

**Almaty, Kazakhstan, May 14, 2024** - The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has launched the 13th [Central Asia Trade Forum](#) (CATF). This year's forum, entitled "Trade Connections: Bridging Globally," is one of the region's flagship trade events advancing connectivity, commerce, and trade policy.

More than 300 business executives and government officials from Asia, Europe, the Middle East, the United Kingdom, and the United States are meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan, to learn how to advance trade in Central Asia. Conference sessions address digitalization, transport, logistics, harmonization, trade regulations, World Trade Organization standards, and impediments to trade in Central Asia.

"We are proud to be supporting this forum which was born more than a decade ago with the belief that increased trade cooperation could create a more stable, prosperous, and interconnected Central Asia," said Zeinah Salahi, Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator at USAID, who traveled from Washington, D.C., and addressed the forum.

CATF has fostered the signing of more than US\$32 million in contracts and hosted more than 10,000 government and business leaders from 25 countries since its inception.

Other keynote speakers are from the Central Asian Ministries of Trade, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, QazTrade, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route Association, and the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA).

Running concurrently with CATF is:

- A trade fair featuring 40 companies from Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and showcasing agricultural, textile, apparel, and food products for international buyers. The fair is hosted in collaboration with the Ministry of Trade and Integration of Kazakhstan and the Almaty Chamber of Commerce and Investment.
- A Pakistan-Kazakhstan Trade Opportunities Forum for Women-Owned Businesses, with 40 Pakistani businesswomen exploring trade opportunities in Central Asia. The forum is hosted by the USAID Pakistan Regional Economic Integration Activity (PREIA).
- The 11th Regional Meeting of the National Trade Facilitation Committees, which attracts business executives and officials from Central Asia's five countries to discuss customs, transport, phytosanitary certification, and veterinary border control. Supported by the Trade Facilitation in Central Asia project, and implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), this meeting focuses on roadmaps for digitalizing trade processes and developing a joint action plan to

streamline trade procedures throughout the region.

USAID's Trade Central Asia activity, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and GIZ are CATF's primary sponsors. Media partners include The Astana Times, Exclusive.kz, Profit.kz, Kapital.kz, and Orient Media Turkmenistan.

For more information, please visit [www.catradeforum.org](http://www.catradeforum.org) #catf2024

*Central Asian countries have made significant progress over the past two decades and have excellent growth potential. During the previous 20 years, the region's gross domestic product (GDP) has expanded by an annual average of 6.2 percent in real terms, reaching US\$347 billion. Since 2000, foreign trade has surged sevenfold. In 2022, the Central Asian countries' combined imports and exports were worth nearly US\$190 billion.*