

YOUTH POLICY REVIEW SERIES

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Youth and
Public Policy in

Kyrgyzstan

A publication of

Youth Policy Press

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First edition printed in 2012
Second edition printed in 2014

This youth policy review has been generously supported by the
Open Society Foundations · www.opensocietyfoundations.org

ISBN 978-3-944859-05-7

Design by Maximilian Kall

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Printed by Druckerei Lokay in Reinheim,
Germany, on 100% recovered paper
with EU Ecolabel



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List of Acronyms

CAFMI	Central Asian Free Market Institute
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
GIZ	German Society for International Cooperation
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRI	International Republican Institute
KIC	Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSF	Open Society Foundations
OSYI	Open Society Youth Initiative
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
SFK	Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan
STDs	Sexually transmitted diseases
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization
YHRG	Youth Human Rights Group

Executive Summary

This pilot review of youth policy in the Kyrgyz Republic, published by Youth Policy Press, was funded by the New York–based Open Society Foundations Youth Initiative (OSYI) in keeping with the program’s dual mission of (a) supporting young people in their efforts to be agents of positive change and (b) advocating for the full and effective participation of young people in political, social, and cultural life. One of the review’s top priorities was to apply and promote the principles of evidence-based research to assess the impact of existing youth policies on young people’s access to information, rights, and opportunities. Analogous assessments were simultaneously conducted by research teams in five other countries, using an evaluation matrix specially designed for that purpose in 2010.

The review in the Kyrgyz Republic, commonly referred to as Kyrgyzstan, began in April 2011. The first stage of the process comprised in-depth desk research and approximately a dozen preliminary stakeholder interviews, which resulted in a rough draft of this report in early November. Soon after, the research team embarked on a two-week field visit aimed at validating or disproving conclusions made during the earlier stages of research. During this visit to the capital city and two provinces, the team interviewed more than two dozen members of youth organizations, government officials, donors, and experts on issues that directly affect young people. The team also held several youth focus groups in the provinces. A second draft of the report was submitted to the project’s International Editorial Board overseeing all policy reviews in January 2012, revised according to the board’s comments and resubmitted as a final draft in March.

Key Findings

As one of the 15 independent countries to emerge from the rubble of the former Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan still faces formidable challenges posed by the collapse of Soviet-era economic, political, and social institutions, which affect the entire population, regardless of age. The remote, mountainous country, underdeveloped even before gaining independence in 1991, is poor, relies heavily on foreign aid, and does not generate sufficient jobs for its citizens. Vital public services like schools, hospitals, and power plants are falling apart, plagued by decrepit infrastructure and a catastrophic dearth of competent workers. Access to reliable information is poor and corruption permeates nearly every sphere of life, particularly those dominated by the state, including education and health care. The justice system barely functions, with laws flouted by those meant to ensure they work. The country serves as a major drug-trafficking route out of Afghanistan. Between 2005 and 2010, it survived two popular uprisings and a deadly bout of interethnic violence. Understandably, public trust in government is low, and people tend to rely on informal, personal support networks more than on state institutions as such.

These burdens weigh heavily on the shoulders of Kyrgyzstan's young people, whose prospects seem quite dim, while effective tools for achieving change are in short supply. The country lacks several ingredients crucial for meaningful improvements to the quality of life—including rule of law, meritocracy, and a widely accepted value system encouraging honesty and diligence. These circumstances often lead young people to replicate the same pernicious traits and practices that are common among their elders and that have long stymied Kyrgyzstan's development. In a practical sense, young people's chances for economic self-sufficiency are impeded by low-quality education, poor opportunities for employment, gender stereotypes, and cultural expectations that the young should be obedient and passive. Furthermore, the end of the Soviet Union left young people without an official ideology. The resulting vacuum has been filling over the past 20 years with a paradoxical, sometimes perplexing mix of greater individualism, greater dependence on patronage networks, heightened emphasis on ethnic identity, greater religiosity, and a resurgence of traditionalist social mores.

Young people account for a large proportion of the country's population, but have a hard time achieving upward mobility. This ratchets up various social tensions in Kyrgyzstan. Demographically, young people, defined since 2009 as 14-to-28 years old, make up nearly one-third of the population, while children and young adults under 29 total 60 percent. About two-thirds of young people live in rural areas, many of which have little in the way of infrastructure, services, and opportunities. This leads to widespread internal migration, particularly to the capital, Bishkek, and its environs, where migrants are often isolated, encounter problems accessing social services, and experience frictions with nonmigrant neighbors. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyzstanis—many of them young—travel abroad in search of work. The remittances they send home prop up the local economy, but wide-scale migration also rips apart families and communities and often relegates migrants to low-paid, dangerous work. Migration notwithstanding, data gathered recently by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) indicate that young people make up 50 percent of the country's unemployed.¹ Ultimately, the young continue to rely economically on their parents and other relatives for protracted periods. They marry and have children relatively early in life, but building independent, sustainable families is difficult because of inadequate opportunities to make a living, exacerbated at times by gender stereotypes that limit young people's flexibility on the job market. Meanwhile, the socioeconomic pressures are compounded by a politicized divide between the country's north and south, as well as festering interethnic tensions, which periodically explode into violence.

Over the past decade, Kyrgyzstan has developed a raft of youth policies, but few of these seem to genuinely improve young people's access to information, rights, and opportunities. Too many of the laws, regulations, and conceptual documents have been reactive: off-the-cuff responses to political events—particularly, young people's participation in the popular uprisings that overthrew two presidents—rather than the enactment of a strategic vision. Worse still, many policies exist on paper only, without effective mechanisms to achieve their stated aims. Two independent assess-

1. "First Review Under the Three-Year Arrangement Under the Extended Credit Facility and Request for Modification of Performance Criteria," International Monetary Fund—Kyrgyz Republic, Nov. 17, 2011, p. 49.

ments, in 2006 and 2009, concluded that the country's youth policy lacks "a comprehensive, systemic approach to existing problems"² and "remains ineffective, poorly targeted and formalistic."³ Worryingly, many youth-related programs rely heavily on international donors and fluctuate together with their priorities and resources.

These weaknesses betray a deep-rooted problem: As part of its Soviet legacy, Kyrgyzstan lacks a strong, realistic policymaking tradition—one that relies on informed analysis and debate, prioritizes the well-being of citizens over the interests of a ruling elite and holds officials accountable for achieving measurable, demonstrably beneficial goals. Frequent changes in leadership and bureaucratic restructuring make the problem worse. In the past eight years, responsibility for youth policy has bounced around among six different agencies, creating a lack of continuity and further diluting officials' accountability. Even the country's first dedicated Ministry of Youth Affairs was created hastily, without a needs assessment or strategic planning, in response to young people's participation in the deadly street protests of April 2010. The minister, a political appointee, had no previous policy experience, and the state budget provided almost no funding for the agency's operations in its first year. Many of the ministry's activities seemed to be more show than substance, while coordination with other agencies barely existed. Moreover, after less than two years, the ministry was overhauled and partially merged with another agency. Many youth policies are currently being revised or written anew; unfortunately, this has become a perennial activity that seems to bear little fruit—in part because policy goals tend to be very broad and the means of implementation very vague.

Kyrgyzstan's approach to creating a Youth Ministry, together with the latest wave of national youth policies, suggest that the country's leadership has not learned from past mistakes and that, despite vocal official commitments to young people, youth policy remains a low priority for the government. (Young people get only three cursory mentions in the 80-page national development strategy for 2012–2014.) Although youth-sector bureaucrats

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2. A. Abdrapiyev et al., "Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan: Report on Study Results" (in Russian), Youth Human Rights Group, Bishkek, 2006, p. 8.

