

Contributing to change— the OSCE Academy in Bishkek

A Case Study for the OSCE50+

This report presents one of four case studies conducted as part of an OSCE Outcome Harvesting (OH) research initiative, led by the Office of Internal Oversight (OIO) to mark the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Funded through extrabudgetary support from Finland, this initiative engaged OSCE staff in a reflective analysis of the Organization's impact, identifying significant changes influenced by the OSCE's work across its region.

The research serves a dual purpose: to strengthen internal learning by fostering evaluative thinking among OSCE staff and to demonstrate the OSCE's impact to external stakeholders through concrete examples of change the Organization contributed to over the past 10–20 years.

In line with the Outcome Harvesting approach, this case study focuses on observable changes in behaviours, practices or relationships—referred to here as 'outcomes'—to which the OSCE plausibly contributed.

Between September and December 2024, OIO gathered over 50 outcome stories from OSCE staff working in field operations, institutions and the Secretariat. This process went beyond documenting individual outcomes—OIO completed a structured analysis to identify patterns across the stories and produced a synthesis report to deepen understanding of how OSCE contributions have shaped developments in its region. From this broader body of work, four stories were selected for in-depth case studies, enabling a closer examination of changes, how they occurred and the OSCE's contributions. This case study explores one of these initiatives in detail—focusing on the observed changes, the actors involved, and the interventions that influenced them.

> Introduction

This report explores the OSCE's longstanding support to the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, a regional hub for higher education, professional training and intellectual exchange in Central Asia. Since its founding in 2002, the OSCE has played a central role in the Academy's governance, financing, and academic and alumni programmes. The OIO research aimed to substantiate observed outcomes and the OSCE's contributions, while exploring their significance in building the Academy's institutional capacities and influence in strengthening regional expertise, regional co-operation, security and good governance in Central Asia.

The assessment was conducted by Leslie Thomas, Senior Evaluator at OIO. Nynke de Witte, Head of Evaluation/Deputy Director OIO, provided oversight and guidance throughout the research process. The research followed a participatory approach, involving OSCE staff, former and current Academy faculty and staff, students, alumni and external experts. Their insights, combined with an extensive review of relevant materials, helped build a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the Academy's development and impact.

This report is structured into five sections:

Context: The challenges that prompted OSCE engagement.

Key outcomes and their significance: The medium- and long-term changes observed.

Contributions: How the OSCE influenced these changes.

Concluding observations: Lessons to inform future OSCE efforts.

Data collection summary: An overview of OIO's research methods.

> Acknowledgements

The OIO would like to express its sincere appreciation to the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek—especially Head of Mission Ambassador Alexey Rogov and Senior Planning and Co-ordination Officer Colin McCollough—for their collaboration, insights and support in providing critical data.

Special thanks are also due to the management and staff of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek for their invaluable support during the data collection phase for this case study. Finally, we are deeply grateful to the students, alumni and stakeholders who participated in the research and generously shared their perspectives.

> Context: the challenges underpinning the OSCE's engagement

In the early 2000s, in the decade following their independence, Central Asian participating States were managing a combination of challenges related to governance, development and regional security. Governance systems were still transitioning from highly centralized models, and civil society and academic institutions were still in their formative stages. While public universities operated across the region, they were hindered by chronic underfunding, outdated curricula and standards, and rigid, rote-based teaching practices. Few institutions offered programmes in political science, international relations or public policy.¹

Higher education systems also struggled with issues of quality and relevance. In a 2014 OSCE Yearbook article, Shairbek Juraev described the education systems as “poorly reformed and seriously underfunded at all levels”, while geographical distance from global centres of higher learning left students with limited access to internationally competitive training. Those who managed to study abroad often did not return, compounding a persistent regional “workforce deficit”.

Central Asian participating States were facing an intimidating set of challenges for long-term and comprehensive development and security, including “an acute deficit of well-educated young professionals” and a persistent “workforce deficit” caused by immigration.

—Shairbek Juraev, *The OSCE Academy: Working for Long-Term Comprehensive Security in Central Asia*, OSCE Yearbook 2014, p. 287

In addition to resource and structural constraints, the region lacked research capacity and adequate platforms for regional academic co-operation. Political tensions, resource disputes and unresolved border issues constrained dialogue, even as growing transnational threats such as extremism, organized crime and drug trafficking called for more effective regional collaboration. “The erection of tough borders, both in physical and political terms, resulted in a deterioration in the levels of human exchange between the countries of the region, including in the area of education and training,” Juraev noted.

