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CENTRAL ASIA



REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION STRATEGY (RDCS)

December 2020 – December 2025

PREFACE

The original RDCS was modified and amended on January 22, 2024. The overall Goal and Regional Development Objectives have not changed, except for the removal of Afghanistan in RDO 1. Due to the changing regional context, the IRs under RDO 2: Resilience to Regional Vulnerabilities Advanced, and several sub-IRs, have changed.

The original IRs and sub-IRs were the following:

IR 2.1 Central Asian Cooperation on Addressing Trafficking in Persons Strengthened

- 2.1.1 Capacity of all migration and CTIP stakeholders to coordinate efforts on safe migration increased
- 2.1.2 Regional information and evidence sharing enhanced
- 2.1.3 Legal frameworks in CA countries harmonized across the region

IR 2.2 Ability of Central Asian Actors to Reduce VE Risk Strengthened

- 2.2.1 Capacity of key regional stakeholders to collaborate on and share evidence-based information on CVE increased
- 2.2.2 Regional cooperation and networks of CVE actors improved

The RDO2 IRs were reworded and a third was added. CVE and CTIP are now a part of IR 2.1. IR 2.2 focuses on countering disinformation and IR 2.3 focuses on health:

IR 2.1 Regional Security and Stability Promoted

- 2.1.1 Regional cooperation on safe migration strengthened
- 2.1.2 Regional coordination to prevent and counter violent extremism increased
- 2.1.3 Legal frameworks in CA countries harmonized across the region

IR 2.2 Information Integrity and Public Vigilance against Disinformation Strengthened

- 2.2.1 Factual and unbiased reporting produced
- 2.2.2 Identification and Counter Messaging Capabilities Improved

IR 2.3 Infectious Disease Control Improved

- 2.3.1 Impact of future pandemics mitigated
- 2.3.2 TB incidence and mortality rates reduced

The updated Results Framework can be found on page eight.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	4
I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
II. CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL CONTEXT	9
III. STRATEGIC APPROACH	17
IV. RESULTS FRAMEWORK	21
Regional Mission Goal Statement and Narrative	21
RDO 1: Regional Connectivity Strengthened	22
RDO 1 Intermediate Results Statements and Narratives	24
RDO 2: Resilience to Regional Vulnerabilities Advanced	26
RDO 2 Intermediate Results Statements and Narratives	29
V. MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING	30
ANNEX: Regional Operations Map	33

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BRI	PRC's Belt and Road Initiative
CAREM	Central Asia Regional Electricity Market
CASA-1000	Central Asia-South Asia power project
CLA	Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CT Bureau	Bureau of Counterterrorism
CTIP	Combating Trafficking in Persons
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DIS	Development Information Solution
DOS	Department of State
EU	European Union
FSN	Foreign Service National
FY	Fiscal Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIS	Geographic Information System
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICS	Integrated Country Strategy
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
INL	International Narcotics and Law
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IR	Intermediate Result
J2SR	Journey to Self-Reliance
JSP	Joint Strategic Plan
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NPI	New Partner Initiative
NUP	New and Underutilized Partners
NSS	National Security Strategy
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PEPFAR	The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PMP	Performance Management Plan
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSE	Private Sector Engagement
RDCS	Regional Development Cooperation Strategy
RDO	Regional Development Objective

UNCLASSIFIED

TB	Tuberculosis
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCIRF	U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
USDH	U.S. Direct Hire
WHO	World Health Organization

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of the USAID/Central Asia’s 2020 – 2025 Regional Development Cooperation Strategy (RDCS) is: *A Self-Reliant Central Asia that is Interconnected, Independent, and Resistant to Malign Influences.* The USAID/Central Asia Mission and the RDCS 2020-2025 is focused on accelerating the journey to self-reliance (J2SR) for the region and supporting key objectives in the U.S. Strategy for Central Asia. The regional development objectives (RDO) that support the RDCS goal align with the restructuring of USAID’s presence in Central Asia and USAID’s Policy Framework, which reorients our work around fostering Central Asia’s capacity and commitment to plan, finance, and implement solutions to its development challenges. As part of USAID’s restructuring of its presence in Central Asia, USAID/Central Asia’s RDCS 2020-2025 goal and the RDOs will address challenges that are regional in nature and provide solutions that are regional in their application.

Central Asia, which includes Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan is a geostrategic region important to the United States’ national security interests. A stable and secure Central Asia contributes directly to U.S. efforts to counter terrorism, support regional stability, promote energy security, and enhance economic prosperity in the region and beyond. Surrounded by Russia, PRC, and Iran, the region is economically and politically isolated and susceptible to malign influences that undermine autonomy and Central Asia’s capacity for development.

Due to the nature of Central Asian countries’ unique development paths, the region’s performance on the J2SR Country Roadmaps is diverse. Economic performance varies across the region and there remains significant bilateral work to achieve self-reliance. Transboundary challenges also exist that require regional approaches. Metrics that appear strong on the surface (i.e., gender and business environment) are compromised by a lack of political will and/or capacity to effectively implement relevant programming, as reflected in the government effectiveness metric. In this regard, Central Asian countries’ commitments to developing an inclusive and diverse economic system and their lack of success in developing policies and regional frameworks to diversify their economies away from natural resource extraction make the region vulnerable to economic shocks. **These underlying weaknesses and vulnerabilities may impede J2SR progress and provide opportunities for malign actors to undermine sovereignty and regional cohesiveness.**

To further the U.S. strategy for Central Asia and advance self-reliance across the region, USAID/Central Asia identified five priority areas for regional support: energy, trade, transboundary water management, countering violent extremism, and combating trafficking in persons. Based on these areas, USAID will advance the RDCS goal through two RDOs:

RDO 1: Regional Connectivity¹ Strengthened². RDO 1 will focus on three areas: (i) reducing barriers to trade; (ii) modernizing the regional energy sector; and (iii) improving cooperation on transboundary water and environment resources. Regional connectivity and collaboration are at the core of the RDCS approach, as aligned with the U.S. Strategy for Central Asia, and are critical to diversifying the regions' economies away from natural resource extraction and a single trading partner system.

RDO 2: Resilience to Regional Vulnerabilities Advanced. RDO 2 will focus on three areas: (i) promoting regional security and stability (ii) strengthening information integrity and public vigilance against disinformation, and (iii) improving infectious disease control. USAID/Central Asia defines resilience as the ability of an actor to manage risks and threats from malign actors while strengthening the actor's capacity to prevent and/or effectively address related issues in the future.

The strategic rationale for selecting these two sector-based RDOs is to ensure clearer alignment with the **U.S. Strategy for Central Asia, specifically:**

- Objective 1: Support and strengthen the sovereignty and independence of the Central Asian States, individually and as a group,
- Objective 2: Reduce terrorist threats in Central Asia,
- Objective 4: Encourage connectivity across Central Asia
- Objective 5: Promote rule of law reform and respect for human rights.

Moreover, the results framework has cross-cutting enablers and implementing modalities for both RDOs. These priority topics will further advance U.S. strategic development priorities and include: (i) gender, youth, and inclusive development; (ii) intra- and inter-regional connectivity; (iii) climate change; (iv) digitalization; (v) anti-corruption; and (vi) local, donor, and private sector engagement. The Central Asia Mission Order on Activity Design proactively engages design teams to ensure robust consideration of these topics in advance of concept drafting.

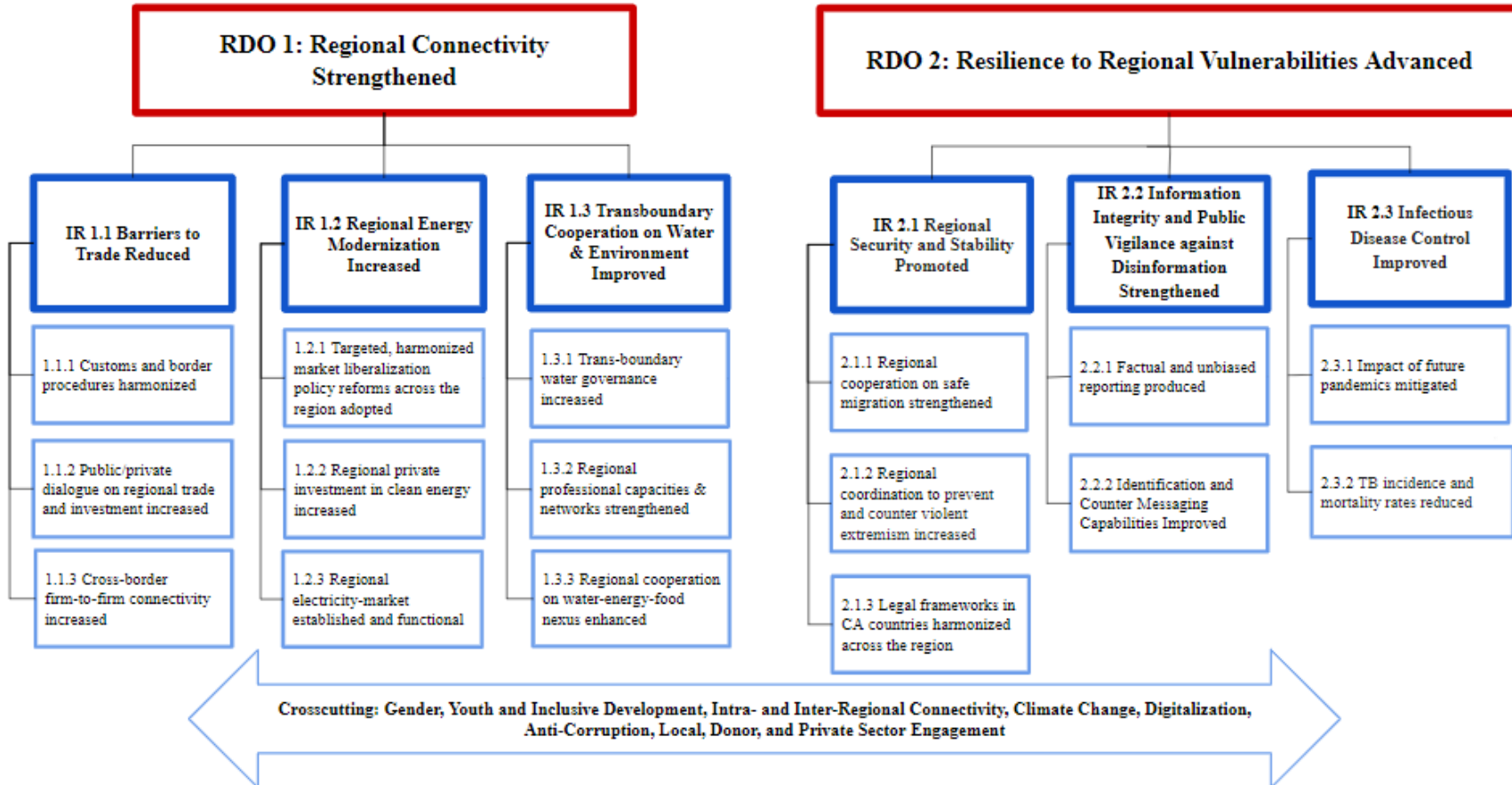
The RDCS results framework, two RDOs, and related intermediate results are presented in Figure 1.

