



# Youth of Central Asia Challenges for Peacebuilding

A comprehensive research review



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### What Challenges for Peacebuilding the Youth of Central Asia Face?

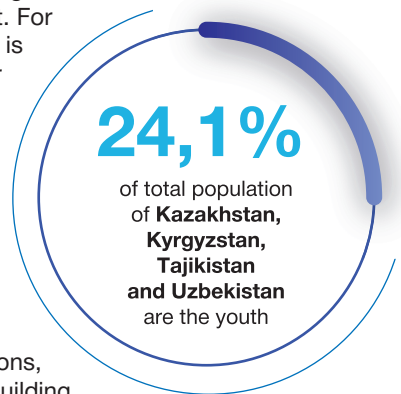
The estimations are that by 2030, the world will be home to 1.3 billion young people. This speaks about the importance of the youth for development in various parts of the globe, particularly in developing countries which constitute 90% of the global youth population. From comprehensive holistic perspective peace, peacebuilding and dialogue embrace all aspects and dimensions of life – inter-generational, social, economic, political, ethnic, religious, civic, ideological, cultural, and natural. The youth -related issues are directly linked with the SDGs agenda.

Central Asian states are also on the list of developing countries, with an increasing demographic share of the youth in the general population, meaning that the countries of the region are “young.” As of 2020, the total population of the four countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) was 68.46 million, of which youth comprised **16.55 million or 24,1%**.

This highlights the urgency required for elaborating and implementing special policies on youth development. For Central Asia, the peace and peacebuilding agenda is the development agenda, and vice versa, as neither is possible without the other, and these in turn are intrinsically linked with youth-related issues.

This report provides a detailed overview of the existing challenges to the youth of the 4 countries of the region – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan, Uzbekistan – structured around three main themes of peacebuilding: (1) an education and learning environment; (2) economic and social participation; and (3) civic engagement.

Governments, international organizations, professionals and policymakers in the youth, peacebuilding and development sectors, academia and NGOs are invited to join forces to accelerate the achievement of youth development for a more just, sustainable and peaceful future.



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## ACRONYMS

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>AGENDA 2030</b> | Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals             |
| <b>CIS</b>         | Commonwealth of Independent States                       |
| <b>EFA</b>         | Education for All  |
| <b>ESD</b>         | Education for Sustainable Development                    |
| <b>ESCAP</b>       | Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific  |
| <b>ETF</b>         | European Training Foundation                             |
| <b>EU</b>          | European Union   |
| <b>FEF</b>         | Friedrich Ebert Foundation                               |
| <b>GCED</b>        | Global Citizenship Education                             |
| <b>GDP</b>         | Gross Domestic Product                                   |
| <b>HEI</b>         | Higher Education Institutions                            |
| <b>IDRC</b>        | International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures   |
| <b>IOM</b>         | International Organization for Migration                 |
| <b>LLL</b>         | Life-Long Learning                                       |
| <b>MIL</b>         | Media and Information Literacy                           |
| <b>MOOC</b>        | Massive Open Online Course                               |
| <b>NGO</b>         | Non-Governmental Organization                            |
| <b>NEET</b>        | (Young people) Not in Employment, Education or Training  |
| <b>OECD</b>        | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development    |
| <b>OOSC</b>        | Out of School Children                                   |
| <b>OSCE</b>        | Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe      |
| <b>PISA</b>        | Program for International Student Assessment             |
| <b>PVE</b>         | Preventing Violent Extremism                             |
| <b>SCO</b>         | Shanghai Cooperation Organization                        |
| <b>SDGs</b>        | Sustainable Development Goals                            |
| <b>SME</b>         | Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises                       |
| <b>TVET</b>        | Technical and Vocational Education and Training          |
| <b>UNCT</b>        | United Nations Country Team                              |
| <b>UNDP</b>        | United Nations Development Program                       |
| <b>UNDAF</b>       | United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks         |
| <b>UNDESA</b>      | United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs |
| <b>UNECE</b>       | United Nations Economic Commission for Europe            |



|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>UNESCO</b> | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| <b>UNFPA</b>  | United Nations Population Fund                                   |
| <b>UNGA</b>   | United Nations General Assembly                                  |
| <b>UNICEF</b> | United Nations Children Fund                                     |
| <b>UNPBSO</b> | United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office                      |
| <b>UNSC</b>   | United Nations Security Council                                  |
| <b>UNSG</b>   | United Nations Secretary General                                 |
| <b>VOT</b>    | Victims of Human Trafficking                                     |
| <b>WHO</b>    | World Health Organization  |
| <b>YPS</b>    | Youth, Peace and Security  |

## INTRODUCTION

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### Objective and Rationale

The paradigm shifts taking place globally throughout the recent decades are due to many varied processes, among which globalization, the digital revolution, increased mobility and intercultural communications are most prominent and significant. The results and effects of these changes are seen in numerous fields and are changing the structure of the global economy, the nature of labor and education, and increasing the effect of artificial intelligence (AI). In turn, this has led to the creation of new specialties, and highlighted the need for life-long education, transversal skills and qualifications. These structural changes are accompanied by demographic and social shifts where youth are increasingly the driving force of demographic landscapes, and equally strong actors in social development and networking.

Increased mobility and networking imply greater communications and interactions within multi-cultural milieus, in which people of different backgrounds, communities and cultures participate. The quantitative growth of mobility and interactions ignores the qualitative

dimension, which consequently raises a major fundamental question: How to deal with increased variety, diversity and multiplicity in modern societies? Considering demographic and socio-economic structural changes, these processes need to address the major paradigm, namely, increasing the role of youth on the one hand, and the importance of the culture of non-violence, peacebuilding and intercultural dialogue, on the other. This paradigm shift highlights that youth and peace are interwoven and significant game changers in modern development. It also highlights the need for discussions that methodologically address the changes that are underway.

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in early 2020 and the consequences it continues having on almost all fields of the human activities and countries' performance globally, had enormously influenced the ways how people and communities study, work and live, and how countries perform. The impacts of the pandemic could be particularly traced in education, gender, health, employment, migration, inclusion, participation.



*“Let’s not forget this is essentially a human crisis. Most fundamentally, we need to focus on people – the most vulnerable.”*

*UN Secretary-General’s Call for Solidarity  
Source : UN COVID Response, 2020*

In other words, as the UN COVID-19 immediate response says, “the COVID-19 pandemic is far more than a health crisis: it is affecting societies and economies at their core”.<sup>1</sup>

Among the most visible and profoundly affected areas are healthcare and education, also known as Human Capital, that “consists of the knowledge, skills, and health that people accumulate over their lives”.<sup>2</sup> According to the World Bank’s Human Capital Index (HCI) report, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to reverse many of the gains made by economies over the last decade, when school closures and family hardships affect the current generation of school-age children, and when the effects ripple indirectly across populations and generations.<sup>3</sup> The report states:



*“In 20 years, roughly 46 percent of the typical economy’s workforce (people aged 20 to 65 years) will be composed of individuals who were either in school or under the age of 5 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The human capital losses of today’s children will translate into a drop of a full HCI point (0.01) for this future workforce. That is, even if the pandemic is brought under control relatively rapidly, the COVID-19 shock could still leave current cohorts of children behind for the rest of their lives. No society can afford to let that happen.”*

*Source : World Bank, 2021, p. 8-9.*

Education field saw enormous challenges of school and higher educational institutes (HEI) closure worldwide that was “unprecedented in history, the scale of the shift from physical provision of education to distance learning programmes covering all levels and all types of education is even larger”.<sup>4</sup>

Significant challenges the higher education and TVET systems and institutions will face in the long run include increased inequality in access and retention and the risk for students to discontinue their studies due to increased socio-economic constraints; diminished resources in both public and private institutions; personal and academic challenges caused by permanent closures of programmes and institutions; demand for improved infrastructure to support continued distance and blended learning models; reduced student mobility putting pressure on admission at national and regional universities.<sup>5</sup>



*“191 countries have implemented nationwide or localized school closures, resulting in over 91 per cent of enrolled students, or 1.5 billion people, not being able to go to school. These students face disruptions to their education of uncertain duration, with varying levels of alternative delivery methods. These disruptions can negatively impact learning, access to nutrition, and consequently, graduation rates. School closures have a particularly adverse effect on poorer students, students without stable internet access at home, and children relying on help from their schools in meeting their nutrition and health needs. The situation is especially acute for girls and young women who are disproportionately excluded from education.”*

*Source : UN DESA Response, 2020, p.1*

The gender aspect of COVID-19 is equally enormous showing the additional load and challenges for women and girls. According to the UN DESA, “although less likely to die from COVID-19, women face additional challenges related to the disease compared to men, including increased risk of domestic violence and abuse due to the isolation measures implemented by governments to curtail the virus spread. Women also comprise 69% of health professionals who are now on the front lines in the battle against the pandemic, facing a higher risk of infection than men in the workplace. Increases in unpaid care and domestic work, job



<sup>1</sup> UN COVID Response, 2020. A UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19, p. 5. <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/un-framework-immediate-socio-economic-response-covid-19>

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, 2021. The Human Capital Index 2020 Update: Human Capital in the Time of COVID-19. Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank. P.1.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank, 2021. P.1-2, 8.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO COVID Response, 2020a. *Distance Learning Strategies in Response to COVID-19 School Closures*. UNESCO COVID-19 Education Response Education Sector issue notes Issue note n° 2.1 – April 2020, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO COVID Response, 2020b. *Quality Assurance and Recognition of Distance Higher Education and TVET*.

UNESCO COVID-19 Education Response. Education Sector issue notes Issue note n° 5.1 – June 2020, 6 p.

and income loss and the effects of the lockdown and the confinement at home, which has been associated with a potential increased risk on intimate partner violence, are among the factors that may be contributing to higher levels of stress and anxiety among women”<sup>6</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on the migrants too. The ESCAP brief response suggests that similarly to previous crises, the migrants among the first are laid off when companies face economic downturn, many of them get free of charge basic food and goods from international and charitable organizations; whereas their families at home are left without income and state social support. The pandemic also showed the extreme vulnerability of the migrants to disease hazards in the absence of the proper healthcare system support. In addition, migrants are likely to face significant difficulties in accessing vaccine against COVID-19. For legal labour migrants the problem may be the expiration of their residence permit and work permits in some host countries.<sup>7</sup>

As per ESCAP brief response, “the COVID-19 coronavirus crisis is driving an increase in the number of people living in extreme poverty across the subregion. According to the latest estimates of the World Bank, in the Europe and Central Asia region, this figure increased by 1 million. ... the number of people living on less than US \$ 3.20 a day will increase by 2-3 million, and the number of people living on less than US \$ 5.50 a day will rise even more (6-8 million).”<sup>8</sup>

The all embracing and profound impact of the pandemic on the life of people and youth causes particular risks to the most vulnerable.

As UN DESA in its turn states, “the pandemic and economic recession may further fuel stigma and discrimination against certain groups of young people,



“young migrants and refugees, youth living in rural areas, adolescent girls and young women, indigenous and ethnic minority youth, young persons with disabilities, young people living with HIV/AIDS, young people of different sexual orientations and gender identities, and homeless youth already experience challenges in accessing healthcare services and social protection. Young people with physical or mental health conditions also face an elevated risk in relation to COVID-19. Many young people may not have stable housing and therefore cannot safely engage in home-based social distancing. The pandemic and economic recession may further fuel stigma and discrimination against certain groups of young people, which in turn would further exclude them from accessing healthcare and maintaining their livelihoods”.

Source: UN DESA Response. 2020, p. 1-2.

which in turn would further exclude them from accessing healthcare and maintaining their livelihoods”.<sup>9</sup>

Against this background the youth in Central Asia had been affected too by the ongoing pandemic in all major fields – education, healthcare, gender, migration, inclusion. The results of the quick assessment survey conducted by the UNESCO Cluster office in Almaty for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan (2020) showed the scale and complex character of the pandemic influence on the youth. The 19-24 age subgroup showed the concern about the further employment, financial stability, low quality of the distance education, including unpreparedness of the teachers and lack of technical provisions, internet connections and educational program software and platforms. Psychological concerns, apathy and fears for the future including the future of the country, as well as the increased aggressiveness of the people were among the other key issues of concern for the respondents of this and the other, 25-30-age subgroups, for the latter subgroup the fears about employment possibilities, job cuts, salary



<sup>6</sup> World's Women. 2020. *World's Women 2020*. UN DESA Statistics. <https://worlds-women-2020-data.unesa.hub.arcgis.com/apps/254619aed54c4f1d8d07e65f99a55365/explore>

<sup>7</sup> ESCAP. 2021. *COVID-19 v Severnoy i Tsentral'noy Azii Vozdeystviye, otvetnyye mery i strategii boleye effektivnogo vosstanovleniya* [COVID-19 in North and Central Asia Impact, Responses and Strategies for Better Recovery]. ESCAP, p. 20-21.

<sup>8</sup> ESCAP. 2021. p. 21

<sup>9</sup> UN DESA Response. 2020. *Protecting and Mobilizing Youth in COVID-19 Responses*. United Nations Economic and Social Affairs. Policy Brief N 67. May 2020, p. 1-2.

reduction were equally crucial.<sup>10</sup>

The aim of this report is to provide an analysis of the existing research, policies and practices relating to the status, development and capacity of the youth of Central Asia to address the challenges for peacebuilding. It seeks to identify the main challenges for youth and peacebuilding.

- How are the youth and peace/peacebuilding related?
- How states of Central Asia interact with their young population, and what are institutional frameworks and the policies towards the youth?
- What are the main challenges for peacebuilding for the youth of Central Asia?
- What are the policy interventions, policy priorities/key drivers needed for youth sustainable development and peacebuilding in Central Asia?

This report focuses on four countries of the Central Asian region – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan was not included in the analysis due to the lack of available data and country-based information, what makes the full picture incomplete. It is

presumed to fill this gap in future reports. As for Afghanistan, according to various classifications<sup>11</sup> the country is regarded as a part of either Central Asia, or South Asia. In this report Afghanistan was not discussed, however, in future analysis it could be made an object of research.

## Methodology

This report highlights the following three key approaches relating to youth and peacebuilding:



**(1)** Changing perceptions and the evolution of the concept of peace and peacebuilding in addressing new challenges worldwide, based on human rights perspectives;



**(2)** Acknowledging the key role of knowledge, learning and education in knowledge-driven societies; and



**(3)** Increasing the role and capacity of the youth to be the catalyst for and driver of global sustainable development.

An integrated holistic approach is required that applies cross-sectoral transdisciplinary analysis and system- and human rights-based perspectives to develop comprehensive frameworks.

As a basis for developing these frameworks, this report applies a systems approach, particularly in relation to four main systems (biological, individual, social and cultural) and their functions



<sup>10</sup> UNESCO Almaty. 2020. *Vliyaniye krizisa COVID-19 na zhizn' molodezhi iz Tsentral'noy Azii. Rezul'taty bystroy otsenki. Almaty: Byuro YUNESKO v Almaty* [Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the lives of Central Asian youth. Rapid Assessment Results]. Almaty: UNESCO Office in Almaty. p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> See for example: Boucher. 2006. Boucher R. *South and Central Asia Update. Foreign Press Center Briefing*. Washington, DC. July 17, 2006. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rm/2006/69193.htm>; Starr F. 2005. Starr. "Greater Central Asia Partnership" for Afghanistan and Its Neighbours. Washington: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Programme. 38 p.

(adaptation, goal attainment, integration and pattern maintenance).<sup>12</sup> The integrated system was developed further and correlated with four different levels relating to the performance of individuals and societies, namely, organic, cognitive,

relational and institutional.

The following discussion provides an analysis of how each of the three key approaches work within the comprehensive frameworks.

### (1) Changing perceptions and evolution of the concept of peace and peacebuilding in addressing new challenges worldwide, based on human rights perspectives

This first approach provides the opportunity to link the idea of peacebuilding with a wider range of development issues, including those unrelated to peace-making processes. As this issue is a key focus of this report, it deserves separate analysis and will be discussed further in Chapter 1.

Within the proposed comprehensive holistic framework, the report analyzes the youth and peacebuilding themes through the interrelation between planes–systems–functions on one hand, and human rights-based key areas on the other (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Comprehensive Holistic Approach Towards Youth and Peacebuilding**

| PLANE-SYSTEM-FUNCTION  | KEY AREAS/THEMES (HUMAN RIGHTS BASED)   |
|--|---|
| <b>INSTITUTIONAL PLANE</b><br>Cultural System<br>Function of Pattern Maintenance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Policy Formulation/ Institutions</li> <li>● Intercultural Dialogue</li> <li>● Religion</li> <li>● Preventing Violent Extremism</li> </ul>                                      |
| <b>RELATIONAL PLANE</b><br>Social System<br>Function of Integration              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Democratic Participation and Inclusion</li> <li>● Economic, Gender Participation, Entrepreneurship, Employment Engagement</li> <li>● Research and Social Innovation</li> </ul> |
| <b>COGNITIVE PLANE</b><br>Individual System<br>Function of Goal Attainment       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Learning (capacity development)</li> <li>● Education</li> </ul>  |
| <b>ORGANIC PLANE</b><br>Biological System<br>Function of Adaptation              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mental Health</li> <li>● Physical Health</li> <li>● Environment / Earth Health</li> </ul>  |

*Elaborated by author based on Systems-Functions Approach (Parsons. 1985)*

The planes – systems – functions interrelation is human rights-centered which means that youth (as any with other age or social group) should fully apply the basic rights (for health, education, labor, belief,

peace, etc.) inscribed in the legislation and provided by institutional settings (both global and local).

It should be highlighted, that key areas of biological, individual, social and cultural



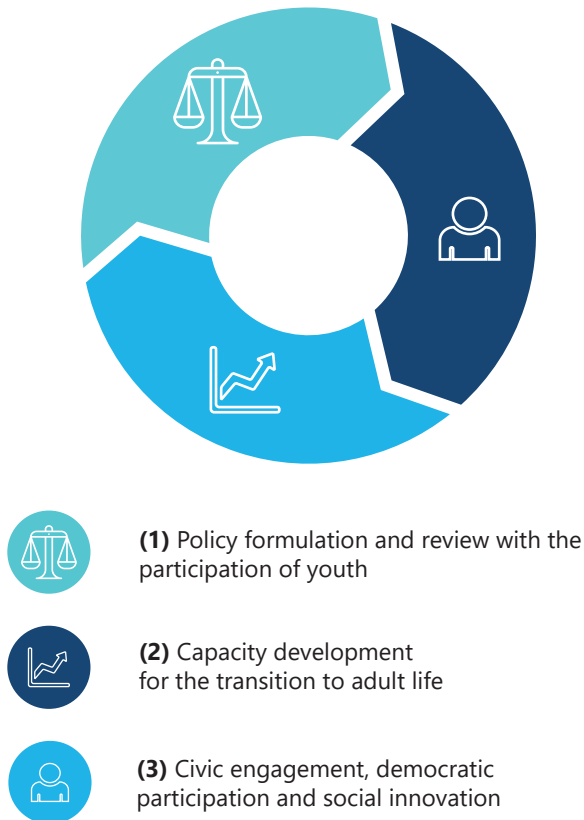
<sup>12</sup> Parsons, T. 1985. *On Institutions and Social Evolution*. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press.

systems form the so-called peacebuilding environment and infrastructure comprised of different units or themes, or drivers. These can enable the youth (as with any other social group) to be engaged and participate in systems' performance as equal members of societies and contribute to their balance and sustainability. The comprehensive systems approach is about making all systems operate in a balanced and harmonized, and therefore, a peaceful way.

The first approach on the changing perceptions and evolution of the concept of peace and peacebuilding is discussed in relation to the five pillars or “areas of critical importance” of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – people, partnerships, peace, prosperity and planet.<sup>13</sup> (see Table 1)

Also, the holistic systems approach was correlated further with operational strategies such as the UNESCO Operational Youth Strategy (2014–2021).<sup>14</sup> (Figure 2).

**Figure 2.**  
**UNESCO's Three Axes of Work on Youth**



*Elaborated by author based on Based on: UNESCO Operational Strategy. 2014*

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<sup>13</sup> UNGA. 2015. *Resolution 70/1 Transforming Our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. UN Publication, pp. 1-2. (Doc. A/RES/70/1.). SDGs'17 goals and 169 targets, adopted by UN General Assembly in 2015, have been clustered around these 5 pillars.

<sup>14</sup> UNESCO. 2014. *UNESCO Operational Strategy on Youth*. Paris, UNESCO, p. 11.

The comprehensive approach is presented in the following table (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Comprehensive Holistic Approach Towards Youth and Peacebuilding in Correlation with SDGs and the UNESCO Youth Strategy**

| Plane-System-Function  | Peacebuilding Environment, or Key Areas/Themes   | SDGs' Five Pillars, or Areas of Critical Importance | UNESCO Axes of Work (Operational Strategy on Youth)  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Institutional Plane</b><br>Cultural System<br>Function of Pattern Maintenance | Institutions;<br>Intercultural Dialogue;<br>Religion;<br>Preventing Violent Extremism  | Peace   | Policy formulation and review with the participation of youth;<br>Civic engagement, democratic participation and social innovation |
| <b>Relational Plane</b><br>Social System<br>Function of Integration              | Democratic Participation and Inclusion;<br>Economic, Gender Participation;<br>Entrepreneurship, Employment Engagement;<br>Research and Social Innovation | Partnership, Prosperity                             | Civic engagement, democratic participation and social innovation   |
| <b>Cognitive Plane</b><br>Individual System<br>Function of Goal Attainment       | Learning;<br>Education   | People  | Capacity development for the transition to adulthood   |
| <b>Organic Plane</b><br>Biological System<br>Function of Adaptation              | Mental Health;<br>Physical Health;<br>Environment/Earth Health   | Planet  | Capacity development for the transition to adulthood   |

*Based on: Parsons. 1985; UNGA. 2015; UNESCO. 2014*

The proposed correlations among SDGs and the UNESCO axes are in parallel and interlinked with respective key areas of the peacebuilding environment, and this may have an effect while proposing and implementing target interventions and policies.

The other key element of the methodology is that all planes and systems are interlinked, interrelated, interdependent and contribute towards each other's performance. This implies

that the slightest changes in one system may have an effect on the whole system; consideration of this interdependence is crucial when it comes to dealing with youth and peacebuilding issues in unstable systemic environments.

Thus, the views on youth and peacebuilding as seen from the systems' approach could be generally correlated with the network of key areas/themes and SDGs' five pillars as a whole, and not only with a particular variable.



## (2) Acknowledging the key role of knowledge, learning and education in knowledge-driven societies and in peacebuilding

One of basic propositions of this report is that knowledge and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) could be an instrumental driver in shaping the peacebuilding environment to mainstream, engage and integrate youth.

While analyzing thematic peacebuilding areas and identifying key challenges for youth, the area of education and learning deserve special attention. Today education and learning are directly linked with sustainable development, whereby individuals acting as change-makers “require the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower them to contribute”. Education is not only crucial for the achievement of sustainable development; it is its key enabler.<sup>15</sup>

Education and learning reflect and are associated with broad changing patterns of modern development taking place globally, and are related to the changing character of knowledge, and ways and principles to deal with ongoing changes. Among them, for example, is “the need for an integrated approach to education based on renewed ethical and moral foundations”, an inclusive education process that “does not simply reproduce inequalities”, and

supporting the vital role of teachers and other educators “for developing critical thinking and independent judgement rather than unreflective conformity.”<sup>16</sup>

The above-mentioned needs are directly linked to policy-related issues which have been identified as: “the gap between formal education and employment; of recognizing and validating learning in a world of increased mobility across borders, professional occupations and learning spaces; and of rethinking citizenship education in an increasingly globalized world, balancing respect for plurality with the universal values and concern for our common humanity.”<sup>17</sup>

One of the important features of ESD is the inclusion of “environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society”<sup>18</sup> principles in its orbit, that are correlated with all key themes/areas of peacebuilding and SDGs’ five pillars (see Figure 3). The same could be applied to the UNESCO-elaborated whole-institution approach that highlights governance policy and capacity-building, community partnership and relationships, curriculum teaching and learning, and facilities and school operations.<sup>19</sup>



<sup>15</sup> UNESCO. 2017. *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives*. Paris: UNESCO, p. 7.


<sup>16</sup> UNESCO. 2015. *Rethinking Education. Towards a Global Common Good?* Paris, UNESCO, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> UNESCO. 2015, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO. 2017, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> UNESCO. 2017, p. 53.

**Figure 3. Comprehensive Holistic Approach Towards Youth and Peacebuilding in Correlation with SDGs and ESD**

| Peacebuilding Environment, or Key Areas/Themes  | SDGs' Five Pillars, or Areas of Critical Importance  | Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Life-Long Learning (LLL)   |
|---|--|--|
| Institutions;<br>Intercultural Dialogue;<br>Religion;<br>Preventing Violent Extremism   | Peace  | Governance Policy and Capacity-Building:<br>Integrating ESD in policies, strategies, and programs                    |
| Democratic Participation and Inclusion;<br>Economic, Gender Participation;<br>Entrepreneurship,<br>Employment Engagement;<br>Research and Social Innovation | Partnership, Prosperity<br> | Community partnership and relationships: Integrating ESD in curricula and textbooks                                  |
| Learning;<br>Education  | People   | Curriculum teaching and learning: Integrating ESD in teacher education   |
| Mental Health;<br>Physical Health;<br>Environment/Earth Health  | Planet   | Facilities, school operations (learning environment):<br>Delivering ESD in the classroom and other learning settings |

*Elaborated by author based on: UNGA. 2015; UNESCO. 2017*

The comprehensive holistic approach presumes that education and learning should be discussed in relation to the entire spectrum of peacebuilding themes and SDGs. Target 4.7 of the SDGs explains this in the following way:



*By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.<sup>20</sup>*

Realization in practice of these key peacebuilding areas by the “sustainability citizen” could be done through developing

and mainstreaming key/transversal competencies for sustainability that “cannot be taught but have to be developed by the learners themselves. They are acquired during action, on the basis of experience and reflection.”<sup>21</sup>

This relates to another important concept of ESD (and peacebuilding) known as life-long learning (LLL), at the heart of which lies quality education, which focuses on “interactive, learner-centered teaching and learning settings” from pre-school to tertiary levels and involves non-formal and informal education.<sup>22</sup>

Quality education and LLL are directly related to SDGs and peacebuilding due to the changing nature of knowledge and development. In knowledge-driven societies, education and learning become



<sup>20</sup> UNGA. 2015.

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO. 2017. p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> UNESCO. 2017. p. 7.

a basic requirement for any nation and social groups to be sustainable. Such societies go far beyond the strict formal educational frameworks and also embrace professional, vocational training, competencies and skills development along with values and attitudes.

The educational and learning environment for youth presumes a wide spectrum of activities accompanying the transition from childhood to adulthood. In modern realities, it initially entails life-long

learning, acquiring skills, beginning work, developing a healthy lifestyle, creating family and participating as a citizen. In other words, the learning environment for the transition to adulthood is about learning all aspects of this transition. A significant factor in this transition is the acquisition and application of the relevant knowledge skills, attitudes, values and competencies.

Thus, quality education lies at the base of peacebuilding themes and links them coherently (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Matrix of Education for Sustainable Development and Life-Long Learning Towards SDGs and Peacebuilding Agendas**



*Based on UNGA. 2015*

In summary, education and life-long learning, as a matrix, are an inevitable part of all peacebuilding themes involving economic, social and democratic

participation, intercultural dialogue, prevention of violent extremism, gender, and entrepreneurship engagement.

### **(3) Increasing the role and capacity of youth to be the catalyst and accelerator/driver for global sustainable development**

In understanding the increasing role of youth as agents of change and one of accelerators for global sustainable development (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 1), methodologies have been applied based on the UN's "MAPS" (mainstreaming, acceleration,

policy support) approach. Of these three elements, particular attention is given to the acceleration method "as a way to ... identify catalytic policy and/or program areas or 'accelerators' that can trigger positive multiplier effects across the SDGs and targets, and find solutions to bottlenecks

that impede the optimal performance of the interventions that enable the identified accelerators.”<sup>23</sup>

In this study it is argued that the area of youth development could be the key accelerator to trigger multiplier effects across numerous SDGs and targets. The SDGs’ Accelerator and Bottleneck Assessment (ABA) mechanism is useful

to identify key challenges to youth and peacebuilding and, consequently, the drivers that would enable progress on acceleration.

Technically, this method is applied while targeting resources to remove “bottlenecks” to sustainable development and peacebuilding, and articulating recommendations for youth development.

## Report Structure: Thematic Focus Areas and Tasks

This report addresses the issues of youth and peacebuilding structured around the above-mentioned methodology and considering the interlinks among and between planes (with corresponding

systems and functions), and the main key areas/themes of peacebuilding that are linked to SDGs, the UNESCO Operational Strategy on Youth, ESD and LLL.

The **Introduction** provides the objectives and rationale, and elaborates the goals, methodology, tasks and structure of the report.



**Chapter 1** provides an overview and vision for youth and peacebuilding, their relation to the issues of peace, sustainable development and growth, while looking at the evolution of concepts of “peace and peacebuilding” and discussing in detail, the definition of the terms “youth” and “youth age” from various perspectives. Special attention is given to the definition of this term as used and officially employed in Central Asian countries.

*Chapter 1 answers the questions: Who are the youth, what is youth age, what is peacebuilding, and why are youth important?*



**Chapter 2** discusses the institutional frameworks and state policies on youth in Central Asia. The analysis of the evolution and existing policy environment is made on a country basis and touches upon the legal and institutional frameworks, and the trajectory of development of national policies on youth.

*Chapter 2 answers the questions: How does each country of Central Asia interact with their young population and what are the policies towards the youth?*



**Chapter 3** highlights key issues pertaining to youth and challenges for peacebuilding in Central Asia, based on the interrelated elements of the comprehensive holistic approach elaborated in the methodology.

The issues addressed are structured around the following themes of peacebuilding: (1) an education and learning environment that deals with formal education, vocational training and skills development; (2) economic and social participation (employment engagement/young people not in education, employment and training (NEET)), migration, inclusion, gender, entrepreneurship); and (3) civic engagement (religion, preventing violent extremism, intercultural dialogue).

*Chapter 3 answers the question: What are the main challenges for peacebuilding that the young people of Central Asia face today?*

As a result of the analysis, **Recommendations for Actions** are elaborated based on the SDGs’ Accelerator and Bottleneck Assessment (ABA) mechanism.



<sup>23</sup> UNDP. 2017. *SDG Accelerator and Bottleneck Assessment*. New York: UNDP, p. 6.

*The recommendations address the following question: What are the areas/drivers for improving the youth-related environments required for sustainable development and peacebuilding in Central Asian countries?*

Therefore, to enhance the focus and to optimize the value of the research, the analysis specifically identifies the following:

to systematize, review, analyze and synthesize available legislation and literature produced by diverse sources related to the challenges of peacebuilding for the youth of Central Asia, at national, regional and international levels;

to provide analysis of the state of policy uptake by governments;

to identify gaps and potential areas for UNESCO to strengthen the contribution of evidence generated by research in the design, implementation and evaluation of policy-making relevant to the challenges of peacebuilding for the youth of Central Asia.

## **Types of Research Utilized in this Report**

The scope of the work is on the research conducted both in and outside the above-mentioned countries and the region, to provide a better understanding of the relevant local and global contributing factors. Along with the scholarly and applied policy research literature, this report analyzes the existing legal and policy frameworks developed by governments of the countries of the region including the national reports and surveys on youth, by UN agencies including the UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF and IOM, other major international organizations and stakeholders (OECD, WHO, World Bank, EU, ADB), analytical centers and foundations (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, etc.). Among the other primary sources are the statistical data provided by the statistics committees of the studied countries. Another important component of the analysis is the available documentation

of local practices and grassroots initiatives implemented by key stakeholders in the field.

The report embraces general global trends and local contexts and practices to better understand the various issues relating to youth and their challenges for peacebuilding. To identify major areas of progress and success, and potential risks and challenges, the report highlights concepts and definitions of the following terms “peacebuilding”, “youth” and “youth age”, and explores institutional frameworks, policymaking, practices and initiatives.

The review’s findings provide the basic analytical background to guide and foster further discussions, elaboration, implementation and development of programming and policymaking relating to youth in Central Asian countries.

# CHAPTER 1. OVERVIEW AND VISION FOR YOUTH AND PEACEBUILDING

## Why Youth? Youth and Peace, Sustainable Development and Growth

### Definitions of Youth used by the UN and Other Organizations

There are several definitions for the terms “youth” and “youth age”, which vary between different societies and have changed continuously in response to fluctuating political, economic and socio-cultural circumstances.<sup>24</sup>

The UN’s initial definition of “youth” was given in UNGA Resolutions in 1981 and 1985 that defined young people as “a broad category comprising various subgroups, rather than a single demographic entity”, and highlighted special youth subgroups “such as young people with disabilities, rural and urban youth and young women”, for whom it was necessary to implement measures to address their specific needs.<sup>25</sup>

From a statistical point of view, the UN General Assembly Resolution 50/81 (1995)

*There exist variations of the term youth age even within the UN official documents and UN agencies:*

*15-24, 18-29, 10-24 years old*

defined the world youth population as the age group of 15–24.<sup>26</sup> The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) also noted “the variations of definition of the term that may exist on national and international levels.” This resolution defines youth “as persons of the age of 18–29 years old.”<sup>27</sup>

However, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) uses the age range of 10–24 years.<sup>28</sup> The range of definitions used by various organizations is illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2. UN Entities, Instruments and Regional Organizations on the Definition of Youth Age**

| ENTITY/INSTRUMENT/<br>ORGANIZATION             | AGE (YEARS)   | REFERENCE                  |
|--|---|----------------------------|
| UN Secretariat/UNESCO/ILO                      | <b>Youth:</b> 15-24   | UN Instruments, Statistics |
| UN Habitat (Youth Fund)                        | <b>Youth:</b> 15-32   | Agenda 21                  |
| UNICEF/WHO/UNFPA                               | <b>Adolescent:</b> 10-19,<br><b>Young People:</b> 10-24,<br><b>Youth:</b> 15-24 | UNFPA                      |
| UNICEF / The Convention on Rights of the Child | <b>Child until 18</b>   | UNICEF                     |
| The African Youth Charter                      | <b>Youth:</b> 15-35   | African Union, 2006        |

Source: UNDESA. (n.d.) *Definition of Youth*



<sup>24</sup> UNGA. 1995. *United Nations General Assembly Resolution 50/81 (1995) on World Program of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (Doc.A/RES/50/81)*, p.7.

<sup>25</sup> UNGA. 1995. p.8.

<sup>26</sup> UNGA. 1995. p.7.

<sup>27</sup> UN Security Council. 2015. *Resolution 2250 (2015)*. UN Publications, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> UNFPA. 2015a. *Investing in Young People in Eastern Europe and Central Asia*, pp. 1-2.

Another aspect of the definition is the distinction between adolescence and youth. The United Nations Population Fund acknowledges that there are no universally accepted definitions of adolescence and youth, but distinguishes them as follows: adolescence is “to include persons aged 10-19 years and youth are those aged 15-24 years for statistical purposes without prejudice to other definitions by member states. Together, adolescents and youth are referred to as young people, encompassing the ages of 10-24 years.”<sup>29</sup>

The UN defines “youth” as a major period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood independence, when a person leaves compulsory education and find their first job.<sup>30</sup> A similar definition of the term is used by the OECD which extends the upper age bracket to 29 years (i.e., 15/16-29 years) because of the need to include the growing proportion of individuals who remain in education for longer and only enter the labor market in their late 20s.<sup>31</sup>

The Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security gives a methodological definition based on the need to apply a participatory and inclusive

approach (since currently “young people” as a social group are often defined more by “who they are not” than by who they are), and also acknowledges the absence of consensus on an age-based definitions of “youth”, and the wide variety of definitions used in different organizations and regions.<sup>32</sup>

The UNESCO focus on youth, particularly its Operational Strategy on Youth (2014), embraces a comprehensive vision and recognizes youth “as agents of change, social transformation, peace and sustainable development.”<sup>33</sup>

Without defining a particular “youth age” bracket, UNESCO uses a holistic approach in defining the term by assigning “four major interconnected life transitions: continuing to learn; starting to work; exercising citizenship; and developing a healthy lifestyle.”<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, the UNESCO definition of the term “youth” reflects the specificity of life transitions in societies and cultures without being strictly attached to age group parameters. This approach is put at the core of the programming and actions or axes of work on youth as developed by UNESCO in its Operational Strategy on Youth (2014–2021) (see Figure 2).



*UNESCO recognizes youth “as agents of change, social transformations, peace and sustainable development”*

*Source: UNESCO Operational Strategy. 2014, p. 8.*

## Youth and Sustainable Development and Growth

The theme of youth is on the agenda of global development due to various reasons, the key one being the demographic situation and future projections up to the year 2030 and beyond. According to UN data, there are dramatic changes in youth growth and, subsequently, it plays an ever-increasing role in social, economic and political development, both regionally and globally.

In 1995, 15- to 24-year-olds were estimated to comprise 1.03 billion people or 18% of total world population,<sup>35</sup> In early 2012, people under the age of 30 accounted for 50.5% of the world’s seven billion people.<sup>36</sup> In 2015, it was estimated that 1.2 billion people were aged between 15 and 24, or 16% of the global population. By 2030, the world will be home to 1.3 billion young people.<sup>37</sup>



<sup>29</sup> UNFPA. (n.d.) *Adolescent and Youth Demographics: A Brief Overview*. p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> UNDESA. (n.d.) Definition of Youth. *Fact Sheet prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)*.

<sup>31</sup> Carcillo, Fernández et al. 2015. Carcillo, S., Fernández, R., et al. *NEET Youth in the Aftermath of the Crisis: Challenges and Policies*. Paris, OECD Publishing, p.7

<sup>32</sup> UNFPA, PBSO. 2018. *The Missing Peace. Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, 2018, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> UNESCO. 2014. *Operational Strategy on Youth, 2014-2021*. Paris, UNESCO, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> UNESCO. 2014. p. 11

<sup>35</sup> UNGA. 1995. Resolution on *World Program of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond*. UN Publication, p.7. (Doc.A/RES/50/81.)

<sup>36</sup> UNESCO. 2013. *Statistics on Youth*.

<sup>37</sup> UNFPA, PBSO. 2018. p.12.

The data also shows that most of the world's youth population lives in developing countries. In 1995, the UNGA resolution stated that “young people in industrialized countries comprise a relatively smaller proportion of the total population because of generally lower birth rates and longer life expectancy.” In 1995, youth comprised 84% and this figure is projected to increase to 89% by 2025.<sup>38</sup>

These figures speak about the importance of the youth for development in various parts of the globe, particularly in developing countries which constitute 90% of the global youth population. In other words, youth and development are interrelated and interdependent issues.

Central Asian states are also on the list of developing countries, with a high percentage of youth in the populations. More detailed general characteristics of the youth population in Central Asia are provided below in this chapter. As of beginning 2020, the total population of the four countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) was 68.46 million, of which youth comprised 16.55 million or 24,1%.<sup>39</sup> In Central Asia, there is an increasing demographic

share of the youth in the general population, meaning that the countries of the region are “young.” This highlights the urgency required for elaborating and implementing special policies on youth development.

In Central Asia, human capital:

*is the second most abundant resource of the sub-region (i.e., North and Central Asia- L.Y.) and the workforce is still growing, with a median age of around 33 years, nearly 10 years younger than the median age for developed countries. Thus, there is an immediate need for the sub-region to focus on the social development linkages and beneficial spillovers inherent in the attainment of the SDGs, with investments in social infrastructure, education, and health serving as corollary in investments in hard infrastructure, such as renewable energy grids, over the medium to long-term.*<sup>40</sup>

The World Bank's Human Capital Index 2020<sup>41</sup> (that ranges between 0 and 1) shows the decline of the HCI in 2020 in 4 countries of the region due to pandemic as compared to the year 2018 and 2010, with except of Kyrgyzstan that kept almost the same level, with slight increase (Table 3):

**Table 3. Human Capital Index in Central Asian Countries in 2010, 2018, 2020**

| COUNTRY         | 2010 | 2018 | 2020 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|
| Kazakhstan      | 0.59 | 0.78 | 0.63 |
| Kyrgyz Republic | -    | 0.59 | 0.60 |
| Tajikistan      | -    | 0.54 | 0.50 |
| Uzbekistan      | -    | -    | 0.62 |

*Based on: World Bank. 2021. The Human Capital Index 2020 Update: Human Capital in the Time of COVID-19. p. 41, 198, 200-201.*

As a major driving force of economic performance and as a huge contributor towards changing social structuring, undoubtedly, the youth demographic is characterized by special dimensions.

There should also be consideration of the evolving contexts and changing paradigm shifts in modern development triggered by globalization and digital revolution and all consequences associated with



<sup>38</sup> UNGA. 1995, p.7.

<sup>39</sup> The detailed data on this see below in this chapter.

<sup>40</sup> ESCAP. 2017. *Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in North and Central Asia*. UN Publication, pp. 15-16. (Doc.ST/ESCAP/2780).

<sup>41</sup> World Bank. 2021. *The Human Capital Index 2020 Update: Human Capital in the Time of COVID-19*. Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank. pp. 41, 198, 200-201



these processes. These consequences include mobility, migration, intercultural communication, peace, human rights, new concepts of education, life-long learning, vocational and professional training, artificial intelligence and the changing nature of labor, digital communities and networking. The cumulative effect of this paradigm shift is that in a new global structure, the youth will play an ever-increasing role and will be “both a major human resource for development

and key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation.”<sup>42</sup>

The practical application of demographic changes compatible with the changing environments of modern development can also be seen in the “demographic dividend” phenomenon (see Box 1), which could become an important game-changer in Central Asia and other developing regions of the world.

### Box 1. Demographic Dividend

“The demographic dividend is the potential economic growth that can result from changes in a population’s age structure. This primarily occurs when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age proportion of the population (14 and younger or 65 and older).

The potential can be massive if supportive economic policies are implemented and substantial and strategic investments are made in human capital, particularly of young people. The demographic dividend may not be fully realized without a solid economic and policy framework to back it up.”

Source: UNFPA. 2015. *Investing in Young People in Eastern Europe and Central Asia*, p. 3.

The demographic dividend factor can have a cumulative effect if it is harnessed properly, that is, if there are investments in young people’s development or in the human capital of the countries. From an economic perspective, the advantages of investing in human capital could be best represented as the benefits from investing in education.

Interlinks between the youth and development were mostly investigated during the 2007–2010 economic crisis, which hit youth in general, and disadvantage youth in particular.

Young people not in education, employment and training (NEET) became one of the most vulnerable social groups. This has far reaching and long-ranging consequences for the social and economic performance of nations, especially as youth employment is important for social cohesion.

The findings of the OECD analysis on youth in the NEET category in 2015 and 2016 show the correlation, from a macro-



“Investments in young people’s human capital through education can lead to per capita GDP growth of up to 1.7% per year”.

UNFPA. 2015. *Investing in Young People in Eastern Europe and Central Asia*, p. 3.

economic perspective, between the persistently high rates of unemployment or inactivity and a substantial loss of economic opportunity and income. Even short spells of inactivity and unemployment at the outset of a career can have lasting effects for young people and make them more prone to unemployment later in their careers.<sup>43</sup>

The 2015 situation in OECD countries where about 40 million young people or 15% of the youth population were NEET, of which more than two-thirds were not actively looking for work, is representative of this situation (see Box 2).



<sup>42</sup> UNGA. 1995, p.7.

<sup>43</sup> OECD. 2016. *Society at a Glance 2016: OECD Social Indicators*, Paris, OECD Publishing, pp. 15-16.

## Box 2. NEET Youth in OECD Countries

“The total gross income that could have been generated by NEETs in 2014 is estimated to have been between USD 360-605 billion, or 0.9-1.5% of OECD-wide GDP. Job and income uncertainty can keep young people from reaching other traditional markers of adulthood, leaving them disenchanting and discouraged. It can also have serious long-term effects on health, fertility and crime, and eventually endanger social cohesion. Helping young people transition into further education or employment is therefore at the top of the policy agenda in the OECD as evidenced by the G20 target of reducing the number of youths who are low-skilled, NEET or working in the informal sector by 15% by 2025.”

Source: OECD. 2016. *Society at a Glance 2016: OECD Social Indicators*, Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016, p. 1.

The OECD Report on NEET Youth (2015) specifies the ways in which governments can reduce NEET rates through targeted interventions, particularly special education programs and mentoring, innovative school programs, after-school support, apprenticeship schemes and second-chance programs.<sup>44</sup>

These interventions could be a part of the application of ESD and LLL aimed at developing and enhancing various skills and competencies in cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral domains.<sup>45</sup>

Investments targeted primarily at the education field could have repercussions in other areas and could also be accompanied by the programs aimed at improving

personality and individual traits of young people. The major conclusion that could be encouraged here is the importance of undertaking and implementing an integrated approach towards investing in youth, that is, investments made in both human capital development, and in personalities and individualities as equal members of social groups.

The issues pertaining to youth could essentially be referred to the whole spectrum of peacebuilding thematic areas (ranging from health, quality of life, education, employment and growth, social cohesion to equality, peace and partnership), which are correlated with SDGs and ESD.

## Youth and Peace and Peacebuilding

There is an intrinsic relationship between youth and development. However, the interlinks between youth, development and peace (and peacebuilding) are equally important. The Progress Study Report (2018) on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) following UNSC Resolution 2250 put special emphasis on issues of peace and security, development and human rights from an intersectional relationship perspective that “offers a powerful transversal vehicle for integrated policy approaches across these pillars of the multilateral system.”<sup>46</sup>



“... a major thrust of young people’s input into the Progress Study was the assertion that YPS [youth, peace and security] issues apply across the full spectrum of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, participants in the Asia and Pacific consultation stressed that, when discussing peace and security, they meant eradicating social and economic inequalities, providing public services for all social groups, maintaining national health-care and social services, and achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.”

Source: UNFPA, PBSO. 2018. *The Missing Peace. Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, p. 14.



<sup>44</sup> Carcillo, Fernández, et al. 2015. Carcillo, S., Fernández, R., et al. *NEET Youth in the Aftermath of the Crisis: Challenges and Policies*. Paris, OECD Publishing, p. 4, 12

<sup>45</sup> UNESCO. 2017. p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> UNFPA, PBSO. 2018. p. 14.

The Progress Study Report is a significant contribution towards methodological understanding of the issues of youth and peace from holistic and inclusive perspectives.

The importance of the Progress Study Report is that it emphasizes the fact that today's seemingly distorted issues of peace and development are no longer isolated from each other. They should be discussed and resolved in an integrated and comprehensive way to answer the challenges facing youth. Therefore, Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals "offers a powerful tool for holistic and integrated programming approaches in YPS" where "YPS issues apply across the full spectrum of the Sustainable Development Goals."<sup>47</sup>

Peace and dialogue can be viewed from comprehensive inclusive perspectives that embrace all aspects and dimensions of life – inter-generational, social, economic, political, ethnic, religious, civic, ideological, cultural, and natural. As highlighted already in the present report, youth-related issues are directly linked with the SDGs agenda. As a result, today peace, youth and

development are important interdependent key elements of the development and peace agenda, both globally and in developing countries, particularly in Central Asia.

Throughout the turbulent 1990s, the Central Asian region underwent immense structural, social, economic and ideological shifts. As a result, societies experienced deep polarization, stagnation and development imbalances in all fields. This presented challenges for nation-building and ideological meaning, among clashes of identities. This situation was later aggravated by the spread of radical ideologies of various origins, labor and migration flows and broader globalized and geopolitical contexts.

As a result, the challenges of social cohesion and solidarity became inevitably linked to the issues of peace and development, both within societies and in the region. It should be stressed that for Central Asia, the peace and peacebuilding agenda is the development agenda, and vice versa, as neither is possible without the other, and these in turn are intrinsically linked with youth-related issues.

## Peace and Peacebuilding: The Changing Concept

Peace and peace-related activities (peace construction, peace keeping, peace maintenance, peacebuilding, mediation, reconciliation, culture of prevention, culture of peace, etc.) are based on universal yet very concrete concepts and terms underlie the guiding principles of United Nations organizations.

However, as a universal concept, peace has been perceived variously by intellectuals and practitioners. The expanded UN peace agenda (see Box 3) attempts to holistically integrate the philosophical theories with UN policies and activities.



*"The term peacebuilding entered the international vocabulary in 1992 through the UN Agenda for Peace. Peacebuilding attempts to encourage the development of the conditions, attitudes and behaviour that foster and sustain social and economic development that is peaceful, stable and prosperous. To this end, it uses a wide range of policy instruments."*

Source: Smith, 2004. Smith D. Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: Getting Their Act Together. Overview report of the Joint Utstein Study of Peacebuilding. Oslo: Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, p. 10.



<sup>47</sup> UNFPA, PBSO. 2018. p. 14.

### Box 3. The Expanded UN Peace Agenda

According to UNESCO research on peace:

“The expanded UN peace agenda has mainstreamed a range of societal concerns in peace discourses that were previously relegated to the sidelines. Today, peace is not only about war and large-scale violence, but also about social justice, poverty alleviation, women’s empowerment, and harnessing the potential of young people and children’s welfare.

It also brings to the fore environmental, health and cultural concerns, including heritage, music, theatre and sports. The emerging concept of “sustaining peace” linked organically with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offers a holistic approach towards achieving a culture of prevention.”