It was in this context that the Kyrgyz government approached the OSCE to help establish a regional educational institution that could develop human capital and foster co-operation. The OSCE Academy in Bishkek was launched in 2002, through a Memorandum of Understanding between the OSCE and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. As Juraev wrote, the Academy was designed to serve as “a regional centre of professional training, education, and research, with a particular focus on conflict prevention and resolution, post-conflict rehabilitation, and regional security issues²”.

The motivations for its creation were multiple. According to Frank Evers, writing in the 2003 OSCE Yearbook, the government of Kyrgyzstan saw the Academy as an opportunity to attract international partnerships and raise the country's profile. For OSCE participating

¹ Shairbek Juraev, *The OSCE Academy: Working for Long-Term Comprehensive Security in Central Asia*. In IFSH (ed.), OSCE Yearbook 2014, Baden-Baden 2015, pp. 287–298.

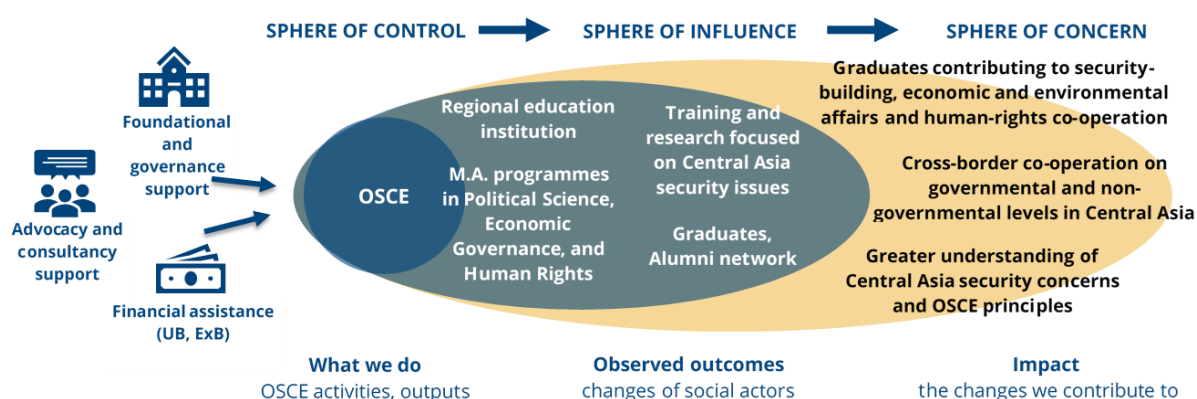
² Ibid, pp.287-288.

States, it provided a means to promote understanding of Central Asian security issues and encourage “soft policy transfer” through joint training and research. The Academy was also expected to serve the OSCE itself, functioning as a source of expertise and a platform for cross-border co-operation.³

> Key outcomes and their significance

Since its establishment in 2002, the OSCE Academy in Bishkek has functioned as a regional hub for **higher education, research and professional training on comprehensive security concerns in Central Asia**. It has played a role similar to a think-tank, producing regionally relevant research and supporting intellectual exchange and capacity development across national boundaries. For twenty-three years, the Academy has served as a small, elite institution—regionally inclusive and merit-based—fostering OSCE values by training a new generation of professionals in governance, security and regional co-operation. Following graduations in 2025, its alumni network includes 710 graduates.

Figure 1. Visual illustration of the sphere of influence of the OSCE's contributions to the reform⁴



The government of Kyrgyzstan established the OSCE Academy in Bishkek as a regional higher education institution grounded in OSCE principles

The founding of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek in 2002 marked a significant step in institution-building and regional co-operation in Central Asia. Initiated at the request of the President of the government of Kyrgyzstan and backed by the OSCE Chairpersonship, the Academy was conceived as a regional hub for education, research and dialogue, “devoted to the promotion of OSCE principles in the Central Asian region”. The initiative gained swift multilateral support and culminated in a Memorandum of Understanding signed in November 2002, formally launching the Academy’s initial phase.⁵

From its inception, the Academy was envisaged as a politically significant, independent academic institution. It received high-level national and international support, the latter from the governments and academic institutions of Austria, Germany, the Netherlands

³ Frank Evers, *A New Think Tank for the OSCE and Central Asia: Establishing the OSCE Academy in Bishkek*. In IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2003*, Baden-Baden 2004, pp. 337–345.

