South and Central Asia

Regional EducationUSA Profile

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

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EducationUSA Advising Centers in the Region

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An electronic version of this publication containing hyperlinks is available at https://educationusa.state.gov/us-higher-education-professionals/recruitment-resources/global-guide

EducationUSA advising centers in South and Central Asia (SCA) are located at U.S. embassies and consulates, Fulbright Commissions, American Councils for International Education offices, and local nonprofit organizations.

There are 68 advisers at 26 EducationUSA centers in SCA, with several countries hosting multiple advising centers at various host institutions. India, Pakistan, and Kazakhstan have the largest concentration of centers. There are 29 advisers in India across six centers, 11 advisers in Pakistan across three centers, and eight advisers in Kazakhstan across three centers. Advisers in SCA function as mentors and local experts in the U.S. higher education sector, providing advising sessions, engaging with students and families, and conducting outreach activities.

Given the current safety and security situation, EducationUSA cannot offer in-person advising services in Afghanistan. The U.S. embassy in Kabul suspended operations in Afghanistan on August 31, 2021.

The EducationUSA Opportunity Funds program, serving high-achieving prospective students who demonstrate financial need, operates at advising centers in Nepal, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan. Nepal and Pakistan host Opportunity Funds cohorts for undergraduate students. Cohorts engage in robust mentoring activities over two years and interact with Opportunity Funds alumni. Turkmenistan hosts Opportunity Funds cohorts for graduate students, offering mentoring activities for one year. U.S. higher education institutions (HEIs) are encouraged to contact the advising centers to learn more about supporting Opportunity Funds students through virtual programs and specialized scholarships.

EducationUSA advising centers in SCA conduct strategic outreach in their respective countries in close collaboration with public affairs and consular sections at U.S. embassies and consulates. U.S. HEI representatives assist advising centers in engaging public audiences by joining visits and participating in webinars for students, high school counselors, and local postsecondary institutions. In addition, visits to advising centers by U.S. college and university representatives allow EducationUSA to highlight outreach opportunities with local HEIs and facilitate personal interactions with students, parents, and local educational institutions.

Regional Overview

SCA is a region of vast cultural and geographic diversity, home to one of the largest youth populations in the world. Young people in the region are driven and eager to enter the workforce. Limited access to higher education is a significant challenge. People-to-people ties, and international student exchanges are crucial in this region. South Asian economies are among the fastest-growing globally, and the region is a tremendous market for recruiting highly qualified students. Despite the growth, challenges include high inflation and volatile economic conditions in Pakistan, rising food costs, and regional and domestic security issues. Turmoil in Afghanistan has also affected neighboring nations. U.S. higher education costs are becoming increasingly unaffordable for students in countries with



declining currencies like Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

While SCA stretches from Kazakhstan in the north to Maldives in the south, students from this region share common traits: They seek similar fields of study (notably STEM and business) and look to develop practical skills that prepare them for future careers. Prospective students and their parents view the award of a scholarship – even a partial tuition award – as a prestigious achievement. SCA has many educational systems, including local government-supported and private English-medium schools. Students from Central Asia are likely to seek intensive English-language programs abroad. At the same time, those in India and the rest of South Asia have opportunities to achieve English proficiency in their home countries. The Kazakhstan government hopes to attract American specialists to improve the qualifications of professors, teach English, give lectures, conduct seminars and master classes, and open branches of American universities in the country. The U.S. government has a growing interest in expanding partnerships between U.S. and Uzbek universities. The U.S. embassy in Uzbekistan has invested millions of dollars in partnering with the Uzbek government to promote English-language education, focusing on improving textbooks, curriculum development, teacher training, and access to English-language study opportunities. There continues to be a growing interest in English-language programs among Central Asian populations with a median age younger than 27 years; the burgeoning youth population faces limited postsecondary capacity and other barriers to access quality higher education, thereby driving demand for academic opportunities abroad.

In many parts of SCA, the internet is widely and easily accessible, with most users accessing the web through mobile devices. According to the January 2024 *Digital Global Overview Report*, internet usage has reached 76.2 percent in Central Asia and 51.5 percent in South Asia. Internet connection speeds vary significantly across the region and between rural and urban areas. Disruptions to electrical service are becoming less frequent; however, some countries continue to face outages during peak summer and winter months. In addition, government-imposed restrictions limit online activity in some countries. Government limits on internet speed, specific applications, and services impact students' ability to access online content, conduct research, sit for exams, and interact virtually. EducationUSA centers in the region are equipped with computers, offering students an alternative, reliable way to connect to the internet. Many people throughout the region lack internet access at home, meaning many students cannot access virtual learning options or participate in virtual programming. The U.S. higher education system is well-positioned to provide training in fields that will equip graduates with practical skills to address these challenges.