¹ Connectivity in this RDCS is understood as developing closer among ties Central Asian countries across trade, energy, and transboundary water management.

² Due to the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, USAID Assistance to Afghanistan has shifted to focus on meeting basic needs through supporting livelihoods, agriculture, health, and education. Efforts through USAID/Central Asia's Development Objective 1 have ceased.

Figure 1: USAID/Central Asia 2020-2025 Results Framework

Goal: Toward a Self-Reliant Central Asia that is Interconnected, Independent, and Resistant to Malign Influences



In making strategic choices for this RDCS, USAID/Central Asia is guided by lessons learned from the previous strategy, assessments of regional platforms, the intersection of U.S. policy and USAID's value add to U.S. policy, and how best to align regional activities with bilateral efforts. As part of the Administrator's transformation agenda, USAID reorganized its presence in Central Asia -- including the establishment of the Uzbekistan and Tajikistan bilateral missions -- and narrowed the scope of the USAID/Central Asia Regional Mission to better advance the journey to self-reliance for the countries in the region. The new Central Asia Mission focuses on the implementation of regional programs that address truly transnational regional issues. As part of that reorganization, USAID/Central Asia's role will be to implement programming that addresses issues that are regional in nature, achieve shared regional goals and objectives, and uniquely complement bilateral efforts.

USAID will advance the C5+1 diplomatic platform through enhancing cooperation with, and among, Central Asian countries to advance the shared goal: an independent, prosperous, and secure Central Asia that addresses common concerns in partnership with the United States. USAID will continue to implement development programs that engage host governments, the private sector, and civil society, to support sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the region by advancing economic resilience, energy and environment security, as well as finding regional solutions to global challenges and make each of the countries and populations safer and more prosperous.

USAID integrated considerations of the known short-term and expected long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic into the RDCS. USAID will review strategic assumptions early in the strategy period through activity appraisals and designs. The strategy provides enough flexibility to pivot and make programmatic adjustments, if needed. The COVID-19 pandemic may affect the ability of businesses to trade and limit the ability of economic migrants to travel and thus cause a drop in remittances. These effects and the parallel tightening of financial conditions will have a major impact on the poor and vulnerable. USAID will remain engaged in Central Asia, regionally and bilaterally, with our new missions in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and with the existing mission in the Kyrgyz Republic. USAID/Central Asia will also continue to implement bilateral programming in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.³

II. CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL CONTEXT

The region is at a turning point in its history. With approximately 72 million residents, the culture, population, and development challenges of the five countries of Central Asia are diverse, dynamic, and strategically important. Central Asia is enmeshed in numerous pressing geopolitical issues such as energy, trade, religious extremism, Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, a hostile Iran, drug trade, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, instability in PRC's Xinjiang province, and the PRC's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).⁴ Although Central Asia has deep historical connections to both Russia and PRC, recent transitions in political power in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, as well as the rising concern over growing PRC influence, have created

³ USAID missions in the Kyrgyz Republic, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan will each have a Country Development Cooperation Strategy and annexes to this RDCS will cover activities in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

⁴ [COVID 19 Heats up the New Great Game in Central Asia](#)

opportunities for the United States to build stronger relations with the region. While there are persistent economic and governmental challenges to sustainable and inclusive development,⁵ there are numerous opportunities for the governments and peoples of Central Asia, with USAID support, to promote trade, regional connectivity, and resilience to malign actors.

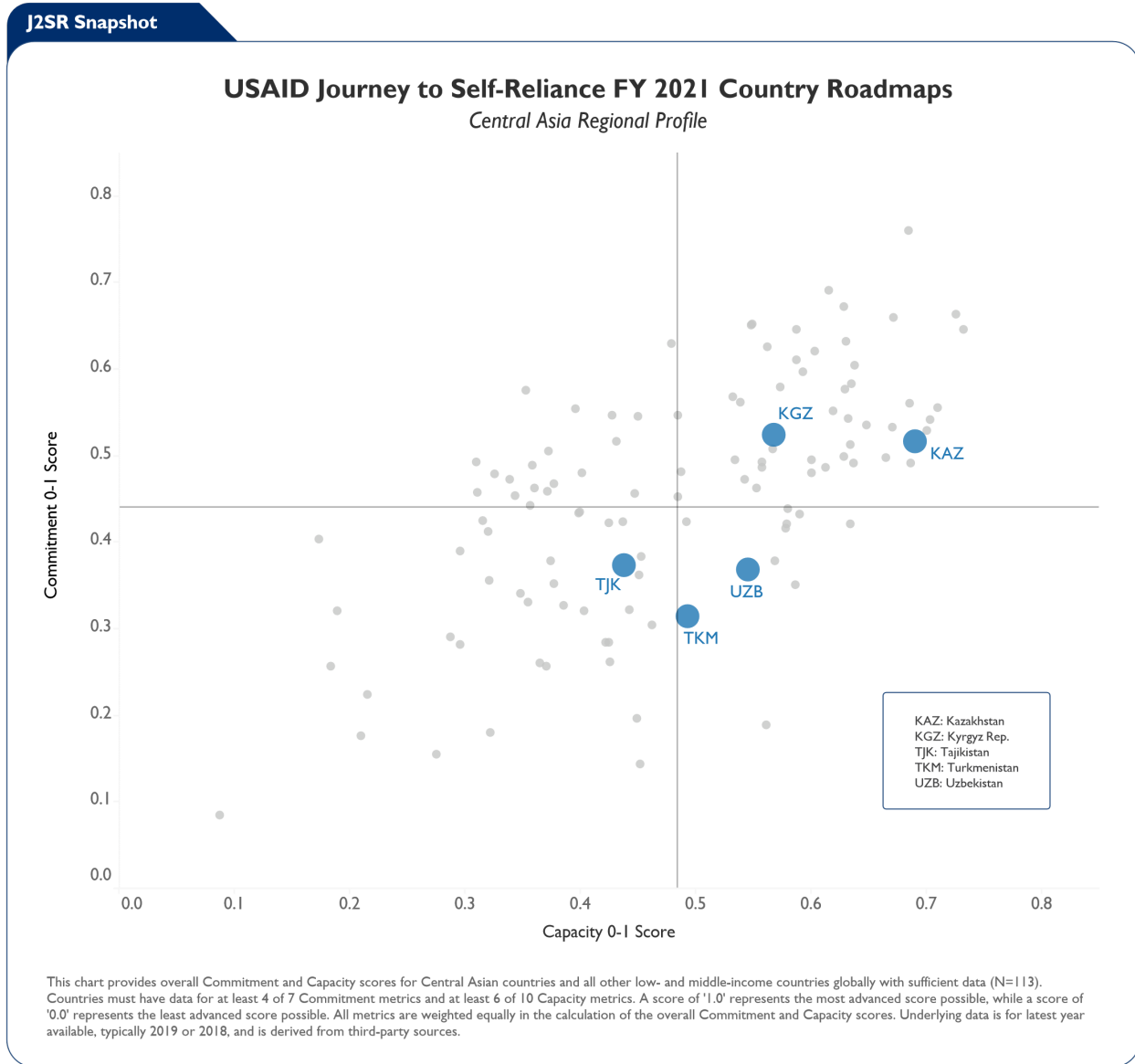
While Central Asian countries share a similar culture, history and an inherited Soviet legacy, each state has developed uniquely and is on a different path in its journey to self-reliance. Although some are rich in natural resources, the Central Asian countries have failed to diversify their economies away from natural resource extraction and develop an inclusive economy that provides gainful employment for the majority of the region's citizens. In addition to the overreliance on natural resource extraction, Central Asia's limited success in addressing political and bureaucratic barriers to trade and to collaboratively manage shared water and energy resources have created national economies increasingly dependent on single trade partners, which are unable to produce employment opportunities to sustain the region's growing workforce.