Source: UNESCO. 2018. *Long Walk of Peace. Towards a Culture of Prevention*. Paris: UNESCO, p. 23.

Issues of peace can no longer be treated separately from development. Hence, achieving positive outcomes from a holistic approach lies in the transformative approach to the challenges and solutions.

Therefore, if the “demographic dividend” phenomenon is applied appropriately, it could produce positive results pertaining to both development (human capital) and peace.

#### Shift from demographic dividend to peace dividend

“If the right investments in youth are made, and their peacebuilding work is recognized and nurtured, societies may reap a peace dividend. Building and sustaining peace through the transformative potential of young people demands a seismic shift and bold reorientation from governments and the multilateral system, for which Security Council resolution 2250 planted the seeds.”

Source: UNFPA, PBSO. 2018, p. xiii.

Such a transformative approach has been described as a shift “from a demographic dividend to a peace dividend.”<sup>48</sup>

### Definitions of “Youth” and “Youth Age” in Central Asia

The definition of “youth” in the Central Asian region also varies based on the existing legal and normative frameworks developed by each country.

The combined population of the four Central Asian states in 2020 was 68.46

million people, of which youth comprised 16.55 million people or 24.1%. The highest youth rates are in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, followed by Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Youth Population in Central Asia (as of beginning of 2020)**

| COUNTRY, YOUTH AGE RANGE | TOTAL POPULATION (IN MILLIONS) | YOUTH POPULATION (IN MILLIONS) | YOUTH PERCENTAGE |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Kazakhstan (14-29)       | 18.63                          | 3.76                           | 20.2%            |
| Kyrgyzstan (14-28)       | 6.52                           | 1.59                           | 24.5%            |
| Tajikistan* (14-30)      | 9.31                           | 2.54                           | 27.2%            |
| Uzbekistan* (14-30)      | 34.00                          | 8.66                           | 25.4%            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>             | <b>68.46</b>                   | <b>16.55</b>                   | <b>24.1%</b>     |

Based on: country-related data (see below)

\* The data for Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is given for the youth age 15-29, based on the official governmental data.

The comprehensive fresh data on demography, social development of the youth will be available following the national censuses projected for the autumn 2021 in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan,

Tajikistan (postponed from 2020 due to the pandemic) and the first national census (since 1991) to take place in the independent Uzbekistan in 2023.



<sup>48</sup> UNFPA, PBSO. 2018. p. xiii.

## KAZAKHSTAN

The Law on the State Youth Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan 2015<sup>49</sup> defines “youth” (young people) as citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan from 14 to 29 years of age. The 2009 Census also uses this age group.<sup>50</sup>

According to the Law, a “young family” is a family in which both spouses

have not reached the age of 29 years, or an incomplete family in which the child/children are raised by one of the parents who have not reached the age of 29 years. The specific term “young specialist” is provided, mainly in order to explain specific provisions for employment and educational services as stipulated by the Law.<sup>51</sup>

**Table 5. Youth of Kazakhstan (in the years 1999, 2009, 2020)**

| Year              | TOTAL POPULATION<br>(IN MILLIONS, PEOPLE) | YOUTH POPULATION<br>(IN MILLIONS, PEOPLE) | YOUTH AS<br>PERCENTAGE OF<br>POPULATION |
|-------------------|---|---|---|
| 1999 Census       | 14.95                                     | 3.79                                      | 25.7%                                   |
| 2009 Census       | 16.01                                     | 4.51                                      | 28.1%                                   |
| Beginning of 2020 | 18.63                                     | 3.76                                      | 20.2%                                   |

*Based on: (1) Republic of Kazakhstan. Census. 2011. Itogi Natsional'noy perepisi naseleniya Respubliki Kazakhstan 2009 goda [Results of the 2009 National Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan]. Astana: Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics, p. 16; (2) Republic of Kazakhstan. 2010. Youth of Kazakhstan. Results of National Census 2009 in the Republic of Kazakhstan. (ed. Smailov, A.) Astana, Agency of Statistics, RK, p. 4; (3) Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2020. National Report "Youth of Kazakhstan-2020". Nur-Sultan, Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'.*

The results of the 1999 census showed that the young population aged 14-29 years comprised 3.79 million people or 25.7% of the total population of 14.95 million people. The 2009 census showed a population of 16.01 million,<sup>52</sup> including 4.51 million young people, or 28.1%.<sup>53</sup> The number of young people aged 14-29 years at the beginning of 2020 was 3.76 million or 20.4% of the total population of the country, what is less compared to the 2009.<sup>54</sup> (see Table 5).

The National Report on the Youth of Kazakhstan 2020, prepared annually since 2013, explains that:

“the decrease in the number of young people of Kazakhstan is a consequence of the ‘demographic hole of the 90s’. For

the last 10 years the number of the youth in the country has declined for 16,3% (-735 389 people). ... The proportion of young people in the country is expected to increase significantly by the mid-2020s - as a result of a stable upward trend birth rate since the early 2000s. It is expected that the peak of the number of youth will reach by 2030.”<sup>55</sup>

Another specific characteristic of the Kazakhstan’s youth is the prevalence of urban young people over rural, with an increase of urban young population from 54.9% in 2014 to 56 % at the beginning of 2020. However, the urban-rural youth proportion in Kazakhstan has been kept almost on the same level for the last 10 years.<sup>56</sup>



<sup>49</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. 2015. The Law 'On the State Youth Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan'.

<sup>50</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. 2010. *Youth of Kazakhstan. Results of National Census 2009 in the Republic of Kazakhstan.*

(ed. Smailov, A.) Astana, Agency of Statistics, RK.

<sup>51</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. 2010, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. 2010, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2020. *National Report "Youth of Kazakhstan-2020"*. Nur-Sultan, Scientific-Research Center 'Youth', p. 149.

<sup>55</sup> Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2020, p. 149.

<sup>56</sup> Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2020, p. 151.

Accordingly, the rural population of the country reached 45.1% in 2014 and 43.5% in 2018, and 44% in 2020 (see Table 6).<sup>57</sup> The continuous slight growth of the urban

youth could indicate the migration of the youth to the cities in search of better opportunities.

**Table 6. Urban–Rural Youth Distribution in Kazakhstan**

|             | 2014 (POPULATION – MILLIONS) (% OF TOTAL) | 2018 (POPULATION – MILLIONS) (% OF TOTAL) | 2020 (% OF TOTAL) |
|-------------|---|---|-------------------|
| Urban Youth | 2,36<br>54,9%                             | 2,20<br>56,5%                             | 56%               |
| Rural Youth | 1,93<br>45,1%                             | 1,70<br>43,5%                             | 44%               |

Based on: Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2018; Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2020.

## KYRGYZSTAN

The existing legislation in Kyrgyzstan defines the youth as the citizens aged 14 to 28 years. However, this definition of youth is largely conditional.

Until 2009, Kyrgyzstan applied a somewhat augmented post-Soviet legal norm,<sup>58</sup> that defined the youth as the people aged 14 to 35. This was enshrined in several pieces of legislation such as the Concept of Development of the State Youth Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic to 2010 of April 14, 2006, No. 173. However, in 2009 the legislative definition of youth in Kyrgyzstan was changed significantly under the Law on the Foundations of the State Youth Policy which defines youth as “the citizens ... aged 14 to 28.”<sup>59</sup> This change has significantly reduced the proportion of young people in the official demographics of the society,<sup>60</sup> in fact it has removed a large proportion of young people from the area of responsibility

of the state in that sphere of internal policy.

This norm is still valid in the Kyrgyz Republic. At the same time, a number of regulations still utilize the norm that actually sets the upper age limit for young people at 35 years. Thus, the Law on the Election of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and Deputies of the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic<sup>61</sup> clearly states that young people up to 35 years have quotas in the country’s parliament.<sup>62</sup> The same norm is expressed in the Decree on the Establishment of the Award of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic for Young Scientists<sup>63</sup> and a range of other legislation. The current edition of the Law on the Foundations of the State Youth Policy clearly states that “a young specialist is a citizen who has not attained 28 years of age and whose work experience in the specialty does not exceed 3 years.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2018. *National Report on Youth of Kazakhstan 2018*. Kaliyev T.B, Kaidarova A.S. et al. (eds). Astana, Scientific-Research Center 'Youth', p. 289.; Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2020, p. 151.

<sup>58</sup> In the late Soviet legislation, the upper age limit for youth was 30 years.

<sup>59</sup> Kyrgyz Republic. 2009. *Zakon Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki "Ob osnovah gosudarstvennoi molodezhnoi politiki"* [The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic 'On the Foundations of the State Youth Policy'. July 31, 2009. No. 256, Section 1, Art.2.

<sup>60</sup> Matkarimov. 2010. Matkarimov N.T. *Sotsializatsiya uchashcheyasya molodezhi v Respublike Kyrgyzstan* [Socialization of students in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan]. Synopsis of the Candidate thesis in Sociology. St. Petersburg, 2010, p. 9

<sup>61</sup> Kyrgyz Republic. 2011. *Zakon Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki "O vyborah Prezidenta Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki i deputatov Zhogorku Kenesha"* [The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic 'On the Election of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and Deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic']. July 02, 2011. No. 68, Art. 60, para. 3

<sup>62</sup> Legal Prosperity Foundation. 2016. *Dostup molodezhi Kyrgyzstana k politicheskomu uchastiyu: vozmozhnosti i ogranicheniya. Otchet po rezul'tatam issledovaniya 2016 goda* [Access of young people of Kyrgyzstan to political participation: opportunities and limitations. Report on the results of the study in 2016]. Bishkek, Blitz, p.8.

<sup>63</sup> Kyrgyz Republic. 2004. *Ukaz Prezidenta Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki "Ob uchrezhdenii premii Prezidenta Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki dlya molodykh uchenykh"* [The Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic 'On the Establishment of the Award of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic for Young Scientists']. November 22, 2004. 4 UP, No. 409, Annex 1.

<sup>64</sup> Kyrgyz Republic. 2009. *Zakon Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki "Ob osnovah gosudarstvennoi molodezhnoi politiki"* [The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic 'On the Foundations of the State Youth Policy'. July 31, 2009. No. 256, Section 1, Art.2.

Therefore, the definition of “youth” in the constitutional legal framework of the Kyrgyz Republic has still not been finalized. This fact highlights the prevailing demographic realities in Kyrgyzstan in terms of global context. The lack of a single criterion enshrined in overall regulatory documents causes an ambiguous interpretation of the age criteria of young people and their role and place in the modern society of Kyrgyzstan.

Unlike some other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, after

1991 Kyrgyzstan did not experience a sharp decline in fertility, gradual depopulation and aging of the nation. In fact, the population of Kyrgyzstan has consistently grown despite ongoing emigration, and fertility has grown since the 2000s.

As of the beginning of 2020, the country’s population had reached 6.52 million people; out of which 1.59 million people (or 24.5% of the total population) were young people aged 14 to 28 according to the current definition of “youth”.<sup>65</sup> (see Table 7)

**Table 7. Youth in Kyrgyzstan (aged 14-28, as of beginning of 2020)**

| TOTAL POPULATION (PEOPLE) | YOUTH POPULATION (PEOPLE) | YOUTH POPULATION (PERCENTAGE) |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 6,523,529                 | 1,597,134                 | 24.5%                         |

*Based on: Demographic Yearbook of Kyrgyz Republic. 2020.*

Thus, approximately one-quarter of the citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic fall under the current legislative definition of the category of youth. This imposes certain obligations on the state in relation

to meeting the needs and requests of this category of the population, and these obligations are enshrined in the relevant legislative documents.

## TAJIKISTAN

The concept of “youth”, as well as other concepts related to youth development (“youth public association”, “young family”, “social institution for youth”, etc.) are defined in the Republic of Tajikistan by the Law on Youth and State Youth Policy, adopted in 2004. Article 1 of the Law identifies “youth” as a socio-demographic group of people aged 14-30 years.<sup>66</sup> However, according to Article 27 of the Law relating to youth public associations and creative youth, the age limit is

increased by 5 years. Similarly, in the same article of the Law, the term ‘young family’ refers to a family in which the spouse, or one of them, has not reached the age of thirty, and to parents under the age of 30 who have young children.<sup>67</sup>

It is worth noting that in Tajikistan, the concepts of “youth public association”, “social institution (service) for youth”, and “infrastructure units of youth” are specifically enshrined in the Law and of particular significance (see Chapter 3).



<sup>65</sup> Demographic Yearbook of Kyrgyz Republic. 2020. *Demographicheskii ezhegodnik Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki: 2015-2019. Tablitsa 1.11. Chislennost' postoyannogo naseleniia Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki po polu i vozrastnym gruppam.* [Demographic Yearbook of Kyrgyz Republic: 2015-2019. Table 1.11. Resident population of the Kyrgyz Republic by sex and age groups]. Bishkek: National Statistic Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic.

<sup>66</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2004. *Zakon o molodezhi i gosudarstvennoi molodezhnoi politike* [The Law on Youth and State Youth Policy]. July 15, 2004. No. 52.

<sup>67</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2004.

The total population of Tajikistan was 9.3 million people as of 1 January 2020.<sup>68</sup> Youth in Tajikistan today are a crucial influence on the development of society. As mentioned earlier, the official age range for youth is 14 to 30 years. However, the Statistical Agency under the President of

the Republic of Tajikistan only provides the official data on the youth population based on the range of 15 to 29 years. Therefore, as of 1 January 2020, in Tajikistan there were officially 2.54 million young people aged 15 to 29 (see Table 8).

**Table 8. Youth Age Subgroup Populations in Tajikistan (as of 1 January 2020)**

| Age Range  | 15-19 age | 20-24 age | 25-29 age | 15-29 age |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Population | 839,000   | 855,100   | 847,300   | 2,541,400 |

Based on: Republic of Tajikistan. 2020. p. 36.

**Table 9. Youth Population in Tajikistan, aged 15 to 29 (as of 1 January 2020)**

| Total population | Youth population | Youth population (%) |
|------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| 9,313,800        | 2,541,400        | 27.28%               |

Based on: Republic of Tajikistan. 2020.

From a gender perspective, 50.8% of the total population of Tajikistan were males and 49.2% females.<sup>69</sup> This proportion has remained almost unchanged for more than 10 years.

## UZBEKISTAN

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Law on State Youth Policy outlines that “young people” (young citizens) are persons aged from 14 to 30 years.<sup>70</sup>

**Table 10. Youth in Uzbekistan aged 15 to 29 years (as of beginning of 2020)**

| Total Population (people) | Youth Population (people) | Youth Population (percentage) |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 34 002 410                | 8 662 220                 | 25.47%                        |

Based on: Statistics. Republic of Uzbekistan. 2020. *Chislenost' molodezhi na nachalo 2020 g. Dannyye Gosudarstvennogo komiteta Respubliki Uzbekistan po statistike* [The number of youth at the beginning of 2020. Data of the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics]; Population of Uzbekistan. 2020



<sup>68</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2020. *Naselenie Respubliki Tadjikistan po sostoyaniyu na 1 yanvarya 2020 goda* [Population of the Republic of Tajikistan as of 1 January 2020]. Dushanbe, Statistics Agency at the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2020, p. 36, 38.

<sup>70</sup> Republic of Uzbekistan. 2017b. *Zakon Respubliki Uzbekistan "O gosudarstvennoi molodezhnoi politike"* [Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan 'On State Youth Policy'].



According to the data from the State Committee on Statistics, as of beginning 2020, the total population of Uzbekistan was 34.0 million people<sup>71</sup>, with 8.6 million being young people (aged 15 to 29) or 25.4%. Of these, there were 4.4 million men and 4.2 million women.<sup>72</sup> As in case of Tajikistan, the official age range for youth in Uzbekistan is 14 to 30 years, whereas

the statistics are given for the 15-29 years range.

The demographic projections by the UN World Population Prospects show that by 2030, the population of Uzbekistan could reach 36.71 million by 2030.<sup>73</sup>

The gender structure of the population of Uzbekistan as of beginning 2020, is shown in Table 11.

**Table 11. Gender Structure of the Youth of Uzbekistan (as of beginning 2020)**

|                       |                   |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Total (people)</b> | <b>34 002 410</b> |
| Youth Men (people)    | 4 426 335         |
| Youth Women (people)  | 4 235 885         |

Source: Population of Uzbekistan. 2020; Statistics. Republic of Uzbekistan. 2020.

The structure of the population is being essentially transformed as expressed in the following analysis:

«The number of people under working age will grow at insignificant rates from 9.1 million in 2012 to 10.0 million in 2030, the number of people of working age (16-54 years for women and 16-59 years for men) will increase from 18.2 million in 2012 to 22.1 million in 2030, the number of people older than working age will increase from 2.1 million to 5.1 million people. There will be changes (albeit minor) in the gender structure of the population: if today the ratio of women to men is 50% to 50%, then in 2030 the ratio will be 49% for women to 51% for men.»<sup>74</sup>

In summary, the definition of youth age in the four countries of the Central Asian region varies slightly: 14–29 years in Kazakhstan, 14–28 years in Kyrgyzstan, and 14–30 in both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. However, the lowest parameter for youth (14 years of age) is the same for each country.

#### **Youth age Parameters in Central Asian Countries:**

Kazakhstan: 14–29 years

Kyrgyzstan: 14–28 years

Tajikistan: 14–30 years

Uzbekistan: 14–30 years



In all the countries included in this study, the youth make up a significant part of population, with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan having the highest proportion (see Figure 5).

It should be noted that the number of the youth in Tajikistan seems to be higher because the official post-census publication data applies to 15–29-year-olds, although the legislation defines “youth” as 14–30 years old. Kyrgyzstan has a similarly high number of youth with 24.5%, while Kazakhstan has only 20.2%. In all studied countries there is an almost equal gender distribution between female and male youth.

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<sup>71</sup> Population of Uzbekistan. 2020. Chislennost' naseleniya Uzbekistana doshla do 34 millionov [The population of Uzbekistan has reached 34 million]. February 18, 2020.

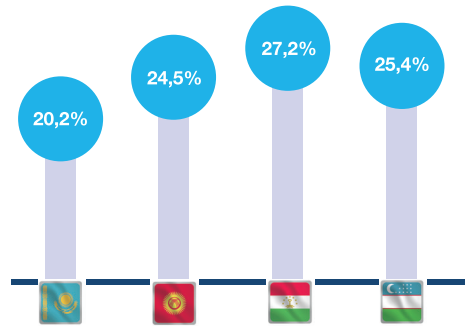
<sup>72</sup> Data as of beginning 2020, submitted by B. Ergashev, on the basis of data given by the State Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

<sup>73</sup> UN WPP. 2017. *UN World Population Prospects*. p. 819.

<sup>74</sup> Center for Economic Research. 2014b. *Transformatsiya sistemy sotsial'noi zashchity v usloviiah transformatsii ekonomiki i obschestva / Analiticheski otkhet* [Transformation of the social protection system in the conditions of transformation of the economy and society / Analytical report]. Tashkent, Center for Economic Research, p. 23.

Developing specific strategies for demographic development relating to the youth pose certain challenges for societies. At the same time, the “demographic dividend” factor in “young” countries implies that youth are a strategic resource for development and peace, and a potential valuable contributor towards enhancing social, economic and ideological policies in the peacebuilding agenda of the countries of the region.

**Figure 5. Percentage of Youth within the Population of each Central Asian Country (2020)**



## CHAPTER 2. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND STATE POLICIES ON YOUTH IN CENTRAL ASIA

Chapter 2 analyzes the legal and institutional frameworks, and policy formulation in the countries of the region. It discusses the major youth-focused

country-based policies and programs, national legal and institutional frameworks, governance and policy-making, and the trajectory of policy evolution.

### KAZAKHSTAN

#### Legal Frameworks

##### Evolution of Legal Frameworks on State Youth Policy

The normative basis for the formation and development of state youth policy are the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, international treaties ratified by the Republic of Kazakhstan, and generally accepted principles and norms of international law.

The first law enacted after independence was in 1991, when the Law of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) on Youth and the State Youth Policy and the concept of youth policy were adopted. In accordance with the Law of 1991, the youth policy was intended to create socio-economic, legal and organizational conditions. It was also intended to guarantee spiritual, cultural, educational and professional development and physical development of youth with the disclosure of its creative potential in the interests of the whole society.

In 2004, this Law was replaced by the second Law on State Youth Policy. The 2004 Law identified the state's strategic tasks in relation to youth in a similar way to the Law of 1991. However, the 2004 Law introduced definitions of "youth", "young family", "social infrastructure for youth", "youth organization", etc. In line with overall societal changes, the objective to provide young people with employment was later replaced with the objective to create and

enhance socio-economic opportunities and adequate competencies.

Currently, the legal and normative frameworks are defined by the Law on the State Youth Policy,<sup>75</sup> adopted on February 9, 2015, and The Concept of the State Youth Policy 2020. The 2015 Law is essentially consistent with the overall aim and definitions adopted in the 2004 Law.

The 2015 Law defines "youth" (young people) as citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan from 14 to 29 years old.

Notably, the 2015 Law for the first time legally stipulates that youth policy is to be developed and applied on the principles of citizenship, interfaith harmony and inter-ethnic tolerance. The 2015 Law also elaborates the instruments and mechanisms of development and application of youth policy which were not obvious in the previous laws. It stipulates instruments for implementing youth policy such as republican and regional youth forums, and advisory councils, including councils for interaction and cooperation with non-governmental organizations, including with the involvement of youth organizations. According to the Law, youth are entitled to the creation and use of social infrastructure such as facilities for their activities aligned with youth policy



<sup>75</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. 2015. *Zakon Respubliki Kazakhstan "O gosudarstvennoi molodezhnoi politike" (s izmeneniyami ot 06.05.2019)* [Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan 'On State Youth Policy' (with amendments as of 06.05.2019.)] February 9. No. 285-V.

goals and objectives. The Law asserts that youth resource centers for support of youth organizations and social service are for the prevention, support and monitoring of individual young persons in difficult

situations. Finally, the Law provides for forms of youth activity such as youth organizations, volunteering and self-governance.

## Concept of the State Youth Policy 2020 <sup>76</sup>

The Concept of the State Youth Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2020 (Kazakhstan 2020: Way to the Future) was approved by the Government on February 27, 2013.

The 2020 Concept was preceded by the 1998 Concept, which outlined youth policy objectives of social services to vulnerable groups of youth; and the 2005–2007 Program that provided a framework for actions based on the 2004 Law.

The 2020 Concept outlines the main aims of youth policy as creating conditions and opportunities for the successful socialization and effective self-realization of young people. The 2020 Concept further outlines 12 key underpinning values which form the basis for youth policy realization: 1) patriotism, 2) unity of the people, 3) cultural diversity, 4) tolerance, culture of

peace and concord, 5) respect for laws, 6) education, 7) value of work and strong work ethics, 8) innovative development, and science and innovation, 9) family, 10) health and sport, 11) positive ideals, and 12) new environmental ethics.

Enabling youth is seen as a driver of socio-economic and cultural development for the country. The 2020 Concept outlines eight contemporary demands which need to be addressed by the young people. Among the new demands, mention is made of the establishment of values of tolerance, unity and concord to prevent youth radicalization and extremism. Following this concept, in December 2020, the Government approved a Comprehensive Plan for Supporting Youth of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2021 - 2025.

## Strategy Kazakhstan – 2050<sup>77</sup>

In December 2012, the Kazakhstan Strategy 2050 was presented in the Address of the First President (Mr. N.A. Nazarbayev) to the people of the country. The main goal of the 2050 Strategy is guiding the course of actions for achieving a welfare society based on a strong state, a developed economy and opportunities for universal labor.

Youth is stated as the main target of the 2050 Strategy. In a special address to youth, the new political and economic course highlighted the objectives of providing education, necessary conditions

for learning and growth, and a dignified future for young people. The strategy has special mention of the need for modern role-models for the design of a modernized worldview model for young people. The strategy emphasizes the priority of developing literacy among young people about the nature of transformation, and manifestations of radicalism, extremism and terrorism. The strategy also encourages adherence to the principle of freedom of conscience, and the traditions of tolerance and freedom of faiths.



<sup>76</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. 2013. *Kontseptsia gosudarstvennoi molodezhnoi politiki Respubliki Kazakhstan do 2020 goda "Kazakhstan 2020" Put' v budushee". Postanovlenie pravitel'stva Respubliki Kazakhstan ot 27 fevralya 2013 goda. N 191* [The Concept of the State Youth Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2020 (Kazakhstan 2020: Way to the Future). Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated February 27, 2013. № 191].

<sup>77</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. 2012. *Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation, N.Nazarbayev "Strategy Kazakhstan-2050": new political course of the established state*. December 14, 2012. Nursultan, Akorda.

## Governmental Programs

Legal and institutional bases are also defined in cross-sectoral and intersectoral governmental programs aimed at the creation of extended socio-economic services for young people. These include large-scale state programs for the development of education, health, languages, and accelerated industrial and innovative development plus the following programs: 100 Schools, 100 Hospitals, Balapan, Business Road Map 2020, and Affordable Housing 2020.

The following governmental programs are aimed at increasing economic opportunities for young people: Employment Road Map 2020; *Zhasyl Yel* (Green Country) program; “With a diploma

– To the village” program; *Mangilik El Zhastary – Industriyaga* (Youth of the Eternal Nation to the Industry) project; and *Serpin 2050* educational grant program.

In September 2018 the Government approved a draft Road Map on Employment and Socialization of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).<sup>78</sup> The NEET Youth Employment and Socialization Road Map provides activities for addressing seven categories of the population: dependents, young women, freelancers, rural youth, people with disabilities, people from low-income families, asocial youth groups (released from prison, and drug- and alcohol-addicted youth undergoing rehabilitation).

## Institutional Frameworks

It should be mentioned that several types of institutions in the Republic of Kazakhstan, both governmental and public, are operational at centralized and regional levels. Among them are

specialized bodies dealing with the issues of youth development (profiled ministries and committees, resource centers and public councils), or addressing the youth through their own programs and initiatives.

## Governmental Institutions

The Law on Youth Policy 2015 assigns the Government with overall responsibility for the formulation of youth policy, preparation of the annual national report on youth, implementation of national and regional youth forums, and the implementation of the state award for young people’s achievements (called ‘Daryn’). The Law stipulates a mandate on various aspects of youth policy under relevant government ministries and committees to

coordinate respective policies on education, science, healthcare provision, employment, entrepreneurship, culture, sport, religion, law enforcement, defense, environment protection and mass media.

According to the Law, the local governments, within their mandates, are responsible for measures to strengthen Kazakhstan’s patriotism, interfaith harmony and inter-ethnic tolerance.



<sup>78</sup> Zakon.kz. 2018. V Pravitelstve RK odobren proekt Dorozhnoj karty po obespecheniju zanjatosti i socializacii molodezhi. [Government RK approved draft of youth employment and socialization road map]

## Ministry of Information and Public Development<sup>79</sup>

The Ministry of Information and Public Development (known before February 2019 as the Ministry of Public Development) is the central executive body of the Republic of Kazakhstan dealing directly with the issues of youth through the Committee on the Youth. The Ministry was formed by the Decree of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated September 13, 2016, partially as a result of modernization of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Accord of the Republic of Kazakhstan. It was renamed and re-structured by decree of the President of Kazakhstan on 29 June, 2018, into the Ministry of Public Development.<sup>80</sup>

The official renaming of this governmental body in 2018 and 2019 suggests the change of focus to public and social development which is more inclusive and embraces all aspects of development - particularly civil society and youth (while religion is also included, it is not particularly emphasized). Hence, social development, civic and general cultural

identity are now specifically highlighted as issues of importance by the state.

The mandate and area of responsibility for the new ministry has been expanded, whereby youth policy has become one of three priorities of action of the Ministry, along with matters related to civil society and religious affairs. It is notable that public development is conceptualized on the principle of peace development. As specified in the mission statement, the Ministry aims to develop constructive relations between state and religious spheres, and state-civil society partnerships, formulate and effectively implement the state youth and family policy, and strengthen the overall stability of the nation.

Among other specific tasks, the Ministry coordinates modernization of public consciousness, philanthropy, volunteering, mediation, ensuring internal political stability, development of ethical behavioral standards, and intergovernmental coordination on the matters within its mandates.

## Research Center on Youth (Molodezh)<sup>81</sup>

This Center, created in 2012, has undergone different affiliation and currently is a legal entity accountable to the Kazakhstan Institute of Public Development “Ruhani Jangyru”. It was created to conduct in-depth studies on processes in the youth environment for the early detection and prevention of various problems among all categories of youth.

In accordance with Paragraph 2 of Article 24 of the Law on State Youth Policy of February 9, 2015, the Research Center on Youth conducts research and provides methodological support for the implementation of state youth policy.

According to the Center, more than 20 research works have been completed or are in progress on a wide range of youth-related social processes, including: value orientations and attitudes of young

people, volunteering, migration attitudes, social well-being and social practices, and religious orientation and practices among young people. Since 2013 it publishes the *Youth of Kazakhstan* Annual Report. The Center provides scientific and methodological support to youth resource centers and other institutions of state youth policy. It also maintains the network edition «Kazakhstan zhastary», located at [eljastary.kz](http://eljastary.kz), as an internet resource for youth. In 2020 new projects had been initiated: an expert platform “JASTAR: ózekti másele”, aimed at expanding expert discussions and dialogue between experts and society on topical youth problems; and the Zertteý project that aims at supporting the research activities of students and developing the country’s future scientific potential.



<sup>79</sup> MIOR. Ministerstvo informatsii i obshchestvennogo razvitiya Respubliki Kazakhstan [Ministry of Information and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan]

<sup>80</sup> Since February 2019 - Ministry of Information and Public Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, cf. [Zakon.kz](http://Zakon.kz). 2019. Obnovlenniy kabmin Kazakhstana [Renewed Government of Kazakhstan].

<sup>81</sup> Scientific-Research Center ‘Youth’. History. 2020. History of SRC ‘Youth’.

## Youth Resource Centers<sup>82</sup>

The Law on State Youth Policy 2015 stipulates provisions for the establishment of youth resource centers (YRC) that are state organizations working directly with young people and youth organizations, promoting their social and personal advancement. The main purpose of the resource centers is providing life skills and competences training, professional

job orientation, digital, innovation, entrepreneurship skills, psychological and legal consultations, volunteer activities promotion, assistance in self-realization of the young people. As of 2021, currently 209 youth resource centers are operating in the 12 oblasts (regions), 35 cities and 162 areas of Kazakhstan.

## Council on Youth Policy<sup>83</sup>

On July 1, 2008, the Decree of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the Establishment of the Council on Youth Policy was enacted for the purpose of improving the system for developing and implementing the state youth policy. This board is an advisory body under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The main tasks of the council are the development of recommendations on priorities, and on the formation and implementation of a comprehensive state policy on youth.

The Youth Policy Council under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan is the main dialogue platform for developing measures to improve the state youth policy in Kazakhstan. The new members of the council include the first heads of central government agencies, leaders of youth organizations, and representatives of business, education, culture, sports and the media.

## Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan<sup>84</sup>

The Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan is a constitutional body headed by its Chairman (since 2021, by the President of Kazakhstan K-J. Tokayev). It was set up in 1995 and represents more than 120 ethnic communities. Since 2009, its members have been delegated into the Senate (the upper level of Parliament), and its decisions must be considered by both government agencies and civil society. Activities of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan are aimed at implementing the state national policy to ensure social and political stability, and increase the efficiency of interaction between

state and civil society institutions in the sphere of inter-ethnic relations.

The Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan has placed a high priority on working with young people<sup>85</sup>. It established the national youth organization *Zharasym*, and in March 2018, the National Youth Movement of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan *Zangiru Zholy* (Renewal Path). *Zhangiru Zholy* is a voluntary movement whose main goal is to consolidate the activities of young people for strengthening a harmonious society by creating a forum and guidelines for youth initiatives.



<sup>82</sup> Youth Resource Centres. 2021. Molodezhnye resursnye tsentry [Youth Resource Centers].

<sup>83</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. 2008. *Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Kazahstan O sozdanii soveta po molodezhnoi politike pri Prezidente Respubliki Kazahstan (s izmeneniyami i dopolneniyami ot 01.06.2019)* [Decree President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the creation of the Council on Youth Policy under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (with amendments and additions as of 01.06.2019)], Nur-Sultan, Akorda.

<sup>84</sup> Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. 2019. Deyatel'nost assamblei naroda Kazahstana [Work of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan].

<sup>85</sup> Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. Youth. 2019. Respublikanskoe molodezhnoe dvizhenie Assamblei naroda Kazahstana «Zhangyru zholy» [Republican youth movement of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan 'Zangyru Zholy'].

## Trajectory of Youth Policy Development

### Year of Youth 2019

On November 13, 2018, it was declared the year 2019 to be the Year of Youth.<sup>86</sup> By the Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 27 of January 30, 2019, the Road Map for the Year of Youth was approved.<sup>87</sup>

The Road Map identified eleven main areas for youth development actions<sup>88</sup>: education, employment, health, affordable housing, business development and improving financial literacy, legal respect, increasing intolerance for corruption, strengthening the sense of patriotism, supporting talented youth, developing non-governmental youth organizations, and developing youth infrastructure and information support.

The Road Map suggests that peace goals are integrated into many of the Year of the Youth initiatives. Peace goals are directly addressed in the proposed social project Mediation as a Factor

in Strengthening Unity in the Youth Environment by conducting a series of seminars on human rights, anti-bullying for children and youth in rural and urban areas, and initiatives to develop a culture of social unity among young people with the active participation of ethno-cultural associations.

It should be also noted that the Road Map includes several new developments such as support to young scientists, and initiatives specifically aimed at the development of digital innovations by youth.

In general, the main goals, objectives and activities of the Road Map are aligned with the priority areas of the 2020 Concept. Being implemented near the conclusion of the 2020 Concept, the initiatives within the Year of Youth can identify and address the priority areas for youth development.

### State Program on Countering Religious Extremism and Terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2018–2022<sup>89</sup>

The State Program on Countering Religious Extremism and Terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2018–2022 was approved by the Government on March 15, 2018. The main goal of the program is ensuring security for the individual, society and the state from the violent manifestations of religious extremism and the threat of terrorism. The specific objectives of the program are creating protective mechanisms for society from radical ideology and zero tolerance for radical manifestations, reducing the influence of external factors on the radicalization of the population, and improving the effectiveness of identifying and eliminating the causes of religious extremism and terrorism.

The main state bodies responsible for implementation are the National Security

Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Civil Service Affairs and Anti-Corruption, Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and several others.

One of the program's objectives focuses on the development of skills for conducting awareness and counter-propaganda work among students who have completed training in journalism, history, political science and sociology. The program provisions are to be universally applied to all the people of Kazakhstan.



<sup>86</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. 2018. *Ob ob'yavlenii Goda molodezhi* [On announcing the Year of Youth]. Decree of the President. November 13. No 784. Astana, Akorda.

<sup>87</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. 2019. *Ob utverzhdenii Dorozhnoi karty po provedeniyu Goda molodezhi. Postanovlenie pravitel'stva Respubliki Kazakhstan* [On approval of the Road Map for the Year of Youth. Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan]. January 30. No. 27. Astana, Akorda.

<sup>88</sup> KAZINFORM. 2018. *V Kazhastane razrabotan proekt Dorozhnoj karty v ramkah Goda molodezhi* [Kazakhstan has developed a draft Roadmap for the Year of Youth]. November 23. KazInform

<sup>89</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. 2018a. *Gosudarstvennaya programma po protivodeistviyu religioznomu ekstremizmu i terrorizmu v Respublike Kazakhstan ya 2018-2022 gody. Postanovlenie pravitel'stva Respubliki Kazakhstan* [State program on countering religious extremism and terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2018 - 2022. Government Decree of the Republic of Kazakhstan]. March 15. No 124. Astana, Akorda.



## KYRGYZSTAN

### Legal Frameworks

Currently the constitutional legal framework of Kyrgyzstan has a substantial amount of legislation related to youth which can be split into two unequal categories: (1) international legal documents acceded by the Kyrgyz Republic; and (2) national legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic which reflects youth policy.

The first category includes the founding documents of the UN, namely, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child,<sup>90</sup> which were ratified by Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s.

When the Kyrgyz Republic joined other international organizations, it assumed obligations under the relevant agreements. The most important of them include the Agreement of the State Parties of the Commonwealth of Independent States on Cooperation in the Sphere of Work with Youth of November 25, 2005, (as amended on May 19, 2011), and the Strategy of International Youth Cooperation of the State Parties of the Commonwealth of Independent States. A number of international agreements are also bilateral, such as the Agreement (of July 4, 2006) on cooperation in the field of youth policy between the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic, and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Despite their predominantly recommendatory nature, all international legal documents impose several obligations on the Kyrgyz Republic for the gradual synchronization of its legal framework for youth policy.

The second category of legislation is represented by a set of national regulatory documents which directly or indirectly refer to youth and their rights and obligations; and govern the state policy in this sphere. The founding document which directly governs the state youth policy is the Law of on the Foundations of the State Youth Policy (2009).<sup>91</sup> According to this Law, the state has a legislative obligation to support the Kyrgyz youth at the local level as reflected in many articles of this Law (i.e., Articles 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 15). This obligation has highlighted the previous existing difficulties in the interaction between local authorities and young Kyrgyz citizens. In 2014, the new Kyrgyz Republic Government attempted to adopt a new version of this Law<sup>92</sup>. but this failed because the new version did not contain any principally new provisions.

The Law on the Foundations of the State Youth Policy in its current wording presupposes the full support of young people by government agencies at various levels for its implementation, especially in economic, political and cultural spheres. It includes the provision that the state youth policy is to be implemented with close interaction between youth movements and organizations as discussed below.

A new main regulatory document of the state youth policy is the Draft Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on Youth, which was developed and put up for public discussion by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic<sup>93</sup>. It contains a range of legal norms that are a positive step forward for the youth policy of Kyrgyzstan. In particular, it provides for the possibility of financing youth initiatives

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<sup>90</sup> The latter international legal document refers to a significant part of Kyrgyz youth as according to the law the citizens who have not reached the age of majority, that is, 18 years old, have the status of a child. Therefore, the citizens aged 14 to 17 years fall under the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

<sup>91</sup> Kyrgyz Republic. 2009. Zakon KR "Ob osnovah gosudarstvennoi molodezhnoi politiki" [The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On the Fundamentals of the State Youth Policy"], July 31, 2009. No. 256.

<sup>92</sup> Kyrgyz Republic. 2014. Ukaz o proekte zakona Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki "Ob osnovah gosudarstvennoi molodezhnoi politiki" [The Decree on the draft Law of the Kyrgyz Republic On the Fundamentals of the State Youth Policy]. October 16, 2014. No. 601.

<sup>93</sup> Kyrgyz Republic. 2019. Gosagentstvo po delam molodezhi, fizicheskoi kul'tury i sporta vynosit na obschestvennoe obsuzhdenie proekt NPA [The draft regulatory legal act is presented for public discussion by the State Agency for Youth Affairs, Physical Culture and Sports]. <http://www.gov.kg/?p=99133&lang=ru>

from the state budget, and ensures that the levels of responsibility of state bodies at the national and local levels are more clearly regulated. In the latter case, there is a persistent issue about differentiating

responsibilities among local and central authorities on the implementation and control of state commitments for the social security of young people.

## Governmental Program and Strategy

Another current key government document on youth policy is the Program of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic entitled Development of Youth Policy for 2017–2020 of August 10, 2017 No. 471.<sup>94</sup> This program, for the first time, envisages widening the range of stakeholders in this field including civil society which is largely involved in the implementation of this strategy. These stakeholders include not only youth NGOs but also other organizations working in the field of youth policy, including religious organizations. While religion in the Kyrgyz Republic is officially separated from the state, its inclusion actually recognizes the obvious influence of religious organizations in the social environment, including among the youth.

The new Concept on the Youth Policy for the years 2020-2030, N 562, has been issued in October 2019.<sup>95</sup> Similar legislative documents were repeatedly adopted earlier (by the Decree of the Kyrgyz Republic Government); one of the latest being the State Youth Policy Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic until 2015 of September 25, 2012 No. 640. Such related documents usually represent quite voluminous and detailed

plans of implementation of activities and initiatives of state bodies in relation to youth.

The current Concept of the Youth Policy for the period 2020-2030, like the previous one, is quite detailed, including goals, objectives, priorities and key measures to support and develop the youth environment of Kyrgyzstan. It is based on the key results of the first ever conducted in the country (2017) the National “Index of Well-being and Development of Youth in the Kyrgyz Republic”, that in turn was based on the international Global Index of Youth Well-being adapted for Kyrgyzstan.

In 2018 there has been adopted the National Strategy of Development of the Kyrgyz Republic for the years 2018-2040 that stated all required legal basis for the effective realization of the state youth policy has been created. According to it, among key tasks in youth policy, the priority should be to create conditions and possibilities for employment and self-realization of young citizens of Kyrgyzstan to work in the country rather than abroad.<sup>96</sup> This task reflects the existing high rate of labour migration among the Kyrgyz youth (this will be explored in detail further in the Chapter 3).



<sup>94</sup> Kyrgyz Republic. 2017. *Ob utverzhenii programmy pravitel'stva Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki "Razrabotka molodezhnoi politiki na 2017-2020 gody"*. *Postanovlenie pravitel'stva Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki. 10 avgusta. № 471. Prilozhenie 1.* [On approval of the Program of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic 'Development of Youth Policy for 2017-2020'. The Decree of the Kyrgyz Republic Government. August 10. No. 471. Annex 1].

<sup>95</sup> Youth Policy Concept. Kyrgyzstan. 2019. *Kontseptsiya molodezhnoy politiki Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki na 2020-2030 gody. 18 oktyabrya 2019 goda № 562.* [Concept of Youth Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2020-2030]. October 18, 2019 No. 562.

<sup>96</sup> National Strategy of Kyrgyzstan. 2018. *Natsionalnaya strategiya razvitiya Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki na 2018-2040 gody* [National Strategy of Development of the Kyrgyz Republic for the years 2018-2040]. Bishkek. p. 18-19.

## Other Legislative Acts Related to Youth

The Kyrgyz Republic also possesses a whole set of legislative documents (laws, Government decrees, Presidential decrees, departmental orders, etc.) which variously

relate to, and govern, state–youth relations. This legislation can be subdivided into the following categories:

01



in the field of medical care (the Law on Medical Insurance of Citizens in the Kyrgyz Republic of October 18, 1999, No. 112; the Law on the Reproductive Rights of Citizens and Guarantees on their Enforcement of August 10, 2007, No. 147; etc.).

03



in the field of labor and economic activity (the Law on State Support of Small Business of May 25, 2007, No. 73; etc.).

02



in the field of education (the Law on Education of April 30, 2003, No. 92; the Law on Primary Professional Education of November 26, 1999, No. 129; the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science on the Implementation of the Program - Incentive for Rural School Teachers (Young Teacher Deposit) of January 25, 2010, No. 20/1; etc.).

04



on social support from the state (the Law on the Rights and Guarantees of Persons with Disabilities of April 3, 2008, No. 38; the Law on State Guarantees and Compensations for Persons Living and Working in High-Altitude and Remote Hard-to-Reach Areas of June 28, 1996, No. 33; the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan on Additional Measures for Social Support of Student Youth of October 4, 1992, No. UP-287; etc.).

05



legislation on conscription (the Law on the Universal Conscription of Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic, on Military and Alternative Services of February 9, 2009 No. 43; the Decree on the Implementation of the Concept for Educating the Members of Armed Forces and Pre-Draft Youth of the Kyrgyz Republic of December 8, 2009 No. 742; etc.).

Most of the legal codes of the Kyrgyz Republic also refer to the rights and obligations of youth.

It is worth noting that the legal instruments of the Kyrgyz Republic that

directly or indirectly refer to the “youth” and “youth policy” are largely not implemented in their full scope for the following main reasons:

01

A contradiction of norms and approaches enshrined in the legislative framework which not only leads to ambiguous interpretation, but also hinders their practical implementation. This contradiction is only now slowly being overcome at the legislative level.<sup>97</sup>

02

The generally declarative nature of the national legislation is very ambiguous in its definition of state responsibility and obligations to meet the needs and demands of today’s youth. The proposed implementation of legislation is often worded as more of a recommendation than a responsibility.

03

Intricate schemes of interaction between government bodies at both the national and local levels for the implementation of youth policy is only gradually becoming regulated. There is now a tendency to shift more responsibilities in this area to local councils, including partial responsibility for the outcomes of implementation.

04

Current legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic in the field of youth policy lags behind all current issues related to the youth. As a result, there should be the legal inscription of the need for ongoing dialogue between the youth and the state.

The above-mentioned issues make it difficult for the state bodies to implement a systematic youth policy. However, at the legislative level, there are conditions and mechanisms of interaction between government agencies and youth that

stipulate the for youth and state to cooperate in decision-making processes. However, progress on this is very slow and currently does not allow youth to reach their full potential, including in regard to peacebuilding.

## Trajectory of Development of the Youth Policy – Assessment of State Initiatives in the Field of Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan

There is need to define the specifics of implementation of state youth policy within both international and national contexts.

The Kyrgyz Republic is a member of a range of international organizations such as the CIS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Within the framework of many such organizations is a whole

package of intergovernmental agreements aimed at developing and coordinating the youth policy of the participating countries. Presently, however, their practical implementation is quite limited despite, for example, the clear intent of several CIS agreements under consideration till 2020.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> For example, it is openly acknowledged in the Program of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic “Development of Youth Policy for 2017-2020” of August 10, 2017. No. 471. Section 1 of this Program highlights a “lack of legislative framework.”

<sup>98</sup> The Strategy of International Youth Cooperation of the States-Participants of the Commonwealth of Independent States for the period up to 2020.

It was promising that the Youth Council of the SCO was established in May 2009<sup>99</sup> and chaired this year by the Kyrgyz Republic as it was intended to unite the efforts of active and creative young people from SCO member countries. However, as is the case of the CIS, this did not happen in practice, at the international level, the connections between youth and youth organizations are often formal and tailored only for positive reporting purposes.

At the national level, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic's attempted approach to the adopted youth policy strategies has been to launch large-scale national programs aimed at supporting the youth environment, e.g. Kyrgyzstan zhashtary (Kyrgyz youth) (2006–2008). However, those programs did not achieve noticeable results due to the same impractical nature of the legislative framework, turning the program events into entertaining concerts and games to portray youth as an obedient instrument of state policy.

Another initiative was the establishment and operation of the Youth Parliament in 2011 supported by the USAID /

DFID Program to assist the Parliament (Jogorku Kenesh) of the Kyrgyz Republic, International Republican Institute and the public foundation Democracy Support Fund.<sup>100</sup> Young people from 18 to 29 years old participated in its activities despite the fact that the current legislation has set the upper limit of the “young age” at 28 years. However, most of the participants were the representatives of the youth wings of the political parties of the country.

The establishment of the Youth Parliament was the direct result of the 2009 Law which outlined the necessity for interaction between the state bodies, and youth and youth organizations. Overall, that project allowed the youth leaders to be involved in the actual political processes, to gain an inside understanding of the principles of operation of the most important state bodies, and participate in the dialogue between the state and the youth. In 2014 its operation was terminated in spite of results. However, in January 2019 its activity was renewed with the support of the NGO “Human Rights Advocacy Center” in cooperation with the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic.<sup>101</sup>



<sup>99</sup> Shanghai Cooperation Organization. 2009. The Declaration on the Establishment of the Youth Council, May 4, 2009.

<sup>100</sup> Kloop.Kg. 2011. V Kyrgyzstane sozdaetsya molodezhnyi Parlament. [Youth Parliament is established in Kyrgyzstan.] June 15, 2011.

<sup>101</sup> Kyrgyzstan Youth Parliament. 2019. Otkryt priem zayavok v proekt molodezhnyj parlament-2019. [Applications for participation in the “Youth Parliament 2019” project are accepted].

## TAJIKISTAN

### Legal Frameworks

The main legal instruments regulating state youth policy in Tajikistan are the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan<sup>102</sup>, the Law on Youth and State Youth Policy 2004<sup>103</sup>, the National Concept of Youth Policy in the Republic of Tajikistan 2006<sup>104</sup> adopted by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan. Key principles for, and approaches to state youth policy are also defined in the Strategy of the State Youth Policy in the Republic of Tajikistan until 2020 (2011).<sup>105</sup>

The National Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for the Period up to 2030 adopted by the government in 2016, defined the vision and key 4 strategic goals, i.e. (1) ensuring energy security and efficient use electricity; (2) breaking the communication deadlock and transforming the country to a transit country; (3) providing food safety and access of the population to quality food; and (4) expansion of productive employment.<sup>106</sup> Above that, it was stated to focus on the cross-sectoral-based human capital development (so-called 4+1) within which youth and gender issues to be solved.

The first youth-related legal act is the Law on State Youth Policy dated March 13, 1992, which refers to the initial period of the formation of statehood. Later, the new Law on Youth and State Youth Policy (2004) reflected socio-political changes that took place in Tajik society. Currently the Law of 2004 (with amendments and additions of 2011 and 2014) is still the key act regulating state youth policy.

The Law covers all spheres of youth activity and personal development, expressed as the “intellectual and spiritual potential of young people in the public interest.”<sup>107</sup> The term “state youth policy” is conceptualized as a unified system of socio-economic, organizational, legal and educational measures implemented by state authorities, organizations and institutions, and public associations of youth and citizens.<sup>108</sup> Thus, it attempts to embrace the state and all organizations, associations and individuals as this is especially important for ensuring social solidarity in a society that has recently experienced a severe civil war.