3. "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," UNDP National Human Development Report, 2009/2010, p. 14.

have justifiably complained of chronic underfunding, many of the deeper weaknesses lie elsewhere: Foundational youth policy documents adopted since 2009 contain contradictions and lack concreteness; responsibility for implementation continues to be diffuse; data collection and procedures for evaluating and monitoring policy are extremely weak; policy coherence, cross-sectoral cooperation, and creative approaches to engaging young people are also missing. Overall, Kyrgyzstan's youth policy fails to focus on young people's needs or future roles in society. It also retains several leftovers from Soviet times—including a paternalistic approach to young people, an emphasis on “talented youth,” and a desire to indoctrinate the young ideologically—today with a focus on pseudo-patriotic platitudes instead of communism. Although considerable rights and freedoms are guaranteed by law in Kyrgyzstan, the lack of a functioning legal system and the rigidity of certain social mores confine many of these to theory.

Predictably, the positive impact of past youth policies has been minimal. Many components of the national youth agendas in place from 2000 to 2008 were never implemented, while those that were tended to focus on entertainment and mass gatherings, genres largely inherited from the Soviet past. Specific unmet objectives fall into the categories of health care, economic independence, vocational guidance, and bridging the rural-urban divide in accessing services and opportunities. Meanwhile, the policy goal of boosting patriotism among young people has too often mutated into divisive nationalist rhetoric. Existing policies seldom support young people in exercising their rights, accessing opportunities, or achieving autonomy. One area in which this is particularly obvious is education, where quality is notoriously below par and students' rights, from primary school through university, are routinely violated or restricted. In the health field, too, youth policies have neither helped compensate for the generally sorry state of medical care nor done much to encourage healthy lifestyles among the young; youth-friendly health services and information on reproductive health are sorely lacking. Labor policy has likewise been anemic and incoherent, doing desperately little to address unemployment among the young.

Young people's ability to avail themselves of those rights and opportunities that do exist has been stymied by a number of factors. One is a lack of knowledge, as information about youth-relevant policies does not,

for the most part, reach the intended beneficiaries. Two more include government dysfunction—which leads, in turn, to public distrust—and cultural traditions that put little stock in young people’s opinions. Some researchers have also pointed to internal obstacles for young people, such as a poor work ethic, weak communication skills, apathy, and fear. Certain youth subgroups have a particularly hard time benefiting from existing policies. In various cases, these include: rural youth; physically and mentally disabled youth; homeless, abused, and institutionalized youth; young people who work; ethnic minorities; internal migrants and refugees; low-income youth; young women (especially those who have fallen victim to sexual abuse or bride-kidnapping); and young people in the hands of law enforcement or military agencies.

One positive shift in youth policy over the past three years has been the explicit commitment to increase young people’s participation in decision making and public life. However, while the number of youth organizations seems to be growing and some groups of young people have shown ample energy in pursuing common aims, overall youth participation in vital sectors of the country’s life remains limited. This results both from young people’s own lack of knowledge and capacity and from a virtual absence of sustained institutional support for their meaningful participation. The most visibly active young people fall into three, sometimes overlapping categories: nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), politics, and civil service. The NGO sector includes many impressive projects but remains quite atomized. Meanwhile, young people involved in politics have often become objects of manipulation rather than agents of positive change or the advancement of youth-relevant issues. And, though young people reportedly make up nearly one-fifth of civil servants, a fair number of them complain that salaries are too low, future prospects are dim, and programs to train and recruit new staff have been deeply flawed, while others fall into the same patterns that have earned Kyrgyzstan’s civil service a bad reputation: corruption, nepotism, lack of professionalism, and the preeminence of personal benefit over the public good.

Finally, it is important to note that youth-related coordination and cooperation across sectors have been virtually absent. Responsibility for coordinating youth-relevant policy used to rest with the Youth Ministry, but the agency did not excel at this task. Prior to its reconfiguration and partial

merger with the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Migration, the Youth Ministry was politically and financially weak and was looked at with a fair amount of skepticism by fellow government workers and NGOs alike. Often, the ministry was treated by other national agencies as a junior partner, while NGOs complained that it failed to complement their work or address pressing youth issues. Neither group had a clear understanding of the ministry's aims and functions. At the end of 2011, the Youth Ministry proposed a number of measures to improve coordination among sectors, but they are marked by many of the same policymaking flaws that have haunted Kyrgyzstan's youth policy for at least a decade: a lack of evidence-based planning and measurable goals; unclear responsibility for implementation; and no sanctions for non-implementation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report attempts to assess the impact of existing youth policies on young people's access to information, rights, and opportunities. In the process, it raises at least as many questions as it answers. A central one is: How feasible is it to apply a rights-based approach to evaluating youth policy in a society where the very concept of rights is not firmly entrenched or well understood or institutionally protected? If this approach is not feasible, then what alternative strategies could be used to improve the long-term well-being of young people, who currently face major hurdles in attaining such basics as education, justice, employment, and health care? Clearly, many of the socioeconomic and human-development challenges confronted by young people in Kyrgyzstan fit into a wider context of troubles faced by everyone in the country. While this makes the task of tackling them even more daunting, it also offers hope that young people will recognize their vested interest in finding effective solutions and will be able to contribute their energies to this process.

Because of the broad scope of this research, the small size of the team producing it, and the limited resources available, this report does not provide specific, in-depth recommendations, as doing so would have required much more investigation into the inner workings of each sector, from health care to justice. Nonetheless, Chapter 7 includes a general list of possible directions to pursue in improving youth policy and heightening its

impact. The list, summarized below, is neither exhaustive nor set in stone and is meant to spur a process of discussion and brainstorming rather than prescribe definitive solutions. While the recommendations are not aimed at youth-focused NGOs, donors, or international aid organizations, the authors hope that both the list and the report as a whole will serve as a basis for these groups to develop some action plans of their own.

Structural

- » Create a functioning hierarchy and coordinating mechanisms for the design and implementation of youth policy, including personal responsibility for particular tasks and a working system of youth focal points—i.e., individuals responsible for coordinating youth policy—in all relevant ministries and agencies.
- » Underpin mandates for youth policy with adequate financial, technical, and human resources at all levels—national, provincial, and local.
- » Perfect and enforce existing legislation, rather than continuing the trend of passing new laws and regulations that exist mostly on paper.

Research-Related

- » Improve youth-related data collection so that policymaking can be evidence-based. This may require the creation of a small, dedicated unit within the new Youth, Labor and Employment Ministry, staffed by qualified professionals, responsible for meeting and coordinating with the National Statistics Committee and the data-gathering operations of other relevant agencies, as well as international organizations and NGOs. Such communication would aim to identify gaps in knowledge about youth needs, to prioritize them, and to track youth-relevant trends. It would also require explicit, valid assurances to officials that they will not be punished for delivering truthful information about young people, no matter how unpleasant.
- » Develop mechanisms for communicating and coordinating regularly with donors and youth-focused NGOs in order to have a better idea of which youth needs are being met, where and by whom, and which have been neglected.

- » Establish and maintain ties with youth policy experts in other countries to exchange observations on challenges, opportunities, and best practices in the field.

Public Trust & Meeting Basic Needs

- » In implementing youth-related policies, make a concerted effort to raise the level of public trust in government by increasing transparency, professionalism, and efficiency, while reducing corruption, nepotism, and waste.
- » End the practice of using public sector employees, like teachers and doctors, for government-mandated work (e.g., voter mobilization) unrelated to their professional activities.

Education & Employment

- » Develop a comprehensive program for expanding and improving early childhood education. This would have the doubly positive effect of better preparing children academically and freeing young mothers to join the workforce.
- » Improve basic education by focusing on just a few key areas, such as textbooks, school infrastructure, teacher training, and teacher retention.
- » Launch a concerted, cross-sectoral effort to combat youth unemployment. This could include the development of effective career counseling services and the creation of incentives for youth-targeted job creation, youth entrepreneurship, and youth training.
- » Do not place the newly created Youth, Labor and Employment Ministry solely under the jurisdiction of the government’s “social issues” bloc.

