

# South and Central Asia

## Regional EducationUSA Profile

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

# 31

### EducationUSA Advising Centers in the Region

21 Comprehensive  
9 Standard  
1 Reference

EducationUSA advising centers in South and Central Asia (SCA) are located at U.S. embassies (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Uzbekistan) and consulates (India, Fulbright Commissions (India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), American Councils for International Education offices (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan), and local nonprofit organizations (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, and Kazakhstan). There are 78 advisers at 31 EducationUSA centers in SCA, with several countries hosting multiple advising centers at various host institutions. The largest concentration of centers is in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Kazakhstan. India has 34 advisers across seven centers, Pakistan has 14 advisers across three centers, Bangladesh has eight advisers across four centers, and Kazakhstan has four advisers across four centers. Advisers in SCA function as mentors and local experts in U.S. higher education, providing advising sessions, engaging with students virtually and in person, and conducting outreach activities.

The Opportunity Funds program currently operates at EducationUSA advising centers in Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Turkmenistan. Nepal and Pakistan host Opportunity Funds cohorts for undergraduate students. Cohorts engage in robust mentoring activities over a two-year period and interact with Opportunity Funds alumni. Sri Lanka and Turkmenistan host Opportunity Funds cohorts for graduate students, offering mentoring activities for up to one year. U.S. higher education institutions (HEIs) are encouraged to reach out to the advising centers to learn more about how to support 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 conducting outreach by joining visits and participating in webinars for advisers, students, high school counselors, and graduate departments within local institutions. In addition, in-person visits to advising centers by U.S. college and university representatives allow EducationUSA to highlight outreach opportunities with local HEIs and facilitate personal interaction with students, parents, and local educational institutions.

### Regional Overview

South and Central Asia is a region of vast cultural and geographic diversity, and it is 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. Countries across SCA recognize the need for educational reforms and curricula that equip students with the skills needed for the workforce. People-to-people ties and international student exchanges are crucial in this region. South Asian economies are among the fastest growing in the world, and the region is a tremendous market for recruiting highly qualified students.

While SCA stretches from Kazakhstan in the north to Sri Lanka in the south, students from this region share common traits: they seek similar fields of study (notably, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics [STEM], and business) and look for



the development of practical skills that translate into jobs. They and their parents are impressed by the perceived prestige of particular academic programs and view the award of a scholarship—even a partial tuition award—favorably. But the region’s differences are also pronounced. Across SCA, there is a wide variety of educational systems, including local-government-supported schools and private English-medium schools. In this region, students from Central Asia and Afghanistan are the most likely to seek out intensive English programs abroad. In India and the rest of South Asia, students are able to master English in their home countries.

The burgeoning youth population, with a median age of less than 26 years, poses specific challenges not just in relation to limited capacity and access to quality higher education locally but also in terms of access to resources. Environmental and conservation concerns are increasingly felt across the region, and concerns about water shortages, floods, landmass erosion, and failing crops have

led to greater migration from rural to urban areas, intensifying demands at all levels of society. The region recognizes the importance of investing in higher education capacity to avoid brain drain but continues to struggle with the slow pace of change in local education systems.

Internet accessibility varies considerably across SCA. In South Asia, the internet is widely and easily accessible with the majority of users accessing the web through mobile devices. Some areas, usually major cities, have easy access to fast and reliable internet service, while other areas have weak connectivity, if any at all. The average speed of internet connectivity is different for big and small cities. Power disruptions are decreasing; however, some countries continue to face outages during peak summer and winter months. In Central Asia, lower internet penetration rates and prohibitively expensive mobile data prevent many Central Asians from being able to fully participate in online education and other networking efforts.

In addition to these concerns, government-imposed restrictions limit online activity in some SCA countries. Limitations on internet speed, certain applications, and services impact student use. This situation affects students’ ability to access online applications, conduct research, take tests, and interact virtually. EducationUSA centers in the region offer students an alternative and reliable way to connect virtually and provide students access to computers with internet connectivity. This is particularly necessary in Central Asia, where EducationUSA centers are sometimes the only places students can apply to international universities.

Students are increasingly going abroad to study and obtain the skills needed to implement change at home. Trained specialists in resource sustainability, finance, business administration, healthcare services, English language studies, water management, law, engineering, and social services are required to meet regional challenges. The

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U.S. higher education system is well-placed to make an important impact in SCA, and institutions that offer programs with real-world skills to address these challenges are well-positioned to recruit in the region.

Although the United States remains the number one choice for higher education abroad, students and families express concerns about perceived attitudes toward international students and visitors. Students are attracted to countries where they anticipate ease in obtaining student visas, work, and permanent residency. Traditionally, students from the region gravitated toward the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Russia. However, over the past few years, China, Japan, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, and India have attracted more students. These countries offer government scholarships and affordable tuition to students from the region. Such offers, combined with proximity to the students' home countries, make these options increasingly attractive. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in particular have increased their higher education offerings in recent years and are becoming attractive to students who wish to stay closer to home.

Engagement with consultants or agents is increasingly common among prospective students, especially in India and Pakistan where consultants and agents provide a range of services. U.S. institutions can publicize their relationships with consultants and agents

to help international students understand the relationship.

