

About CAREC

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) began the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program in 1997 with one regional technical assistance project that examined improving infrastructure and augmenting the availability of public goods. This led to the establishment of the CAREC unit (CARECU) in March 2000 as the focal point for promoting regional cooperation. CAREC organized its first ministerial meeting in March 2002 at which the Overall Institutional Framework (OIF) was established marking a milestone in partnership and trust. Since then, CAREC activities have been supervised and guided by the OIF headed by a ministerial committee, and CARECU has evolved into a secretariat for the OIF. Currently, CAREC members are the People's Republic of China (PRC), primarily the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR),¹ Mongolia, and five of the six Central Asian republics (CARs) namely Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan has not yet joined.

The six CARs cover a vast, landlocked landmass between Europe and Asia that measures 4 million square kilometers, an area larger than Southeast Asia. In fact, Uzbekistan, the most populous country, is one of only two countries in the world that is double land locked.² The republics share a Turkic-Persian heritage of linguistic, cultural, and social practices. They are sparsely populated by 65 million inhabitants who are concentrated in the eastern valleys and along the two main rivers—Amu Darya and Syr Darya—and their tributaries. Except for Azerbaijan, the CARs and Afghanistan share these waters and depend on them for irrigation and drinking. Most of the land is covered with desert and steppes; only 7.8% is cultivable. Average annual rainfall is low restricting the

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