Health Care

- » Commission and facilitate the spread of simple, creative, far-reaching information campaigns aimed at young people to promote basic knowledge of health and safety (e.g., eating a balanced diet, safe sex and reproductive health, regular exercise, first aid, fire safety).
- » Develop and implement a detailed, realistic, pragmatic plan to improve young people’s access to basic health care and youth-friendly medical services.

Access to Information

- » Simplify access to information held by government agencies on matters about which the public should be well informed to participate meaningfully in political and socioeconomic decision making.
- » Be creative and proactive in providing relevant information to young people.
- » Create incentives for public-private partnerships and/or private business to make vast improvements in the availability of Internet services throughout the country.
- » Reform the rules and procedures for library access to ensure that young people lacking permanent residency registration can have equal access.



Youth and
Public Policy in

Kyrgyzstan

A grayscale world map with the United States highlighted in white. The map shows the outlines of continents and countries. The United States is the only landmass highlighted in white, standing out against the dark gray background of the rest of the world.

Background to the Pilot Review

1

1.1 Rationale for the Pilot Review

This report evaluating youth policy in Kyrgyzstan is part of a pilot series of six reports reviewing public policies affecting young people in the following countries: Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Serbia, and Uganda. The pilot project consisted of research teams on the ground to conduct analyses based on a specially developed evaluation matrix, assisted and supported in the research process by international advisors. An International Editorial Board supervised and evaluated the pilot process.

The Open Society Youth Initiative provided funding for the pilot project. The Youth Initiative supports young people in their efforts to be agents of positive change and advocates for the full and effective participation of all young people in the political, social, and cultural life of their communities.

The pilot project had the following objectives:

- » To review public policies pertaining to youth (including, but not exclusively, specific youth policies) in several countries using the draft evaluation matrix specifically developed for the purpose.
- » To make available research that will allow young people to engage in an informed debate on the public policies affecting them and their communities in the countries concerned.
- » To build a pool of young researchers capable of evaluating policies pertaining to youth, including specific youth policies.
- » To contribute to building the capacity of the youth sector in the countries concerned to research public policy issues.
- » To develop the evidence base for pilot advocacy activities in cooperation with the Open Society Youth Initiative and other partners.
- » To broaden the scope of the international youth sector to include general policies pertaining to youth that go beyond specific youth policies.
- » To develop the capacity of the international youth sector and its partners and networks for evidence-based strategy development for young people and their issues.

1.2 Rationale for the Review in Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan was selected as a participant country for a number of reasons, which are discussed in greater detail here. While a significant number of studies conducted over the past five years have considered the country's youth policies, this is the first to adopt a rights-based approach.

One specific issue that differentiated our team's terms of reference from those of our colleagues in other countries was the state of flux in which policy found itself during the research period in Kyrgyzstan. Because of many factors, a substantial number of policies, including youth policy, were being revised, rewritten, and otherwise reconsidered. A reason was the government-wide drafting of medium- and long-term strategic documents throughout the second half of 2011; another was a streamlining and downsizing of government agencies envisioned for 2012; and, last but not least, was anxiety about the results and consequences of presidential elections, held on October 30, 2011, and the realignment of political forces that would follow. As a result, our research team could not fully evaluate the impact of existing policy but focused, instead, on its content and extrapolated some conclusions about possible future outcomes based on that content and on the impact of youth policy in the past.

Another issue that affected our terms of reference is the magnitude of the marginalization of young people in modern Kyrgyzstani society. While uses of the term vary, "marginalization" can generally be defined as a process or confluence of circumstances that results in an individual or group's exclusion from meaningful participation in society. If we take "meaningful participation" to include access to decent education, employment, health care, justice, and a reliable social safety net, then there is reason to worry that a very high proportion of young people in Kyrgyzstan have been marginalized—even when public policies intended to prevent this exist on paper.

The motive behind this pilot review is to elevate the above-described evaluation matrix from theory to practice by applying it in countries where local partners wish to engage young people in their strategies and programming. The countries in question also had to meet at least one of three criteria: to have adopted youth policies that are in the process of being imple-

mented; to have been affected by conflict; and to experience substantial inward or outward migration. Kyrgyzstan meets all of these.

Demographically, the country is one of the “youngest” in the former Soviet Union, with more than one-third of the population aged under 18 and about 60 percent under 29.⁴ This youth bulge has major implications for development. Deteriorating health care and education systems have undermined, from childhood, young people’s chances for attaining a high standard of living. Because of sparse employment opportunities, hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyzstanis, many of them young, migrate outside the country in search of work or within the country, from poorer, rural areas to more prosperous ones. Because of a cumbersome bureaucracy, poor enforcement of laws that protect individuals’ rights, and generally low trust in government, much of the economy is informal. A large proportion of workers do not contribute to pension funds, meaning that many of today’s young people are likely to have no formal social protection in their old age.

In 2008, to strengthen the potential of young people and facilitate their active, meaningful participation in all aspects of public life, OSF’s local branch office, the Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan (SFK), started a dedicated Youth Program. In part, this initiative stemmed from work the foundation had been doing after the so-called Tulip Revolution of March 2005, which had shed light on youth discontents. The bloodless overthrow of then-president Askar Akayev suggested that young people—very active in the protests that led to his ouster—had legitimate grievances that could sometimes be manipulated for political ends. The foundation hoped it could help lessen the likelihood of such manipulation by improving young people’s ability to form independent civic points of view, enabling them to lobby for their own interests and enhancing their knowledge of their rights.

The outburst of disaffection among young people in 2005 turned them into a top-priority social group, and, in response, the government adopted a number of successive youth policy documents; however, both implementation and impact were weak. Moreover, five years after the first revolution came a second, this one with fatalities. Nearly one hundred people were killed in the capital’s main square in April 2010 in shooting between secu-

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 4. 2009 Census, National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic website. Accessed Oct. 27, 2011, <http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/node/23>.

rity forces and protesters opposed to then-president Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who quickly fled the country along with a number of family members. Two months later, the power vacuum was at least a partial cause of the country's south exploding in a bout of interethnic violence that left more than four hundred people dead and thousands homeless. Young people played a major part in the events of 2010—both as participants in demonstrations and as perpetrators and victims of violence—once again throwing into relief the need to carefully assess and address the conditions in which the country's youth now live.

Less than three weeks after Bakiyev's overthrow, the new interim government created a Ministry for Youth Affairs, the first dedicated, high-level agency to focus exclusively on youth policy in the history of Kyrgyzstan's post-Soviet independence. During the 20 months of its existence, the ministry tried to develop strategies and concept papers, to modify or lobby for legislation, and to work with other government bodies to develop youth-related programs. However, its rushed creation and consequent shortcomings have generated a great deal of skepticism about its effectiveness. In December 2011, under a government restructuring, the ministry was partially merged with another national agency to form the Ministry of Youth, Labor and Employment.

Nonetheless, today is a propitious time to examine youth policy in Kyrgyzstan and to share the findings with a broad range of stakeholders, including government bodies, international aid agencies, local nongovernmental organizations, and young people themselves. In the wake of the political turmoil of 2010 and the presidential elections of 2011, most national public policies are being reshaped. In this context, an evaluation of youth policies in terms of their goals, priorities, institutional capacity for implementation, and impact could be a timely contribution to policymakers' work.

For SFK, the upheavals of 2010 served as further confirmation of the necessity to keep working with and for young people, both to augment their potential and to support policies that truly correspond to their needs. Over the years, the foundation's Youth Program has built up a solid knowledge base and a strong network of contacts; its executive director was a member of the new Youth Ministry's public oversight board. With the combination of its institutional strengths and the ongoing reshaping of national policy,

the foundation has the potential to carry out successful advocacy work together with other partners in the youth policy field.

