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Phase 2: Supporting the Economic Empowerment of Afghan Women through Education and Training in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan

Annual Project Progress Report

EUROPEAN UNION



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Project Manager:	Askhat Zhumabayev, Project Manager, askhat.zhumabayev@undp.org



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Acronyms

CO	Country Office
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Delegation
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IT	Information Technology
IUNV	International United Nations Volunteer
KBTU	Kazakh-British Technical University
KazNARU	Kazakh National Agrarian Research University
NGO	Non-governmental organization
RPA	Responsible Party Agreement
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
ToC	The Theory of Change
TOC	Theory of Change
TSUE	Tashkent State University of Economics
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UCA	University of Central Asia
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

I. Executive Summary

In 2021, the European Union committed significant financial resources to initiate Phase 2 of the programme titled “Phase 2: Supporting the Economic Empowerment of Afghan Women through Education and Training in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.” This regional initiative aims to advance the academic, economic, and social empowerment of Afghan women by expanding their access to quality higher education and vocational training opportunities across Central Asia.

Progress during the year demonstrated clear advancement toward expected outcomes. Bachelor’s students in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan progressed through their academic programmes and entered their final year with sustained academic performance, while TVET cohorts in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan successfully completed their studies. Graduates increasingly transitioned from education to employment-related pathways, with a strong emphasis on employability outcomes. In particular, UNV opportunities emerged as a key mechanism supporting post-graduation engagement, resulting in their placements within UN agencies. These results reflect the cumulative contribution of project outputs related to learning mobility, inclusive access to education, and skills development toward the overarching outcome of enhanced employability and economic participation of Afghan women.

The Project faced several challenges during the reporting period. These included dropouts, mobility constraints, academic retakes for a small number of students, and geopolitical limitations affecting placement opportunities in certain locations and evacuation of a graduate serving under a UNV assignment in Iran. These risks were mitigated through close coordination with host universities, timely administrative support, flexible academic arrangements, and sustained engagement with UN partners. Lessons learned underscored the importance of early contingency planning for mobility and the value of diversified employment pathways beyond a single geographic context.

From a financial perspective, the project achieved full utilization of the approved 2025 budget of \$583,809, with expenditures aligned to planned activities and outputs. Budget efficiencies identified during implementation enabled the reallocation of resources to support additional employability initiatives, including an international UNV placement, thereby maximizing value for money and reinforcing outcome-level results.

Key recommendations emerging from the reporting period include strengthening structured transition-to-employment support, expanding partnerships with UN agencies and private sector actors, enhancing early career guidance for final-year students, and maintaining flexible implementation arrangements to respond to evolving contextual risks. These measures will be critical to sustaining project results and reinforcing long-term empowerment outcomes for Afghan women.

II. Introduction / Background

During the 2025 reporting period, the project “Phase 2: Supporting the Economic Empowerment of Afghan Women through Education and Training in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan” continued to advance its objective of strengthening Afghan women’s access to higher education, technical and vocational training, and employment pathways in the region. Despite an evolving and restrictive operating environment, particularly affecting post-graduation mobility and employment, implementation across the three host countries remained stable, with host institutions ensuring continuity of academic delivery, student support, and practical learning opportunities.

This report provides a comprehensive account of programme implementation for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2025. It outlines the principal milestones achieved, highlights notable accomplishments, and examines key challenges encountered during the reporting year, offering insight into progress made, lessons learned, and areas requiring continued support.

The assessment focuses on activities and outcomes across Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, presenting an overview of the contributions of each country to the programme’s overarching objectives.

The project’s primary focus is on fostering resilience and advancing the academic, economic, and social empowerment of women in Afghanistan, particularly those facing significant challenges. This is achieved by enhancing their capabilities, employability, and prospects through education and training programs in Central Asia, equipping them to actively contribute to their communities and broader economic development.

The Specific Objectives are:

1. Improved higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility system for women in Afghanistan
2. Improved involvement of Afghan women in higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility programmes
3. Enhanced employability of women participating in the higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility programmes

This initiative aligns directly with the international development agenda, specifically contributing to the goals of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which focuses on inclusive, equitable, and quality vocational and higher education, and SDG 5, which centers on empowering women and girls. The project also plays a role in supporting SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships). These contributions represent significant progress towards a more inclusive and empowered society, emphasizing women’s participation and equal opportunities across multiple sectors.