Although the United States remains the top study destination for students from the region, students and families are attuned to political developments and discourse. Students are attracted to countries in which they anticipate the ability to obtain student visas, work, and sometimes transition to permanent residency. Traditionally, students from the region have gravitated toward the United States, Canada, the UK, and Australia. However, over the past few years, China, Japan, Malaysia, and India have begun to attract more students by offering government scholarships, affordable tuition, and employment opportunities. Such offers and proximity to the student's home countries make these options increasingly attractive. Linguistic and cultural ties draw many Central Asians to study in Russia and

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the former Soviet Union. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in particular, have expanded higher education capacity in recent years and are becoming attractive to students who wish to stay closer to home. The Arab Gulf states are also an option for students from the region, given their proximity, multicultural environment, and flexible student visa regulations.

Prospective students commonly rely on consultants or agents, especially in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. Consultants and agents provide a range of services, from basic advice to the full completion of student applications. Representatives of U.S institutions should highlight their institutional recruitment standards and criteria as a strength when speaking with parents and students. Institutions are encouraged to publicize their relationships with consultants and agents to ensure international students are fully informed.

Recent Trends

According to the Institute of International Education's (IIE) *2023 Open Doors® Report on International Educational Exchange,* just over 30 percent of international students in the United States in the academic year (AY) 2022-2023 were from the SCA region. *Open Doors* reported a 33.2 percent increase in mobility from this region, with 316,466 students from SCA studying in the United States in AY 2022-2023.

Of the SCA students studying in the United States, approximately 59.7 percent are in graduate programs, and 25 percent are enrolled in nondegree programs and Optional Practical Training (OPT). Undergraduate students represent 15.1 percent of international students from SCA. Student mobility to the United States increased in AY 2022-2023 across the 11 countries in SCA. According to *Open Doors* data, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan were among the top 20 sending countries in the world to the United States in AY 2022-2023. India and Nepal are the world's second- and 11th-largest senders, respectively, while Bangladesh and Pakistan are the 13th- and 16th-largest senders.

Bangladesh, India, and Nepal were among the top 15 sending countries of graduate students to the United States in AY 2022-2023, with 25.4 percent from India, 1.4 percent from Nepal, and 1.3 percent from Bangladesh.

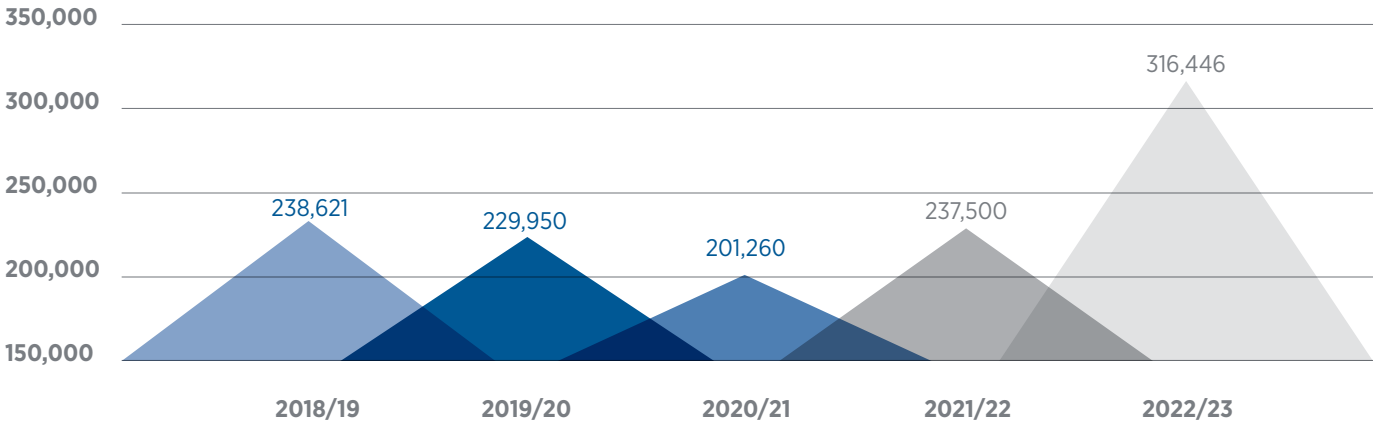
Sri Lanka is recovering from its political and economic crisis. In recent years, defaults on foreign debt led to crippling power cuts and severe shortages of food, fuel, and other essential items such as medicines. One of Sri Lanka's major sources of income, tourism, was heavily impacted but is recovering. In 2023, the country welcomed 1.48 million tourists, up from 719,978 in 2022.