⁴ Visualization inspired by Clark and Apgar (2019), *Unpacking the Impact of International Development: Resource Guide 1*.

⁵ Quote, statements sourced from the aforementioned article by Frank Evers, *OSCE Yearbook 2003*, p. 337.

and Switzerland. These OSCE participating States contributed both diplomatically and financially, with their academic institutions providing technical guidance and blueprints for the Academy's format and direction.

The coalition of partners in its establishment was diverse and involved European and Central Asian institutions, including the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) Hamburg, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael and the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution. Their support—along with early operational oversight by the OSCE Centre in Bishkek—ensured a solid institutional and academic foundation.

The Academy established high-standard, multi-disciplinary academic programmes in political science, security, economic governance and human rights

The OSCE Academy has established unique, multi-disciplinary academic programmes, corresponding with the OSCE's core dimensions—the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimension. All programmes are taught in English,⁶ emphasize academic integrity and enrol students based on merit. The Academy's tuition-free education and monthly stipends are critical in attracting talented applicants from across the region, ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent access to high-quality education. A key tenet of the Academy is regional inclusion, and each year students are admitted from all five Central Asian OSCE participating States, as well as Afghanistan and Mongolia. Its programmes include:

- **Master of Arts in Politics and Security (launched in 2004).** This 18-month flagship programme has enrolled about 25 students each year, providing instruction in international relations, comparative politics, development and security studies. By 2025, the total number of graduates reached 478, equal representation of men and women.
- **Master of Arts in Economic Governance and Development (launched in 2011).** Developed in response to regional needs for economic policy expertise, this 18-month programme covers economics, public policy and development. By 2025, 219 students had graduated, 58 per cent of them female.
- **Master of Arts in Human Rights and Sustainability (launched in 2023).** The Master of Liberal Arts and Sciences with specialization in Human Rights and Sustainability Programme was established in 2023 as part of the Global Campus of Human Rights⁷, providing a transdisciplinary programme that spans international law, social sciences and humanities. A first cohort of 13 graduates (nine female, four male) completed the programme in the spring of 2025.
- **Bachelor of Arts in Economics (launched in 2022).** This four-year undergraduate programme responded to gaps in regional economic education and enrolls approximately 20 students annually. The first cohort will graduate in 2026, 70 per cent of them female.

⁶ Shairbek Juraev, OSCE Yearbook 2014, Baden-Baden 2015, p. 289.

⁷ [Who we are – Global Campus of Human Rights](#)

The Academy raised academic standards, including commitments to academic honesty, freedom and fairness

The Academy introduced academic norms often absent in other regional institutions. Students, faculty and other stakeholders consistently highlighted the significance of the Academy's commitment to intellectual honesty and fair treatment. They also underscored the importance of the Academy's support and assurance to critical inquiry, including the freedom to research sensitive topics—albeit within certain constraints. As one international professor noted, “the Academy has provided a protected space for teaching and research, in contrast to national institutions where academic freedom is more fragile”.

Interviewees emphasized that academic integrity was a key factor to them in choosing the Academy. In a region where grading and assessment were often seen as opaque or negotiable, students and alumni noted that the Academy stood out for enforcing rigorous standards and promoting ethical academic practices. “Plagiarism wasn't really understood,” one graduate recalled. “We learned not just what it was, but why it mattered.”

“The OSCE Academy's curriculum, teaching approaches, and treatment of students represent a rare case of full commitment to academic honesty.”

—Shairbek Juraev, *The OSCE Academy: Working for Long-Term Comprehensive Security in Central Asia*, OSCE Yearbook 2014

Across **independent assessments**—including by Ednet (the national accreditation body in Kyrgyzstan) and the Centre for Assessment of Education and Teaching Methods (CAETM)⁸—the Academy's standards and programmes have been recognized as exemplary. In 2018 and 2022, its MA in Economic Governance and Development won ‘Best Educational Programme’ and awards for academic integrity and freedom. In 2024 and 2025, the Academy was ranked the top higher education institution in Kyrgyzstan by CAETM based on standardised admissions test scores. A 2019 decentralized evaluation⁹ report noted: “It appears to be one of the best academic institutions—if not the best—in the Central Asian region. The fact that some 20 graduates from the Academy are pursuing PhD-studies at a number of universities outside the region is also an indicator of the high quality of the students that the Academy manages to attract, as well as the quality of the teaching there.”