### Recent Trends

According to the most recent *Open Doors* report, in the United States, 21.8 percent of the total international student population originates from SCA. *Open Doors* reported a 3 percent increase in mobility from this region, with 238,621 students from SCA studying in the United States in academic year (AY) 2018-2019.

Of the SCA students studying in the United States, 44.2 percent are in graduate programs, and 37.6 percent are enrolled in Optional Practical Training (OPT). Undergraduate students make up only 16.9 percent of total students from SCA.

Bangladesh (+10 percent), Kyrgyzstan (+27.8 percent), and Turkmenistan (+19.7 percent) saw the fastest growth in the region for AY 2018-2019.

Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan were among the top 25 countries in the world sending students to the United States in AY 2018-2019, according to the *Open Doors* report. India and Nepal are the second and 12th largest senders, respectively. Bangladesh and Pakistan are the 20th and 22nd largest senders, respectively.

Kyrgyzstan (+26.3 percent), Tajikistan (+12.1 percent), and Turkmenistan (+14.6 percent) have seen a notable increase in undergraduate student mobility.

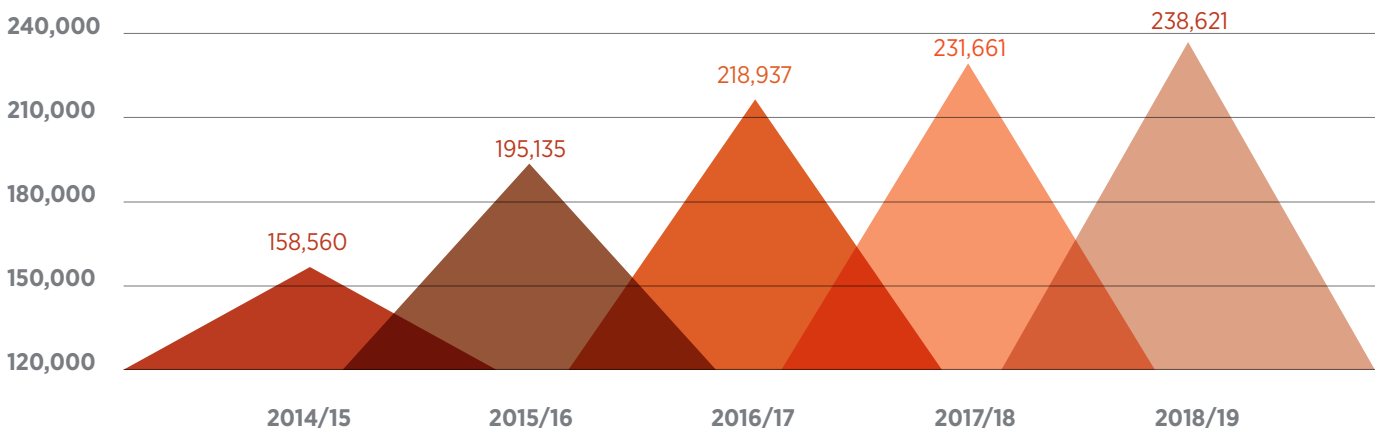
India (+6.3 percent), Nepal (+1.3 percent), and Pakistan (+2.2 percent) saw increases in undergraduate student mobility in AY 2018-2019.

Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka were among the top 25 countries in the world sending graduate (Master's and Doctoral) students to the United States in AY 2018-2019, according to the *Open Doors* report. Other SCA countries with increases in graduate mobility include Kazakhstan (+13.1 percent), Kyrgyzstan (+35.6 percent), and Turkmenistan (+24.1 percent).

In AY 2018-2019, enrollment by students from SCA in non-degree programs saw a significant increase. There was an 87.7 percent increase in enrollment in such programs by students from Bangladesh and an 88.9 percent increase in students from Kyrgyzstan. India, Nepal, and Turkmenistan also saw increases in AY 2018-2019. These increases can be attributed to interest in professional development, as the workforce is changing and trying to keep up with global trends. Students from the region pursue certifications, short-term exchanges, and summer courses to prepare for the changing environment.

Several factors led to growth in the number of graduate students from the region. Local HEIs often require a foreign terminal degree to join the faculty, fueling a growing interest in foreign doctoral programs. A lack of opportunity to pursue research in their home countries leads many students to seek foreign research

## Student Mobility in the Region (Five-Year Trend)





institutions, especially those in the United States. Savvy students understand that careers can be built on the important connections made during graduate studies, so they will prioritize a graduate degree abroad. The high cost of a U.S. undergraduate education is also an important factor causing students to wait to study in the United States.

In some countries, private English language secondary schools focus on preparing students for undergraduate study abroad. 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, well-connected, and able to invite appropriate students to meet representatives either at EducationUSA

advising centers or during a college fair. Students and their families are increasingly concerned about safety on campus and in the community. Many opt to apply to institutions in states with existing diaspora communities from the local culture or institutions with large international populations. Institutions able to demonstrate and address concerns about the safety of international students and their successful integration into the surrounding community will have an advantage.

Gap years are increasingly common among prospective students from the region. Local curricula are rigorous, making it challenging for students to prepare for the required admissions tests. Thus, they will often take a gap year to prepare for the SAT or ACT.