Several factors contributed to an increasing number of graduate students from the region. Local HEIs often require a foreign terminal degree when hiring faculty, fueling interest in foreign doctoral programs. A lack of opportunity to pursue research in their home countries also leads many students to seek foreign research opportunities, especially in the United States. Savvy students understand that connections made during graduate studies can build careers, leading many to pursue graduate degrees abroad to expand their professional networks. The high cost of U.S. undergraduate education also drives students to pursue fully or partially funded graduate study in the United States.

Private English-language secondary schools prepare students for undergraduate study abroad in some countries. Although such schools hesitate to sacrifice class hours to accommodate visiting college and university representatives, EducationUSA advisers may be able to assist institutional representatives in securing a meeting. Advisers are well placed and well connected and can invite qualified students to meet U.S. HEI representatives at EducationUSA advising centers or during a college fair.

Students and their families are increasingly concerned about safety on U.S. campuses and in surrounding communities. Many opt to apply to states and institutions with existing diaspora communities or sizable international student populations. Institutions are encouraged to address safety concerns and share success stories of international students thriving on campus and in the community.

Student Mobility in the Region (Five-Year Trend)





Gap years are increasingly common among prospective students from the region.

Top Senders and Countries to Watch

Below are the top five countries in the region by the number of students studying in the United States. *Student Mobility Facts and Figures* sheets for all countries are available on the *Open Doors* website.

1. India
2. Nepal
3. Bangladesh
4. Pakistan
5. Kazakhstan

What to Expect in the Next Three to Five Years

South Asia has a huge population of youth, many of whom will pursue study abroad. Across the region, competition for limited seats in engineering and business programs at respected local undergraduate institutions may increase the number of undergraduate applicants to the United States.

Central Asia's most populous country, Uzbekistan, is home to more than 35 million people, and 60 percent are younger than 30. Almost half of Uzbek students in the United States pursue an undergraduate degree. English-language proficiency is rapidly expanding in the country, paving the way for more students to pursue educational opportunities in the United States. The country will seek partnerships and greater student exchange in the years to come. In February 2024, the president announced efforts to implement a new education system that bridges academic and vocational education components with a focus on job sectors such as textiles, engineering, construction, electrical industries, and machinery.

As Uzbekistan develops and the economy grows, more families will have funds to pay for quality education and will consider sending their children abroad. Uzbekistan's educational vision and priorities continue to evolve. In 2019, the Ministry of Higher and Secondary-Specialized Education introduced a five-year education sector plan focused on expanding the English-language curriculum, increasing technical and vocational training, opening new educational institutions, and diversifying available fields of study. The public diplomacy section at the U.S. embassy in Tashkent recently completed a four-year, USD$7 million English Speaking Nation (ESN) program, which provided professional development to more than 18,000 secondary school English teachers to improve their pedagogical skills. The number of private secondary schools continues to increase, with many focusing on English language and STEM education. Private schools and Uzbekistan's Presidential School system are one of the primary sources of international students from Uzbekistan due to the quality of education and English language proficiency. Uzbek universities seek partnerships with foreign institutions to support their government decreed internationalization efforts. Several U.S. institutions have recently signed agreements supporting student mobility and agricultural sciences.

Shared linguistic and historical roots as well as affordability have long made Russia the preferred study destination for Central Asian students; however, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and resulting economic instability and political concerns as well as increased hostility toward Central Asians following the Crocus City Hall terrorist attack are prompting families to look elsewhere for study and work

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opportunities. Affordable options and community colleges with matriculation agreements with four-year institutions are attractive to prospective students. In Turkmenistan, there are limited seats in STEM and business programs at the undergraduate level, making foreign institutions attractive. Due to limited access and slow or unreliable internet, flexibility around testing is essential for students from Central Asia.

