periodic internet disruptions, which reduce access to independent, diverse, and verifiable information.



These constraints shape what can be published, what is amplified, and what is silenced, and they push sensitive discussions into closed channels where verification is weaker and accountability is limited. Disinformation spreads through domestic and cross-border flows, including narratives linked to Russia and China that merge with local political messaging and exploit social divisions; media-sector actors in all four countries also report a perception that governments are among the main creators and distributors of disinformation.

Where official communication and mainstream media do not provide usable guidance, civil society organizations fill core gaps. They produce practical, rights-based information; provide legal aid; build verification and media literacy skills; maintain open-data resources where official data is missing or removed; and deliver localized, multilingual outreach to groups excluded by language, geography, or stigma. Their role is service delivery and access, and it matters most where state channels are distrusted, inaccessible, or incomplete.

In remote areas, last-mile information delivery depends on trusted intermediaries embedded in local governance and community structures. Akimats play this role in **Kazakhstan** and **Kyrgyzstan**; Khokimiyats and Mahallas in **Uzbekistan**; and Rais-led structures and elder councils in **Tajikistan**.¹ These channels extend reach efficiently, but they can also amplify misinformation, reproduce bias, and transmit government-influenced narratives as community consensus. They also systematically fail to include women and persons with disabilities in community decision-making, with the quality of representation varying significantly from one neighborhood, region or country to another.

Digital platforms increasingly reward reach over reliability, elevating bloggers and informal influencers who often outpace official channels. Their advantage is distribution, driven by short-form dynamics and high-frequency posting, but reliability is inconsistent because sourcing, verification, and correction standards are uneven. Bloggers are also increasingly targeted by the same repressive tools used against journalists, which reduces independent, high-reach information supply without improving quality.

Access is further shaped by infrastructure and service design. Rural broadband initiatives,

¹ An Akimat is the local executive government body in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, functioning as a regional or city administration led by an Akim (governor/mayor). In Uzbekistan, the equivalent executive structure is the okimiyat, while a Mahalla refers to a neighbourhood-level community unit and a form of local self-organisation. In Tajikistan, Rais refers to a local executive leader or chairman.

including DARE in **Kazakhstan** and Digital Foundations in **Tajikistan**, address coverage gaps but face affordability and capacity constraints that limit meaningful use. Government e-service portals, including Tunduk in **Kyrgyzstan** and MyGov in **Uzbekistan**, have expanded access to procedures and official guidance, but adoption lags due to limited awareness, usability barriers, incomplete language coverage, and persistent rural access gaps.

Demand is concentrated around immediate needs and shaped more by platform habits than institutional credibility. Vulnerable groups rely most on social media and television, while interpersonal networks remain decisive for interpretation and decision-making; these networks can translate complex policies into locally understandable guidance, but they also accelerate rumors when trusted peers circulate unverified claims. Traditional gathering practices (social events) remain part of this interpersonal layer—Aitys in **Kazakhstan** and **Kyrgyzstan**, and gap/tashkil/chayhana-type settings in **Uzbekistan** and **Tajikistan**—providing recurring venues for community news, practical advice, and informal interpretation of national developments.

Across the region, short, visually engaging videos are the preferred—and often the most trusted—format, shifting influence toward high-reach platforms optimized for reels and TikTok-style clips and away from text-heavy official communication. This intersects with pronounced audience fragmentation with older generations preferring Facebook both to access and publish information, and younger audiences preferring platforms like TikTok and Instagram to consume it, creating a structural mismatch between where information is produced and where high-need audiences search for it. The digital divide persists despite rising internet penetration and widespread smartphone use; rural connectivity gaps and affordability constraints convert nominal “access” into intermittent, low-quality consumption rather than reliable inclusion.

The highest-demand information areas are consistent across all four countries: public services, healthcare—especially for women—and jobs—especially for men under prevailing provider norms. Women face cultural and logistical barriers to health information, preventive-care knowledge remains low, and campaigns are often short-lived, leaving sustained gaps in early detection and routine care. Employment information flows remain highly informal, with personal networks gatekeeping access and undermining equity for migrants, rural residents, and marginalized groups with fewer connections, even where online vacancy channels exist.

The core problem is not content scarcity, but the gap between supply channels and consumption realities.



Official systems and legacy media often communicate through institution-centered, text-heavy formats, while vulnerable groups consume through short video, messaging apps, interpersonal validation, and local intermediaries. Improving information access requires aligning credible guidance with Telegram, short video, and trusted last-mile structures, while reducing predictable risks: misinformation amplification, platform manipulation, and the exclusion of women and persons with disabilities from decision-making and information circulation.