### Countries in the Spotlight

**Bangladesh.** Bangladesh has a long tradition of English language education, a booming education sector, and a rising middle class, all of which combine to make it a prime target for student recruitment. UNESCO reports more than 57,000 students studying abroad from Bangladesh, with the highest numbers in Malaysia, followed by the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Germany. The *Open Doors* survey reports a steady flow of Bangladeshi students coming to study in the United States, with an increase of 10 percent in AY 2018-2019. Graduate students made up 64 percent of Bangladeshi students in the United States, an increase of more than 13.5 percent over the previous year. Non-degree programs saw an increase of 87.7 percent, while OPT programs saw an increase of 12.7 percent. Undergraduate students account for 20.7 percent of Bangladeshi students in the United States. While the total number of undergraduate students from Bangladesh studying in the United States declined by 3.2 percent in AY 2018-2019, there is room for growth in this sector.

The most popular fields of study are engineering and business, with a growing interest in the humanities and social sciences. While some families can afford to fully fund students' studies in the United States, receiving a scholarship is a matter of pride and prestige. Students pursue higher education opportunities in Australia and the UK because there is easy access to visas and residency opportunities, and because of perceived affordability. Bangladesh is a relatively small country in area but is the second most densely populated country in the world, with 53 percent of the population being younger than 30 years old. Higher education in Bangladesh has made immense strides, but a foreign degree is still seen as a significant career asset. At the undergraduate level, practical education and skill development are closely tied to access to the labor market, and Bachelor's and Associate's degrees offering enhanced vocational skills are popular.

Research opportunities at the graduate level are limited in Bangladesh, and many Bangladeshis acquire a Master's degree in Bangladesh before pursuing a second research-based graduate degree abroad. There is steady growth in Bangladeshi

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Ph.D. applicants to foreign HEIs, mainly because of the local universities' requirement for a foreign Ph.D. degree to join the faculty.

**India.** It is estimated that more than half of India's total population is younger than the age of 26. Limited capacity and access to quality education and vocational training continue to be concerns. The growing private education sector provides some relief to the expanding middle class. Currently, there are 138 Indian schools offering the International Baccalaureate diploma program and more than 400 high schools offering the International General Certificate of Secondary Education curriculum in India. Such high schools recognize the need for professional college counseling and are hiring staff to meet such demands to help students apply to institutions abroad.

Indian students' international education preferences are complex and diverse. At the undergraduate level, the intense nature of academic preparation, emphasis on test scores, and competition to gain admission to a high-quality local educational institution push parents and students to consider destinations abroad for higher education. Flexibility of choice and research opportunities are important considerations in the decision-making process.

At the graduate level, students do their research and seek programs that will provide them specific and specialized knowledge to launch their careers. A degree from a top foreign university is highly valued in the Indian job market.

Students may seek options within their previous area of study or seek multidisciplinary programs to further diversify their knowledge base. Students are increasingly attracted to new fields of study in disciplines such as artificial intelligence, data sciences, and data analytics. There is growing interest in practical applications in emerging fields. For example, students are interested in game design and development, animation, filmmaking, graphic arts, music, and sound engineering. Finances, physical safety, research opportunities, and practical training opportunities (such as Curricular Practical Training, or CPT, and OPT) are important factors in students' decision-making. Student profiles and their fields of interest vary from region to region within India. There is also a growing interest in international undergraduate programs among high school students, an important trend in a country that has historically seen most students choosing universities abroad for graduate-level programs.

The majority of Indian students will take out bank loans to finance a portion of their overseas education. On average, students and their families finance about 80 percent of the cost of education, with personal funds covering the remaining 20 percent. Most families save funds in dedicated accounts over time, in fixed deposits or in Employees' Provident Fund accounts (similar to U.S. retirement accounts). Many also possess fixed assets in the form of land, jewelry, or stocks and mutual funds. Converting fixed assets to liquid assets for proof of finances is a major concern for students.

According to UNESCO's report on outbound internationally mobile students for tertiary education by region, the number of Indians studying abroad has increased by 400 percent since 2010. This number is likely to increase, highlighting a significant area of opportunity for U.S. higher education institutions, which host more than 42 percent of all Indians studying abroad.

The reorganization of the Indian higher education sector is an important factor in student mobility. The current government proposed a draft national educational policy to address issues and concerns related to institutional oversight, the relevance of higher education offerings, vocational education, and collaborations with reputable HEIs internationally for research and exchanges. This pro-reform stance of the Indian government could lead to several significant changes in the Indian higher education system. For instance, the government has already initiated digitization of all academic records under the National Academic Depository program to provide credible educational documentation to third parties such as HEIs and prospective employers.