Steady economic growth and a growing middle class in Bangladesh has increased demand for quality higher education. Interest in graduate studies overseas is expected to rise as political instability and economic challenges impact higher education in SCA. Many students and families realize that obtaining a foreign degree confers prestige and allows them to develop valuable professional networks.

In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) replaced the 34-year-old previous policy, prioritizing establishing connections with HEIs in the United States. The shift from a three-year system to a four-year degree option bodes well for students applying to U.S. universities. Still, it is causing concern among current Indian faculty, who are used to a three-year system and are facing a continuing shortage of seats. As a result, more students from Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities in India will seek higher education opportunities in the United States. The University Grants Commission, the Indian government's regulatory body for education, released a draft curriculum framework for four-year degree programs. Only a few Indian HEIs have adopted it.

The new policy also shifts focus to a multidisciplinary education that will better align with the pedagogical model in foreign universities, allowing students to transition more easily from one education system to another. Furthermore, the NEP allows top-ranked foreign universities to set up International Branch Campuses (IBCs) in India.

Virtual Engagement and Social Media Usage

The internet is widely available in the region, but there are significant disparities in speed and accessibility outside major cities. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, YouTube, Viber, and Zoom are popular social media platforms throughout the region. They are among the most effective ways for institutions to promote opportunities for international students. The EducationUSA India Facebook account has more than 191,000 followers. EducationUSA Bangladesh's official Facebook page has more than 1.3 million followers. The messaging app Telegram is also a popular communication platform in Central Asia. It allows interaction with subscribers through reactions, comments, and live streams. Users can chat directly with each other or join thematic groups or channels. Internet bandwidth in some locations cannot always sustain webinars and video conferencing sessions; however, messaging tools and social media announcements remain highly effective. Messages highlighting student success stories and short, engaging pieces of information are the most popular.

The Indian government's DigiLocker service allows citizens virtual access to authentic and official documents as part of an official digital empowerment initiative. State boards and Indian universities are gradually opting to use the DigiLocker service to provide official documents such as transcripts, diplomas, and letters of recommendation. This service addresses the issue of document authentication for school/university-issued documents, although many Indian HEIs have yet to opt into the service.

In the past year, Turkmenistan has eased restrictions on popular social media platforms, and EducationUSA centers increasingly offer webinars and virtual meetings. Students primarily rely on traditional advising methods: in-person sessions, telephone, and email. Instant messaging platforms like Skype or Google Meet have proved highly effective in the past year. Highlighting recent student success stories from the region on social media platforms is an effective strategy for gaining visibility. With limited testing options available, flexibility around testing will be critical to students interested in applying to institutions in the United States.

Pakistan launched the EducationUSA Pakistan Mobile App in 2022. The free digital tool complements EducationUSA's efforts to inform students, parents, and educators about study opportunities at accredited postsecondary institutions in the United States. In addition to its

Five Countries of Origin (with over 100 students) **with Highest Percentage Growth, International Students in the Region** (Five-Year Trend)

Country	2018/19	2022/23	% Change
Kyrgyzstan	290	705	143%
Uzbekistan	571	1,089	91%
Bangladesh	8,249	13,563	64%
Afghanistan	418	682	63%
India	202,014	268,923	33%

143.0%

Kyrgyzstan has the largest percentage growth in the region over the last five years ***(with over 100 students)***

Five Countries of Origin in the Region with Highest Per Capita College-Age Student Mobility to the United States



Nepal
College-Age Population
3,250,507



Bhutan
College-Age Population
72,552



India
College-Age Population
124,944,952



Kazakhstan
College-Age Population
1,256,507



Sri Lanka
College-Age Population
1,681,005

Source: *UNESCO Institute of Statistics; Indicator: 2023 or most recent Population of the official age for tertiary education, both sexes*

user-friendly interface, the EducationUSA app is a timely resource that takes audiences through its content in a smooth, logical flow. India and Nepal have also implemented a mobile app to reach students and parents.

