

# CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF EU-UZBEKISTAN COOPERATION: THE IMPACT OF ERASMUS+ AND TEMPUS PROGRAMMES ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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**Abstract.** This paper examines the transformative impact of Erasmus+ and Tempus programmes on Uzbekistan's higher education system, emphasizing developments from 2022 to 2024. These EU programmes have fostered international collaboration, institutional modernization, and academic mobility within Uzbekistan's universities. Key areas of progress include capacity-building projects, international credit mobility partnerships, Jean Monnet initiatives, and Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters scholarships, which collectively align Uzbekistan's higher education with global standards. Highlighting quantitative insights and regional engagement, the study underscores the programmes' contributions to enhancing educational governance, research quality, and student mobility. This paper concludes by exploring prospects and strategic objectives within the Erasmus+ framework, emphasizing green and digital transformations alongside inclusive education policies (November 2024).

**Keywords:** Erasmus+, Uzbekistan, higher education, EU-Uzbekistan cooperation, 2022-2024.

## Introduction

This year is the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of cooperation between the EU and Uzbekistan in higher education. Erasmus+ is a European Union programme, which aims to enhance educational quality, promote international mobility, and build capacity among universities and academic institutions across Uzbekistan. Since their establishment, the Erasmus+ and Tempus programmes have played a crucial role in this partnership, promoting international cooperation, academic excellence, and institutional capacity building. These programmes have allowed Uzbekistan's higher education institutions (HEIs) to modernise management systems, adapt curricula to international standards, and conduct cutting-edge research and teaching methods. Higher Education cooperation between the European Union and Uzbekistan started in 1994 when the Tempus programme began its activities in Uzbekistan. Tempus was the only programme, providing educational exchange, curriculum reform, and institutional partnerships with European universities, which contributed to the governmental decisions on the modernisation of the higher education system in Uzbekistan adopted in 2012-2013. Between 1994 and 2013, around 55 Uzbekistan HEIs and over **150** universities from **22** EU countries and **10** partner countries took part in overall **80** projects of Tempus in Uzbekistan (see Figure 1).

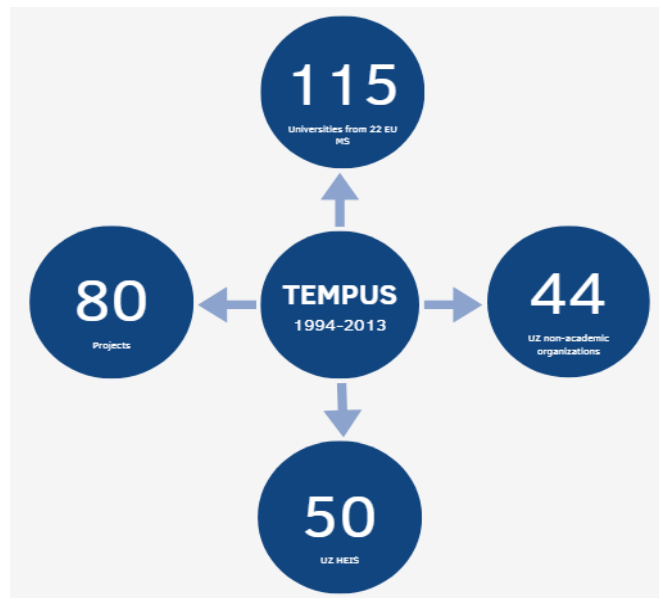


Figure 1. Tempus in Uzbekistan (1994-2013)

Moreover, from 2011 to 2014, the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan (MHSSE)<sup>1</sup> actively participated in **9** Tempus projects, which constitutes **11%** involvement of MHSSE from a total of **80** projects. Tempus projects span all regions of Uzbekistan, with notable contributions from the following regions: Tashkent city and Tashkent region, involving **27** projects, Bukhara and Samarkand regions – **14** projects, and the Republic of Karakalpakstan with Jizzakh and Kashqadarya regions – **6** projects. These are the primary regions with significant involvement to Tempus projects (see Figure 2).