**Kazakhstan.** The overall number of Kazakhstani students studying in the United States increased by about 1 percent in AY 2018-2019. Although undergraduate numbers decreased by 6.3 percent and non-degree program numbers decreased by 26.7 percent, graduate student numbers increased by 13.1 percent and OPT numbers by 19.6 percent. The government of Kazakhstan has undertaken reforms at all

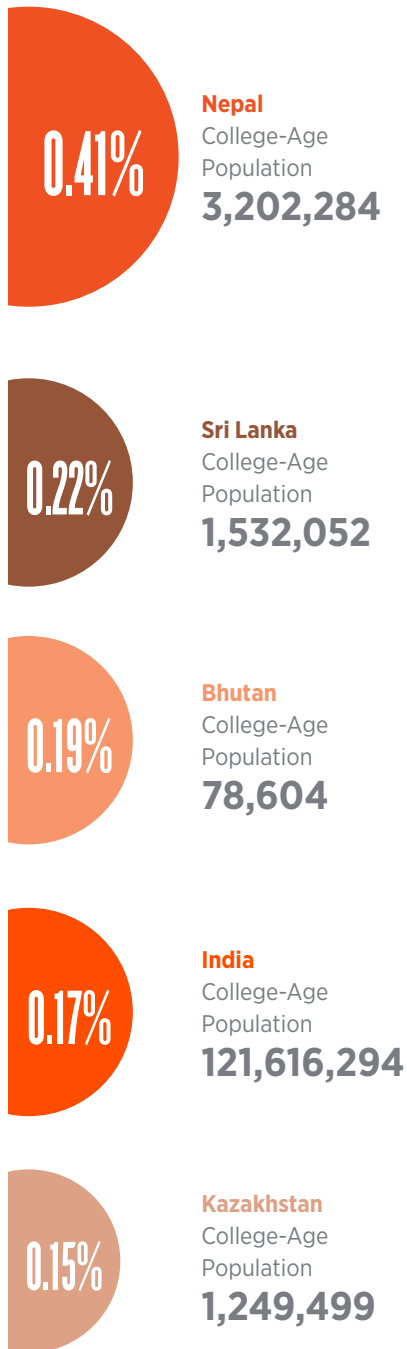
### Five Countries of Origin (with over 100 students) with Highest Percentage Growth, International Students in the Region (Five-Year Trend)

Country	2014/15	2018/19	%Change
Nepal	8,158	13,229	62.2%
India	132,888	202,014	52.0%
Bangladesh	5,455	8,249	51.2%
Pakistan	5,354	7,957	48.6%
Turkmenistan	201	280	39.3%

# 62.2%

**Nepal** 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



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics; Indicator: 2017 Population of the official age for tertiary education, both sexes

educational levels and has established a goal of making the country trilingual by 2050. As a result, schools throughout the country began teaching science classes in English last year. Education is highly valued in Kazakhstan, and students continue to have a strong interest in university study in the United States. The country has 10 international schools with sizable expat representation: close to 100 percent of the senior year students seek an education overseas.

Kazakhstani students interested in English language instruction Bachelor's degrees typically first consider Nazarbayev University, the flagship national university that has partnerships with many U.S. institutions. The government's Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools and Nazarbayev University offer free education to the country's high-performing youth; however, because of limited seats and highly competitive admissions standards, many elite Kazakhstani students seek to study abroad.

Kazakhstan is a landlocked country with a population of more than 18.5 million. The rapidly growing economy is largely dependent on the country's oil and gas reserves. Since the currency devaluation in 2014, the Kazakhstan tenge has lost nearly half its value against the dollar, resulting in an increase in education expenses in the United States for Kazakhstani students. As a result, students from Kazakhstan are exploring study abroad options in countries with lower tuition rates and are becoming more open to considering affordable options in the United States, such as community colleges. Most consider studying domestically or in China, Russia, Germany, Malaysia, or the Republic of Korea. More than 66,000 students from Kazakhstan study abroad each year, but fewer than 3 percent of those students study in the United States.

Graduates of Intellectual Schools and other selective schools seek graduate studies abroad. Many undergraduate institutions, including English-medium Nazarbayev University, offer strong STEM and other programs. Undergraduates from these institutions also seek graduate study abroad.

**Kyrgyzstan.** The number of Kyrgyzstani students studying in the United States

has grown steadily over the past two years, increasing 34 percent between 2017 (216 students) and 2019 (290 students). In AY 2018-2019, 49.7 percent of Kyrgyzstani students studying in the United States were enrolled in undergraduate programs, 27.6 percent were in graduate programs, 17.6 percent were in non-degree programs, and 5.2 percent were in OPT.

EducationUSA offers various opportunities, available through the country's cohort advising programs, referred to as College Prep Clubs (CPCs). In 2019, an average of 80 students engaged with CPCs in Bishkek and Osh. Advisers assist promising high school students, many from low-income backgrounds, with their applications to U.S. HEIs by offering free, results-based, intensive group advising. In addition, centers have seen an increase in visiting U.S. college and university representatives, allowing more in-person engagement with prospective students and their parents.

EducationUSA Kyrgyzstan will continue to promote Kyrgyzstan as a destination for HEI representatives and to foster relationships between the United States and local educational institutions. EducationUSA is exploring virtual fair options, and will share additional details as they become available.

**Pakistan.** In AY 2018-2019, there was a 7.4 percent increase over the previous year of Pakistani students (7,957) studying in the United States, according to the *Open Doors* report. The increase was split among undergraduate (2.2 percent), graduate (0.2 percent), non-

### Regional Student Totals Top Five Countries of Origin

Country	2018/19	% Change
India	202,014	2.9%
Nepal	13,229	-0.3%
Bangladesh	8,249	10%
Pakistan	7,957	5.6%
Sri Lanka	3,334	0.8%

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degree (11.3 percent), and OPT programs (28.5 percent). The data clearly reflects students' career interests and intent to take advantage of practical training after their studies.