1.3 Approach and Methodology

The pilot review in Kyrgyzstan was conducted between April 2011 and February 2012; the initial team included five people: the executive director of SFK's Youth Program, an International Advisor, and three young, local researchers. Work began with an orientation meeting in Bishkek, during which the researchers were briefed on the project's mission and familiarized with key documents and principles that would be used to shape the report. The team adapted the evaluation matrix to ensure maximum coverage of issues relevant to Kyrgyzstan, and each researcher was assigned the writing of two chapters. This meeting was followed by several weeks of desk research—tapping documentation in English, Kyrgyz, and Russian—and, in July, a round of key interviews in the capital city, Bishkek, with six government officials, four representatives of international donor organizations, and two youth researchers. In September, unfortunately, two of the team's researchers left the project, thus the remaining researcher and the international advisor drafted an initial version of the report.

Upon completion of the draft in English in early November, the remaining team members embarked on a two-week field visit to the provinces of Osh, in the south, and Chui, in the north, as well as Bishkek. During the visit, the team met with members of youth organizations, government officials, donors, and experts on issues that directly affect young people. Most of the meetings—10 in Osh, 5 in Chui Province, and 10 in Bishkek—were conducted as semi-structured interviews; three more were held as focus groups of young people. (Interviewees are listed in Appendix II.) The choice of research methods reflects the premise that this project was not expected to generate new data, but rather to take existing knowledge, analyze it, and draw some conclusions from a process of validation involving all relevant stakeholders.

1.4 Team Reflections on Drafting the National Report

Needless to say, the greatest challenge in writing the draft report on Kyrgyzstan was the loss of two team members. This significantly increased the workload of the remaining participants and delayed the production of the report by more than two months.

Another challenge concerned the project's multi-sectoral approach, which greatly increased the volume of information to be digested during the desk-research phase and also made it difficult to generate specific recommendations. A considerable number of studies have been written about Kyrgyzstan's youth policy—an even greater number of old and new policy documents are available. However, because the evaluation aimed to consider not only youth policy per se, but policies that affect young people more broadly, the range of documents to be studied expanded dramatically. The team explored areas such as education, labor, migration, health care, justice, and local governance. Each involves an intricate system of politics, policymaking, and policy delivery. This report does not provide an in-depth study of these sectors but does indicate guideposts for the further exploration of ways in which policy in these areas does or does not support young people in their pursuit of autonomy, rights, and opportunity.

A surprising aspect of the team's research work was the conservative, anti-youth ageism we sometimes encountered among officials whose very job it was to empower young people. Granted, this attitude reflects a deeply ingrained, culturally accepted convention of respect for elders and the related perception of their superiority to the young. But the potency of this worldview raises a serious question about the compatibility of ageist traditions and rights-based youth policy: How are certain goals for young people's development—for instance, autonomous decision making and critical thinking, which require vigorous debate—to be reconciled with the submissiveness expected of the young, especially when the young embrace this status quo, seeing it, perhaps, as a mainstay of stability in an otherwise harsh and unpredictable world? Whatever the answer, the behavior of our interlocutors was jarring in light of their professional positions. At one meeting, for example, a very high-placed, middle-aged official addressed the most youthful-looking of our researchers with an informal and, in this context, disparaging word for “you,” instead of the more polite, respectful

word that was reserved for older-looking members of our team; the official also called the researcher not by her given name but by a condescending diminutive. At the start of another meeting, a comparably high-level official haughtily sent a young staffer to fetch cigarettes from a car parked outside.

1.5 Assumptions Underlying the Research Process

The assumptions we had at the beginning of our research were based mostly on our knowledge of Kyrgyzstan's Soviet past, the economic and social breakdown that followed independence, the current problems facing young people, and the informal networks of patronage that currently play a much greater role in people's lives than do formal institutions of the state.

A key element of the country's Soviet legacy is the absence of a strong policymaking tradition—one that relies on informed analysis and debate, prioritizes the well-being of citizens over the interests of a ruling elite, and holds officials accountable for achieving measurable, demonstrably beneficial goals. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, policy was passed down through centralized, politicized directives by the Communist Party leadership. At the start of our research, we suspected that this fundamental shortcoming in policy formation had not been fully overcome and that weaknesses in youth policy reflect systemic problems in the practice of policymaking overall.

The dismantling of the Soviet command economy famously led to widespread poverty and social upheaval across the crumbling empire's 15 former republics. Kyrgyzstan, a small, resource-poor country, continues to bear this burden. After the political turmoil of 2010, the national economy contracted; it is now growing again, but far-reaching, sustainable prosperity remains a distant goal, hampered by bureaucratic red tape, dilapidated infrastructure, depleted human resources, and pervasive corruption. This suggests that many of the socioeconomic and human development challenges faced by young people fit into a wider context of troubles faced by the entire country. While this makes the task of solving some of these problems more daunting, it also offers hope that young people will recognize their vested interest in finding effective solutions and will contribute their energies to this process.

Finally, the breakdown of formal institutions after the Soviet collapse entrenched a phenomenon that had existed in Central Asia even in Soviet times: a deep reliance on extended families, acquaintances, and other informal personal networks for work, goods, services, and innumerable other benefits. Today, these personal networks often fill a vacuum left by weak state institutions, thereby undermining the institutions even further: The latter do not enjoy public trust and are seen as deeply dependent on personalities, rather than on rights or rules. This state of affairs has also hindered the advance of meritocracy over personal connections. Moreover, the less powerful groups within informal networks—young people among them—often fall prey to manipulation. On the one hand, this situation stymies development and modernization; on the other, it demonstrates the existence of an indispensable social safety net in the absence of strong, service-oriented official bodies. This paradox promises to be one of the most challenging contextual factors in developing policies dedicated to protecting young people’s rights and improving their opportunities for meaningful participation in society.



Youth and
Public Policy in

Kyrgyzstan



The Situation of Young People

2

While Kyrgyzstan faces certain challenges and opportunities that are youth-specific, many of the problems afflicting the country's young people mirror difficulties that confront the state and society as a whole. A significant number of these can be characterized as "post-Soviet": After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, previously functional political, social, and economic institutions broke down or lost their relevance and largely failed to adapt to new realities. As mentioned in Chapter 1, since independence, the country has gone through two popular uprisings. The implosion of the totalitarian state weakened governance and security, while the abrupt end of central planning severely undermined employment opportunities and the economy in general. This breakdown also resulted in the deterioration of major physical infrastructure—roads, power plants, hospitals, and schools—and the disappearance of "Soviet-trained specialists who have kept this all running," raising what one team of analysts has called "the increasingly likely prospect of catastrophic systemic collapse."⁵

In addition to navigating these shoals together with their elders, young people have been forced to confront a separate challenge: The transition from childhood to adulthood has also been greatly affected by the demise of the U.S.S.R. Under the Soviet system, the very concept of youth had been institutionalized at all age levels, from Little Octobrists (7–9 years), to Pioneers (9–14), and ultimately the more exclusive Communist Youth League, or Komsomol (14–26).⁶ These organizations indoctrinated children and young people ideologically, but also—together with a slew of other state-managed institutions—helped to organize their leisure time and to funnel them through government-run systems of education and employment. The state ensured that all Soviet citizens would have work and a living wage. After 1991, however, educational, professional, and leisure activities shifted from strong regimentation to near-total free fall. The state-endorsed system of communist values likewise disintegrated, leaving an ideological and, to some extent, moral vacuum. Thus, today's young people—defined

5. "Central Asia: Decay and Decline," Asia Report No. 201, International Crisis Group, Feb. 3, 2011, p. i.

