

# One region, one objective – Trade Facilitation in Central Asia

## Context

Throughout history, Central Asia benefited from its location on the Silk Road, connecting East Asia with the Middle East and Europe. Today, with its young and educated population, natural resources and strategically advantageous location, the region has immense potential for economic development. Trade in agricultural and industrial goods offers many opportunities for export to regional and international markets. However, despite significant improvements in trade facilitation over the past years, the participation of Central Asian countries in regional and global trade remains comparatively low. There is a need to improve cooperation between border control agencies within one country and between states, as well as standardisation, simplification and digitalization of forms and procedures. This will increase transparency in the processing of documents and reduce the risk of corruption. For companies this means lower transaction costs, which will subsequently lead to lower prices for goods and better choices for consumers.

All five Central Asian countries understand the importance of managing their borders effectively and making trade easier. They joined various international and regional trade agreements to reduce tariffs and administrative and technical barriers to trade and are actively working on reforms.

## Our objective

Central Asian countries have developed regional approaches and knowledge, esp. in digitalization, to facilitate cross-border trade along regional trade routes.

Project name	Trade Facilitation in Central Asia
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project regions	Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
Main partners	Ministry of Trade and Integration of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Ministry of Economy and Commerce of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Trade and Foreign Economic Relations of Turkmenistan Ministry of Investments, Industry and Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan
Duration	01.2024 - 12.2026

## Our measures

The current phase of the regional project started in January 2024 and builds on the activities of its predecessor projects.

We support partner institutions with advisory services on processes and improvement of knowledge and skills in four areas of cross-border trade. Employees of state entities learn to design digital solutions aligned with international standards and to enable regional interfaces and data exchange along trade routes. We make available methodological expertise and specialized knowledge for the development and execution of an experimental training course.

Our experts provide advisory services (on IT, legal, operational, process analysis) to improve clearance processes, introduce



*L. to r.: Discussion of progress in trade facilitation measures at the 10th Regional Meeting of NTFCs. Uzbekistan, Nov. 2023.*

*Monitoring of the activities of 'Nur Zholy' border check point. Kazakhstan.*

*Pg 2: Training on RSM for veterinary and phytosanitary services of Central Asia during the study tour. Latvia, Sept. 2022.*

*Launch of pilot shipments utilizing the digital TIR procedure at the border between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.*

*Central Asian Leadership Conference for Women in Trade. Kazakhstan, June 2022.*



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more effective control measures, advise on strategy and Key Performance Indicators, and adapt the digital solutions to trade procedures.

Public-private partnership plays an important role in enhancing trade, therefore our third area of work is focused on support of national and regional public-private dialogue.

Finally, we advise transport and logistics companies in Central Asian countries on improvements of the efficiency and green approaches of their operations. Costs data will be analysed, practical trainings in logistics management, digital solutions, and intermodal transport operations will be conducted.

We also facilitate the development of a networking system and business concepts with Germany and other European-based transport and logistics companies or associations.

## Our results to date

The predecessor projects have successfully advanced trade facilitation reforms in the region. All five Central Asian countries adapted international standards provided under the TIR system (*Transports Internationaux Routiers*) and now accept the 'electronic pre-declaration'. Digital TIR corridors help traders to save time and paper enormously.

Public and private parties joined together under the umbrella of the National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs), a format

created by the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement. Recommendations of the private sector solidified its role as negotiation partner. The regional network of NTFCs is equally effective in generating debate and recommendations. Given the absence of an intergovernmental body discussing trade issues, this presents an important step forward for trade facilitation in Central Asia.

The border agencies have designed their own strategies and implemented action plans aimed at fully introducing Risk Management Systems (RMS) and pre-arrival information. Their staff on all levels learned principles of RMS and have developed plans to integrate such trainings on a regular basis. The coordination and regional exchange of experiences between agencies is also greatly improved.

Dialogues and results of detailed studies on the situation at selected border posts in Central Asia have formed the basis for several piloting measures for improving processes. For instance, the 'Sanarip Tamga' software on the sharing the pre-arrival information in the Kyrgyz border agencies was developed and introduced in 2023. The automated information system 'E-Transit' launched in Uzbekistan is used for online submission of pre-arrival information and customs clearance of transit goods. In addition, the developed mobile application assists exporters in avoiding queues at borders through the use of the 'E-Navbat' booking service. The Data Exchange Portal at the Kyrgyz/Uzbek border checkpoints 'Dostuk'/'Dustlik' has eliminated the duplication of data entry resulting in enhanced efficiency and transparency in border crossing procedures.

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