⁸ The Center for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods is a non-governmental organization in Kyrgyzstan, financed by USAID. It conducts educational assessments on both students and teaching methods, and provides expertise in this field to improve the educational situation in Kyrgyzstan.

⁹ External Assessment of the OSCE Academy project, 2004-2017, 30 April 2019. Commissioned by the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek.

The Academy's faculty and students are diverse, enabling learning and dialogue based on pluralistic perspectives

The Academy's faculty and student diversity have created a distinctive platform for pluralistic learning and regional exchange. Faculty members include a mix of international and local experts—nearly all holding doctoral degrees and active in research—comparatively stronger than other university settings in the region.¹⁰ Lecturers seconded from OSCE participating States (e.g., Germany, Hungary, Poland) operate with independence and expose students to critical, comparative and globally informed approaches.

Courses blend theoretical foundations with applied learning. In 2024 alone, 26 high-level guest lectures were held, allowing students to engage directly with ambassadors, policy leaders and leading academics. These events allow students to connect classroom experiences with real-world issues and dialogue.

Interviewees consistently described the Academy as a uniquely inclusive platform that fosters pluralistic scholarship and dialogue across borders. “The Academy is a unique platform,” one interlocutor explained. “It’s able to attract some of the best and brightest professors and hosts high-level officials and diplomats, giving students the opportunity to engage in real-time dialogue, apply concepts, and participate in democratic practices.”

Others emphasized how the classroom environment reflected the regional mission of the Academy. “In any given class, all five Central Asian states are represented—plus students from Afghanistan, Mongolia, and beyond. In one seminar I realized that the 20 participants represented 13 different countries. That kind of exposure is very rare in this part of the world.”

The Academy established merit-based acceptance processes and financial support to improve access

To support access for students from across Central Asia regardless of their financial background, all degree programmes are tuition-free and all students receive a monthly stipend. This financial support reduces economic inequality and ensures that academic merit drives admission. Each year applicants to each programme number in the several hundreds, with admission highly competitive and selection rates under 5 per cent—in 2024, 87 students were accepted by the Academy to its programmes, out of 1,787 applications.

“I was sitting at an event alongside a high-level representative from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. About 17 students were part of the discussion. I remember thinking—I had studied these concepts and was excited to apply them in the real world. But here these students were doing it already. This is what democracy does—it brings people together and enables discussion and co-operation.”

—OSCE staff member

¹⁰ July 2012, European Commission, Higher Education in Kyrgyzstan, [Kyrgyzstan.pdf](#). Master degrees are officially required for lecturers, however, 60 per cent of the total number of teachers have no degree.

Students from Afghanistan were admitted starting in 2006, shortly after Afghanistan became an OSCE Partner for Co-operation, offering one of the few pathways to graduate education and exchange for Afghan youth inside the Central Asian region.

The regional and gender-balanced composition of students was said to create a dynamic mix of perspectives in coursework and research unique to the region. A professor noted, “Our students are diverse and talented. They bring their personal experiences and knowledge about each society to test their assumptions and develop innovative solutions to chronic social and political problems.”

Required internships for graduate students and a JPO programme for alumni have enhanced capacities and career opportunities

International and regional internships are a required component of the MA curriculum, bridging study and practice, and have strengthened the skills of participants and supported career pathways. Students intern in various OSCE structures and with academic partners, such as the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), GCSP and the European Centre for Minority Issues—sought-after places to conduct research and gain international professional experience. Furthermore, since 2019 the Academy has collaborated with Erasmus+, the EU programme for education, training, youth and support, providing students with additional internship opportunities.