This report provides an overview of the year's progress in strengthening the capacities of Afghan women, highlighting key achievements and addressing challenges encountered.

III. Progress Review: Key Activities and Results, 2025

Section 1: Analysis of Theory of Change

The Theory of Change (ToC) underpinning the Empowering Afghan Women project remains largely valid during the reporting period. The core assumption that access to quality higher education and TVET opportunities outside Afghanistan enhances Afghan women's skills, resilience, and employability continues to hold. Evidence from the project demonstrates that participants successfully progressed academically, completed training programmes, and strengthened their professional competencies despite an increasingly restrictive operating environment.

However, the context in Afghanistan has evolved, particularly in 2021 with respect to labor market access and mobility for women. While the original ToC assumed that graduates would transition smoothly into employment upon completion of their studies, ongoing policy restrictions have constrained local employment opportunities. In response, the project strategy has demonstrated adaptability by strengthening linkages with international organizations and alternative employment pathways, such as United Nations Volunteers (UNV) assignments, to support post-graduation outcomes.

The project's continued relevance is reinforced by sustained demand for education, training, and employment guidance among Afghan women, including graduates from previous cohorts. The expansion of career monitoring, alumni engagement, and post-graduation support reflects an implicit refinement of the ToC, emphasizing not only education delivery but also structured transition support into the labor market.

Based on these developments, a minor adjustment to the Theory of Change is recommended to more explicitly recognize the importance of flexible employment pathways, extended graduate support, and international partnerships as critical enablers of impact. These refinements would strengthen the ToC's responsiveness to the current context while preserving its core strategic logic and objectives.

Section 2: Overall progress against outcomes

During the 2025 reporting period, implementation across Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan recorded steady progress in supporting Afghan women's education and skills development. Host universities advanced students through their academic programmes, strengthened support systems, and expanded practical learning and career opportunities. The following sections outline key achievements in each country.

In Kazakhstan, seven students enrolled in the Bachelor's programme in Marketing at Kazakh-British Technical University (KBTU) completed the Spring 2024–2025 semester and advanced to their final year of study. While overall attendance remained in line with institutional requirements, three students undertook academic retakes. One student is progressing on an extended timeline due to entering the programme one semester later and is completing additional summer coursework with the objective of graduating within the project period.

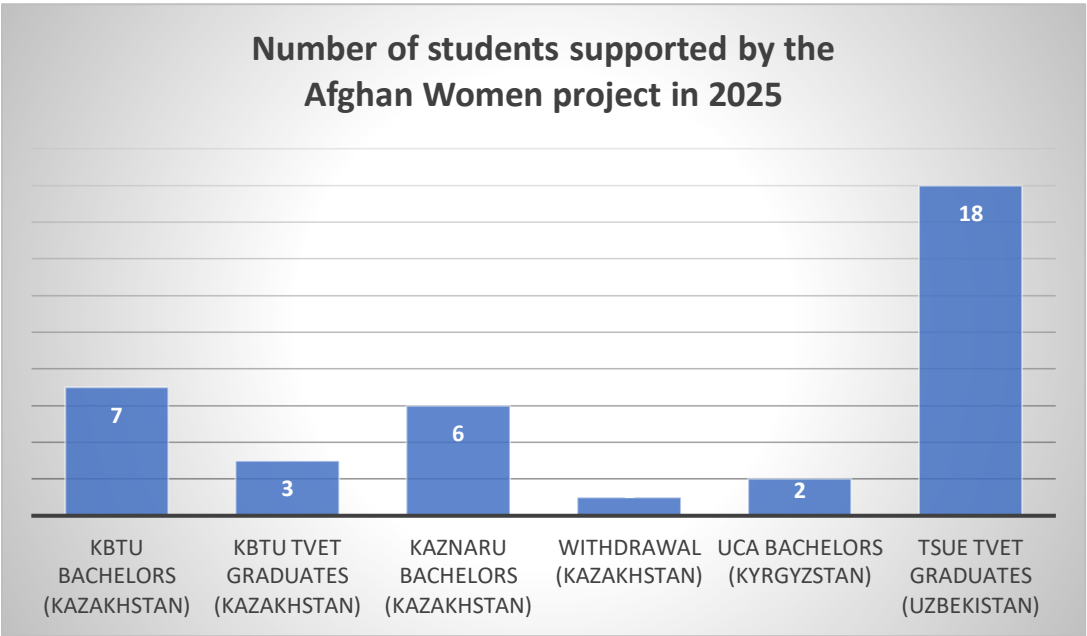
KBTU also successfully delivered the TVET Finance programme, with three students graduated in March 2025. Upon completion, all three returned to Afghanistan and applied for United Nations Volunteer (UNV) positions. They have since begun assignments within UN system entities operating in Afghanistan.