Successful Recruiting Strategies

- Connect with students through EducationUSA college and regional university fairs. Graduate and undergraduate applicants appreciate the opportunity to meet institutional representatives virtually or in person, discuss study options, and pose questions to HEI representatives to ensure they are well-informed when deciding where to apply.
- Consider organizing summer precollege or incubator programs to create a pipeline toward degree-granting programs. These programs also help students learn about the institution, engage with other international and American students, and connect with faculty.
- Look for armchair recruiting opportunities to engage with advising offices. In May 2024, Central Asia launched the first free "Meet and Greet" session, allowing HEI representatives to meet EducationUSA advisers from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This will be an annual event.
- Participate in informational seminars that showcase the breadth of U.S. higher education, highlight the strengths of U.S. educational institutions, and offer insights into specific fields of study.
- Organize interactive webinars that go beyond a presentation with a question-and-answer period. Look for opportunities to build a connection with students and offer tangible and measurable ways to engage.
- Combine multiple partial financial aid awards into more significant awards for fewer students. Providing more prominent awards attracts quality students who share their positive experiences with peers, encouraging them to apply. Word of mouth is the most effective recruiting tool in the region.
- Engage alumni and train them to promote their alma mater at EducationUSA recruitment fairs. Parents of prospective students are keen to send their children to study in the United States at universities and towns where they know other people from their home country or region have studied.
- Offer opportunities for parents of enrolled students to meet parents of prospective students to provide a sense of security to families anxious about sending children abroad.
- Share information about internship opportunities and other practical training experiences. Students in the region are highly motivated by opportunities to advance their career prospects.
- Research virtual platforms that can facilitate communication with prospective applicants and parents. Students appreciate opportunities to speak directly to admissions representatives or other students. Contact EducationUSA REAC: Regional Managers and advisers in the region to organize a webinar for a specific country or group of countries. Collaborating with other HEIs will help centers accommodate programming.
- Showcase alumni success stories and career trajectories, emphasize the value of a degree from your institution, and highlight affordable financing and scholarship options. These topics generate strong interest on social media.
- Communicate any test-optional policies or flexibilities your institution offers.

Regional Student Totals Top Five Countries of Origin

Country	2022/23	% Change
India	268,923	35%
Nepal	15,090	28%
Bangladesh	13,563	28%
Pakistan	10,164	16%
Sri Lanka	3,106	6%

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Local curricula are rigorous, making it challenging for students to find the time to prepare for admissions tests.

- Organize fly-ins for EducationUSA advisers, local university and high school guidance counselors, and key stakeholders.

- Connect with high school counselors in specialized private and public schools and conduct workshops for school counselors, teachers, and students.

Institutional Partnerships

While many countries in SCA are eager to establish formal partnerships with U.S. institutions, needs and scope vary. Interested U.S. institutions are encouraged to contact U.S. embassies and consulates in the region and other not-for-profit international entities within the United States and abroad to assess and understand the needs of specific countries regarding institutional partnerships. Effective partnerships are those in which both institutions invest time and resources while developing strategies to ensure the sustainability of these academic linkages.

India. U.S. institutions interested in partnerships in India should be prepared to invest time in developing connections. Institutional partnership grants are sometimes supported by the United States-India Educational Foundation (USIEF) or the Institute of International Education India. Previous association with HEIs in India and experience navigating complex institutional bureaucracies can be helpful to both parties. U.S. university representatives are encouraged to explore mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborative opportunities, such as twinning programs, faculty and student academic exchanges, research and secondary school internships, and summer programs.

Pakistan. The U.S.-Pakistan university partnership initiative, funded by the public affairs section of the U.S. embassy in Islamabad, established 23 long-term relationships between Pakistani and U.S. HEIs. Through sustainable peer-to-peer relationships, these three-year partnerships promoted faculty professional development, curriculum reform, joint research, and mutual understanding between Pakistan and the United States. In 2020, the U.S. embassy's public affairs section launched a follow-on program, the U.S.-Pakistan University Partnerships Grants Program (UPGP) 2020-2023, in collaboration with the U.S. Educational Foundation in Pakistan (USEFP).

Central Asia. Central Asian institutions are eager to explore partnerships focused on enhancing teacher preparation, teaching methodology, and training to support language teaching and learning. U.S. embassies throughout the region support partnerships through the Central Asia University Partnerships Program (UniCEN) to build capacity for substantive international engagement between HEIs in the United States and Central Asia. Since 2017, the program has supported more than 70 projects led by U.S. HEIs to improve teacher training.

Uzbekistan. Following Uzbekistan's reforms permitting international branch campuses to open, Russian, British, and U.S. campuses are now operating throughout the country. The U.S. Embassy funds semester long exchanges to the United States for approximately 30 Uzbek faculty members annually and provides strategies for successful engagement with the U.S. higher education sector and campus internationalization. For example, the University of California, Davis, and the National University of Uzbekistan organized the Central Asia Genomics Symposium. Purdue University and Urgench State University's collaboration on ecotourism opportunities in Uzbekistan resulted in a new Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) focused on increasing awareness of the topic. Tashkent State University of Law sends a significant number of students to Penn State University's MLL program through an MOU between the two universities.