In 2010, the Academy established a **Junior Public Officers (JPO) programme** establishing agreements with governments providing select alumni with early career opportunities at ministries of foreign affairs and other public agencies. By 2024, a total of 56 alumni had completed the JPO programme. Academy publications have featured alumni statements¹¹ on how the experience deepened their skills and influenced their careers:

- A 2015 Afghan graduate joined Afghanistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of the 2015 JPO programme. He reported that the placement allowed him to participate in diplomatic seminars and training, develop practical administrative skills, and engage with regional policy issues. He reflected that the experience significantly deepened his understanding of international and regional affairs and reinforced his commitment to a diplomatic career.
- While working at the Ministry of Economy and Commerce of Kyrgyzstan, a 2019 graduate gained exposure to public administration, trade policy and decision-making processes—broadening her understanding of how state agencies approach formal mandates and internal co-ordination processes.
- A 2022 participant applied macroeconomic and World Trade Organization knowledge gained at the Academy to contribute to a draft free trade agreement. The internship also expanded her professional network and prompted a recommendation to join the Ministry of Economy and Commerce in Kyrgyzstan full-time.

¹¹ Data and alumni quotes sourced from OSCE Academy website [Junior Public Officers' Programme :: OSCE Academy in Bishkek](#)

- A 2024 graduate from Kazakhstan emphasized how the JPO programme sharpened her research and analytical skills, preparing her to contribute to international legal debates and human rights policymaking. The experience reinforced her commitment to pursuing a career in academia and foreign policy.

The Academy has become a leading platform for regionally focused research

The Academy's Research and Training Department produces policy briefs and security and applied research publications, focused on regional issues such as counterterrorism, environmental governance, foreign policy and socio-economic development. Faculty members and visiting scholars regularly contribute to this body of work and have contributed to a steady rise in academic output, helping to establish the Academy as one of the most active research institutions in Central Asia.

Since 2017, the Academy has hosted Associate Research Fellows to support PhD candidates and post-doctoral researchers¹², and it has secured third-party funding for research collaborations. Fellowships have supported studies on the Belt and Road Initiative's impact on Central Asia, Afghan-Central Asian relations, and Forecasting Central Asia¹³.

A major milestone was the launch of the Springer publication series in April 2020 with the publication of *Transformation and Development, Studies in the OSCE Member States*.¹⁴ The Springer series has resulted in several collective volumes and a few monographs, raising the Academy's international profile and further reinforcing its reputation as a credible knowledge platform.

Alumni are a long-term regional asset

With over 700 graduates to date, the Academy's alumni are playing an increasingly influential role in public service, civil society and academia across Central Asia and beyond. Initiatives such as the JPO programme have extended the Academy's footprint in government institutions,

"The network is approaching critical mass. They remain loyal, they give back and stay connected. It's about shared purpose."

—OSCE staff member

while alumni chapters and reunions sustain peer-to-peer networks that support professional development. Sixty-six per cent of graduates remain in the region, many of them holding mid- to senior-level positions in national ministries, non-governmental as well as international organizations, or universities. Some have held senior appointments, including ministerial-level roles.

Regular alumni surveys help track career trajectories, strengthen ties and inform programme design. Events such as summer schools, reunions and regional chapter

¹² [Fellowship Programmes: OSCE Academy in Bishkek](#)

¹³ [Forecasting Central Asia: OSCE Academy in Bishkek](#)

¹⁴ [OSCE Academy / Springer Open Access Series: OSCE Academy in Bishkek](#)

meetings sustain a pan-regional network shaped by shared academic experiences. According to the OSCE Academy's most recent alumni survey in 2024:¹⁵

- **Alumni predominantly reside in Central Asia with 66 per cent working in their home region.**

Of those remaining in the region, 33 per cent reside in **Kyrgyzstan**, 13.7 per cent in **Tajikistan**, nine per cent in **Kazakhstan**, seven per cent in **Uzbekistan**, and around one per cent each in **Turkmenistan**, **Afghanistan** and **Mongolia**.

Nuria Kutnaeva, class of 2005 and Alumna of the Year in 2023, served as the Minister of Digital Development of the Kyrgyz Republic (2023-2025). Her leadership significantly influenced the country's digital transformation and opened internship opportunities for OSCE Academy graduates through the JPO Programme.

- 39 per cent work in international organizations, 26 per cent in the private sector, 19 per cent in education and research, nine per cent in public service, and seven per cent in NGOs.
- **36 per cent of alumni hold senior positions**, such as Director, CEO or Department Head, in government, academia and international organizations, contributing to policymaking, security reforms and regional development.