At Kazakh National Agrarian Research University (KazNARU), six Bachelor’s students in the Plant Science and Technology programme successfully completed their third year and advanced to their final year. All students passed their examinations and demonstrated strong academic performance throughout the year, gaining both theoretical knowledge and practical skills relevant to their field of study.

The cohort also saw one withdrawal during the reporting period. One student was expelled in February 2025 after traveling to Afghanistan in December 2024 and not returning within the extended deadlines, resulting in the loss of university enrollment and forfeiture of the return travel entitlement.

In Kyrgyzstan, two Afghan students at University of Central Asia (UCA), one in Communications & Media and the other in Computer Science maintained strong academic performance with GPAs above 3.0 and completed required internships. One of them was elected as a President of the Student Association, leading governance activities and representing the student body. Another completed a three-month paid internship at a University Research Institution, gaining professional experience while supporting a programme to expand Afghan women’s access to knowledge and economic opportunities.

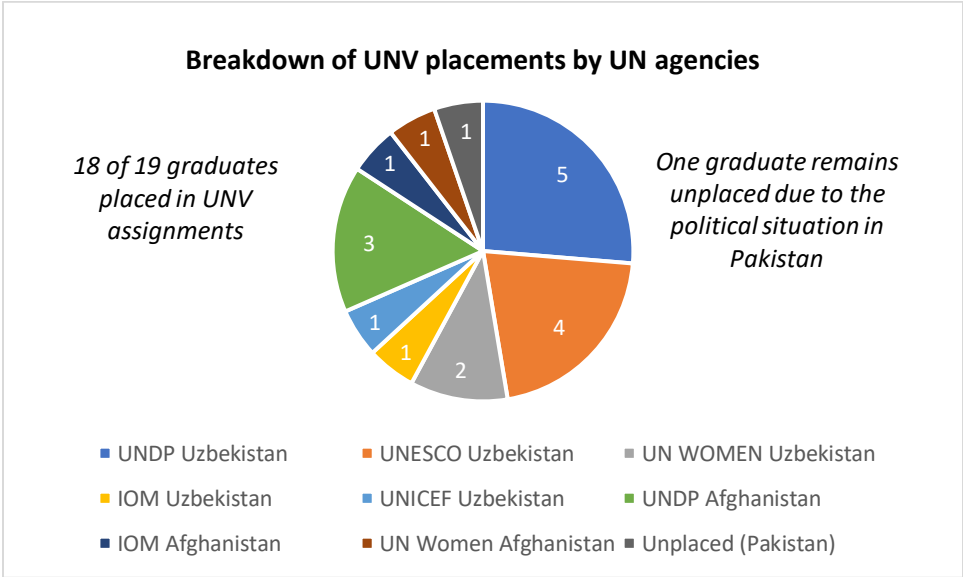
The project in Uzbekistan was successfully completed with the graduation of eighteen students from the TVET programme in Agronomy/Agribusiness and Marketing at Tashkent State University of Economics (TSUE) in January 2025. Among the graduates, two received diplomas with honors, while fourteen were awarded standard certificates. Additionally, two students who exited the programme in early 2024 were issued certificates of attendance, having completed one year of study.



Following graduation, UNDP Afghanistan facilitated access to the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme to support graduates in securing post-study employment opportunities within the UN system. In total, 19 graduates applied for UNV assignments, and 18 were successfully placed across UN agencies in Uzbekistan and Afghanistan for one-year assignments commencing from their respective start dates.

3 TVET graduates from Kazakhstan secured placements with IOM Afghanistan, UN Women Afghanistan, and UNDP Afghanistan. 13 graduates from Uzbekistan were placed with UNDP, UNESCO, UN Women, IOM, and UNICEF in programme support roles. Additionally, 2 graduates from Uzbekistan applied for UNV assignments in Afghanistan, resulting in two confirmed placements with UNDP offices in Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif, while one graduate residing in Pakistan could not be placed due to prevailing political and contextual constraints.