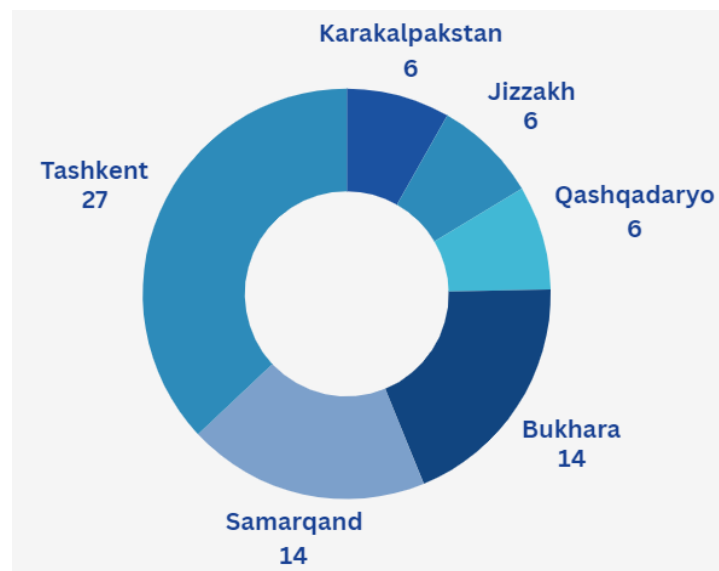


Figure 2. Geographical Distribution of Tempus Projects

There was a huge positive impact of Tempus and Erasmus+ on Uzbekistan: Erasmus+ projects and the overall experience of European countries in the

<sup>1</sup> On December 24, 2022, it was re-established and renamed to the “Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation”.

implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and a transition to a credit and module-based educational process have a particularly significant impact. Moreover, national and international cooperation brought closer not only EU universities but also all regional higher education institutions around Central Asia, CIS member states, and other regions of the world.

### **Scope of NEO and HERE activities**

The National Erasmus Office (NEO), alongside the National Team of Erasmus+ Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE), plays an important role in developing international collaboration and assisting the modernisation and development of the country's higher education system. The NEO serves as the national point of contact for the Erasmus+ programme in Uzbekistan, which manages and promotes Uzbek HEI involvement in Erasmus+ activities. The NEO helps with execution of projects enabling contact between HEIs and European partners. The primary mission of NEO is to disseminate information, raise awareness about Erasmus+ programmes and opportunities for Uzbek institutions and students, support various projects, assist with the preparation of project proposals, management, and promotion of Erasmus+ projects' results and best practice, and extend the collaboration by strengthening partnerships between Uzbek and European HEIs to promote exchange and mobility. The Erasmus+ programme is one of the main activities of NEO aimed at strengthening collaboration between HEIs in Europe and Uzbekistan. The Erasmus+ programme is offered to higher education institutions in Uzbekistan in the following areas:

- |    |                                               |   |
|----|-----------------------------------------------|---|
| 1) | Capacity building in Higher Education (CBHE); | C |
| 2) | International Credit Mobility (ICM);          | I |
| 3) | Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM);          | E |
| 4) | Jean Monnet Actions (JM).                     | J |

The Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE) network advises governments and higher education institutions on changes that are consistent with the EU educational standards. In Uzbekistan, the HERE team contributes knowledge to the modernisation of the higher education system, encouraging quality, accessibility, compliance with international standards, and many more. The scope of the HERE's activities is very substantial.

Both NEO and HERE provide major contributions to the objectives of increasing the quality and worldwide competitiveness of Uzbekistan's higher education system. Their efforts resulted in the application of European best practices, improved academic mobility, and stronger integration of Uzbek institutions into the global academic community. These programmes also align with Uzbekistan's strategic goals of modernising its higher education system, boosting research quality, and expanding student possibilities. The NEO and the

HERE collaborate to make a significant contribution to the development of higher education in Uzbekistan, ensuring a more inclusive, creative, and internationally attributed educational environment.

### **Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education projects (2<sup>nd</sup> programming period)<sup>2</sup>**

Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) projects support international cooperation projects based on multilateral partnerships between organisations active in the field of higher education. A year after the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> programming period (2020), the 2<sup>nd</sup> programming period, started from 3 Erasmus+ Call for Proposals for 2022, 2023, and 2024.