Central Asia's Regional Road Map - Region's Commitment and Capacity

While the region shares a common Soviet history and legacy, since 1991 Central Asian countries have had divergent development trajectories. As the countries of Central Asia are at various stages on their J2SR, their performance on the Country Roadmap is diverse. As a region, however, there are J2SR-related regional challenges that undermine the individual countries' ability to create an inclusive society and economy. Among the self-reliance indicators, governance challenges, particularly around transparency and openness, are shared obstacles to development across the region. Opportunities, such as the political opening in Uzbekistan, allow for potential transformation across the region. Underlying weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the region's commitment and capacity measures may impede J2SR progress in some areas.

⁵ For additional information on inclusive development see Suggested *ADS 201: Approaches for Integrating Inclusive Development Across the Program Cycle and in Mission Operations*

Figure 2: Journey to Self-Reliance Central Asia Regional Profile



The region's road map is mixed. There are both capacity and commitment opportunities and challenges that USAID will leverage and attempt to address through this RDCS. Although the region does poorly on the commitment metrics, and the USAID gender assessment has identified additional gender concerns and challenges such as barriers to women in the trade and energy sector, there are some strengths to build on, particularly in the capacity areas. For detailed J2SR roadmaps please refer to the Regional Landscape Analysis Annex.

Implications of regional roadmaps for RDCS programming. The RDCS and RDOs have been purposely designed to address lagging indicators, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities. In turn, using evidence and data gained from Country Economic Reviews, the Gender Analysis, and non-USAID analyses should result in more targeted activity designs that will address regional challenges and amplify bilateral programming.

Road maps are primarily used to identify strengths and weaknesses at the national level. Therefore, the J2SR framework has gaps in relationship to a regional analysis. During the analysis period of the RDCS, USAID identified the following key findings and gaps:

- According to the 2019 WB Trading Across Borders category of the Cost of Doing Business index, Central Asian countries ranks vary, with Kazakhstan ranked 25, Uzbekistan ranked 69, Kyrgyz Republic ranked 80, and Tajikistan ranked 106 out of 190 countries. Turkmenistan was not listed. Lack of intraregional trade in Central Asia, which represents less than five percent of total trade, making the region one of the least economically integrated regions in the world and hampers investment.
- Evidence from USAID/Central Asia's preliminary research on violent extremist recruitment suggests that as migrants leave their families and support networks, they are at greater risk of exposure to violent extremist networks, both online and in person.
- While not captured in any metric, it is important to note that the region lacks strong regional institutions. This is a gap that USAID cannot fill. Nevertheless, there are nascent institutions USAID and others are supporting such as the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) and increased intergovernmental dialogue and cooperation through the C5+1⁶ diplomatic platform.

PRC Engagement in Central Asia: PRC, the region's number one trading partner, provides substantial investment, and is the largest buyer of the region's natural gas. In Turkmenistan, for example, PRC is the main buyer of Turkmen gas. Through the BRI, PRC invests in large infrastructure projects, the extractive sector, power generation, and gas pipelines, which are traditionally non-transparent and distort economic security and increase indebtedness. PRC is increasingly the primary lender to the region. For example, PRC is Uzbekistan's largest single foreign creditor, possessing over 20 percent, or nearly \$3 billion, of Uzbekistan's total foreign debt.

Similarly, debt distress is particularly high in Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic. The Kyrgyz Republic's debt to the Export-Import Bank of PRC has reached \$1.8 billion or nearly 50 percent of the country's public external debt. Tajikistan is among the top eight countries in the world at risk for debt distress linked to BRI-related financing. The PRC's use of debt trap diplomacy along with increasing security engagement in Tajikistan could threaten the country's sovereignty. PRC investment is pervasive, with PRC's debt representing 54 percent of Tajikistan's external debt. PRC foreign investment rose six percent in 2019 to \$262.3 million, accounting for almost 76 percent of the \$346 million of 2019 foreign direct investment into Tajikistan.

Central Asian regimes will continue to depend on their strong economic relationships with PRC but concerns about PRC intentions and debt diplomacy are growing across the region. Concern over PRC labor practices, an overreliance on PRC workers, and corruption tied to PRC-linked business ventures have fueled protests in recent years across the region. Protesters have also

⁶ C5+1 is a format for dialogue and a platform for joint efforts to address common challenges faced by the United States and the five Central Asian states. It complements bilateral relationships in the region, particularly in issue areas where regional approaches may provide a comparative advantage. Under C5+1, USAID currently supports four key initiatives: Central Asia Business Competitiveness, C5+1 Transport Corridor Development, Adaptation Planning, and C5+1 Power the Future.

targeted Beijing's mass internment of Muslim minorities in its western Xinjiang Province, which has included many ethnic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz.⁷

PRC has sought to gain positive publicity during the COVID-19 pandemic by donating supplies throughout the region and is attempting to disrupt the U.S.-Central Asian relations. Through their 'mask diplomacy,' PRC is attempting to strengthen commercial and institutional ties across the region. Notwithstanding efforts by Beijing to attribute all donations to the PRC government, data from 1,061 aid transactions highlights that over 70 percent of PRC donations come from private or a composite of sources.

Economic Trends: Persistent development challenges remain. Relatively small, and in most cases fairly undiversified, Central Asian economies depend heavily on foreign trade. Despite the fact that their location and landlocked position impose higher transport costs, the ratio of trade turnover to GDP across the region averages 65 percent, higher than the 58 percent OECD average.⁸ According to the International Trade Forum, these costs are in many instances increased by poor trade facilitation and inadequate connective infrastructure.⁹ Exports constitute over a third of GDP in Central Asia, but in each country three products account for two-thirds of all exports, highlighting a lack of economic diversification.¹⁰ Similarly, in comparison to other developing countries, the majority of Central Asian countries perform below average on J2SR export sophistication metric, which measures the diversification of a country's export products and is one key marker of the sophistication of the economy and its resilience to economic shocks. Except for Kazakhstan, the countries of Central Asia export to a narrow range of markets, which leaves the region vulnerable to external shocks.

There are other challenging economic trends for the region. Significant downward pressure on global oil and gas prices will have considerable impact on Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan's national budgets. This is coupled with cross subsidies and non-cost recovering tariffs which distort markets and decrease overall generation, performance, and reliability across the region. The limited success to structurally reforming and harmonizing the region's energy sector further threatens to reduce sustainable economic growth and increases inefficiencies.

Natural resources: Water and energy systems are inextricably intertwined in Central Asia. Multiple transboundary rivers, including Amu Darya and Syr Darya of the Aral Sea basin, improve regional connectivity among the countries of Central Asia. Under the Soviet Union, Central Asia had a unified irrigation and hydropower system that was managed either for electricity production by upstream countries (the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan) or addressing irrigation needs of downstream countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan). The upstream countries supplied hydroelectricity for the downstream countries during summer months, while downstream countries compensated their upstream neighbors with gas, coal, and thermal power during the winter months. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian countries abandoned the previous water and energy exchange practices; the downstream countries sold energy at higher and more competitive market rates. Upstream countries deprived of energy resources expanded their hydropower system, thus preserving increasing amounts of

⁷ [From COVID 19 to China: Mapping the Changing Face of Dissent in Central Asia](#)

⁸ [Covid Crisis Response in Central Asia](#)

⁹ [Covid Crisis Response in Central Asia](#)

¹⁰ [Covid Crisis Response in Central Asia](#)

water which left the irrigated crops in downstream countries with insufficient water for irrigation during spring and summer months.

Primarily due to energy exports, downstream countries (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and, to a lesser extent, Uzbekistan) are wealthier and also feature greater agricultural areas that require irrigation. Most of the water for irrigation derives from upstream countries of the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. By contrast, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan lack both significant fossil fuel deposits and the ability to pay for greater energy imports. The Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan have maximized the contribution of hydropower to their energy mix and expanded their hydropower capacity to cope with the increasing energy and food demand from growing populations¹¹ (the Kyrgyz Republic now derives 94 percent of power from hydropower).

The region is also vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. According to USAID's Climate Risk Profile for Central Asia¹² and Central Asia Climate Change Analyses¹³, increased temperatures, reduced precipitation, decreased river flows, and extreme weather will severely impact both agriculture and energy sectors in the near future. The environmental sustainability of the region is also exacerbated by the lack of regional cooperation to address the interlinkages of the water-energy-and agriculture sectors. To meet the demands of a growing population, expected to grow 30 percent by 2050, Central Asia must find a path for future cooperation to effectively manage shared water resources, build local capacity and address outdated water infrastructure that is unable to respond to natural disasters and emerging environmental challenges.

