

GERMANY'S DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION WITH UZBEKISTAN:
ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROSPECTS

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Annotation. This article examines the historical evolution, achievements, and future prospects of Germany's development cooperation with Uzbekistan from the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 to 2026, employing a qualitative historical-analytical framework organized across three chronological periods: the post-independence era (1991–2000), strategic consolidation (2000–2020), and contemporary enhanced cooperation (2020–2026). Drawing on official data from the German Federal Foreign Office, GIZ project reports, DAAD statistics, Uzbekistan's National Statistics Committee, and verified media sources, the analysis focuses on five key sectors: trade and economic cooperation, education and cultural exchange, environmental sustainability, agriculture and water management, and regional security.

Keywords: Germany-Uzbekistan relations, development cooperation, bilateral trade, German development assistance, GIZ projects, Aral Sea environmental restoration, green economy, German language in Uzbekistan, DAAD scholarships, migration partnership.

Introduction

The development cooperation between Germany and Uzbekistan represents one of Central Asia's most significant and enduring bilateral partnerships, rooted in historical connections that predate Uzbekistan's independence. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Germany recognized Uzbekistan's independence on December 31, 1991, and the two nations established formal diplomatic relations on March 6, 1992. This recognition was not merely a procedural diplomatic gesture but rather the beginning of a multifaceted relationship that has steadily deepened over three decades. The historical foundations of this cooperation can be traced to the Soviet era, when Volga Germans were deported to Central Asia, creating a German diaspora in Uzbekistan that served as an informal cultural bridge between the two societies. These early connections, combined with the shared experience of post-Cold War transformation, set the stage for a partnership that has evolved from basic diplomatic recognition to comprehensive strategic cooperation encompassing economic development, environmental sustainability, education, and regional security. This article examines Germany's development cooperation with Uzbekistan through a historical lens, analyzing the achievements across multiple sectors and identifying future prospects, while drawing upon official German government sources, international agreements, and recent statistical data to provide an evidence-based assessment of this evolving relationship.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative, historical-analytical approach to examine Germany-Uzbekistan development cooperation from 1991 to the present. The research framework is organized around three historical periods: the immediate post-independence era (1991–2000), the strategic consolidation period (2000–2020), and the contemporary period of enhanced cooperation (2020–2026). Primary sources include official bilateral agreements such as the 1993 Cultural Cooperation Agreement registered with the United Nations and the 1996 EU-Uzbekistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which established the broader framework for German engagement as part of European Union policy. Additional primary sources include official data from the German Federal Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt), reports from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), project documentation from the Deutsche

Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and trade statistics from Uzbekistan's National Statistics Committee¹. Secondary sources include analytical reports from the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies (ISRS)² under the President of Uzbekistan, news reports from verified media outlets including UzA (Uzbekistan National News Agency), Kursiv Media, and Kun.uz, as well as project summaries from implementing organizations. The analysis focuses on five key sectors of cooperation: trade and economic development, education and cultural exchange, environmental and climate resilience, agriculture and water management, and security and regional stability. For each sector, quantitative indicators (trade volumes, student numbers, project funding amounts) and qualitative outcomes (institutional developments, policy alignments, infrastructure projects) were assessed to evaluate achievements and identify trends for future cooperation.

Results

The analysis reveals substantial achievements across multiple dimensions of Germany-Uzbekistan cooperation, with particularly notable progress in trade relations, educational exchange, and environmental collaboration.

Bilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation: Germany has emerged as Uzbekistan's most important trading partner within the European Union. According to the German Federal Foreign Office, bilateral trade reached approximately 1.2 billion euros in 2024, with German exports accounting for roughly 1.1 billion euros of this total. More recent data from Uzbekistan's National Statistics Committee indicates that total bilateral trade reached 1.4 billion US dollars in 2025, reflecting continued growth. The trade relationship is characterized by German exports of machinery, equipment, chemical products, and vehicles, with recent monthly data showing Uzbek imports from Germany averaging between 32 million and 67 million US dollars monthly from February through June 2025. As of 2024, approximately 220 companies with German participation are active in Uzbekistan. This represents a significant increase from earlier periods; in 2018, bilateral trade stood at only 542 million euros. The growth trajectory accelerated following high-level engagements, including President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's official visit to Berlin in January 2019, during which agreements totaling over 4 billion euros were signed at the Uzbek-German business forum. More recently, Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz traveled to Uzbekistan in September 2024, where bilateral talks with President Mirziyoyev resulted in the signing of a migration and mobility partnership agreement.