During the COVID-19 pandemic (2022), it was seen that having prior experience with webinars, video conferencing, and telecommunications was essential to Erasmus+ projects. Because of the professionals and project team members who served as researchers during the shift to distance learning, this experience allowed local HEIs, in general, to make the move to online education without experiencing any difficulties. In total, **20 CBHE projects** were funded for Uzbekistan during the second period (2022–2027), with **5** new CBHE projects selected for funding in 2024. For 15 ongoing projects in November 2024, the allocated budget was €5.7 mln, from which €3.7 mln the Erasmus+ funded to Uzbekistan. The total budget allocated for the 5 new projects is €3.5 mln, including the budget of €1 mln for Uzbekistan. Between 2022 and 2024, more than 65 Uzbekistan HEIs and over **10** non-academic organizations took part in these CBHE projects, with the involvement of MHESI in **8** projects. Moreover, these 20 projects constituted **10** national projects that involved Uzbek universities, **8** regional projects that connected HEIs from Uzbekistan and several other Central Asian countries, and two cross-regional projects with participating both Uzbekistan and other regions beyond Central Asia (see Figure 3).

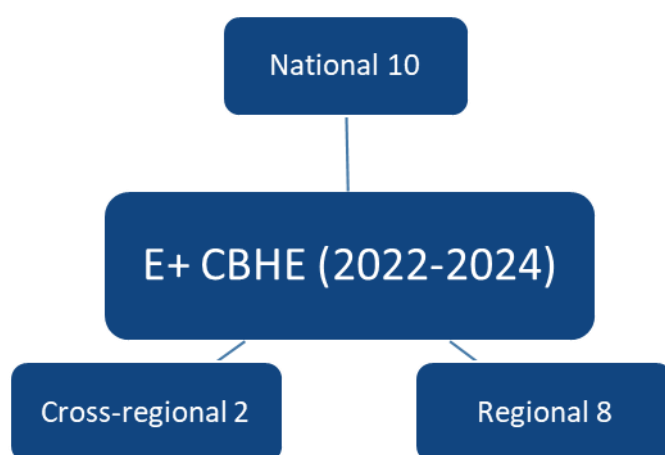


Figure 3. Types of CBHE projects (2022-2024)

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<sup>2</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> programming period covered 6 Erasmus+ Calls for Proposals for 2015-2020 years.

The geographical spread of Erasmus+ projects demonstrates active participation across Uzbekistan. The leading regions in CBHE projects from 2022-2024 have been universities from Tashkent and Tashkent region, Bukhara, Xorazm, and Andijon regions involved in 16, 10, 7, and 7 projects respectively. Starting from 2022, CBHE projects were divided into strands: strand 1, strand 2, and strand 3 (see [Figure 4](#)).

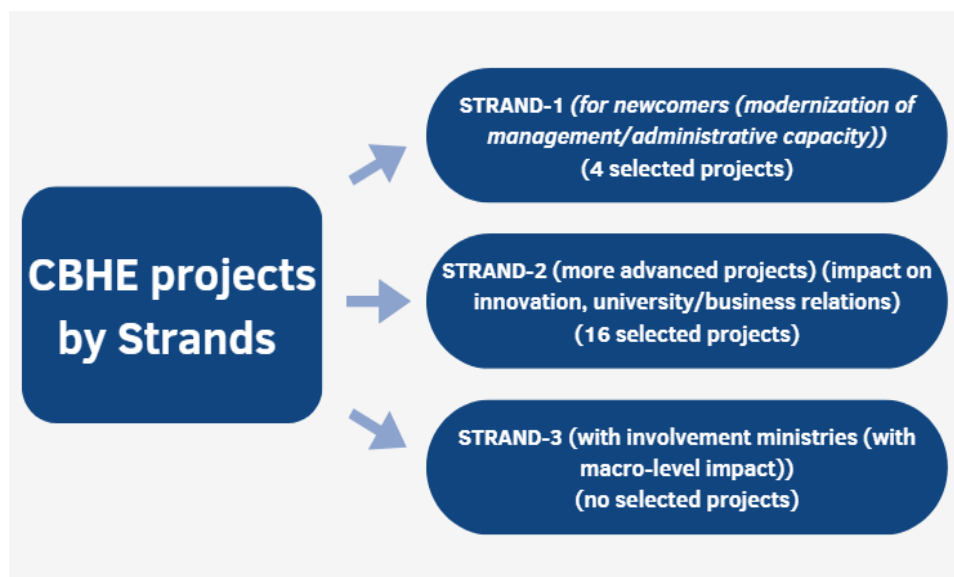


Figure 4. CBHE projects by strands

Strand 1 supports new entrants, institutions in rural or disadvantaged areas, and HEIs with limited experience to encourage cooperation in higher education. The aim is to strengthen institutional capacity, promote inclusive education, and address gaps in internationalisation. Activities include improving university governance, establishing international offices, improving quality assurance, and supporting students with fewer opportunities.