COVID-19: The COVID-19 pandemic is a multifaceted crisis exacerbating long-term development challenges. The drop in oil and gas prices, the reduction of trade, the inability of economic migrants to travel and the associated drop in remittances, and the parallel tightening of financial conditions are decreasing the economic outlook of the region.¹⁴ The Asian Development Bank expects economic growth in Central Asia to be -2.1 percent in 2020.¹⁵ The number of Central Asians living in poverty increased across the region in both middle- and low-income countries¹⁶. In Kazakhstan, for example, the number of citizens living in poverty has increased by 27 percent since the beginning of 2020.¹⁷ In Uzbekistan, 56 percent of families reported a decrease in income and 15 percent reported they had no income at all due to the impact of the pandemic.¹⁸ Although it is too early to fully know the legacy of COVID-19, the pandemic may have a detrimental and long-lasting impact on human capital, economic and social

¹¹ [Rethinking Water in Central Asia, Adelphi and CAREC](#)

¹² [USAID's Climate Risk Profile for Central Asia](#)

¹³ USAID/Central Asia Climate Change Analysis

¹⁴ [IMF's Regional Economic Outlooks Middle East and Central Asia](#), April 2020

¹⁵ [Asian Development Bank](#)

¹⁶ According to the [World Bank](#): Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan; upper-middle income, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyz Republic; lower-middle income, and Tajikistan; low-income

¹⁷ From DOS Cable (Kazakhstan)

¹⁸ From DOS Cable (Uzbekistan)

development in Central Asia, where schoolchildren and students make up nearly half of the overall population.¹⁹

Economic Migration: At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, it was estimated that there were between 2.7 and 4.2 million Central Asian labor migrants in Russia alone.²⁰ As domestic job creation has not kept pace with population growth, migrants have leveraged linguistic and cultural connections to find employment outside of their home country, mostly in Russia and Kazakhstan. Their subsequent remittances have driven poverty reduction.

The inability of the economies in Central Asia, particularly in Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic, to create well-paid employment for its citizens continues to drive economic migration. In Tajikistan, for example, migrants have become the country's prime export and the single largest source of income.²¹ Tajik workers in Russia on average earn six times the monthly average income of workers in Tajikistan.²² However, due to the pandemic, seasonal migration, and its related remittances have halted. Russia is a destination for many of the region's economic migrants, and it continues to wield great political, and economic influence.

Trafficking in Person (TIP) and CVE: There are growing concerns that at-risk groups in the region are increasingly vulnerable to radicalization. With the demise of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the middle east, some Central Asians who lived under ISIS are returning. The COVID pandemic is exacerbating the economic situation and further straining households and increasing the importance of economic migration. While migration is not the only factor influencing Central Asians' pull to violent extremism, the mission's ongoing research on violent extremist recruitment in the region offers early evidence that migrants are at greater risk of being exposed to extremist networks, online and in person, in their destination countries.

Both male and female migrants from Central Asia are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Female migrants often end up in informal employment, especially in care and domestic work, that offers minimal, if any, labor protection, while men are particularly vulnerable to trafficking in the construction sector.

Despite the role of remittances in economic development, persistent migration takes labor and family breadwinners away from support systems and potentially increases the risk of exposing these populations to negative support systems and networks, such as extremist groups and the dangers of trafficking and human rights violations. It has also led to a brain drain, as most talented young people make the economic decision not to return to Central Asia after obtaining advanced qualifications. Persistent migration also weakens support networks in home communities often separating families and placing greater responsibility on those who do not migrate.

¹⁹ [COVID-19 Pandemic May Result in a Long-term Human Development Crisis in Central Asia, Warn World Bank Experts](#)

²⁰ [Covid Crisis Response in Central Asia](#)

²¹ [Dependent on Remittances, Tajikistan's Long-Term Prospects for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Remain Dim](#)

²² [Dependent on Remittances, Tajikistan's Long-Term Prospects for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Remain Dim](#)

Youth: Central Asia’s economic growth is also inhibited by the failure to fully integrate half of its population's creativity and ingenuity. Demographically, Central Asia is young with 50 percent of the population of the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan; 49 percent of Kazakhstan; and 40 percent of Turkmenistan under the age of 25. The number of youths present the region with an economic opportunity to increase government revenue and integrate innovation into society and the economy. However, this generational opportunity may be lost, if the region’s governments fail to integrate young Central Asians into a 21st century economy and civil society.

Gender Equality: Despite a fairly progressive outlook and practical policies on gender equality promoted by the former Soviet Union, social and gender norms perpetuate gender inequalities, which are even more pronounced for marginalized populations. Investing in gender equality and promoting women’s economic empowerment has significant potential to support inclusive development, promote economic growth for all, and alleviate poverty. Across the region, boys’ and girls’ life paths are generally laid out for them from early childhood based on perceived gender roles and stereotypes. Families encourage their girls to study health or education, while boys are encouraged to study science, technology, engineering, math, and information technology. This segregated approach is later translated into the labor market where men and women remain in their accepted and socially prescribed “spheres of influence.”²³ Women in Central Asia are underrepresented in the workforce and in small and medium enterprise ownership, making less money than their male counterparts. Due to cultural norms and gender roles, women are the primary caretakers of children and home, and, therefore, have fewer opportunities for full-time employment. All five countries suffer from gender occupational segregation, gender pay gaps, and horizontal segregation, evidenced by the absence of women in higher paid, decision-making positions.

Opportunities and Openings: There are a number of positive trends that are indicative of a potential transformation in the region's national policies. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have recently undergone their first transitions of power. These transitions create new opportunities to address long-standing constraints to integration and inclusive economic growth. Central Asia’s most populous country, Uzbekistan, historically a barrier to progress in the region, is a country in transformation. Since 2016, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has been implementing a “good neighbor policy” and reengaging the region on issues once seen as unresolvable. For example, Uzbekistan withdrew its objections to Tajikistan’s plans to build the Rogun Dam, removed barriers to improving transboundary water management

Kazakhstan, the largest and most influential economy in the region, demonstrates how small steps can lead to more effective energy trade and how clean energy can be competitively procured and integrated. Kazakhstan is also integrating green energy into its energy production. While more than 70 percent of Kazakhstan’s electricity is currently produced from coal-fired plants, most of which are outdated, the development of renewable energy is an integral part of the country’s effort to transition to low-carbon development, diversify the economy and bring private capital and investments into the country.²⁴ Kazakhstan plans to increase its share of

²³ USAID Central Asia Gender and Social Inclusion CDGS Gender Analysis

²⁴ [Nine Renewable Energy Projects to Be Launched in Kazakhstan By December, Astana Times, May, 2020](#)

renewable energy to three percent in 2020, ten percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2050.²⁵ Following Kazakhstan’s lead, the region is taking steps to integrate renewable energy into its energy mix.

There are increasing opportunities for regional connectivity among Central Asia countries. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are implementing bilateral agreements and constructing transmission lines, through which the CASA-1000 project is connecting energy produced in Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic with Afghanistan and Pakistan. The CASA-1000 power project will also give Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan an additional incentive to release water during the summer.

The lack of regional collaboration and reform has created opportunities for migrants to fall victim to traffickers and human rights violations. The lack of regional collaboration on trade, water management, energy, extremism, and migration has limited the region’s ability to effectively address economic development issues, create an integrated regional economy, and develop regional and national resiliencies to economic and political manipulation. The region’s governments, however, are increasingly moving towards greater collaboration and have expressed interest in reviving a unified Central Asian power system, now on a market-based approach. It is vital that policies to support recovery are aligned with long-term structural needs, so as to help Central Asia recover their dynamism and establish a trajectory of sustained inclusive growth. Reaffirming our partnership with the countries of Central Asia and ensuring the region remains independent and resistant to malign actors is a U.S. strategic interest and the goal of our activities.

III. STRATEGIC APPROACH

The U.S. Strategy for Central Asia²⁶ and the USAID/Central Asia RDCS support the National Security Strategy objectives to ensure “Central Asian states that are resilient against domination by rival powers, are resistant to becoming jihadist safe havens, and prioritize reforms,” and “to encourage the economic integration of Central and South Asia to promote prosperity and economic linkages that will bolster connectivity and trade.”²⁷

The USAID/Central Asia Mission is focused on regional integration and localization and supporting key objectives in the U.S. Strategy for Central Asia during the 2020 – 2025 strategic period. USAID will continue to support the C5+1 diplomatic platform through advancing regional cooperation and facilitating stronger economic ties of the Central Asian countries in partnership with the United States. Reaffirming our partnership with the countries of Central Asia and ensuring the region remains independent and resistant to malign actors (Russia, PRC, and Iran) is a U.S. strategic interest and the goal of our activities. The USAID Policy Framework assists USAID target interventions to maximize impact and outcome. Self-reliance through enhanced localization, capacity building, and increased cooperation and sovereignty will be accelerated and strengthened through interventions that increase economic, environmental, and

²⁵ [Nine Renewable Energy Projects to Be Launched in Kazakhstan By December, Astana Times, May, 2020](#)

²⁶ [U.S. Strategy for Central Asia](#)

²⁷ [U.S. National Security Strategy](#)

energy ties across Central Asia; reduce barriers to trade; promote regional cooperation on safe migration; and reduce violent extremist influence. As the region transitions, USAID is also adjusting its posture in the region. USAID/Central Asia regional programming will focus on regional connectivity (trade and energy), transboundary water and environment resources, countering violent extremism and human trafficking, media, and health.

Activities developed under this RDCS will position USAID as the preferred development partner by addressing development obstacles that provide malign actors with political and economic leverage over Central Asian states and develop and strengthen platforms for regional cooperation. USAID/Central Asia's RDCS will support mutual priorities for sustainable development that build long-term capacity and strengthen commitment by advancing government effectiveness in all top-level objectives and motivating private sector engagement and inclusive public participation to support a 'well-governed' set of partners, including both regional and national institutions.

USAID/Central Asia's regional strategy is based on:

U.S. Strategy for Central Asia

USAID/Central Asia's 2020 – 2025 RDCS is framed by the U.S. Strategy for Central Asia, which directs U.S. resources to work with Central Asian states to build their resilience to short- and long-term threats to their stability, strengthen their sovereignty by enhancing states' individual and collective capacity and commitment to lead their own development, and foster regional connectivity.