Rights Constraints and Sustained Pressure on Media Pluralism in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

Central Asia’s information environment is constrained by a rights context that restricts pluralism. In **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan**, authoritarian governance, nation-building policies, and societal intolerance systematically narrow what can be reported, debated, and safely shared, with marginalized communities often bearing the highest cost.

Religious freedom is tightly managed through state oversight of worship, education, and religious literature, which disproportionately affects non-dominant groups and penalizes independent religious life. Ethnic and linguistic minorities face exclusion through education policy, media restrictions, and periodic crackdowns, with clear pressure points including ethnic Uzbeks in **Kyrgyzstan**, Pamiris in **Tajikistan**, and Karakalpaks in **Uzbekistan**. Language-related constraints reduce access to public-service guidance and reliable news, increasing dependence on informal intermediaries and rumor-prone channels.

LGBTQI+ communities remain highly vulnerable across the region. In **Uzbekistan**, male same-sex relations are criminalized, while stigma and limited protections elsewhere enable harassment and violence with minimal accountability. Disinformation targeting LGBTQI+ groups is used to generate moral panic and justify restrictive measures, further shrinking safe access to information, with the law targeting LGBT ‘propaganda’ that was passed in **Kazakhstan** at the end of 2025 is a clear example of this trend.

Country-specific dynamics intensify risk. In **Kazakhstan**, rising online hate speech and expanded penalties framed as addressing “false information” create enforcement pathways that can chill legitimate expression. In **Uzbekistan**, political disinformation and cyber fraud grow in an environment of uneven digital literacy, persistent surveillance, and funding controls that weaken independent media and civil society oversight. **Tajikistan** remains the most restrictive case, combining centralized internet-gateway surveillance, high data costs, and frequent outages that make alternative sources unreliable and reinforce dependence on official narratives.

Journalism is under sustained pressure in all four countries. Arrests, lawsuits, raids, and site blocking have increased in recent years, producing risk-averse reporting and weakening investigative capacity. Political interference, concentrated ownership, limited resources, and pervasive self-censorship further reduce verification depth and make corrections inconsistent.

The main opportunities are practical fixes that increase inclusion and trust. Digital literacy programming exists but often emphasizes safety and compliance rather than critical analysis and verification routines, leaving vulnerable users underprepared. Disability-accessible formats, minority-language content, and plain-language service guides remain scarce, limiting reach among those most excluded.

Trust can be strengthened through standardized practices that are currently weak or uneven: transparent sourcing, visible corrections policies, and routine “myth vs. fact” outputs in the channels people use.



Donor support often funds short campaigns; what is needed are always-on, KPI-driven information services that provide continuous service navigation, verification, and rights guidance. Connectivity expansion helps, but it does not produce inclusion without enforceable rights protections, multilingual access, and sustained, community-anchored information delivery.

Aligning Channels, Reducing Cost Barriers, and Strengthening Accountability to Improve Information Environments in Central Asia



Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

Stakeholders across **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan** describe the same practical gap: credible information exists, but it rarely arrives in a form that vulnerable groups can access, understand, and act on. When information does reach them, it is often too text-heavy, delivered in the wrong language, tied to costly data usage, or routed through channels they do not use—leaving space for rumor, manipulation, and fraud to move faster than verified guidance. The recommendations below reflect that reality and integrate the most consistent country-level insights from CSOs, media representatives, and sector experts.

Employment information was repeatedly framed as structurally gatekept. The proposed fix is to push vacancies into the open by incentivizing employers to post publicly—through tax credits or visibility badges—and requiring salary ranges to reduce informal bargaining and network control. Stakeholders emphasized that transparency measures matter only if they translate into use, which is why proposed delivery mechanisms are intentionally simple: hotlines and Telegram bots that can transfer to a human operator, systematic logging of unresolved cases, and follow-up until the person actually completes an application or enrollment. Several actors stressed that outreach should not end at “awareness”; it should end at completion, with beneficiaries assisted to apply on the spot and results recorded.

Public services surfaced as the most universal information need, but stakeholders stressed that “digitalization” has not translated into “access” for rural users, low-literacy audiences, and communities with limited connectivity or devices. The operational proposal is to build e-service literacy where people already go—banks, post offices, and clinics—through pop-up digital help desks that use step-by-step screens and staff support to walk users through priority portals. Affordability was treated as a hard barrier, not a secondary issue, prompting recommendations to negotiate zero-rating for essential portals (MyGov, Tunduk, health guidance, legal aid) and provide targeted data vouchers for vulnerable users. **Kyrgyzstan**-specific feedback reinforced that online services and government chatbots must provide clear, actionable answers rather than generic text, while **Tajikistan** feedback emphasized that high data costs and outages make “online-only” communication structurally exclusionary.