Strand 2 emphasises the importance of cooperation in promoting transformation by promoting innovation, employability, and institutional reform. Projects focus on aligning education with labour market needs, introducing learner-centered pedagogy, and strengthening links with industry and research.

Strand 3 promotes structural reforms aimed at modernising the higher education system. It facilitates policy reforms at the national level, in line with socio-economic requirements and the Global Gateway priorities for eligible regions. The reforms seek to achieve systemic improvements in collaboration with higher education institutions, ministries, and relevant stakeholders.

### **Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM)**

Erasmus+ facilitates academic mobility among students, faculty, and staff, allowing them to gain international experience and get acquainted with different educational systems. The ICM programme has afforded Uzbek students and academic staff significant opportunities for learning and professional development in the EU. A total of **70** students from Uzbekistan participated in ICM programmes in 2022 and 2023, all for academic purposes. This significant figure highlights the

increasing motivations of Uzbek students to pursue different educational opportunities and expand their academic perspectives within EU institutions. Alongside student exchanges, **127** academic staff members from Uzbekistan engaged in mobility programmes. Of the total, **43** participated in teaching activities, while **84** of them were directed to training. This balance demonstrates Uzbekistan's dedication to improving educators' teaching capabilities, providing them with contemporary methodologies and specialized skills via focused training sessions. These initiatives are significantly important for enhancing the professional development of Uzbek educators and, as well as, improving the overall education standards in the country (see [Figure 5](#)).

The exchange between the EU and Uzbekistan, although limited in scale, has been equally significant. The involvement of **90** EU staff members in Uzbekistan HEIs significantly contributed to the country's higher education ecosystem. Among these, **66** are engaged in teaching, contributing their expertise and innovative methodologies to local classrooms. Furthermore, **24** staff members participated in the training, which facilitated crucial knowledge-sharing and capacity-building within Uzbek HEIs. The exchanges served as important factors to strengthen institutional ties and reinforce the significance of collaboration in addressing the challenges within Uzbekistan's education system.

The ICM programme remains a fundamental component of Uzbekistan's educational reform and development strategy. Facilitating knowledge sharing, skill acquisition, and best practice exchange among students and staff contributes to the development of a more contemporary and globally integrated education system. Uzbek students acquire improved competencies, and faculty members develop significant teaching and training skills, thereby ensuring the programme's enduring influence on Uzbekistan's academic environment.

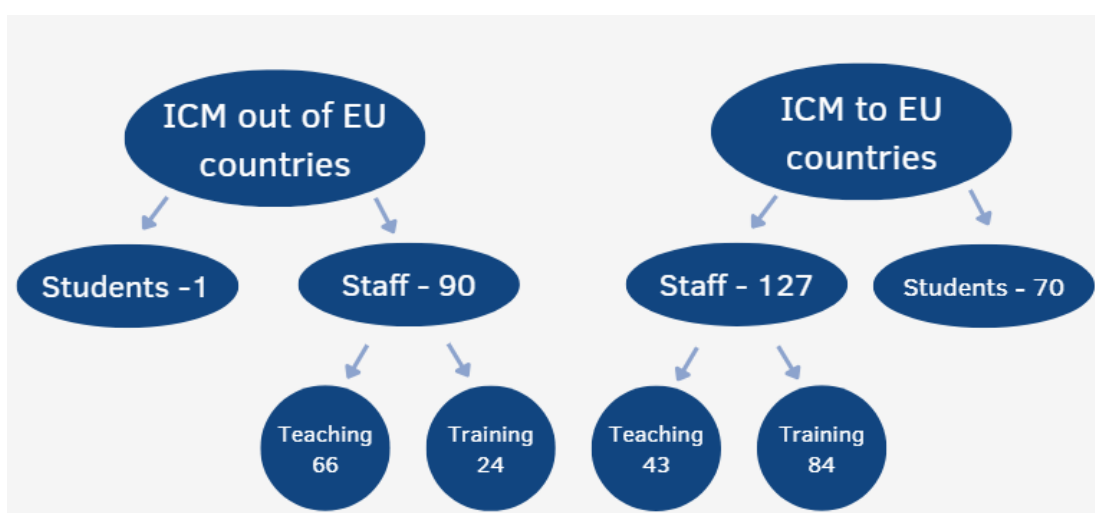


Figure 5. International *Credit Mobility between Uzbekistan and the EU for 2022-2023*

Between Uzbek universities and higher education institutions in Europe and non-EU countries, the ICM programme fosters staff and student mobility. By the geographic distribution, Tashkent has been leading with **151** staff, academics, and

students, supporting the mobility in the period between 2022 and 2024 years. Moreover, staff and students from Samarkand, Kashkadarya, and Xorazm regions reached **43**, **37**, and **33** respectively. In total, UZ to EU mobility consisted of **197** staff and students, whereas EU to UZ mobility included **91** teachers, trainers, and students (see [Figure 6](#)).