UNDP Uzbekistan reported initial challenges in extending Uzbek visas for thirteen graduates preparing to begin UN assignments; however, with support from TSUE, all student visas were successfully renewed in February 2025 through 31 December 2025.



Section 3: Monitoring and Evaluation¹ of activities.

A performance monitoring mechanism has been established as a routine activity managed by the UNDP Kazakhstan Project team across all three host countries. This system is designed to ensure consistent oversight of the academic progress and overall well-being of Afghan women participating in the program. As part of this mechanism, evaluative meetings are regularly held with partner universities in Almaty, Tashkent, Bishkek, and Naryn. These meetings serve as a platform to review student performance, identify challenges, and strengthen institutional support.

On 18 June 2025, the UNDP project team conducted a monitoring mission to Almaty, meeting focal points at Kazakh-British Technical University and Kazakh National Agrarian University. The visit reviewed academic progress, student welfare, institutional commitments, challenges and post-graduation pathways.

At KBTU, the team monitored students' academic performance, initiated tailored support for those requiring assistance, reviewed housing and social integration concerns, and strengthened internship and employment linkages with partners such as ESG.

At KazNARU, the team assessed academic quality, reinforced behavioural and programme expectations, engaged the university on replacing non-English-speaking professors, reviewed documentation systems for passports and visas, and updated contingency and emergency support arrangements for student travel.

Findings from the monitoring mission affirmed continued programme relevance, robust institutional cooperation, and the need for sustained support mechanisms to ensure positive academic, psychosocial, and transition-to-employment outcomes for Afghan women participating in the programme.

Section 4: Progress against each output

Project Output 1: Improved higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility system for women in Afghanistan

Under Objective 1, UNDP aimed to support the development of a learning mobility mechanism integrating higher education and TVET pathways, including hybrid exchange sessions between Afghan NGOs and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The initial design envisaged a flexible delivery model combining virtual and in-person engagement to facilitate institutional collaboration, knowledge exchange, and policy dialogue despite geographic and contextual constraints.

However, the rapidly evolving political and operational context in Afghanistan significantly affected the feasibility of implementation. In particular, restrictions on women's participation, the displacement or suspension of activities of several women-led NGOs, and reduced operational capacity of civil society actors created substantial barriers to engagement. As a result, the enabling conditions required for meaningful participation and sustained collaboration were no longer present. Consequently, activities under this objective could not be implemented as originally planned and were not carried forward during the reporting period.

Project Output 2: Improved involvement of Afghan women in higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility programmes

In February 2025, KBTU students successfully completed a 10-hour academic course titled "Practical Webinar on Digital Marketing with iPad for Students and Teachers," delivered by iTeacher ACADEMY. The course provided hands-on training in digital content creation and marketing, covering topics such as 3D modeling using the

Nomad Sculpt app, digital illustration and logo transformation from 2D to 3D in Procreate, marketing visuals, and creative doodling techniques using the Keynote app. The program enhanced their practical skills in visual communication and digital marketing tools, relevant for both educational and professional contexts.

In February 2025, a human-interest story focused on the last cohort of Afghan students in Tashkent was published. While the article told the story of Laila, a graduate of Tashkent State University of Economics, the video explored the stories of her fellows.



UNDP Kazakhstan	https://www.undp.org/kazakhstan/stories/education-human-right-empowering-afghan-women
UNDP Kazakhstan	https://www.instagram.com/p/DGPsZkXsJrQ/?igsh=MWh3YnFucWJic3RuMw==
UNDP Kazakhstan	https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1AdprD3ksN/
UNDP Kazakhstan	https://x.com/UNDPKAZ/status/1892110214582632699
UNDP Kazakhstan	https://x.com/UNDPKAZ/status/1892110793954545811

In February 2025, for the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, a human-interest story of an agriculture student in Almaty was published.

