ENHANCING CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF BORDER LIAISON OFFICES IN CENTRAL ASIA
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BY STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF BORDER LIAISON OFFICES IN CENTRAL ASIA

UNODC PROGRAMME FOR CENTRAL ASIA 2022 - 2025
PREVENTING AND COUNTERING TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

Afghanistan increased by 32 per cent, to 233,000 hectares – making the 2022 crop the third largest area under cultivation since monitoring began. Opium prices have soared following the announcement of the cultivation ban in April 2022. Income made by Afghan farmers from opium sales more than tripled, from US$ 425 million in 2021 to US$ 1.4 billion in 2022.

Drug seizure data across the region indicates an exponential increase in drug trafficking. Since August 2021, there has been a significant increase in drug seizures in Central Asian states.

To provide Central Asian states with technical assistance and to connect national and regional efforts, UNODC utilizes a mechanism of an integrated response to drug-related challenges and border security issues. The organization’s initiatives strengthen both national interagency coordination and cross-border cooperation by establishing Border Liaison Offices, Port Control Units, border outposts, and Interagency Mobile Teams.

Fostering greater cross-border and interagency cooperation is the only way forward for achieving our shared vision to build a more inclusive and fairer future, to make the region safer from drugs and crime, and to contribute to the health of our generation and those to come.

Ashita Mittal, UNODC Regional Representative for Central Asia
ENHANCING CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

DONORS

PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

Border and Customs Services, Drug Control Agencies, Ministries of Internal Affairs

FRAMEWORK FOR COOPERATION


Programme “Revival of a New Epoch of the Powerful State: National Programme of Turkmenistan’s Socioeconomic Development for 2022 - 2052”

"Uzbekistan – 2030“ Strategy
The strengthening of selected border crossing points and the establishment of a new system for enhanced interagency and cross-border cooperation, improved intelligence gathering and coordination on countering drug trafficking in the region - thus protecting vulnerable territories against the trafficking of Afghan opiates - are some of the key areas of cooperation for the UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia.

The UNODC Regional Project on Enhancing Cross-Border Cooperation by Strengthening the Capacity of Border Liaison Offices in Central Asia (project) of Sub-programme 1 Preventing and Countering Transnational Organized Crime of the UNODC Programme for Central Asia 2022 - 2025 is designed to strengthen the capacity of border crossing points (BCPs) and improve cross-border cooperation by promoting the concept of Border Liaison Offices (BLOs) and developing information and communication networks for border agencies.

BLOs are established at key border crossing points in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan. BLOs promote improved communication and cooperation between different national law enforcement agencies working along the border. They also aim to foster greater law enforcement cooperation through direct cross-border communication links at the operational level, and to promote the sharing of real-time information on drug traffickers to enable fast and effective intervention by law enforcement officers on both sides of the border.

Under this system of cooperation, UNODC has assisted with the establishment of 24 BLOs in geographically remote and potentially vulnerable border crossing points on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz (4), Kazakh-Uzbek (2), Kyrgyz-Tajik (4), Kyrgyz-Uzbek (2), Tajik-Afghan (2), Tajik-Uzbek (8), Turkmen-Uzbek (1), and Uzbek-Afghan (1) borders.
Each of the participating countries has provided both premises and staff for the BLOs. UNODC is contributing to new infrastructure development and capacity-building through the provision of training courses, high-tech equipment and specialized analytical software needed to enhance database analysis and intelligence-sharing, and to establish sustainable information-sharing mechanisms at the regional level. This will enable joint, proactive, and intelligence-driven drug trafficking investigations.

Between 2022 and 2023, BLOs were established at the railway BCP Kayindy on the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border, at the Merke (Sypatai Batyr) BCP on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border, at the Alat BCP on the Uzbek-Turkmen border, at the Ayvaj BCP on the Tajik-Uzbek border and at the Gulbahor BCP on the Uzbek-Tajik border.
Enriching cross-border cooperation

**BLO**

- Border Liaison Office
- Information exchange between the authorities
- Classified information transmission
- Real-time information exchange between BLOs
- Classified information transmission

**Competent Authorities of Country A**

- Drug Control Agency
- Ministry of Internal Affairs
- Border Service
- Customs Service

**Competent Authorities of Country B**

- Drug Control Agency
- Ministry of Internal Affairs
- Border Service
- Customs Service
IMPLEMENTATION

Steering Committees and Working Groups have been established in each country, consisting of five agencies - Border and Customs Services, Drug Control Agency, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs - with the purpose of guiding strategic decision-making for the project, and to streamline its implementation.

The project has established institutionalized platforms to hold regular interagency and cross-border training courses at national and regional levels and has standardized information-sharing and reporting mechanisms for interagency and cross-border communication at the selected BCPs.