The Law on Youth and State Youth Policy (Article 3) defines four main objectives that the state pledges to fulfill to support of youth. Article 4 of this Law outlines 19 main strategies for the implementation of the state youth policy, and the basis on which the state programs are structured as follows: (1) Ensuring the rights and interests of young people; (2) Social and economic opportunities for young people; (3) Supporting various groups of youth and creating conditions for the implementation of their initiatives; and (4) The participation of young people in society and the prevention of negative behavior.

The Law also established the legal frameworks for the implementation of the State Youth Policy (Chapter 3) and special procedures for the youth to exercise their rights. Through its authorized state bodies



<sup>102</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2016. *Konstitutsiya Respubliki Tadjikistan* [Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan. Dushanbe, Nashrien Ganch.

<sup>103</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2004. *Zakon Respubliki Tadjikistan o molodezhi i gosudarstvennoi molodezhnoi politike* [The Law of the Republic of Tajikistan on Youth and State Youth Policy]. July 15, 2004. No 52.

<sup>104</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2006. *Natsional'naya kontseptsia molodezhnoi politiki v Respublike Tajikistan (utverzhdena postanovleniyem ptavitel'stva Respubliki Tadjikistan)* [National Concept of Youth Policy in the Republic of Tajikistan (approved by the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan Decree). June 3, 2006. No. 228.

<sup>105</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2011. *Strategiya gosudarstvennoi molodezhnoi politiki v Respublike Tadjikistan do 2020 goda (utverzhdena postanovleniyem ptavitel'stva Respubliki Tadjikistan)* [The strategy of the state youth policy in the Republic of Tajikistan until 2020 (approved by the Decree of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan) October 4, No. 480.

<sup>106</sup> National Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan-2030. 2016. *Natsional'naya strategiya Respubliki Tadjikistan na period do 2030 goda*. Dushanbe. [National Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for the Period up to 2030. Dushanbe]. p. 8.

<sup>107</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2004. Preamble.

<sup>108</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2004. Article 1.

for youth affairs, and local and other government bodies, the state defines and extends support to the economic and entrepreneurial activities of young people in material, technical and financial terms. For example, Article 15 stipulates that state bodies should allocate grants to commercial organizations, of which 75% of each must comprise youth and the resulting products (work and services) must be for the benefit of the state, youth, etc. These organizations must be supported by establishing benefits such as rental for buildings and equipment, free provision of commercial information, discounts on advertising, and preferential taxation in

accordance with legislation. Article 16 considers the right of young people to work by stipulating that the state provide support for employers who are engaged in the employment of young people.

The above-mentioned paragraphs of Article 15 and Article 16 are particularly relevant to Tajikistan since a significant part of the population are young people in need of employment.

Other articles of Chapter 3 stipulate, *inter alia*, the rights of young people to have free time and health protection (Article 17), education (Article 18), state support of young families (19) and support for gifted youth (19 (1)).

## The National Concept of Youth Policy in the Republic of Tajikistan<sup>109</sup>

The National Concept (adopted in 2006, with amendments in 2014) defines the main goals, principles and priorities of the State Youth Policy. The Committee on Youth and Sport is the responsible body for the implementation of the National Concept. The National Concept establishes the regulatory and legal mechanisms for the implementation of the state youth policy, as well as the methodological, organizational and informational basis for its provision.

The main purpose of the state youth

policy in Tajikistan is explained as: “The creation and strengthening of legal, economic and organizational conditions for the civil development and the social self-realization of young people.” The principles in Part III generally reflect the clauses of Article 3 of the Law on Youth and State Youth Policy, that is, democracy, progressiveness, purposefulness, universality, differentiation and targeted protection under the framework of implementation of the state youth policy.

## Strategy of the State Youth Policy in the Republic of Tajikistan until 2020

The Strategy on the State Youth Policy was developed with medium-term perspective covering ten years and outlined the objectives and expected achievements by 2020. It defined the following priority areas: the involvement of young people in social practice and their potential contribution to development opportunities, the development of creative activity for youth, and the social integration of young people in difficult life situations.

The strategy acknowledged the large-scale tasks confronting the country and the limited resources available for development. As a result, the key objectives for youth were to provide favorable conditions for successful socialization and effective self-realization and create conditions for youth to effectively solve their own issues.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, socialization, self-initiative and participation were seen as key drivers for the development of youth.



<sup>109</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2006.

<sup>110</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2011, pp. 3-4.

The targets of the strategy's contribution to the development of the youth are quite broad and with the following expected outcomes:

- Education – an increase in the number of young people who have received the secondary vocational certificate)
- Poverty – a reduction in the number of young people with extremely low incomes and living below the subsistence minimum (poverty reduction is one of the main tasks for Tajikistan)
- Employment – a reduction in youth unemployment
- Crime – a reduction in the levels of crime among youth. This is of special significance in light of the growth of radicalism and the formation of the Islamic State group (*Daesh*)
- Business and arts – an increase of business, entrepreneurs, creativity and sports activity
- Politics – an increase in socio-political participation of the youth, including in elections at all levels

As of now there are no official direct data on the results of this Strategy implementation, however, indirectly, there could be mentioned that in 2019 the Governmental Decree on National Programme of the Social Development of the Youth in the Republic of Tajikistan for the years 2019-2021 has been issued.

It made a focus on the social issues pertaining to the youth development, first of all, more proactive participation of the youth in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the country, effective employment, especially of the rural youth. As the Programme states, the youth make up almost 76% of the total workforce of the country, and “the number of 15–29-year-old youth uncovered by the employment is very high, what makes them vulnerable and requires urgent measures.”<sup>111</sup> Healthcare,

access to education, gender equity are among other priorities of the youth development, and this speaks about the need to implement further policy towards the youth development.

There are another legal framework relating to the youth issues in specific fields, such as the National Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan on Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2016-2020. The Strategy highlighted sections on the Prevention of extremism and radicalization among minors and youth (Para 5) and Gender aspects (Para 6). In both aspects it stated the need to use the potential of education (on all levels, starting from the pre-school level), including religious education, transparent access to education, youth and women employment and their proactive social engagement.<sup>112</sup>

## Institutional Frameworks

The main bodies administering youth policy, as stated in Chapter 2, Article 7 of the Law on Youth and State Youth Policy (2004) are:

- Central government, ministries and departments (of education, culture, internal affairs, etc.)
- Local state authorities (administrations of regions, cities and districts)



<sup>111</sup> Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan. 2019. *Postanovleniye Pravitel'stva Respubliki Tadjikistan «O Natsional'noy programme sotsial'nogo razvitiya molodezhi v Respublike Tadjikistan na 2019–2021 gody» ot 1 marta 2019 goda № 94*. [Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan «On the National Program of Social Development of Youth in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2019-2021» dated March 1, 2019 No. 94].

<sup>112</sup> National Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan on Countering Extremism and Terrorism. 2016. *Natsional'naya strategiya Respubliki Tadjikistan po protivodeystviyu ekstremizmu i terrorizmu na 2016-2020 gody. Prilozheniye 1 k ukazu Prezidenta Respubliki Tadjikistan ot 12 noyabrya 2016 goda, № 776* [National Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan on Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2016-2020. Appendix 1 to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan dated November 12, 2016, No. 776]. P. 6-8.



- Authorized state body for youth affairs (Committee on Youth and Sports under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan), and local bodies for youth affairs
- Youth public associations, other organizations and institutions promoting the implementation of the state youth policy

According to Article 29 of the Law on Youth and State Youth Policy, the National Council on Youth Affairs was established to coordinate and effectively implement the Youth State Policy under the President of Tajikistan. The provisions of this council are also approved by the President of Tajikistan.

Such councils are established under local governments. Representatives of state bodies, public associations of youth, non-governmental organizations, educational and health institutions, law enforcement agencies and trade unions can be members of those councils.

## Trajectory of Youth Policy Development

The formation of youth policy in Tajikistan began in 1991, when state youth policy entered the legal system with adoption of the Law on the General Principles of the State Youth Policy in the USSR.<sup>113</sup> It announced the transition of the implementation of youth policy from the Party directly to state institutions with the formation of the State Committee on Youth, Physical Culture and Sports (Decree of the President of the Tajik SSR of February 9, 1991, FFP No. 27).

From 1991 to 1993, the Committee was renamed several times, and was abolished during the civil war on June 9, 1993, when it was known at that time as the Committee on Youth Affairs of the Council of Ministers.<sup>114</sup>

In general, the process of formation and transformation of the state youth policy in Tajikistan underwent the following main stages:

### Stage One (1992–1997)

Adoption of the first Law on State Youth Policy in March 1992. During the civil war, the implementation of this policy progressed with difficulty. In April 1994, the first Congress of the Youth Union of Tajikistan was held where the Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic (Emomali Rahmon) delivered a keynote speech on the situation in the country and the future tasks facing youth in achieving peace and ending the civil war in Tajikistan.

In 1997, a special body was re-established – the Committee on Youth Affairs with structural organizations in all oblasts (zones), cities and districts, aimed at the practical implementation of the Law on State Youth Policy.

### Stage Two (1998–2005)

After the end of the civil war and the signing of the Universal Agreement on the Strengthening of Peace and National Harmony in Tajikistan in June 1997, new tasks were set for the implementation of youth policy.

In the context of post-conflict peacebuilding, a special state body was formed – the Committee on Youth Affairs. In 1999, the first national Program entitled Youth of Tajikistan was adopted for a three-year period. In 2004, amendments and additions were made to relevant legal acts. The Law on Youth and State Youth Policy was adopted on July 15, 2004. Since 1998, May 23 has been celebrated as Youth Day in Tajikistan.



<sup>113</sup> Buriyev. 2004. Buriyev N.S. *Gosudarstvennaya molodezhnaya politika v Respublike Tadjikistan. Dissertatsiya na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kand. polit. nauk. Dushanbe: Tadjikskiy gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskiy universitet, [State Youth Policy in the Republic of Tajikistan. Dissertation: Candidate of Political Sciences. Dushanbe, Tajik State Pedagogical University]*, p. 27.

<sup>114</sup> For details see: From the history of establishing the committee (1991–2017).

### Stage Three (2006–2012)

During this period, standard and legal acts were developed and supplemented, and the National Concept of Youth Policy and the Strategy of the State Youth Policy in the Republic of Tajikistan until 2020 were adopted. The financial and structural base of the Committee on Youth, Sport and Tourism has been strengthened. Since 2012, the previous Youth of Tajikistan Program has been transformed into the National Program for the Social Development of Youth<sup>115</sup> due to changes in the youth environment and the need to strengthen its social component.

### Stage Four (2013 until the present)

Emerging challenges and threats in the youth environment during this period significantly changed the structure of public policy, due to the growth of radicalism and extremism all over the world (including Daesh). This caused an implementation of new approaches including a special social policy for young people entitled View on Youth.

In 2017, the Year of Youth was celebrated in Tajikistan and the number of activities for young people and their participation significantly increased. The Council on Youth Affairs was established under the President of the country.

In terms of the governance of state–youth policies, new state programs have been developed which are currently active. At the same time, Tajikistan actively participated in international cooperation in youth policy, youth forums and meetings within the CIS, including the Youth Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of CIS Member States, established by decision of the IPA (International Youth Parliament) CIS Council (a permanent advisory body) on November 22, 2012.<sup>116</sup> It also participated in the SCO Youth Council, Forum of Young Leaders of the SCO countries, UN agencies within the framework of programs and projects of the UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women, UNESCO, etc.).



<sup>115</sup> Miralijon. 2017. Miralijon K.A. *Osobennosti i tehnologii razvitiya molodezhnoi politiki v Respublike Tadjikistan. Dissertatsia na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni doktora polit. nauk*. Dushanbe: Tadjikskiy gosudarstvennyy pedagogicheskiy universitet [Specifics and development technologies of youth policy in the Republic of Tajikistan. Doctor of Political Sciences Dissertation. Dushanbe, Tajik State Pedagogical University], p. 166.

<sup>116</sup> Miralijon. 2017, p. 252.

## UZBEKISTAN

### Legal Frameworks

Beginning from the first years of independence, Uzbekistan has formed legal and institutional frameworks that define the main priorities of the youth policy.

The legislation directly regulating youth policy is the Law on the Fundamentals of the State Youth Policy in the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated November 20, 1991. This Law contains key provisions for securing the rights of young people to access education, social protection and legal protection, in particular, for juvenile offenders and the economic rights of young people. The Law outlines financing mechanisms for youth programs and the state bodies responsible for the implementation of the youth policy strategies. However, the strategies in this Law are described in very general terms, without defining mechanisms for their implementation. Despite this shortcoming, in general, this Law played a positive role in developing the foundations and practical implementation of the state's youth policy during a transitional stage of development.

Based on the need to improve the country's youth policy at a transitional stage, in September 2017, the Law on State Youth Policy was adopted. It identified new mechanisms for youth policy that complimented the reformation and modernization of all spheres of society being carried out at that time.

The purpose of the new Law is to improve the legal framework and rationalize the legislative act into practical provisions, and organizational and legal mechanisms for the development and implementation of youth policy.

The 2017 Law defines the State Youth Policy as the system of socio-economic, organizational and legal measures carried out by the state in order to create conditions for the social development of young people, and the development of their intellectual and creative potential.

The State Youth Policy is based on

the principles of participation of young people in youth policy implementation, openness and transparency, support and encouragement of youth initiatives, prioritizing spiritual, moral and cultural values, and preventing discrimination against young people.

The Law defines the main guidelines of the State Youth Policy as being targeted at human rights; quality education; work and employment; patriotism and citizenship; protection from ideas of terrorism and religious extremism, separatism and fundamentalism; legal awareness and legal culture; youth entrepreneurship; participation in healthy lifestyles and sports; decent housing and living conditions; and cooperation with international organizations working towards the realization of the rights and freedoms of young people.

The Law on State Youth Policy (2017) has several new provisions compared with the previous Law on the Fundamentals of the State Youth Policy (1991).

Firstly, it clearly establishes the priority directions of youth policy with regard to modern requirements of: ensuring social, economic, political and other rights and interests; accessible and quality education for young people; promoting their physical, intellectual and moral development; creating conditions for employment and education in the spirit of respect for the law; national and universal values; and protection from actions leading to the degradation of moral principles leading to radicalism, violence and cruelty. It also prioritizes support for talented children and young families, the formation of a healthy lifestyle, and the development of youth sports, etc. The Law says that to ensure the implementation of its requirements, other state, regional and other programs should be adopted to support young people.

Secondly, the Law defines the tasks and mandate of the bodies and institutions that implement the state youth policy at central

and regional areas, as well as the scope of their responsibilities. These bodies are entrusted with ensuring the unconditional fulfillment of the requirements of regulatory acts regarding the rights and legitimate interests of young people in education, health, culture, sports, labor and other areas. Those specified bodies have been provisioned for the implementation of measures to improve legal literacy, crime prevention among young people, interaction with community organizations, etc.

Thirdly, the provisions of the Law aim at strengthening the role and position of organizations, self-governing citizen

Lastly, the Law establishes the following measures of protection and support for young people:

(a) legal and social guarantees such as ensuring rights and freedoms, free medical care and general education, conditions and guarantees for obtaining higher education within state grants, employment, the provision of benefits in the workplace, the allocation of reduced interest loans for the construction and purchase of housing, material support for low-income young people and families, and the development of leisure and recreation;

(b) government support for talented youth by providing awards, scholarships, educational grants, organizing sports' schools, competitions, exhibitions, conferences, seminars, ensuring access of talented young people to training programs, and creating conditions for young scientists and specialists.

In summary, the Law on State Youth Policy 2017 updated the legal frameworks as a guideline for youth policy implementation and for the application of organizational, legal and institutional

bodies and the media in the implementation of state youth policy. The Law defines the legal mechanisms for the mandatory participation of civil society institutions in the development and execution of state and other programs. This relates to participatory mechanisms for the organization and the conduct of activities to nurture a healthy and harmonious young generation, enhance the role and activity of young people in public life, and exercise public control over compliance with legislation and youth-related government programs.

measures. It was also aimed at improving public administration of youth policy and empowering each participating entity. In addition, it expanded and established state guarantees that will stimulate the all-round development of young people in Uzbekistan and their involvement in private entrepreneurship, which are viewed as the driving force of the country's economic growth.

Other youth-related laws that should be also mentioned are the laws on: Education (29.08.1997), the National Program for Personnel Training (29.08.1997), Guarantees of the Rights of a Child (01.12.2007), Physical Culture and Sports (01.14.1992), and the Prevention of Child Neglect and Delinquency Among Minors (29.09.2010).

These legal frameworks created the basis for the implementation of youth policy in Uzbekistan for the socio-economic, legal, psychological and pedagogical development of young people.

## Strategies and Decrees

The Action Strategy for the Five Priority Areas of Further Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2017–2021 defines the goals, objectives and mechanisms of

political, economic and social reforms in Uzbekistan. The Strategy also identifies important tasks (Para 4.5. Advancement of the state youth policy)<sup>117</sup>, to enable



<sup>117</sup> Strategy 2017–2021. Uzbekistan. 2017. *Strategija dejstvij po pyati prioritetnym napravleniyam razvitiya Uzbekistana v 2017—2021 godah* [The Action Strategy for the Five Priority Areas of Further Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2017–2021]. Tashkent: Sobraniye zakonodatelstva Respubliki Uzbekistan, 6 (766). P. 236.

young people to participate in the process of building a democratic state and civil society. Special attention is paid to developing young, educated, innovative, enterprising, conscientious, and dedicated managers.

By the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan (Sh. M. Mirziyoyev) on June 30, 2017, the Youth Union of Uzbekistan was formed on the basis of the *Kamolot* (Public Youth Movement). Since then, this date has been celebrated as National Youth Day in Uzbekistan.

The Decree on Measures to Increase the Effectiveness of the State Youth Policy and Support of the Activities of the Union of Youth of Uzbekistan dated July 5, 2018,<sup>118</sup> became the key initiative in activating the state youth policy in Uzbekistan at a new stage of the country's development.

This document identified main strategies for improving the institutional framework of the youth movement in the country. Reforming the Union of Youth of Uzbekistan aims to ensure that the Union is focused on: ensuring the rights of young people; creating conditions for obtaining high quality education and training qualified specialists; increasing spirituality; promoting a healthy lifestyle; increasing material and moral support for young families; support for youth entrepreneurship; and the development of international cooperation in the field of youth policy.

The main designated tasks of the Union of Youth of Uzbekistan are research on the social composition of young people, assistance in organizing their vocational training and retraining, and

providing employment based on modern requirements. The Union outlines the following as its key tasks: intensifying activities to improve the interaction of state and non-governmental organizations, working with unorganized youth, preventing crime among young people, and protecting young people from the influence of destructive ideas.

The COVID-19 influence on the social economic wellbeing of the people caused the leadership to declare the year 2021 in Uzbekistan as a *Year of the Youth and Strengthening the Health of the Population*. President Mirziyoyev acknowledged a decisive role of the healthy and harmonious development of the youth in the progress and effective reforms of the country, calling “the energetic, proactive, comprehensively developed youth with modern knowledge and skills to be our (country's – L.Y.) pillar.”<sup>119</sup>

In February 2021 there was issued another presidential decree *On the State Program for the Implementation of the Action Strategy in Five Priority Areas of Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021 in the “Year of Support for Youth and Strengthening the Health of the Population”*. Special attention was given there to economic support to and social protection of the youth, especially vulnerable youth as regards the education (additional 200 presidential grants, educational credits to the families, 25% growth of the number of the educational grants in higher education, double growth of the educational grants for the girls from low-income families), and other.<sup>120</sup>



<sup>118</sup> Republic of Uzbekistan. 2017a. *Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan “O merah po povysheniyu effektivnosti gosudarstvennoi molodezhnoi politiki b podderzhke deyatelnosti Soyuza molodezhi Uzbekistana”* [Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On measures to increase the effectiveness of the state youth policy and support the activities of the Youth Union of Uzbekistan”]. July 5, 2017. No. UP-5106.

<sup>119</sup> Year of Youth. 2021. 2021 god ob'yavlen Godom podderzhki molodezhi i ukrepleniya zdorov'ya naseleniya. 29.12.2020. [2021 is declared the Year of Supporting Youth and Strengthening the Health of the Population. 12.29.2020].

<sup>120</sup> Presidential Decree. Republic of Uzbekistan. 2021. *Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan O gosudarstvennoi programme po realizatsii strategii Deystviy po pyati prioritnym napravleniyam razvitiya Respubliki Uzbekistan v 2017–2021 godakh v «God podderzhki molodezhi i ukrepleniya zdorov'ya naseleniya»* 03.02.2021. [Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan On the State Program for the Implementation of the Action Strategy in Five Priority Areas of Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021 in the “Year of Support for Youth and Strengthening the Health of the Population” 03.02.2021]

## Trajectory of Youth Policy Development

Decree on the State Program *Yoshlar-Kelajagimiz* (Youth is Our Future) of 27 June 2018 provides practical steps for realizing the state youth policy in the medium term. The Programme key goal is to support youth entrepreneurship, create youth-friendly environment for the business activities,

provide for new jobs for and employment of the youth.<sup>121</sup> On more details on program results see Chapter 3.

Within the framework of the State Program, the following measures are carried out:



Establishing under the Union of Youth of Uzbekistan, district and city branches of the *Yoshlar-Kelajagimiz* (*Youth is Our Future*) Foundation. The resources of the foundation are to finance the activities of the State Program, including:

- provision through commercial banks, of preferential loans and leasing of property at a rate of seven percent per annum for the implementation of youth business initiatives, start-ups, ideas and projects;
- issuance of guarantees for loans received under the State Program of not more than 50% of the main loan;
- participation in entrepreneurial projects carried out within the framework of the State Program, of not more than 50% of their value with the subsequent realization of the Fund's share for five years;
- acquisition of up to 20 young poultry and rabbits, and five small cattle and two adult cattle for households with unemployed youth;



Organization of retraining and advanced training of young people, training for professions in demand in the labor market, and training in business skills;



Facilitating construction in the form of public-private partnerships of:

- *Yosh tadbirkorlar* (Young Entrepreneur) Centers to allow young entrepreneurs to work with private entities on preferential terms for: the lease of premises, office equipment and consumables; access to the Internet; and other assistance in the implementation of youth business initiatives, start-ups, ideas and projects;
- complexes *Yoshlar mehnat guzari* (Youth Labor Markets) in areas with a labor surplus to create small community trade and production sites.

As noted above, the construction of the Young Entrepreneur Centers and complexes is carried out on the terms of a public-private partnership.



Formation of commissions for the development of youth entrepreneurship in the districts and cities with the main tasks of:

- assistance in the development of youth business initiatives, start-ups, ideas and projects; preparation and implementation of the necessary documents and materials with the involvement of assigned employees of investment bodies, social complexes, as well as commercial banks;
- provision of a 'one window' principle for the review of applications for assistance in the implementation of youth business initiatives, start-ups, ideas and projects within the framework of the State Program.



<sup>121</sup> Presidential Decree. Republic of Uzbekistan. 2018. O gosudarstvennoy programme «Yoshlar – kelajagimiz». Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan [About the state program «Yoshlar - kelajagimiz». Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan].

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## Brief Summary on the Chapter 2

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In all four countries of the Central Asian region, youth-related legislation has been enacted and applied. The Laws on Youth and Youth Policies (under different titles) have been adopted as key legal frameworks since the early 1990s, followed by further amendments in the 2000s. The Laws contain basic rights relating to the youth in terms of their definition, status, and participation without differentiation to gender or ethnicity.

There are also a wide range of operational programs, policies and strategies targeting the youth, both directly and indirectly, through provisions in the Laws on education, labor, migration, economic development and anti-extremism.

The recent high level of importance placed on youth is evidenced by the

fact that Kazakhstan (in 2019), Tajikistan (2017) and Uzbekistan (in 2021) declared an annual Year of the Youth to highlight and promote issues related to youth development at national levels.

In all four countries included in this report, as evidenced by the recent laws and programs, and commitments to various aspects of human capital investment, there is a clear understanding of the importance of the youth as the strategic resource, and of the need for investment in youth including investments in poverty reduction and socialization, quality education, employment, vocational training, entrepreneurial and socio-political participation, and inclusion and social welfare.

## CHAPTER 3. YOUTH AND CHALLENGES FOR PEACEBUILDING IN CENTRAL ASIA

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This chapter highlights the key issues pertaining to youth and the challenges for peacebuilding in Central Asia, based on the interrelated elements of the comprehensive holistic approach discussed in the methodology.

The issues addressed are structured around the following peacebuilding areas or themes:

- (1) education and learning environment that deals with formal education, technical and vocational training, and skills development;
- (2) economic and social participation through employment engagement/NEET, migration, gender, inclusion, entrepreneurship and innovation;
- (3) civic engagement (religion, intercultural dialogue and preventing violent extremism). The issues related to physical and mental health of the youth deserve special consideration and are not discussed in the report.

These thematic areas are examined according to the specific situation of each country of the region that are covered by this report. To better understand the challenges, relevant case studies are presented.



## KAZAKHSTAN

### General Characteristics of the Youth

In Kazakhstan youth became the focus of active policymaking relatively recently. Among the reasons for this interest in youth are: the quality of the country's 'human capital'; the rise in the number of young people convicted of extremism and acts of terrorism; higher unemployment among young people; and increasing internal rural to urban migration, which is not always regulated.<sup>122</sup>

Researchers<sup>123</sup> and public figures<sup>124</sup> distinguish millennials (so called generation Y, born between 1981-1995) and post-millennials (so called generation Z born after 1995) or a demographic subset of people born when digital technologies had profoundly affected modes of social interactions by increasing the quick flow and variety of information. As a result, post-millennials in Kazakhstan (as elsewhere) are responsive to global trends, digital consumers, have a cosmopolitan mentality, are embracing individualism and very conscious about their self-image. At the same time post-millennials

are moderately optimistic about their economic and socio-political prospects, are interested in personal comfort, and have very pragmatic attitude to work and personal competitiveness.

Various surveys have been conducted throughout last years in Kazakhstan<sup>125</sup> and Central Asia<sup>126</sup> on self-evaluation of young people that provide a glimpse on their perceptions of values, politics, economic processes and their role in these aspects.

According to the results of these surveys the value orientation and life choices of post-millennial youth in Kazakhstan are strongly affected by their family, including extended family. National Report on Youth (2020) mentions that for the 4 years in a row the value orientations of the young Kazakhs didn't undergo dramatic changes – the basic values continued to be family, health, friendship, irrespectively of youth sub-group age, urban-rural localization.<sup>127</sup> Kosnazarov notes three things the teens value most, i.e. health, family and freedom; whereas the first two are interrelated.<sup>128</sup>



<sup>122</sup> Friedrich Ebert Foundation Kazakhstan. 2016a. *Youth of Central Asia: Kazakhstan*. Based on a sociological survey. Research Advisor: Prof. Klaus Hurrelmann. Almaty, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, p. 13.

<sup>123</sup> Umbetaliyeva. 2016. Umbetaliyeva, T. Chem jivet segodnya molodej kKazahstana? Interviyu Forbes.kz [What's the youth of Kazakhstan is it for today? Interview to Forbes.kz]. 6 April, 2016. Kosnazarov. 2019a. Kosnazarov, D.D. Pokolenie "Zyn-Zyn" i ideologija. Interviyu Expert-Kazakhstan [Generation «Zyn-Zyn» and ideology]. Interview to Expert-Kazakhstan. 24 March, 2019. <https://expertonline.kz/a15415/>

<sup>124</sup> Smayyl. 2019. Smayyl M. Ministr opisal kazakhstanskoye pokoleniye Z. [The Minister described the Kazakh generation Z]. 04 November 2019.

<sup>125</sup> Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2018, p. 287; Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2020; Problems and Needs of Youth. 2020. Sotsiologicheskoe issledovanie 'Problemy i potrebnosti osnovnykh strat molodezhi' [Sociological research 'Problems and needs of the main strata of youth'] / Rudneva E.A., Kozhabekova D.A., Mukhambetova K.A. Nur-Sultan: NRC "Youth". p. 123; Kosnazarov. 2019b. Kosnazarov D. #Hashtag Activism: Youth, Social Media and Politics in Kazakhstan. Central Asia Program Paper 217. 13 p.

<sup>126</sup> Friedrich Ebert Foundation Kazakhstan. 2016a, p. 260.

<sup>127</sup> Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2020, p. 207-208.

<sup>128</sup> Kosnazarov. 2019b.

## (1) Education and Learning Environment

Kazakhstan, like other countries of the region, inherited the Soviet educational policies that covered almost 100% of primary and secondary education,<sup>129</sup> which provided a good basis for further implementation of the national programs on education and training. However, the transition from a liberal model of economics and education with reduced government funding, to a more privatized model, along with a reduction in the development of technical vocational education and training (TVET) throughout the first decade after independence,<sup>130</sup> dramatically changed the learning environment. Researchers define three general types of educational ‘crises’ in the newly independent countries during the 1990s: expenditure decline, decentralization and destabilization, and ‘structural anomalies’.<sup>131</sup>

Throughout next decade, “social, economic and demographic developments in Central Asia have pushed education, including TVET, up the policy agenda in all countries”<sup>132</sup> and today education, TVET and skills development have acquired a totally new dimension. According to the UNPFD, “Kazakhstan has achieved near universal enrolment in primary and secondary levels of education, and the Government is committed to continuing investing in pre-school and school programs.”<sup>133</sup> The UN Economic Commission for Europe Report on Innovation Performance Review of Kazakhstan (2012) also stated that there was an increase of the gross enrolment rate in tertiary education by fifteen percentage points between 1999 and 2009, reaching 39% by the end of this period, while education has increased substantially,

averaging 3.5% of GDP in 2007–2010.<sup>134</sup>

However, there are some critical issues remaining for the provision of education infrastructure and content. In 2016, reform of the education system was initiated. The State Program for Education and Science Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2016–2019 aimed to expand participation in early childhood education and care, transitioning to a 12-year compulsory education system, as well as to a more competence-based pedagogical approach.

The current State Program for Education and Science Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020–2025 (adopted by the government in 2019) sets 2 key goals: “(1) Increasing the global competitiveness of Kazakhstani education and science, education and training of the individual on the basis of universal human values; (2) Increasing the contribution of science to the socio-economic development of the country”.

To achieve these goals there are 11 tasks set to address the current challenges in the education field. Among them are to provide the higher status of the teachers; lessen the difference in the quality of education among the rural and urban schools, various higher education institutes; to provide for a safe and comfortable learning environment; to introduce the updated quality assessment of education system; to conduct education and professional training based on the economic and regional needs; to provide the educational and scientific organizations for a digital infrastructure; to update the system of management and financing of education; to strengthen the scientific

# <sup>129</sup> Pre-school education and early childhood development are equally important for the development of young people, especially in a view of implementation of the life-long learning (LLL); this deserves special consideration. However, for the purpose of the current theme that focuses on youth, this aspect is omitted here.

<sup>130</sup> According to ETF research on vocational training in Kazakhstan, “in 1992–2002 the number of vocational school students more than halved from 203,100 to 89,600, while the number of ninth-grade graduates changed only slightly in the same period. This means that over 100,000 graduates from secondary schools potentially could, but have not, enrolled in professional schools and lycées.” More on this: European Training Foundation (ETF). 2004. *Review of Vocational Education and Training and Employment in Kazakhstan 2003*, p. 16.

<sup>131</sup> Yakavets. 2014. Yakavets N. Educational Reform in Kazakhstan: The First Decade of Independence. In *Education Reform and Internationalisation*. Edited by David Bridges. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 4.

<sup>132</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017a. *Torino Process Regional Overview: Central Asia 2016–2017*. Turin, ETF, p. 2

<sup>133</sup> UNPFD. 2015. *Partnership Framework for Development, Kazakhstan, 2016–2020*. Kazakhstan, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Kazakhstan, p. 75.

<sup>134</sup> UNECE. 2012. *Innovation Performance Review of Kazakhstan*. Geneva, United Nations, pp. 4–5. (Doc.ECE/CECI/14).

intellectual potential; to increase the effect of the researches and integrate them into the global scientific space.<sup>135</sup>

These tasks have been identified and analyzed following the OECD recommendations and the country goals to enter the 30 most developed countries and to fulfil the commitments to achieve the United Nations' SDGs by the year 2030: pre-school training and education, 12-year compulsory education, obtaining by the students the 21 century skills, equal access to the affordable and quality vocational, professional, and higher education. For example, the Program sets the goal to reach a 100 % enrollment of the 3-6-year-old preschool education, and to increase the OECD's PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) performance by the Kazakhstan's school children; whereas it is planned to increase the DGP share for education and science by the 2025 to 7% (in 2019 it was 3,8%).<sup>136</sup>

OECD findings indicate that in 2017, Kazakhstan updated the State Compulsory Standard of Primary Education, and for General and Secondary Education. It also established assessment criteria for student knowledge, and curricula and programs for primary and general secondary education.<sup>137</sup>

One of the most discussed issues in the educational field in Kazakhstan throughout the last years was the introduction of the three-language education (in Kazakh, Russian and English) in schools and the transition of the Kazakh language's scripture from the Cyrillic to Latin graphics. In 2019 President K.-J. Tokayev made it clear that the trilingualism issue was a very complicated and important one, whereas the first priority should be given to the education in the Kazakh, Russian languages that are very important for the children; and then only to study in English

language.<sup>138</sup>

Global pandemic and closure of schools and universities produced a huge impact on the educational field. It is estimated the already existed challenges such as disparities among the regions, rural-urban areas, and the advantaged and vulnerable schoolchildren and students, could be even more increased during and after the pandemic.



«In Kazakhstan, after four months of school closures in March-June 2020, future income could be reduced by 2.9 percent, or equivalent to an overall economic loss up to \$1.9 billion every year»

Source : Marteau. 2020. Marteau, Jean-François. Post-COVID Education in Kazakhstan: Heavy Losses and Deepening Inequality

According to Jean-Francois Marteau, the World Bank country manager for Kazakhstan, “The pandemic now threatens to push over 100,000 more students into functional illiteracy. ... as a result of the pandemic, learning will decline by eight PISA points. ... losses and negative implications are going to be most pronounced for the already vulnerable and disadvantaged. Even short-term school closures will widen the reading achievement gap by 18 percent between children from poor and rich households”.<sup>139</sup>

The focus on education and associated key challenges that was acknowledged as an important strategic task, both by the UNPFD<sup>140</sup>, and the government,<sup>141</sup> should be taken further jointly with all stakeholders bearing in mind immediate and prolonged consequences of the pandemic. Throughout the 2020-21 the government introduced the anti-pandemic measures unprecedented earlier, they targeted the teachers, school and HEI physical, digital



<sup>135</sup> State Program 2020-25. Republic of Kazakhstan. 2020. Gosudarstvennaya programma razvitiya obrazovaniya i nauki Respubliki Kazakhstan na 2020-2025 gody. Utverzhdena postanovleniyem Pravitel'stva Respubliki Kazakhstan ot 27 dekabrya 2019 goda № 988 [State Program of the Development of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025. Approved government decree Republic of Kazakhstan dated December 27, 2019 No. 988].

<sup>136</sup> State Program 2020-25. Republic of Kazakhstan. 2020, p. 5, 30.

<sup>137</sup> OECD. 2018b. *Education Policy Outlook*. Kazakhstan, p. 4.

<sup>138</sup> Trilingualism. 2019. Tokayev o trekh'yazychi: Snachala kazakhskiy i russkiy, potom angliyskiy [Tokayev on Trilingualism: First Kazakh and Russian, then English]. March 27, 2019.

<sup>139</sup> Marteau. 2020. Marteau, Jean-François. Post-COVID Education in Kazakhstan: Heavy Losses and Deepening Inequality. November 16, 2020.

<sup>140</sup> UNPFD. 2015. *Partnership Framework for Development, Kazakhstan, 2016-2020*. Kazakhstan, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Kazakhstan, p. 75.

<sup>141</sup> State Program 2020-25. Republic of Kazakhstan. 2020.

and social infrastructure. Among them are increase of teachers' salaries and students' stipends 2 times by 2024, construction of new 800 schools and modernization of 5000 rural schools, free of charge college education, introduction of the 100% professional standards-based educational programmes in the universities, increase by 50% of universities educational grants, adoption of the new Life-long learning concept, etc.<sup>142</sup>

The above-mentioned tasks are linked to the full spectrum of SDGs and peacebuilding themes and, as such, should be addressed using a systemic approach. Urban-rural disparities and poor-quality

education cause internal migration within the country, whereas lack of vocational professional skills and abilities required for the job market leads to low competitiveness and inability to find a job. Kazakhstan, as a host country to migrants from other Central Asian states, should also focus on developing comprehensive measures and policies to integrate the migrants and their families into the society. The latter is intrinsically linked to the SDGs targets in the field of education, including those on the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity.

## Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Education and the labor force are interrelated factors, while the changing profile of the labor market and increased mobility signifies a higher significance of TVET on the one hand, and the need to apply unified qualification standards that are applicable in various countries. The findings of the European Training Foundation (the so-called Torino Process) indicate that vocational education and training is crucial, not only for supplying the labor market with necessary skills, but also for playing a key role in social inclusion and cohesion by providing good job opportunities for the youth.<sup>143</sup> The TVET system is a key driver in socio-economic development and should be practically implemented and scaled up to help remove the "bottleneck" issues in the youth development agenda.

Throughout last decade, Kazakhstan developed practical TVET measures that were acknowledged by ETF. Among these measures are: inclusion for socially vulnerable young people and young people with special needs, countering labor market imbalances, improving the national qualifications framework, and enhancing the prestige of TVET and

attracting more students to colleges. In 2014, Kazakhstan entered the World Skills International competition and held its first national championship.<sup>144</sup> Since then other such competitions have been held that were widely popularized on TV, including on official news channels such as *Khabar* and *Kaz24*.

TVET acquires special importance due to its focus on the development of skills of the youth and of specific segments of the economy. Since 2017 Kazakhstan has launched a new project entitled Free Vocational Education for All. It stipulates that training in the first profession in which a person finds employment will be provided.<sup>145</sup> As of 2020 within the framework of the project "Free vocational and technical education for all" the state order is allocated for 94.8 thousand seats.<sup>146</sup> The other programme – on the Development of the Productive Employments and mass Entrepreneurship for 2017-2021 has also been realized, according to which the stipend, travelling and hot meal were also provided for the program participants to get the professional education and training.<sup>147</sup>



<sup>142</sup> Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2021. *Pravitel'stvo rassmotrelo sistemnyye voprosy razvitiya sfery obrazovaniya* [The government considered the systemic issues of the development of the education sector]. 11 March 2021.

<sup>143</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017b. *Torino Process 2016–17 Kazakhstan report*. Executive Summary. Turin, ETF, p. 2.

<sup>144</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017b, pp. 1, 3.

<sup>145</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017b, p. 1.

<sup>146</sup> State Program 2020-25. Republic of Kazakhstan. 2020, p. 6.

<sup>147</sup> Professional Education. The Republic of Kazakhstan. 2017. *V Kazakhstane do 2021 goda besplatnoye professional'no-tekhnicheskoye obrazovaniye poluchat boleye 720 tysyach grazhdan* [In Kazakhstan, until 2021, more than 720 thousand citizens will receive free vocational technical education]. 07 November 2017.; Free Vocational Education. N.d. *Besplatnoye professional'no - tekhnicheskoye obrazovaniye* [Free Vocational-Technical Education]

A good example of increasing awareness of TVET is the Skills and Jobs Project (2016-2020) jointly implemented by Kazakhstan and the World Bank aimed at supporting the development of human capital, and promoting reforms related to skills and jobs. This project aims to improve employment outcomes and skills, the relevance of technical and vocational education and training, and higher education programs. The project consists of the following components: (1) Building the foundation of a National Qualifications System; (2) Enhancing skills for improved employment outcomes and productivity; and (3) Project management and monitoring and evaluation.<sup>148</sup>

Under the general umbrella of TVET and National Qualifications System development, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Kazakhstan in

2019 authorized the creation of the New Professions Atlas to identify promising industries and professions for the next 10 to 15 years. The listing will embed industry credentials and professional standards.<sup>149</sup> Equally important, TVET is aimed at those who wish to move on to higher education, and with a view to enrolling the most vulnerable groups in society.

In a quickly changing job and market environment with uncertainty about the impact of the rapid development of artificial intelligence,<sup>150</sup> TVET that embraces digital innovation provides grounds for developing the skills required to address the challenges posed by these transformations. This approach aids in the creation of young specialists who are instrumental in closing the gap between labor and changing market demands.

## (2) Economic and Social Participation

There were generally favorable demographic and labor trends in Kazakhstan from 2001 to 2010 such as job creation leading to a rise in employment of 21% and an increase in the number of economically active people.<sup>151</sup> In Kazakhstan, issues of concern that have been highlighted include a higher proportion of women who are marginalized, vulnerable and working in relatively low-paid economic sectors; as well as general rural-urban disparities. In regard to the latter, the UNPFD mentioned in 2015 that “every third person who is classified as self-employed, lives in a rural area and works on his/her private plot. There is a lack of economic diversification and a shortage of decent employment opportunities, especially in non-oil or non-agricultural sectors in rural areas.”<sup>152</sup>

Lack of employment, especially in rural areas of Kazakhstan has become a major social and economic challenge, with potential ideological consequences. To address this problem, the government introduced the Employment Road Map 2020; and to correct the imbalance in labor resources, in 2014, it implemented a program entitled Mangilik El Zhastary – Industriyaga (Youth of the Eternal Nation for Industry).<sup>153</sup> The idea of educating and training the youth to acquire basic competencies in TVET to improve employment opportunities has shown positive results, with ETF research indicating that 88% (104,000 people) who completed their training between 2011 and 2015 subsequently found employment.<sup>154</sup>



<sup>148</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. 2016. “Skills and Jobs» Project.

<sup>149</sup> New Professions Atlas. 2019. Kazakhstan to Develop New Professions Atlas. Astana Times. 7 September 2019.

<sup>150</sup> OECD. 2019. OECD Forum 2019. Of special importance for the theme were the following sessions held at the Forum 2019: Global Competencies and the Future of Learning, Designing Skills Policy and Services, Growing into the Future of Work, etc.

<sup>151</sup> UNECE. 2012. *Innovation Performance Review of Kazakhstan*. Geneva, United Nations, p. 4. (Doc.ECE/CECI/14.)

<sup>152</sup> UNPFD. 2015, p. 75.

<sup>153</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017b, p. 3.

<sup>154</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017b, p. 2.

## NEET

Youth significantly influence the economic situation, “contributing” towards NEET. In terms of employment, youth are generally the most risk-prone age category with a higher unemployment rate than prime age adults. Those youth who do work tend to have poorer quality jobs and are much more likely to be on temporary contracts or to earn lower wages than older workers.<sup>155</sup>

Studies indicate youth unemployment and NEET should be differentiated, and this view is supported by the figures. For example, in Kazakhstan, the proportion of youth NEET is more than double the youth unemployment figure (8.5% and 4.1%, respectively).<sup>156</sup>

NEET are as diverse a group as are the causes of their situation. The causes may be early dropout from school, caring obligations (especially among women), illness and disability, and language barriers for migrants.<sup>157</sup> Some of the crucial factors that are also mentioned include: low levels of education and skills that heighten the risk of becoming NEET; gender (NEET rates are higher among women, mainly due to family and household responsibilities); personality traits, or non-cognitive skills.<sup>158</sup>

The above points indicate that NEET could be as a result of the existing structural environment. Accordingly, identifying youth NEET and addressing these challenges requires a systemic approach.

In Kazakhstan, rural-urban and interregional socio-economic development disparities, along with insufficient access to quality education, are among the major structural causes of NEET. Research indicates that there are strong regional differences. For example, the West Kazakhstan Region has a NEET rate of 3.4% while in Karaganda Region it is four times higher.<sup>159</sup>

In 2015, the share of NEET individuals between the ages of 15 and 28 was 8.5%,

with the largest share in the Zhambyl Region (13.6%).<sup>160</sup> However, according to the National Report on the Youth of Kazakhstan 2018, the proportion of NEET as of the second quarter of 2018 was 7.7%, mostly represented by the regions of Karaganda (12.9%), Turkestan (11.3%) and Northern Kazakhstan (10.0%).<sup>161</sup> There is a lack of detailed data on youth NEET subgroups and categories, which impedes the development of well-designed and well-targeted programs for youth NEET.

The government developed the *Serpin* 2050 program<sup>162</sup>, with the aim of stimulating educational migration by bringing young people from regions with a labor force surplus (e.g., South Kazakhstan) to all the other regions where there is a deficit of labor by educating them in specialized professional skills that are in high demand. The government also allocates state educational grants with the overall target to reduce the numbers of potential youth NEET through their education and training. For example, in 2018, there were 12,344 young people enrolled in 26 higher education institutions of the nine regions of western, northern, eastern and central Kazakhstan. The amount of allocated financial resources, or state educational grants has almost quadrupled – from 1,050 educational grants in 2014–2015 (mainly in the field of pedagogics) to 3,793 grants in 2017–2018 (of which 1,550 were for pedagogical education, 1,898 for technical education, and 345 for agricultural education).<sup>163</sup>

In 2014, the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development launched the web portal *Rabota* (Work) ([www.enbek.kz](http://www.enbek.kz)), containing a database of employers and job-seekers throughout the country. The aim of the portal was to support graduates and it became an important step in structuring the basic data relating to the entry of graduates into the labor market. However, there is still a



<sup>155</sup> OECD, 2016, p. 14.

<sup>156</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF), 2017b, p. 2.

<sup>157</sup> OECD, 2016, p. 23.

<sup>158</sup> OECD, 2016, pp. 24, 27, 26.

<sup>159</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF), 2017b, p. 2.

<sup>160</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF), 2017b, p. 4.

<sup>161</sup> Scientific-Research Center ‘Youth’. 2018, p. 211

<sup>162</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. 2014. ‘Serpin-2050’ State program.

demand for further systemic improvements such as useful data on relevant skills and labor market needs; or needs for retraining or advanced training from ESD and/or LLL perspectives.

## Youth and Gender

Kazakhstan has made progress on gender equality, and the women are the heads of 41% of all existing small and medium business enterprises (SMEs). According to the IMF, female labor force participation in Kazakhstan is now at 65%, making it the highest in the region and a benchmark for every country in Central Asia.<sup>164</sup> Yet many challenges remain in the field. The UNDP Kazakhstan estimates that on average, the wages of women are only 67% compared to the wages of men.<sup>165</sup>

Gender is highlighted in SDG 5 and its full acknowledgment could have multiplier effects in reaching targets and other goals. As an accelerator and driver that enables progress across the SDGs, gender equality and women's empowerment is an opportunity for investment that is still unfulfilled in many countries.<sup>166</sup>

The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) used the scorecard of the System-Wide Action Plan for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (SWAP) to analyze the targets, outcomes and indicators of the UNPFD (as signed by Kazakhstan and UN agencies in 2014) to announce that in terms of general gender outcomes, Kazakhstan approaches minimum standards.<sup>167</sup>

Traditional perceptions of the social role of women influence the whole of society, including the youth, as evident from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation's sociological study (2016). According to this study, young people in both urban and rural areas of Kazakhstan think that women have enough rights (84.8%

Considering the high proportion of youth NEET in Kazakhstan, it is important to consider regional imbalances in order to understand and overcome the reasons for youth unemployment, and to determine ways to (re)integrate youth into society.

of respondents).<sup>168</sup> When asked about the role of women in the family, 36.5% agreed that men and women should have equal rights and responsibilities, whereas 32.2% believed that men should take on the role of the head of the family. Only 19% of respondents viewed women as independent and self-reliant.

Young people have mixed opinions about the practice of bride kidnapping – 48.9% have an indifferent or positive opinion, explaining it largely by reference to the presumption of mutual agreement and economic reasons. Another 44.8% have a negative view, seeing the practice as abusive to women and inhumane in principle. A small difference was identified in the responses of urban residents – 30.5% view bride kidnapping as outdated and barbaric as compared to 24.4% among rural residents. There was a more significant difference between urban and rural respondents on whether the practice is insulting to women – 54.9% in urban locations compared to 32.1% in rural.<sup>169</sup>

The analysis of the responses suggests that although gender equality norms are present in the minds of the young people, they lack understanding about the nature and implications of gender biases in the society and ways of addressing them. Their views on gender are formed by daily practices and established beliefs.

Research by the Institute for Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Kazakhstan<sup>170</sup> confirms that people in youth and other age categories do not identify themselves as knowledgeable about gender issues,

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<sup>163</sup> Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2018. p. 213.

<sup>164</sup> Lagarde, C. 2019. Finding a Path to the Higher Plain of Inclusive Growth. Opening Remarks at Astana Economic Forum – Nur-Sultan, AEF.

<sup>165</sup> UNDP. n.d. Preodolenie gendernogo neravenstva. [Overcoming Gender Inequality.]

<sup>166</sup> UNDP. 2017. *SDG Accelerator and Bottleneck Assessment*. New York, UNDP, p. 11.

<sup>167</sup> Ormonbekova L. 2017. *Gender Equality SWAP Scorecard Assessment Results and Action Plan*. Almaty, United Nations Country Team in Kazakhstan, pp. 3, 26.

<sup>168</sup> Friedrich Ebert Foundation Kazakhstan. 2016a. p. 260.

<sup>169</sup> Friedrich Ebert Foundation Kazakhstan. 2016a. p. 260.