6. Stefan B. Kirmse, "Bridging the Gap: The Concept of 'Youth' and the Study of Central Asia and the Caucasus," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 29, No. 4, December 2010, pp. 381–382; Merle Fainsod, "The Komsomols—A Study of Youth Under Dictatorship," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 45, No. 1, March 1951, p. 29.

by law as aged 14 to 28—have spent their formative years during a period of transformation, with both state and society undergoing constant political turbulence, socioeconomic difficulties, and ideological vacillations.

As noted in Chapter 1, young people played a prominent role in the uprisings of 2005 and 2010,⁷ and in the tragic clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks in June 2010. How they were mobilized and by whom remain topics of debate, considered in greater detail in Section 5.5; however, young people’s willingness to protest and, in some cases, even to fight physically point to their anger and sense of injustice or stunted opportunity. In 2009, a representative national survey of 1,000 young people found that they gave top priority to five values: health, peace, family and children, material well-being, and freedom.⁸ As general and universal as these concepts may seem, a significant number of young people did not feel optimistic about their ability to attain them, with 31 percent saying they “are afraid of the future or uncertain about tomorrow” and 23 percent saying they were dissatisfied with what was happening in the country and wanted “to change the situation by any means.”⁹

2.1 Socioeconomic Challenges and Labor Migration

Economic decline lies at the heart of many problems now plaguing Kyrgyzstan. The collapse of the integrated Soviet economic system and the end of subsidies from Moscow resulted not only in the underfunding of vital sectors but also in widespread unemployment. Early reforms aimed at building a market economy resulted in growth but did not lead to significant, sustainable improvements in most people’s standard of living; they also neglected to strengthen institutions crucial to business, such as independent, objective courts and law enforcement. Today, landlocked, mountainous Kyrgyzstan ranks in the bottom third of world economies by GDP,¹⁰

7. More than 50% (49 out of 87) of the protesters and onlookers killed in Bishkek’s Ala-Too Square on April 7, 2010, were under 35: “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” p. 5.

8. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 20.

9. *Ibid.*

10. World Bank data, available at <http://data.worldbank.org>.

has a \$400 million budget deficit,¹¹ and relies heavily on foreign aid.¹² The country's poverty and limited opportunities for employment, as well as the general weakness of the state, have conspired to fuel a huge shadow economy as well as corruption and criminalization.

A major indicator of the country's economic malaise is its scarcity of rewarding jobs and the attendant exodus of workers, many of them young. A study conducted by the National Statistics Committee in 2006 revealed an unemployment rate of 17 percent,¹³ while an economist who heads a research center in Bishkek calculated in mid-2011 that it is 20 percent.¹⁴ According to data gathered by the IMF, young people make up about 50 percent of the unemployed.¹⁵ A significant number of people migrate in search of work, both internally and to wealthier countries like Russia and Kazakhstan. According to a 2009–2010 report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as many as 700,000 Kyrgyz citizens—or 22 percent of the working-age population¹⁶—work abroad, and the number is growing; as of 2006, most labor migrants were “20- to 29-year-olds with general or specialized secondary education.”¹⁷

11. National budget 2011, breakdown by Central Asian Free Market Institute (CAFMI); project funded by the Budget Transparency and Accountability Program of Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan.

12. “Each Kyrgyz Citizen Owes \$500 to Foreign Creditors,” CA-News, Jan. 31, 2012. Accessed Jan. 31, 2012, <http://en.ca-news.org/news/440531>.

13. “First Review Under the Three-Year Arrangement Under the Extended Credit Facility and Request for Modification of Performance Criteria,” p. 50.

14. Diana Esenaliyeva, “The True Unemployment Rate in Kyrgyzstan Is 20%—Expert” (*Realny uroven bezrobotitsy v Kyrgyzstane sostavliaet 20%—Expert*), KyrTAG, May 20, 2011. Accessed Dec. 1, 2011, <http://www.kyrtag.kg/?q=news/6370>.

15. “First Review Under the Three-Year Arrangement Under the Extended Credit Facility and Request for Modification of Performance Criteria,” p. 49.

16. According to the 2009 Census, the working-age population numbers about 3.2 million. National Statistics Committee website. Accessed Oct. 28, 2011, <http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/node/23>.

17. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 32.

2.2 Education

The problem of young people's employability is aggravated by the sad state of the education system, characterized by low teacher qualification and pay, teacher shortages, a lack of textbooks, poorly designed curricula, disconnectedness from the labor market, rigidity, venality, and extortion. The deterioration of educational institutions, plus the conservatism of the educational establishment and the absence of a strategic vision for the role of education, all make it difficult to channel young people's potential into the country's development by conferring needed skills and knowledge. This steady decline in the quality of education and in its relevance to upward mobility threatens to do lasting damage to the image of education as something intrinsically valuable. A set of youth focus groups in Bishkek in 2010 found that "one notable problem of students' perception of the education system lies in the fact that education is often no longer regarded as a type of activity requiring personal and mental effort, time and a willingness to be involved in the learning process. [. . .] Young people have begun to perceive education as a form of filling free time."¹⁸

Problems such as those listed above permeate all levels of schooling; as a result, students' proficiency in basic subjects is disturbingly poor. In 2009, the latest round of testing by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)—which measured language, math, and science skills among 15-year-olds in 65 countries—ranked Kyrgyzstan in last place worldwide.¹⁹ More than 80 percent of the country's students displayed reading skills below a level at which they "begin to demonstrate [. . .] competencies that will enable them to participate effectively and productively in life"; scores in math and science were comparably poor.²⁰ Overall, the national curriculum has been called "outdated," "overloaded," and "incoherent," in part because changes to it have been piecemeal rather than holistic.²¹ In 2011,

18. Zaura Sydykova et al., "Giving Youth a Voice in Youth Policy," University of Central Asia and USAID, Bishkek, July 2010, p. 13.

19. "PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do. Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume 1)," OECD, 2010, p. 15. Accessed Oct. 23, 2011, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/10/61/48852548.pdf>.

20. Ibid.

21. "Central Asia: Decay and Decline," pp. 7–8.

a study in southern Kyrgyzstan found that only 8 percent of young people had learned to use a computer in school, while 12 percent had learned to “cut, sew, and stitch.”²²

Dropout rates are high, with a considerable number of teenagers leaving school to seek seasonal or permanent work. In 2011, the Education Ministry cited census data saying that nearly 30,000 children were not attending school as they should be,²³ while some nongovernmental groups believe the number could be as high as 120,000.²⁴ While poverty seems to be the leading reason youngsters discontinue their education, the ministry has pointed to additional causes such as crime, gangs, video games, and religious extremism.²⁵ Press reports have claimed that nearly one-third of secondary school students leave school after completing the mandatory 9 grades, instead of completing the available 11,²⁶ and some estimates suggest that only one-fifth of those who leave after the 9th grade go on to vocational schools.²⁷ A 2010 report by the OECD concluded that youth who leave the education system after 9th grade are “in most urgent need of policy support.”²⁸

Naturally, many young people’s opportunities beyond secondary school are diminished by the low quality of primary and secondary education.

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22. “Youth, Livelihoods and Peace Promotion: A Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice Study Among Youth aged 15–28 in Osh and Jalal-Abad Provinces, Kyrgyzstan 2011,” carried out by UNICEF in cooperation with the UNDP, UNHCR, and the Ministry of Youth Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, April–May 2011, p. 19. Accessed Oct. 20, 2011, http://www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/KAP_Study_Eng.pdf.

23. “Announcing One Month of School Attendance Monitoring” (*Obiavlén mesiachnik kontrolia po poseshchaemosti uchaschimisia uchebnykh zavedenii*), Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic, Oct. 21, 2011. Accessed Oct. 24, 2011, http://edu.gov.kg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=218:2011-10-21-09-12-42&catid=217:2011-10-21-09-11-44&Itemid=197.