Regional meetings of Steering Committees are conducted on an annual basis to review and discuss the implementation of the project at the regional level and to draw up recommendations to strengthen further cross-border cooperation and develop a joint action plan for enhancing border controlling capacities in Central Asia.
The trainings were delivered with the involvement of international and national trainers and experts, including trainers from the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre for Combating Illicit Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and their Precursors (CARICC), the Turkish International Academy against Drugs and Organized Crime (TADOC) – the structure within the Turkish National Police established by UNODC, the Central Directorate of Counternarcotics Service of Italy, and international experts from Austria, Germany, Japan, Israel, Latvia, Poland and the United Kingdom. The project conducted several trainings jointly with the Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) and Law Enforcement in Central Asia (LEICA) experts.
Situation and coordination centers established within law enforcement agencies aim to enhance interagency coordination in monitoring the work of road, railway and air border crossing points; improve the analytical capacity of operational units of law enforcement agencies; and facilitate the centralized collection, processing and analysis of intelligence and cooperation in information exchange based on intergovernmental and interagency agreements in countering narcotics, transnational organized crime, smuggling and the violation of customs regulations.

They are connected to law enforcement agencies’ databases to monitor and respond to potential security threats at borders. The real-time data provide invaluable insights, enabling agencies to make quick decisions on conducting security operations and to streamline border management procedures.

In October 2017, a BLO Coordination Center was established within the State Border Service of the Kyrgyz Republic as part of the implementation of the project.
In March 2021, a Situation Center was established within the Central Office of the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

In March 2022, a Border Cooperation Coordination Center was opened within the Border Troops of the State Committee for National Security of the Republic of Tajikistan.
In April 2023, the Operational Management Sector of BLOs as an operational branch of the BLO Coordination Center of the State Border Service of the Kyrgyz Republic was opened in Osh, Kyrgyzstan.

Work on the establishment of the Situation Center at the Customs Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, started in 2023. The center was provided with cutting-edge equipment.

The Situation Center at the Border Service of the National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan became technically operational in 2023. When officially opened, it will coordinate all the BCPs, BLOs and computer-based training classes along the state border of the country and regulate all processes for data collection, analysis, and exchange.
INTERACTIVE COMPUTER-BASED TRAINING CLASSES

The project assisted Central Asian states with the establishment of interactive computer-based training (CBT) classes within BLOs and law enforcement agencies, with an interactive multimedia training programme that is aligned with the UNODC’s overall drug control and crime prevention strategies in the region, adjusted to legal, procedural and cultural aspects of Central Asian countries.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the CBT classes provided an opportunity for distance learning when travel restrictions limited face-to-face trainings. The CBT classes contributed to the capacity development efforts of UNODC aimed at supporting national operational capacities on drug law enforcement and maintaining the legal turnover of controlled narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors under the ratified UN conventions.

CBT classes are also used to test the professional expertise of officers. In 2020 - 2022, 487 border officers enhanced their knowledge and skills at the CBT classes.
To date, four CBT classes have been established in Kazakhstan, five CBT classes in Turkmenistan, and one CBT class in Tajikistan. Two CBT classes are being established in Uzbekistan.

In 2023, the project developed a concept for the establishment of a Regional Information and Communication System (RICS) with the aim to promptly process the data provided by border law enforcement authorities online that ensures effective collection, storage, protection, analysis, and exchange of information in combating drug trafficking, as well as interaction between the competent authorities of Central Asian states.
RICS will strengthen the existing BLO communication systems and further enhance regional cooperation in countering transborder organized crime and addressing new challenges and threats.
MOBILE APPLICATION
“MY BORDER”

The project supported the launch of the “My Border” mobile application with the Border Service of the National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which is intended for wide use by the public. This mobile application aims to deploy a national mechanism for establishing communication between the Border Service and the general population, by providing useful and easily accessible up-to-date, first-hand information at the BCPs. The mobile application’s testing started in 2023. UNODC plans to launch the application in other Central Asian countries starting from 2024.

STUDY VISITS

From 7 to 9 March 2023, the UNODC Regional Project on Enhancing Cross-Border Cooperation by Strengthening the Capacity of Border Liaison Offices in Central Asia in cooperation with the EU-funded Border Management Programme in Central Asia – Phase 10 organized a study visit to the European Border and Coast Guard Agency - FRONTEX (Warsaw, Poland) and the Polish Border Guard for 15 representatives of the border control authorities from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

The study visit aimed to share with Central Asian border agencies best practices applied by FRONTEX in border security with a focus on information flow management, operational management based on data exchange in real-time, strategic, operational and tactical risk analysis, including assessment of vulnerability, and cooperation between competent agencies.