Foreign Government and Private Funding

Many national governments across SCA allocate funding each year for students to pursue higher education overseas. Despite such assistance, students with government funding often attend institutions closer to home – in countries such as India, Türkiye, and the UK – because of lower tuition, geographical proximity, and familiar cultural traditions. However, many students are eager to study in the United States, and institutions that offer competitive tuition or discounts have a recruiting advantage.

Bangladesh. Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), the country's premier HEI for STEM education, recently announced it would provide three-year-long fellowships to 30 master's and 20 doctoral students to encourage research and innovation.

Kazakhstan. Since 1993, the government's Bolashak International Scholarship has funded postgraduate training to address a shortage of specialists in priority fields. Scholarships are available for those admitted to top global institutions to study toward master's and doctoral degrees and internships in engineering, medicine, and teaching. The program provides full funding for study in the United States, including a monthly stipend for living expenses, roundtrip airfare, textbook allowances, and health insurance. In 2023, the Bolashak International Scholarship plans to fully fund 395 master's students, 50 doctoral students, and 110 people pursuing internships. Bolashak introduced a cost-sharing practice: Students who received a partial scholarship from a U.S. institution can request funds to cover the rest of the expenses. STEM and medical students can take a one-year-long English-language preparation course before receiving an admissions decision from the university. The program has also expanded the list of approved foreign universities.

India. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has offered the National Overseas Scholarship since 1954. The scholarship supports overseas graduate study for low-income students who are recognized as belonging to the following groups: scheduled castes, denotified nomadic and seminomadic tribes, landless agricultural laborers, and traditional artisans. The government has invested USD$206 million annually in this scholarship program.

In 2021, Quad partners Australia, India, Japan, and the United States announced the Quad Fellowship Program, designed to build ties among the next generation of scientists and technologists. The fellowship will be operated and administered by Schmidt Futures in

consultation with a nongovernmental task force.

The JN Tata Endowment Loan Scholarship is dedicated to Indian students who wish to pursue higher studies abroad. Introduced by the Tata Trusts, this scholarship specifically supports postgraduate, doctoral, postdoctoral, and research-level education.

Nepal. Nepal's Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology and the World Bank launched a USD$60 million Nurturing Excellence in Higher Education Program in 2021. The program seeks to support fields that address labor market needs, boost collaborative research and innovation, and enhance access for underprivileged and disaster-affected groups in Nepal. This is a five-year program that can help students plan for further studies.

Pakistan. The U.S.-Pakistan Knowledge Corridor, established in February 2017, supports high-level human capital development as outlined in the government of Pakistan's Vision 2025 policy document. This initiative supports Pakistan's efforts to strengthen its university system by increasing the number of Pakistani faculty who obtain doctoral degrees from U.S. universities. More than 230 U.S. institutions are on the approved scholarship list for this program. The scholarship covers travel and living expenses; for some scholars, it also covers partial tuition.

Turkmenistan. EducationUSA Turkmenistan offers a year-long cohort model program with a build-up and top-up scholarship. The U.S. embassy in Turkmenistan fully funds the top-up scholarship. It provides a maximum of USD$20,000 for 16 to 20 alumni annually, to be paid out during the first two years of study at any U.S. institution. In addition, cohorts are eligible for the Opportunity Funds scholarship, which can cover the upfront cost of studying in the United States based on demonstrated talent and needs.

Uzbekistan. The El-Yurt Umidi Foundation's government scholarship program introduced new scholarships for the undergraduate level. The foundation offers scholarships for doctoral, master's and bachelors degrees, as well as short-term professional development programs, and six-month internship programs.

Currently, 190 scholarship holders are studying at 34 universities in the United States. In February 2024, El-Yurt Umidi Foundation transferred to the presidential administration's control. The foundation will implement a new system for foreign studies, dedicating resources to train students in the much-needed fields of engineering and technology. The program is only able to offer funding to students attending universities ranked in the top 500 globally.

Regional Economics and Market Demands

Many students in the SCA region gravitate toward STEM fields. English-language proficiency is strong in India and Pakistan, and the local postsecondary sector offers high-quality undergraduate programs. As a result, many students complete undergraduate degrees at home and pursue graduate study overseas to enhance their career opportunities. Program quality, research opportunities, and competitiveness are all factors that students consider when applying to U.S. institutions.