UNDP Kazakhstan	https://www.undp.org/kazakhstan/stories/agriculture-tool-making-change-story-shahrazad-afghanistan
UNDP Kazakhstan	https://www.instagram.com/p/DF7AzlRsToj/?igsh=dGszNWwxaHhlcWl1
UNDP Kazakhstan	https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1HLQ1g16cU/
UNDP Kazakhstan	https://x.com/UNDPKAZ/status/1889198576867090933

UNDP Kazakhstan	https://x.com/UNDPKAZ/status/1889198586941800563
UNDP Kazakhstan	https://x.com/UNDPKAZ/status/1889198597201109142

In March 2025, UNDP project team conducted a training session on Essential Knowledge for Everyday Situations, covering key topics such as understanding contracts, individual rights and obligations, managing personal documents, health insurance, consumer rights, financial literacy, and the legal consequences of everyday actions. The training aimed to provide participants with practical knowledge to navigate daily life more confidently and responsibly.

In March 2025, three students enrolled in the TVET Marketing programme at KBTU successfully completed a 20-hour Change Management course and a Project Management course. The Change Management course focused on enhancing their ability to adapt to organizational changes effectively, while the Project Management course aimed to strengthen their skills in planning, coordinating, and executing projects in professional settings.

In April 2025, in recognition of International Girls in ICT Day, the UNDP project team engaged Afghan students currently studying in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, asking how they envision using ICT in their future careers. Project participants shared reflections on how they intend to leverage digital technologies, innovation, and emerging tools to advance their academic and professional paths, enhance their competitiveness in the job market, and contribute to sectors critical to Afghanistan’s development.



UNDP Kazakhstan	https://www.instagram.com/p/DI3NXgrMGne?igsh=dnIobnEoaGY2YjR5
UNDP Kazakhstan	https://www.facebook.com/share/p/16satD2ptX/
UNDP Kazakhstan	https://x.com/UNDPKAZ/status/1915687775124303993

Project Output 3: Enhanced employability of women participating in the higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility programmes

At KazNARU, six Bachelor's students enrolled in the Plant Science and Technology programme participated in a six-week internship at greenhouse facilities in summer 2025. This practical, field-based experience enabled students to apply theoretical knowledge from their coursework, gaining hands-on exposure to modern horticultural practices, crop management techniques, and research methodologies directly related to their academic specialization.

All bachelor's students from KBTU have successfully completed summer 2025 internships with ESG, a Kazakhstan-based company recognized for its strong commitment to sustainability, innovation, and industry-driven solutions. The collaboration with ESG also reflects the university's ongoing efforts to foster strategic partnerships that enhance student employability and career readiness. ESG has expressed interest in supporting high-performing interns by offering opportunities to pursue master's degree programs, potentially with financial sponsorship from the company.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) initiative, implemented by UNDP Afghanistan with the support of the European Union Delegation (EUD) in Afghanistan serves as the main employment pathway for Project graduates by providing structured and meaningful post-graduation opportunities within UN agencies in Central Asia. The initiative not only facilitates immediate employment but also supports longer-term professional development, strengthening the capacity of Afghan women to participate in the workforce and contribute to national development.

As a result of reduced participation in the Spain component, saved funds enabled the EU and UNDP to jointly approve an International United Nations Volunteer (IUNV) placement with UNDP Iran. Through a competitive selection process, one Afghan woman was assigned to a six-month IUNV position, which commenced in March 2025. Due to the escalation of the regional conflict between Israel and Iran in June 2025, the volunteer was evacuated to Istanbul and subsequently returned to Afghanistan. Despite these disruptions, she successfully completed her assignment remotely from Afghanistan in September 2025, ensuring continuity of deliverables and fulfillment of assignment objectives.

Although the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) initiative was initially intended to support graduates from the current project cohort, interest soon expanded to include alumni from earlier phases of the programme. Following expressions of interest from former participants, the UNDP project team, in coordination with UNV Kazakhstan, convened an online information session in July 2025, facilitated by official UNV representatives. The session outlined the UNV framework, available assignment modalities, eligibility requirements, and step-by-step guidance on the application process, with the objective of enabling participants to pursue volunteer opportunities across the UN system irrespective of their current academic or employment status. The strong turnout and high level of engagement demonstrated sustained interest in international volunteer pathways and highlighted the continued demand for structured career guidance among Afghan youth.