In support of the U.S. Strategy for Central Asia's Objective 1: *Support and strengthen the sovereignty and independence of the Central Asian States, individually and as a group*, and Objective 4: *Encourage connectivity across Central Asia*, USAID/Central Asia will support and encourage connectivity across Central Asia and promote U.S. investment in and development of Central Asia through harmonizing trade policies and legislation and reducing barriers for and facilitating U.S. investment in the region and with neighboring countries. In support of the U.S. Strategy for Central Asia's Objective 2, *Reduce terrorist threats in Central Asia* and Objective 5, *Promote rule of law reform and respect for human rights*, USAID/Central Asia will enhance collaboration among Central Asian countries to increase resilience to cross-border risks and vulnerabilities, including the malign influences of violent extremism and TIP.

USAID/Central Asia plays a core strategic role in implementing the U.S. Strategy for Central Asia. USAID/Central Asia activities will complement and strengthen bilateral efforts, contributing to a Central Asia that has increased capacity and commitment to address challenges to creating a region that is interconnected, independent, and resistant to malign influences. Our activities ensure Central Asian states avoid dependency on foreign assistance and progress on their development journey. USAID initiatives in the region strengthen inclusive, transparent, and equitable growth, which underpin the region's independence and improve the investment environment for U.S. and international businesses. USAID's activities build the capacity of local institutions to identify, address, and reduce the risks of extremist ideology and recruitment across Central Asia. Our programs focus on regional connectivity for Central Asia by removing trade barriers and enabling the sharing of critical commodities such as energy and water.

Regional Transformation

As part of the Administrator's transformation agenda, USAID reorganized the USAID/Central Asia platform and its regional presence.²⁸ The reorganization narrowed the scope of the USAID/Central Asia Regional Mission to better achieve USAID's development objectives and shifted its focus to the implementation of regional programs that address transnational regional issues and support the President's National Security Strategy and the U.S. Strategy for Central Asia. As part of that reorganization, USAID/Central Asia's role in the region will be to implement programming that addresses issues regional in nature, achieve shared regional goals and objectives, and are only employed when a challenge requires a regional approach or solution.

Changing Role of the Private Sector in USAID Programming

USAID will work with the private sector to advance innovation and technical expertise across all USAID interventions. To ensure our activities incorporate private sector approaches, interests and buy-in, USAID will take steps to ensure greater private sector participation in the design of our activities. In addition, to increase private sector engagement in design processes, we will engage and encourage the private sector to advocate for policy reform, specifically regarding reducing trade barriers. We will also seek opportunities to engage with the private sector on women's economic empowerment. We will forge new partnerships with the private sector entities and sensitize them to issues relevant to combating trafficking in persons (CTIP), train staff on how to identify potential TIP cases and vulnerable populations and promote job platforms that provide domestic job opportunities which reduce the risk of unsafe migration. USAID will engage the private sector to advance investments in clean energy and introduce science, technology, innovation, and water management technologies.

Redefining our Relationships with National and Regional Partners

USAID is redefining our relationships with national and regional partner governments to drive policy reforms and structural changes that transition the region from recipients to providers of foreign assistance. Recognizing Central Asian states are at different stages in their development journey, we will seek to partner with a diverse array of actors to build regional institutions and platforms that support regional collaboration. USAID will work closely with regional platforms, such as the C5+1, to strengthen efforts to address shared development challenges, particularly in areas where regional approaches may provide a comparative advantage. Similarly, USAID will support CAREM and CASA-1000, which provide mechanisms for regional solutions and joint funding to address regional challenges. USAID will work with regional institutions such as the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea's affiliated institutions Amu Darya and Syr Darya basin water organizations and the World Bank to increase cost-sharing.

Unlike more traditional foreign assistance activities USAID implements in Central Asia, the nature of both countering violent extremism (CVE) and CTIP will require USAID to partner differently with governments and non-traditional partners in the region. Central Asian states have been active in CVE and USAID's partnership with governments in the region is not a typical donor-recipient relationship. Instead, USAID seeks to influence policies and interventions away from overly security-focused approaches to a more nuanced approach that utilizes data-driven initiatives and evidence-based decision-making within and among our partner governments to

²⁸ For further information on the reorganization of regional platforms see [Optimizing Operational Platforms: Regional Platforms at USAID](#)

address the underlying cause of violent extremism. Similarly, in the CTIP sector, USAID will redefine our relationships by partnering with governments to collaborate and learn from fellow Central Asian governments, organizations, and institutions. In supporting a more collaborative relationship across the region, USAID will seek to align policies across the region on cross-border migration, CVE, and migrant reintegration. Finally, USAID will work with donor partners to secure political will to support civil society interventions and sensitize host-country governments on the necessity of CTIP and CVE and the linkages between the two.

USAID Collaboration with U.S. Interagency Partners

USAID works closely with a variety of U.S. interagency partners across the region. In collaboration with the Department of State and Department of Energy to strengthen C5+1, USAID will support the policies identified in that forum. USAID will also work closely with the U.S. State Department on CVE initiatives, including the department's work with the United States Institute of Peace, Safe Cities Network, and in the various CVE working groups embedded in U.S. embassies across the region.

USAID regularly coordinates CTIP activities through participation in Embassy TIP Working Groups and engagement with the U.S. Embassy TIP Coordinators in each of the Central Asian missions. Sub-grantees are shared with all U.S. CTIP stakeholders and, therefore, USAID works closely to ensure activities are not duplicated.

USAID as the Preferred Development Partner

USAID will advance the Clear Choice agenda and provide support to the region to resist malign influence by addressing development obstacles that provide these actors with political and economic leverage. Through increased support to C5+1, USAID will provide support to Central Asian states to potentially utilize the regional fora to discuss, negotiate, coordinate, and reach consensus on transborder migration policy and CVE. Through a stronger C5+1, USAID and our U.S. interagency partners will facilitate Central Asia's ability to secure regional autonomy that balances against dominant regional trading partners. Furthermore, USAID will support the region to liberalize its energy market, integrate new energy sources, such as renewables into national power systems, and establish a commercially viable regional power to promote energy alternatives to an over reliance on a single trading partner.

Gender, Youth, and Inclusive Development

As youth and women constitute both the majority of the population and a large proportion of those vulnerable to unsafe migration, USAID's strategy will ensure RDCS activities integrate youth, gender, and other marginalized populations by promoting inclusive development. USAID will continue to promote the rights and inclusion of marginalized and underrepresented populations in the development process, and lead the U.S. Government's response to addressing the needs of children in adversity and youth. Under this RDCS, USAID will implement activities that combat stigma and discrimination, promote empowerment and inclusion of marginalized or underrepresented groups, and improve the lives of populations in high-risk situations. Activities during this RDCS period will be inclusive to ensure that programming impacts all segments of society, including through capacity building and participation across all sectors.

Activities during this RDCS period will focus on the intersection of gender equality and youth with environment management, youth, job creation, economic diversification, migration, and vulnerability to violent extremism. USAID will also support the development of a reintegration

system for migrants in the countries of origin (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyz Republic) with a special focus on the needs of women and children. CVE activities will identify best practices to address youth vulnerabilities and how best to deliver prevention programming to this target audience. CVE activities will ensure consideration of the varied roles and vulnerabilities women have as related to recruitment, violent extremist organization participation, and prevention with attention to gender-based violence.

International Religious Freedom

USAID/CA will support efforts to promote religious freedom and protect the rights of ethnic minorities in the region. Regional programming will seek ways to complement bilateral programming in this area, which will be guided by the U.S. Department of State reports on International Religious Freedom and will also consider the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF) annual reports. Turkmenistan and Tajikistan are designated as countries of particular concern for engaging in or tolerating "systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom" in the 2020 International Religious Freedom Report²⁹, and Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are on a special watchlist.

USAID/Central Asia Donor Coordination

USAID will assist regional institutions and national governments' lead donor coordination actors and collaborate with a wide range of development partners. Notable organizations and donor agencies relevant to regional connectivity efforts include the World Trade Organization (WTO), Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation, *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the World Bank, Aga Khan Foundation, and UN agencies working on trade, energy, and water.

In the CTIP space, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the UN agencies -- International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), International Labour Organization (ILO), and UNICEF -- are active across the region. OSCE works closely with governments on developing national referral mechanisms. IOM works in partnership with governments, international and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and development partners in improving prevention, protection, and prosecution. UNODC focuses on the criminal justice elements of human trafficking crimes. ILO focuses on ending forced labor and UNICEF focuses on child trafficking. USAID will also explore engagement with the Aga Khan Foundation on migration.

Donor coordination on CVE is in the nascent stages. USAID will explore coordination and collaboration with entities entering the sector, such as with UNDP and the OSCE, where appropriate.

What USAID is not doing in this RDCS? While the mission will focus its regional programming on CVE, trafficking in persons, media, health, trade, water, and energy sectors, USAID/Central Asia will transition out of the education sector and will support democracy and governance in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan at the bilateral programming level.

²⁹ [USCIRF Kazakhstan Annual Report](#)
[USCIRF Tajikistan Annual Report](#)
[USCIRF Turkmenistan Annual Report](#)
[USCIRF Uzbekistan Annual Report](#)

IV. RESULTS FRAMEWORK

Regional Mission Goal Statement and Narrative

USAID/Central Asia’s 2020 – 2025 RDCS goal is: “A self-reliant Central Asia that is interconnected, independent, and resistant to malign influences.” The goal is framed by the U.S. Strategy for Central Asia and USAID’s policy framework. The U.S. Strategy for Central Asia directs resources to support Central Asian states to build resilience to short- and long-term threats to their stability and strengthen their sovereignty by enhancing states’ individual and collective capacity and commitment to lead their own development, as well as fostering regional connectivity. USAID/Central Asia activities will complement and strengthen bilateral efforts, contributing to a Central Asia that has increased capacity and commitment to address challenges to creating a self-reliant Central Asia that is interconnected, independent, and resistant to malign influences.