During the visit, the participants were provided with an overview of the operations of the FRONTEX Situation Center and the Situation Centers of the Polish Border Guard at regional and local levels. Participants observed implementation of the European Integrated Border Management by being acquainted with the practical “green” border surveillance for tackling the large-scale migration crisis on the border between Poland and Belarus.
In cooperation with the Strategic Affairs Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, a working study visit was conducted to the State of Israel between 19 and 21 December 2022 for 15 representatives of law enforcement agencies and Ministries of Foreign Affairs from Central Asian countries. During the visit, participants got acquainted with the best practices of law enforcement agencies utilized by the State of Israel for effective implementation of border control and interagency cooperation, as well as exchanged knowledge and experience on enhancing cross-border cooperation in combatting smuggling and illicit drug trafficking.

During project implementation, equipment worth US$ 4,800,000 was handed over to project beneficiaries, including passport readers, specialized search and inspection equipment for customs and border control, specialized analytical software, X-ray equipment, drug identification kits, closed-circuit television (CCTV) and surveillance systems, IT equipment, LED monitors, off-road vehicles, and others.
This technical support enhances the capacity of BLOs, interagency coordination on monitoring road, railway and air border crossings, and improves the analytical capacity of the operations units of law enforcement agencies.
JOINT EFFORTS TO COUNTER SMUGGLING OF NARCOTIC DRUGS AND PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES

In 2022 – 2023, 12 joint operations were conducted by BLO officers. As a result, the activities of 4 organized criminal groups were dismantled and 1,487 kg of narcotic drugs and 10 kg of psychotropic substances were seized within this period.
NARCOTIC DRUGS AND PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES SEIZED BY BLO OFFICERS IN CENTRAL ASIA IN 2022 - 2023

- **Heroin**: 3.3 kg
- **Psychotropic substances**: 2 kg
- **Cigarettes**: 412 kg
- **Hashish**: 10 kg
- **Methamphetamine**: 46 kg
- **Cannabis**: 251.4 kg
- **Opium**: 16 kg
- **Synthetic drugs**: 802.3 kg

ADVOCACY, OUTREACH AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

**AWARENESS-RAISING CAMPAIGNS**

Thematic public awareness-raising campaigns play an important role in the fight against illicit drugs. It is crucial to inform people – in particular youth, who make up more than half of the population in Central Asian countries - about the risks posed by drug use and illicit drug trafficking.
During the campaign, the UNODC project team, together with the border and customs services in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and BLO officers working at the Kordai and Ak-Zhol border checkpoints on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz and the Oybek and Fotehobod border checkpoints on the Uzbek-Tajik borders, placed banners with information on the harm of drugs and preventive measures undertaken by UNODC in cooperation with law enforcement agencies in Central Asia to counter drug trafficking. The project team conducted interviews with border and customs officials working at the border checkpoints and with civilians crossing the border.
To commemorate World Drug Day 2022, the project conducted a campaign to raise public awareness of illicit drug problems.

The awareness-raising campaign was conducted at the Korday BCP on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border, the Sypatay Batyr BCP on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border, the Ak-Zhol BCP on the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border, the Zhibek Zholy BCP on the Kazakh-Uzbek border, the Dusti BCP on the Tajik-Uzbek border, the Sariosiyo BCP on the Uzbek-Tajik border, the Gisht Kuprik BCP on the Uzbek-Kazakh border and also at the Aktau International Airport in Kazakhstan, the International Airport Manas in Kyrgyzstan and Tashkent International Airport in Uzbekistan.
During the campaign, the UNODC project team and law enforcement officers working at the BCPs and international airports placed informational banners and gave out fridge magnets to people crossing the borders. The messages on the banners and magnets were presented in English, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Russian, Tajik, and Uzbek languages.

A campaign video dedicated to World Drug Day was shown at the arrival and departure terminals of international flights of the Aktau International Airport and the border terminal of the Sypatay Batyr BCP.

UNODC representatives and law enforcement officers informed citizens crossing land and air borders about World Drug Day, the harmful health consequences of drug use and the legal consequences of illicit drug use and trafficking, among others.
The project developed several publications, including a manual on concealment methods for drugs and psychotropic substances, methodological recommendations on profiling at border crossing points and a guideline on using IBM i2 iBase and i2 Analyst’s Notebook analytical software and a number of awareness-raising materials, including information posters on types of narcotic drugs and precursors, and legal consequences for illicit drug trafficking, sale, storage and abuse, and produced animations that were shown at border crossing points across the region aimed to prevent and suppress offenses at the border by raising awareness of citizens regarding their rights and responsibilities when crossing the border.

The banners provided the following information: “Even a single use of a drug can cause severe harm to the human body. You can become addicted to any type of drug the first time you try it”; “Illegal drugs are often transported under the guise of ordinary food, medications, or other legal goods”; “Anyone can be found to be a drug trafficker by agreeing to transport a stranger’s luggage across the border if it is found to contain drugs.”
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[Image of group of people standing in front of a gate with flags in the background.
Image of people sitting at a table during a meeting or conference.

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