Section 5: Cross-Cutting Integration

The Empowering Afghan Women project directly advances several cross-cutting priorities, with gender equality and women's empowerment at the core of its mandate.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

The project is explicitly designed to address and remove structural barriers that limit Afghan women's access to education, professional development, and employment opportunities. By providing targeted support, mentorship, and skills-building activities, the project seeks to empower women to participate fully in the workforce and society, enhance their decision-making capacity, and contribute meaningfully to the economic and social development of their communities.

Human Rights

By creating safe learning mobility pathways outside Afghanistan, the project enables women to exercise their fundamental rights to education, skills development, and economic participation—rights currently denied to them within their home country. Gender equality is not an ancillary consideration but the primary driver shaping all program activities, selection criteria, partnership modalities, and support systems.

Leave No One Behind

The project embodies the principle of leaving no one behind by prioritizing women who are most affected by intersecting vulnerabilities, including those from rural provinces, economically disadvantaged households, and environments where local educational access is restricted by gender. In doing so, it advances a rights-based approach that upholds women's autonomy, dignity, and participation in public life.

Disability Inclusion

Recognizing the systemic exclusion of women with disabilities within Afghan society, the project incorporates a dedicated quota and tailored support measures to ensure equitable participation. Partner institutions apply inclusive teaching and infrastructure standards to enable women with disabilities to enroll, progress academically, and graduate successfully.

Sustainability and Resilience

Beyond education, the project strengthens long-term resilience by enabling women to translate academic qualifications into employment and income generation. Initiatives such as the post-graduation UN Volunteer pathway provide structured professional entry points, helping participants secure livelihoods in uncertain contexts and reducing socioeconomic dependency. This contributes to broader community resilience by positioning Afghan women as economic actors and decision-makers.

Cultural Context

Program delivery is grounded in respect for cultural identity while supporting opportunities for social and personal transformation. Educational institutions in Central Asia provide culturally sensitive environments that honor Afghan traditions while equipping participants to engage confidently in diverse academic and professional settings.

IV. Partnerships and Sustainability

Partnerships

The programme continued to rely on a strong network of partnerships essential to its implementation, with collaboration sustained across regional and national levels. The EUD to Kazakhstan remained the primary donor and strategic counterpart, providing financial support and policy guidance. UNDP Country Offices in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan jointly facilitated programme management, coordination, and cross-border implementation, while UNV Kazakhstan enabled the newly established graduate employment pathway through United Nations Volunteers placements. Academic partnerships with Kazakh-British Technical University, Kazakh National Agrarian University, Tashkent State University of Economics, and the University of Central Asia remained central to delivering quality education and student services. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan continued its critical role in visa facilitation, institutional coordination, and enabling student mobility.

These partnerships directly contributed to programme results by ensuring smooth admissions, student retention, and post-study transition support, while also enabling the expansion of career, internship, and volunteer opportunities. Stakeholders were engaged through joint planning, university coordination meetings, monitoring visits, and regular reporting mechanisms, reinforcing accountability and ownership. Visibility and knowledge sharing were promoted through student-focused events, coordination meetings, and dissemination of programme updates across institutional platforms, contributing to broader awareness and sustainability of outcomes.

Sustainability

Transition planning and sustainability measures were integrated into project implementation throughout the reporting period to ensure that outcomes continue beyond the current funding cycle. The primary sustainability pathway is capacity transfer: enabling Afghan women beneficiaries to independently leverage the knowledge, networks, and qualifications gained in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. By supporting students through full academic cycles and post-graduation employment transitions, the project contributes to a self-reinforcing model of empowerment where graduates become role models, mentors, and future contributors to Afghanistan's human capital development.

The project also made deliberate investments in labour market integration, which is critical to transforming education gains into long-term socioeconomic outcomes. The UN Volunteers placement scheme, supported by the EUD to Afghanistan and UNDP Afghanistan, provides a formal transition platform bridging education and employment. The initiative is designed to be institutionalized across UN Country Teams and replicated in future cohorts, progressively reducing reliance on project-based funding. Further expansion of employer networks with private firms and civil society organisations in Afghanistan and the region is expected to generate additional entry points for graduates.

Another dimension of sustainability is the intentional promotion of gender equality norms and professional pathways for Afghan women during a period of constrained access to higher education and employment opportunities in Afghanistan. By supporting Afghan women to complete degrees abroad, secure professional experience, and develop leadership competencies, the project strengthens a pipeline of female professionals able to contribute to future national rebuilding efforts when enabling environments re-emerge. The continuity of skills and expertise among returning graduates represents a long-term asset for the country.