The major cities of Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad/Rawalpindi have large populations of students who apply to study abroad, and cities such as Faisalabad, Sialkot, Gujrat, and Gujranwala also have large numbers of prospective students interested in pursuing higher education at foreign institutions. Colleges and universities planning to recruit in Pakistan should consider a broad range of cities for recruitment.

The U.S. Educational Foundation in Pakistan administers several U.S. government academic exchange programs and hosts all three of Pakistan's EducationUSA advising centers. Through these exchange programs, 19,000 participants from Pakistan have come to the United States since 1946. Pakistani

youth are academically strong and globally aware as a result of widespread internet use and exposure to 36 television news channels now available in the country. These well-informed young Pakistanis are increasingly interested in U.S. study options and are able to make discerning choices when comparing international study options.

### **What to Expect in the Next Three to Five Years**

As South Asia's youth come of age, an increasing number of students will study abroad. Across the region, competition for limited seats at respected local undergraduate institutions, particularly for engineering and business majors, may result in an increase in undergraduate applicants to the United States.

The U.S.-Pakistan university partnership initiative, funded by the Public Affairs section of the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, establishes long-term relationships between Pakistani and American HEIs.

These three-year partnerships promote faculty professional development, curriculum reform, and joint research, and increased mutual understanding between Pakistan and the United States through sustainable peer-to-peer relationships. So far, 23 partnerships have been established, and their success is expected to lead to more institutions seeking comparable programs.

The vision of education in Uzbekistan that began four years ago under new leadership continues to evolve and change. In 2019, the Ministry of Higher and Secondary-Specialized Education introduced a five-year Education Sector Plan focusing on expanding the English language curriculum, increasing technical and vocational training, adding more educational institutions, and diversifying fields of study. That same year, the U.S. Department of State and USAID funded a multimillion dollar effort to support Uzbekistan's large-scale modernization of their education system. These projects

specifically focus on English language instruction in secondary schools and mathematics and reading instruction in primary schools. The number of private high schools continues to increase, with a focus on STEM fields.

The higher education system will introduce advanced international experience to the education process and improve the skills of teachers and scholars through closer relationships with leading foreign educational and scientific institutions. As a result, universities in Uzbekistan seek to establish partnerships with foreign universities. The U.S. Embassy is in the process of opening six American Corners across the country, and each will have a part-time EducationUSA adviser. Expanding the advising team and EducationUSA’s reach across the country will assist in connecting with a broader group of students. Uzbekistan is Central Asia’s most populous country. It has more than 30 million people, more than 64 percent of whom are under the age of 30. Close to 50 percent of Uzbekistani students in the United States are pursuing an undergraduate degree, including students at community colleges. While Uzbekistan will not likely become a major source country for foreign students in the next three to five years, Uzbekistanis will have improved English language skills and greater access to EducationUSA centers and advising services.

In Afghanistan, the Ministry of Education’s priority is to increase the number of faculty who hold a Master’s degree or Ph.D. There is a strong push to continue to support female education at all levels. Afghanistan’s education system desperately needs to produce a new generation of professional workers for the government and private sector who can lead the country to a more productive future. The government’s aim is to raise university enrollment overall, with a focus on women and girls, and to expand graduate and doctoral programs. As the country rebuilds its educational infrastructure and increases capacity, local institutions will look to the United States and other countries to build partnerships and create linkages. The U.S. Embassy in Kabul will continue to use the 25 Lincoln Learning Centers (LLCs) spread throughout the country

to promote EducationUSA activities through an organized series of virtual sessions at the LLCs on topics related to university admissions, finding the right university fit, writing a strong personal statement, essay writing, application review, and testing.

China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to develop infrastructure across SCA, includes education as a priority element. Future collaboration and scholarships will attract prospective students to opportunities in East Asia. As a result, more opportunities for students will open up in China and participating countries.

### Virtual Engagement and Social Media Usage

Across the region, the internet is widely available, but there are significant differences in speed and accessibility outside of big cities. Where it is available,

the internet is easily accessible and most commonly used through mobile devices.

Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and YouTube are popular social media platforms throughout the region and are among the strongest ways to promote study abroad programs, scholarships, and EducationUSA center events. Telegram is also popular in Central Asia.

Because they are unreliable, internet connections cannot always sustain webinars and remote sessions; however, messaging tools and social media announcements are still highly effective. Messages about student success stories and short, engaging bits of information are most popular.

EducationUSA advisers in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka host virtual advising through weekly live chats on Facebook.

## U.S. Study Abroad

### Top Five Receiving Countries in the Region

Destination	2017/18	% Change
India	3,986	-15.3%
Nepal	566	-2.6%
Bhutan	104	40.5%
Sri Lanka	85	-45.9%
Kyrgyzstan	63	117.2%

### Five Countries (with over 50 students) with Highest Percentage Growth, U.S. Students in the Region (Five-Year Trend)

Country	2013/14	2017/18	% Change
Bhutan	38	104	173.7%
Kyrgyzstan	27	63	133.3%
Kazakhstan	37	50	35.1%
Nepal	460	566	23.0%
India	4,583	3,986	-13.0%

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EducationUSA at the Edward M. Kennedy Center in Dhaka, Bangladesh, schedules regular Skype sessions for students to interact with U.S. institutions.