<sup>170</sup> Uskambaeva. 2016. Uskambaeva M.A. *Policy on Women and Men in Modern Kazakhstan: a Gender Survey*. Astana: Institute for Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities. p. 13-30.

that gender equality topics are available for young people mainly through media, some of which provide good analysis, relatable formats and scientifically informed material. Presently, there are more opportunities to learn about gender issues in the larger cities and regional centers. There are no gender-related courses in school, colleges or high schools but gender-oriented courses were identified in the curriculum of at least four Universities – Nazarbayev University in Astana; and KIMEP University, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and Narxoz University in Almaty. It is possible that more gender-oriented courses are offered by the other HEIs. Nonetheless, it was observed that there is a lack of specialists on gender policy and education, as well as other spheres.

The state policy *The Concept of Family and Gender Policy until 2030* (adopted in December 2016) stipulates basic standards and measures. However, most respondents of the gender survey do not know about the

regulatory documents governing the gender rights of citizens in Kazakhstan. Only 6.8% of informants indicated that they know the content of the previous gender equality policy for 2006–2016.<sup>171</sup>

There is a need for a greater variety of formal and informal institutional support to increase awareness and opportunities for gender of youth rights. Local organizations and initiatives also attempt to reach remote areas. An example is the Association of Businesswomen of Kazakhstan who trained women in leadership and business skills in some regions of Kazakhstan. Other examples of ongoing changes are seen in various grassroots initiatives, such as, *Technovation Kazakhstan* which was launched in 2016 for 10 to 18 year-old girls. This is part of the Technovation Girls global initiative that inspires women and girls worldwide to become leaders and innovators by solving problems in their communities through technologies and entrepreneurship.<sup>172</sup>

## Youth and Inclusion

As was discussed earlier, the methodology for this report embraces a holistic systemic approach that emphasizes the interdependence and interrelation among multiple fields. It presumes that in any society there should be social solidarity and cohesion, which are a basis for sustainability and peacebuilding. Accordingly, inclusion relates to all fields, particularly to education and participation, and should be addressed equally by governments and citizens, and by business and professionals.

Social inclusion is a broad concept in Kazakhstan that implies mainstreaming and integrating all members of the society, especially the marginalized such as rural women, children, disabled people, *kandas/oralmans* (ethnic Kazakhs repatriating to Kazakhstan from abroad), ethnic and religious minorities and labor migrants, among others. Each of these groups face specific challenges and the challenges of

social inclusion also have great impact on the youth. In a broad sense, social inclusion can be leveraged with intercultural dialogue and is one of key themes of peacebuilding, since integration and peace lie at the heart of both concepts.

People with disabilities and Kazakh repatriates/*kandas* could be regarded as the groups facing the greatest challenges. An increasing number of people face various types of challenges for inclusion. This acquires a social dimension that requires a comprehensive normative legal basis that complies with international standards and norms. It also requires awareness of the issues and participation of all members of the society to look at the people with special needs from a human rights and dignity perspective.

Since the 2000s, Kazakhstan has introduced and expanded the legal frameworks in the field of protecting the people with special needs by adopting



<sup>171</sup> Uskambaeva. 2016, p. 38.

<sup>172</sup> Technovation 2017.



the Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities. Under this Law, two state programs have been implemented (in 2002–2005 and 2006–2008) for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities by: establishing the Coordination Council for Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities; adopting the Law on Special Social Services in late 2008; and signing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol in December 2008, and ratifying this Convention in 2015.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is the first human rights treaty that recognizes persons with disabilities as rights holders and agents of change rather than targets of charity. The UNDP in Kazakhstan particularly highlights the conceptual focus and huge practical application stemming from this approach for the country: “While in the past the state dealt with social protection of persons with disabilities only, this mandate is now expanded to cover the need to provide equal opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in social life.”<sup>173</sup>

Among the key challenges for persons with disabilities in Kazakhstan, the UNDP has identified: the small amount of financial assistance given to them; limited availability of accessible shops, public facilities and transport; limited information; and their high risk of poverty.<sup>174</sup>

The UNDP says that 466,300 people, or 3% of the population, have disabilities, including 43,100 children as of January 1, 2009.<sup>175</sup> According to the data of the Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy, “the number of citizens with special needs increased by 13.2% between 2011 and 2015.”<sup>176</sup> In 2020 there were 139,887 people in Kazakhstan with special educational needs. Among them, 37,970 preschoolers, 95,497 are students

in secondary educational institutions, 2,900 are those who receive TVE, and 3,520 are enrolled in higher educational institutions.<sup>177</sup>

There is of wide range of challenges faced by people with special needs, including access to medical assistance, equal participation in education, employment, labor, science and culture, and access to infrastructure.

The ratification in February 2015 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities implies confirmed commitment by Kazakhstan to provide equal opportunities. In the field of education this implies free access to educational facilities and resources, including specially designed textbooks and other equipment for children and youth with hearing and visual impairments. However, “lack of the competent medical assistance at home, and special social workers (not necessarily nurses) is still one of the major challenges” for people with disabilities.<sup>178</sup>

According to the Ministry of Education and Science by 2020 “only 20% of kindergartens, 60% of schools, 30% of colleges have provided measures for inclusive education. Quality inclusive education covered only 28.2% of preschool children and 46.5% of schoolchildren with special educational needs. Lack of specialists for psychological and pedagogical support of children in an inclusive environment is 64%.”<sup>179</sup>

A number of well-run programs and organizations focus on issues of inclusion. One of these is the Center of Social and Inclusive Programs, an NGO in Almaty that deals with various participatory, educational and knowledge-sharing programs. The center publishes a series of small booklets focusing on various aspects of inclusion, which are targeted at children and adults.<sup>180</sup> The idea of educating the children on social inclusion through a set of “toolkits”



<sup>173</sup> UNDP. 2010. Strengthening of the Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities within the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Development of the Special Social Services Provision System. Kazakhstan, p. 3.

<sup>174</sup> UNDP. 2010, p. 3.

<sup>175</sup> UNDP. 2010, p. 3.

<sup>176</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017b, p. 3.

<sup>177</sup> Abdullina, Elubaeva. 2020. Abdullina Z.A., Elubaeva A.A. Inkluzivnoye obrazovaniye – vklad v budushcheye strany [Inclusive education is a contribution to the future of the country]. December 07, 2020.

<sup>178</sup> UNDP. 2019. Ravnnye vozmozhnosti dlja vseh. [Equal Opportunities for All]. Kazakhstan, UNDP.

<sup>179</sup> State Program 2020–25. Republic of Kazakhstan. 2020.

<sup>180</sup> Center of Social and Inclusive Programs (CSIP). 2018. Vash lichnyi atlas sotsial'noi integratsii. Seriya “Inkluzivnost' vdohnovlyayet” [Your Personal Atlas on Social Inclusion. Series ‘Inclusion Inspires’]. Almaty, CISIP, p.

is of particular importance. What inclusion is, how to address it, how to make friendships with “special” children, how to compassionately communicate with them and understand their situation, and many other themes could be labelled as cultural literacy practices. Such informal education and learning on social inclusion, unfortunately, is not widely embedded in the formal educational system and is not practiced in all regions of the country.

The other major social inclusion challenge is the case of the *kandas/kandastar* (previously – *oralmans*), or ethnic Kazakh repatriates who migrated to Kazakhstan throughout 1990s, mainly from Mongolia, China, other Central Asian countries, and Russia.<sup>181</sup>

During the decade starting from 1993, around 170,802 ethnic Kazakhs (or 38,899 families) came to the country under the presidential quota. A lack of preparation and institutional support on the part of Kazakhstani authorities however, led to an outflow of *kandas/kandastar* back to their previous countries of residence. Since 1994 about 20,000 *kandas/kandastar* have migrated from Kazakhstan back to

Mongolia.<sup>182</sup> It is estimated that since the independence of Kazakhstan, over one million people including over 464,000 ethnic Kazakhs immigrated to the country in search of a better life.<sup>183</sup>

Key challenges for *kandastar*, particularly young people, are their integration and mainstreaming into society – economically, socially, psychologically, and linguistically (Kazakh language is state language, and Russian is an official language in Kazakhstan). Adjustment to a new way of life while maintaining social and cultural cohesion is one of the biggest challenges the young *kandastar*, the state and society at large must deal with. This makes integration and peace key tasks of social inclusion. In order to regulate and implement the State Program Nurly Kosh centers of adaptation and integration were introduced for *kandastar* in various regions.

Box 4 gives a summary of the case study from the UNDP project for *kandastar* explaining the efforts to facilitate their adjustment and social inclusion in Eastern Kazakhstan.

#### Box 4. UNDP Project for *kandastar* in Eastern Kazakhstan

The UNDP supported the setup of the Oralman Center in Semey, as part of a joint United Nations Program in East Kazakhstan. The center in Semey initially provided language and computer classes in 2009, and is now a fully-fledged organization, providing a wide range of consultancy and educational services to the repatriates of the East Kazakhstan Region.

The Center for Oralman Support has provided more than 2,000 consultations to *oralmans* since 2012. With the support of the UN Joint Program for *Oralmans* in East Kazakhstan, eight NGOs have been created. In total, about 12,000 *oralmans* in the region (50% of the total *oralman* population in East-Kazakhstan) successfully integrated into Kazakhstan society thanks to the center in Semey. National partners have recommended that the model of support services provided by the center in Semey be replicated in other regions of the country.

Source: UNDP. n.d. *Adapting to Life in Eastern Kazakhstan*

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<sup>181</sup> In September 2020 the name *oralmans* has been officially replaced by the *kandas/kandastar*. See : Yeliseyeva. 2020. Yeliseyeva Ye. Termin «oralman» ofitsial'no zamenili na «kandas» v RK [The term “oralman” was officially replaced by “kandas” in the Republic of Kazakhstan]. *Kazakhstanskayaya pravda*. 3 September 2020.

<sup>182</sup> Yerekeshcheva. 2005. Yerekeshcheva L. International Migration in Kazakhstan. In *International Migration in Central Asia: Challenges and Prospects*. Conference Report. Almaty, UNESCO, p. 70.

<sup>183</sup> UNDP. n.d. *Adapting to Life in Eastern Kazakhstan*. Available from

## Youth Entrepreneurship

According to the National Report on the Youth of Kazakhstan 2018, developing youth entrepreneurship is one of the priority directions of SME advancement in Kazakhstan. As SME is the main driver of the economy, the report promotes the transition towards innovative development and reflects the specificity of youth entrepreneurship, such as quick responses to consumption and market demands, and creativity in the production of small scale and unique products.<sup>184</sup>

To fulfil this strategic goal, institutional and operational infrastructure for youth entrepreneurship has been developed, including several programs and institutions which have been structured as shown in Figure 6.

As Figure 6 shows, there is well-developed infrastructure aimed at administering and achieving youth entrepreneurship development, support for the unemployed and self-employed

youth through various programs, and financial and non-financial support instruments. For example, the Council for the Development of Youth Entrepreneurship, a consultative advisory body within the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs, was created to promote and review youth entrepreneurship challenges and opportunities for development. Within the Fund for Entrepreneurship Development (DAMU), there are envisaged the programs: For Beginning Entrepreneurs, For Acting Entrepreneurs, and For Women in Business, where youth is also targeted.

In support of the youth entrepreneurship there is the informational and consultative bilingual web resource Business Territory for Your Development. Within this framework is a special elaborated module on “Youth Business.”<sup>185</sup>

**Figure 6. Youth Entrepreneurship Institutional and Operational Infrastructure in Kazakhstan**

| INSTITUTIONS   | NATIONAL PROGRAMS   | INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS  |
|--|---|---|
| Fund for Entrepreneurship Development “DAMU”             | “Enbek” Development Program on Productive Employment and Mass Entrepreneurship for 2017-2021      | World Bank project “Zhasproject”  |
| National Chamber of Commerce “Atameken”                  |   | EBRD projects   |
| Fund of Youth Initiatives                                |   | Microsoft Program “Bizspark”  |
| Kazakhstan Development Bank                              | Unified Program on Support and Business Development “Business Road Map 2020”                      |  |
| National Agency on Technological Development             |   |   |
| “KazAgroFinans” Fund of Financial Support of Agriculture | DAMU Programs: “For beginning entrepreneurs”, “For acting entrepreneurs”, “For women in business” |   |
| National Agency on Export and Investment “KaznexInvest”  |   |   |
| Kazakhstan Institute of Industry Development             |   |   |

Based on: Scientific-Research Center ‘Youth’. 2018



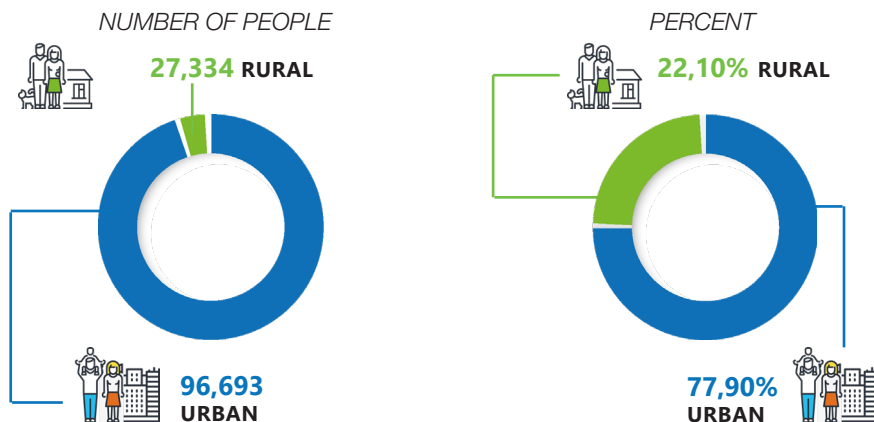
<sup>184</sup> Scientific-Research Center ‘Youth’. 2018, p. 216.

<sup>185</sup> Scientific-Research Center ‘Youth’. 2018, p. 216.

Based on the data of the Statistics Committee at the Ministry of National Economy, as of July 1, 2018, there were 124,027 young people (up to 29 years

old) who were registered as individual entrepreneurs. The majority (96,693 people) lived in urban areas while 27,334 people lived in rural areas.<sup>186</sup> (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7. Registered Young Individual Entrepreneurs (up to 29 years old) in Kazakhstan, Rural-Urban Based**



Based on: Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2018

These figures confirm the social-economic disparities mentioned earlier between the rural and urban areas. The smaller number of young entrepreneurs in rural areas is also associated with the internal migration from rural areas to cities, and low-quality education (both general and professional).

Young people in Kazakhstan generally express favorable attitudes to youth entrepreneurship. According to the GUESS study<sup>187</sup> of 2016, most surveyed students expect to be employees of medium or large businesses immediately after graduation (18% and 27%, respectively), and about 10% want to be small-business entrepreneurs. The total number of people willing to work in the business and civil service sectors is 45% and 16.1% respectively, whereas 7.9% and 1.6% respectively want to work for academic and non-profit organizations. However, participation in entrepreneurship varies. According to the same study, 10.4% of all students are already business owners

(active entrepreneurs) and more than a third (39.6%) have attempted to establish their own enterprise.

A review of entrepreneurship-themed media suggest that young people have a positive attitude to other young entrepreneurs. Young people respond enthusiastically to the stories of peer and young entrepreneurs who have achieved success in Kazakhstan, and regularly publicize the use of their products and services.

The media portal *Baribar*<sup>188</sup> launched the project 50 Young Entrepreneurs in order to promote and popularize the work of 50 young (up to 30 years old) Kazakhstan entrepreneurs who are successfully implementing business projects in various fields. As the portal organizer emphasizes, the goal of the project is to increase motivation for creating small and medium businesses among the Internet audience.

Such promotion of youth entrepreneurship is a good mechanism for social inclusion and social integration.



<sup>186</sup> Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2018, p. 217.

<sup>187</sup> Sudibor, Turgumbayeva. 2016. Sudibor, O., Turgumbayeva, A. *Entrepreneurial Intentions and Behavior of Students Attending Kazakhstani Universities. Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students. Survey 2016. National Report Kazakhstan*. Almaty, Turan University.

<sup>188</sup> Baribar. 2019. 50 zhas kasipker. [50 young entrepreneurs.] Almaty, Baribar.kz.

It is known that the success rate of start-up enterprises is low worldwide, and even lower for youth enterprises. It is unrealistic to expect that every youth start-up will become a successful enterprise. The key purpose of the youth entrepreneurship policy is to help young people invent creative solutions, acquire business and life skills, work in teams, and become acquainted with the trends and success stories of other people. Networking, teamwork and mentoring help to establish social integration. Start-ups, being enterprises with minimum capital requirement, encourage broad participation and promote social inclusion.

The representative is the case of young entrepreneurs club MOST<sup>189</sup> that was established by two young people to help other budding entrepreneurs. Eventually it became: a successful provider of incubation services, a hub, training provider, and partner to national and international start-up competitors and institutional investors. Youth entrepreneurship initiatives in Kazakhstan are becoming very diverse and are carried out by governmental and developmental agencies, universities, public organizations and interested youth themselves.

The potential for addressing peacebuilding goals through youth entrepreneurship is high, and it is notable that young people perceive modern entrepreneurship as a creative, socially positive activity. Youth value entrepreneurs with strong personalities and original ideas that symbolize their enterprise and consequently commercial success. As mentioned already, it is positive that youth interest and engagement in social entrepreneurship has been steadily growing because social entrepreneurship is an approach for solving social issues in a financially viable way.

Notwithstanding the growing number and scale of youth entrepreneurship initiatives, the National Report on the Youth of Kazakhstan 2018<sup>190</sup> points out that 25.7% of young people surveyed do not

know about any youth entrepreneurship initiatives. The numbers indicate a lack of awareness and may also reflect the concentrated presence of initiatives in large cities. This further suggests that measures have to be undertaken to enable youth entrepreneurship in all regions of Kazakhstan, including in remote rural areas.

As discussed at the beginning, the report methodology highlights that education and learning are crucial elements of youth and peacebuilding development. The establishment (as in rural areas) and advancement of youth entrepreneurship could easily be done through education using TVET in colleges. ETF's 2017 report mentioned that the first steps towards developing entrepreneurial competences in educational institutions have already been taken, and the State Program of Education and Science Development (SPESD) has scheduled the basics of entrepreneurial activities as an optional subject in colleges for the period 2016 to 2019. Another achievement was the establishment of the Youth Entrepreneurship Development Council under the auspices of the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs. However, some barriers are yet to be overcome.<sup>191</sup>

The literature identifies differences in the quality of social infrastructure, and access to social development and integration among urban and rural youth. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation's survey (2016) and the National Report on the Youth of Kazakhstan 2018 found significant differences in the quality of leisure institutions: 55.3% of rural youth have access to leisure institutes compared to 75.2% of urban youth.

Urban young people find various additional opportunities to develop and diversify their academic and professional experience. They often participate as organizers, or partner with universities, business, non-governmental organizations, governmental agencies, development institutions and others in events such as TedEx conferences, case



<sup>189</sup> MOST. 2019. Biznes-inkubator MOST. Biznes-akseleracia, konsalting, investitsiyi. O nas. [Business Incubator MOST. Business acceleration, consulting, investments.] Almaty, MOST.

<sup>190</sup> Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2018.

<sup>191</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017b, pp. 2-3.

competitions, hackathons, eduthons, business forums, master classes, science expos and fairs. These arrangements may be regular or temporary, depending on the interests, objectives and capacities of the participants.

The review of the practices suggest that young people care about sustainable development and peace, and these educational arrangements provide a forum for the generation of knowledge and the acquisition of competence on matters of

peace. For example, *TEDxAbayStWomen*<sup>192</sup> independently organizes conferences by young women and men in Almaty that are devoted to gender equality. *Neupusti.net*<sup>193</sup> is a web-portal established by a team of former students which searches for, and publishes, the most recent announcements of international educational events for young people. Events based on international peace, leadership, inclusion and social entrepreneurship are among the frequent placed in the portal.

## Young Women in Entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan

In the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2019, the number of operating small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) amounted to 1,330 thousand units, of which, in proportion, the number of SMEs headed by women entrepreneurs was less (41.3%) compared to 58.7% of businesses headed by men. Moreover, in the regional plan, there were imbalances, for example, the region with the largest share of SMEs headed by women was the Karaganda region (45.7%), East Kazakhstan, Kostanay and West Kazakhstan regions.<sup>194</sup>

As of January 1, 2021, the number of registered small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the republic amounted to 1,603,839 units, and the share of SMEs headed by women amounted to 677,390,<sup>195</sup> or 42.2%, i.e., there is a slight upward trend, even in a pandemic. At the same time, the areas of entrepreneurial activity in which enterprises headed by women are involved - agriculture, construction, information and communication are indicative. In all of these areas, there is a pronounced imbalance between female and male-headed SMEs. For example, in agriculture - 60,202 SMEs headed by women versus 188,859 entities headed by

men; in construction - 12 821 and 52 091; in information and communication - 5,570 and 12,699, respectively.<sup>196</sup> These figures indicate that SMEs headed by women cannot yet compete in areas considered to be male, such as construction.

Similarly, within the framework of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) programs in Kazakhstan to support women in entrepreneurship, it was noted that only about 9% of women entrepreneurs can establish themselves in business areas that are traditionally considered to be “men-appropriate”.<sup>197</sup> One of the main problems faced by women entrepreneurs, according to experts, are systemic issues such as “barriers to entering new markets, lack of accounting for their own finances and lack of knowledge of modern IT tools for effective business”.<sup>198</sup>

Review of women-entrepreneur success stories suggests that at the initial stage of their business activities, women faced distrust and sometimes disapproval of their initiatives. Examples of expressed attitudes include a belief that women should give priority to housework:



<sup>192</sup> TED Conferences, LLC. 2019. TEDxAbayStWomen x = independently organized TED event. Almaty, TEDx.

<sup>193</sup> Neupusti.Net. 2019. O Nas. [About us]. Almaty.

<sup>194</sup> DAMU. 2020. *Otchet o sostoyanii razvitiya malogo i srednego predprinimatel'stva v Kazakhstane i yego regionakh* [Report on the State of Development of Small and Medium-size Businesses in Kazakhstan and Its Regions]. Almaty: Entrepreneurship Development Fund DAMU. Issue 12. p. 11, 18.

<sup>195</sup> Gender MSE. 2021a. *Kolichestvo zaregistrovannykh sub'yektov malogo i srednego predprinimatel'stva (MSP) po sostoyaniyu na 1 yanvarya 2021 goda* [The number of registered small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as of January 1, 2021]. Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan

<sup>196</sup> Gender MSE. 2021b. *Raspredeleniye deystviyushchikh sub'yektov MSP v razreze vidov ekonomicheskoy deyatel'nosti po sostoyaniyu na 1 yanvarya 2021 goda* [Distribution of operating SMEs by type of economic activity as of January 1, 2021]. Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan

<sup>197</sup> Forbes.Kz. 2019. *Bolshe poloviny zhenshin-predprinimatelej ostajutsja na urovne micropredpriyatij* [More than half of women-entrepreneurs remain at level of micro-enterprises]. January 28. (Accessed 19 June 2019).

<sup>198</sup> Forbes.Kz. 2019.



*In some regions of Kazakhstan there is a stereotype that a girl should be a good housewife, and not a good programmer<sup>199</sup> and that women in general cannot be high-achievers in non-conventional areas: “At first I was not taken seriously.... I believed in my own business, while many asserted that nothing would come of it. People considered boxing school to be my entertainment, they said: ‘she will play and quit’. But now everyone understands how seriously I take business”.<sup>200</sup>*

The same young women, however, explained that lack of self-confidence and doubts were common characteristics and they sought support both on business and social adaptation.<sup>201</sup> Experts suggest that both young men and young women have common strengths such as creative and innovative approaches, flexibility and open-mindedness, and tolerance of risks. Both men and women entrepreneurs named the most typical characteristic vulnerabilities as insignificant social experience, absence of business reputation, and less pronounced sense of responsibility.<sup>202</sup>

In general, young people of both sexes are interested in entrepreneurship

in Kazakhstan. In particular, according to the results of a survey of students on entrepreneurship, conducted in 50 countries of the world (2016), in Kazakhstan the gap is insignificant - 63.2 percent of women who announced their intention to start a business, and 64.3 percent of men.<sup>203</sup>

Therefore, social context is an important determinant of young people's success as entrepreneurs, which is historically different for young women and men. The OECD Report<sup>204</sup> and the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2016/2017 Report for Kazakhstan<sup>205</sup> concluded that societal value of entrepreneurship is high, and the overall variety of instruments to support entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial ecosystems is sufficient. Nonetheless, OECD analyses of SME and entrepreneurial policy in 2018 showed that both youth and women's entrepreneurship can be boosted by increasing women and youth-related capacities and other instruments in all parts of the ecosystem: entrepreneurs, policymakers, financial support providers, financial sectors, educational and training providers, etc.<sup>206</sup>

### (3) Civic Engagement

The important form of youth engagement is civic participation in social processes relating to migration, religion, intercultural dialogue, and preventing violent extremism (PVE) that is best seen through the prism of identity and social cohesion.



*Participation has been defined as: “the active, informed and voluntary involvement of people in decision-making and the life of their communities (both locally and globally). This broad, general definition provides a useful anchor for discussion of migrant youth participation.”*

Source: Cortina, Taran et al. 2014, p. 4.



<sup>199</sup> The-Village.Kz. 2019b. Neslabij pol: Dina Mukasheva o tom, kak reshat' socialnye problemy s pomoshju innovatsiy. [Not a craven gender: Dina Mukhasheva talks about how to solve social problems with help of innovations]. Dina Mukhasheva's interview to The Village Kazakhstan. April 1.

<sup>200</sup> The-Village.Kz. 2019a. Neslabij pol: Aiala Konakbayeva o tom, kakovo eto — assotsirovatsiya s boksom v Kazahstane. [Not a craven gender: Ayala Konakbayeva talks about how it is to be associated with boxing in Kazakhstan]. Ayala Konakbayeva's interview to The Village Kazakhstan. 28 February.

<sup>201</sup> The-Village.Kz. 2019b.

<sup>202</sup> Shestov, P. 2015. Nuzhno li osobo vydeljat molodezhnoe predprinimatelstvo? [Is there a need to distinctly define 'youth entrepreneurship'?] Materials of the expert discussion of KIPR analytical group. Kapital.kz.

<sup>203</sup> Sieger, P., Fueglistaller, U., and Zellweger, T. 2016. Student Entrepreneurship 2016: *Insights From 50 Countries*. Bern, St.Gallen KMU-HSG/IMU.

<sup>204</sup> OECD. 2018. *SME and Entrepreneurship Policy in Kazakhstan 2018*. OECD Studies on SME and Entrepreneurship. Paris, OECD Publishing, p. 15.

<sup>205</sup> Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM). 2017. *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: National Report: Kazakhstan 2016/2017*. GEM//Nazarbayev University/Economic Research Institute, p. 21; pp. 41-46.

<sup>206</sup> OECD. 2018. p. 16

## Migration

Multiethnic Kazakhstan is a host country to (labor) migrants (including *kandastar*) from the other Central Asian countries – Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

This fact influences the social engagement and participation of both “local” and migrant youth. Participation of young migrants in the social cohesion process has become a reality. There have been almost three decades of migration to the country, with some of migrants already reaching the retirement age and having children born in Kazakhstan, who have become citizens of the country. This highlights the importance of participation and social cohesion of the migrants and their family members.

If to look at the global experience, then, as UNICEF findings on youth migrants suggest, there are positive outcomes coming from migrants’ participation such as “a leadership role in raising awareness and changing attitudes and

practices about migration and migrants in their communities”, participation in local organizations, and contributing to public policy debate with the use of social media on matters affecting them and the communities in which they live.<sup>207</sup> These forms of participation in a so-called “established” social environment characterized by developed civil societies, grassroot policy debates and open expression, could be difficult to find in countries with another cultural traditions. Hence, in these countries, the inclusion of migrants in a social environment may require targeted and systemic interventions, along with specially designed and elaborated tools for social integration or peacebuilding.

What is the situation in the field of migration in Kazakhstan? The main contributing countries of migration to Kazakhstan are Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and to a lesser extent Tajikistan (see Box 5).

### Box 5. Contributing Countries to Migration to Kazakhstan



**“Uzbek migrants** form by far the largest group: more than one million were temporary registered in 2016 (33% more than during the previous year), and more than 300,000 received work permits (almost three times as many as in 2015). Less than 10% of applicants from Uzbekistan were women.



**Kyrgyz migrants** are no longer captured in migration statistics since Kyrgyzstan joined the EAEU, but registration statistics show an increase of more than 150,000 (ca. 40% more compared to the previous year). The majority of them settled in either of two metropolitan cities (Almaty and Astana), or regions bordering on Kyrgyzstan - for the most part in the Almaty and Zhambyl regions.



**Tajik migrants** remain the smallest group of registered foreigners in Kazakhstan ... 10,957 Tajik nationals entered Kazakhstan in 2015 and 12,373 in 2016 (i.e., an increase of 1,416 people); another 5,076 went to Kazakhstan in the first five months of 2017. Kazakhstan has not yet become an alternative to Russia for migrant workers from Tajikistan (as is the case for migrants from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan).”

*Source: IOM. 2017. Executive Summary on Migrant Vulnerabilities and Integration Needs in Central Asia 2017. Assessing Migrants’ and Community Needs and Managing Risks. Astana: IOM Sub-Regional Office for Central Asia, 2017, p. 18.*



<sup>207</sup> Cortina, Taran et al. 2014. Cortina, J., Taran, P., et al. Chapter 15 Strengthening Participation by Young Migrants. In: *Migration and Youth: Challenges and Opportunities*. GMG/UNICEF, p. 2.



A significant element of peacebuilding is the provision of migrants with basic rights and freedoms in the host country. A study by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on the laws and institutional frameworks governing international migration in Central Asia and South Caucasus reveals the existing situation in Kazakhstan and Russia as the two main host countries in the region.<sup>208</sup>

It is argued that Kazakhstan and Russia have a body of legislation dealing variously with the migrants' rights. The rights of migrant workers and members of their families are scattered across a wide range of fields, including labor, trade unions, employment, pension security, statutory social insurance, state social benefits, health protection, education and housing conditions. Consequently, the regulation of these fields for labor migrants is a comprehensive task to ensure the provision of their rights.

The study discusses definite progress in the field of migrant workers' economic rights in Kazakhstan and Russia (when work permits and labor licenses are issued to migrant workers rather than to their employers) including: the right of migrant workers to join and take part in trade union

activities, which opens up legal avenues for these organizations to protect their rights; and the access of migrant workers and members of their families to free medical care.

The study also identifies some limitations that need to be resolved such as absence of an explicitly defined right to family reunification for other categories of migrant workers that might be used as a reason for not providing their children with access to education. As a very problematic legal issue it defines the rights to access pensions and statutory social insurance. In Kazakhstan, if migrants are employed, their employers are not obliged to make any payments; and even if these payments are made, migrant workers have no right to receive the relevant benefits.<sup>209</sup>

ESCAP findings show that access to vocational training, language and integration courses, which are major contributing factors towards peacebuilding and the development of migrants, is provided for but not guaranteed. This signifies the need for implementing the legal norms immediately and at local levels to engage migrants in educational training, social cohesion programs and activities. The same concerns apply to the issue of education which is not explicitly provided for.<sup>210</sup>

## Youth and Identity

Other forms of participation of the youth in Kazakhstan relate to their social environment that could be best seen from the prism of their identity, social solidarity and cohesion. Identification of the youth in generational terms (i.e., millennials and post-millennials) provides a ground to understand their specificity within the broader context, i.e., to take into account institutional, relational, individual categories that differ in a wide range and include the presence of organized structures and initiatives. This includes the availability of organized structures and initiatives, such as youth organizations,

peer groups and public events, as well as the media environment such as groups in social media networks, media personalities, vloggers, bloggers and vloggers.

There are two wider socio-cultural processes occurring in Kazakhstan that should be explored in order to explain the modalities of socio-political participation. The first process is post-millennials' immersion in the digital media. The second process is the relations among millennials – a generation whose formative years were in the transitional period immediately after the establishment of the newly independent Kazakhstan.



<sup>208</sup> Ni V. (n.a.) *Study of the Laws and Institutional Frameworks Governing International Migration in North and Central Asia from the Perspective of Countries of Origin and Destination*. ESCAP Working Papers N 4. Almaty, ESCAP, p. 43.

<sup>209</sup> Ni V. (n.a.), pp. 16–19.

<sup>210</sup> Ni V. (n.a.), p. 17.

Overall, the socialization of post-millennials has been permeated by a variety of media inputs and formats. Thus, new media have been an influential factor in socialization, means of communication, and social and self-identification. Unlike millennials, who tend to use new media as practical means toward achieving certain goals, post-millennials tend to approach media content less critically and less analytically.

On the one hand, post-millennial young people are very sensitive to the image they project to the social media and they seek positive comments, 'likes' and recognition. On the other hand, post-millennials seem to understand the frequent insubstantiality of media content and do not take any input seriously. According to the Friedrich Ebert Foundation,<sup>211</sup> in 2016, the most popular free-time activity was socializing with friends through online and off-life entertainment. Young people preferred to spend time networking with friends rather than reading books or doing sports. The inability to think critically while at the same time socializing in social media and networks can make the online space an arena of unthoughtful judgements and hate speech that may have cumulative effect.

Although young people attach strong value to healthy life, sports and education, they prefer passive socializing. At the same time, an opposite global trend should be mentioned – namely, the growing inactivity of both adolescents and adults, with variations in developed and developing countries. According to the WHO, “insufficient physical activity is a key risk factor for noncommunicable diseases... such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer and diabetes... Globally, 81% of adolescents aged 11–17 years were insufficiently physically active in 2010. Adolescent girls were less active than adolescent boys, at 84% and 78% respectively, which does not meet WHO recommendations.”<sup>212</sup> Noncommunicable diseases among the youth are mainly caused by their passive lifestyles, outdoor threats or overreliance on gadgets.

Millennials in Kazakhstan, similar to their peers worldwide, have witnessed the development of digital technology and the associated progress. They appreciate innovation and creative products, and may choose entrepreneurship over stable jobs. In Kazakhstan, millennials have lived through economic hardship at the beginning of 1990s, socio-economic transition, and years of economic boom and downturns. Millennials have thus acquired more practical and more resilient work ethics, and more confidence to sustain themselves. Millennials often engage in sports, may combine work and entrepreneurship, organize charities, running and cycling marathons, and have a good approach to mentoring post-millennials.

Not surprisingly, post-millennials find role models among millennials due to the guidance and relatable values that they see among millennials. One example is the association of *Bolashak* which is comprised of young people of various age cohorts who initiate a range of youth programs aimed at their integration into society, and the sustainable development of the country.

Post-millennial youth do not perceive the need for higher institutional support. As a result, they face challenges to accommodate their expectations of easy satisfaction and future obligations to sustain themselves socially and economically. Although young people acknowledge the fact that their basic needs are provided, some concerns about their future economic situation exist. The literature confirms that education and entrepreneurship are two social domains in which youth mobilization and participation are very high.

Youth identity is interlinked with the issues of social and national integration due to the multiethnicity factor, multireligious, multilingual population, regional differences. The last factor has specific feature and is linked to the so called “invisible borders” still influencing



<sup>211</sup> Friedrich Ebert Foundation Kazakhstan. 2016a, p. 260.

<sup>212</sup> WHO. 2018. Physical activity. Factsheet.

the mentality and stereotyping of thinking and behaviour of the people. For example, the Zhuz division and regionalism (based on tribal division between great, middle, and small Zhuzes), is still a divisive aspect that affects the country's nation-building performance.

The Constitution of the Kazak Republic enshrines the civil principle of building Kazakhstan's identity and unity of the people based on the recognition of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity. This implies the need for developing by young people of the corresponding competencies for citizenship based on the cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic pluralism.

As it is known, the personal identity formation is shaped by a wide variety of complex socio-cultural influences. This is a fluid process which should be further researched in the context of the country. It is apparent that in Kazakhstan, family and non-formal circles are the most influential reference groups.

As far as religious identity of the youth

is concerned, the results of the sociological survey conducted by the Research Center for Youth in 2018 showed that 69% of young people identified themselves as believers. Of these, 6.4% were deeply involved in the observation and practice of religious beliefs and rituals. Of the young people who were seldom involved in religious life, 26.5% seldom observed religious norms and 36.1% did not participate in religious life. In other words, 62.6% of the 69% of young believers were not deeply involved in religious observance or practice. Just over one-quarter (28.2%) defined themselves as non-believers. This group comprised 15.2% who respected religion, 8.0% who were indifferent to religion, non-believers (i.e., occasionally attended religious events or places), and a small number of atheists (1.6%).<sup>213</sup>

According to this sociological survey, there are some negative tendencies relating to the challenges of religious radicalization among the youth that need to be addressed.<sup>214</sup> Among them are the following:



**(1)** There was less interest in other religions among the Kazakh youth (7.7%) compared to 19.0% among Russian youth and 14.2% among other ethnic groups. Meanwhile, an interest in other religions and cultures is considered to be an important aspect of religious and general tolerance, and open secular consciousness, because it helps to create immunity against radical religious ideology. In this respect, the Kazakh youth seem to lag behind.



**(2)** All sub-age youth groups of different ethnic, religious, social, and regional backgrounds (both rural and urban) indicated a growth of religious ideology among the youth (57.3%). The figures were higher for respondents from the Aktyubinskaya (76.5%) and Atyrauskaya (81.2%) regions in western Kazakhstan where solving the problem of religious radicalism is high on the government's agenda.



**(3)** De-privatization of religion in modern society is making a comeback and influencing social space as demonstrated in the responses of the youth respondents. 23.8% regarded religious youth as a source of tension in society, and 15.1% valued the input and contribution of religious people to society. Less than a half (41.9%) of those surveyed thought that religious youth don't have an impact on Kazak society.



<sup>213</sup> Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2018, p. 246.

<sup>214</sup> Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2018, p. 247.



(4) The responses from young people on whether religious extremism is an actual problem in the places where they live showed that 35.2% believed this - some 17.0 % said it is highly relevant; and 18.2% said it is quite relevant. In the regions this issue is considered especially relevant: in Atyrauskaya (72.5%), Aktyubinskaya (34.7%), Mangystauskaya (24%), Western Kazakhstanskaya (32.9%) regions, and Nur-Sultan city (25.6%).

Another none less important factor is radicalization of youth in prisons. A study by S. Beisembayev on the profile of imprisoned people found that nine out of 14 of those convicted for religious extremism were young people between 19–29 years old.<sup>215</sup>

The above four factors show the latent and open challenges in the religious field. With Kazakh youth showing lower levels of interest in other cultures and religions, a general admittance of the growth of their own religious beliefs (57.3%) and a belief in its potential effect for society, a picture emerges of religion becoming an influential factor in the modern development of the society, including the youth. The figures also show the extent of the influence of religious radical ideology on the youth who have been imprisoned for religious extremism.

It could be summed up that the issues of youth civil engagement in various fields (migration, religion, intercultural dialogue, preventing violent extremism) signify this thematical area of peacebuilding. Among its key trends are self-identification and identity of the youth (its construction, formation and shaping), and implementation of the relational function that focuses on links and relation-building. As a result, the identity and dialogue should be exposed in the social, economic, ideological, religious fields. Consequently, the basic and fundamental condition for dialogue in these and other areas are awareness and capacity building of all actors that could be realized through education and learning.



<sup>215</sup> Scientific-Research Center 'Youth'. 2018, p. 247.

<sup>216</sup> World Bank Group. 2018. *A New Growth Model for Building a Secure Middle Class. Kazakhstan Systematic Country Diagnostic*. Washington, DC, WBG, p. 13. (Doc. No. 125611-KZ).

## Summary

The youth of Kazakhstan face several challenges in the field of peacebuilding that are interconnected and interdependent.

Within the social-economic framework, unemployment, low employment and inactivity are major issues, with youth and women “appearing to bear the brunt of worsening labor market conditions.”<sup>216</sup> The figures show that 42.2% of young people permanently experience the problem of unemployment, especially in the regions of Aktyubinskaya (53.1%), Atyrau (58.0%), Mangistauskaya (73.3%), Turkestanskaya (51.4%) regions, as well as in the more urban Nur-Sultan (73.4%).<sup>217</sup> There is also the growth by more than 1 million number of poor people during the years 2014-2015.<sup>218</sup>

Rural youth find themselves in a more difficult situation while searching for jobs. Regional disparities in unemployment could be correlated with the particular regions of the country where young jobseekers live.

These regions are also characterized by an increase of religious radicalism that could be correlated with economic and social conditions. The growth of religiosity among the youth, and at the same time less interest towards other religions as compared to other ethnic groups, also signals the possibility of a high risk of religious intolerance.

Issues of inclusion (in various degrees) for people with disabilities, *kandastar*, labor migrants and their families, and women also indicate the level of the country's development.

The situation with labor migrants from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakh repatriates (*kandastar*), makes it even more important to focus on the social cohesion of the migrants and their mainstreaming into Kazakhstan society. As a host country

to migrants, the problem of labor migration should be referred to in terms of intercultural dialogue as well rather than as economic performance only. Hence, participation programs, education and training need to be developed and introduced for both the locals and the migrants, while the cultural literacy competencies should occupy a significant part of finding solutions.

A low level of youth participation in the public and political processes of the country suggests the risks of social disintegration and social exclusion. There is worthwhile noticing little development of cultural leisure infrastructure for youth in the regions.<sup>219</sup>

Thus, unemployment/low employment, rural-urban polarization, regional disparities, growth of religiosity and the possibility of religious radicalization, and low social and political engagement of the youth present a wide spectrum of challenges that are deeply rooted and relevant to the highly actual issue of quality education, including TVET and professional education, especially in rural areas. The results of the survey by the Research Center for Youth indirectly supports this. For example, the survey report states that the aspirations and plans of the youth of Kazakhstan for the next five years are focused on obtaining the following: quality education (30.4%), successful career (27.3%), a well-paid job (22.8%), and housing (17.4%).<sup>220</sup> This means that youth consider pursuing a quality education to be more important than a successful career, well-paid job and housing, because the latter factors are seen as a consequence of the first one. In other words, quality education could be viewed as a driver and enabler of the youth.



<sup>217</sup> Scientific-Research Center ‘Youth’. 2018, p. 248.

<sup>218</sup> World Bank Group. 2018, p. 18.

<sup>219</sup> Scientific-Research Center ‘Youth’. 2018, p. 227.

<sup>220</sup> Scientific-Research Center ‘Youth’. 2018, pp. 216, 246.

## Key Challenges for Youth and Peacebuilding in Kazakhstan

The following key challenges for Kazakhstan youth could be identified:



**Youth unemployment and low employment**, especially in rural areas.



**Rural-urban and regional disparities, and marginalization of rural youth**, that lead to internal migration from rural areas to cities. Disparities and marginalization are due to low employment in rural areas and low-quality education.



**Income disparities**, that are directly associated with the previously-mentioned challenges, that is, unemployment and rural-urban and regional disparities. Income disparities are an obvious indicator of social inequality and polarization that impede social cohesion and encourage protest and civil unrest.



**Insufficient access to quality education**, TVET and professional training. Education should reflect the present and future employment needs of the labor market, especially in view of digitization and the changing nature of jobs.



**Insufficient inclusion and integration** of persons with disabilities, *kandastar*, women and ethnic groups into society and mainstream education. This creates social, psychological and mental barriers among different groups and impedes social cohesion.



**Low inclusion of labor migrants, refugees and their families into the society** prevents their participation in dialogue and contribution to the society.



**Radicalization of youth is region-based** and is a crucial challenge for peacebuilding as a result of both “pull” (individual motivations) and “push” (conditions that are conducive) factors.



**Low political and public participation** including insufficient / the lack of a culture of open discussion and debate with the participation of all stakeholders and social groups. Social, political, economic engagement and involvement, promotion of equal opportunities, and upward social pathways for youth are among the crucial factors for youth mainstreaming, participation, dialogue and social cohesion.

## KYRGYZSTAN

### General Characteristics of Youth-Related Issues

The 2000s were associated with a gradual increase in negative trends in the economy and social sector of Kyrgyzstan, which were caused by a sluggish economy, political instability, and changes in the cultural sphere. Additionally, a generation of young people were not linked with the Soviet past, possessing different life values to previous generations, this confronted youth with new challenges for which they were unprepared.

Kyrgyzstan is rated economically as a low-middle income country characterized by (as of 2014) a poverty problem, mainly in rural areas, with one third of the population living below the national poverty line with two-thirds of the poor living in rural areas.<sup>221</sup>

Since youth comprise 25.7% of the population of the country, these figures imply that youth are potentially one of main vulnerable groups of the society which requires systemic responses from the government. In 2017, UNDAF for the Kyrgyz Republic signaled an unstable situation in the social field. Although a significant amount of GDP is invested in social issues, as yet, “social assistance directly addressing poverty is limited in terms of both coverage and value, constituting only 0.5% of GDP.”<sup>222</sup>

Poor economic performance of the country raised questions about the most vulnerable groups, including children and youth, and the state’s activities and regulation of the problems. Research done throughout the 2000s addressed these issues, and particularly the lack of social, economic and political participation

of the youth. The so-called Green Paper stressed that state officials were considering the youth as an object for control, and not as a party to dialogue and interaction in different spheres, including the maintenance of stability and peaceful development in the country.<sup>223</sup> Further, the so-called White Paper<sup>224</sup> that was prepared by young people themselves, also revealed that key problems were the lack of a constant and operating dialogue between the youth and the acting state authorities.<sup>225</sup> Many statements of this White Paper are still valid, and some of the proposals are yet to be taken into account. The main youth-related issues for Kyrgyzstan (as articulated in the research of that period) are briefly summarized below:

At that period the state distanced itself from solving the problems of youth, whereas the youth policy was implemented in a declarative form. The young people had to solve current problems on their own, and, bearing in mind a lack of opportunities for self-realization in their own country, and for maintaining their basic financial and social status, they opted for labour migration outside the country. In addition to this, there was a relatively low involvement of Kyrgyz youth in the youth organizations in the country. Most such organizations were formed within the framework of the projects initiated by international organizations working, among other things, on the development of democratic values and other related themes of participation.



<sup>221</sup> UNDAF Kyrgyz Republic. 2017. *The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the Kyrgyz Republic 2018-2022*. Bishkek, Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, p. 17.

<sup>222</sup> UNDAF Kyrgyz Republic. 2017, p. 33.

<sup>223</sup> Tret'yakova, Saynazarov et al. 2006. Tret'yakova T., Saynazarov K., et al. *Problemy uchastiya molodezhi v razvitiy Respubliki. Analiticheskaya zapiska* [Problems of youth participation in the development of the Republic. Analytical note]. Bishkek. [in Russian].

<sup>224</sup> Syrdybayev, Sydykova, Kudabayeva. 2008. Syrdybayev S., Sydykova Z., Kudabayeva G. *Molodezh' – strategicheskiy resurs Kyrgyzstana (Belaya kniga)* [Young people are a strategic resource of Kyrgyzstan (White Paper)]. Bishkek.

<sup>225</sup> Syrdybayev, Sydykova, Kudabayeva. 2008, pp. 18-20, 32-39. Annexes 1, 2.

## (1) Education and Learning Environment

As was discussed earlier in the methodology, education is an important driver of addressing a whole range of challenges standing before any society. This acquires a special dimension in developing societies such as Kyrgyzstan with a high percentage of youth.

Currently, the task of modernizing the education system is a huge challenge, when the expenditure on education has been significantly reduced in Kyrgyzstan. The report of the UNDP Human Development Regional Office noted that in Kyrgyzstan in the period between 1990–2001, the quota of education expenditure in GDP had reduced by 8.3% to 3.1% (while the worldwide average was 4.1%).<sup>226</sup>

Kyrgyzstan has pre-school, secondary school, TVET and higher education institutions (HEI) system.<sup>227</sup> Since 2011, the country introduced a two-level structure for higher professional education with awards of academic degrees of “Bachelor” and “Master” (except for certain specialty courses),<sup>228</sup> as well as the planned introduction of PhD degrees on a pilot basis.

The educational field in the country is diverse, with the number of participant institutions increasing from nine universities in 1991 to 54 in 2010.<sup>229</sup> According to the EU SPHERE Program, 64 higher educational institutions now function (32 state institutions and 32 non-state institutions) that host 160,000 students,<sup>230</sup> whereas current official data show 31 state and 19 non-state institutions. In 2014/15 there were 50 with 223,200 students.<sup>231</sup>

A specific feature of the higher education system of Kyrgyzstan is its openness towards establishing foreign HEI and their branches. There are also

institutions set up with foreign participation, as is the case of the Kyrgyz-Russian (Slavonic) University, Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University, American University of Central Asia, Mahmood Kashgari-Barskani Kuwait University, Ataturk-Alatoo International University, Kyrgyz-Russian Academy of Education, Kyrgyz-Uzbek University,<sup>232</sup> and University of Central Asia under the Aga Khan Development Network (which also has campuses in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan).<sup>233</sup> According to the Ministry of Education and Science, there are seven branches of Russian HEI only.<sup>234</sup> There is also a significant presence of the Gülen educational institutions (secondary *Sebat/Sapat* schools and a university) that “for most of Kyrgyzstan’s post-Soviet history, operated quietly in parallel with educational institutionsin”<sup>235</sup>

The sphere of education is regulated by the Law on Education (1992, amended in 1997 and 2003),<sup>236</sup> Law on the Status of Teachers, Law on Pre-school Education, and others. In 2012, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted the Education Development Concept and Strategy (EDS) for 2012-2020 with the aim of further developing and reforming the field. In the higher education sector, reforms have been initiated with reference to EDS and based on three-year action plans.