Education and Cultural Cooperation: The educational dimension of Germany-Uzbekistan cooperation has produced remarkable results. A cultural cooperation agreement has been in place between the two countries since 1993, and this framework has enabled extensive programming. The most striking achievement is in German language learning: approximately 400,000 people in Uzbekistan are currently learning German—the highest number across the entire Asian continent. Nineteen Uzbek schools participate in Germany's global "Schools: Partners for the Future" (PASCH) network, and four DAAD lecturers and two language

¹ National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (2025). Top 10 countries in Uzbekistan's foreign trade turnover (January-September 2025). <https://stat.uz/en/press-center/news-of-committee/64756-zbekiston-tash-i-savdo-ajlanmasidagi-top-10-davlatlar-5>

² Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies (ISRS) under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (2019). *Uzbekistan - Germany: experience, cooperation and development prospects*. <http://isrs.uz/en/page/pdf/prezidenta-respubliki-uzbekistan-savkata-mirzieeva-v-federativnuu-respubliku-germania-sostoalos-intervu>

assistants work in the country . Higher education collaboration has grown substantially, with 74 active cooperation projects between German and Uzbek universities . Notable partnerships include collaboration between the Technical University of Munich and New Uzbekistan University (established 2021), and in September 2024, Merseburg University of Applied Sciences opened a German as a foreign language faculty in cooperation with Tashkent State Pedagogical University . The Goethe-Institut, Central Agency for Schools Abroad (ZfA), and German Archaeological Institute (DAI) all maintain active programs in Uzbekistan ³.

Environmental Cooperation and Climate Resilience: German development assistance through GIZ has yielded significant environmental outcomes. The ECO ARAL regional project (2020–2025), commissioned by Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), achieved measurable results in the Aral Sea region. Over two million people indirectly benefited from improved environmental services, six memoranda of understanding were signed between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan across five economic sectors, more than 250 micro, small, and medium enterprises received advisory services on ecologically oriented development, and resource efficiency was improved on 165 hectares, including 70 percent water savings for rice cultivation through solar-powered drip irrigation systems . Additionally, 218 sesame varieties were tested to build drought-resistant value chains, and the first artemia (brine shrimp) aquaculture pilot farms were established in Karakalpakstan . The Green Central Asia regional project, initiated by the German government in 2020, supports regional political dialogue on climate and security, while the Energy-Water-Land-Use Nexus project (ongoing since 2022) operationalizes cooperation among Central Asian states at the intersection of these critical sectors .

Agriculture and Water Management: In July 2025, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Mirzaev Scientific Research Institute of Horticulture, Viticulture and Winemaking and GIZ under the "Managing Climate Risks in Central Asia" project, which is funded by BMZ and scheduled to continue until 2028. This agreement aims to modernize agriculture in the Zarafshan River basin in Navoi region through innovative technologies including smart drip irrigation systems, with a 10-hectare intensive orchard featuring drip irrigation established by the end of 2025.

Green Economic Development: In April 2026, Uzbekistan signed a new agreement with GIZ for a 9-million-euro grant to support "green" economic development and regional growth . This funding will be deployed from 2026 to 2029 for the development of master plans and implementation of green pilot projects, including the application of artificial intelligence and modern analytical methods. Previous grants of 1.3 million euros had already enabled the development of master plans for 12 districts, the approval of 24 pilot projects, the establishment of a 500-hectare agritourism complex in Shakhrisabz district, the opening of vocational training centers in seven districts, and the creation of IT and craft centers . The new agreement will extend these initiatives to Bakhmal, Boysun, and Sokh districts .