Finally, sustainability is reinforced through beneficiary empowerment itself. Graduates demonstrate increased agency, digital literacy, language proficiency, and professional confidence. These capabilities are transferable and portable, regardless of political or economic change. The project's emphasis on self-reliance equips graduates to adapt, advocate, and pursue meaningful opportunities without continuous project support.

In combination, these measures create a holistic sustainability model based on strengthened institutions, durable partnerships, targeted employment pathways, and empowered individual beneficiaries. The project's impacts extend beyond direct outputs, laying the groundwork for long-term resilience, women's leadership, and expanded opportunities for Afghan women at home and abroad.

V. Update on risks and mitigation measures

During the reporting period, the overall risk landscape of the project remained broadly consistent with the original risk analysis. While political and security-related risks continued to shape implementation, targeted mitigation measures contributed to a reduction in some previously identified risks.

One of the key risks identified at design stage was uncertainty surrounding post-graduation outcomes, including graduates' ability to transition into meaningful employment. During the reporting period, this risk was significantly reduced through the establishment and expansion of structured United Nations Volunteer (UNV) pathways.

Contextual risks related to policy restrictions in Afghanistan, particularly those limiting women's participation in the labour market, remained high. These constraints continued to affect the original Theory of Change, which assumed smoother integration of graduates into local employment. In response, the Project demonstrated adaptive management by prioritizing international and remote employment modalities, ensuring continued engagement of graduates despite evolving restrictions.

Operational risks, including visa processing, cross-border mobility, and academic progression delays, were actively managed through close coordination with host universities, national authorities, and UNDP Country Offices. Challenges related to visa extensions and student retention were addressed through timely interventions, individualized academic support, and institutional advocacy, ensuring continuity of studies and assignments where possible.

VI. Key Challenges, Lessons Learned and Recommendations

1. Uncertainty in post-graduation transition and employability

At the outset, uncertainty regarding graduates' post-study trajectories posed a significant risk, particularly in the absence of predictable labour market absorption. This risk was heightened by the completion of TVET and Bachelor programmes during a period of constrained employment opportunities.

Mitigation and response:

The UNV initiative launched by UNDP Afghanistan with the support of the EUD to Afghanistan significantly reduced this risk. During the reporting period, the majority of graduates who applied for UNV assignments secured placements within UN agencies, ensuring continuity between education outcomes and professional engagement.

Recommendation:

Employability indicators should be refined to track both immediate placement rates and longer-term career progression of graduates, skills transfer, and reintegration into national or regional labour markets.

2. Academic progression delays and cohort variability

Academic delay affected one student who entered the programme one semester later than her peers and therefore faced a risk of delayed graduation. Such variability required additional academic planning and monitoring to ensure alignment with project timelines.

Mitigation and response:

Individualized academic support was provided through host universities, including summer coursework and adjusted study plans. Continuous coordination with academic institutions allowed for early identification of risks and tailored interventions.

Recommendation:

The project should systematically document these adaptive academic support measures and lessons learned and formally share them with partner universities, UNDP Country Offices, and donors to inform institutional practices.

3. Financial shortfall due to currency fluctuations

During the reporting period, exchange rate fluctuations created a funding gap that affected the completion of studies for two Bachelor's students in Kyrgyzstan, preventing their graduation within the planned timeframe.

Mitigation:

The issue remains under discussion within UNDP Kazakhstan. Options to address the financial shortfall are currently being explored in coordination with relevant stakeholders.

Recommendation:

As the project approaches closure, this case should be documented as a key financial lesson learned. Future regional programmes should incorporate stronger contingency provisions to manage currency volatility and protect critical academic milestones.

VII. Financial Summary²

Table 1: Overview of available resources for the project duration

Donor	Opening Balance	Contribution Received	Available Resources
EU	84,566.81	293,545.26	378,112.07
Total	84,566.81	293,545.26	378,112.07

Table 2: Overview of allocation and utilization³ per output

For multi-donor projects, show the cumulative total

Output	Budget	Utilization	Total Budget	Total Utilization
2.1 Increased access of the Afghan women to higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility mechanism in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan	492,626	446,645	492,626	446,645
4 Effective Project Management	91,183	89,806	91,183	89,806
Total	583,809	536,452	583,809	536,452

2 Disclaimer 1: Data contained in this financial report section is an extract of UNDP financial records. All financial provided above is provisional. Certified financial statements will be provided on <indicate date (30 June of the following year)>.