The EDS strategy implementation speaks about the need for structuring and reforming the educational field in Kyrgyzstan which was stricken by systemic challenges of development and the transition to new models of education and life-long learning. The UNDAF for Kyrgyzstan highlighted some of these challenges. Starting from upper secondary education school, attendance starts



<sup>226</sup> Cited in: Kaldybaev. 2018. Kaldybaev, Salidin. Reform Analysis in Higher Education System of the Kyrgyz Republic. In *21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY PEDAGOGY. Transformations of the Education Systems in Europe and in Asia at the turn of 20th and 21st century.* De Gruyter Open. Vol. I, p. 17.

<sup>227</sup> Education Kyrgyzstan. 2019. Sistema obrazovaniya v Kyrgyzstane [Education System of Kyrgyzstan]. Official site of the Ministry of Education and Science of Kyrgyz Republic.

<sup>228</sup> EU. SPHERE. The Higher Education System in the Kyrgyz Republic.

<sup>229</sup> Kaldybaev 2018, p. 18.

<sup>230</sup> EU. SPHERE.

<sup>231</sup> Education Kyrgyzstan. 2019..

<sup>232</sup> Kaldybaev. 2018, p. 18.

<sup>233</sup> UCA. Kyrgyzstan. About the University of Central Asia.

<sup>234</sup> Education Kyrgyzstan. 2019.

<sup>235</sup> Kyrgyzstan Schools. 2016. Kyrgyzstan: Antagonism Grows with Turkey Over Gülen Links. 26 July 2016.

<sup>236</sup> UNESCO IBE. 2010/11. UNESCO. World Data on Education. Kyrgyzstan. 7th Edition.



decreasing because out of school children (OOSC) come from socially vulnerable families where there is a tendency towards combining education and work, as experienced by 33% of school children. The low quality of higher education (60% of students perform below the standard) and high unemployment among the youth<sup>237</sup> increases labor and educational migration outflows, and chances of youth involvement in extremist activity and radical movements.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the issues of the youth and education to the limelight. According to the State Statistical Committee and UNICEF 2020 Cluster Survey, about 76% of households of Kyrgyzstan had been affected by the pandemic, about 98% of 7–17-year-old children dropped the school, and about 83% of children were on distant learning; while there was down to 89% decrease of the school attendance by the 10-11 grade school students. Among those 83% who were on distant learning almost half of them didn't have quality internet connection, couldn't see in time the TV educational programmes, 1/3 of them couldn't afford themselves to pay for the mobile/internet connection. As for the distant learning equipment, they used mainly mobile phones/tablets (98,9%), TV (51,5%), computer/notebook (5,6%), and others (0,7%).<sup>238</sup> These figures speak about the high pressure the children and their families experienced during online education without proper technical equipment (huge amount of respondents could use mostly mobile phones that were more affordable for them as compared to more expensive notebooks and computers).

It is evident that quality education, along with the financial expenditures for the field could continue to be one of the urgent issues in the country.

Expenditure on education was 6.6% of GDP in Kyrgyzstan in 2016.<sup>239</sup> Kyrgyzstan experienced a sharp increase of gross enrolment in tertiary education in the late 1990s and is currently at around 45%.<sup>240</sup> However, quality education is still one of big challenges directly linked to many other social and economic issues, including low allocation of financial resources to higher education and research, uneven availability of education, deepening inequalities and polarization of the population, specificity of the educational services' market, and the inability of the general population to subsidize education.

For example, government financing of higher education continues to be low at 4.9% of the total education budget (in 2012), which is well short of the 25% to 33% allocations of OECD countries.<sup>241</sup> ADB findings show that the average level of government funding per regular student is about \$112 per year, compared to \$5,000 per student per year as allocated by the Kyrgyz–Turkish Manas University (KTU-Manas), jointly funded by the governments of the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkey, and the privately funded American University of Central Asia (AUCA).<sup>242</sup> Sabzalieva (2019) mentions that until recently, the Kyrgyz government spent around US\$600 per student per year, although that dropped rather dramatically in 2014 to under US\$200 per student.<sup>243</sup> Although private universities provide more financing, they enroll a small percentage of the students, only 27,500 (12.5%).<sup>244</sup>

Educational migration out of the country, mainly to Russia (5,500 people), China (3,500 people) and Turkey (1,900 people) is another dimension that affects educational infrastructure and government policy. As per the IOM survey, the general number of Kyrgyz youth studying abroad was more than 15,700 people in 2018, or about 5.5% of all



<sup>237</sup> UNDAF Kyrgyz Republic. 2017, p. 34.

<sup>238</sup> Cluster Survey. Kyrgyzstan. 2021. *Klasternyye opros o vozdeystvii Covid-19 na polozheniye detey i zhenshchin v Kyrgyzstane, kratkiye obzory osnovnykh rezul'tatov* [Cluster survey on the impact of Covid-19 on the situation of children and women in Kyrgyzstan, summaries of the main results. Bishkek: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic and UNICEF]. p. 16, 33, 35.

<sup>239</sup> Sabzalieva. 2019. Sabzalieva Emma. *Higher Education Policy in Central Asia and Afghanistan*. University of Central Asia. Working Paper #51, p. 17.

<sup>240</sup> Sabzalieva. 2019, p. 8.

<sup>241</sup> ADB. Kyrgyzstan. 2015. *Assessment of Higher Education. Kyrgyz Republic*. Manila: Asian Development Bank, p. 8.

<sup>242</sup> ADB. Kyrgyzstan. 2015, p. 8.

<sup>243</sup> Sabzalieva. 2019, p. 16.

<sup>244</sup> ADB. Kyrgyzstan. 2015, p. 5.

students in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>245</sup>

Another feature of education in Kyrgyzstan is a legacy inherited from the Soviet system regarding the strong leadership role played by women. As the ADB highlights, enrollment of the female population in higher education stands at 55%, with many women in senior management. The Gender Inequality Index gave Kyrgyzstan a value of 0.357, ranking it 64 out of 148 countries in 2012. There is correlation between the high enrollment of women in higher education and their good representation at the middle leadership level in HEIs. However, rector-level appointments of female academics remain elusive.<sup>246</sup>

The characteristics of the education system in Kyrgyzstan can be briefly summarized as the following. Bearing all the characteristics of broader general development of the country, the education system has reflected this general development accordingly. Growth in the numbers of educational entities in the post-1991 period did not bring immediate qualitative results; rather, it highlighted the gaps that had to be overcome. The transition from the Soviet type of education towards a competence-based education system required structural reforms with long preparatory periods, and only since 2012 has the country started developing the Education Development Concept and Strategy (EDS, 2012-2020). According to the strategy's Action Plan for 2018-2020 there is a need to transform the fields of educational and professional standards, to transform content, to develop legislation on e-learning, to introduce PhD degree, and to advance management and assessment.<sup>247</sup> This work has commenced relatively recently, and may take some more time.

The other striking systemic challenge in the field of education in Kyrgyzstan that is typical for all countries of Central Asia is a lack of well-qualified and highly motivated faculty. According to researchers, the

faculty are underqualified, undervalued, overworked and aging, and often feel forced to leave the country or the education system to develop their careers; there are also infrastructural barriers.<sup>248</sup> The teaching profession is undervalued and underpaid, which leads to low social status for the profession, and this results in a tangible shortage of qualified schoolteachers, especially in rural areas.

Meanwhile, the variety of HEI including the foreign-funded ones, broadened the picture and promoted the practical introduction of new types of content and structure in the field. This has compensated at least partially for the demand for a quality education. However, this better quality education is not available for all students, hence some young people make a choice in favor of foreign HEIs and move abroad; while the majority, especially from rural areas, either enter the local HEIs, or, as a rule, replenish the "army" of labor migrants. Some young people are forced to receive higher education at non-prestigious faculties in state universities with a lower cost of education. However, many students do not master the program for their chosen specialty and leave the university with low qualifications and low level of education.

The need for improvements in the education field is acknowledged by government which started implementing the reforms through the support extended on EDS by international stakeholders such as the European Union, Asian Development Bank, and the World Bank through financial, capacity-building, training and other support. This includes increasing the quality, availability and efficiency of general secondary education in Kyrgyzstan and its key components: quality of educational standards and teaching-methodological resources; quality of teachers and their qualifications; access to quality education with participation of innovative schools; advancement of management of the education sector and projects as in the



<sup>245</sup> IOM. 2019. *Vneshnyaya molodezhnaya migratsia v stranah Tsentral'noi Azii: analiz riskov i minimizatsiia negativnykh posledstviy* [External Youth Migration in Central Asian Countries: Analysis of Risks and Minimization of Negative Consequences]. IOM, p. 17.

<sup>246</sup> ADB. Kyrgyzstan. 2015, p. 3.

<sup>247</sup> EU. SPHERE.

<sup>248</sup> Sabzalieva. 2019, pp. 14-15.

ADB-supported project Global Partnership for Education Project (Early Education Project)<sup>249</sup>. The European Union project Support of Education Sector in the Kyrgyz Republic aims at supporting the structural reforms in education, through: (1) capacity-building of institutional

and human resources in management, financial planning, budgeting, monitoring and accountability in the field of education at central and local levels; and (2) the introduction of special measures for transparency and effective management.<sup>250</sup>

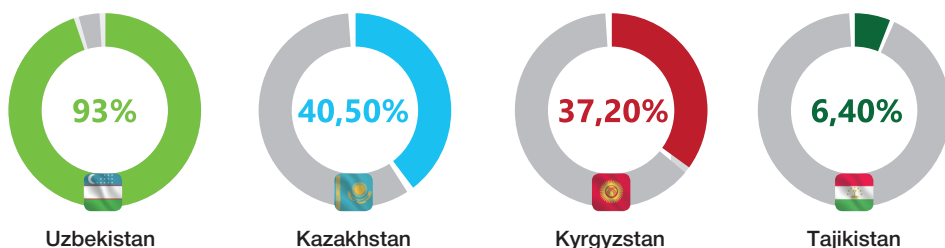
## Technical Vocational Education and Training

General educational challenges are equally reflected in the field of TVET. In Kyrgyzstan this field is comprised of 110 organizations for initial professional development, and 131 organizations for secondary professional education, in which more than 100 specialties/fields are taught to the students.<sup>251</sup>

It is evident from Figure 8 below that TVET participation is strongest in Uzbekistan with almost full enrollment (93%), followed by Kazakhstan (40.5%), Kyrgyzstan (37.2%) and Tajikistan (6.4%). For Kyrgyzstan this figure could be expected to be higher due to

the demographic proportion of young population that could enter the TVET field; but it is low because enrollment to HEI is comparatively low at 5.5%. An excess of labor resources could be naturally channeled into the TVET field, but this has not been the case. This could be explained by both structural systemic reasons such as underdevelopment of the TVET field itself and its non-popularity among the youth; and high (labor) migration flows abroad for what is regarded by youth as a better option for earning money “there and now.”

**Figure 8. Total Upper Secondary Students in Vocational Programs in Selected Countries**



Based on: European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017a.

These reasons highlight the need to further elaborate and promote the TVET policy including the introduction of the national programs and qualification frameworks. One of the ways of starting this process could be a system of short-training courses which, according to the Torino process findings, has proved relevant in contexts of widespread poverty, and in situations when many people cannot

afford to attend long VET courses because of low levels of education.<sup>252</sup>

Thus, overall lack of access to relevant and quality education due to having low qualifications, or an absence of TVET courses in the educational system, are among significant reasons for a reduction of youth participation and economic, civic and political engagement. There are intrinsic links between knowledge



<sup>249</sup> ADB. Kyrgyzstan. 2018. ADB Project in Kyrgyzstan ‘Global Partnership for Education Project (Early Education Project)’.

ADB. 2019. ADB in Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>250</sup> EU. Kyrgyzstan Education. EU Project ‘Support of Education Sector in Kyrgyz Republic’.

<sup>251</sup> Education Kyrgyzstan. 2019.

<sup>252</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017a. *Torino Process Regional Overview: Central Asia*. Turin, ETF, p. 3.

acquisition and implementation in practice, i.e., links between the TVET graduation and subsequent employment, according to Torino process, is a key indicator of the labor market relevance of TVET.<sup>253</sup>

In summary, the existing education and learning environment in Kyrgyzstan doesn't create full opportunities for wider enrolment of the youth in the system

of higher education and TVET, and, consequently, for the implementation of SDGs 4 and right to the quality education. At the same time, quality education also continues to be an issue of concern, which was acknowledged by government that started transitioning to a new type of education system with the support of international organizations.

## (2) Economic and Social Participation

### NEET

For Kyrgyzstan, the NEET is one of the most significant challenges for development and peacebuilding. The high percentage of the youth, insufficient economic performance and low involvement of the youth in education, especially higher education and TVET, all contribute to high levels of NEET.

The UNDAF estimate the proportion of youth (in the 15-24 age group) not in education, employment or training was 21.4% in 2015, of which 13.6% were male and 29.5% were female.<sup>254</sup> These figures indicate a very high level of young NEETs, especially women, which is an alarming factor that needs to be fully addressed. The other aggravating factor is that regionally, the share of NEETs in Central Asia is on the increase. In Kyrgyzstan since 2013 it has increased by 0.9%, while in Kazakhstan this figure grew by 5.5%.<sup>255</sup>

The higher numbers of female NEET, especially from rural areas, could be partially explained by traditional views that as future wives, after marriage girls would live in the husband's household and therefore, it is not worthwhile investing in their education.

Another factor contributing to youth NEET is that there is a high percent of statelessness people in Kyrgyzstan. Young people without any documents cannot access education or the job market. The UNHCR report recorded

46,886 stateless persons in the Central Asian region at the end of 2009 and estimates that 24,615 stateless persons reside in Kyrgyzstan. In Tajikistan, the number of officially registered stateless persons was 249,<sup>256</sup> while in Kazakhstan 7,649 were officially registered as stateless at the end of 2009. Another 12,000 were estimated to be stateless in Turkmenistan. Nonetheless, UNHCR believes the real number of stateless persons in the region is higher. Thus, out of 46,886 recorded stateless persons in Central Asia in 2009, there were an estimated 24,615 people in Kyrgyzstan, i.e., almost half the 1999 figure, while close to 13,000 persons were stateless or at risk of statelessness in 2007 and 2008.<sup>257</sup>

As of 2018, in all Central Asian countries, according to UNHCR, there were 105,704 stateless persons, out of which, the majority 85,460 were living in Uzbekistan, followed by Kazakhstan and Tajikistan with almost the same numbers of 7,389 and 7,353 respectively, Turkmenistan with 4,313, and Kyrgyzstan with 1,189 stateless persons.<sup>258</sup> Though the number of stateless people in Kyrgyzstan has been reduced, yet this factor should not be discounted, since it influences the access to education and labour market.

In summary, it should be mentioned that unemployment and lack of access to education and training result in the



<sup>253</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017a, p. 3.

<sup>254</sup> UNDAF Kyrgyz Republic. 2017, p. 67.

<sup>255</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017a, p. 3.

<sup>256</sup> A national census carried out in Tajikistan in 2000 recorded 2,297 people who identified themselves as stateless.

More in: Farquharson. 2011. *Farquharson, M. Statelessness in Central Asia. Report for UNHCR*. UNHCR/EU, p. 5.

<sup>257</sup> Farquharson. 2011, pp. 5-7. *Ending Statelessness in Central Asia*. 4 p. (In English and Russian).

<sup>258</sup> UNHCR Infographic. 2018. *Ending Statelessness in Central Asia*. 4 p. (In English and Russian).

marginalization of the youth that find other ways to find participation. This also leads to high migrant outflows abroad, which makes a significant imprint on the development patterns of Kyrgyzstan and

consequently, poses challenges in the economic and social fields, including those relating to bilateral relations with the host countries.

## Migration and Return Migration

In Kyrgyzstan both educational and labor migration became a marker of the country's development throughout last two plus decades. The issue of labor migration in general, and of Kyrgyz youth in particular, is perhaps one of the main problems that the country has been facing. As various research indicate, the Kyrgyz youth make up the bulk of guest workers in neighboring countries, primarily in the Russian Federation.<sup>259</sup> However, it is noted that the youngest section of Kyrgyz youth aged 15 to 19 is at least subject to participation in migration abroad.<sup>260</sup>

For Kyrgyz youth, educational migration is seen as the opportunity to escape the hardships of life at home and to more meaningfully participate in a new society. Another type of migration is forced migration and human trafficking which also is a part of the situation. The socio-economic situation, unemployment and people's unawareness about their rights make Kyrgyzstan a country of origin for human trafficking. In order to address this situation, UNDAF stresses the need for developing national standards on social protection and rehabilitation of victims of human trafficking (VoTs), despite the fact that legal provisions for social protection and rehabilitation already exist. According to UNDAF, 247 investigations on this were reported during the period of 2002-2015, along with 54 court proceedings from 2010 to 2014.<sup>261</sup>

Another aspect of the country's situation linked to migration issues (as consequences) and a cause for concern is the phenomenon of children who are left behind or are without parental care due to the migration of their parents. UNDAF link this situation with the risks of limited social protection and increased risk of offending and victimization.<sup>262</sup>

Rural poverty<sup>263</sup> and unemployment<sup>264</sup> have driven migration from rural to urban areas and abroad for improved employment opportunities. It is estimated that approximately 850,000 people are seeking employment abroad primarily in the Russian Federation and Republic of Kazakhstan.<sup>265</sup> According to the State Migration Service of Kyrgyzstan, as many as 780,000 Kyrgyz citizens live and work abroad.<sup>266</sup>

IOM provides data on about 594,000 Kyrgyz citizens registered in Russia at the beginning of 2017, and 157,000 Kyrgyz migrants in Kazakhstan in 2016. Along with these two main countries, Kyrgyz migrants move to a diversity of other destinations: 27% of the country's external migrants have chosen destinations other than Russia, with half of them moving to Kazakhstan, while the other main countries are Turkey or South Korea.<sup>267</sup>

Thus, labor migration perhaps more than any other instrument of economic



<sup>259</sup> Zharkynbayeva, Abdiraymova. 2014. Zharkynbayeva R.S., Abdiraymova A.S. Osobennosti trudovoy migratsii molodezhi iz gosudarstv Tsentral'noy Azii (na primere Respubliki Kyrgyzstan) [Features of labor migration of young people from Central Asian countries (on the example of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan)]. In News of Volgograd State Technical University. Series 'Problems of social and humanitarian knowledge', 16(143), pp. 94-97; Toksonaliev. 2015. Toksonaliev R. *Vliyaniye migratsii molodozhi na ekonomicheskoye i demograficheskoye razvitiye Kyrgyzstana* [The impact of youth migration on the economic and demographic development of Kyrgyzstan]. Bishkek, InoZpress, kg.

<sup>260</sup> Zharkynbayeva, Abdiraymova. 2014, p. 96.

<sup>261</sup> UNDAF Kyrgyz Republic. 2017, p. 34.

<sup>262</sup> UNDAF Kyrgyz Republic. 2017, p. 34

<sup>263</sup> IOM Sub-regional office for Central Asia, based on UNDP data, defines a quarter of Kyrgyz nationals living in poverty, while highlighting the decline of poverty rates in some migration-prone regions (Jalal-Abad or Osh), and stating that the situation has deteriorated or remained challenging in other areas (e.g., Batken, Chuy or Naryn regions). See: IOM. 2017, p. 16.

<sup>264</sup> Unemployment of women is the most challenging factor, since in nearly all the regions of the country (especially in Batken, JalalAbad, Osh and Naryn regions) they are more likely to be unemployed than men. See: IOM. 2017, p. 16-17.

<sup>265</sup> UNDAF Kyrgyz Republic. 2017, p. 17.

<sup>266</sup> Cit. in: IOM. 2017, p. 16.

<sup>267</sup> IOM. 2017, p. 16-17.

integration within the Eurasian Economic Union, links Kyrgyzstan to the economy of Russia in a profound way. According to an ESCAP survey, Kyrgyzstan is currently the fifth largest country of origin in terms of the flow of labor migration to the Russian Federation.<sup>268</sup>

Therefore, Kyrgyzstan labor migration could be viewed in dual way. Firstly as a consequence of the existing economic development and uncertainty about one's own country; and secondly, the influence on the home economy through mechanisms of financial remittances that migrants send to their families back at home.

The departure of a significant proportion of active youth cannot positively affect the ability of the young people of the country as a whole to contribute to maintaining stability and peace in their motherland country. However, the financial remittances sent home by migrant workers to support their families (mainly from Russia and Kazakhstan) smooths the negative effect of unresolved socio-economic problems existing in Kyrgyzstan. The IOM analysis states that “devaluation of the Russian and Central Asian currencies slashed migrants’ incomes in 2015, which was reflected in the dramatic decline of remittances to the region by as much as 33% in Kyrgyzstan, 43% in Tajikistan and 46% in Uzbekistan.” However, “the rise in Kyrgyz emigration stimulated, *inter alia*, by the Eurasian integration, has been reflected in a 26% increase of remittances from Russia, which exceeded \$1.7 billion in 2016. However, even the improved 2016 figures (to nearly \$2 billion) stand at 11% below pre-crisis levels when remittances amounted to 30% of the Kyrgyz Republic’s GDP.”<sup>269</sup>

To a lesser extent, the remittances to Kyrgyzstan from Kazakhstan too, make up an important contribution to Kyrgyz households. Money transfers to Kyrgyzstan comprised \$44.7 million in 2016.<sup>270</sup>

Kyrgyzstan, along with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, faced the challenge of “return migrants” or migrants returning to their countries due to strict legal provisions on migrants in Russia in 2013. Although these provisions were later liberalized, and in 2016 and 2017 the negative impact of return migration decreased, the issuing of re-entry bans that Russia issued to Kyrgyz migrant workers still remain. IOM suggests this may have negative effects on Kyrgyzstan’s vulnerable populations in the countryside, where women are disproportionately affected by unemployment and where poverty rates lie above the national average (particularly in the regions of Batken, Jalal-Abad and Naryn), or have even increased compared to previous years (e.g., in Chuy Region).<sup>271</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic caused yet another wave of return migration, the scale of this problem being so extent that one of the first decrees of the newly elect President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Sadyk Japparov in 2021 was the Decree *On the Adoption of Measures Aimed at Improving the Migration Situation (2021)*. The decree acknowledged the economic crisis in Kyrgyzstan caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on the Kyrgyz migrant workers who lost their jobs, income, housing, healthcare in the countries of destinations and had to return to the home country.<sup>272</sup>

The gender dimension of migration shows that although migratory flows are mainly comprised of young males, the number of female migrants have increased. According to FIDH research (2016), “currently, nearly 40% of Kyrgyz migrants in Russia are women, whereas Tajik and Uzbek women represent respectively less than 20% of the total number of migrants from each of these countries.”<sup>273</sup> The high numbers of Kyrgyz migrant women, i.e., almost half of all migrants, indicate that upon coming back home as return migrants they face similar and perhaps even more



<sup>268</sup> Ni V. (n.a.), p. 9.

<sup>269</sup> IOM. 2017, pp. 18-19.

<sup>270</sup> IOM. 2017, pp. 18-19

<sup>271</sup> IOM. 2017, p. 15.

<sup>272</sup> Presidential Decree. Republic of Kyrgyzstan. 2021. Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic *On the Adoption of Measures Aimed at Improving the Migration Situation*. January 29, 2021. UP No. 4. p. 1.

<sup>273</sup> FIDH. 2016. *Kyrgyzstan. Women and Children from Kyrgyzstan Affected by Migration and Exacerbated Vulnerability*, Paris, FIDH, no. 675a, p. 4.

pressure than do men. Along with the economic challenges of unemployment, they may experience some discrimination in the society (especially in rural areas) based on traditional perceptions that women after a long stay abroad could be too “impure” to start families. As for married women, whose children were left behind, they also could experience alienation from their families and children.

Another important social aspect of migration that affects the families of migrants who stay in Kyrgyzstan, are women’s and children’s’ rights. FIDH highlights the following practices that violate women’s rights: bride kidnappings, polygamy, and the practice of religious marriages without official registration which increases the vulnerability of women whose husbands work abroad. Lacking legal protection and financial means, women left behind may face discrimination in the household of their husbands’ parents and can find themselves in a very precarious situation in case of a divorce. With the feminization of the migratory flows, the number of children left behind has also increased. These children can become “invisible” and are often at higher risk of facing restricted access to health care and education, and of being subjected to ill-treatment and sexual violence.<sup>274</sup> Currently the social and security dimensions of the situation is such that the 2021 Presidential Decree highlighted the need to guarantee the monitoring the situation on, care and rights of the “left behind” children, to introduce in the legislation the term “the children of labour migrants” and to provide these children with the state support, while

also to strengthen the responsibility of the parents and guardians for not informing the state guardianship authorities about these children.<sup>275</sup>

The return migrants issue became a challenge for the government of Kyrgyzstan who needed to respond through elaboration and implementation of social policies, legal measures and re-integration. In particular, the Draft Concept of the State Migration Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic until 2030 that is under review by the government, highlights the need for providing assistance to returning migrants in terms of their employment and utilization of acquired knowledge and skills.<sup>276</sup>

In regard to the peacebuilding theme, the issue of reintegration of migrants back to their home country involves putting the focus not only on economic issues, but social perspectives as well. Along with institutional issues, it is important to consider the significance and urgency of addressing peacebuilding from cognitive and relational planes as well. Connectedness with one’s own family equally implies connectedness and links with community and institutions; where links need to be restored, reinforced and strengthened. As in any integration process, reintegration should also be implemented through education and practical activities. Therefore, various social cohesion and solidarity practices and knowledge on this could form the basis of grassroot communities, families and individual activity; whereas the state and its institutions should provide the legal basis and possibilities to implement this.

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### (3) Civic Engagement

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#### Youth Movements and Political Participation

The 2000s drew the line between the period of initial formation and development of youth movements and organizations in Kyrgyzstan and their consequent rapid, but unfortunately not quality, growth that began after the events of 2005. Unstable

character of emergence and development of youth movements until 2005<sup>277</sup> has been linked later to the political institutionalization of the youth after the 2005 revolution when major political parties began to form youth wings. That phenomenon in the socio-



<sup>274</sup> FIDH. 2016, p. 5.

<sup>275</sup> Presidential Decree. Republic of Kyrgyzstan. 2021, p. 2-3.

<sup>276</sup> IOM. 2017, pp. 21-22.

<sup>277</sup> Radzhapova. 2010. Radzhapova N.A. *K voprosu o molodezhnom dvizhenii v Kyrgyzstane* [On the issue of the youth movement in Kyrgyzstan]. Bishkek, Izvestiya VUZov, no. 5, pp. 235-236.

political life of Kyrgyzstan has remained up to the present time. It was evidently not a random process but a natural consequence of understanding the role of youth in those events. According to researches, since then, young people have been assigned a number of practical tasks within the party branches (protests, rallies, etc.) indicating the gradual involvement of the active youth in political processes.<sup>276</sup>

A new round of scholarly literature on the youth environment of Kyrgyzstan, its problems and the role of the state in solving them, started in the 2010s. Such literature indicates that political events (the so-called April Revolution) of 2010 might have played an important role to further encourage youth participation. The evidence suggests that the participation of youth in the repeated overthrow of the political regime in the Kyrgyz Republic was not an accident, but a trend, resulting to a large extent from the lack of attention from the political elite to youth challenges and problems. Awareness of this by the state has to a large extent forced them to activate the youth policy.

As elsewhere across the region, the second decade of the twenty-first century saw a young generation born and raised in an independent Kyrgyzstan, which started influencing the demographic situation. This factor, and also the global processes triggered an interest in studies about youth, particularly themes such as youth identity, how youth perceive itself in the country and globally, which values prevail among young people, and how they are reflected in the social sphere.<sup>279</sup>

These themes are authentic for Kyrgyzstan, since they reflect the difficulties the Kyrgyz society faced along cultural (ethnic), religious and social identities.<sup>280</sup>

As a result, the process of understanding their place in society and belonging to socio-cultural groups is more painful for members of the current young generation.

Therefore, emerged studies<sup>281</sup> aimed at understanding the value orientations of modern youth in the context of its rapid globalization and gradual withdrawal from so-called 'traditional' values, followed and reflected the general situation existed in the country.

The questions on the value and identity of modern youth were mainly related to understanding the role of youth in the maintenance of peace in the country. According to the UNDP report, young people consider peace second in their value system after health. This, however, reflected young people's concern about the "unstable situation in the country"<sup>282</sup> in a post-revolutionary period. This is not surprising given the hidden and growing conflict potential in society resulting from a whole range of factors that are definitely influencing the perception of the young people to their present environment. As a result, the issues of peacebuilding and stability have been perceived as the enabler of addressing other major problems of the modern youth of Kyrgyzstan in the sphere of education, labor and health.

The report prepared by UNDP as early as in 2010 has shown that the youth, including the 18% who are active according to the results of the study, were seldom involved in decision-making.<sup>283</sup> This was quite a disappointing conclusion about the potential input of young people in the modern political processes of the country. To a large extent, this situation still existed for several years after the analysis.

Issues on the access of the youth to participation in political processes

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<sup>276</sup> Radzhapova. 2010, p. 236-238.

<sup>279</sup> Zhunushova. 2013. Zhunushova S.O. *Spetsifika politicheskoy identifikatsii molodezhi Kyrgyzstana v kontekste globalizatsii i multikulturalizma* [The specifics of political identification of young people of Kyrgyzstan in the context of globalization and multiculturalism]. Bishkek, Bulletin of the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, 18, pp. 78-82.

<sup>280</sup> The events of the early summer of 2010 in southern Kyrgyzstan have apparently played a significant role in increasing the amount of research on the subject of hidden ethnic, socio-cultural and other conflicts as they've again highlighted the problem of the unsolved ethnical and cultural conflict in that part of the country.

<sup>281</sup> Salpieva. 2018. Salpieva E.B. *Rol mentaliteta kyrgyzov v vospitanii molodezhi*. [The role of the Kyrgyz mentality in fostering youth]. International Journal of Humanities and Natural Sciences, 3, pp. 189-191.

<sup>282</sup> UNDP. 2010. *Kyrgyzstan: uspehnaya molodezh' – uspehnaya strana. Khroniki pokoleniya "Y" (Natsional'nyy otchet PROON o chelovecheskom razvitiy za 2009-2010 gody)* [Kyrgyzstan: successful youth - successful country. Chronicles of the "Y" generation (UNDP National Human Development Report for 2009-2010)]. Bishkek, UNDP, pp. 20-21.

<sup>283</sup> UNDP. 2010, pp. 61-68.



continued to shape the national agenda at a later period too. Particularly, the participation of the youth of the country, both in official political wings of political parties and in informal movements.<sup>284</sup> According to 2016 sociological polls, young people (aged 14 to 28) “are not actively involved in the activities of the three main political institutions, i.e., political parties, informal political organizations, and state authorities.” Moreover, it was noted that those institutions were not able to ensure youth participation in their work as they could not offer such an opportunity for young people. This highlighted not only the need to increase the proportion of young workers in state authorities, but also the need to establish an operating model for their interaction with youth.<sup>285</sup>

The national research project (2019) studying key factors that lead the youth of Kyrgyzstan to radicalization identified the interrelated 5 fields (injustice, political, religious, social, psychological). The youth

lacked the possibilities to participate politically due to the domination of the elder generation, and, according to the survey, nearly 1/3 of the respondents were ready to support more religious candidate in the political field and even to introduce the *sharia* legal frames instead of the Constitution, thus changing dramatically the political field.<sup>286</sup>

The above analytical studies, based on extensive sociological surveys, largely concur in their assessments of modern youth policy in the Kyrgyz Republic, summarizing that it is of low efficiency and randomness, while also noting the low involvement of young people in dialogue and partnership with the authorities. This undoubtedly affects the ability of young people to make a significant contribution to maintaining a stable situation in the country and highlights the need for a fundamental reform of state relations whereby the youth are treated on an equal partnership basis.

#### Box 6. Inter-Ethnic Conflict in Southern Kyrgyzstan

Inter-ethnic conflict in 2010 had a very negative impact on the youth situation, especially in southern Kyrgyzstan. Because of a similar conflict in 1990, the relationship between Kyrgyz and Uzbek youth remained strained only in the region of Osh and around it. After the tragic events of 2010, they became strained in nearly in all places where those two ethnic groups co-existed, i.e., significant parts of the Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken regions.

For nearly decade, the state and non-governmental organizations made attempts, including among youth, to reduce the negative consequences of the conflict and to establish an inter-ethnic dialogue. However, like other similar projects aimed at peacebuilding and reconciliation of Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities, they concentrated on promoting reconciliation by holding general events, festivals, etc., which did not meet the high expectations that young people had hoped for.

The reasons for the conflict were the core existing socio-economic problems. The places of cohabitation of the Kyrgyz and Uzbek population in Kyrgyzstan have been historically densely populated and lacked croplands, water, and other resources. That situation inevitably created fierce competition that had been simmering for decades at the ethnic level in various areas of society in the south of Kyrgyzstan. A change in the economic and political balance between the two ethnic communities caused the tensions to “boil over” with the youth at the forefront of those processes.

The involvement of youth in governmental and nongovernmental peacebuilding projects in southern Kyrgyzstan should be done on a long-term basis. As practice shows, one should not expect rapid results in this sphere, but targeted comprehensive measures and actions will help to at least partially return the former balance at the ethnic level in this region.

Submitted by D. Berdakov

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<sup>284</sup> Legal Prosperity Foundation. 2016. *Dostup molodezhi Kyrgyzstana k politicheskomu uchastiyu: vozmozhnosti i ograniicheniya. Otchet po rezul'tatam issledovaniya 2016 goda* [Access of young people of Kyrgyzstan to political participation: opportunities and limitations. Report on the results of the study in 2016]. Bishkek, Blitz, p. 8, 9-14, 15-17.

<sup>285</sup> Legal Prosperity Foundation. 2016, p. 20.

<sup>286</sup> Nasritdinov, Urmanbetova et al. 2019. Nasritdinov E., Z. Urmanbetova, K. Murzakhalilov, M. Myrzabaev. 2019. *Uyuzvost' i ustoychivost' molodykh lyudey v Kyrgyzstane k radikalizatsii i ekstremizmu: analiz v pyati sferakh zhizni* [Vulnerability and Resilience of Young People in Kyrgyzstan to Radicalization and Extremism: An Analysis in Five Areas of Life]. Central Asian Program, The George Washington University, CAP. No. 212. Bishkek: Scientific Research Institute of Islamic Studies. 53 p.

## Religion and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE)

There are in Kyrgyzstan a range of problems of involvement of youth in religious movements and sects, especially those of a destructive and radical nature, which are worth a special mention as such involvement also leads to a split

in society by socio-cultural (including religious) parameters. Current military and protracted conflicts of a religious-political nature also pose a particular threat to Kyrgyzstan, especially to youth.<sup>287</sup>

### Box 7. Youth of Kyrgyzstan and Radicalization

Radicalization is another acute problem of the modern youth of Kyrgyzstan. It is worth noting the involvement of young people in the ranks of followers of non-traditional Islamic movements of a radical nature. The most active among them are *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and the *Salafi* radical wing (including affiliated ISIS cells).

These movements: preach religious intolerance towards not only representatives of other faiths, but also of other mainly traditional Islamic movements; put pan-Islamic interests higher than state or national concerns; and are ready to take part in *jihad* for the sake of building a world caliphate, etc. It is difficult to determine what percentage of these are radicalized followers and of which particular radical group due to a significant number of the so-called “sleeping cells”. Young people make up a big part of the neophytes of these movements, as they concentrate on recruiting youth.

The reasons why young people join such radical Islamic movements include the long-term unresolved socio-economic problems in Kyrgyzstan. The decrease in the level of education, together with the decrease in access to education, the growing loss of trust in state bodies, and the frequent inability to realize their own potential, put young people in a certain spiritual vacuum and in fear of their future prospects. In general, this encourages young people to get involved in non-traditional religious groups where they seem to find like-minded people and friends, and understanding and mutual help. Without a deep knowledge of the basics of Islam and theology, they quickly become dependent on religious leaders and take for granted what they preach.

At the same time, non-traditional Islamic movements have adopted modern technologies. With sufficiently strong financial and ideological support from abroad, they build powerful propaganda networks through underground training centers and social media. According to polls, more than 30% of the followers of extremist Islamic movements were recruited via the internet, especially open social media, namely, Facebook. They also actively use WhatsApp which is the most popular messenger in Kyrgyzstan. In other cases, they often invite their friends and colleagues to visit at least one meeting in an underground Islamic center or mosque.

The gradual slow radicalization of youth has captured many of this age category in the last 10-15 years. Moreover, this happens not only among rural youth but is also gradually gaining momentum in the cities. Revealingly, according to various estimates, from 600 to 800 people from Kyrgyzstan, including their family members, i.e., women and children, went to Syria and Iraq to wage *jihad* on the side of ISIS. All this testifies to the serious nature of the situation, especially considering the periodic awakening of “sleeping” cells of supporters of radical movements. Therefore, the problem of radicalization of young people in Kyrgyzstan may become a tangible problem for the national security of the country in the medium term if the youth problems, first of all, in the socio-economic field, are not resolved.

Submitted by D. Berdakov

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<sup>287</sup> Nasreddinov, Esenamanova. 2014. Nasreddinov E., Esenamanova N. 2014. *Religioznaya bezopasnost v Kyrgyzskoy Respublike*. [Religious security in the Kyrgyz Republic]. Bishkek, Carnegie Endowment, pp. 7-11 [in Russian]; Zhunushova. 2017. Zhunushova S. *Rol sovremennogo universitetskogo obrazovaniya v protsesse formirovaniya religioznoy kultury molodezhi*. [The role of modern university education in the process of formation of the religious culture of youth]. *Alatoo Academic Studies*, 1, pp. 148-152; Zhunushova. 2018. Zhunushova S. *Obespecheniye religioznoy bezopasnosti molodezhi Kyrgyzstana v sovremennykh usloviyakh*. [Ensuring the religious security of young people of Kyrgyzstan in the modern settings]. Bishkek, Bulletin of J. Balasagyn Kyrgyz National University, 2(94), pp. 106-108.

Unlike 'invisible' children left behind, the issues of religious radicalism became profoundly visible in Kyrgyzstan, and this cannot help influencing the state institutions. One of the official indicators of the need to counter-act the spread of radicalization is the elaboration of a strategic document addressing the challenges of radicalism in the country.

In 2014, following the urgency of the situation in the field of religious extremism, the Concept of the State Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Religious Sphere for 2014-2020 was adopted by the decree of the President. Its main directions were focused on: (1) cooperation with religious organizations; (2) religious and religion-related education; and (3) prevention of religious extremism.<sup>288</sup> The policy was aimed at introducing both quality religious and secular education in religious schools, particularly at reforming religious education, and modernizing, upgrading and regulating the religious content, curricula and activity in religious entities of Kyrgyzstan.

The need for systematization and upgrading of religious education and curricula, and the introduction of unified standards is high on the agenda considering that there are no standards or common curriculum in religious educational entities, as well as no licensing system for all religious entities in the country. Quality of knowledge of imams is another matter of concern, since only 20% of imams have basic religious education, whereas in some schools, reading is limited to memorizing chapters of the Qur'an and performing rituals only.<sup>289</sup>

In public education also, there is a need to define secularism, and at the same time to link the introduced new course for ninth graders on History of Religious Culture to provide the younger generation with a better knowledge of religion. This course began teaching in September 2016

in ten pilot schools in Bishkek, Osh and seven other regions. It comprises 16 hours of instruction per semester; and since 2017, was reported to be compulsory in all schools nationwide according to the government's plan.<sup>290</sup>

Related to the education field, are various stakeholders in the form of religious entities. Among them are nine Islamic institutions and one Islamic university registered with the State Commission on Religious Affairs, including 102 registered *madrasah*, with only 78 from them currently functioning.<sup>291</sup> The 2014 State Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Religious Sphere for 2014-2020 provides slightly different figures: 2,362 mosques and 81 *madrasah* in 2014, along with 68 Islamic centers, foundations and associations that are engaged in education and charitable activities and ritual objects.

This religious pluralism, however, is not comprehensively administered. Research indicates: non-compliance with the unified curriculum approved by the Council of Ulema of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims (the *Muftiate*), the absence of secular subjects in the curriculum, the lack of stable financial sources, poor conditions for education and a shortage of qualified teaching staff.<sup>292</sup>

Regarding the youth, the State Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Religious Sphere for 2014-2020 regulates the enrollment of children into religious schools, i.e., only after a completing ninth grade can children start education at the religious school (earlier this could happen after completing the fifth or sixth grade). This measure allows the state to intervene in the field of education and to eliminate the possibility of lop-sided education without the basics of secular education, as is not taught to young schoolchildren in religious schools (*madrasahs*).



<sup>288</sup> Concept. 2014. Concept of State Policy of Kyrgyz Republic in Religious Sphere for 2014-2020. November 14, 2014, approved by Decree No. 203.

<sup>289</sup> Concept. 2014.

<sup>290</sup> Nazarov. 2016. Nazarov Ulan. Kyrgyzstan launches education reform to fight extremism.

<sup>291</sup> Religious Education in Kyrgyzstan. 2017. *The Report "Religious Education in Kyrgyzstan: Madrasah System in Urgent Need of Reform"*. Report by the Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations. Bishkek: Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations, p. 3.

<sup>292</sup> Religious Education in Kyrgyzstan. 2017, p. 3.

At the administrative and management level, the religious schools will be required to introduce transparent procedures, publicize their curriculum and give financial reports that include information on all local and foreign donors.<sup>293</sup>

The 2014-2020 Concept was followed by the new *Concept of the State Policy*

*of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Religious Sphere for 2021-2026*, the draft of which is currently being discussed in the country.<sup>294</sup>

It is not an exaggeration to say that by reforming its public and religious education, the authorities can contribute towards fighting radical ideology and extremism in Kyrgyzstan.

## Assessment of the Youth-Focused NGOs

According to C. Pierobon, since 1991 civil society in Kyrgyzstan underwent 4 stages of development and was shaped and influenced by both national and international political environment.<sup>295</sup> During the period of independence of the Kyrgyz Republic, many NGOs emerged who were implementing youth projects in the country. However, most of these projects were financed by grants from international organizations who acted as partners and donors of such NGOs and who “since the 1990s, have invested millions of dollars in promoting democratisation in the region through the seeding of civil society” that resulted in 14,880 registered Non-Commercial Organisations by 2017.<sup>296</sup>

The main problem with such organizations is their relatively short life span. They usually exist for a short period of time and quickly terminate their activities upon completion of the relevant projects. However, we can mention a few successful NGOs who have dealt with youth who have been able to conduct consistent and long-term work with young people.

One of the examples of such successful NGOs is the *Youth Development Institute* (from 2010 till 2014 – Public Foundation «*Dostoyaniye Respubliki*»<sup>297</sup>). This NGO is actively implementing projects in the sphere of improving the quality of youth education, the attraction of young leaders to democratic values, and etc. Their recent most successful initiatives include

the youth camp-forum “*Zhash Bulak*” (“Young Source”) in 2017 aimed at the development of citizenship as the basis for the democratic development of modern society. That camp has become a large international platform for more than 600 youth delegates from 12 countries.<sup>298</sup>

The *Youth Development Institute* actively cooperates with other NGOs implementing projects in the field of youth policy, e.g., with the biggest NGO operating in the south of Kyrgyzstan – «*Youth of Osh*»<sup>299</sup>, and others.

Despite certain achievements in the development of local youth NGOs, it is important to consider their strong dependence on external donors. In the absence of large projects initiated by international organizations or local state authorities, the profiled State Agency for Youth, Sports and Physical Culture, their activities freeze to a complete cessation in some cases. All these evidences the immaturity of this form of non-state work with the youth, a strong financial and other dependence on the external factor in this case. Though one should note some positive shifts in this area: state authorities, first of all, the mentioned profiled State Agency, more and more often become the official customer and partner in the implementation of a range of initiatives being in line with the state strategy in the field of youth policy.



<sup>293</sup> Nazarov. 2016.

<sup>294</sup> Concept Draft. 2021. Obsuzhdeniye proyekta «Kontseptsii gosudarstvennoy politiki Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki v religioznoy sfere na 2021-2026 gody» [Discussion of the draft “Concept of state policy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the religious sphere for 2021-2026”], 29 April 2021.

<sup>295</sup> Pierobon. 2018. Pierobon C. The Development of Civil Society in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. An Analysis of the National and International Context. *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale* 54(1). p. 110-111.

<sup>296</sup> Pierobon. 2018, p. 108-109.

<sup>297</sup> IRM. 2019b. Chto takoye IRM? [What is YDI? (Youth Development Institute)] Bishkek, IRM.

<sup>298</sup> IRM. 2019a. Godovoi otchet 2017. [Annual report 2017]. Bishkek, IRM.

<sup>299</sup> Youth of Osh (YO). 2019. O Nas. [About Us]. Osh, YU.

It can be assumed that in the near future NGOs could become gradually more important platforms for fostering and strengthening the dialogue between the state and the youth, especially because

the youth leaders and activists make up a considerable part of the human potential of these NGOs, and are the framework of the volunteer movement.

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## Brief Conclusions

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Thus, the main problems and difficulties faced by young people in Kyrgyzstan in the field of peacebuilding could be summarized as follows.

Youth is in every respect one of the most active age groups of the modern population of the Kyrgyz Republic and possesses high potential to drive the development of processes in these areas. However, to realize this potential it is important to implement the actual integral programmes of the country development in general, of the youth in particular. It is also important to understand how current responses of the state to the existing challenges is reflected in the modification and development of relevant legislation.

Despite some positive shifts, youth policy in the Kyrgyz Republic still remains quite insufficient and inefficient. Active participation of the youth in the events of 2005 and 2010 that repeatedly resulted in regime change forced the authorities to look more closely at the youth, and not without some anxiety and fear. On one hand, it caused a gradual curtailing of a range of government initiatives and programs like *Kyrgyzstan zhashtary* (Kyrgyz youth) aimed at the “incubation” of a group of loyal young performers. On the other hand, it resulted in a substantial revision of the state youth policy aimed at widening the existing dialogue with offers of partnership, rather than instructions from above.

The decrease of education levels in Kyrgyzstan results in a plethora of

negative consequences, including the low involvement of youth in political and public processes. This factor continue to be one of the most important one that affects various fields.

Young people are often forced to pay more attention to work in order to solve their own economic problems, although most are not working in their own profession after or during university studies. Many also go to work in other countries, with an estimated 50% of labor migrants from Kyrgyzstan under the age of 29. Even by the most conservative estimates, about 350,000 young people, or 20% of all youth are working abroad. As a result, most cannot take part in political decision-making and lead an active social life; or just simply participating in street meetings and demonstrations.

At the same time, social and political participation of the youth is limited to the activity of its small groups – volunteers, employees of NGOs, international organizations, etc., as well as the youth wings of political parties or pro-government organizations. In turn, the youth experience little interest from governmental bodies and lose faith in the possibility of contributing to these processes. Ultimately, young people search for another forms of participation. Bearing in mind the low education level and of religious education in particular, and high unemployment rate, this generates participation of the youth in religious organizations and extremist movements.

## Key Challenges for Youth and Peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan

Socio-economic challenges in the country became the major reason for the marginalization of youth of Kyrgyzstan, economically, socially and ideologically. The outcomes of this marginalization include: unemployment/NEET; low quality of education; internal rural-urban migration; labour migration abroad

(mainly to Russia and Kazakhstan but also to other countries); human trafficking; participation in extremist religious movements.

Modern Kyrgyz youth face a wide range of problems and challenges, which can be highlighted as follows:



***Economic problems in the state*** which primarily leads to unemployment and low youth employment, as well as lower wages for young people in general.



***Access to quality education.*** Higher education is becoming less accessible to the masses of youth in Kyrgyzstan as it becomes fee-based, and the parents of young people cannot always afford it.



***The marginalization of rural youth*** due to low employment levels in the rural areas, low level of modern education, and the need for their parents to work for long periods - often abroad, while leaving their children behind.



***Labor and educational migration.*** A significant portion of Kyrgyz youth has to look for decent work abroad – mainly in Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkey because they are unable to fully implement their potential in own country. Educational migration is seen for



***The radicalization of youth*** due to their general dissatisfaction with existing living conditions, targeted recruiting by religious radical organizations. The spiritual and moral search in an environment of unsettled socio-economic problems attracts many youths to religious sects with radical ideology.



***Due involvement in political and public processes.*** The Kyrgyz state has not yet developed a working mechanism for involvement of youth in political decision-making because the state is not properly determined to expand this partnership.

In summary, it is important to highlight the significance of education and learning, particularly relating to TVET, professional skills of migrants, public education in schools, particularly, on inter-ethnic, inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, and reforming religious education. Education, learning, training in general, and particularly targeted for acquiring

intercultural competencies and skills, assist with the preparedness of the youth for work abroad, and re-integration into the societies of countries of origin. Perhaps, even higher significance these aspects of peacebuilding acquire for restoring and maintaining inter-ethnic dialogue in the country.