In Afghanistan, few people have regular internet access. Information is shared via SMS text messages. To send information via SMS about a U.S. institution or program, contact the EducationUSA advisers in Kabul for assistance.

In Turkmenistan, most popular social media sites have been blocked or are heavily restricted. Despite many restrictions, EducationUSA centers are able to hold webinars and virtual meetings. Students primarily rely on traditional methods of advising: in-person sessions, telephone, and email.

YouTube is available in Pakistan. Many Pakistanis also use alternative websites, such as Vimeo and Dailymotion.

### Successful Recruiting Strategies

- Connect with students through EducationUSA college and university fairs throughout the region. Graduate and undergraduate applicants appreciate the opportunity to meet institutional representatives in person, discuss available options, and have questions answered so that they are well-informed when making decisions about where to apply.
- Initiate summer programs for high school students. A positive experience at a summer program encourages students to continue toward a degree program at an institution.
- Connect and meet EducationUSA advisers at centers in the region. Participate in informational seminars that showcase the breadth of U.S. higher education, highlight the strengths of U.S. educational institutions, or offer insights into specific fields of study that might not be familiar. Although sessions must be strictly informational in nature and not promotional, the institution's presence will attract attention and may enhance recruitment efforts.
- Combine multiple partial financial aid awards into larger awards for fewer students. Providing larger awards attracts quality students, who in turn share their positive experiences with

peers, encouraging the peers to apply. Word of mouth is the most effective recruiting tool in the region.

- Engage alumni at EducationUSA fairs by having them represent the college or university they attended. Encourage alumni to visit EducationUSA centers to meet students and conduct information sessions.
- 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.
- Clearly inform prospective students of options for internship possibilities and other practical training experiences. Students in the region are highly attuned to information about career prospects.
- Talk to applicants and their parents via video chat and take advantage of multimedia capabilities and webinar options at advising centers. Students appreciate the opportunity to speak directly to an admissions representative or student. Webinars are advertised on center websites and through social media platforms.
- Expand the list of cities considered for recruitment visits. EducationUSA can advise on how to effectively go beyond capital cities to smaller cities and rural areas to reach students eager to expand their horizons through higher education abroad.
- Showcase success stories. Emphasize the value of a degree from a particular institution, options for affordable financing and scholarships, and the successful career trajectories of alumni. Publicize the successes of international students through the EducationUSA centers in their home countries. Advisers see a lot of interest in such highlights when they are shared on social media.

### Institutional Partnerships

While countries in SCA are eager to establish formal partnerships with U.S. institutions, needs and scope vary. Interested U.S. institutions are encouraged to work with the Regional Educational Advising Coordinator (REAC) and EducationUSA advising centers,

in collaboration with U.S. embassy colleagues, to assess and understand the needs of specific countries regarding partnerships. Effective and successful institutional partnerships are those in which both institutions invest time and cost-share expenses. The cost-share component ensures that partnerships can be sustained beyond the initial grant period.

**India.** U.S. institutions interested in partnerships in India need to be ready to invest time in developing such partnerships. EducationUSA observes that U.S. institutions have found it easy to work with private universities in India, even though the preference is to work with the better known federally funded institutions of national importance, such as the Indian Institute of Technology or the Aligarh Muslim University. In most cases, institutional partnership grants that the United States-India Educational Foundation (USIEF) deemed successful were those in which the principal representative of the U.S. institution had significant prior association with the Indian partner university. Prior association may encompass a U.S. staff member's experience as a study abroad student or visiting Fulbright scholar in India, or experience leading a group of U.S. study abroad students to visit the institution. This "insider" connection can help the U.S. institution navigate the sometimes complex bureaucracy in Indian institutions. U.S. universities can explore mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborative opportunities, such as twinning programs, faculty and student academic exchanges, research internships, summer programs, and internships (for high school students).

**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 American HEIs. These three-year partnerships promoted faculty professional development, curriculum reform, and joint research, and increased mutual understanding between Pakistan and the United States through sustainable peer-to-peer relationships. Although these grants have come to an end, the institutions involved continue to collaborate frequently and support each other. The U.S. embassy continues to

support partnerships between U.S. and Pakistani universities, offering smaller grants, which are posted on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) when available.

**Central Asia.** Common areas of interest for developing institutional partnerships in Central Asia involve enhancing teacher preparation, teaching methodology, and training to support language teaching and learning. For example, in September 2018, PAS Tashkent awarded a grant to American Councils to manage a U.S.-Central Asia University Partnerships Grants Program (UniCEN) to build capacity for substantive international engagement between higher education institutions in the United States and Central Asia. Funded through regional foreign assistance money, the program currently supports twenty-two projects led by U.S. higher education institutions. Through UniCEN, American Councils has created a growing network of more than 100 Central Asian universities seeking to improve their knowledge of U.S. higher education practices, increase internationalization, implement action plans for partnerships with U.S. higher education institutions, and collaborate on cross-border projects.

### Foreign Government and Private Funding

Many governments in 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, Turkey, and the United Kingdom—because of their lower tuition, proximity, and similar cultural traditions. Many students still desire to study in the United States, and institutions able to offer competitive tuition or discounts have a recruiting advantage.