24. Asyl Osmonalieva and Gulzat Abdurasulova, “Poverty Drives Child Labour in Kyrgyzstan,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Nov. 5, 2010. Accessed Oct. 23, 2011, <http://iwpr.net/report-news/poverty-drives-child-labour-kyrgyzstan>.

25. “Announcing One Month of School Attendance Monitoring”.

26. “In Kyrgyzstan, One-Third of Schoolchildren Leave Educational Institutions After 9th Grade” (*V Kyrgyzstane tret’ shkol’nikov posle 9-go klassa pokidaet uchebnye zavedeniia*), CA-News.org, Sept. 1, 2010. Subscription required: <http://ca-news.org/news/472221>.

27. “Reviews of National Policies for Education: Kyrgyz Republic 2010. Lessons from PISA,” OECD Publishing, 2010, p. 243.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

Representatives of two large, wealthy Western organizations that conduct vocational training in Kyrgyzstan complained recently that their trainees exhibit a declining level of literacy and numeracy, forcing instructors to digress from their training manuals and “start at a more basic level, since young people can’t read or do math properly.”²⁹ Teachers at the country’s vocational schools agree. Nonetheless, vocational education remains a popular option for many young people. It is divided into two levels, sometimes called VET I, which is more hands-on, and VET II, which tends to be more academic and offers accelerated access to institutions of higher learning for those who choose to continue their education. VET I schools are almost entirely state-funded and, to some extent, “are expected to take care of vulnerable low-performing youngsters, particularly those without parental support or living in difficult economic conditions,” but they “have only limited interest in being a second-chance pathway.”³⁰

Tertiary, or higher, education also experiences numerous problems, from low quality to egregious violations of students’ rights. Many of these have come about as a result of the rapid, poorly regulated expansion of higher education after the Soviet collapse. In the U.S.S.R., institutions of higher learning were attended by a minority of young people—only 15 percent of secondary school graduates, according to one study.³¹ Since independence, the number of higher education institutions in Kyrgyzstan has quintupled, from 10 to 50,³² and the number of registered students rose to 243,000 in the 2008–2009 academic year, “almost half of them studying in some form of distance or part-time arrangements.”³³ (For comparison, the number of stu-

29. Interview with NGO staffers, Bishkek, November 2011.

30. “Reviews of National Policies for Education: Kyrgyz Republic 2010. Lessons from PISA,” OECD Publishing, 2010, pp. 244–245. For an excellent discussion of Kyrgyzstan’s vocational education system, see Chapter 8 of the same publication.

31. Duishon Shamatov, “Impact of Standardized Tests on Equity Issues in Kyrgyzstan,” *European Education* (special issue, “New Educational Assessment Regimes in Eurasia: Impacts, Issues and Implications,” guest edited by Alan DeYoung and Todd Drummond), 2011, p. 6.

32. *Ibid.*

33. “Reviews of National Policies for Education: Kyrgyz Republic 2010. Lessons from PISA,” pp. 311–312.

dents in both types of VET schools in 2006 was under 70,000.³⁴) While degrees from institutions of higher learning are still sought after, a significant number of people regard their true value skeptically.³⁵ This stems in part from the low quality of higher education and, also, from the understanding that many degrees “were purchased rather than earned.”³⁶ Another factor eroding the perceived value of education is the mismatch between graduates’ studies and the demands of the labor market. Many people with a higher education remain unemployed or are forced to work in spheres unrelated to their degrees.³⁷ According to research published in 2007, “every year anywhere between 50% and 80% of university graduates join the long list of unemployed youth in the country.”³⁸ A number of other challenges faced by post-secondary students, particularly in terms of their access to rights and opportunities, are considered in some detail in Sections 4.1 and 5.5.

2.3 Health Care

For many young people, health problems begin when they are infants, in part attributable to widespread micronutrient deficiency, which has been identified by some medical professionals as a major threat to physical health and intellectual capacity.³⁹ The lack of crucial vitamins and minerals—particularly, iron, iodine, Vitamin A, folic acid, and zinc—can severely hinder children’s development as they get older. In 2006, UNICEF found alarming signs of far-reaching, chronic micronutrient deficiency in Kyr-

34. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

35. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 27.

36. “Central Asia: Decay and Decline,” p. i.

37. Tatyana Tretyakova et al., “Analytical Note: Problems of Youth Participation in the Development of the Republic” (in Russian), published by the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth Policy, the Youth Project of the UN Volunteer Program and the OSCE, Bishkek, 2006, p. 35, n5.

38. Shamatov, “Impact of Standardized Tests on Equity Issues in Kyrgyzstan,” p. 6.

39. “Kyrgyzstan: The Hidden Threat of Micronutrient Deficiency,” IRIN News, Nov. 17, 2010. Accessed Dec. 1, 2011, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=91119>.

gyrgyzstan and, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, nearly 40 percent of women in the country suffer from iron-deficiency anemia.⁴⁰

More generally, the problems beleaguering medical services resemble those in education: Though health care is officially state-funded, it “in fact survives on informal contributions and bribes paid by ordinary citizens; the services are beset by a deficit of trained, qualified personnel and demoralized by low pay and grim working conditions.”⁴¹ As an example, between 1998 and 2008, the number of pediatricians fell by nearly 70 percent.⁴² And, in 2008, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), Kyrgyzstan’s maternal mortality rate was the highest in the states of the former Soviet Union.⁴³ Young people living in rural areas and those without a full set of residency documents, like internal migrants and refugees, have the hardest time accessing decent health care. Moreover, the declining quality of medical education makes the problem worse, as new generations of medical personnel seem grossly underprepared to provide acceptably professional services. Some older physicians “regard most of those trained in the past 15 years as unqualified.”⁴⁴ According to the UNDP, a July 2006 study measuring the levels of knowledge among Kyrgyzstani students on a 5-point scale gave medical students in nine educational institutions a score between 2 and 2.6.⁴⁵

Kyrgyzstan’s young people also have trouble getting information about reproductive health and getting professional, youth-friendly medical treatment for related conditions, including sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).⁴⁶ One obstacle is the stigma, awkwardness and moral judgments

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40. Ibid.

41. “Central Asia: Decay and Decline,” p. 2.

42. “Review of the Situation on Mother and Newborn Healthcare in the Kyrgyz Republic for the Period of 2008–2009,” UNICEF, 2010, p. 14. Cited in “Central Asia: Decay and Decline,” p. 3.

43. “Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990–2008. Estimates Developed by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank,” WHO, 2010, pp. 28–32. Accessed Oct. 27, 2011, http://www.childinfo.org/files/Trends_in_Maternal_Mortality_1990_to_2008.pdf.

44. “Central Asia: Decay and Decline,” p. 2.

45. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 27.

46. Ibid., p. 37.

associated with this set of topics.⁴⁷ The latter applies even to the country's medical personnel: A recent survey by a Danish aid organization found that 50 percent of doctors and nurses believe that HIV-positive people have been singled out for divine punishment.⁴⁸ The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and its peer-to-peer counseling program, Y-PEER, have spent years lobbying for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education in Kyrgyzstan, sometimes encountering resistance from educators and parents alike.⁴⁹ They have found that the country's young people are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection, with 52 percent of officially registered cases in 2007 involving individuals aged 15–29.⁵⁰ The UNFPA has also noted increases in STDs among those aged 15–24, in unintended pregnancies among girls under 18, and in the number of registered abortions.⁵¹ Young people are generally not well informed about family planning techniques: Although “data on abortions in Kyrgyzstan is contradictory and incomplete,” some research claims that the average 22-year-old woman has already had one abortion and that 70 percent of pregnancies in Kyrgyzstan end that way.⁵² At the same time, health care reforms and changes to school curricula are doing less, rather than more, to improve young people's access to information and treatment, as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

2.4 Corruption and Criminalization

Another major challenge faced by Kyrgyzstan since independence is greatly increased crime and corruption, with young people affected at least as deeply as their elders. Levels of corruption in the country are abysmally

47. Interview with youth specialist, Bishkek, July 2011.

48. David Trilling, “HIV Myths Nurture Risky Behavior on Central Asia's Heroin Highway,” EurasiaNet.org, Feb. 4, 2011. Accessed Oct. 26, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62825>.