## TAJIKISTAN

### General Characteristics of Youth Development

The national censuses were held in Tajikistan in 2000 and 2010 (with the next census rescheduled from 2020 to 2021 due to the pandemic). In 2000 the total population

was 6.0 million people, reaching 9.3 million people by 1 January 2020 according to the figures from the National Statistics Office (see Table 12).<sup>300</sup>

**Table 12. Dynamics of Total Population in Tajikistan by Years**

| Year                | 2000      | 2010      | 2018   | 2020  |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|--|---|
| Population (people) | 6 001 300 | 7 417 400 | 8 931 200<br>urban 2,354,200 (26.4 %)<br>rural 6,577,000 (73.6%) | 9 313 800<br>urban 2,438,9 (26,19%)<br>rural 6,874,9 (73,81%) |

Source: *Population of Tajikistan. 2018. Population of the Republic of Tajikistan as of 1 January 2018. Dushanbe: Statistics Agency at the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2018, p. 6, 8, 9, 31; Population of Tajikistan. 2020. Naseleniye Respubliki Tajikistan na 1 yanvaria 2020 goda [Population of the Republic of Tajikistan as of 1 January 2020]. Dushanbe: Statistics Agency at the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020, p. 9.*

Tajikistan's population has grown at an average annual rate of 2% over recent years.<sup>301</sup> As stated earlier, the youth currently make up 27.28% of the total population. The other specific issue is that the rural population made up an overwhelming majority – 6.87 million people or 73.81% in 2020 (see Table 12). This implies many crucial challenges directly affecting youth development.

The civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997) along with collapse of the former integrated system impeded the economic and social performance of the country and reduced its ability to develop in the 1990s, resulting in general to extreme poverty. However, throughout next decade, the return of stability together with initial reforms,

increased outwards migration and a growth of remittances inflow led to significant poverty reduction from 81% in 1999 to 47% in 2009. According to UNDAF Tajikistan, poverty remains widespread and linked to specific factors such as continued high birth rates and the uneven impact of remittances on different population groups.<sup>302</sup>

Youth is a significant factor for the country. Research describes it as a great potential for development of the country with more than half of population under the age of 25, and yet accounts for 60 percent of those formally registered as unemployed. The economy and human development in Tajikistan are highly dependent on its natural capital.<sup>303</sup>



*Tajikistan has a young population and is not rich in exportable natural resources, meaning investment in human capital should be one of the country's strategic priorities*

Source: *UNECE. 2015. Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan. United Nations: New York and Geneva, p. 59. (ECE/CECI/22)*



<sup>300</sup> Population of Tajikistan. 2018. Population of the Republic of Tajikistan as of 1 January 2018. Dushanbe: Statistics Agency at the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2018, p. 6, 8, 9, 31.; Avesta.tj. 2019. Chislenost naseleniya Tadjikistana za 28 let uvelichilos na 3.7mln chelovek. [The population of Tajikistan over 28 years has increased by 3.7 million people].

<sup>301</sup> UNECE 2015. *Innovation Performance Review for Tajikistan*. New York and Geneva, United Nations, p. 5. (Doc.ECE/CECI/22), p. 5.

<sup>302</sup> UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015. *United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for Tajikistan, 2016-2020*. Dushanbe, UN, p. 11.

<sup>303</sup> UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015, p. 10.

As mentioned earlier, the demographic and economic performance of the youth should be viewed in connection with the general performance of the country. This means that any vulnerable factor for the country's performance potentially targets and aggravates the youth. It is no exaggeration that the youth dominate not only from demographic, but also from socio-economic perspectives, influencing the labor market, migration flow, employment and human capital development.

The youth in Tajikistan is included among the most vulnerable groups of the population, along with women, children, people with disabilities, elderly people, ethnic and sexual minorities, refugees, stateless persons, people who use drugs, people living with HIV, sex workers, etc. These groups often also suffer from discrimination at different levels and "their access to public education and health care, political participation, property and land ownership and finance is restricted."<sup>304</sup>

## (1) Education and Learning Environment

Dual factors affect the educational field in Tajikistan. On the one hand, as with other aspects of the economy, education was hugely affected by state- and nation-building policies and the consequences of the civil war, which are still felt today. Aspects that are particularly impacted are educational infrastructure in rural areas (80% of schools need repair), low teacher's qualifications (absence of HEI graduation for nearly half of all teachers) and a teacher shortage. According to the UNDAF Tajikistan, approximately 36% of students are being instructed in schools with these problems.<sup>305</sup>

On the other hand, according to the UN's Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan (using UNESCO data), "Tajikistan enjoys a very high adult literacy rate of 99.8% in 2015 - which is significantly above the average of its peer group of lower-middle-income economies (70.5% in 2012), and in line with the high average literacy rate in Central Asia (99.6% in 2015). The youth literacy rate stands at 99.9%."<sup>306</sup> The Constitution of Tajikistan guarantees nine years of free compulsory education and full gender equality for children aged 7 to 15. Tajikistan achieved nearly universal primary school education and lower secondary education rates, with gender parity.<sup>307</sup>

Research indicates that in Tajikistan, growth of gross enrolment in tertiary education was also negatively affected by the 1992-1997 civil war, but in recent years has recovered and is currently at around 30.0%, exceeding figures from the late Soviet period (22.5%).<sup>308</sup> Yet tertiary education is still largely inaccessible to poorer families, and to girls who start dropping out in large numbers after the compulsory ninth grade.<sup>309</sup>

Geographically as a mountain country Tajikistan is prone to natural hazards, avalanches, mudflows, landslides, floods, rock falls and earthquakes, and this influence the education and living in rural areas of the country. UNICEF states that 88.3% children of Tajikistan live in areas of high to very high seismic hazard, with the inadequate school infrastructure that cause economic loss and severe disruption to or loss of education.<sup>310</sup>

To deal with educational challenges, by the Decree of the Government of the Tajikistan, the National Strategy of Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan until 2020 was introduced in 2012. It declared education as a priority of the state and social policy, and a key resource of national development. Related to this was the introduction in 2009 of the *Durakhshandagon* international stipend



<sup>304</sup> UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015, pp. 12-13.

<sup>305</sup> UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015, pp. 12-13, 31.

<sup>306</sup> UNECE 2015.

<sup>307</sup> UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015, p. 31.

<sup>308</sup> Sabzalieva. 2019, pp. 5, 8.

<sup>309</sup> UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015, p. 31.

<sup>310</sup> UNICEF Tajikistan. 2021. *Bezopasnyye okruzhayushchiye usloviya. Ustoychivyye shkoly, ustoychivoye obshchestvo* [Safe environment. Resilient schools, resilient communities]. UNICEF.



of the President of Tajikistan to support education abroad.<sup>311</sup> These measures are targeted at increasing the quality of education through creating and providing educational institutional frameworks and educating students abroad.

The new National Strategy for the Development of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan for the Period up to 2030 was approved in September, 2020.<sup>312</sup> It was designed to correlate with the SDGs and set the following tasks: to ensure that by 2030 all girls and boys receive free, fair and quality primary and secondary education; to eliminate gender inequality in education by 2030 and ensure equal access to education and vocational education at all levels for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations; creation and improvement of educational institutions that take into

account the interests of children, the special needs of people with disabilities and gender aspects and provide a safe, free from violence and social barriers, effective learning environment for all and others.<sup>313</sup>

One of major challenges in the educational field in Tajikistan is the need to increase expenditure, including on the tertiary component. The United Nations Report on Innovation for Tajikistan (2015) suggests that expenditure on education as a share of GDP, both in total and tertiary education, compare well with some other countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus.<sup>314</sup> However, in 2012 it was still unproportionally low at 4.02% for all education and 0.46% for tertiary education, which is almost half as much as Kyrgyzstan spent - 7.38% and 0.89% respectively (see Table 13).

**Table 13. Expenditures on Education as a Share of GDP (%)**

|                            | EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION | TERTIARY EDUCATION  |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Kyrgyzstan (2012)</b>   | 7.38%                    | 0.89%               |
| <b>Tajikistan</b>          | <b>4.02% (2012)</b>      | <b>0.46% (2013)</b> |
| <b>Turkmenistan (2012)</b> | 3.05%                    | 0.28%               |

Source: UNECE. 2015, p. 5, based on UNESCO Education dataset

Expenditure on education increased by 6.6% of GDP in Kyrgyzstan in 2016, and by 5.2% in Tajikistan in 2015.<sup>315</sup> Although these figures show growth of expenditure on education in Tajikistan, yet they are less compared to Kyrgyzstan, what is a factor of concern especially given the fact that the youth in Tajikistan makes up more than 27.2% of population compared to 24.5% in Kyrgyzstan.

The high youth population requires more investment in education and tertiary education, which is not presently the case, and remains a challenge for the country. Less expenditure on education results in less state-supported educational grants in HEIs. Consequently, after completing secondary education, disengaged youth can't pursue further education in HEI, although, as results below show, the youth are very keen on doing so.



<sup>311</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2012. *National Strategy of Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan until 2020*. Approved by the Decree of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan on June 30, 2012, №334, pp. 6-7.

<sup>312</sup> Education Development Strategy. Republic of Tajikistan. 2020. *Utverzhdena postanovleniyem Pravitel'stva Respubliki Tadjzhikistan ot 29 sentyabrya 2020 goda, №526 Natsional'naya strategiya razvitiya obrazovaniya Respubliki Tadjzhikistan na period do 2030 goda* [National Strategy for the Development of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan for the Period up to 2030 approved by the Decree of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan dated September 29, 2020, No. 526].

<sup>313</sup> Vecherka. 2020. *Strategiya razvitiya obrazovaniya v Tadjzhikistane priyata v sootvetstvi s TSUR*. [The Strategy for the Development of Education in Tajikistan was adopted in accordance with the SDGs]. 03 November 2020.

<sup>314</sup> UNECE. 2015. *Innovation Performance Review for Tajikistan*. New York and Geneva, United Nations, p. 5. (Doc.ECE/CECI/22).

<sup>315</sup> Sabzalieva. 2019, p. 17.

In 2018, the National Study on Adolescents and Youth - Assessment of Needs and Interests was conducted on 10- to 19-year-olds by the National Center of Strategic Studies with the support of UNICEF and the International Labor Organization (ILO). The outcomes of the study show that when asked about plans for future, the majority of respondents (73.9%) replied that they want to graduate from eleventh grade of secondary school

and study at university; whereas 9.2% plan to study in college after graduation from eleventh grade. Only 1.1% of respondents plan to graduate from eleventh grade and then leave for labor migration; and 0.4% plan to leave for labor migration after graduating from ninth grade.<sup>316</sup> This means that the aspirations of this age category are more associated with higher education than with labor migration and TVET.

## Technical and Vocational Education and Training

The same survey on adolescents reveals a very low perception of the TVET system in the country. Only 5.5% of respondents plan to study in vocational school/college and then at university after graduating from ninth grade, and 4.0% want to study in vocational school/college after graduating from ninth grade.<sup>317</sup> Although young respondents have a low opinion of the TVET, this field acquires special importance for the country, bearing in mind the high unemployment rate and high number of young and labor migrants (as discussed later in this chapter). Due to the above, TVET could be perceived not only as an element of educational policy, but from a broader human rights-based perspective “ensuring and protecting the right to decent work.”<sup>318</sup>

Earlier, it was briefly discussed that the TVET field requires urgent development, with only 6.4% of upper secondary students enrolled in vocational programs vis-à-vis 93% (!) in Uzbekistan (see Figure 8 above). In 2005-2010, according to official annual figures: almost two thirds of graduates of basic and secondary schools (or 90,000 young people) did not have access to vocational education of all levels; less than 22% of the population has vocational (basic, secondary and higher) education; and the number of men with vocational education is 2.4 times higher than women – a similar difference that could be observed between the urban and rural

population.<sup>319</sup> As for TVET infrastructure, the 2012 governmental data indicate there were 66 functioning institutions of basic vocational training with 22,316 students (3,398 females), 49 institutions of secondary vocational training with 37,550 students (20,651 females), and an increasing number of institutions of higher vocational education, i.e., 30 institutions with 154,832 students (29% females).<sup>320</sup>

As a result, a lack of access to TVET education for a majority of school graduates, and female students in particular, implies the need for targeted investment and active public policy support in the field. This is an urgent task for Tajikistan, where the participation of total upper secondary students in vocational programs is still at the minimum as compared to other Central Asian countries - only 6.4% in a striking contrast to 93.0% in Uzbekistan, 40.5% in Kazakhstan and 37.2% in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>321</sup>

Thus, delivering TVET and quality education represents a big challenge for Tajikistan and requires investment in human capital, education, training and skills development. The quality of education exhibits systemic characteristics and hence, could be applied to all countries of the region in varying degrees. According to the UN Innovation Performance Report (2015), delivering TVET and quality education should be regarded as a strategic modernization project and dealt with accordingly. (See Box 8)



<sup>316</sup> National Study Tajikistan 2018. National Study on Adolescents and Youth. Assessment of Needs and Interests. Dushanbe: Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. p. 6.

<sup>317</sup> National Study Tajikistan 2018, p. 6.

<sup>318</sup> IOM. 2017.

<sup>319</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2012, p. 9.

<sup>320</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2012, p. 6.

<sup>321</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017a, p. 7.

### Box 8. What is Needed to Enhance Quality of Education in Tajikistan

- “Gradually introduce world standards of quality in teaching. Current initiatives like introducing an agency for quality of education, accreditation of programs, harmonization with the EU Bologna process, and the introduction of a credit system are steps in the right direction. However, they will produce perverse effects if the quality of teaching itself does not improve;
- Modernize and evaluate curricula to ensure the skills of graduates correspond to the needs of the economy. This is a medium-term process which may be carried out in different formats in different subject areas but which should be considered as strategically important for the Government;
- Establish a dedicated program of short- and medium-term international training programs for researchers, scientific staff and students. Similar to our recommendations for Armenia, we see a strong need for a Tajikistani version of Kazakhstan’s Bolashak programs, based on a highly competitive selection process and on promising career opportunities. This might be incorporated into the existing Durakhshandagon program, and the Government could approach the international donor community and propose funding agreements based on cost sharing.”

Source: UNECE. 2015, p. 74.

Education as a basic process of knowledge acquisition, requires institutional settings/legal frameworks, standards for quality of education, contents/curricula and teachers in order to meet the challenges of economic development in a country with a high share of youth in the population. Such modernization and advancement should be done on all educational levels ranging from primary, secondary and vocational, to tertiary, higher education and research.

Rural-urban and gender disparities significantly contribute towards the current status of the low development in the educational field. Although the Constitution and Law on Education guarantee equal access to education for all people, the access to quality education differs for rural and urban dwellers. According to the research, “evaluation of 2,000 households showed that overall, the level of satisfaction of education is very low, and much lower in rural areas: only 19% of rural households answered that they were satisfied or fully satisfied by the quality of education in rural areas, compared to 33% of respondents in urban areas.”<sup>322</sup>

These data show that existing rural-urban disproportions impede the development of educational field. Without the establishing the system-

based approach towards providing with quality education, any distorted measures including mentioned above *Durakhshandagon Program* could yield only fragmented effects. However, this programme, as far as higher education and research are concerned, could be instrumental for increasing mobility of researchers, scientific staff and students.

The annual per capita/student expenditure of the government in Tajikistan is now under US\$600 per student; while in neighboring Afghanistan in 2014 it was over US\$800, and in tertiary institutions in OECD countries it was US\$8,944.<sup>323</sup> These figures show that investment in higher education also falls behind some other countries of the same region (even Afghanistan), and way behind the OECD countries.

Thus, the situation in the educational field in Tajikistan indicates: insufficient expenditure by government; absence of private HEIs since 2010/11; and the need for an improved curricula and quality education including professional qualifications for teachers. Yet at the same time, as the survey above indicates, the youth (particularly adolescents) would prefer studying at the HEIs, despite that very few of them have the luxury of realizing



<sup>322</sup> Development Coordination Council - Tajikistan (DCC). 2012. *Forum v oblasti Razvitiya. Prezentacija Koordinacionnogo Soveta po Razvitiyu (KSR)*. [Development Forum. Presentation of the Coordinating Council on Development.], Tajikistan, DCC.

<sup>323</sup> Sabzalieva. 2019, p. 16.

this pursuit. Another feature of education field in the country is the low level of

development of technical and professional education and training.

## (2) Economic and Social Participation

### Employment/NEET

Low education levels and/or lack of quality education directly affect the labor market and overall performance of the country.



*There is demand for highly skilled workers in Tajikistan, as only 5% and 29%, respectively, of unemployed workers have tertiary and secondary education... So unemployment, which in 2013 stood at 10.7%, is largely an issue for those with only primary education, and only partly for those with secondary education.*

Source: UNECE. 2015. Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan, p. 59

The direct indicator of this is the following data on unemployment ranked by education level which shows that 67% of unemployed have only primary education,

while 29% and 5% have secondary and tertiary education respectively.

In other words, investment in education of youth is a must to tackle the issues of unemployment. This is directly related to human capital, skills development issues and VET, employment/NEET, gender participation and migration.

According to the official data (see Table 14), the unemployed population was higher in rural areas, although it declined from 2009 to 2016. However, there was an almost exact correlation between changes in the numbers of urban and rural unemployed. In other words, the decline by 3% in rural areas from 62.1% in 2009 to 59.0% in 2016 could be explained by migration of people to towns, where the unemployed population increased by almost 3%, from 37.9% in 2009 to 41.0% in 2016.

**Table 14.** Dynamics of the Demographic Profile Structure of the Unemployed Population in the Republic of Tajikistan

| UNEMPLOYED POPULATION | DISTRIBUTION (%) |              |              |
|-----------------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|
|                       | 2004             | 2009         | 2016         |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>100.0</b>     | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Urban                 | 55,5             | 37,9         | 41,0         |
| Rural                 | 44,5             | 62,1         | 59,0         |
| <b>By Gender</b>      |                  |              |              |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>100.0</b>     | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Men                   | 51,9             | 61,1         | 68,4         |
| Women                 | 48,1             | 38,9         | 31,6         |

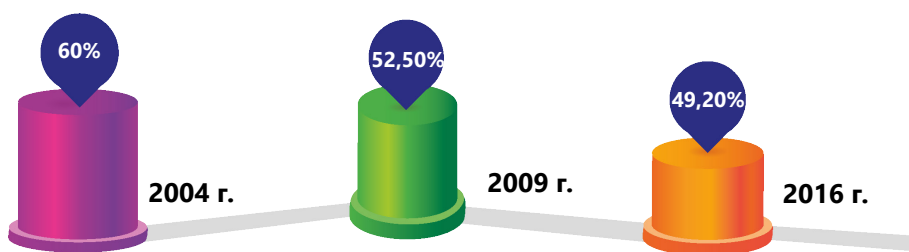
| UNEMPLOYED POPULATION | DISTRIBUTION (%) |              |              |
|-----------------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|
|                       | 2004             | 2009         | 2016         |
| <b>By Age Group</b>   |                  |              |              |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>100.0</b>     | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| 15-19 years           | 23,6             | 14,2         | 10,6         |
| 20-24 years           | 18,9             | 22,3         | 19,5         |
| 25-29 years           | 17,5             | 16,0         | 19,1         |
| 30 to 75 years        | 40,0             | 47,5         | 50,8         |

Source: Labor Market Situation in the Republic of Tajikistan. 2017, pp. 28-30. Submitted by M. Babajanova

The data also show extremely high figures of unemployed youth, although with a slight decline recently. In 2004, the young people aged 15-29 made up 60% of all unemployed people in Tajikistan.

However, in 2009 and 2016 the numbers slightly decreased, but remained quite high at 52.5% and 49.2% respectively (see Figure 9). This can be partially explained by migration of the youth abroad.

**Figure 9. Dynamics of Unemployed Youth (15-29 years old) in Tajikistan by Year**



Source: Based on Labor Market Situation in the Republic of Tajikistan. 2017, pp. 28-30. Submitted by M. Babajanova

Throughout several years unemployment could be labelled as a huge challenge for the country with high consequences for social development. For example, in 2013 the overall formal employment rate was 51.2%. The UNDAF for Tajikistan set a target

of increasing by 2020 the employment rate of: i) the general population by at least 60% (at least 30% for females); ii) young people (18–30 years) by at least 20%; and iii) the rural population by at least 20% (see Table 15).<sup>324</sup>

<sup>324</sup> UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015, p. 55.

**Table 15. UNDAF Target of Increasing by 2020 the Employment Rate in Tajikistan**

| GENERAL POPULATION         | AT LEAST 60% |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| Female                     | At least 30% |
| Young People (18-30 years) | At least 20% |
| Rural Population           | At least 20% |

Based on: UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015, p. 55.

Hence, the major vulnerable groups as far as unemployment is concerned are female, youth and rural people, what reflects the overall challenges facing the country.



*The labor market in Tajikistan is characterized by a significant gap between the male and female labor force, while unemployment of youth and the rural population is becoming another disturbing problem for the country. Education is a key-determining factor in domestic employment, as unemployment particularly strikes those without specialized education.”*

Source: UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015, p. 28.

As a result, the primary activities should focus on a variety of schemes and programs tailored to the country’s needs in the employment field, such as “tailor-made pre-employment” and “the job training

program which will increase employability and boost active participation of the most disadvantaged in the labor market (e.g. long-term unemployed, women, young jobseekers, people with disabilities, rural populations, refugees and stateless persons).”<sup>325</sup>

Therefore, in brief, the focus should be given to creating and improving: learning infrastructure through practical learning and professional training; legal infrastructure by “establishing a strong labor law framework to protect the rights of individuals entering the workplace”; business infrastructure to boost access to the resources needed to start businesses (equipment, credit, property); and “business advisory and job-guidance services for the most vulnerable groups.”<sup>326</sup>

All these activities should answer, perhaps one of the most crucial challenges that Tajikistan faces, i.e., development of its human capital.

## Migration

An increase of migration flows, both globally and regionally, has become a constant feature of current development; with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan being the countries of origin, and Kazakhstan and Russia being the countries of destination. Socio-economic, demographic, geopolitical and environmental factors are among the main driving forces behind the migration flows across the Central Asian region and

Eurasia. For Tajikistan, the key drivers of migration are high unemployment and low wages.

As evident from Table 16, according to the official data, the highest number of migrants occurred in 2010 and 2011 with 736,466 and 744,369 respectively. The year 2017 witnessed a decline in the number of migrants to 552,794, a significant amount of whom were male (467,326). IOM provides other considerably



<sup>325</sup> UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015, p. 28-29.

<sup>326</sup> UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015, p. 28-29.

higher figures - “ca. 867,000 Tajik citizens present in Russia in early 2017 compared to ca. 861,000 at the beginning of 2016.”<sup>327</sup> Taking into account the 9.1 million people of Tajikistan, it could be said that almost

every one person out of nine is a labor migrant.

The age range of the labor migrants from Tajikistan in 2015 can be viewed in the Table 17.

**Table 16. Number of Labor Migrants from Tajikistan by Years (people)**

| YEAR | TOTAL   | MALE    | FEMALE  |
|------|---------|---------|---------|
| 2010 | 736 466 | 635 814 | 79 632  |
| 2012 | 744 369 | 657 345 | 87 015  |
| 2014 | 670 806 | 654 390 | 106 416 |
| 2015 | 552 596 | 487 929 | 64 667  |
| 2016 | 591 127 | 489 546 | 102 181 |
| 2017 | 552 794 | 467 326 | 85 468  |

Source: Reports of Migration Service of the Ministry of Labor, Migration and Employment of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan for the years 2010-2017. Submitted by M. Babajanova

**Table 17. Labor Migrants from Tajikistan by Age (2015)**

| AGE             | MALE           | FEMALE        | TOTAL                  |
|-----------------|----------------|---------------|------------------------|
| <b>Below 18</b> | 304            | 20            | 324 (0,05%)            |
| <b>18-29</b>    | <b>188 776</b> | <b>25 641</b> | <b>214 417 (38,8%)</b> |
| <b>30-39</b>    | 165 666        | 21 976        | 187 642 (33,9%)        |
| <b>40-49</b>    | 120 851        | 15 218        | 136 069 (24,6%)        |
| <b>50-54</b>    | 11 296         | 1 602         | 12 898 (2,3%)          |
| <b>55-59</b>    | 846            | 150           | 996 (0,18%)            |
| <b>Above 60</b> | 190            | 60            | 250 (0,004%)           |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>487 929</b> | <b>64 667</b> | <b>552 596</b>         |

Source: Report of Migration Service of the Ministry of Labor, Migration and Employment of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan for the year 2015. Submitted by M. Babajanova



Based on the data, the greatest number of migrants in 2015 were youth aged 18-29, who contributed 214,417 people or 38.8% of all labor migrants for the year 2015 (i.e., of 552,596 in total). As discussed earlier, because most unemployed are young people with basic education in search of a job, the most common characteristic of a labor migrant from Tajikistan could be the following: an unemployed young man aged 18-30 with primary or secondary education.

*The typical labor migrant from Tajikistan is an unemployed young man aged 18-29 with primary or secondary education.*

Thus, the labor migration issue in Tajikistan automatically becomes the challenge for youth and should also be considered from this perspective.

Labor migration entails a range of issues relating to the implementation of human rights. In particular, labor migrants from Tajikistan in host countries face various challenges. In order to earn money they often agree to unacceptable rates of pay, and poor labor and living conditions. This intrinsically affects their self-esteem, and mental and psychological health. Therefore, a human rights based-approach is a must when dealing with these issues. In case of youth migrants, “the migration experience can be beneficial to youth if, and only if,

migration policies are anchored in a system that protects young migrants’ human rights, including labor rights, and enables meaningful engagement in decisions and processes that affect them.”<sup>328</sup>

Thus, a human rights-based approach should be also applied jointly with an age-sensitive and equity-focused one. Otherwise youth migrants are more vulnerable to discrimination, social exclusion, violence, abuse and exploitation as they transition from childhood to adulthood. The other aspect of rights restrictions and violations is associated with mental health and psycho-social development challenges that are harmful both in the short and long term.<sup>329</sup>

Migration is also linked to the phenomenon of remittances sent by labor migrants to their families. This is something that made Tajikistan a global leader in the field, with remittances equaling 42.7% of GDP in 2014 according to the World Bank.<sup>330</sup>



*According to the World Bank, remittances from Tajik migrants are the highest in the world, equaling 42.7% of GDP in 2014*

*Source: UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015, p. 11.*

In 2014, Tajikistan was the most remittance-dependent country in the world, with 90% of remittances originating in the Russian Federation.<sup>331</sup>

## Return Migration

Return migration has become another characteristic feature since 2014, when Russia (as a host country) introduced the re-entry ban, the effect of which mostly lasted from 2014 to 2016. Consequently, labor migrants, who had been put on the blacklist by the Russian authorities due to the violation of rules, had to return home and wait for the lifting of the ban for a few years (mostly three to five years, but up to 10 years).

Tajikistan experienced significant numbers of return migrants. For example, at the beginning of 2014 there were 71,000 return migrants, while by 2015 it was 202,000, and by the first half of 2016 it was already 329,000.<sup>332</sup> According to IOM, the numbers were higher: 437,000 in 2016 compared to 388,000 in 2015, with a decrease in the number of people leaving for work abroad from ca. 550,000 to 517,000 for 2016 and 2015 respectively.<sup>333</sup>



<sup>328</sup> UNICEF. 2014. *Migration and Youth. Challenges and Opportunities*. Global Migration Group/UNICEF, p.7.

<sup>329</sup> UNICEF. 2014, p. 14.

<sup>330</sup> UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015, p. 11.

<sup>331</sup> UNECE. 2015, pp. 5-6.

<sup>332</sup> Current archives/materials of the “MOST School on Youth Return Migration in Tajikistan: Problems and Research-Informed Solutions” organized by UNESCO Cluster Office in Almaty and UNESCO Chair at the Russian-Tajik (Slavic) University, held 28-29 March 2019, Dushanbe.

<sup>333</sup> IOM. 2017, p. 16.



In 2016 and 2017, following some liberalization of Russia's migration policy, some citizens from Central Asia were removed from the re-entry ban list, particularly those banned for administrative infringements, including Kyrgyz migrants after Kyrgyzstan joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and some Tajik migrants, perhaps because Tajikistan was a potential EAEU candidate. However, according to IOM estimates, 100,000 Tajik citizens were removed from the list but 152,000 Tajik migrants remain banned.<sup>334</sup>

The phenomenon of return migration effected the labor and employment sectors of the country and created a new situation whereby Tajik women took the initiative and headed abroad. Thus, gender-based labor migration became a new reality in the country. IOM highlights that in 2015 and 2016, while an 11% decline was noted in departures of Tajik men, a nearly 27% rise was observed for women migrating for work, with some regions showing nearly a doubling of departure rates by women (particularly the Khatlon Region and the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region).<sup>335</sup>

The feminization of Tajik labor migration remains a continuing trend, though, according to IOM, women also significantly contributed towards return migration due to the fact that women have been more vulnerable to economic hardships,<sup>336</sup> or also because of the factor of the "left behind" children who were left at home with either one parent or with relatives.<sup>337</sup> Following this it should be stressed that labor and return migration become a crucial catalyzing factor of changes that take place not only in the economic, but also in other fields as well, such as social, psychological-emotional, cognitive, in the field of interpersonal communications and relations.

The COVID-10 pandemic posed a tremendous challenge to the Tajik (as well as other) migrants who at the early

stages of pandemic were either stuck in the countries of destination, particularly in Russia losing their jobs and having no healthcare or were kept at the border camps unable to quickly pass and return home.



*«For migrants who attempted to return home, containment measures created a series of further challenges. In one survey of Tajik migrants in Russia, some 46% said that they were unable to return to Tajikistan, while 80% of those still in Tajikistan but seeking to return to Russia were blocked. Border closures have contributed to a range of social and organisational challenges, with thousands of migrants remaining stuck at border crossings, usually in temporary camps (Gershkovich, 2020[46]). Although their return by land to Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan is dependent on the periodic granting of transit permission from Kazakhstan, more migrants arrive at the makeshift camps by the day. This situation is also causing distress for their families left at home who remain dependent on the transfers from migrants stuck or out of a job».*

Source: OECD. 2020. COVID-19 Crisis Response in Central Asia. OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Return migrants upon their return home faced other challenges getting little financial and social support or finding a job – only 32% Tajik migrants could find employment in their own country in 2020.<sup>338</sup> Thus, support by the governments to labour return migrants both in destination and home countries should be extended and, as in case of Eurasian Economic Union coordinated and correlated.

The wide range of migration issues poses a challenge for the country and raises questions of reintegrating the return migrants back into the society and providing them with job opportunities. The government made these issues a priority and included them in several



<sup>334</sup> IOM. 2017, p. 15.

<sup>335</sup> IOM. 2017, p. 16.

<sup>336</sup> IOM. 2017, p. 16.

<sup>337</sup> More on the impact of migration on the "children left behind" from a child-rights based approach, as towards health, education, economic activity and psycho-social variables, see in: UNICEF. 2011. *Impact of Labor Migration on "Children Left Behind" in Tajikistan*. Dushanbe, UNICEF.

<sup>338</sup> OECD. 2020. COVID-19 Crisis Response in Central Asia. OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19), Paris: OECD Publishing. 22 p.

programs such as the National Strategy for Labor Emigration of the Citizens of the Republic of Tajikistan until 2015, and the Ombudsman's Strategy for 2016-2020, Decree on Activity Plans to Prevent Influence of Possible Risks on National Economy (2015-2018).<sup>339</sup> Among others, provisions were made for actions

targeted at return migrants; including their employment, social security, professional training and professional qualifications' certification, migration legislation upgrade and many others. Important challenges facing young return migrants are discussed in Box 9.

### Box 9. Challenges for Young Return Migrants in Tajikistan

Unemployment and the search for a job in an environment of demographic pressure and economic performance of the country is highly challengeable. "Of all re-entry-banned migrant workers who returned to Tajikistan in 2016, only 2,066 were provided with jobs through employment agencies."<sup>340</sup>

From an institutional perspective, some legal provisions and norms in the legislation regulating the field of migration and labor and employment need to be corrected and updated. One of them is that after returning back home, the (young) migrants cannot apply for unemployment welfare since they are not registered in the Agency of Labor and Employment of Population, and the Agency of Social Security and Pensions.

According to the legislation, unemployment welfare can only be given to those citizens who are officially registered as unemployed, have worked no less than 18 calendar months throughout the last three years, and have paid the required social tax during those years. In other words, the return migrants who have stayed abroad for at least three years are not eligible to apply for the unemployment benefit. Since many migrants are young people with basic education and without job experience in the country, they consequently didn't pay social tax, which eliminates them from getting the benefit.

Another issue relates to return migrants' physical health when they need qualified medical support, check-ups and assistance.

Equally important are the issues related to family coherence in regard to high social and psychological impacts. Some migrant workers who leave behind their families in Tajikistan, create (sometimes simultaneously) new families in the countries of destination, or even break any links with families at home and stop sending them the remittances. As a result, children in these families are left to fend for themselves which leads to a loss of their life orientation, a decrease of education level, and even criminalization. Such stressful situations can potentially have a negative influence on the whole of society.

Source: IOM. 2017, p. 22

Based on sociological interviews with migrants, IOM came up with the following typology of vulnerabilities (determinants of vulnerability) for return migrants,<sup>341</sup> structuring them around:

#### ● Individual Factors

Low social, economic or human capital; no knowledge of their rights; legal illiteracy or ignorance.

#### ● Structural Factors

Economic: Unemployment, low salaries and no market for migrant's services and skills;

Legal: Complicated legalization processes of work and residency in Russia and Kazakhstan; insufficient protection of migrants' human and labor rights;



<sup>339</sup> Republic of Tajikistan. 2015. *Postanovlenie pravitel'stva Respubliki Tadjikistan ot 5 fevralya 2015 goda № 50 "Plan meropriyatiy po predotvrascheniyu vliyaniya vozmozhnyh riskov na natsional'nuyu ekonomiku"* [Decree No. 50 as of 5 February 2015 of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan on "Activities Plan to Prevent Influence of Possible Risks on National Economy"].

<sup>340</sup> IOM. 2017, p. 22.

<sup>341</sup> IOM. 2017, pp. 25-27.

Cultural: Patriarchal norms as a source of vulnerability, especially for young and divorced women.

- *Situational Factors*

Death of a family member; getting stranded in Kazakhstan or Russia; becoming a victim of trafficking or exploitation.

- *Family and Household Factors*

Dependents: five or more per breadwinner; and disabled or acutely sick family members;

Women: Divorced/widowed with or without dependents; married women who are the main breadwinners of the family; Orphans: from an early age with weak social support groups and low human capital.

Some positive factors of return migration are:

01

Increased professional qualifications and newly acquired job experience, business skills and technologies that can contribute towards society's economic performance and growth, and transfer of knowledge.

02

Additional remittances made by migrants before and after returning home that could be used for consumption, as well as for investment towards new houses, education, healthcare, and for starting a business. As an economic multiplier factor, these activities contribute to the local economy.

03

Creation of professional and social networks abroad.

In summary, return migrants, as a rule, come back with increased human, economic and social capital that allows them to maintain their increased status, for some time at least. However, when it comes to the institutional environment, legislation and other structural factors such as unemployment, low salaries and social protection, the advantages gained could be overshadowed by dominating structural vulnerabilities. This could cause people to search for new opportunities in life, some of which could be associated with a radical approach.

## Youth and Gender

Gender issues are important for Tajikistan, as they directly relate to the existing socio-economic performance of the country, particularly in relation to migration and quality of education. However, they still reflect the existing traditional perception of the role of girls and women in society, associating them more with education, healthcare and the social field, rather than with science and technology. Cultural norms and stereotyping of females by the general public can still be found in rural areas where the majority of population (73,81%) of the country lives.

Throughout last decade the country introduced several policy measures on gender equity, among them are State Program for the Upbringing, Selection and Placement of Leading Personnel of the Republic of Tajikistan from Among Gifted Girls and Women for 2017-2022, the Action Plan of the National Strategy for the Enhancement of the Role of Women in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2015-2020, as well as the National Strategy for the Enhancement of the Role of Women in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2011-2020.<sup>342</sup>

The UN Coalition on Gender Equality for Europe and Central Asia (UN Development



<sup>342</sup> Education Development Strategy. Republic of Tajikistan. 2020, p. 76-77.

Group) rated Tajikistan as ‘medium’ in overall gender-responsiveness in their Common Country Analysis (CCA), although it had a low gender prioritization in their UNDAF (i.e., they did not have any gender-specific outcome statements, and 66% of their indicators were gender-neutral or blind).<sup>343</sup>

Of concern are the country’s low gender indices for higher education and for economic and political empowerment, including: “disparities in favor of boys throughout the education system, especially at university level; gender-based occupational and sectoral segregation and resulting earnings inequities; and weak implementation of gender-proactive policies.”<sup>344</sup> Researchers indicate that in tertiary education, female participation that has historically been less in Tajikistan (compared to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan with around 55%) appears to be quickly increasing as the rate is currently just over 40%.<sup>345</sup>

The new National Strategy for the Development of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan for the Period up to 2030 (2020), acknowledges the existing gender gap in education, particularly, higher education where the participation of girls and women is still strikingly low. For example, in 1991-1992 the proportion of women in the total number of students was 34%, and in the 2018-2019 academic year this figure was almost the same - 36.4%, i.e. about 1/3 of the total number of students.<sup>346</sup>

One of the ways how the government tries to solve this problem is to increase the state quota (educational grants) allocated for girls to enter the HEIs. In 2018-2019 academic year out of 7190 state educational grants almost half of them, 3438 were allocated to females and 3752 to males. The other state measure - increase of the marriage age for the girls from 17- to 18-year-old<sup>347</sup> - could be a

significant contribution against dropout of the girls mostly in the rural areas, and towards access of the girls to the vocational and higher education.

Early marriages, household maintenance, child- and family care due to both traditions, social and economic challenges, security concerns (or the unavailability of the schools in the same rural areas where the girls live) – all this contribute towards high dropout rate of the girls especially in the rural areas and stop them from pursuing further vocational or higher education after completing the mandatory school education.

Even when the girls are enrolled in these institutions for further education, yet they choose the specialties and professions that are traditionally perceived to be for women. For example, the proportion of girls who chose the specialty “pedagogy” makes up 75,3% in higher educational institutions and 64,8% in secondary vocational education. At the same time, proportion of girls who chose the “law” specialty was 19% in the HEIs, and only 6% in the secondary vocational education. Specialty “economy” was chosen by 28% of girls.<sup>348</sup> These figures show that upon the completion of the education the girls could have less chances to join the higher managerial positions in future, particularly in governmental bodies or to start own business. Therefore, one of the tasks is to increase the female enrollment in vocational and higher education and to diversify the educational specialties for them.

Gender-awareness programs are other ways to overcome the existing challenges. The Girls’ Education Program was implemented in more than 350 schools of the country, reaching more than 90,000 students. The Center for Gender Pedagogics was established at the Academy of Education to support a gender-sensitive curriculum, and the



<sup>343</sup> UNDG Europe and Central Asia. 2018. *Desk Review of 18 UNDAFs in Europe and Central Asia. Application of Twin-Track Approach to Gender in UNDAFs and CCAs to Promote Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women*. United Nations Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Equality for Europe and Central Asia, United Nations Development Group, Europe and Central Asia, p. 28.

<sup>344</sup> UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015, pp. 12-13

<sup>345</sup> Sabzalieva. 2019, p. 10.

<sup>346</sup> Education Development Strategy. Republic of Tajikistan. 2020, p. 70.

<sup>347</sup> Education Development Strategy. Republic of Tajikistan. 2020, p. 76.

<sup>348</sup> Education Development Strategy. Republic of Tajikistan. 2020, p. 77.

supply teaching and learning materials.<sup>349</sup> The other form of activity to raise awareness about prevention of violence against women and girls, early marriages, other harmful practices and to promote gender equity was the partnership between UNFPA and the Committee on Religious Affairs and Regulation of National Traditions, Celebrations, and Ceremonies (CoRA), faith-based organizations.<sup>350</sup>

The gender factor, as mentioned earlier, influences the migration demographic as well. The challenges of economic development and the need to earn money has resulted in a specific situation in Tajikistan where young men are ready (compared to young Uzbek men from southern Kyrgyzstan) or willing, due to cultural dispositions, to let their wives work to help sustain the family. It is assumed that this is the case because of the economic hardship of some of the Tajik men, as they are the only breadwinners of very large households.<sup>351</sup>

Based on analysis of the public data and interviews with migrants from



*“UNFPA during its year’s long partnership with the Committee on Religious Affairs and Regulation of National Traditions, Celebrations, and Ceremonies (CoRA) has successfully enabled Muslim religious leaders to communicate correct information on the issues of HIV, sexual and reproductive health and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence to their constituents. Further, inclusion of sexual and reproductive health related themes into Friday prayers throughout the country as well as broadcasting of radio and TV programmes strengthened the awareness of most conservative groups in Tajikistan as to prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections.”*

Source: UNFPA. Tajikistan. 2020

Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (collected in January-May 2017), the IOM tabulated the vulnerabilities of youth and women migrants in their countries of origin (see Table 18).

**Table 18. Vulnerabilities of Youth and Women Migrants in Countries of Origin**

| YOUTH  | WOMEN  |
|--|--|
| Mostly poorly educated                                   | Divorced/widowed young women with or without dependents  |
| Have no skills   | Breadwinners whose husbands are ill and do not share family’s financial burdens  |
| Unemployed or limited chances for employment back home   | Employed as general workers in Russia they do not gain new skills that would allow them to find jobs back home                                       |
| Pressure to support their new families (as breadwinners) | Divorced women tend to have no private property as they did not have control over earnings in Russia but work for the benefit of ex-husband’s family |



<sup>349</sup> UNDAF Tajikistan. 2015, p. 19.

<sup>350</sup> UNFPA. Tajikistan. 2020. The Winners of The Best Article on Prevention of Domestic Violence Writing Competition Announced in Dushanbe. 29 September 2020.

<sup>351</sup> IOM. 2017, p. 28.

| YOUTH  | WOMEN  |
|--|--|
| Possess no house or other private property   | Moral stigmatization for being divorced and lost reputation for migration in Russia as unaccompanied female. |
| They are waiting for the expiration of the re-entry ban and do not search for jobs in the home country because they are hopeless to find a job with decent salary. |  |

Source: IOM. 2017, p. 28.

Thus, migrant women from Tajikistan (as well as from Kyrgyzstan) became the breadwinner for their families back home and equally participate in the economy of

the extended family. However, they are even more vulnerable compared to male migrants as explained in Box 10.

### Box 10. Women Migrants' Vulnerability

“Divorced or widowed female migrants with or without dependents are another category of the most vulnerable re-entry-banned migrants. Divorced women with dependents are experiencing economic hardships and feel most desperate. Usually, their family members are not capable of providing them with financial support and they cannot find work in their country of origin due to a lack of professional skills or due to a lack of employment opportunities and decent salaries. Moreover, a majority of interviewed re-entry-banned women in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan do not have their own property, unlike most of the interviewed men. Female migrants who are the breadwinners of the family because their husbands are not capable of providing for the family are also among the most vulnerable re-entry-banned migrants. For them, migration had been a solution and life strategy to provide for their families when their husbands failed to do so.”<sup>352</sup>

Source: IOM. 2017, p. 28.

## Youth and Entrepreneurship

In knowledge-driven and digital economies, youth entrepreneurship is one of the “natural” ways to promote the economic development of the country, social cohesion and capacity-building. The digital era provides many opportunities for unfolding creativity potential of the youth and promoting a culture of entrepreneurship in society. However, this requires a significant input into the infrastructure, education, training, and creating a business-friendly environment.

The positive potential and significance of (youth) entrepreneurship is enormous

whether it relates to the general economic performance of the country, reducing the roots of radicalism, or investing in the human capital, which as discussed earlier, is the only way towards development and growth.

For youth to start their own business, they must know how to do this. Hence, the issues of developing learning infrastructure and capacity-building activities for existing and would-be young entrepreneurs are of high importance. The UN Innovation Performance Review for Tajikistan suggests introducing entrepreneurship classes

<sup>352</sup> IOM. 2017, p. 28.

into the curricula at various educational levels and running public awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of entrepreneurship for socio-economic development. It also recommends the application of interactive forms of learning to ensure that the knowledge can be actively applied in practice; and the participation of successful entrepreneurs as coaches and mentors.<sup>353</sup>

In Tajikistan, entrepreneurship is also related to the situation in the migration field, which means taking into account the skills and basic entrepreneurship knowledge that migrants acquired during their work abroad, and also investments made by migrants into entrepreneurial activities. Research even draws parallels between this activity and an equivalent subsidy by public and donor funds.<sup>354</sup>

In Tajikistan, the year 2017 was declared the Year of the Youth. On January 18, 2017 the Forum of Youth Entrepreneurship supported by the World Bank Group was held in Dushanbe, where more than 200 young people representing various fields took part. The key focus was on the youth in terms of their skills and creation of new jobs for economic growth so to strengthen their abilities towards entrepreneurship through knowledge-sharing and capacity building.

The Permanent Representative of the World Bank in Tajikistan (Patricia Vivers-Carter) was quoted as saying that the World Bank was ready to support the efforts of the government of Tajikistan to help with youth-centered priorities for development so the youth could gain the

necessary skills to productively contribute towards the country's future.<sup>355</sup> In April 2017, another International Forum of Young Entrepreneurs was held with the aim of boosting the business potential of the youth, increasing their entrepreneurial skills, and acquainting them with innovative applied projects.<sup>356</sup>

Youth entrepreneurship could be the enabler to promote not only economic development, but intercultural dialogue as well, especially at a grassroots level in border areas of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan that suffered from inter-ethnic conflicts. A good initiative in this respect was the 2017 project Strengthening Peace and Cooperation Between the Youth of the Border Communities of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. This project targeted young men and women aged 18-35 from the town of Isfara and the Bobodjan-Gafurov District of Tajikistan to participate in a contest for business ideas, to attend two training cycles on basic entrepreneurship skills; followed by a practical training cycle to submit their preliminary business plans and finalize them.<sup>357</sup>

Another case of youth entrepreneurship for intercultural dialogue was the Peacebuilding Youth Forum for adolescents from bordering districts of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan held in 2019. Considering the much-needed activities to improve relations in border areas between the countries, the idea of youth entrepreneurship for peacebuilding is a relevant and timely measure. Box 11 gives a summary of this initiative supported by the UN Peacebuilding Fund.

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<sup>353</sup> UNECE 2015, p. xxvi.

<sup>354</sup> UNECE 2015, p. xxvii.

<sup>355</sup> Today News. 2017. V Dushanbe proshel forum molodezhnogo predpinitelstva [In Dushanbe there took place the Youth Entrepreneurship]. [Forum]. [In Russian].

<sup>356</sup> TAJPATENT. 2017. Molodezh - dvigatel innovatsionnogo razvitiya. [Youth is the Driver of the Innovative Entrepreneurship]. Dushanbe, TAJPATENT, April 18. [In Russian]

<sup>357</sup> Association of Scientific-Technical Intellectuals of Tajikistan (ASTI). 2017. Predpinitelstvo- zhizneno vazhnaja perspektiva sovremenno molodezhi [Entrepreneurship is a vital prospect for today's youth. [Entrepreneurship is a vitally important prospect for modern youth].

### Box 11. Peacebuilding Youth Forum for Adolescents from Bordering Districts of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (2019)

In June 2019, the Youth Forum brought together young people from Isfara Town and Bobodjan-Gafurov District of Tajikistan, and Batken and Leilek districts of Kyrgyzstan to showcase the vital role that young people play in strengthening the social cohesion and intercommunal conviviality with their peacebuilding competencies.

This forum is part of an initiative on cross-border cooperation for peace and development that is implemented in border districts of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan with the financial support of the UN Peacebuilding Fund. Activities under this initiative have built peacebuilding competencies and skills for innovation among 753 Tajik and Kyrgyz adolescents, supported adolescents in developing 12 innovative solutions for promoting intercommunal tolerance, engaged adolescents in two cross-border cultural exchange events, including a media camp under the slogan “Messages for Peace” that produced 15 adolescent-authored media presentations on peace and tolerance.

Adolescent girls and boys from both countries took center stage during the Forum by leading sessions, moderating panel discussions, showcasing best examples of cross-border collaboration, and conveying messages of peace and friendship with their peers and public from across the border. By the end of the Forum, adolescents and young people from the two countries concluded that they, if given a chance, can play a bigger role in building social cohesion and improving cross-border cooperation through their active engagement and meaningful participation in the lives of their society.

*«I thought all Tajik boys were aggressive. I was standing nervously at the border with the flag to wait for the Tajik team to come. But when I saw their smiles, I relaxed.» - Janara Abdikhalilova, from Leilek, Kyrgyzstan*

*“Platforms, such as this Forum brings together adolescent girls and boys who become friends, learn about each other, and come up with new ideas that contribute towards better social co-existence and inter-communal relations. This is how adolescents become agents of social cohesion in their communities and bring positive change.” - Khushbakht Hojiev, Head of the Adolescent Program of UNICEF Tajikistan*

Source: UNICEF. Shokamolova. 2019. Shokamolova S. Peace and friendship do not have nation, colour and religion. Peacebuilding Youth Forum for adolescents from bordering districts of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The above-mentioned events and activities held in 2017 and 2019 in the border area between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are examples of good practices where the youth act as accelerators enabling various directions

for development and peacebuilding, such as breaking down stereotypes and promoting inter-ethnic relations, entrepreneurial skills, confidence-building, and direct engagement and participation in building social cohesion.