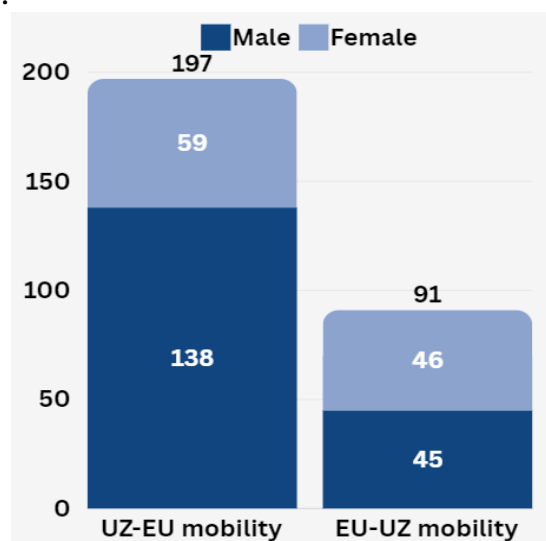


Figure 6. International Credit Mobility by Gender (2022-2024)

Over the last three years, **288** ICM partnerships have been formed between Uzbekistani universities and European Union countries, with Poland, Romania, France, Bulgaria, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, and Sweden playing a major part (see [Figure 7](#)).

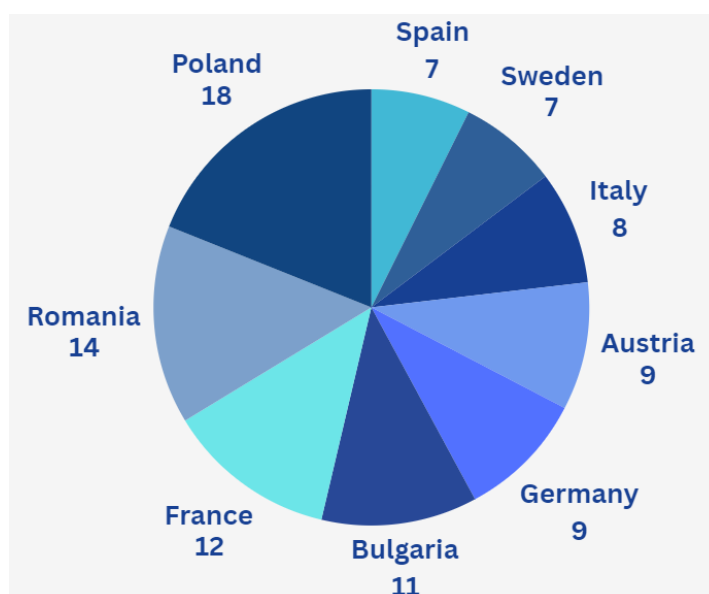


Figure 7. UZ-EU mobility by country level (2022-2024)

### Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Actions

The Jean Monnet Actions promote excellence in teaching and research in European studies across the globe. These initiatives seek to increase conversation between academia and industries, promote EU policymaking, and contribute to a better understanding of EU ideas and policies. The initiative aims to assist in



reaching academic excellence by establishing **European Modules, Information and Research Activities, Centres of Excellence, Jean Monnet Chairs, and Jean Monnet Modules**, focusing on European integration and EU governance (see [Figure 8](#)).

Since its presence in Uzbekistan in 2009, Jean Monnet Projects have played an important role in promoting European studies within the country's higher education sector. With **17** successful initiatives, Uzbekistani HEIs has greatly expanded its academic and professional capacity to promote European studies. These measures have enabled academic institutions throughout the nation to conform to European standards and include EU-related topics in their curriculum. The University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent has been seen as the most active participant, taking part in **5** of the seventeen Jean Monnet Projects, demonstrating the university's excellence in creating deeper knowledge and better educational standards on EU issues. Furthermore, institutions such as Tashkent Finance Institute, Westminster International University, Tashkent State University of Economics, and Tashkent State University of Law have contributed to the successful implementation of these projects.