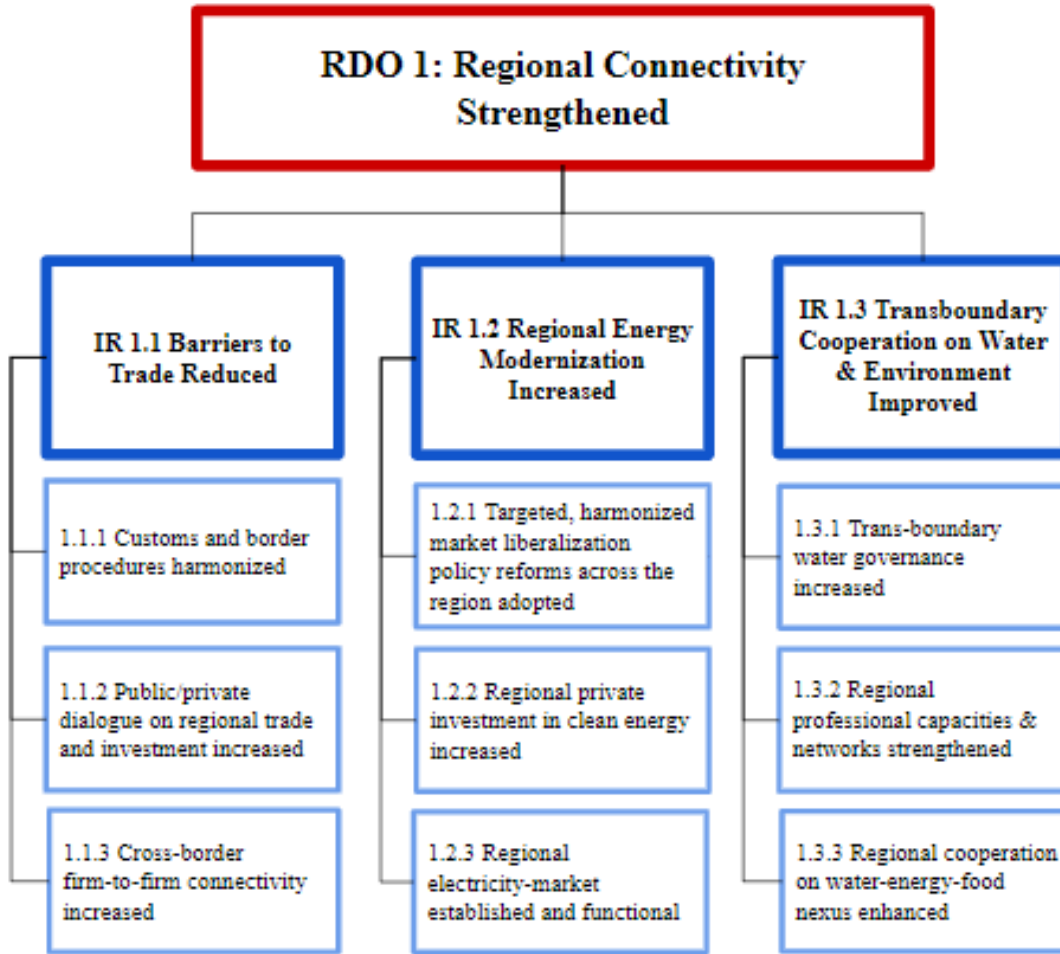
RDO 1: Regional Connectivity Strengthened

Development Hypothesis: If Central Asia reduces its barriers to trade, modernizes its energy sector, and improves cooperation on transboundary water and environmental issues, then the region will strengthen its overall connectivity and self-reliance.

Development Hypothesis Narrative: The U.S. Strategy for Central Asia prioritizes regional connectivity across Central Asia. USAID activities will complement and strengthen bilateral efforts to create inclusive and sustainable economies. Connectivity in this RDCS is understood as developing closer ties among the Central Asian countries across trade, energy, and transboundary water management.

Activities within this RDO will support Objective 1 of the U.S. Strategy for Central Asia: *Support and strengthen the sovereignty and independence of the Central Asian States, individually and as a group*. In order to achieve regional connectivity while maintaining their sovereignty and independence, Central Asian states must be able to function as a regional bloc of cooperative partners on critical drivers for economic growth, including trade and energy, as well as management of scarce, transboundary resources such as water. Reducing trade barriers will allow the region to function as a unitary economic actor, thereby increasing the region's economy of scale and creating leverage for trade agreements. In support of Objective 4: *Encourage connectivity across Central Asia*, RDO 1 will support Central Asian states to develop closer economic and energy ties across Central Asia. By modernizing the energy sector across the region, the region will invite more foreign direct investment and expand opportunities for energy investment beyond Russia and PRC. Cooperation on water will maintain coordination and strategic dialogue between the Central Asia states to mitigate vulnerabilities for conflict. Efforts across all sectors will be enhanced by and through developing and strengthening Central Asian regional platforms for development cooperation.

Figure 3: RDO 1 Regional Connectivity Strengthened



USAID will advance self-reliance throughout the region by strengthening the capacity and commitment to regional development cooperation that strengthens autonomy and reduces debt-driven dependency, increasing trade freedom and linkages that diversify economies and bulwark economic independence.

RDO 1 Approach to J2SR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Redefining the Relationship: Develop collaboration amongst Central Asian states that drives policy reforms and structural changes; partner with a diverse array of actors to build regional institutions and platforms; work closely with regional platforms, such the C5+1, to strengthen efforts to address common challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Financing Self-Reliance: Support an enabling environment for private investment, working with the private sector and partner governments to address the systemic constraints to investment and regional economic development.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Private Sector Engagement: Consult with the private sector to identify sector needs; leverage the private sector across the regions to advocate for policy reform, specifically regarding reducing trade barriers.

RDO 1 will advance Clear Choice and resistance to malign influence by strengthening the C5+1 as a regional platform for diplomatic and development cooperation, thereby securing greater collaboration and regional autonomy. It will also give the region opportunities to engage other economic and investment opportunities beyond PRC. Through energy market liberalization and reform, integrating new energy sources, such as renewables into national power systems, and establishing a commercially viable regional power market across Central Asia, USAID will promote energy alternatives to overreliance on a single trading partner.

Capitalizing on political openings that allow USAID to engage regionally at the government level, RDO 1 will focus on improving regional water management cooperation and practices. USAID will also sustain and scale-up basin councils at transboundary rivers and build the technical capacity of water stakeholders and institutions across Central Asia. In addition, improved regional water management cooperation will be coupled with and coordinate closely with bilateral efforts that increase community engagement in the oversight and accountability of water service stations, and promote public and private investment to establish cost-effective business models for increased public and private investment in water infrastructure in rural and suburban areas.

RDO 1 will advance gender equality, youth and inclusive development across the portfolio. It will leverage the skills of youth on efforts to advance regional tourism and information technology cooperation in Central Asia. It will promote university-level exchanges on renewable energy as well as faculty exchanges and internships and engage in strategic dialogue with youth across the region on changing mindsets on shared water resources. RDO 1 will complement, where possible, RDO 2 on the intersection of youth, job creation, migration, and vulnerability to violent extremism. It will also seek to improve the business enabling environment for increasing women's economic participation across the region. RDO 1 will facilitate strategic dialogue around narrowing the economic gender gap in key sectors, such as transport and logistics and energy, foster women's leadership across activities, and bring in gender inclusion considerations to ensure, for example, inclusive resource access.

USAID is working closely with bilateral and multilateral donors in Central Asia on regional connectivity. On CASA-1000, for example, USAID/Central Asia's investment will leverage a combined commitment of \$1.2 billion of donor investment from the World Bank, Islamic Development Bank, European Investment Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the UK Department for International Development. USAID's investments support the Secretariat in planning, procurement, and implementation of the project.

RDO 1 Intermediate Results Statements and Narratives

IR 1.1: Barriers to Trade Reduced will reduce barriers to trade in Central Asia by: (i) increasing the region's application of international trade best practices to increase transparency; (ii) harmonizing specific customs and border procedures to reduce transit and cost; and (iii) increasing public and private dialogue on regional trade and investment to promote regional investment. By reducing barriers to trade, Central Asia can unlock the region's trade potential and create a more economically diverse and connected region.

The Mission will engage trade authorities from throughout Central Asia, such as Ministries of Trade and Customs Authorities for streamlining and harmonizing customs and border procedures and facilitating regional agreements to facilitate trade. We will engage international organizations, including the World Trade Organization and the World Customs Organization to ensure that reforms are consistent with international best practices.

IR 1.2: Regional Energy Modernization Increased will increase energy modernization across the region through adopting targeted market liberalization reforms, including comprehensive cost accounting principles, and harmonizing cost-based tariff methodologies. Activities will increase private investment in clean energy across the region by improving efficiency, identifying private sector business opportunities, and collaborating with Blue Dot Network³⁰ efforts where possible.

In addition, activities will establish a regional electricity market by working through C5+1 to enable greater cross-border power trading and offer opportunities for meeting the countries' energy needs. The mission's energy efforts will also support electricity transmission to South Asia.