### (3) Civic Engagement

#### Youth, Religion and Violent Extremism

Tajikistan was almost the first country in the post-Soviet era that faced the challenge of extremism among the youth, i.e., during the civil war (1992-1997). However, nowadays this acquires another dimension. During the civil war and up to 2001 there were no terrorist explosion events. This happened for the first time in 2010 in Khujand when a member of the extremist group *Jamaat Ansarullah* attacked the local law enforcement body.

Issues of radicalism and religious extremism, including among the youth, became a focus of research from the 2000s onwards.<sup>358</sup> Research findings indicate that there is a sufficiently strong trend of marginalization among the youth in the rural areas; and there are also some socio-economic, cultural, informational factors that potentially could lead to unexpected and rather quick radicalization of the youth.<sup>359</sup>

Generally, grounds for radicalization of the youth are complex and entail a wide range of interrelated factors – socio-economic, ideological and socio-cultural – leading to the marginalization of the youth, especially in rural areas. Among these are: unemployment and poverty; a lack of resources, social opportunities, and civic engagement and participation; low-quality education including general knowledge on religion; mistrust of religious and secular authorities (especially bearing in mind the civil war experience); and migration which has a strong impact on a wide range of social relations.

The sense of belonging and identity becomes another important factor for the youth, who, taking into consideration high migration flows and the increasing

number of separated families and children/youth left behind, search for belonging and identity as valued members of social groups. Thus, youth choices are also determined by existing social inequality and injustice and feelings of being left behind and abandoned or isolated by the society. As was discussed earlier, for millennials and post-millennials, the sense of belonging and self-identity plays a significant role in amplifying the longing for the social, particularly family bonds and basic social cohesion.

Low quality of education, poverty and unemployment trigger and exemplify these sentiments, paving the way towards supporting the thesis mentioned earlier in the UN Progress Report on Youth, Peace and Security (2018) that “in the absence of meaningful opportunities to participate socially, politically and economically; marginalized young people are strikingly creative in forging alternative places of belonging and meaning through which to express themselves.”<sup>360</sup>

For the youth, one of the seemingly available ways of realizing a sense of belonging and fulfilling their own aspirations and ambitions is enrollment and participation in some of the networks that propagate extremist radical view of religion, fully exploit these sentiments, capitalize on them and provide the youth with material support.

In regard to inter-ethnic conflicts and religious extremism, similar factors that aggravate tensions between communities can be identified. Research indicates four particular variables: the unresolved legacies of the Soviet past, inefficient use of natural resources, militarization of borders, and



<sup>358</sup> FECA-Tajikistan. 2010. *Snizhenie urovnya radikalizatsii sredi molodezhi v Matchinskoy raione: issledovatel'skii otchet* [Reducing the Radicalization Level among Youth of Matchinsky District]. Dushanbe: FECA-Tajikistan, 2010, 28 p.; FECA-Tajikistan. 2012. *Snizhenie urovnya radikalizatsii sredi molodezhi v gorode Dushanbe: issledovatel'skii otchet* [Reducing the Radicalization Level among Dushanbe Youth]. Dushanbe, FECA-Tajikistan, 2012, 14 p.; Muminov. 2017. Muminov A.I. *Religiozniy ekstremizm v kontekste sotsial'nykh izmenenii* [Religious Extremism in the Context of Social Changes]. Dissertation submitted for the attaining the scientific degree of the doctorate of philosophical sciences. Dushanbe: 2017, 294 p.; Mahmadiyev. 2012. Mahmadiyev N.D. *Sotsial'nye korni religioznogo ekstremizma v Tadjikistane* [Social Roots of Religious Extremism in Tajikistan]. Synopsis of the dissertation submitted for the attainment of the scientific degree of candidate of philosophical sciences. Dushanbe: 2012, 24 p.

<sup>359</sup> Abdullayev. 2012. Abdullayev. R. *Itogi bazovogo issledovaniya dlya proekta 'Snizhenie urovnya radikalizatsiyi molodezhi v Tadjikistane'* [Results of the initial research for project 'Decrease in level of youth radicalization in Tajikistan']. Dushanbe.

<sup>360</sup> UNFPA, PBSO. 2018. *The Missing Peace. Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*. Progress Study. UN Publication, p. x-xiii. (Doc. A/72/761; S/2018/86.).

lack of evidence-based policymaking.<sup>361</sup> The inter-ethnic conflicts that took place in the Isfara and Batken regions of the border area between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan respectively could be described as the result of those variables.

The April 2021 border conflict between two countries that led to deaths of 55 people and set a new wave of tension, was followed by the official statement of governments of both countries stating to withdraw the military troops from the border, to start doing topography of the state border leading to its further delimitation and demarcation.<sup>362</sup>

The border conflict caused by the water resource disputes among local communities, became the worst incident since the collapse of the Soviet Union and, as brief responses indicate it was quickly escalated on the social media in both countries: “while the fighting on the ground seems to have been contained, the community-on-community meme war

continues undebated”.<sup>363</sup>

This speaks about the high role the mass-media plays in shaping and constructing the attitude, perceptions of the people, including the youth (the main consumer of the social networks and media content) in the peacebuilding process. Media and media literacy seems out to be substantial factor reinforcing or countering the stereotyping of the “Other”. As this conflict shows, peacebuilding and conflict prevention come to the forefront of the countries development and speak about the need to use trust- and peacebuilding activities by the local communities and authorities, and governments.

There have been several stages in the development of violent extremism in relation to religion in Tajikistan, reflecting the general situation in the country and the broader region. The stages are briefly summarized in Box 12.

### Box 12. Stages in the Development of Violent Extremism in Tajikistan

**First stage (1991-1997):** The civil war, the growth of religious consciousness, and the active phase in the formation of political Islam.

**Second stage (1998-2013):** Post-conflict peacebuilding; the political Islamist party (e.g. Party of the Islamic Renaissance of Tajikistan) was legitimized till 2015 when it was banned and blacklisted as terroristic and extremist one; activation since end of 1990s of extremist organizations such as *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* and *Salafist movement*.

**Third stage (since 2014 to the present):** The ISIS factor which comprises the activation of youth radicalization, new trends and approaches towards enrollment of people especially labor migrants to radical religious organizations, and participation in the war conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. This stage also saw an active response from the government by adopting and widely implementing the nationwide National Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan on Counteracting Extremism and Terrorism for 2016-2020. It should be noted that civil society members actively participated in drafting the national strategy.

Since 2017: A period of “post-radicalization” of youth; the development of measures targeted at returning extremists and their families, and their rehabilitation and adaptation back into society.

Submitted by Sh. Rizoyen

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<sup>361</sup> Toktomushev. 2017. Toktomushev Kemel. *Promoting Social Cohesion and Conflict Mitigation: Understanding Conflict in the Cross-Border Areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*. Working Paper N. 40. Bishkek: University of Central Asia, p. 4.

<sup>362</sup> Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan. 2021. *Sovmestnoye zavayleniye pravitel'stvennykh delegatsiy Kyrgyzstana i Tadjikistana i po delimitatsii i demarkatsii gosgranitsy* [Joint Statement by the Government Delegations of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and on the Delimitation and Demarcation of the State Border]. May 6, 2021

<sup>363</sup> Helf. 2021. Helf, Gavin. *Border Clash Between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan Risks Spinning Out of Control. Under pressure at home, the leaders of both countries, looking for a distraction and a win, could escalate the conflict*. May 4,

The radicalization of migrants has become another specific feature of Tajikistan. Taking into account that the majority of migrants are young people, radicalization among them poses risks for future development, both in Tajikistan as well as in the countries of destination.

IOM research findings on migrants' vulnerabilities indicate a combination of various factors at play in the radicalization of migrants: economic factors (poverty and unemployment, and inability to feed the family); social factors (constant experiences of mistreatment, feelings of injustice and the inability to make life meaningful); and ideological factors (dissemination of radical ideas by extremist groups both in Russia and Central Asia as well as the absence of opportunities for religious development in a secular state).<sup>364</sup>

Based on expert interviews, the IOM study revealed the complex link between potential radicalization and the lack of knowledge of the destination country's language, feelings of alienation, and mistreatment by law enforcement agencies. Understanding the combination of socio-economic and ideological factors is essential to understanding the onset of radicalization.

The important main element for analyzing the spread of radicalization among migrants is to understand the working mechanisms of radicalization during the various stages of a migrants' life in their home country, and country of destination and after returning home. As the literature suggests:

*Typically radicalization takes place in Russia, involving certain vulnerable groups of young migrants without social ties who are experiencing social stigma, for instance, divorced women, abandoned children, and people who had contacts*

*with criminal networks or youth gangs in the past. Some reports identified young uneducated people free of control both from the family and from the state who join extremist organizations in Russia after being recruited at mosques run by North Caucasian or other ethnic groups. However, it is not yet clear if, or how, their behavior changes when they return to Central Asia. Most likely those migrants prefer not to come home, being afraid of possible repressive measures, and they often choose further migration to Turkey or Syria.*<sup>365</sup>

This summary shows how the vulnerabilities of young labor migrants related to all the factors mentioned above (economic, social, psychological and ideological) contribute to the process of recruitment into radical groups.

It should be noted that education (basic knowledge, skills and intercultural competencies acquisition and practical implementation), as a part of a life-long learning process, could serve as a preventive and protective measure against radicalization. Intercultural competencies which work most effectively on cognitive and relational planes<sup>366</sup> could potentially become a game-changer in this regard, especially in multicultural societies and in environments where radicalization can thrive. This is due to the very definition of intercultural competencies which are "about improving human interactions across difference, whether within a society (differences due to age, gender, religion, socio-economic status, political affiliation, ethnicity and so on) or across borders."<sup>367</sup> This could mean that education, and acquiring and practicing intercultural competencies, should be viewed as an essential part of the peacebuilding process in Tajikistan, and elsewhere.

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<sup>364</sup> IOM. 2017, p. 33.

<sup>365</sup> IOM. 2017, p. 34.

<sup>366</sup> According to UNESCO there are three main domains of learning to foster global citizenship education - cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral. See more in: Deardorff. 2020. Deardorff, Darla K. 2020. *Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies. Story Circles*. UNESCO and Routledge, p. 6.

<sup>367</sup> Deardorff. 2020, p. 5.

## Radicalization Online

Along with the socio-economic and identity (belonging) factors influencing youth radicalization mentioned above, other factors that should be mentioned are those relating to the export and implanting of extremist ideas from abroad and within the country, or as was discussed above, during the labor migration experience in the host countries, particularly in Russia. In all cases, information-communicative technologies and online social networks play a role in spreading radical ideas and recruiting youth.

The role of media in the shaping attitudes and perception of the youth towards dialogue and peacebuilding is an extremely important in the country where there exist “a strong demand for religious topics, but there are no recognized resources. A significant part of the population meets their needs through external sources: from video hosting sites, social networks, satellite TV channels, to the use of Google queries”.<sup>368</sup>

Against this background the construction of the general environment of dialogue and peace is impossible without the mass-media literacy, particularly in the field of preventing violent extremism and radicalization. Sh. Rizoyen defines the following key issues in this field: (1) Weak level of knowledge in the field of preventing radicalization leading to violent extremism (definitions, terms, concepts); (2) Use of inaccurate information, hate speech, disclosure of personal data; (3) Ineffective mechanisms of communication with state law enforcement agencies, expert and analytical community, religious

organizations, international organizations; (4) Lack or insufficiency of specialized educational trainings, teaching aids and manuals for journalists and media experts on the coverage of religious topics and prevention of radicalization leading to extremism and terrorism.<sup>369</sup>

The stereotype of social network users who are attracted to religious themes highlights the role of communication and dialogue in modern societies, and the need to be heard, listened to, understood and respected. Government can only partially fulfill an individual's need to be a dignified and respected member of a social group. This unmet need is exploited by violent extremist groups through primordial responses yet very modern means – communication and digital communication over social networks. Consequently, this raises the issue of using the same tools of communication, as understood in a broad sense, to stand against and prevent violent extremism.

Summing up, there is a wide range of factors (economic, social, ideological, cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral) leading to the radicalization of youth, including: unemployment; identity and sense of belonging; the need for socialization and social cohesion for children/youth from separated families; lack of civic engagement and participation in social, political and economic life; difficult living conditions that impede the opportunities for development; and “religious brainwashing” or coming under the influence of radical dogmas and views, including through online social networks.



<sup>368</sup> Mass and Social Media Analysis. N.a. *Analiz SMI i sotsial'nykh media po svobode veroispovedaniya i nasil'stvennomu ekstremizmu v Tsentral'noy Azii: keysy Kazakhstana, Tadzhikistana i Uzbekistana. Opublikovano v ramkakh proyekta «Zashchita dlya predotvrashcheniya: formy realizatsii svobody veroispovedaniya kak preventivnyy podkhod v bor'be s nasil'stvennym ekstremizmom»* [Media and Social Media Analysis on Religious Freedom and Violent Extremism in Central Asia: Cases from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Published as part of the project “Protecting for Prevention: Implementing Religious Freedom as a Preventive Approach in Combating Violent Extremism”]. p. 26.

<sup>369</sup> Mass and Social Media Analysis. N.a., p. 26.

## Key Challenges for Youth and Peacebuilding in Tajikistan

Main challenges arising from the country's development, are associated with unemployment, rural-urban disparities, high migration and return migration, marginalization and low quality of education, including the religious education of youth. Linked with these aspects of human capital development are radicalization, social cohesion and civic identity that are also high on the national agenda in Tajikistan.

An important element of social cohesion and justice is linking the members of formal and informal social groups; this is achieved through dialogue with the most vulnerable groups – youth, women, children, and people with disabilities – and the fair representation and treatment of these groups.

This implies the important role that

should be played by dialogue and peacebuilding as a broad concept reflecting all walks of development, as well as application of the measures for social, economic, ideological engagement and cohesion, with youth as a crucial and primary group to be focused on and to be engaged with.

On the legal plane, there are basic legal mechanisms regulating youth development, including the Law on Youth and the State Youth Policy, National Concept of Youth Policy in the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Strategy of State Youth Policy in the Republic of Tajikistan up to 2020. However, ensuring the quality of the implementation is an under-resourced task.

The existing challenges could be ranked as follows:



**Economic challenges and youth unemployment** which are primarily related to education and NEET issues.



**Lack of access to quality education and training.** Low quality of education (primary, tertiary, TVET and professional training) is a common feature in rural areas and among girls.



**The marginalization of (rural) youth** due to low employment and education levels (especially in rural areas), and lack of comprehensive social security packages and benefits.



**Labor migration and return migration.** A significant part of Tajik youth has to look for decent work abroad, mainly in Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkey due to demographic pressure and unemployment at home. Return migrants need to be mainstreamed, rehabilitated and employed in the society anew.



**Low level of legal literacy, economic knowledge and entrepreneurship skills** impede the economic activity and initiatives of the youth, and protection of their rights and interests.



**The radicalization of youth.** A complex range of factors contribute to attracting the youth to illegal religious and extremist organizations such as ISIS, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, *Salafiya* and *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*.



**Low involvement in political and public processes.** A working mechanism for involvement of youth in political decision-making and recognizing the potential and capacity of youth remains to be developed.

## UZBEKISTAN

### General Characteristics of the Youth

As discussed in previous chapters, a sense of belonging and emotional comfort among post-millennials are combined with adherence to traditional values, especially in rural areas. A sense of belonging to a family and larger community, friendship (as part of social cohesion) and linking oneself to these concepts and institutions are representative of the answers of the respondents from Uzbekistan who participated in the sociological survey on the Youth of Central Asia (2016) implemented in Uzbekistan by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

The results of the survey show that the self-identity and value-orientation of the youth are also affected by traditional values, especially family values. The questions and responses on this issue were:

*Above all, I am a person who appreciates friendship and friends very highly = 26.3%;*

*Above all, I am a person who appreciates being a member of a family very highly = 17.2%;*

*Above all, I am a person who appreciates being a citizen of Uzbekistan very highly = 16.7%.*

Validation of the importance of family is provided by the answer to the question as to whom you trust first of all: 95.4% of respondents answered “I completely trust my family members”. The emphasis on the preservation of the traditional family and the tradition of large families can also be clearly observed. Thus, 37.5% of respondents expressed a desire to have four children in their family, 25.7% said three and 30.3% said two. The results also showed that 84.2% of respondents answered ‘no’, as to whether they “intend to move anywhere from Uzbekistan.”<sup>370</sup>

Almost same results were yielded by the national study conducted by UNICEF jointly with local partner organizations – Youth Union of Uzbekistan and Nationwide Movement *Yuksalish* in 2018-2020. It states that “Uzbekistan’s youth almost exclusively trust and relies on their parents”. Traditional values of respect to the elder generations are expressed in that “they should be ‘obedient’, especially within their neighbourhood communities (mahalla)”, whereas exceptional sense of belonging to their home villages and cities is manifested by ‘their motivation not to migrate both in-country (80,3 percent) and abroad (77,3 percent).’<sup>371</sup>

The above shows that for a new generation of youth, the traditional forms of social cohesion, along with emotional belonging and solidarity do matter to them. This makes a new generation of millennials and post-millennials a unique generation that combine competencies in advanced digital technologies, perhaps overly highlighting their personal identity and yet emotionally linking themselves with traditional values and family bonds as well. This has certain implications for peacebuilding.

As discussed above, the countries of the region are characterized by an increase of the proportion of the youth in the general structure of the population. This creates both opportunities and challenges for the countries’ economic and social policies.

Uzbekistan is the biggest country of the region in terms of population, where youth (within the 14 to 30 age group) comprise a significant part (25.47%, this figure is given for the 15-29-year old) of the total population. For Uzbekistan, the “demographic dividend” issue could be especially applicable.<sup>372</sup>



<sup>370</sup> Friedrich Ebert Foundation. 2016b. *Youth of Central Asia: Uzbekistan*. Based on a sociological survey. Almaty, Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

<sup>371</sup> UNICEF Report. 2020. *Youth of Uzbekistan: Challenges and Prospects*. Tashkent: UNICEF. p. 7, 66, 68.

<sup>372</sup> See, for example, UNFPA. 2015. *Investing in Young People in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. A Supplement to the 2014 State of World Population Report, The Power of 1.8 Billion*. Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, United Nations Population Fund; UNICEF Uzbekistan. 2018. *Generation 2030 Uzbekistan: Investing in children and young people to reap the demographic dividend*, Tashkent, UNICEF.

The case of Uzbekistan is representative, considering the high number of youth population in the country, which, although continuing to grow, has stabilized and remains young, while the proportion of dependents (children under 15 and people over 65) among the general population has declined. Due to this change in the age structure of the population, currently Uzbekistan is at the stage of an ‘early demographic dividend’. As a result, an increase in the share of the working population over the years with a

moderate number of dependents creates favorable demographic conditions for economic growth.

As also discussed earlier, the maximum effect of the demographic dividend could be achieved if there is investment in education that could increase GDP by 1.7% annually. To implement the ‘demographic window of opportunity’ (i.e., sustainable economic growth, increasing real income, reducing poverty) in Uzbekistan, it is therefore necessary to invest in human capital, first of all, in educational and learning field.

## (1) Education and Learning Environment

### Youth and Access to Education and Training

Human resources could be viewed as an important asset for Uzbekistan if there are investments in human capital development. One of the major prerequisites for the full realization of youth potential is the equal (human-rights based) access of the youth to quality education, irrespective of the area in which they live (rural or urban) and their gender, income, ethnicity and religion.

Government expenditure on education in 2017 amounted to 6.41% of GDP and 19.96% of total government expenditure.<sup>373</sup> The literacy rate of youth (15–24 years old) in 2016 reached 100% for the total population (the same for both women and men).

Reforms in education and the adoption of a number of important policy decrees and resolutions within the frames of the ongoing reforms taking place in Uzbekistan since 2017 are an indication of the policy targeted to improve the field and advance it further, and more broadly, to implement reforms according to the National Action Strategy on Five Priority Development Areas 2017–2021. Development of education and science, along with improving the state–youth policy are key

elements of Priority 4 “Developing the social area.”<sup>374</sup>

The Uzbekistan education system features free and near-universal access for both sexes and high levels of enrolment in both general secondary and secondary specialized, professional education.<sup>375</sup> There are pre-school (3–6 years old), primary (7–10), secondary (11–18), and tertiary (19–23) levels of education in Uzbekistan. Compulsory education lasts 11 years, from the age of 7 to 18. Until 2017, general secondary education consisted of nine years of compulsory education (grades 1 to 9). Currently the reformed structure provides three options: (i) 11 years of general secondary education; (ii) 9 years of general secondary education + 2 years in an academic lyceum; or (iii) 11 years of general secondary education + 0.5–2 years in a vocational college.<sup>376</sup>

The gross enrollment ratio in secondary education (11–18 years old) for 2017 was 93.4% in total (92.42% female and 93.63% male). This can be compared to 2009, when the total enrolment was 89.22% (89.44% female and 89% male) (see Figure 10 below).<sup>377</sup>



<sup>373</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics. *Uzbekistan*

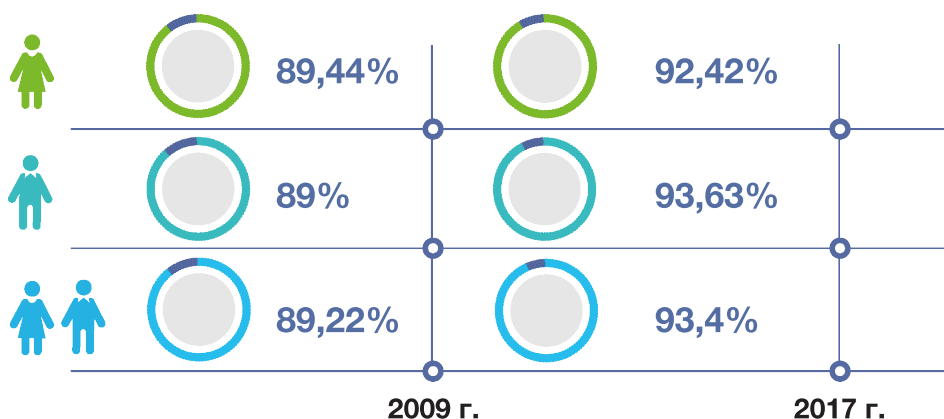
<sup>374</sup> UNESCO. 2019a. *Education Sector Plan of Uzbekistan 2019–2023*. 180 p., with appendices, pp. 13–14.

<sup>375</sup> UNDAF Uzbekistan. 2015. *United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the Republic of Uzbekistan 2016–2020*. Tashkent: Baktria Press, p. 12.

<sup>376</sup> UNESCO. 2019a, p. 20.

<sup>377</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics. *Uzbekistan*.

**Figure 10. Gross Enrollment Ratio in Secondary Education (11-18 years old) in Uzbekistan, by Year and Sex (in %)**



Based on: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Uzbekistan

Despite the progress achieved in recent decades, one of which could be the 100% literacy rate among youth, the main task in the field of reforming the educational system of Uzbekistan is the need to expand access to pre-school and higher education and to improve the quality of secondary and higher education.

Less than 30 percent of young children (3–6 years old) in the country have access to an early childhood education program (compared to 60% in Kazakhstan and 87% in Russia), the quality of secondary education is unknown and less than a tenth of the youth who complete secondary education make it to higher education today in Uzbekistan.<sup>376</sup> An important aspect of general secondary compulsory education is the number of “out-of-school” or “dropout” children. These numbered around 33,000 children and 108,000 adolescents in 2017 with girls comprising around 60% of out-of-school adolescents; noting that, according to the Ministry of Public Education, these figures are merely a reflection of student absenteeism.<sup>379</sup>

Enhancing the relevance of education requires the introduction and implementation of various systemic factors, particularly full coverage and student enrollment starting from pre-

school level and onwards, implementation of the principles of life-long learning at all stages of the learning process, qualified and trained teachers, updated curricula standards implementation, use of ICT, and the development of school infrastructure.

The interdependence and interinfluence of these factors could have a crucial effect on the quality of education, which in the case of Uzbekistan is currently experiencing region-specific variations. A joint study by UNICEF and the Ministry of Public Education (2018) on secondary school student performance revealed wide variations across regions, with six regions (Karakalpakstan, Fargana, Khorazm, Bukhara, Surkhadarya and Sirdarya) having a high concentration of low performers (the highest being Karakalpakstan with 55.1%) compared to regions such as Jizzak, Navoi and Tashkent (the lowest indicator of low performers being Navoi with 13%).<sup>380</sup> Nonproportional regional differences indicate a complex set of challenges to ensuring the quality of education.

Regional factors also come to light as far as teachers’ professional development is concerned. Out of 407,705 general secondary education teachers in the country, 85% work in rural areas; while around two-thirds of the teachers are



<sup>376</sup> UNESCO. 2019a, p. 9, 25.

<sup>379</sup> UNESCO. 2019a, p. 28.

<sup>380</sup> UNESCO. 2019a, p. 30.



female.<sup>381</sup> This suggests an urgent need to focus on enhancing and upgrading the qualification of the teachers working in rural areas, bearing in mind that effective teachers contribute positively to students' overall performance.<sup>382</sup>

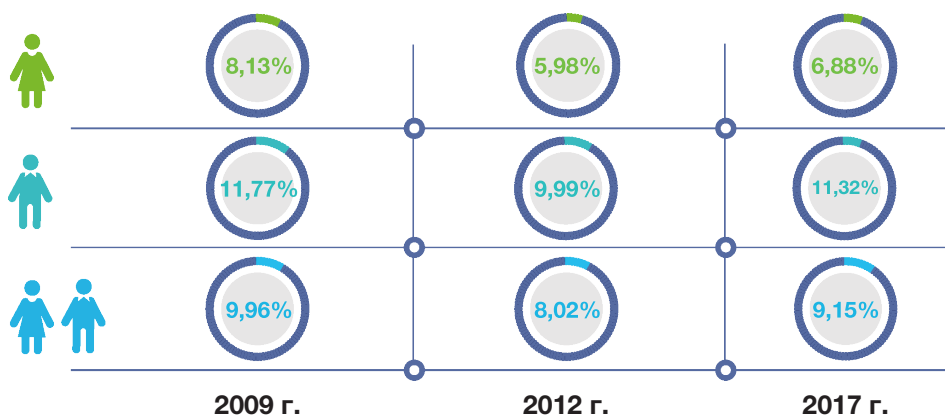
In tertiary education, currently there are 85 national higher education institutions (HEIs), including 42 institutions that are under the authority of the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education and eight branches of foreign universities operating in partnerships with public institutions. Although the legal frameworks imply the participation of the private sector in higher education, this participation remains limited.

One of the distinct characteristics of tertiary education in Uzbekistan is the overall decline in the gross enrollment ratio

from 17% in 1991 to slightly more than 9 percent in 2017. According to the UNESCO Education Sector Plan for Uzbekistan, the number of students in higher education per 10,000 people in the country has been declining, from 219 students a decade ago to 167 now. Of all the students currently enrolled in tertiary education in Uzbekistan, the majority (around 95%) attend a Bachelor level course. In 2017, only 4.5% of those who graduated from a Bachelor program in 2016 continued their studies in a Masters degree program.<sup>383</sup>

Thus, in Uzbekistan there appear to be challenges in providing access to higher education at steady levels, with the level of enrollment in 2009 at 9.96%, followed by a decline in 2012 to 8.02% and reaching 9.15% in 2017 (see Figure 11 below).

**Figure 11. Gross Enrollment Ratio in Tertiary Education (19-23 Years Old) in Uzbekistan, by Year and Sex (in %)**



Based on: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Uzbekistan

Gross enrollment ratio in secondary and tertiary education reveals gender disbalance (see Figures 10, 11). If in secondary education in 2017 the general ratio was almost equal (92,42% female and 93,63% male), then in tertiary education same year the ratios of female and male enrollment were in stark contrast. In 2017, female enrollment was almost twice as low as male enrollment (6.88% for females, 11.32% for males).

The lower participation of girls in tertiary education compared to boys could be due to various reasons, including the traditional perception of the role of women in families (especially in rural areas), and the HEI grants-based admission policy. More comprehensive data could help in further analysis.

The reforms in the education field imply a wide range of measures among which could be mentioned an increase



<sup>381</sup> UNESCO. 2019a, p. 38.

<sup>382</sup> UNESCO. 2019a, p. 35.

<sup>383</sup> UNESCO. 2019a, p. 47.

of the number of HEIs, increased access to higher education, reformed university admission policies to make them more transparent, and fair and equal gender participation.

In particular, a characteristic of the admission policy at HEIs is the imposition of government quotas that do not meet the existing demand for higher education:

*On average, for every 100 seats/quotas available for Bachelor degree course, there were 323 applications and for every 100 seats available for Masters degree programs, 263 candidates had applied. In 2017, this meant that on average, only 12% of the applicants for Bachelor degree courses managed to get admission to the studies, while around 46% of applicants for the Masters degree program managed to continue their studies.<sup>384</sup>*

Therefore, expanding the coverage, managing the administration of HEI admission policies that meet the needs and

existing demands for enrollment, as well as addressing the quality of the curricula and teachers especially across regions, should be considered as priority areas to realize the opportunity to reap the demographic dividend. Otherwise, given the current trends in the field of education, the country will be able to double the GDP per capita only by the middle of the 21st century.

Along with the above-mentioned strategies, other key challenges that should be highlighted are the access to pre-school education and the overall access for children with special needs. The UNDAF for Uzbekistan points to the need to increase the number of qualified teachers in rural areas and the need to improve the quality of education at secondary and secondary specialized, professional education institutions, identifying these as crucial priorities in ensuring the match between education and national economic and labor needs.<sup>385</sup>

## Technical and Vocational Education and Training

A specific characteristic of Uzbekistan is its young population which points to the need to invest in human capital as a prerequisite to the economic growth of the country. Bearing in mind the need to invest in human capital as the only possible way of answering the challenges of demography and economic performance, the development of TVET and professional training becomes a strategic priority.

The ongoing reforms in the education field made an imprint on the TVET system as well. For example, only graduates of compulsory general secondary education (after Grade 11) could be admitted to vocational colleges on a voluntary basis for 6 months and up to 2 years of study, subject to specialization.<sup>386</sup>

Notably, the TVET system in Uzbekistan is very large, involving 87 percent of the students of the total number of students enrolled in professional education; it is also the only option available in some regions. TVET includes almost 10 times more institutions than the non-vocational

stream professional education provided in academic lyceums and hosts 9 in every 10 students enrolled in professional education. Moreover, the share of students attending TVET in Uzbekistan is significantly higher than in other countries.<sup>387</sup>

Another significant characteristic of TVET development in Uzbekistan is the absolute dominance of vocational colleges in rural areas, except for Tashkent city and the Republic of Karakalpakstan.<sup>388</sup>

One of the challenges in the TVET field is to align professional education with the national and regional economic development priorities, labor market needs, and technological development and trends. As the UNESCO Education Sector Plan Report for Uzbekistan estimates, it is expected that the number of vocational colleges will be substantially reduced (from around 1,400 to around 800 colleges) for reasons including the organization of multi-disciplinary colleges providing targeted training programs in high-demand specializations.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> UNESCO. 2019a, p. 47.

<sup>385</sup> UNDAF Uzbekistan. 2015, p. 12.

<sup>386</sup> UNESCO. 2019a, p. 22.

<sup>387</sup> UNESCO. 2019a, p. 41. Earlier in the current Report there was mentioned the figure of 93%.

<sup>388</sup> UNESCO. 2019a, p. 42

<sup>389</sup> UNESCO. 2019a, pp. 22-23.

Another aspect of the necessary reform of the professional education system is to better support continuous TVET for adults and to adjust to the needs of the economy. This is taking place through structural administrative management changes by subordinating vocational colleges directly to various ministries, public agencies or enterprises operating in the same sector under which training programs are offered. It seems the crucial factor behind this change is to establish direct operational links between the TVET institutions and administrative or business bodies in order to better meet the needs existing in particular fields. Logically, it can lead to further state–business partnership linkages which at the current stage are still formative.

The other way in which the necessary reform can occur is through the provision of adult training in existing vocational colleges, including vocational training and retraining for the unemployed, thus, vocational colleges playing the role of training provider.<sup>390</sup> This is a much-needed step, taking into account the transformation of the concept of education as life-long learning. The TVET system could also play a role as the providers of training for the reintegration of return migrants into society. The development of such measures could be informed by extant research identifying the short training courses and training that have proved relevant in contexts of widespread poverty, very low levels of education and where attendance in long TVET courses is not widely affordable.<sup>391</sup>

Thus, development of the TVET field in Uzbekistan serves several purposes. First of all, it promotes the development of skills, competences and professional training of people. It also creates frameworks for potential cross-sectoral cooperation of various stakeholders, including the state, business and civil society, in providing quality TVET education and training. Finally, expansion of TVET for various groups of population could have far-reaching consequences for broader involvement of the population in the developmental programmes and education in general, and in a long-term perspective, for enhancing the participation and cohesion of various groups of society as well.

It could be briefly summarized that the challenges in the field of education, particularly TVET, are directly interlinked with the general economic situation in the country, influenced by high percentage of young people and the need to regulate the labor market's demands and meet current needs. In terms of the country's overall performance, TVET is strategically important. Although well developed, TVET still requires further adaptation to the changing paradigm of education as a life-long learning process. This paradigm points to the need for the education system to aspire to full enrollment and coverage of all ages and social groups; it also reflects the central role of the partnership among key stakeholders in providing the infrastructure and learning environment, quality content of education and training. It also shows the potential pathway towards more engaged and participative communities and people.



<sup>390</sup> UNESCO. 2019a, pp. 22-23.

<sup>391</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017c. *Executive Summary of the Torino Process 2016–17 Uzbekistan Report*. Turin, ETF, p. 3.

## (2) Economic and Social Participation

### Employment/NEET

The National Action Strategy on Five Priority Development Areas for 2017–2021 highlighted reforms in the following five areas: (1) Improving the system of state and social construction; (2) Ensuring the rule of law and reforming the judicial system; (3) Developing and liberalizing the economy; (4) Developing the social sphere; and (5) Ensuring security, inter-ethnic harmony and religious tolerance, and the implementation of balanced, mutually beneficial and constructive foreign policy.<sup>392</sup>

These priorities are aimed at transforming existing institutions or creating new institutions, promoting public–private partnership dialogue, and enhancing economic liberalization, social development, and cohesion. Realization of this strategy would bring within reach the country’s ambitious goal to become an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and would entail the previously defined focus on providing decent work, overcoming disparities, supporting the sustainable use of resources, ensuring the rule of law and access to justice, and providing effective and accountable governance.<sup>393</sup>

To support these goals to transform the economy and enhance existing institutions, the concepts of sustainable economic development and growth acquired new dimensions and relevance for Uzbekistan. This could introduce a broad range of opportunities for human development, particularly youth development. In case of

Uzbekistan that would mean the creation of new jobs and the assurance of stable employment for the population. In 2015 the proportion of unemployed in the active labor force (the unemployment rate) was 5–5.2%, while the target for 2020 was set at 4.9–5%.<sup>394</sup>

It is in this regard that the government and UNDAF have made links between employment and education and begun to give consideration to “the number of youth with secondary specialized and vocational education, those with higher education, and those who have entered the labor market for the first time.”<sup>395</sup>

Official estimates suggest the labor force in Uzbekistan is projected to increase by 7.3 million to 25.9 million people by 2035, making it the fifth largest labor force in Europe and Central Asia (after Russia, Turkey, the Ukraine and Poland). This forecast also highlights the importance of replacing unskilled older workers with skilled younger people for the sake of economic growth and the country’s transformation into a higher middle-income country.<sup>396</sup>

Strong demographic pressures including the high proportion of youth are currently influencing the labor market, with about 550,000 people entering the labor market annually. The labor market in Uzbekistan is characterized by two intercorrelating factors (see Box 13 below).

#### Box 13. The Specifics of Labor Market in Uzbekistan

(1) As a result of the predominantly young and rural population there is an excess of supply over demand, with about 550,000 persons entering the labor market annually;

(2) There is a mismatch between the quality of workforce preparation and the professional and qualification-based requirements of employers. For disadvantaged groups, their labor is the only asset they can use to improve their well-being.

Source: UNDAF Uzbekistan. 2015, p. 25



<sup>392</sup> Uzbekistan Strategy. 2017. *Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan “O Strategii deistvii po dal’neishemu razvitiyu Respubliki Uzbekistan”* [On Strategy of Activities on Further Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan]. In *Sobranie zakonodatel’sva Respubliki Uzbekistan* [Volume of Legislation Acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan]. N 6 (766), pp. 223–224.

<sup>393</sup> UNDAF Uzbekistan. 2015, p. 12.

<sup>394</sup> UNDAF Uzbekistan. 2015, p. 50.

<sup>395</sup> UNDAF Uzbekistan. 2015, p. 25.

<sup>396</sup> UNESCO TVET. 2019. *TVET Policy Review: Uzbekistan*, p. 32.

Results of several national surveys and research undertaken by World Bank and UNICEF (2018) and UNICEF (2019, 2020) are correlated among each other as far as the youth (un)employment and NEET, and a strong disproportion between young men and women are concerned.

Based on the World Bank and UNICEF “Listening to Citizens of Uzbekistan” survey (2018) there were 37% of NEET among 14–30-year-old youth, 53% among young women and 18% among young men.<sup>397</sup>

According to the UNICEF survey and research (2019)<sup>398</sup>:



*“Out of the country’s 8.5 million young people aged 15-29 years, an estimated 42 per cent (3.6 million) are not in employment, education or training. Nationwide, the female NEET rate is 66 per cent, compared to 34 per cent for young males. Among young people with severe disabilities, the NEET rate is 77 per cent, rising to 91 per cent of those with profound disabilities”.*

Source: UNICEF Uzbekistan. 2019. *Building a National Social Protection System Fit for Uzbekistan’s Children and Youth*. Tashkent: UNICEF Uzbekistan. p. 4.

Another UNICEF survey (2020) indicates that “the NEET-rate significantly increases for respondents older than 18 years of age - the phase in life corresponding to the completion of compulsory secondary education. Among 19-30-year-old respondents, the NEET rate is 54.6 per cent”.<sup>399</sup> Whereas the gender aspect is alarming: the NEET rate for women increases rapidly once they are above 18 years of age (69%) and is 74% for the 25-30-year-old women; while for men it remains generally low (33.5%) and

decreases with age (to 24.8%)<sup>400</sup>

The results above speak about at least three big challenges for youth of Uzbekistan: high NEET rate for youth in general (37% in 2018 and 42% in 2019), the higher NEET rates for young women than for young men (53% in 2018 and 66% in 2019), and the huge NEET rate for youth with severe and profound disabilities (77% and 91% correspondingly in 2020).

Improvements in education, in particular TVET and acquiring necessary skills and qualifications is imperative for addressing the needs of the labor market, and to project aspirations into the reality of becoming a higher middle-income country by 2030. Another factor is the large income disparities associated with the differences in the qualifications and education of the population living in different regions, and the resulting economic disparities. For example, the highest total income per capita is in Tashkent city, which has more than twice the national average. The lowest incomes per capita are in Jizzakh and Namangan regions, and in the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan, which is only one-third of the Tashkent figure.<sup>401</sup>

As noted above, the Government of Uzbekistan has recognized the employment challenge and taken a number of steps to address it, including through annual employment programs. However, as in 2015, active policies are still required to promote inclusive regional and rural development while managing urban development. In addition, policies are needed to promote employment for the social inclusion of vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, young people and women with small children.<sup>402</sup>



<sup>397</sup> Cited in: UNICEF Report. 2020. *Youth of Uzbekistan: Challenges and Prospects*. Tashkent: UNICEF. p. 47.

<sup>398</sup> UNICEF Uzbekistan. 2019. *Building a National Social Protection System Fit for Uzbekistan’s Children and Youth*. Tashkent: UNICEF Uzbekistan. p. 4.

<sup>399</sup> UNICEF Report. 2020. p. 47.

<sup>400</sup> UNICEF Report. 2020. p. 48.

<sup>401</sup> UNESCO TVET. 2019. p. 24.

<sup>402</sup> UNDAF Uzbekistan. 2015. p. 25.

## Migration

An excess of labor in the workforce is a push factor for labor (youth) migration abroad, mainly to Kazakhstan and Russia, as well as to other countries such as Turkey, Qatar and Korea.

The UNICEF Survey (2020) found that the Uzbek youth considered migration, particularly to Russia attractive due to better education and income opportunities to earn and send money back to families or relatives, or to start new career or business upon returning back home.<sup>403</sup>

Research findings show a strong increase in registered migration from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan. Uzbek migrants form the largest group with more than one million temporary registered in 2016 (33% more than during the previous year), and more than 300,000 received work permits due an increase in the number of work permits issued by Kazakh authorities. Approximately four out of five Uzbek citizens applying for a work permit reported a monthly income of up to 40,000 Kazakh tenge. Less than 10% of applicants from Uzbekistan were women. The migrants work mainly in the regions of South Kazakhstan, Almaty, Mangystau and Nur-Sultan, in the construction, agriculture and trade sectors.<sup>404</sup>

As a result of migration, a new environment emerges, not only in relation to pure economic indicators, but also contributing towards the creation of multicultural space and a new social landscape, which has implications for the peacebuilding process. Therefore, labor migration should be viewed from this dual perspective of political economy and intermingling of cultures. In the latter case targeted research is needed to trace and understand the workings of the social fabrics of intercultural exchanges and communications. According to the UNICEF Survey (2020) the Uzbek youth acknowledge the demands and even risks for their physical and emotional integrity

in Russia, including language barriers, cold climate, social isolation, xenophobic aggression, harassment by public officials (police).<sup>405</sup>

The evolving situation requires acquiring knowledge and crafting skills and intercultural competencies for living together, which has always been a remarkable feature of Central Asia throughout its long history. The alternative to this is the possibility of turning the positive dialogue into the opposite of hostility and hatred.

This choice is dependent on the culture of dialogue that should be taught, learnt and shared. In other words, the process of learning to live together is about acquiring life skills and cultural literacy, and, as in case of labour migration, should be targeted at both hosts and guests.

This highlights the importance of acquiring skills and intercultural competencies as basic tools for living together in the contemporary world. From a peacebuilding perspective it means the need for applying the seemingly dissimilar issues of migration, economic performance, peace, education and dialogue into one coherent whole.

It is important to consider the lack of statistical accounting of labor migrants from Uzbekistan. On the one hand, bilateral mechanisms exist, as is case with South Korea, that are regulated by bilateral labor acts including registration and insurance provision. On the other hand, there are no mechanisms developed towards labor migrants heading for Russia and Kazakhstan. As a result, it is difficult to comprehensively estimate the data on labor migrants in terms of age and gender. This problem should be resolved through the creation of comprehensive statistical database on labor migrants jointly by the Ministries of Labor and Labor Relations, Home Affairs and the State Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Uzbekistan.



<sup>403</sup> UNICEF Report. 2020, p. 95.

<sup>404</sup> IOM. 2017, pp. 17-18.

<sup>405</sup> UNICEF Report. 2020, p. 95.

## Return Migration

Return migration is also on the agenda in the countries which faced the re-entry ban to Russia and its consequent reversal. There is general data on the numbers of Kyrgyz and Tajik migrants who remain banned with “as many as 51,000 Kyrgyz and 152,000 Tajik migrants having to wait out the expiration of their ban.”<sup>406</sup> Despite the fact that Uzbek labor migrants form the largest group of banned migrants who have not been covered by regulation schemes, there are no available data on their numbers.

The banned migrants become vulnerable legally, economically and socially, thereby risking random exploitation and economic deprivation such that “their negative experience of contacts with authorities in Russia discourages them from turning to the authorities of a new destination country (e.g., Kazakhstan) for assistance and limits opportunities for aid

through informal channels.”<sup>407</sup>

The economic vulnerabilities of return migration are related to the decline of remittances to Uzbekistan from Kazakhstan. Compared to the analogous period in 2015, remittances decreased from \$159.1 million to \$100.5 million in 2016. Money transfers to Kyrgyzstan fell by a similar rate from \$62.6 million to \$44.7 million over the same period.<sup>408</sup>

It should be noted that today there are still no available data on existing programs on reintegration of labor return migrants in Uzbekistan. This situation must change as is the case for return migrants from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (see above, the part on Tajikistan in this Report) as their re-integration into society could be helpful in facing this challenge, since the issue of return migrants bears equal systemic characteristics.

## Youth and Inclusive Development

Comparing to other countries of the region, Uzbekistan has quite expanded development of an inclusive education system, aimed at creating an environment where children with special needs can receive education on an equal basis with their peers. State educational standards with inclusive approaches aim to facilitate youth socialization.

In Uzbekistan, the Concept for the Development of Inclusive Education was formulated and adopted for implementation in 2009. The Concept serves as the main guide to the implementation of inclusive education in the country.

To date, Uzbekistan has successfully operated a differentiated network of special educational institutions comprised of 89 special schools and boarding schools which deliver education to more than 18,000 children. Homeschooling also covers more than 11,000 such children. The number of homeschooled children is



*Uzbekistan has moved towards including students with special needs as of 2005. It remains the country with the most experience in this area and provides a choice of professions for students with special needs.*

*In 2015 about 5,000 special needs students were enrolled in upper secondary education, including VET. Uzbekistan maintains a small number of specialized schools, in which 1,500 students requiring specialized and intensive support are enrolled. The remaining students with special needs study in mainstream schools.*

Source: European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017a, p. 10

steadily decreasing due to their integration into the general educational process, and overall development of inclusive education in Uzbekistan.<sup>409</sup> These children receive not only general secondary education, but also additional vocational education for social



<sup>406</sup> IOM. 2017, p. 15.

<sup>407</sup> IOM. 2017, p. 15.

<sup>408</sup> IOM. 2017, p. 19.

<sup>409</sup> These data have been submitted by B. Ergashev.

adaptation in life. Pupils of special schools and boarding schools of these special educational institutions study on the basis

of ten types of curricula approved annually by the Ministry of Public Education.

#### Box 14. Students with Special Needs in Uzbekistan

Since 1996, Uzbekistan has been working on the integration of children with special needs into the general educational process. To implement this initiative, the Resource Center for Inclusive Education was created at the Republican Center for Education in order to unite the efforts of state and non-governmental organizations, parents and volunteers in providing comprehensive correctional and educational assistance to children and adolescents with special needs.

Samarkand and Fergana State Universities and the Tashkent State Institute of Culture teach “social work” specialty. New faculties of defectology have been opened at the Tashkent State Pedagogical University, Djizak, Kokand, Angren and Nukus Pedagogical Institutes. Jointly with the St. Petersburg Medical Academy, three-month seminars were held for specialists in the field of pediatric rehabilitation, courses on the specialty ‘ergotherapy’ have been organized for teachers of medical and pedagogical universities.

A number of Uzbek NGOs jointly with the European Union, including Foundation for Support of Social Initiatives (SISF), Hayet (Life) Center for Disabled People, Zie (Illuminator) have successfully implemented the project “Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs in Uzbekistan”. Launched in March 2014, this project carried out consistent work to integrate children with special needs into the society, improve the skills of teachers, and develop new curricula. The project contributes to the development of a sustainable and long-term strategy to ensure the effective solution of issues related to children with special needs, and the improvement of methods of inclusive education. As part of Project, 907 children with special educational needs were included in the general education system in 27 pilot schools and 27 kindergartens, with the total number of children beneficiaries in the project reaching 1,500.

Submitted by B. Ergashev

According to Torino Process Report, Uzbekistan was the only country in 2010 to report on the inclusion of students with special needs; whereas by 2016 most countries of the region had taken their first steps in inclusive approaches, covering

physical access and new teaching methods. However, all countries noted that considerable efforts in teacher training and stakeholder cooperation would be required for largescale implementation.<sup>410</sup>

## Youth and Gender

The Article 18 of the Constitution of Uzbekistan provides the legal frames of the principle of equity of women and men, whereas institutionally there exist the Women’s Committee of Uzbekistan (WCU), a public organization chaired by the deputy prime minister. The gender equity is also reflected in various legal instruments. The February 2018 Decree of the President of Uzbekistan on *Measures for Radical Improvement of Activities in the Field of Support of Women and Strengthening of*

*the Institute of the Family* is an indicator of more focused activity targeted at mainstreaming and implementing gender-related strategies in a practical way.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) Uzbekistan Report on Country Gender Assessment Update, defines the following major issues related to the status of women and gender equality: (i) significant gender disparities in property ownership; (ii) gender asymmetry in higher segments of decision-making and managerial positions;

# <sup>410</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF). 2017a, p. 3.



(iii) horizontal and vertical segregation in the labor market, where women mostly have seasonal and low-paid jobs in the formal and informal sectors; and (iv) traditional attitudes toward the roles of women and men in the family and society, which predominantly position women as mothers and family caretakers.<sup>411</sup>

It should be highlighted that the basic reason underlying these issues is heavy unequal access of girls to HEIs, thereby denying them the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for meaningful involvement in decision-making processes and in the labor market.

Increased participation of girls and women is an important component of ensuring economic growth, the formation of a competitive economy, and a developed and innovative-oriented society. As discussed earlier, the investment in human capital in Uzbekistan is a window of opportunity to reap the dividends of increased youth participation throughout forthcoming years. Hence, the need to invest in education, skills and professional competencies of the youth (both female and male) is vital for the country's economic performance. According to official data of the State Committee of Uzbekistan on Statistics in 2017, of the economically active proportion of the population, 45.8% were women and 54.2% were men.<sup>412</sup>

Therefore, there is need to promote wider participation of young people, including young girls and women in economic and social life. This wider economic engagement and participation, however, is limited by the lower education attainment level of girls, especially at the HEI level. As discussed earlier in this report, the disparity between the girls and boys in their access to primary and secondary education is even greater when it comes to higher education levels.