Inclusion failures were described as predictable and fixable. Stakeholders repeatedly pointed to shortages of disability-accessible formats, minority-language content, and plain-language service guides, and they linked these gaps directly to dependence on rumor-prone informal networks. The proposed standard is straightforward: translate key laws and procedures into citizen guides with examples, appeal steps, and printable checklists in minority languages, and require accessible packaging—subtitles, adapted formats for hearing and visual impairments, and, where relevant, sign-language interpretation. **Tajikistan** stakeholders were explicit about language coverage needs—Tajik, Russian, Uzbek, and Pamiri and Afghan languages—and urged subtitles and multilingual materials as default practice rather than the exception. Similar concerns appeared in **Kyrgyzstan** and **Uzbekistan**, where stakeholders emphasized simplifying official language so that people can understand messages without intermediaries.

Across the region, stakeholders drew a sharp line between countering misinformation and criminalizing speech. They described enforcement-heavy “false information” approaches as high-risk because they can be used to intimidate critics while leaving the underlying drivers of misinformation intact. The recommended alternative focuses on capability and coordination: a

regional fact-checking alliance to share keywords, debunks, and influencer toolkits across Telegram and YouTube; routine pre-testing of messages with vulnerable groups; and a requirement for all funded campaigns to maintain a disinformation risk register that anticipates likely misreads, hostile reframing, and platform vulnerabilities. **Kyrgyzstan** stakeholders added concrete education measures—fake-news detection courses in schools, guidance for government agencies and schools on working effectively with social networks, and a methodology for identifying hate speech and online harassment to avoid arbitrary responses. **Uzbekistan** stakeholders emphasized training-of-trainers models to scale verification skills through communities and called for practical public education on phishing and cyber fraud, reflecting the scale of harms that follow manipulated content.

Trust repair was treated as a measurable practice rather than a communications slogan. Stakeholders argued that corrections, transparent sourcing, and consistent “myth vs. fact” outputs are still rare and uneven, and that credibility cannot be rebuilt without routine, visible accountability. **Kazakhstan**-based insights were unusually blunt: audiences should actively call out media mistakes, demand corrections, and stop supporting unreliable outlets, creating reputational consequences for misinformation. Complementary system-level proposals include rewarding outlets that publish corrections policies, source labeling, and data notes, and publishing monthly service-delivery scorecards—request volumes, processing times, and resolution rates—to reduce speculation and show whether institutions are functioning.

Protection of information producers was raised as a fundamental for improving the regional information environment. Journalists—and increasingly bloggers with large audiences—were described as exposed to arrests, lawsuits, raids, intimidation, and site blocking, which drives self-censorship and reduces investigative capacity. Proposed safeguards included legal-defense pools, internal digital-security audits, and emergency relocation pathways. Stakeholders also suggested widening the set of trusted messengers by partnering with credible bloggers and training them on verification routines, correction practices, and disclosure standards, since they often reach audiences that institutional channels cannot.

Finally, stakeholders emphasized that last-mile delivery is dominated by local intermediaries and community routines, and information strategies fail when they ignore them. The practical recommendation is to formalize CSO–ministry MOUs so NGOs can mirror official information, co-own dashboards, and escalate frontline feedback, while requiring local outreach plans (Akimat/Mahalla/Rais structures and equivalents) to specify target groups—women, persons with disabilities, migrants, and minorities—channels, and post-event follow-ups. **Uzbekistan**-specific insights reinforced using mahallas, schools, and mosques as trusted delivery points for digital literacy and verification education, paired with illustrated materials suitable for low-literacy and time-poor audiences, particularly women. Stakeholders also highlighted the continuing influence of Aitys and gap/chayhana-type gatherings as spaces where community interpretations are formed; the operational implication is to use these settings as moderated civics forums that translate policies into concrete community actions rather than leaving them vulnerable to rumor cascades.

Across all recommendations, the throughline is implementation discipline: combine channel alignment (Telegram, short video, and radio where needed), affordability support (zero-rating, data vouchers, and device subsidies where appropriate), inclusive design (language and disability access), and accountability routines (corrections, scorecards, and risk registers) so that reliable information can compete with misinformation on speed, clarity, and reach.



This brief provides a concise synthesis of the full report, **Information Environment Mapping in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan**, and therefore cannot capture all characteristics and nuances of the region's information environment. It summarises the key cross-cutting findings and priority recommendations. For a complete account, readers are encouraged to consult the full report, including the detailed methodology, sources, limitations, and country-level analysis.

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