IR 1.3: Transboundary Cooperation on Water and Environment Improved will improve cooperation on water and the environment by increasing transboundary governance initiatives, specifically at the ministerial level. It will enhance the water-energy-food nexus regulatory framework and agreements across the region by building technical capacity of water stakeholders and institutions, such as academic, training and research institutes, and water agencies to work collaboratively and share disseminate information.

Inclusive approaches will engage a diversity of leaders and stakeholders to promote broad-based benefits and resource access, while simultaneously promoting environmental safeguards to minimize and reduce potential adverse impacts on the environment and biodiversity³¹.

These IRs are regional in nature, so naturally their achievement depends upon success in more than one country. However, a priority for regional connectivity, on trade should be connecting Kazakhstan with Uzbekistan, as the largest and most populous Central Asian countries respectively, their cooperation is crucial to regional integration.

³⁰ For more information see [Blue Dot Network](#)

³¹ [USAID's Central Asia Biodiversity Analysis](#) will inform future activities, particularly around transboundary environmental management.

RDO 1 Critical assumptions and risks

Critical Assumptions	Critical Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Political will for trade cooperation exists. Diplomatic channels throughout the region with the U.S. remain open. ● Political will for energy modernization remains, especially due to the emerging oil crisis. ● Political will to address transboundary water cooperation remains despite economic challenges that could occur as a result of COVID-19. ● Willingness of the private sector and local actors to engage with USAID. ● Russia and PRC will continue to exert economic and political influence throughout the region. ● The USAID/Central Asia Mission will maintain adequate technical staffing to oversee regional connectivity objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Russia’s economic influence on Eurasian Economic Union derails political will to engage with the U.S. or cooperate on international, rules-based initiatives. ● PRC’s growing economic influence (if BRI is a preferred approach) or PRC’s ongoing opaque economic practices distort open-market practices. ● Governments become more autocratic due to political, economic, and social repercussions of COVID-19, which may also threaten ongoing cooperation and momentum toward connectivity across sectors, due to competing priorities. ● Due to limited ability to migrate, migrant remittances will decrease and lead to greater poverty, food insecurity, and social instability. ● Political unrest (in the Kyrgyz Republic or elsewhere) may halt economic progress and reduce regional cooperation.

RDO 2: Resilience to Regional Vulnerabilities Advanced

Development Hypothesis: If Central Asia cooperation on security and stability is promoted, information integrity and public vigilance against disinformation is strengthened, and infectious disease control is improved, then resilience to regional vulnerabilities will be advanced.

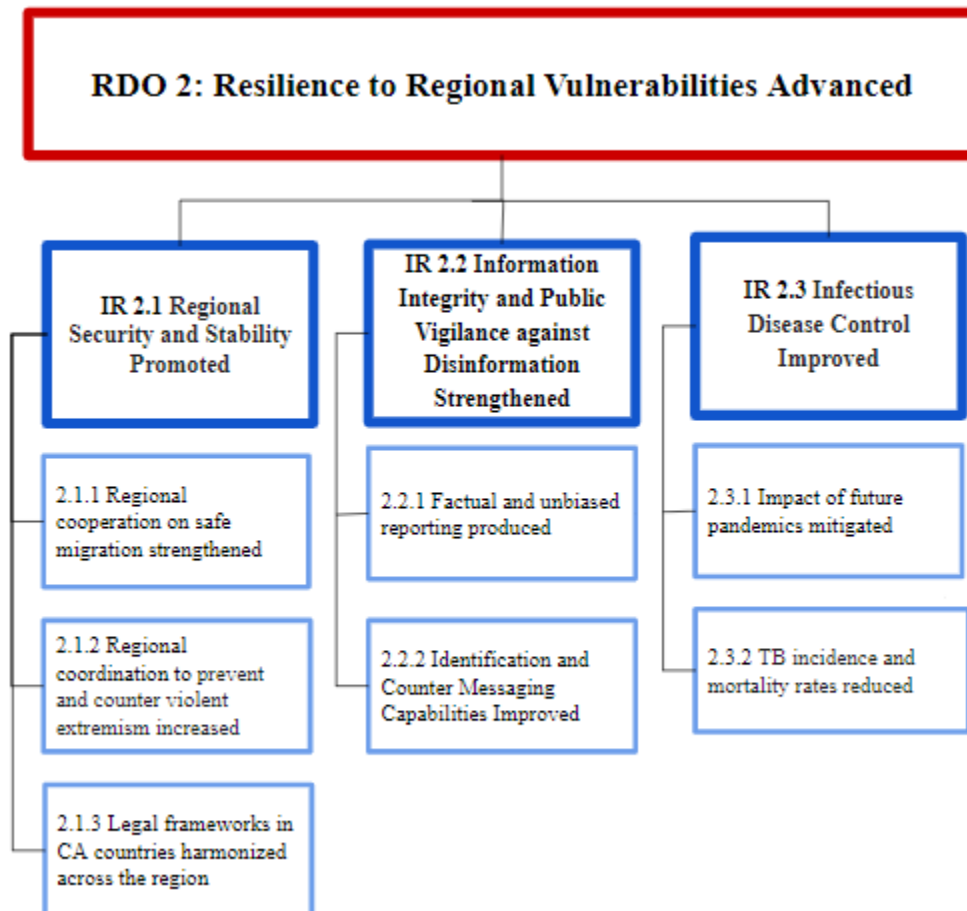
Across the region, Central Asia is increasingly vulnerable to the threat of trafficking and violent extremist organizations. For various economic and social factors, Central Asians migrate (both regularly and irregularly) within the region and to neighboring countries for employment. Due to a lack of formal processes, regional government cooperation, access to information, and enforcement mechanisms, these migrants can fall victim to trafficking. Central Asia also lacks a system for monitoring and analyzing disinformation via the media. There is a growing need for an independent information space and raised public awareness about the dangers of disinformation.

Located at the crossroads of global value chains, Central Asia is particularly vulnerable to emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. As illustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, infectious diseases can surface and spread rapidly, with devastating consequences for global public health, economies, security and development. The global community recognizes that we must act preemptively and systematically to improve individual countries’ abilities to rapidly identify and mitigate current and future infectious disease threats. In addition, four Central Asian countries in the region (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) are among the world’s 30 high-burden multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB) countries (WHO Global TB

Report 2022). Investment in combating TB in this region has an outsize impact on overall global goals to address TB. While the incidence of new cases of TB is declining in almost all countries, as is mortality, the proportion of TB cases that are drug-resistant across the region remains uncomfortably high.

RDO 2 will support regional platform(s) to share information and best practices and improve coordination among local actors including civil society organizations (CSO), government organized non-governmental organizations, think tanks, and government officials to strengthen their capacity to address violent extremist threats, reduce instances of trafficking in persons, and mitigate the impact of disease outbreaks. In addition, disinformation will be targeted through factual and unbiased reporting and improving counter messaging capabilities. USAID/Central Asia defines resilience as the ability of an actor to manage risks and threats from malign actors while strengthening the actor’s capacity to prevent and/or effectively address related issues in the future.

Figure 4: Resilience to Regional Vulnerabilities Advanced



RDO 2 will advance the region’s commitment to open government by improving Central Asian governments’ ability to share information,empower migrants with the tools and data to avoid

TIP, work with regional actors active in CTIP, counter disinformation, and mitigate the impact of future pandemics.

RDO 2 Approach
<p>Redefining the Relationship: Partner with governments to collaborate and learn from fellow Central Asian governments, organizations, and institutions; seek to align policies across the region on cross-border migration, CVE, migrant reintegration, media & information management, and public health; build regional institutional support for civil society organizations and cross-border organizations; work with donor partners to secure political will around support for civil society interventions and to sensitize host-country governments on the necessity of information integrity, robust public health systems, CTIP and CVE, as well as the linkages between the two.</p>
<p>Financing Self-Reliance: Partner with Central Asian actors to harmonize legal frameworks in the region and increase formal migration. Increase government and household revenues to finance their own development.</p>
<p>Private Sector Engagement: Advance innovation and technical expertise across all USAID interventions.</p>

Russia and the PRC provide the region with alternative models to address violent extremism that potentially exacerbate social tensions and radicalize vulnerable members of society. USAID will support data driven policy making processes, public engagement, and collaborative solutions to these challenges. This will offer an alternative development model that is more inclusive, effective, and sustainable and one which provides greater independence.

Gender, Youth and Inclusive Development: The RDO will advance gender equality, youth, and inclusive development across the portfolio. Activities under this RDO will ensure support services to trafficking survivors are tailored to the different needs and risks of labor migrants. USAID will also support regional cooperation to develop a reintegration system for migrants in the countries of origin (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyz Republic) and the needs of women and children from the labor migrants’ households. USAID will support the rights and inclusion of marginalized and underrepresented populations. The focus will be on combating stigma and discrimination, promoting empowerment and inclusion of marginalized or underrepresented groups, and improving the lives of populations in high-risk situations. CVE activities will identify best practices to better target and deliver prevention programming to at-risk youth. CVE activities will ensure consideration of the vulnerabilities women have as related to recruitment and violent extremist organization participation as well as women’s engagement in prevention of violent extremism. Activities under RDO 2 will work to strengthen regional organizations working on TIP and CVE to address the specific needs of affected women and youth.