India has surpassed China as the world's most populous nation and continues to be one of the world's fastest-growing economies. The rise of the middle class has led to growing workforce needs in several areas, including the service sector, technology finance (banking and insurance), information technology (robotics, cybersecurity, data science, machine learning, and blockchain), manufacturing, e-commerce, media, and entertainment. U.S. universities offer cutting-edge programs with specializations catering to these industries' current and future needs and much-needed expertise and training for new entrants to the job market and mid-career professionals. The number of startups in India is growing, and many aspiring business leaders choose programs that integrate tech and entrepreneurship.

India was one of the few countries where U.S. visa applications saw a major upswing after pandemic-related travel restrictions were lifted. The U.S. Department of State implemented the recommendations of a presidential commission, which suggested steps like opening up American diplomatic missions outside India for visa appointments to reduce the visa backlog in the country.

Economic and workforce needs in Central Asia differ from those of the subcontinent, where English is widely spoken. Central Asian countries are establishing programs to ensure teachers and students have the skills to enter the global market, including English-language proficiency. Key areas of interest are oil and gas, mining, STEM, agriculture, education, and health care. In Nepal, expertise is needed in infrastructure development and management, tourism and hospitality, and information and communication technology.

China's Belt and Road Initiative will leave an indelible mark on the region for years. This large-scale infrastructure investment will expand China's economic influence

U.S. Study Abroad

Top Five Receiving Countries in the Region

Destination	2021/22	% Change
India	336	2,000%
Nepal	209	2,886%
Kyrgyzstan	120	300%
Kazakhstan	58	0%
Bhutan	25	0%

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in the region, creating jobs and attracting students from SCA to study in China to develop the expertise needed to support the initiative.

For students in Turkmenistan and other Central Asian countries, affordability is the main factor in educational decisions. Countries such as Australia, Canada, Türkiye, and Malaysia that offer robust funding and job placements are strong competitors for international students. U.S. HEIs interested in recruiting in Central Asia should emphasize the affordability of their programs and/or return on investment to make a compelling case to prospective students.

The birth rate in Kazakhstan has been relatively high since 2003. This demographic will increase the number of applicants for undergraduate programs. The number of highly selective private and public high schools is growing; they employ school counselors and offer college prep programs, a rigorous curriculum, and a range of extracurricular activities. Some schools sponsor professional training led by leading U.S. institutions. Kazakh school counselors actively participate in the International Association for College Admission Counseling (ACAC), improving their expertise and enlarging their network.

More high schools in Kazakhstan plan to introduce Advanced Placement (AP) classes, with some schools serving as AP centers where students from other schools can take AP classes. This change may increase the quality of applicants from Kazakhstan in the next few years. In the past two years, the EducationUSA Almaty and Nur-Sultan centers have developed virtual programs (some open to the public and some only for Competitive College Club participants) covering all Kazakhstan regions. Advisers have already seen growing interest from students in underserved areas and expect this trend to continue.

Regional EducationUSA Events, Fairs, and Conferences (in person and virtual)
HEIs can find country-specific information about upcoming in-person and virtual events, including fairs and webinars, on the EducationUSA website. REACs regularly host in-person and virtual workshops and training in the region. Contact them to learn how you can participate in these activities.

In addition to the many in-person and virtual student recruitment opportunities offered through participation in EducationUSA fairs and conferences, EducationUSA advisers provide country briefings, facilitate meetings by U.S. embassy public affairs and consular staff (subject to scheduling availability), give welcome presentations at EducationUSA advising centers, and arrange visits to local high schools or colleges for representatives of U.S. HEIs. Contact the EducationUSA staff to explore options for participating in upcoming events.

Bhutan. The Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry organizes an annual International Education Fair in Thimphu in March.

Central Asia. The EducationUSA Central Asia tour includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. The tour consists of college and university fairs, secondary school visits, cultural activities, and visits to local universities. Many advising centers in the region have strong cohort advising programs composed of students seeking opportunities at the undergraduate level. The tour visits multiple cities, including Almaty, Nur-Sultan, and Atyrau in Kazakhstan; Bishkek and Osh in Kyrgyzstan; and Tashkent, Uzbekistan. EducationUSA Central Asia has hosted virtual fairs over the past year, with some events highlighting community colleges and 2+2 options.