**Bhutan.** The Scholarship and Student Support Division in the Royal Government of Bhutan's Ministry of Education, Department of Adult and Higher Education, hosts and manages scholarships offered by U.S. institutions specifically for Bhutanese students. If your institution is interested in designing a scholarship for Bhutanese students, please contact the New Delhi-based REAC to facilitate meetings with the Ministry of Education. For more information, visit [www.education.gov.bt](http://www.education.gov.bt).

**Kazakhstan.** Since 2011, the government's Bolashak scholarship program has funded training to address a shortage of specialists in fields related to economic development. The Bolashak scholarship program funds graduate study at leading institutions abroad in priority fields identified by the state. In AY 2018-2019, 320 students studied in the United States with support from the Bolashak program. The program includes funding for arts and mass media industry professionals, public servants, academic and medical staff, engineers, and technical workers. 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. Students can use scholarships for general English studies and Master's and Ph.D. programs, as well as short-term scientific training opportunities.

**Pakistan.** In June 2016, the U.S.-Pakistan Knowledge Corridor was established to support the development of high-level human capital envisioned in Pakistan's policy document Vision 2025. The aim is to support Pakistan's efforts to strengthen its university system by jointly increasing the number of Pakistani faculty who obtain a Ph.D. from U.S. universities. The plan is to send 10,000 Pakistani scholars to U.S. universities in the next 10 years. This is an effort of the government of Pakistan to train its faculty in priority subject areas. In the effort's first phase, 1,500 scholarships will be supported through the Public Sector Development Program. There are 235 U.S. universities on the approved scholarship list for this program. The scholarship covers living expenses and return airfare but not tuition fees.

**Uzbekistan.** The Islam Karimov Foundation, established in 2016 in honor of the late president, organizes a competition to select gifted young people to study in American and European Master's programs. The foundation's grant is open for the following fields of study: natural sciences (renewable energy and chemistry), water and land resource management, engineering technology, food technology, food safety, food production and marketing, architecture (urban development, and protection and restoration of architectural monuments),

design (product design, industrial and architectural design), and fine arts and painting. The fund covers full tuition and living costs in foreign countries for up to two years. Uzbekistani students generally can afford as much as USD\$10,000 per year to study abroad. U.S. and Uzbekistan relations have improved since 2016, when President Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power. American Councils for International Education reopened its Uzbekistan office in August 2018, after being closed since 2006. It was the first nongovernmental organization (NGO) to receive accreditation in the past 15 years in Uzbekistan. Such partnerships can lead to greater institutional collaboration, teacher and faculty development, and research.

### Regional Economics and Market Demands

Most students in the SCA region gravitate toward the STEM fields when looking for programs of study. Science, technology, engineering, mathematics, business, and computer sciences are all popular fields. In India and Pakistan, English language proficiency is strong and quality undergraduate programs exist. As a result, students focus on graduate degrees that will enhance career opportunities. Program quality, research opportunities, and competitiveness are all factors students consider when selecting institutions to which to apply.

India has been on a steady growth trajectory and is among the world's fastest growing economies. With the rise of the middle class and an increase in consumption, several sectors are seeing continuous growth. Service and technology are two of the fastest growing employment sectors in India. Specifically, within those sectors, some of the leading areas experiencing employment growth include 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 and courses, with specializations catering to the current and future needs of these industries in India. U.S. HEIs provide needed expertise and training not just to new entrants to the job market but also to mid-career and experienced

## South and Central Asia

### Best and Worst Times of the Year to Interact with Students (Face-to-Face and Virtually)

Regarding holidays, note that the Muslim calendar is lunar-based, and dates vary from year to year. 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 because not all countries or school systems within a country are on the same academic timetable. Advisers try to accommodate representatives' needs and plans throughout the year.

**Afghanistan.** The best times to visit are October to November and February to April, but please note the travel warning.

**Bangladesh.** The best times to visit are January to April and July to December. Avoid public holidays (e.g., Ramadan and Eid holidays).

**Bhutan.** The best time to visit is from March to June. Avoid travel between November and January during exams, school closings, and holidays.

**India.** The best time to visit to recruit both undergraduate and graduate students is from April to December. To recruit graduate students, visit between mid-January and mid-March. States adhere to local holidays in addition to national holidays. Check the U.S. Embassy New Delhi's list of holidays for dates of regional holidays.

**Kazakhstan.** The best times to visit are October to December and March to April. Avoid visiting during major 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 times to visit are February to April and June to July, but be sure to avoid Islamic holidays. The worst times to visit are May and October, when high school exams are scheduled, and November to January, when schools and universities are closed.

**Nepal.** Visit any time of the year except exam season, from May to June, and festival season, which is predominantly in October (but the time may vary each year).

**Pakistan.** The best time to visit is September to February. Avoid Ramadan, Eid, exams, and school holidays, which occur between May and August.

**Sri Lanka.** The best times of the year to visit are January to February, May to July, and September to November. Avoid visiting during local exams and holidays in March, April, August, and December.

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

**Turkmenistan.** The best time to visit is from the end of June to November. The major 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.

professionals. With a rise in start-ups and entrepreneurial culture in India; aspiring enterprisers are choosing integrated programs in tech and entrepreneurship.