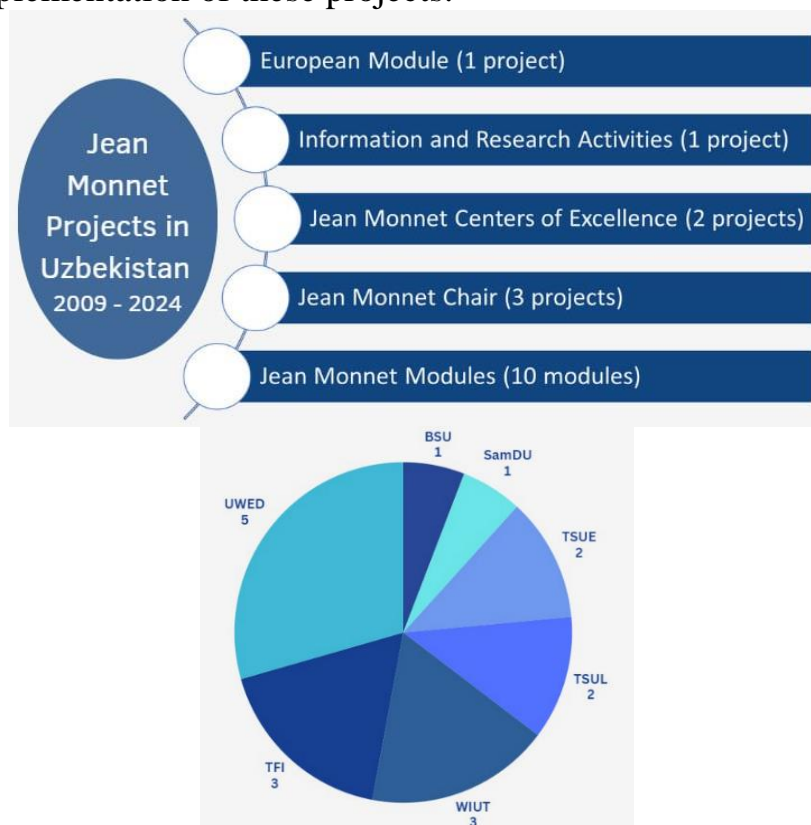


Figure 8. Jean Monnet projects in Uzbekistan

The success of these initiatives, notably the Jean Monnet Modules (a total of **10** projects), has assisted in promoting critical thinking in line with European principles (see [Figure 9](#)). The projects involved in these modules have not only enhanced teaching but have also helped to broaden the scope of study, increasing understanding of EU policies and governance in Uzbekistan. As these projects progress, they will keep playing an important role in ensuring the ongoing success



of the next generation of students and professionals to collaborate with European institutions and contribute to the global discussion around EU policy.

PROJECT_YEAR	PROJECT_TYPE	PROJECT_TITLE	UNIVERSITY
2022	Jean Monnet Centres of Excellence	Erasmus Center of Excellence in Sustainable Business and Finance (ECESBF)	TSUE
2022	Jean Monnet Chairs	Central Asian Centre for European Trade Law	WIUT
2022	Jean Monnet Modules	European Economic Integration: Policies, Mechanisms and Lessons for Central Asia	BSU
2022	Jean Monnet Modules	EU foreign policy in Central Asia and Afghanistan	UWED
2023	Jean Monnet Modules	Artificial Intelligence Regulation: European Approach for Central Asia	SamDu
2023	Jean Monnet Modules	European experience in developing health insurance in Uzbekistan	TFI
2023	Jean Monnet Modules	EU digital Finance strategy: best practices for Uzbekistan	TFI
2023	Jean Monnet Modules	Training of Trainers (ToT): European experience in mainstreaming gender equality in education	TFI
2024	Jean Monnet Modules	European Union Private International Law	TSUL
2024	Jean Monnet Modules	EU Competition and Anti-Dumping Law	WIUT

Figure 9. Uzbekistani HEIs involved in Jean Monnet Projects

### EMJM Scholarships

The Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM) programme is a distinguished project conducted by the EU to promote excellence and internationalisation in higher education. It is a master's-level programme established and offered by a worldwide association of HEIs. These collaborations include at least **3** institutions from **3** countries, with at least **2** being EU member states. The goal of the programme is to support academic achievement, cultural interchange, and the development of a global perspective by allowing students to study in institutions in various countries, promoting a pure international environment of study.