ADB assesses that enrollment rates in higher education are 38.2% for females and 61.8% for males; and the percentage of females appears to be decreasing. Rural families with limited income might give preference to higher education for boys for economic reasons or because they are unwilling to send "their daughters far from home to study, given that two-thirds of higher-education institutions are in three large cities. Therefore, low access of women to higher education might become a major barrier to increasing their competitiveness in the labor market."<sup>413</sup>

ADB and UNDAF findings equally highlight that gender stereotypes influence educational choices and are reproduced in the labor market. Professional segregation is widely observed, with girls over-represented in the education and health care sectors and under-represented in the rapidly developing and better-paid sectors of telecommunications, construction and ICT. It is also noted that cultural traditions, as well as the increasing competition for admission to tertiary education, constitute barriers to girls continuing to study past specialized secondary and professional levels, particularly in rural areas.<sup>414</sup>

The lower representation of women in better-paid sectors of telecommunications, construction and ICT could be supported by the following data: 38.2% of women and 61.8% of men are employed in the information and communication sector; and 37.3% of women and 62.7% of men work in financial and insurance activities. In both cases the difference is almost half for women compared to men. However, in the lower-paid education sector, 75.6% are women and only 24.4% are men.<sup>415</sup>

Gender-related issues in Uzbekistan, as well as in the whole of Central Asia is a theme yet to be advanced and enhanced further, especially when it comes to the



<sup>411</sup> ADB Uzbekistan. 2018. *Uzbekistan Country Gender Assessment Update*. December 2018, p. 4.

<sup>412</sup> Statistics. Republic of Uzbekistan. 2017a. Pokazateli ekonomicheskii aktivnogo naseleniya. Gendernaya statistika Uzbekistana. Gosudarstvennyy komitet Respubliki Uzbekistan po statistike [Indicators of the economically active population. *Gender Statistics of Uzbekistan*]. State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics.

<sup>413</sup> ADB Uzbekistan. 2018, p. xxi.

<sup>414</sup> ADB Uzbekistan. 2018, p. xxi; UNDAF Uzbekistan. 2015, p. 13

<sup>415</sup> Statistics. Republic of Uzbekistan. 2017b. Pokazateli zanyatosti naseleniya. Zanyatyte po polu i ekonomicheskoy deyatel'nosti v 2017 g. Gendernaya statistika Uzbekistana. Gosudarstvennyy komitet Respubliki Uzbekistan po statistike [Indicators of employment of the population. Employed by sex and economic activity in 2017. *Gender Statistics of Uzbekistan*]. State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics.

social protection and employment field. Joint research in 2019 on strengthening the social protection field by World Bank and the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations, analyzed key stakeholders in the field, with high priority given to women and the youth.

The stakeholder mapping and segmentation showed the following categories of women: women with no skills (school education only); women engaged in seasonal agriculture; women after maternity leave; women with secondary vocational education; women with higher education (especially those with foreign degrees); and single mothers and/or female-headed households.

Irrespective of status, women's issues of concern are the same. Women wish to be employed but have insufficient skills or have no one to leave their children with while at work, or do expect to have a permanent job.<sup>416</sup>

As evident, gender issues do influence the social and economic fields. Overcoming the existing stereotyping and practices could be done through the "soft power" mechanisms of education, one of which is the introduction of gender-related issues in the educational content through teaching and learning materials introduced at the education level.

Another aspect of gender inequality is the challenge of early marriages, that could be partially explained by the cultural traditions as well as by legislative norms that have remained unchanged since the Soviet Union period, stating that the marriage age for girls begins at 17 years of age. This regulation caused some disparities in the state family policy.

However, in March 2019 the Parliament introduced changes in the Family Code that defined 18 years as the marriage age for both males and females.

Social and political engagement of girls and women is equally important for the development of social cohesion, for expression of concerns and needs, and to receive feedback and communicate their opinions to the state bodies implementing youth policy. In the social and political fields, women's organizations comprise 7% of NGOs in Uzbekistan. Women account for almost half of the membership of Uzbekistan's four political parties, which have female factions that concentrate on improving women's activism, nominating women to representative bodies during central and local elections, and enhancing women's role in decision-making.<sup>417</sup>

As for the young girls and women, there are no separate youth initiatives, movements or organizations to voice their concerns, and little social, political and economic participation, except for the Youth Union (discussed in more detail below). Equally important is to develop special programs of participation targeted at girls and young women in a range of areas including entrepreneurship, leadership of innovative businesses and politics.

Today, the only format focused on the search and promotion of socially active or creatively gifted young girls is the annual awarding of the *Zulfiya* State Prize. This award was established to further enhance the creative, intellectual and physical potential of girls in areas such as science, education, art, culture and literature.



<sup>416</sup> Stakeholder Engagement Plan. 2019. *Stakeholder Engagement Plan. Strengthening Social Protection System in Uzbekistan*. Tashkent: Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan, April, p. 13.

<sup>417</sup> ADB Uzbekistan. 2018, p. 5.

## Youth Entrepreneurship

The research on key issues contributing to the growth of youth unemployment in Uzbekistan, as well as the analysis of the state policy in the field, are of special interest given the scale and relevance of the problem of youth employment in the country.

As a result of the above-mentioned research findings, the World Bank, the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations analyzed the vulnerable groups of youth as key stakeholders, on their expectations. It highlighted young people with no skills (school education only); unemployed young people engaged in seasonal agriculture or construction; and unemployed young people with secondary vocational education. The main youth concerns were that they wanted to get a well-paid job and receive free training; while expecting a permanent job with long-term employment.<sup>418</sup> Thus, as in case of young girls and women, the youth in general faces the same challenges related to the need to upgrade their skills and qualifications through trainings and seminars, to be able to get further the permanent officially paid, and not seasonal, job.

As discussed earlier, every year about half a million young people enter the labor market of Uzbekistan. The available jobs for young people does not meet the demand, resulting in the youth unemployment rate in Uzbekistan reaching 17%, which is three times the average unemployment rate for the entire working-age population.

The government is aware of the need to increase employment. For example, the state employment program for 2018 provides for the creation of no less than 346 new permanent jobs, and 169,500 seasonal and temporal jobs.<sup>419</sup> In 2019 new document has been adopted – State provision for the employment of people and organization of new jobs for more than

370,000 citizen.<sup>420</sup>

The challenge of unemployment in the country is well recognized by international agencies as well. For example, in 2019 the UN Development Programme jointly with the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of Uzbekistan started the 3-year long project on Promotion of the Youth Employment in Uzbekistan. It is targeted for most vulnerable groups – the youth, college and university graduates, young women, return migrants, young entrepreneurs and business start-ups.<sup>421</sup>

Of the four major state programs which support people, especially women but also youth, in urban and rural areas, namely, *Obod Mahalla*, *Obod Kishlak*, *Every Family is an Entrepreneur*, and *Youth is Our Future*, the last two are most significant for this particular theme.

The general *Every Family is an Entrepreneur* state program provides organizational training and financial support to those families who wish to be engaged in entrepreneurship, and allocates soft loans and provision of «systematic practical support» at each stage in the organization and implementation of entrepreneurial activity. Within the program, soft loans are allocated by the banks up to the equivalent of 150 minimum wages for the development of family businesses; up to 1,000 minimum wages to registered small businesses; and over 1,000 minimum wages for crediting of investment projects of entrepreneurship entities.<sup>422</sup>

The youth-focused state program *Youth is Our Future* (2018) is aimed at employment of youth by assistance and support in the implementation of youth business initiatives, startups, ideas and projects, training of unemployed youth in in-demand specialties and business skills, and to increase their social and economic



<sup>418</sup> Stakeholder Engagement Plan. 2019, p. 13.

<sup>419</sup> State Programme on Employment. 2018. Utverzhdena gosprogramma zanyatosti na 2018 god [State Programme on Employment for 2018 Has Been Approved].

<sup>420</sup> Presidential Decree. Uzbekistan. 2019. Postanovleniye Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan O gosudarstvennom zakaze po obespecheniyu zanyatosti naseleniya i organizatsii novyh rabochih mest v 2019 godu [Republic of Uzbekistan President Decree on State Order on Provision for Employment and New Jobs for the Population]. № ПП-4227 dated 05.03.2019.

<sup>421</sup> UNDP Uzbekistan. 2019. UNDP and Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations to Work on Promotion of Youth Employment in Uzbekistan.

<sup>422</sup> Stakeholder Engagement Plan. 2019, p. 8.

activity in general. It particularly targets young entrepreneurs to engage them in employment and business, that is, to create jobs.

For financing of the program's activities, the *Yoshlar — kelajagimiz* Fund was established under the Youth Union of Uzbekistan in all districts and cities of the country. Its funds are allocated through banks for soft loans and property leases at 7% annual interest for: youth business initiatives, issuance of guarantees for credits (up to 50% of the credit amount), and participation in projects at no more than 50% of their cost (with the subsequent sale of the share of funds within five years).<sup>423</sup> Support is provided in issuing guarantees for loans received under the state program to the amount of no more than 50% of the loan size for the purchase of up to 20 young poultry and rabbits, and five small and two cattle for households with unemployed youth.

Also, measures are outlined for the organization of retraining and advanced training of young people, and for training for professions in demand on the labor market. Qualified youth specialists are provided information on issues such as registration of regulatory documents on entrepreneurial activities, financing youth entrepreneurship and small business loans, tax breaks, benefits and preferences, equipment and technology, and development of raw materials for import and export.

In June 2020, after 2 years since the establishing of the *Yoshlar-Kelajagimiz (Youth is Our Future)* Foundation, it is reported that the Foundation provided beneficial loans of 1 trillion 614 billion *sum* (Uzbek national currency) for the realization of the 7 690 business projects by the young entrepreneurs, whereas 39 577 new jobs had been created.<sup>424</sup>

According to the *Yoshlar-Kelajagimiz (Youth is Our Future)* Foundation's Executive Director, Mr. Khairulla Sattarov, it is expected to provide in perspective 2 billion *sum* grants

for the youth start-up projects in Andizhan oblast, 1 billion *sum* for the "Start-up" initiative programme. "Young Entrepreneurs" multi-profile technological parks is expected to open, particularly, in Dzhozak oblast. As a result of COVID-19 pandemic, the dedicated online platform is also going to be initiated to provide online courses for the young entrepreneurs.<sup>425</sup>

Under the public-private partnerships there is the construction of co-working centers *Yosh tadbirkorlar* (Young Entrepreneurs) for preferential rent of rooms, office equipment and consumables, and Internet access. Other planned assistance includes the development of business plans, consulting, legal, accounting and other services, organization of forums, master classes and seminars. In areas with a manpower-surplus, *Yoshlar mehnat guzari* complexes will be established for the creation of domestic and trade enterprises, and small production sites.<sup>426</sup>

Currently, the Concept of Development of Youth Entrepreneurship of Uzbekistan is being established. The purpose of the concept is the development of youth entrepreneurship, aimed at creating the necessary socio-economic, political, legal and organizational infrastructure.

An important state initiative is the creation of Clusters of Youth Entrepreneurship, which is defined as a territory, including production areas, provided with engineering and technical communications, transferred to the subjects of youth entrepreneurship as a long-term lease. Production areas are provided for the period of the establishment of the enterprise, but not more than five years at no rental cost. Clusters in district centers and cities of the republic can be established without formation of legal entities and as such can be managed by district and city councils of the Youth Union of Uzbekistan.

It is expected that clusters will involve young people in entrepreneurial activities, provide practical assistance



<sup>423</sup> Stakeholder Engagement Plan. 2019, pp. 8-9.

<sup>424</sup> *Yoshlar – kelajagimiz*. 2020. Fondu "Yoshlar – kelajagimiz" – dva goda [Yoshlar – kelajagimiz Foundation is 2-year-old].

<sup>425</sup> *Yoshlar – kelajagimiz*. 2020.

<sup>426</sup> Stakeholder Engagement Plan. 2019, pp. 8-9.

in preparing the necessary documents, teach young people the basics of running a business, and implement the functions of business incubators to create start-ups. These activities aim to increase the competitiveness of young entrepreneurs and develop their activities. Clusters are placed, as a rule, in vacant buildings of institutions of secondary specialized and vocational education donated to the Youth Union of Uzbekistan.

The production areas of the clusters will be provided exclusively to young entrepreneurs who are members of the Youth Union of Uzbekistan. Seventy percent of the employees of a business entity located in the cluster must be under the age of 35 years. The Start-Up Initiative Youth Support Program is implemented every year, covering all higher education institutions (HEIs) of Uzbekistan. In 2017, of more than one thousand students who took part in the Program, 65 students (and 15 coordinators) from HEIs, who mastered the methodology of a 'lean start-up', were deemed to have met the final criteria.

The *Start-up Initiative* is a comprehensive program designed to support the development (acceleration) of start-up ideas and projects of students and young scientists of higher educational institutions. As part of the three-month program, participants test their hypotheses, create basic working models, test them in practice, study the target audience, get feedback, test the first sale, analyze the project's drawbacks, and then improve

it. Throughout the program, participants attend topical seminars, meetings and consultations with industry experts (mentors) on issues such as launching startups and development methodology, strategy, product development, marketing and sales, finance and accounting, legal and tax issues, and additional consultations. Individual business mentors (trackers) support and advise teams on all issues of project development. At the end of the program, participants present their project to potential investors and professional market participants as part of a specially organized 'DemoDay' event in order to attract investment or joint business development.

Thus, it could be briefly summed that to achieve the goals of increasing employment and providing jobs for youth, the major factors remain the same – access to quality education and training, and acquiring skills and competencies, especially in rural areas and for women. These are interrelated issues which are acknowledged by government and international agencies through its focus on the policy priorities of self-employment and small business creation discussed above. For government these issues are of high priority, therefore an entrepreneurial learning is included in TVET curricula for all students. In addition, a special credit facility has been established for TVET graduates as part of a wider job guarantee scheme.<sup>427</sup>

### (3) Civic Engagement

Along with educational and economic aspects, peacebuilding embraces also social and cultural issues highlighting social stability, human rights and values. It also includes the search for effective practical solutions to expand the communicative space between representatives of different religious associations, faiths, cultural traditions, and between society's various stakeholders.

The period after the collapse of the Soviet Union was characterized by a sharp increase in inter-ethnic contradictions, and the growth of religious radicalism and extremism. One of the first and cruel conflicts was the Osh conflict (1990), with the participation of large Kyrgyz and Uzbek ethnic groups. It shared several common features with conflicts elsewhere, however, had its own specific features. According to researchers, this "Turkic self-genocide" aroused the ethno-territorial interests of the people and was prompted by the difficult socio-economic conditions and under-utilized labor resources in the region; and

was connected with the struggle for access to power and resources, and search for "greater liberty."<sup>428</sup>

The other conflict that took place in 2010, however, was defined by scholars as also reflecting a broader context – the legacy of the Soviet Nationalities Policy, that "in combination with regional peculiarities – particularly its ethno-demographic features – were the ultimate causes of the eruption of the Uzbek–Kyrgyz conflicts in southern Kyrgyzstan in 1990 and 2010."<sup>429</sup>

The possible continuous repercussions of these conflicts are perhaps best sensed in the social communicative poly-ethnic milieu, therefore, the important mechanism of dealing with these issues is the advancing the quality of this milieu, that is, the just social (and economic) policy implementation and practical realization of intercultural dialogue. Education aimed at ensuring intercultural and inter-ethnic tolerance in Uzbekistan is one of the most effective instruments for achieving this.

### Youth Participation in Social and Political Processes

Political activity of youth in Uzbekistan had been organized within the framework of the *Kamolot* Public Youth Movement, which was transformed into the Youth Union of Uzbekistan. Existing structures of the Youth Union of Uzbekistan unite socially active youth in the system of educational institutions (i.e., secondary school, technical vocational educational colleges, academic lyceums and universities). However, this factor impedes the Youth Union to enable the potential of the working youth.

According to the analytical report State Policy of Civil Socialization of Youth in Uzbekistan: Problems and Prospects<sup>430</sup>, the implemented policy of civic socialization of youth, including

political, legal and labor socialization, is currently limited. This dramatically reduces the effectiveness of this policy and often induces a tendency for working youth to become the main consumer and object of destructive, extremist, radical propaganda, including over the internet. As a result, efforts to implement a policy of positive civic socialization of young people at an early stage of socialization in the system of educational institutions are often ineffective.

Based on the results of the sociological survey conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the youth of Uzbekistan highly appreciate the opportunity to participate in political processes, with 84.1% of respondents intending to



<sup>428</sup> Asankanov. N.a. Asankanov, Abilabek. Ethnic conflict in the Osh region in summer 1990: Reasons and lessons.

<sup>429</sup> Rezvani. 2013. Rezvani, Babak. Understanding and Explaining the Kyrgyz–Uzbek Inter-ethnic Conflict in Southern Kyrgyzstan. In *Anthropology of the Middle East*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Winter 2013: 60.

<sup>430</sup> Center for Economic Research (CER). 2014a. *Gosydarstvennaya politika grazhdanskoi sotsializatsii molodezhi v Uzbekistane: problem i perspektivy* [State Policy of Civil Socialization of Youth in Uzbekistan: Problems and Prospects], Tashkent, CER.

actively participate as voters in elections at all levels. The study shows that the youth in Uzbekistan is a potentially active segment of the population, willing to actively implement their right to vote. Youth participation must be studied regularly and from a range of comparative perspectives.<sup>431</sup>

Another institution that unites socially active youth is the youth wings of political parties operating in the country. Each of the five political parties represented in parliament (Movement of Entrepreneurs and Businessmen - Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, Democratic Party of Uzbekistan *Milliy Tiklanish*, Social Democratic Party of Uzbekistan Adolat, People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, Ecological Party of Uzbekistan) has its own youth wing. It is worth mentioning that recently (January 2019) created new party - Ecological Party of Uzbekistan – embraces 37% women and 60% youth in its ranks.<sup>432</sup>

The main goal of party-based youth movements is to train young personnel for political parties, ensure popularization of the activities of political parties, and form ideological attitudes among young people. The main methods of work include

conducting party training for participants, or party-wide *Young Politician* contests for party members aged 18 to 30. At these contests, young party members present their projects with suggestions on further development of socio-economic areas in the regions, creation of new jobs, support for young families, and development of social infrastructure in villages and communities. Participants demonstrate their knowledge of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, activities of political parties and their party's program goals; as well as their oratory skills.

Thus, these major forms of youth engagement in the political process are yet to include rural youth and youth with secondary or secondary specialized education, who may not be enrolled in an educational institution or be a party member. Therefore, bearing in mind the high percentage of young people in the population, this highlights the need for broader youth participation in social life and political activity. The vacuum of engagement as a result of this situation, potentially could be filled by other destructive forms of participation in the form of violent extremism.

## Youth, Religion and Violent Extremism

UNICEF survey results (2020) on the Youth of Uzbekistan indicates that “religion plays an important role in youths’ lives: a combined 70.6 per cent of respondents either somewhat or absolutely agreed with this observation (regardless of differences in age, gender, settlement type or regional belonging).”<sup>433</sup> The issue of how to relate religiousness/religiosity and social cohesion and participation of the youth is and will be one of the challenges for the country, bearing in mind the strict stand of the government vis-à-vis religious extremism.

Uzbekistan encountered challenges of religious extremism and radicalism as early as the 1990s and again in the early 2000s

with attacks by such groups as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union, who were later expelled. Research indicates that the current level of extremist activity in Uzbekistan is very low, although a few extremists still maintain an operational capability in Uzbekistan or along its border, and Uzbekistan remains concerned about the possible spillover of terrorist activity from neighboring Afghanistan.<sup>434</sup>

The country elaborated state-sponsored responses through making an integral system of counter-action, counter-propaganda and PVE measures including education of young people. There is an understanding that social, political,



<sup>431</sup> Friedrich Ebert Foundation. 2016b. *Youth of Central Asia: Uzbekistan*. Based on a sociological survey. Almaty, Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

<sup>432</sup> Ecological Party. 2020. O sozdaniy ekologicheskoi partii Uzbekistana [On Setting Up Ecological Party of Uzbekistan].

<sup>433</sup> UNICEF Report. 2020, p. 72.

<sup>434</sup> Uzbekistan. Counter-Extremism. N.d. Uzbekistan: Extremism & Counter-Extremism. Counter-Extremism Project, p. 1.

economic and other problems are “push” factors of youth engagement in the radical environment. Youth are especially prone to radical ideologies and views as globally most of the crimes related to extremist activities and violence are committed by people under 30 years old, including minors. Strict anti-terrorism measures of the state resulted in a minimal number (only one) of incidents between 2012 and 2016 in Uzbekistan, while in the whole region there were 30 incidents, including eleven cases in Kazakhstan, ten in Tajikistan, and eight in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>435</sup>

Despite government efforts to suppress extremism, it largely went underground and abroad, and Uzbekistan has become a primary source of foreign jihadist fighters from Central Asia in the war in Syria. It is stated that in recent years, the Uzbeks have also participated in a number of significant terror plots and attacks worldwide, including the October 31, 2017 truck attack in New York City, and deadly attacks in Istanbul, St. Petersburg, and Stockholm.<sup>436</sup>

While some research indicates that the Uzbeks are most likely to be radicalized while working as migrants abroad, where they more easily become targets of online or in-person recruitment,<sup>437</sup> the other findings show that there is no basis that labor migrants, including women are particularly prone to radicalization.<sup>438</sup>

On the institutional level the main goal of the government’s activities is to prevent the participation of young people in extremist, radical, terrorist organizations and movements. This system includes a set of educational measures at all levels of education (school-vocational and technical institutions, and universities). The main method of preventive education is carrying out cycles of educational activities (mainly lectures by teachers, law enforcement officers and religious people). The main problem with the implementation of this approach is that the youth audience

remains a passive recipient of information.

Today, there is an understanding that these methods have their limitations and disadvantages. It is presumed to develop new methods and approaches that would focus on more active involvement of young people in efforts to prevent violent extremism, radicalization and terrorism. In particular, the potential of young people to counter-act radical ideas and develop a resilience to them could be revealed in applying new, interactive methods, as well as enhancing religious education.

Education plays an extremely important role to counter violent extremism, and there should be more active use of PVE-through-education strategies via various media of communication (primarily internet), culture and art (music, video, internet audio formats) and sport. As is highlighted, media and information literacy is essential for responsible consumption of any information, and for the ability of the society to uphold pluralism and tolerance.<sup>439</sup> This will make it possible to more actively respond to emerging cyber threats and militant online propaganda of the ideology of terrorism and extremism. It should be noted that, among other media, music and arts have been actively used by extremists.

In practice, there have been developing in Uzbekistan digital online platforms aimed at informational literacy to counter the propaganda of violence and extremism. One of the new such approaches was the creation of an internet portal *stopterror.uz* that was initiated by the Center for the Study of Regional Threats (in Tashkent, Uzbekistan) in cooperation with the OSCE. The portal contains special sections for parents, youth and labor migrants abroad with available information about extremism, and with vivid examples of methods used by cyber extremists and religious propagandists to promote and recruit young people.

In general, the counter-propaganda system, and countering the spread



<sup>435</sup> UNESCO. 2019b. *Policy Brief: Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education in Central Asia*. Central Asia Series. Almaty: UNESCO Office, p. 2.

<sup>436</sup> Uzbekistan. Counter-Extremism. N.d., p. 1.

<sup>437</sup> Uzbekistan. Counter-Extremism. N.d., p. 1.

<sup>438</sup> Information Flows. 2018. *Information Flows and Radicalization Leading to Violent Extremism in Central Asia*. EU, Internews, Search for Common Ground, p. 5.

<sup>439</sup> Information Flows. 2018, p. 5.



of violent extremism ideology and radicalization among young people, to be effective and fruitful, should be based not on the one, but on a system of institutional, legal, political, socio-economic and informational measures, linked with the provision and realization of guaranteed freedoms, rights, opportunities for individuals and social groups.

Prevention of violent extremism, particularly, its religious dimension is viewed in Uzbekistan mainly through the prism of political and geopolitical security issues. In other cases, it relates to the plane of prevention and fight against aggressiveness, violence including youth violence and in schools.

As mentioned earlier, the role of mass-media, particularly, online media in constructing the general attitude of the people and youth is very high. According to B. Babajanov, in Uzbekistan the Uzbek-language mass-media focusing on the religious issues could be structured as follows: (1) state running media and those of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, similar to them; (2) the channels of the liberal Islamic opposition (in the UZ.domains or in WEB); (3) the channels of the radical religious opposition that use foreign hostings. This differentiates the debates on the forms and the sources of religious freedom in Islam, when various groups of believers offer their own and largely selfish interpretation of religious freedoms, imposing them on a part of believers and the state.<sup>440</sup> Therefore, the youth become a crucial target group for all these mass-media structures.

For Uzbekistan, the practice of bullying and violence at school against schoolchildren and teachers has not yet acquired serious dimensions. However, there is an understanding that even isolated acts can turn into a pattern and therefore preventive steps are being taken.

One such example is the activity of the Ministry of Public Education of Uzbekistan scheduled for 2019–2020, in cooperation

with UNESCO, on the implementation of a project to prevent violence in secondary schools. The project will adapt training materials on violence prevention to the Uzbek context and legislation and aims to support the prevention of bullying, by providing methods for identifying children in a depressed emotional state and assisting them through the application of positive psychology methodologies.

It can be concluded that the participation of youth in violent extremism and radicalization bears both regular and specific features. The general trend of radicalization acquires a special dimension in Uzbekistan due to various factors - economic, social, ideological and psychological ones.

The focus of Uzbekistan policymakers on youth is a mark to address the challenges of development in which the youth play a significant role. Similar to the role of youth in providing demographic and economic dividends for the economy, the ideological engagement of youth in religion and the challenges of radicalization have emerged as another risk that has prompted moves towards more proactive initiatives of the state regarding youth. Among recent initiatives at the international level is the proposal by the Uzbek Mission to the UN to develop a UN International Convention on the Rights of Youth. Another initiative was the hosting of the International Conference on the Role of Youth in Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism, which was held in Tashkent and Samarkand under the auspices of the OSCE in June 2018.<sup>441</sup>

At the 2018 conference, delegates developed youth strategies and policies which signaled the vital need to tackle the issues of youth radicalization at the regional, national and global levels. The essential position was that democratic reforms, economic liberalization and modern education were among the key fields to address the risks of violent extremism among the youth.<sup>442</sup> It was



<sup>440</sup> Mass and Social Media Analysis. N.a., p. 29.

<sup>441</sup> OSCE. 2018. Uzbekistan hosts OSCE-supported international conference on role of youth in countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. Tashkent, 12 June 2018.

<sup>442</sup> Statement by the delegation of the Republic of Uzbekistan at the open briefing of the Counter-Terrorism Committee. 2018. Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan. (2 July 2018, New York)

suggested to introduce new mechanisms - the Central Asian Youth Forums as a platform for interaction and sharing of experience in countering the influence of radical groups, conduct joint cultural and sports activities as well as business forums.<sup>443</sup>

The online radicalization of youth has become a significant challenge. One of the ways to address this could be to develop *transversal competencies* to contribute to building more peaceful societies. UNESCO research indicates that these competencies are key to preventing violent extremism. Particularly crucial among these competencies are critical thinking,

empathy, perseverance, media and information literacy, and tolerance.<sup>444</sup> Using the potential of culture and education is another important resource in learning and knowing the diversity of cultures and their heritage, in creating narratives and stories through various forms of creativity such as writing, art, music and performance, and greater engagement in local and national activities. Thus, UNESCO initiatives and programs within the Global Citizenship Education (GCED) umbrella, particularly the theme of preventing violent extremism through education (PVE-E) is a valuable mechanism to adapt and apply.



<sup>443</sup> Roy. 2018. Meena Singh Roy. Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: The "Uzbek Model."

<sup>444</sup> UNESCO. 2019b, p. 3.

## Key Challenges for Youth and Peacebuilding in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan began to undertake liberal reforms and economic transformation in 2016 and faces various challenges in development that affect the youth as well. Due to the high demographic profile of the youth (25.4% of the country's total population) it is not an exaggeration to say that the key challenges faced by the country are associated in one way or another with youth development. Many

of the challenges are spread across economic and social fields, highlighting education, regional disparities, unemployment, labor migration and return migration, and are gender-related as well.

In this context, the following existing challenges in Uzbekistan can be highlighted:



**Economic structural challenges** are linked with youth unemployment, especially in rural areas.



**The need for equal access to and development of quality education** for all social groups, across all educational levels and all regions of the country with the aim of solving the issues of low employment and unemployment.



**Imbalance between educational content, acquired skills and competencies, and market and country development needs.**



**Labor migration and return migration.** The need for mainstreaming, rehabilitation and integration of return labor migrants.



**Gender-related issues** influence the (higher) education and employment fields. The need for practical implementation of gender equality and the change of perception of social role of women (issues of access of women to higher education, labor employment).



**High entrepreneurship potential of the youth (SMEs, start-ups, etc.),** the focus for which has been recently declared a state priority, has to be implemented and scaled up across regions and economic sectors.



**The need for combatting the spread of radical religious ideology and practice** (both offline and online) leading to violent extremism among the youth, including among labor migrants.



**Low engagement and participation of the youth in political and social life.** The need for a real working mechanism and practice of youth involvement in political and social activities in the country, especially on grassroots decision-making level.

## Recommendations for Actions

This report has been prepared with the goal of identifying and analyzing existing major challenges for peacebuilding for Central Asian youth. The concept of peacebuilding has undergone transformations and today is understood through a broad systemic approach that embraces diverse themes/areas according to cognitive (learning and education), relational (economic participation, employment, entrepreneurship, inclusion, gender participation, integration) and institutional (institutions, intercultural dialogue, religion, preventing violent extremism) planes.

All societies — especially developing ones — face myriad typologically similar challenges relating to the paradigm shift of modern development, including economic globalization, demographic growth and urbanization, ecological degradation, widening inequalities, cultural diversity and migration, increasing violence of different etymology and scale, radicalization, greater demands for voice and participation, increased mobility, and the repercussions of the digital revolution. The youth is at the epicenter of these challenges of peacebuilding.

The youth of a region share general characteristics, including high percentage in the demographics, and are varied in terms of factors such as age (adolescents

and senior youth), profession and education, and urban or rural background.

The specific development of each state of Central Asia significantly influences the characteristics of the youth. The countries of the region are ranked at different levels of development, with Kazakhstan being ranked as an upper middle-income developing country,<sup>445</sup> Uzbekistan aspiring to reach the same status by 2030, and Tajikistan occupying the low developing level. However, irrespective of the differences, there also exist similarities in regard to peacebuilding challenges, which are mostly of a structural nature.

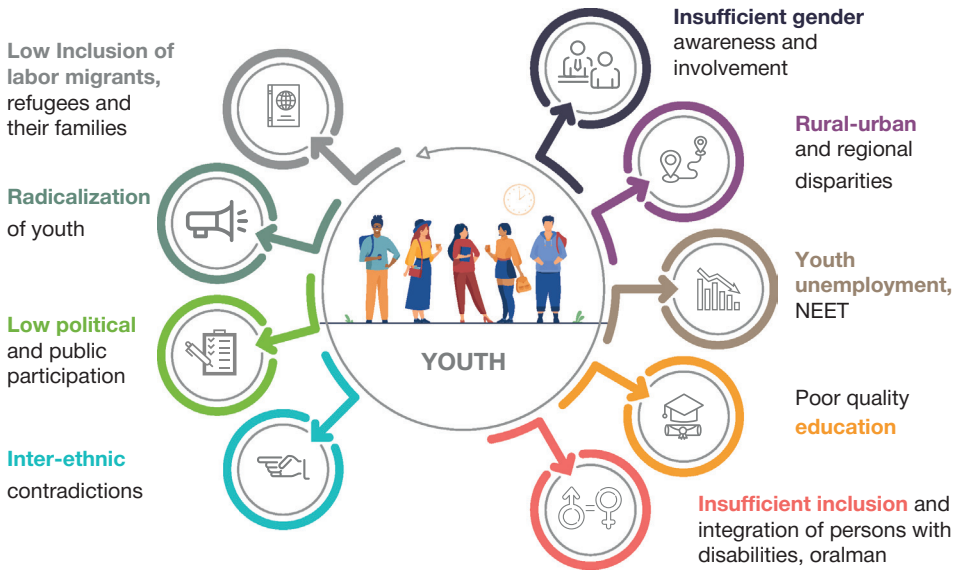
The report has developed a number of key recommendations for policy implementation based on the UN SDGs “accelerators and drivers” methodology (see in Introduction), as this approach is helpful in highlighting the key aspects of the youth and peacebuilding picture. Applying the “accelerators and drivers” methodology, the report has identified youth as a key accelerator with multiplier effects for the implementation of the wide spectrum of SDGs.

The key challenges facing peacebuilding in Central Asia vis-à-vis the youth, as discussed extensively throughout the report (particularly in Chapter 3), are now illustrated in diagrammatic form – see Figure 12 “The Key Challenges for Youth”.

 <sup>445</sup> UNPFD. 2015, p. 73.

**Figure 12. Key Challenges for Youth (Youth as Accelerator)**

Source: L. Yerekesheva



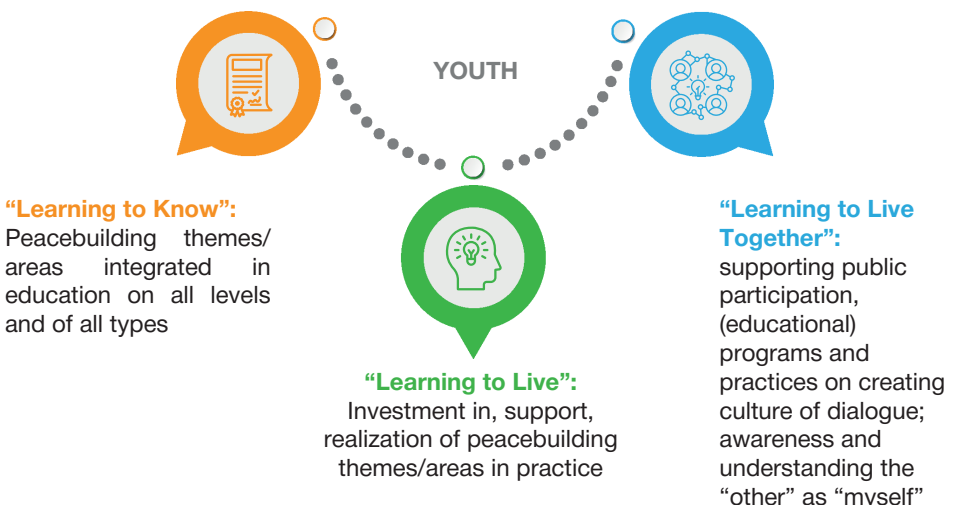
Source: L. Yerekesheva

Having identified the key challenges vis-à-vis the youth, the report has further defined the main drivers that would enable progress for youth as the accelerator – see Figure 13 “The Key Drivers/Policy Interventions for

Youth”. These drivers are structured along three directions that reflect a paradigm of life-long learning, i.e. “learning to know”, “learning to live”, “learning to live together”.

**Figure 13. Key Drivers/Policy Priorities for Youth**

Source: L. Yerekesheva



Source: L. Yerekesheva

Systemic approach implies that to resolve this or that issue, an integrated and cohesive approach linking all elements of ecosystem with each other, is required. Therefore, the key challenges for peacebuilding that the youth of the region face, and the key drivers that could help to answer these challenges, should be discussed and analyzed coherently. This

means the importance of correlation and mapping of all the relevant key themes/ areas of peacebuilding discussed in the previous chapters in regard to the main challenges, policy interventions, policy priorities and SDGs – see Table 19 “Mapping Peacebuilding Areas as per Main Challenges, Policy Interventions, Policy Priorities and Goals”.

**Table 19. Mapping Peacebuilding Areas as per Main Challenges, Policy Interventions, Policy Priorities, and Sustainable Development Goals**

| PEACEBUILDING KEY THEMES/ AREAS                | MAIN CHALLENGES   | POLICY INTERVENTIONS  | POLICY PRIORITIES (DRIVERS)  | SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)  |   |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| <b>Institutions</b>                            | Increased disparities and disproportions across regions, rural-urban areas; stratification of the society                                       | Updating institutional policies   |  |   |   |
| <b>Intercultural Dialogue</b>                  |   | Enhancing political and public participation, particularly of minorities, at the local community level  |  |   |   |
| <b>Religion</b>                                |   |   |  |   |   |
| <b>Preventing Violent Extremism</b>            | High potential of violent extremism, religious radicalization, region-based; low esteem of the “other”, especially “religious and ethnic other” | Developing courses and training on culture, intercultural dialogue for (religious) youth, migrants and locals   | “Learning to Live Together”: supporting public participation, (educational) programs and practices on creating culture of dialogue and debate; awareness and implementing the concept of the “other” as “myself” | Education (SDG 4)   |   |
|  | Lack of / insufficient “social lifts” for (rural) youth in general, from ethnic, religious communities in particular                            | Creating/providing open informational resources, platforms for expressing creativity, cultural awareness, enhancing partnership and networking                    |  | Gender equality (SDG 5)   |   |
| <b>Democratic Participation and Inclusion</b>  | Low adjustment of employment needs with labor skills and market (especially in a view of digitization and change of the nature of jobs)         | Ensuring inclusion and integration of persons with disabilities, <i>kandastar</i> , ethnic minorities through learning programs, centers and co-networking spaces |  | Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)   |   |
| <b>Economic, Gender Participation</b>          |   |   |  |   | Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16) |
| <b>Entrepreneurship, Employment Engagement</b> |   |   |  |   |   |
|  |   |   |  | Strengthening Dialogue and Partnership for Sustainable Inclusive Development (SDG 17) |   |

| PEACEBUILDING KEY THEMES/ AREAS              | MAIN CHALLENGES  | POLICY INTERVENTIONS  | POLICY PRIORITIES (DRIVERS)   | SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)   |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Research and Social Innovation</b></p> | <p>Lack of/low professional qualifications, competencies and knowledge among the youth</p> <p>Lack of/poor information, skills, financial resources to start/run own business by young entrepreneurs</p> <p>Insufficient inclusion and integration of persons with disabilities, <i>kandastar</i>, ethnic minorities</p> <p>Inclusion of labor migrants, refugees and their families: legally provided but not guaranteed or incomplete</p> <p>Lack of/insufficient cohesion between migrants and local population in host countries</p> <p>Insufficient/low knowledge on gender issues among population</p> | <p>Developing programs and establishing training courses for young entrepreneurs jointly with other stakeholders and within existing best practices</p> <p>Developing programs and establishing training courses for labor migrants</p> <p>Providing access to vocational training, language and integration courses for youth, migrants and their families</p> | <p>“Learning to Live”:<br/>Investment in, support of peacebuilding themes/areas in practice</p> | <p>Education (SDG 4)</p> <p>Gender (SDG 5)</p> <p>Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8)</p> <p>Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)</p>   |
| <p><b>Learning, Education</b></p>            | <p>Insufficient/poor quality education for the youth, especially in rural areas</p> <p>Curricula not reflecting fully the increasing challenges and diversity in the society</p> <p>Education not adequately reflecting present and future employment needs on labor market (especially in a view of digitization and change of the nature of jobs)</p>  | <p>Education and skill development courses elaborated for rural youth</p> <p>TVET and professional training courses development</p> <p>Disabilities, gender, ethnic minorities issues included in the school and tertiary education curricula</p> <p>Intercultural dialogue theme included in the school and tertiary education curricula</p>                   | <p>“Learning to Know”:<br/>Peacebuilding themes/areas integrated in education on all levels</p> | <p>Enhancing human capital through equal access to quality education on all levels (SDG 4)</p> <p>Gender (SDG 5)</p> <p>Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8)</p> <p>Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)</p> |

Based on the table, the key results of the analysis are briefly discussed next.

## Interdependence of Peacebuilding Themes

The report has identified the main challenges according to key peacebuilding themes. Although being structured, the challenges are interrelated and interinfluencing.

Identifying the challenges shows they are spread across all thematic areas, and, consequently, the respective policy priorities (drivers) and interventions are equally interrelated. Picking up one challenge reveals its correlation to another.

For example, the risk of religious radicalization is due to various, so-called “push and pull” factors, among which could be youth unemployment and youth migration from rural to urban areas or abroad. However, equally important is the lack of quality education of the youth, especially rural youth, which impedes their ability to better compete and perform in the labor market, start and run an own business, participate socially and politically, and realize their own potential. In other words, lack of quality education makes the youth less competitive on the job market and more vulnerable economically, financially, socially, psycho-emotionally. As a result, they could opt for choosing other ways of participation, including radical ideology-based.

Equally the same issue of insufficient/ low education, especially low knowledge of the “other”, other cultures, and systems of beliefs significantly contributes towards intolerance and possibly, to violent extremism.

In highlighting the policy priorities (drivers), the report has made correlations between each peacebuilding theme/area and key role of education. The provisions on role of education are based, though in

a modified way, on the “Delors Report” (1996),<sup>446</sup> that highlighted four basic pillars, i.e. “learning to know”, “learning to do”, “learning to be”, “learning to live together”. Whereas in current work there have been distinguished three pillars, namely, “learning to know”, “learning to live” and “learning to live together”. An important aspect is the correlation between these pillars and the peacebuilding themes.

Thus, within the discussed holistic approach, “learning to know” has been correlated with the cognitive plane of the peacebuilding area, i.e. “learning/ education”. The “learning to be” concept has been modified to “learning to live”, to emphasize the importance of full realization of own’s potential through the participation of individuals who work, perform and realize in practice their gained knowledge, skills and competencies, along with basic intrinsic rights to labor, health and knowledge. The thematic area of peacebuilding on the institutional plane (i.e., institutions, intercultural dialogue, religion, PVE) is correlated with “learning to live together.” The idea is that learning to live together implies learning to live in a socially coherent and integrated way, and to consider the interests of other members of social groups.

It should be mentioned that, similar to the policy priorities and interventions, there is the interrelation and inter-twinning of various SDGs across all peacebuilding themes/areas. This means that, not only one SDG, but several SDGs are targeted and potentially implemented. This aspect is also presented in the above-mentioned Table.



<sup>446</sup> Delors. 1996. Delors, J. et al. *Learning: The Treasure Within. The Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century*. Paris: UNESCO.

The “Delors Report” became a landmark contribution towards understanding the concept of education methodologically. In particular, the “Delors Report” (1996) introduced the influential concepts of four pillars of learning, to which there should be paid equal attention, i.e.: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, learning to live together.



## Education as an Enabler

An important result arising from the analysis is that at the root of all the challenges lies the lack of sufficient education or the provision low-quality education in all variety of types and levels, namely, pre-school, basic, secondary, TVET and tertiary/higher education, and formal, informal, and non-formal education. Consequently, at the basis of all interventions should be the strategies targeted at enhancing the educational policy and institutions, content (curricula), teaching methodologies, learning infrastructure and assessment.<sup>447</sup> Bearing in mind the importance of digitization in modern development, these interventions should also be digital and go online.

It can be concluded that education lies at the core of the development and peacebuilding agendas of the countries of Central Asia, though in various aspects. Directly linked with employment, health, migration and participation in social life, education is a significant factor of peacebuilding. Therefore, education, learning, knowledge, skills and competencies are crucial enablers across different fields of peacebuilding, embracing school and higher education, technical and

vocational education and training, migration, labor and unemployment, research and innovation, education for intercultural dialogue, sustainable development (ESD) and preventing violent extremism through education (PVE-E).

In other words, the adage of the importance of knowledge is relevant and urgent in today's world, where information is a key resource and digitization has become a modality of life. For youth, the priority for investment in learning and education acquires special meaning due to the specific needs of the youth as a subset of the population in a formative phase. The other factor highlighting the importance of learning and education is that investing in the youth now, in human capital, could reap dividends in the future. For Central Asia this is a real opportunity. Hence, the assessment made by the UN Progress Study Report on Youth, Peace and Security should be echoed: that investment in the education system (as well as in health care and economic policy) could yield a demographic dividend in the long term<sup>448</sup> along with so-called peace dividends.

## Peacebuilding as Social Cohesion

Peacebuilding is about social cohesion and justice linking together the members of social groups, both formally and informally.

Peacebuilding is about harmonizing all members, social structures, institutions, ideas within the broad cultural and social fabric of the societies in an organic, or peaceful way. It is about communication and specific feedback between institutions, governments and people, between people of different ethnic groups, religion, age, gender, social and professional status. It is about relations which are established, communication which is conveyed and maintained, behavior and participation that are expressed and practiced, ideas and thoughts that are shared and respected. In short it is about basic needs, practices, ideas to be heard, listened, understood,

respected, implemented. It is about human rights and responsibilities that should be taught, learned, implemented, practiced, maintained. It is about intercultural skills and competencies that act as ways of peacebuilding.

It could be summed, that peacebuilding is about such harmonizing all members, social structures, institutions, ideas, that is directly linked with education and learning, on the one hand, and with practical implementation of intercultural competences and skills, on the other. Therefore, to build peace in the minds of men and women is to learn and implement intercultural competencies in practice, "at the center of which are communication skills and behavior".<sup>449</sup> Therefore, peacebuilding is always a dialogue, when the ability to hear



<sup>447</sup> UNESCO. 2019b, p. 1.

<sup>448</sup> UNFPA. 2015.

<sup>449</sup> Deardorff. 2020. p. 6.

and be heard is combined with the right to say and accept. Perhaps, the quintessential peacebuilding is the just treatment of the most vulnerable, namely, people with special needs, elders, women, children, youth, unemployed by all members of social groups.

Peacebuilding is about constructing a cohesive society that is characterized by close social relationships, intensive emotional connectedness, and a pronounced orientation towards the common good.<sup>450</sup> Also known as the *Social Cohesion Radar*, this conceptualization correlates with the peacebuilding themes/ areas discussed in this report through highlighting factors such as relations,

institutions and civic participation<sup>451</sup>. A major conclusion coming from this is the possibility of measuring the determinants and outcomes of social cohesion in society, or peacebuilding, as far as youth is concerned. This opens a new vista for understanding the regularities and specificities of peacebuilding and potentially could contribute towards its maintenance.

Youth as a particular age group reflects the peacebuilding environment and challenges, perhaps, in a more focused, “condensed” and at the same time, in a dispersed way, and hence this projection may have significant consequences, for now and for the future.



<sup>450</sup> Larsen and Boehnke. 2016. Larsen, Mandi and Klaus Boehnke. *Measuring Social Cohesion in the Kyrgyz Republic The Social Cohesion Index*. Bishkek: University of Central Asia, Working Paper No. 37, p. 6.

<sup>451</sup> Larsen and Boehnke. 2016, pp. 6-7.

## Future Research on Peacebuilding Themes

The peacebuilding themes relating to the youth of Central Asia highlight the need to carry out further extensive, both comprehensive and specialized research

(including sociological research and surveys) on many challenging issues of peacebuilding. Among them could be highlighted the following:



**Access to quality education,** peacebuilding curricula and programs' development and life-long learning for all;



**Secular-religious aspect of radicalization,**<sup>454</sup> preventing violent extremism and radicalization among young people and women;



**Civil, political engagement, participation** and protest potential of young people, especially in (rural) areas and regions of Central Asian countries;



**Social cohesion,** youth and interreligious and inter-ethnic dialogue (the impact of a changing social structure on intercultural interaction);



**Influence of migration on the identity** formation of both migrants and the society of the host countries;



**Youth, digitization and communication,** including media and information literacy that are essential for responsible consumption of any information and also for the ability of the society to uphold pluralism and tolerance.<sup>455</sup>



**Youth educational migration**<sup>452</sup> there are no special surveys yet that extensively focus on these issues, though recently Kazakhstan's educational migration has become a special subject of research;<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> IOM. 2019. *Vneshnyaya molodezhnaya migratsiya v stranah Tsentral'noi Azii: analiz riskov i minimizatsiya negativnykh posledstviy* [External Youth Migration in Central Asian Countries: Analysis of Risks and Minimization of Negative Consequences]. IOM, p. 13.

<sup>453</sup> Nasimova G. *Obrazovatel'naya migratsiya iz Kazakhstana: tendentsii, faktory i sotsial'no-politicheskiye posledstviya* [Educational migration from Kazakhstan: trends, factors and socio-political consequences]. Research Project (2018-2020) under the grant of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Based on my discussions with the author and project leader.

<sup>454</sup> Information Flows. 2018, p. 6.

<sup>455</sup> Information Flows. 2018, p. 5.

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# Youth of Central Asia Challenges for Peacebuilding

A comprehensive research review

Despite the youth development issues are at the forefront of the international and regional agendas, yet the youth in Central Asia still generally remain influenced by the insufficient measures to address their social, economic, political engagement and participation. Nevertheless, institutional frameworks, policy instruments, best practices exist to advance the situation.

For the first time the study comprehensively looks at the youth-related challenges for peacebuilding and development in 4 countries of the region (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan, Uzbekistan). Based on the methodologically defined structural themes, it offers a detailed overview of each of them: (1) formal education, vocational training and skills development; (2) employment engagement/young people not in education, employment and training (NEET), migration, inclusion, gender, entrepreneurship; (3) religion, preventing violent extremism, intercultural dialogue

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