Economic and workforce needs in Central Asia, such as English language proficiency, 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 needed to enter the global market, including English language proficiency. Key areas of interest are oil and gas, STEM, agriculture, education, and healthcare. In Nepal, support and expertise are needed in infrastructure building and management in both the private and public sectors, tourism and hospitality, and information and communication technology. This need includes development of roads, transmission lines, airports, hydropower, hospitals, and real estate construction.

China's Belt and Road Initiative and associated infrastructure projects will expand China's economic influence in the region and drive interest among students from SCA in exploring academic opportunities in China.

Many countries in SCA have struggled with weakening economies and currency devaluation. For example, the Kazakhstan tenge has lost nearly half its value against the dollar since 2014, resulting in increased education expenses for Kazakhstani students studying in the United States. Similar economic trends are playing out in Pakistan. As a result, students from struggling economies are exploring study abroad options in countries with lower tuition or generous scholarship opportunities. While students and parents value the quality of a U.S. education, they are looking for opportunities that meet their educational needs at an affordable cost. Students from Central Asian countries have shown a growing interest in community colleges as they look for more affordable options to study in the United States. This is evident in the AY 2018-2019 percentage of students studying at these types of institutions: 26.55 percent in Kyrgyzstan, 30 percent in Turkmenistan, and 11.9 percent in Uzbekistan.

### Regional EducationUSA Events

Use the EducationUSA website to find country-specific information about upcoming in-person and virtual events, including fairs and webinars. REACs host workshops and trainings in the region, both in-person and virtually. Connect with the REACs to learn how you can participate and lend support in trainings.

### Fairs and Conferences

In addition to attending the many in-person student recruitment opportunities offered through participation in EducationUSA fairs and conferences, representatives of U.S. institutions often receive country briefings from EducationUSA advisers, meet with U.S. embassy Public Affairs and Consular Affairs staff (subject to scheduling availability), make presentations at EducationUSA advising centers, and visit local high schools or colleges. Contact the EducationUSA staff organizing the event to explore options for maximizing the impact of participation. Visit <https://educationusa.state.gov> and select “Find an Event” to see the latest upcoming fairs, conferences, center events, and more.

**Afghanistan.** For three consecutive years, the annual education expo has attracted large numbers of interested students. To share information at the expo, contact the EducationUSA adviser at [iiqbal@educationusa.org](mailto:iiqbal@educationusa.org).

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

**Central Asia.** The Central Asia fair tour (through Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) scheduled for October 2020 will not take place in-person as planned. For updates, visit the “Find an Event” page at <https://educationusa.state.gov>.

**India.** The India fair tour scheduled for August-September 2020 will not take place in-person as planned. EducationUSA India also hosts Chalo America, small group tours in the spring, across different cities. Alumni fairs are also typically held in December and January. EducationUSA India partners with Yocket to host separate graduate virtual fairs in the fall. For updates, visit the “Find an Event” page at <https://educationusa.state.gov>.

### Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

EducationUSA centers participate in fall international student fairs, the Begin Group spring and fall international education fairs, and the winter Globus Education Fair. The Bolashak scholarship program holds an annual international education fair in the fall that includes six cities across Kazakhstan ([www.bolashak.gov.kz/en/](http://www.bolashak.gov.kz/en/)).

**South Asia.** The South Asia fair tour (through Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) scheduled for September-October, 2020 will not take place as planned. Please check the “Events” section of the EducationUSA website for updated information.

**Turkmenistan.** In November, the government sponsors an annual international exhibition and scientific conference titled “Education, Sport, and Tourism in the Era of Power and Happiness” in Ashgabat. The EducationUSA advising center in Ashgabat reaches thousands of high school and university students, parents, teachers, professors, and various organizations at this event.

**Uzbekistan.** Twice a year, the Expocontact Ltd. Company, under the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan, organizes an education and career fair with support from the Ministry of Higher and Secondary-Specialized Education of Uzbekistan. More than 30,000 high school students, university students, and faculty attend. This fair usually occurs in early April and mid-September. U.S. institutions are invited to contact the advising center for more information.

### U.S. Study Abroad in the Region

Learning a new language is a common reason U.S. students study abroad. Russian is widely spoken in Kazakhstan, which means it is an excellent site for Russian language learning for foreign students. Tajikistan historically has been a popular destination for students to study Farsi.

SCA overall saw a decrease of 13.4 percent in U.S. study abroad students in AY 2017-2018, compared to the previous year, with 4,919 U.S. students traveling to different countries in the region. India continues to attract the largest number of study abroad students in the region, with more than 3,900 American students in AY 2017-2018,

followed by Nepal, with 566 students. In AY 2017-2018, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Kyrgyzstan saw an increase in the number of American study abroad students.

Kazakhstan introduced Go Nomads, a volunteer program for U.S. citizens to spend one to six months teaching English at local universities and colleges in Kazakhstan. The program supports the country’s initiative to enhance trilingual capacity and increase the number of English language speakers (<https://go-nomads.com/en/>).

In 2019, the U.S. Embassy in Nepal received a Study Abroad Engagement Grant from the USA Study Abroad Branch at the U.S. Department of State to carry out capacity-building projects to promote U.S. study abroad. These projects, including a weeklong Higher Education Administrator Workshop in Nepal, offer opportunities to emphasize the importance of higher education and capacity building, and further solidify Nepali-American relations.