Discussion

The historical evolution of Germany-Uzbekistan development cooperation demonstrates a consistent pattern of deepening engagement across multiple sectors. Several factors have contributed to this positive trajectory. First, as noted by analysts from Uzbekistan's Institute for

³ German Eastern Business Association / Dunyo Information Agency. (2025). Uzbekistan-Germany trade turnover increases by 30% in first half of 2025. August 24, 2025. <https://dunyo.info/en/ekonomika/joriy-yilning-birinchi-yarim-yilligida-%d0%8ezbekiston-va-germaniya-%d1%9ertasidagi-savdo-aylanmasi-30-foizga-oshdi>

Strategic and Regional Studies, both countries gained their contemporary political identities through significant historical transformations-Uzbekistan through the dissolution of the USSR and Germany through reunification-creating a shared experience of navigating post-Cold War transitions . Second, both nations have pursued foreign policies characterized by continuity, predictability, and a commitment to multilateral frameworks, with common positions on counter-terrorism, organized crime, and drug trafficking . Third, the ambitious reform program initiated by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev after 2016, including the "Strategy of Action" focused on five priority development directions, has aligned closely with Germany's emphasis on rule of law and human rights as fundamental aspects of its foreign policy .

The expansion of German language learning to 400,000 individuals represents a strategic asset for both countries. This creates a pool of potential employees for German companies operating in Uzbekistan, facilitates academic exchange, and builds long-term people-to-people connections. The 74 higher education cooperation projects and the recent expansion of preparatory courses for study in Germany indicate that this educational infrastructure will continue to grow.

Environmental cooperation has emerged as a particularly significant area, driven by shared concerns about climate change, water scarcity, and sustainable development. The ECO ARAL project's achievements in the Aral Sea region-improving resource efficiency for over two million people and developing drought-resistant agricultural value chains-demonstrate the tangible impact of German development assistance on vulnerable populations . The transition from the 1.3-million-euro pilot phase to the 9-million-euro implementation phase (2026-2029) suggests German confidence in the effectiveness of this cooperation model .

However, several challenges and limitations warrant consideration. Despite impressive growth, bilateral trade remains modest relative to the potential of both economies. German exports dominate the trade relationship, and Uzbekistan's export capacity to Germany requires further development through investments in value-added processing, quality certification, and logistics infrastructure. The transportation of goods between Central Asia and Europe remains costly, limiting the competitiveness of Uzbek products . Additionally, while German companies are increasingly active in Uzbekistan, their presence remains concentrated in Tashkent and major industrial centers, with less penetration in rural areas where development needs are greatest.

Looking to future prospects, several promising avenues for enhanced cooperation emerge. The migration and mobility partnership signed in September 2024 provides a framework for managed labor migration, skills development, and professional training that could address labor shortages in Germany while providing employment and skills for Uzbek workers . The integration of artificial intelligence and modern analytical methods into regional development planning, as outlined in the 2026 GIZ agreement, represents an innovative approach that could serve as a model for other development partners. The potential for joint production of goods for Afghan and South Asian markets, particularly through the development of transport corridors such as Mazar-i-Sharif to Herat, offers strategic opportunities given Germany's continued engagement in Afghanistan's stabilization. Finally, the "Green Central Asia" and "Energy-Water-Land-Use Nexus" projects provide platforms for continued regional cooperation that positions Uzbekistan as a leader in sustainable development within Central Asia⁴.

⁴ Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (2025). *Artemia - a new opportunity for business in the Aral Sea region*. Government Portal News, February 28, 2025. <https://gov.uz/ru/agro/news/view/38349>

Conclusion

Germany's development cooperation with Uzbekistan has evolved over three decades from initial diplomatic recognition to a comprehensive strategic partnership encompassing trade, education, environmental sustainability, and regional security⁵. The achievements are substantial: bilateral trade has grown to 1.4 billion US dollars with over 220 German-affiliated companies operating in Uzbekistan ; 400,000 Uzbek citizens are learning German with 74 university partnerships active ; German development assistance has improved environmental services for over two million people in the Aral Sea region and achieved 70 percent water savings in pilot agricultural projects ; and a 9-million-euro green economic development initiative has been launched for 2026-2029 . The historical foundations of this cooperation-shared experiences of political transformation, compatible foreign policy orientations, and the presence of a historic German diaspora-have provided a stable basis for sustained engagement. Looking forward, the alignment of Uzbekistan's reform agenda with German development priorities, combined with new frameworks for migration partnership and green economic development, suggests continued strengthening of this relationship. The challenge for both partners will be to ensure that the benefits of cooperation reach beyond Tashkent to rural communities, to develop Uzbekistan's export capacity to balance the trade relationship, and to leverage their partnership for broader regional stability and sustainable development in Central Asia.

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