RDO 2 Critical assumptions and risks

Critical Assumptions	Critical Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No major economic, political, or natural shocks that disrupt existing systems (not including COVID-19). ● Political will of Central Asian Governments to coordinate their activities. ● CA Governments continue to prioritize trafficking in persons given other priorities such as widespread COVID-19 socio-economic impacts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of government commitment to work with local civil society, institutions, and media organizations. ● COVID-19 impact on the economy will divert resources. ● COVID-19 and the return of migrants may cause significant shifts in the allure of violent extremism. ● Due to political repression in the region.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local organizations are willing to work together to expand knowledge about CVE best practices. ● Governments are willing to pursue a non-securitized approach to CVE. ● Governments to commit to countering disinformation 	<p>governments use the threat of violent extremism to target political opposition.</p>
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Work of other donors

For countering trafficking in persons, the key donors in the region are: OSCE, IOM, UNODC, ILO, UNICEF. The U.S. also has TIP programs in Central Asia. As for countering violent extremism, the key donors in the region are UNDP, EU, OSCE, UNODC, UNICEF, and the World Bank. There are also U.S. government or U.S. government-related players, such as the CT Bureau, INL, and USIP. USAID/Central Asia will aim to strengthen donor coordination and to align priorities in countering violent extremism and trafficking in persons in the region.

For infectious disease/health, the key donors in the region are The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) and The World Bank. GFATM supports activities to address the tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS pandemics. The World Bank supports activities through The Pandemic Fund to strengthen the capacity of host country governments to prepare, prevent and respond to emerging infectious disease threats. Strong coordination with these multilateral entities is already occurring which is critical to maximize the investment in these areas.

RDO 2 Intermediate Results Statements and Narratives

IR 2.1: Regional Security and Stability Promoted will advance regional cooperation on safe employment, labor migration processes, the conditions of migrant workers, and practices for the safe and voluntary repatriation and reintegration of trafficked persons. IR 2.1 will also improve information sharing and cross-border cooperation among NGOs, diaspora networks, host-country officials, and the private sector to collect data on TIP to identify and support TIP victims. In addition, IR 2.1 will harmonize and standardize definitions and procedures across the region dealing with the identification, provision of services, and repatriation of targeted populations, and will strengthen the capacity of organizations engaged in trans-border migration to better provide support services to targeted vulnerable populations. IR 2.1 will also support the development of and collaboration between national and regional networks of CSOs working on preventing violent extremism. USAID will also strengthen the capacity of CSOs and host governments working on CVE to promote information-sharing on risk and prevention factors, at-risk communities, and best practices for programming. Through greater information sharing, governments and regional networks will be able to provide more targeted and effective support to vulnerable communities.

IR 2.2: Information Integrity and Public Vigilance Against Disinformation Strengthened USAID will strengthen integrity and accountability in the information space, and build societal resilience in the face of disinformation. This assistance will support Central Asian governments, journalists, media organizations, social media “influencers”, content creators and other stakeholders to 1) produce factual and unbiased reporting and improve counter messaging capabilities to decrease the spread of disinformation; 2) create content on issues relevant to local communities; and 3) improve the quality of reporting and materials in local languages. Also, to

address fundamental challenges in Central Asia’s legal and regulatory framework which hinder the operation of independent media, USAID will support collective advocacy and joint efforts with the Governments of Central Asia to promote coherent policy solutions to reduce mis- and disinformation.

IR 2.3: Infectious Disease Control Improved Infectious disease does not respect geographic borders, therefore a regional approach is necessary to mitigate the impact of infectious disease both locally and globally. Assistance will address vulnerabilities related to health by strengthening pandemic preparedness, prevention and response. Assistance to the Government (relevant ministries) and national level stakeholders will result in Central Asia improving capacity in early detection and response to infectious diseases, including current public health threats (such as tuberculosis) or emergent public health threats.

V. MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING

USAID will establish a mission monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) system that derives from the standardized performance management plan (PMP), project, and activity MEL systems and is supported by geospatial information systems (GIS) and Development Information solutions (DIS) tools.

The MEL system will be utilized to:

1. Independently investigate and verify the impact of interventions through performance, impact, meta-analysis, and developmental evaluations.
2. Generate evidence to inform RDCS implementation and learning through research and studies such as sectoral assessments, case studies.
3. Provide technical assistance across the RDCS’ RDOs, such as share lessons learnt across DOs and IRs, encourage coordination among activities, and to ensure MEL policies are compliant.
4. Integrate gender, youth and inclusive development, as well as other cross-cutting themes into program cycle and results utilization.

Performance monitoring will be accomplished through a systematic collection of a compact set of standard and custom performance indicators at the RDCS, project, and activity levels to track outcomes and impact. Context monitoring will improve the mission’s understanding of performance indicators across the various Central Asian operating environments. USAID will apply complexity-aware monitoring to dynamic situations across the target provinces as appropriate. This includes using remote monitoring for oversight and performance tracking of project activities during periods of a compromised operating environment. Remote monitoring may include the following approaches: peer monitoring, context monitoring, and complexity-aware monitoring.

Through the RDCS period of performance, USAID will explore opportunities for rigorous impact and performance evaluations to determine the results of interventions and projects. USAID is committed to adaptive management incorporating recommendations, lessons learned into follow-on activities, and adapting to both internal and external changes during the period of implementation. USAID will also invest in different types of evaluations to understand if

interventions are impacting Central Asia RDCS outcomes as planned. USAID will ensure that the evaluation methodology and questions advance the Agency's Self Reliance Learning Agenda, where possible. USAID will utilize local companies and experts as evaluators to build local capacity.

USAID places emphasis on a Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) Framework that will strengthen internal and external collaboration and coordination, fill knowledge gaps, improve use of existing evidence, and inform strategic and programmatic decision-making. The CLA Framework, led by the mission's Regional Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Specialist, will cultivate a culture of strategic collaboration and shared learning, mapping questions and learning needs to appropriate stages of the program cycle, and embedding a knowledge management approach that synthesizes evidence and facilitates adaptation. USAID/Central Asia encourages bilateral missions to participate in the regional CLA Agenda. USAID/Central Asia collaborates closer with bilateral missions in the region on portfolio reviews, annual operational planning and performance planning and reporting. In addition, the regional mission will provide GIS support to bilateral missions and country offices.

Currently, USAID has an Evaluation and Learning Platform, which serves the goal of local capacity building by collaborating with local specialists and organizations on evaluations, research, and assessments. Once procured, the new Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Platform will continue to further advance the J2SR learning agenda. This approach will utilize local organization's country knowledge, build their MEL capacity, and promote ownership of performance management processes and data. The MEL approach will prioritize measures and questions through the main J2SR components: (i) redefining the relationship; (ii) financing self-reliance and (iii) private sector engagement.

Below are the high priority questions to be addressed through the MEL system.

RDO1 learning questions:

- What approaches or mechanisms encourage the political will to adopt transparent power sector reforms to create an improved investment climate across the region?
- How can transboundary water cooperation provide a forum for addressing other transboundary environmental issues?
- What is the impact of demographic geography, i.e. urban vs. rural on trade and energy connectivity? How can that information affect USAID's approach to implementation?
- What are the new ways/approaches the mission can realistically use to partner with both U.S.-based small businesses and the local private sector to enforce New Partnership Initiative strategy?
- How can private sector engagement (PSE) support countries in advancing on the Journey to Self-Reliance?

RDO 2 learning questions:

- What are the important barriers and obstacles preventing effective cooperation and cohesive and coordinated regional and bilateral responses to rights-based migration, CTIP, countering disinformation, and mitigating the impact of health crises?
- How do host government perceptions of the violent extremist threat in Central Asia

compare among countries in the region and how do these perceptions affect their approaches to preventing it?

- What is the impact of demographic geography, (i.e., urban vs. rural) on CVE, CTIP, countering disinformation? How can that information affect USAID's approach to implementation?
- Are the risk factors of vulnerability to violent extremism shifting (increasing or decreasing) over time, and what factors affect these shifts (changes in the environment - ex. COVID 19, gender dynamics, reintegration, or other)? Is resilience to violent extremism changing and if so, how, and why?
- What are the gender specific drivers of violent extremism in Central Asia, and how can that knowledge be used to tailor prevention efforts?

Cross-cutting questions:

- How do global events impact our programming? What challenges and opportunities do they raise?

ANNEX: Regional Operations Map

USAID/Central Asia Regional Activities & Support Services to USAID Bilateral Missions and Offices												
Country	Regional Programming					Technical Support	Pooled Support Services					Regional Convening
	Regional Trade and Energy Connectivity	Transboundary Water and Environment	Regional Security & Stability (CVE & CTIP)	Media	Health		Regional Office of Financial Mgmt.	Reg. Office of Acquis. & Assistance	Regional Legal Office	Regional Executive Office	Program Office & Budget Support	
USAID Bilateral Missions												
Kyrgyz Republic	x	x	x		x	Visitor Exchange Program	x	x	x	x	x	x
Tajikistan	x	x	x	x	x	Environment, MEL* Gender* GIS/DIS	x	x*	x	x*	x*	x
Uzbekistan	x	x	x	x	x	Environment, MEL*, Gender* GIS/DIS	x	x*	x	x*	x*	x
USAID Country Office												
Turkmenistan	x	x	x		x	Environment, MEL GIS/DIS, Gender	x	x	x	x	x	x
USAID Mission Office												
Kazakhstan	x	x	x	x	x	Environment, MEL, GIS/DIS, Gender	x	x	x	x	x	x

* Central Asia Mission will provide support, as needed, during the initial years after reorganization.

Note:

USAID Bilateral Missions implement bilateral programming across multiple sectors

USAID Country Office located in Turkmenistan is led by a Country Office Director and fully supported by USAID/CA

USAID Mission Office in Kazakhstan is currently located in Astana and is fully supported by USAID/CA