India. The EducationUSA India fair tour, traditionally held in the fall, visits as many as nine cities. EducationUSA India hosts Chalo America, small-group tours in the spring across different cities, and alumni fairs in January and June. For details about these events, contact the South Asia Tour Planning Team.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. EducationUSA advising centers participate in an array of locally organized international student fairs, the Begin Group's spring and fall international education fairs, and the fall Bolashak Development Fund Program, with 300 HEIs from around the globe visiting six cities across Kazakhstan.

South Asia. The South Asia EducationUSA tour traditionally includes Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The tour offers college and university fairs, secondary school visits, cultural activities, and visits to local universities relevant for

graduate-level recruiters. EducationUSA advisers across South Asia leverage social media networks to reach diverse student audiences. The tour traditionally takes place in either the spring or fall. For details, contact the South Asia Tour Planning Team.

Turkmenistan. The government of Turkmenistan sponsors an annual international exhibition and scientific conference in Ashgabat each November. The EducationUSA advising center in Ashgabat reaches thousands of high school and university students, parents, teachers, professors, and various organizations at this event.

Uzbekistan. T Begin Tour Group organizes a fair twice a year in fall and spring. For more information, contact the EducationUSA Tashkent office.

U.S. Study Abroad in the Region

According to the 2023 *Open Doors* report, 804 U.S. students studied in the SCA region in AY 2021-2022. The top study-abroad destinations were Nepal, India, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. India and Nepal hosted nearly half the study-abroad students in the region, followed by Kyrgyzstan.

The State Department's USA Study Abroad branch collaborates with government and higher education stakeholders throughout the region to build capacity for U.S. study abroad programming. In the summer of 2023, the Increase and Diversify Education Abroad (IDEAS) Program awarded 34 grants to U.S. colleges and universities to develop study abroad programming. One grant focused on developing a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) entrepreneurship course in Kyrgyzstan. In 2023, USA Study Abroad also awarded Study Abroad Engagement Grants to the U.S. embassy in Kyrgyzstan to train local HEIs to foster their ability to partner with U.S. colleges and universities on study abroad programming.

U.S. study abroad students are welcome to join EducationUSA programming activities throughout the region. U.S. institutions are encouraged to provide information and resources to study-abroad participants before they depart from the United States so that they can promote the institution to local audiences. Students have delivered general presentations about their institutions, joined conversation groups, assisted with mock admissions interviews, and participated in alumni fairs and other events that allowed them to engage with local high school and university students.

Best and Worst Times of the Year to Interact with Students (in person and virtual)

U.S. HEI representatives are encouraged to note U.S. Department of State travel warnings posted at travel.state.gov. Regarding holidays, note that the Muslim calendar is lunar-based, and dates vary yearly. Please check U.S. embassy websites and consult EducationUSA advising centers for a complete list of annual holidays. Exam periods and religious holidays can vary due to multiple academic calendars. Advisers try to accommodate U.S. HEI representatives' needs and plans throughout the year.

Bangladesh. The best times to visit are August to November, February, and March. Avoid public holidays, such as Ramadan and Eid holidays.

Bhutan. The best time to visit is from March to June.

India. The best times to visit India for recruitment are July, August, October, and November. States observe local and national holidays, and U.S. HEI representatives are encouraged to refer to the U.S. embassy website for a list of holidays. HEIs should coordinate their visits to India and travel in groups to maximize the time for themselves and visiting institutions. Visiting HEIs are also advised to connect with respective alumni associations or chapters in their recruitment efforts.

Kazakhstan. The best times to visit are October to December and late March to April. Avoid visiting during significant exam periods, from January to February and May to June.

Kyrgyzstan. The best time to visit is October to February. Avoid exam times and school holidays from May to August.

Maldives. The best time to visit is February to July. Avoid holidays.

Nepal. The best time to visit varies according to the lunar calendar, but October and November generally have the most significant number of holidays in the year.

Pakistan. The best time to visit is September to March. Avoid holidays, exams, and school holidays between May and August.

Sri Lanka. The best times to visit are January and February, May to July, and September to November. Avoid visits during significant school holidays or breaks and major exam periods.

Tajikistan. The best times to visit are September to October and April to May. Students are out of school in March, June to August (for summer break), and December.

Turkmenistan. The best time to visit is from the end of June to November. The primary exam period runs from late May to approximately June 20 and should be avoided.

Uzbekistan. The best times to visit are September to November and February to May.