The Academy has carefully nurtured its alumni community as a core pillar of its impact. Regular alumni chapter meetings (e.g., in Tashkent, Astana and Vienna) have fostered collaboration among graduates from various cohorts and countries. Reunions, planned every third year, convene hundreds of participants—the 6th Alumni Reunion in 2025 gathered over 200 participants over two days, including students, partners, donors, staff and experts, and more than 100 alumni.

Stakeholders emphasized that the Academy's uniqueness in student size and diversity fosters strong personal and professional relationships across borders. There was a common view that these informal ties advance the mission of the Academy across the region and offer important informal channels for regional co-operation where official ties may be limited.

As noted by Asel Doolotkeldieva in *OSCE Insights* (2024)¹⁶: "The Academy's ties with its former students have significantly affected the former's standing in the wider region; many alumni have entered high-ranking positions in various professions and continue to promote the Academy and its benefits to Central Asia. Thanks not least to regular alumni conferences, chapter meetings, and special alumni teaching and travel grants, the Academy has kept in close contact with its former students and invites them to make their own contributions to the institute's development."

¹⁵ Salam Alum, Issue 14, Winter 2024/25, [1735035307_64123300.pdf](https://www.osce.org/insights/1735035307_64123300.pdf).

¹⁶ Asel Doolotkeldieva, *The OSCE Academy in Bishkek: A Potential Yet to Be Unleashed*, in *OSCE Insights*, eds. Cornelius Friesendorf and Argyro Kartsonaki (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748945857-03>

> How the OSCE contributed to the changes

The OSCE has played an integral role in the Academy's development from its inception to the present day. The contributions reflect a sustained commitment to institutional and programme development, regional co-operation, and political and financial support.

Foundational support and institutional establishment

In 2002, responding to a formal request by the government of Kyrgyzstan, the OSCE co-founded the Academy as a regional initiative for education, training and dialogue. The OSCE co-ordinated with the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH) and CORE Hamburg to shape the Academy's initial concept, structure and curriculum.

"The OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek under the leadership of the ambassador works very closely with the Academy. I can't say that we work together on a daily basis—as it is often on an hourly basis or even more frequently, depending upon the needs. The open doors of the Programme Office are essential and highly appreciated. This is a very intensive working relationship that serves the best interest of the OSCE Academy."

—Director of the OSCE Academy, statement in the Academy's 2025 Annual Report

The OSCE convened an international technical steering committee to guide institutional development prior to the formation of a permanent board of trustees. The OSCE Centre in Bishkek (now the Programme Office in Bishkek) provided hands-on assistance with staffing, financial management and protocol arrangements.¹⁷

A 2004 memorandum of understanding between the OSCE and the government of Kyrgyzstan formally recognized the Academy's mandate. The vision was to create a small, elite institution that would be regionally inclusive, merit-based and aligned with OSCE commitments related to good governance, human rights and comprehensive security.

Governance and strategic oversight

From the outset, the OSCE played a pivotal governance role. The Head of the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek chairs the Academy's Board of Trustees, which also includes representatives from the OSCE Chairpersonship and the Conflict Prevention Centre. This arrangement ensures continued alignment with OSCE mandates and helps sustain the Academy's regional relevance.

The Programme Office and OSCE officials on the Board liaise closely with ministries in Kyrgyzstan, support diplomatic engagement and assist in processes such as institutional re-registration.

Curriculum development and academic standards

Working with partners, such as NUPI and GCSP, the OSCE has shaped the Academy's academic identity by embedding its values into the curricula. Graduate programmes in

¹⁷ Frank Evers, OSCE Yearbook 2003, Baden-Baden 2004, pp. 337.

politics and security, economic governance and development, and human rights and sustainability, reflect the OSCE commitments and its practical work. The OSCE also provided assistance with accreditation processes and supported efforts to align programmes with Bologna-style standards.

Financing and resource mobilization

As the Academy's longest-standing donor, the OSCE has financed operations through both its Unified Budget (UB) and Extrabudgetary (ExB) contributions, with the level of UB financing increasing between 2016 and 2019 from €175,000 to €480,000 annually.

The OSCE Secretariat co-ordinates outreach and resource mobilization with the Organization's participating States, with support from the Programme Office, which manages financial and administrative operations. Contributions have come from Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, the US and others, through direct contributions and OSCE mechanisms, with ExB contributions for the years 2021–2024 totalling €3,084,737.