3 Disclaimer 2: Of the USD xxxxx presented above, USD xxxx corresponds to eligible expenses (as per IPSAS terminology), and USD xxxx corresponds to legal commitments in force between UNDP and third parties for the reporting period.

VIII. Annexes

Annex I: Progress Review: detailed matrix of activities and results

Output 2	Indicators	Baseline	Annual target	Progress / Milestone
2.1. Increased access of the Afghan women to higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility mechanism in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan Indicator intervention Budget: 492,626 Expenditure to date: 446,645	2.1.1: Number of Afghan women, enrolled in higher education outgoing learning mobility programmes, awarded with a scholarship with support of the	50	50	On track
Activities		Results		
- Bachelor's and TVET programmes for Afghan women were delivered in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. - Academic progress was monitored, including administration of retakes and approval of extended study arrangements where required. - Internships, practical training, and student leadership activities were conducted in partner universities. - Graduation, certification, visa extensions, and transition of graduates to UNV employment opportunities were coordinated with host universities and UNDP Afghanistan.		- Kazakhstan: 13 Bachelor's students progressed to final year (KBTU, KazNARU); 3 TVET graduates completed studies and secured UNV placements with UNDP, UN Women, and IOM Afghanistan. - Kyrgyzstan: 2 students maintained GPA >3.0, completed internships; 1 elected Student Association President; 1 completed paid research internship. - Uzbekistan: 18 TVET students graduated (2 with honors); 18 out of 19 applicants secured UNV placements across UNDP, UNESCO, UN Women, IOM, and UNICEF; visas for 13 graduates extended through 31 December 2025		

Annex II: Updated Risk Log

#	Description	Date Identified	Type	Impact & Probability	Counter-measures / Mngt response	Owner	Last Update	Status
1	<i>Delayed receipt of the financial resources to meet commitments</i>	2025	Financial, Delivery	<i>Likelihood: 3-Moderate likelihood Impact: 4-Extensive Risk level: Substantial</i>	Consistent communication with the support of senior management to reinforce the importance of timely and systematic utilization of funds in accordance with the approved annual working plans.	Project Manager, UNDP Kazakhstan	December 2025	Resolved
2	One or more students decide to stop their participation in the project	2025	Operational, Flexibility and Opportunity management	Likelihood: 3-Moderately likely Impact: 3-Intermediate Risk level: Moderate	Ensure a sufficient pool of potential reserve list candidates to replace those who quit the project; Establish an arrangement with universities for replacement of students.	Project Manager, UNDP Kazakhstan	December 2025	Mitigated
3	Project data publicly disclosed by Afghan students	2025	Safety and Security, Crime	Likelihood: 3-Moderate likelihood Impact: 3-Intermediate Risk level: Moderate	Conduct a training session every semester for all students regarding rules of interaction with the media and the importance of non-disclosure of project background, personal information including details about other students.	Project Manager, UNDP Kazakhstan	December 2025	No change
4	SEA related issues occurring during one-on-one, unsupervised interactions with students	2025	Social and environmental	Likelihood: 1 - Not likely Impact: 3 - Intermediate Risk level: Low	Design/implement project activities in open spaces (when possible); when closed spaces are required make sure that project staff representative is the same sex as the project beneficiaries, Afghan women and girls; ensure project personnel wear visible forms of identification (e.g. project ID cards, caps, vests, t-shirts etc.) when conducting programme activities.	Project Manager, UNDP Kazakhstan	December 2025	No change

Annex III: Annual Work Plan for 2026

Attached

Annex IV: Assets List

N/a

Annex V: Knowledge Generation

During the 2025 reporting period, the project did not undertake specific knowledge generation activities. Accordingly, no knowledge products (such as studies, publications, analytical reports, or knowledge-sharing events) were produced or disseminated during this period. Project implementation in 2025 focused on operational and delivery-related activities rather than the generation or documentation of new knowledge.

Project Manager

DocuSigned by:
Askhat Zhumabayev
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