Erasmus Mundus provides fully funded scholarships that cover tuition, travel expenses, and living costs, making it an affordable programme for competitive students from all over the world, including Uzbekistan. These scholarships enable students to obtain international experience while earning a jointly recognised master's degree from prestigious universities, providing them with better educational and career opportunities.

Over the last three years, the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters programme in Uzbekistan has grown rapidly (see [Figure 10](#)). Each year, 12 to 14 Uzbek students are granted the chance to participate in this programme, which allows them to study at some of the most famous institutions in the EU. Such involvement not only exposes Uzbek students to worldwide academic cooperation but also promotes cultural exchange and global networking.

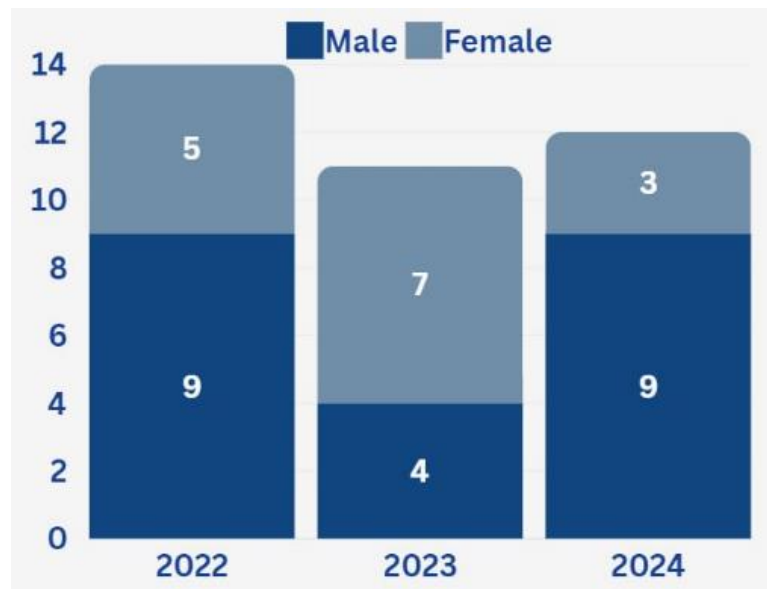


Figure 10. The number of EMJM scholarship winners from Uzbekistan

The initiative provides an important venue for Uzbekistan's higher education institutions to build academic relations with top European universities. By giving Uzbek students access to world-class education and worldwide research networks, the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters helps to enhance Uzbekistan's higher education sector and aligns it with global norms.

### Conclusions and Expectations

Erasmus+ and Tempus programmes have transformed Uzbekistan's higher education system. It has a strong international dimension for cooperation among the 33 countries and third countries worldwide. This strong international focus requires promotion in Uzbekistan. With ongoing support, these partnerships will contribute to academic excellence, global integration, and innovation within Uzbek universities. Within the 2021 and 2027 programming period, National Erasmus Office in Uzbekistan is planning to reach significant project milestones in all 5 programme key actions. By this year, overall, 20 ongoing projects are assigned to higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. Moreover, 288 ICM partnerships have been formed between the EU and Uzbekistan universities in exchanging ideas through teaching, training, and learning. From 2022 to 2024, a total of 37 students won Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters in Uzbekistan and have been having the opportunity to study in European universities. Additionally, Uzbek institutions have shown active commitment to participating in Jean Monnet initiatives, involving 10 projects in these three years. It's also remarkable to note the significant involvement of MHESI in CBHE, assisting in the implementation of the projects. It can be seen in the increase of the involvement of the MHESI from 11% (in Tempus programmes) to 40% in CBHE projects during 2022 and 2024.

The 2021-2027 objectives emphasise social inclusion, green and digital transformations, and encouraging young people to participate in democratic life. Over the next seven years, Erasmus+ will invest €16.5 billion in education, training, youth, and sport throughout Europe, allowing more than 4 million young people to gain experience and skills by studying, training, or volunteering abroad.

The NEO will also contribute to Uzbekistan's national higher education modernisation strategy, which is stated in the Concept of Higher Education Development until 2030 by The Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The primary areas of focus include increasing access to higher education through public-private partnerships, cultivating a competitive environment, and advancing academic independence, improving university rankings worldwide, transitioning to a credit-modular system, encouraging practical skill development, and boosting innovation through the development of initiatives and global cooperation.

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