The OSCE also brokered in-kind support from the government of Kyrgyzstan, including long-term rent-free use of the Academy's premises.¹⁸

Internships, capacity-building and promoting alumni engagement

Internships are a cornerstone of the Academy's educational model and a pillar of the OSCE's support. Each year Academy students have interned with OSCE structures, including the Secretariat, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, and field operations.

The OSCE has also contributed to efforts in fostering the Academy's alumni network. In collaboration with the NUPI, the OSCE facilitates alumni chapters, reunions and mentoring to help maintain connections among graduates across borders.

Leveraging the Academy as a regional platform

The OSCE has made strategic use of the Academy as a neutral venue for dialogue, professional training and regional co-operation and OSCE officials frequently speak at Academy events, lending visibility and strengthening its convening power.

Events include conflict prevention seminars, governance workshops and mission-preparation briefings. The Annual Central Asian Security Seminar—organized in co-operation with GCSP and NUPI—is a flagship example.¹⁹

Research support and academic networking

In collaboration with CORE Hamburg, NUPI, and others, the OSCE has supported academic networking and the Academy's research programme. While challenges to institutionalizing research remain, OSCE support has contributed to research projects, and faculty engagement in regional and international projects.

¹⁸ Shairbek Juraev, *The OSCE Academy: Working for Long-Term Comprehensive Security in Central Asia*. In IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2014*, Baden-Baden 2015, pp. 287–298.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 295.

> Concluding observations

The OSCE Academy has grown from a pilot project with a single master's programme into a respected higher education institution in Central Asia—delivering high-quality education, facilitating regional dialogue, and fostering the learning and careers of a generation of security professionals grounded in OSCE principles and commitments. While offering a unique education and research platform, the Academy also faces risks and sustainability challenges calling for renewed commitment and strategic investment.

An evolving regional asset

The Academy's design—small-scale, merit-based, tuition-free and embedded in an international framework—remains unique in the region. Its reputation for pluralism, academic integrity and practical training has earned it recognition beyond its size. As one interviewee observed, “we punch above our weight” and “it's just getting started.”

The growing alumni network—now exceeding 700—has become a long-term asset for the region. Graduates are serving in national governments, international organizations, research institutes and civil society across Central Asia and beyond. Their professional ties often span national boundaries, reinforcing informal regional dialogue and co-operation.

Navigating sustainability challenges

Despite its achievements, the Academy is confronting financial and operational pressures. In 2025, it faces a significant funding gap, with student stipends largely dependent on unpredictable ExB contributions. OSCE UB and ExB contributions together account for a major share of the Academy's funding, creating volatility and funding uncertainty. Diversifying its donor base and securing multi-year agreements could reduce these vulnerabilities.

The Academy's identity as a space for open, regional dialogue is also under pressure. Geopolitical developments—including intermittent tensions along the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border, the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, and legislative developments across the region—have impacted student flows and constrained academic freedom. At times, heightened sensitivities around politically charged research topics challenge the Academy's autonomy and its ability to attract faculty, students, and research support.

In this context, the OSCE's continued support will remain crucial. Its political backing, convening power and long-standing presence in the region offer both visibility and a degree of institutional protection—though not without risk, given the Organization's current budgetary and political challenges.

Looking ahead

As the Academy moves forward, three strategic opportunities stand out.

- **Reinvigorating the research function.** Interviewees emphasized the Academy's potential as a regional research hub. Continued commitments to dedicated staffing, protected time, and core funding remain essential to position the Academy as a driver of evidence-based policy dialogue in Central Asia.

- **Expanding regional engagement.** OSCE field operations could strengthen support for student recruitment and assistance, visibility and outreach, especially in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. This would help diversify the applicant pool and reinforce institutional partnerships.
- **Further leveraging of alumni networks.** The Academy is well-positioned to serve as a backbone for broader regional academic collaboration. Deeper alumni engagement, paired with inter-university partnerships, could help establish a Central Asian scholarly network grounded in OSCE values and academic excellence.

The Academy has already shown that a small, well-designed institution can have lasting impact. Securing its future will require not only sustained donor support and continued OSCE commitment but also strategic investment in governance, funding and partnerships that match its promise and regional relevance.

> Data collection summary