49. Interviews with youth reproductive health activists in Bishkek, July 2011, and Osh, November 2011.

50. “Half-Year Y-PEER National Report,” UNFPA in Kyrgyzstan, 2008. Accessed Oct. 26, 2011, <http://kyrgyzstan.unfpa.org/?reports=211>.

51. “Preventing HIV Among Young People” (in Russian), UNFPA-Kyrgyzstan brochure, 2010.

52. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 38.

high, creating an extremely unhealthy environment for young people's maturation. In 2010, Kyrgyzstan ranked 164th out of 178 countries in Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index. The table below shows the country's rankings from 1999 through 2010 (excluding 2000–2002, when no data were available). Kyrgyzstan's average score on a scale from 0 for "highly corrupt" to 10 for "highly clean" hovers around 2, suggesting the systemic nature of corruption and the depth of its entrenchment in society.⁵³

The high corruption rate bodes ill for the country's future and for its young people, who learn how to survive in the corrupt system and themselves gradually become agents of corruption. For example, according to a 2010 study conducted in Bishkek, young people see corruption in education in two basic ways: as "a kind of necessary evil that is justified by the low wages of teachers or instructors" and as "a tool that allows students to free up time they would prefer to use for other types of activities by paying a bribe to a teacher whose course is of no educational interest to them."⁵⁴ For those young people who do not want to work in corrupt environments, it becomes increasingly difficult to find ways to apply their knowledge, to find their niches professionally, and to live in accordance with their values. A recent study on young people's role in decision making at the level of local government showed that they considered the non-transparency of decision-making processes to be the main obstacle to their active participation.⁵⁵ Young people felt that "nothing depends on them; nothing will change with their participation, since all procedures are corrupt."⁵⁶ This sentiment suggests, not surprisingly, that the pervasiveness of corruption seriously undermines public trust in government and periodically makes young people feel helpless in dealing with the state through established channels rather than by more radical means.

53. Data available on Transparency International's website. Accessed Oct. 30, 2011, <http://www.transparency.org>.

54. "Giving Youth a Voice," p. 13.

55. Chinara Satkynaliyeva et al., "Improving the Participation and Role of Youth in the Process of Decision-Making at the Local Level" (in Russian), Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan and Lawyers of Kyrgyzstan Association, Bishkek, April 2011, p. 18.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Table 1

Corruption Perceptions Index for Kyrgyzstan 1999–2010

Year	Country rank	Total number of countries	Score
2010	164	178	2.0
2009	162	180	1.8–2.1
2008	166	180	1.7–1.9
2007	150	179	2.0–2.2
2006	142	163	2.0–2.6
2005	130	158	2.3
2004	122	145	2.2
2003	118	133	2.1
1999	87	99	2.2

Equally detrimental to public trust in government is the complicated web of links between state officials and organized crime. “Criminal groups have become a powerful force, able in some regions to dictate ‘the rules of the game’ to local authorities,” then-president Roza Otunbayeva told regional leaders in February 2011. “If this continues, then tomorrow criminal groups will be appointing provincial governors and other officials,” she said.⁵⁷ Later that month, a deputy interior minister told reporters that “organized crime groups have a ‘roof’ [i.e., protection] in the Interior Ministry, prosecutors’ offices, State Committee for National Security, and courts.”⁵⁸ Recent research also suggests that in Kyrgyzstan, as in other Central Asian

57. Official website of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic (in Russian). Accessed March 20, 2011, <http://www.president.kg/ru/posts/4d6cf5527d5d2e720d000811>.

58. Natasha Yefimov, “Kyrgyzstan: Bishkek Looks to Georgia as Role Model for Justice Overhaul,” EurasiaNet.org, March 21, 2011. Accessed March 21, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/63116>.

states, high-placed officials may be protecting or otherwise colluding with major drug traffickers.⁵⁹

How and where to seek justice is unclear: A considerable proportion of Kyrgyzstanis do not feel protected by the police or judiciary, despite many years of attempted reforms. A national poll conducted in April–May 2011 found that only 25 percent of respondents had a favorable opinion of the police and only 21 percent had a favorable opinion of the courts; unfavorable opinions of the two were held by 63 percent and 65 percent of respondents, respectively.⁶⁰ The overall legal system, including law enforcement and the judiciary, is permeated by lack of professionalism and corruption and has retained much of the Soviet era’s pro-prosecution bias: In 2009, only 1.7 percent of criminal cases ended in acquittal, while 28.6 percent were closed without a verdict, and 44.3 percent ended in convictions.⁶¹

That said, young people in Kyrgyzstan have a broad range of feelings about criminality, violence and aggression, “from concern for their safety to [. . .] desire to join the criminal world,” sometimes perceiving such affiliations as a guarantee of safety and prestige in view of the low credibility of law-enforcement bodies.⁶² In one small-scale assessment of youth needs in 2010, a majority of the young people surveyed said “criminals and gangs were a destructive force in Kyrgyzstan and for youth in particular,” but some young people “spoke very highly of the protection and support offered to entire communities by criminals,” praising them for filling “a vacuum left by a lack of civil society or public-sector leadership.”⁶³

Official statistics for January–October 2011 show that nearly half of newly registered criminal offenders in that period were under the age of

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 59. David Lewis, “High Times on the Silk Road: The Central Asian Paradox,” *World Policy Journal*, Spring 2010, pp. 39–49.

60. Kyrgyzstan National Opinion Poll, April 25–May 13, 2011, carried out by SIAR–Bishkek for Baltic Surveys/Gallup on behalf of IRI, funded by USAID, p. 39.

61. Data supplied by the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic.

62. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 47.

63. Daniel Oliver and Karin Akins, “Youth Assessment: Kyrgyz Republic,” International Youth Foundation, October 2010, p. 13.

30 and 8.4 percent were minors.⁶⁴ The crimes most often committed by the 14-to-29 age group tended to be theft, robbery, and disorderly conduct, with drug-related crimes growing in frequency in the 25-to-29 subset; the primary causes seem to be poverty, idleness, and unemployment.⁶⁵ Elements of unlawful behavior have seeped down into a very young cohort. According to figures from the Interior Ministry, every year about two thousand schoolchildren are recruited to take part in various types of criminal activity.⁶⁶ Gangs and racketeering by schoolchildren among their peers have become major problems that, some researchers believe, threaten “to sow the seeds of criminal activity among a whole generation.”⁶⁷ Official statistics show that youth crime rates grew in the first 10 months of 2011 compared with the year-earlier period by 26.5 percent among 14-to-17-year-olds, 16.9 percent among 18-to-24-year-olds, and 20.4 percent among students of all ages.⁶⁸

One crime-related topic that warrants further exploration is “the role of sex work among youth in Kyrgyzstan.”⁶⁹ According to a 2004 investigation by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) called “Lost Children of Central Asia,” prostitution is “widespread in Kyrgyzstan.” The report stated that “while often hidden from Western observers and the donor community, a large percentage of young girls and boys, typically aged 11–16, are involved in the sex trade” and that “more than 4,000 women, many of them younger than 16,” have been sold or involved in prostitution by human traffickers.⁷⁰

64. “Socioeconomic Situation of the Kyrgyz Republic, January–October 2011: A Monthly Publication” (in Kyrgyz and Russian), National Statistics Committee, Bishkek 2011, pp. 121–122. Accessed Dec. 9, 2011, <http://www.stat.kg/rus1/common.files/obzor9k.pdf>.

65. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 47.

66. Nurjamal Djakubova and Alexandra Melnikova, “Report on a Study of the Prevalence and Spread of School Violence in Kyrgyzstan” (*Otchet po issledovaniuu rasprostranennosti i dinamiki nasiliia v shkolakh Kyrgyzstana*), UNICEF, March 2011.

67. “Giving Youth a Voice in Youth Policy,” p.11.

68. “Socioeconomic Situation of the Kyrgyz Republic, January–October 2011: A Monthly Publication” (in Kyrgyz and Russian), National Statistics Committee, Bishkek 2011, pp. 121–122. Accessed Dec. 9, 2011, <http://www.stat.kg/rus1/common.files/obzor9k.pdf>.

69. “Youth Assessment: Kyrgyz Republic,” p. 16.

70. Ibid.

2.5 Traditions and Values

The ideological vacuum left by the Soviet collapse, and the relative political liberalization that followed it, exposed young people to various competing influences, worldviews, and agendas; at the same time, economic stratification and the breakdown of state institutions led to greater social fragmentation. These tumultuous changes have fueled varying, sometimes contradictory, trends in young people's interpersonal relations and behavior. Paradoxically, researchers have noted both a growing sense of individualism among the young⁷¹ and, at the same time, a strong reliance on personal connections,⁷² a resurgence of pre-Soviet patriarchal traditions,⁷³ and a heightened respect for religion.⁷⁴

As mentioned in Chapter 1, informal support networks centering on extended families have long played a crucial role in Kyrgyzstani society and, within those relations, young people have been expected to respect and obey elders. This tradition of dutiful submissiveness is even enshrined in the Constitution, which says that “respect for elders and care for relatives and close ones is the responsibility of every individual.”⁷⁵ Likewise, the Law On Reproductive Rights of Citizens calls for a program of “gender development” that upholds “positive national traditions” and “the priorities of parents, or those acting in their stead, in determining and fulfilling family functions.”⁷⁶ The emphasis on parental authority is stronger in some places

71. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 5.

72. For a detailed examination of the power of informal personal networks, see Scott Radnitz *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia* (London: Cornell University Press, 2010).

73. Summary of gender-related challenges, UNDP-Kyrgyz Republic website, 2010. Accessed Dec. 12, 2011, <http://www.undp.kg/en/what-we-do/cross-cutting-themes/gender>. Also, Barbara Wejnert and Almagul Djumbaeva, “From Patriarchy to Egalitarianism: Parenting Roles in Democratizing Poland and Kyrgyzstan,” in *Marriage & Family Review* (New York: Haworth Press, 2004), p. 167. Accessed Dec. 12, 2011, <http://www.law.buffalo.edu/baldycenter/pdfs/Regional07Wejnert3.pdf>.

74. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 53; “Kyrgyz Youth Thinks That US Is a Threat to Islam, but Dreams About Living and Studying There,” 24.kg, Oct. 24, 2008. Accessed Dec. 11, 2011, <http://eng.24.kg/community/2008/10/24/6368.html>.

75. Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, as amended June 27, 2010, Article 37.2.

76. Law On Reproductive Rights of Citizens and Guarantees for Their Realization, Article 4.

and situations than in others. In Jalalabad Province, for example, 42 percent of nearly 2,300 school and college students said in 2011 that obedience was an important trait to cultivate in young people, while only 16 percent said the same of independence.⁷⁷

Deference toward elders existed during the decades of Soviet rule as well, but the state counteracted the power of older generations somewhat by playing a much more prominent role than today in providing young people with education and work. Now, young people not uncommonly rely on their families economically and, although they make many decisions on their own, parents are often considered the best advisors for certain major choices.⁷⁸ A recent set of surveys conducted under the auspices of the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Migration (prior to its fission and partial merger with the Youth Ministry) showed that 44 percent to 68 percent of young people plan to solicit their parents' counsel in choosing a profession, while a much smaller proportion, between 6 percent and 15 percent, said they would rely on other sources of information.⁷⁹ Some researchers argue that today's globalized world may offer young people an advantage over their elders in acquiring skills and knowledge conducive to upward mobility.⁸⁰ But it remains unclear whether the social and economic constraints on young people in Kyrgyzstan will prove too formidable for such a "trading places" scenario to play out.

Apart from ageism, a broader set of pre-Soviet, "traditional" relations—including a strong patriarchal streak—is regaining prominence in certain Kyrgyzstani communities, especially in rural areas. Some analysts worry that this trend may have a negative impact both on young people's socioeconomic status and on their human rights, particularly the rights and opportunities available to women. While women in Kyrgyzstan "generally

77. Surveys conducted in three provinces (Chui, Issyk-Kul, and Jalalabad) by the Labor Ministry in the middle of 2011; results provided by Dr. Hannelore Kress, senior advisor on labor market policy.

78. "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," p. 44.

79. Surveys conducted in three provinces (Chui, Issyk-Kul, and Jalalabad) by the Labor Ministry in the middle of 2011; results provided by Dr. Hannelore Kress, senior advisor on labor market policy.

80. Hans Ibold, "Disjuncture 2.0: Youth, Internet Use and Cultural Identity in Bishkek," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 29, No. 4, December 2010, pp. 521–535.

enjoy fewer restrictions on their lives than women in other Central Asian countries,”⁸¹ some researchers contend that increasing gender inequality has become “one of the major characteristics of the post-Soviet period.”⁸²

Patriarchal attitudes in the country vary in intensity, but, according to a number of experts, they persist, and a “cultural framework of discriminatory values and religious beliefs [. . .] confine women to the private sphere,” limiting their “active participation in public life.”⁸³ Data for 2010 showed the female youth unemployment rate to be consistently higher than the rate for young men,⁸⁴ particularly in the south,⁸⁵ and rights activists have noted a high incidence of gender-based violence⁸⁶ and bride-kidnapping,⁸⁷ although both are punishable under Kyrgyzstan’s Criminal Code. (For a more detailed discussion of bride-kidnapping, see Section 5.2.) Polygamy, too, is officially prohibited by law, but in practice—based on Muslim traditions, and perhaps attributable to the higher rate of labor migration among men⁸⁸ and thus a “surplus” of women in some areas—there are cases of men having two or three wives. Moreover, while the average age of women at the time of their first registered marriage has been rising in the post-Soviet period, anecdotal evidence suggests that there may be a growing incidence of unregistered, illegal, family-arranged marriages of underage girls: “Assuming that a young daughter-in-law will be more obedient and patient,

81. David King, *Cultures of the World: Kyrgyzstan* (New York: Benchmark Books, 2005), p. 71.

82. Summary of gender-related challenges, UNDP-Kyrgyz Republic website, 2010. Accessed Dec. 12, 2011, <http://www.undp.kg/en/what-we-do/cross-cutting-themes/gender>.

83. Interview with Dr. Nurgul Djanaeva, “What Is the Status of Women in Kyrgyzstan?” Association for Women’s Rights in Development, June 11, 2009. Accessed Dec. 12, 2011, <http://www.awid.org/Library/What-is-the-status-of-women-in-Kyrgyzstan>.

84. “First Review Under the Three-Year Arrangement Under the Extended Credit Facility and Request for Modification of Performance Criteria,” p. 49.

85. “Youth, Livelihoods and Peace Promotion,” p. 8.

86. Project Description: Developing Mechanisms to Provide Women with Social and Legal Protection Against Violence” (in Russian), SFK/EU, Feb. 11, 2009. Accessed Dec. 13, 2011, <http://women.soros.kg>.

87. For a detailed analysis of bride-kidnapping, see Russell Kleinbach et al., “Kidnapping for Marriage (Ala Kachuu) in a Kyrgyz Village,” *Central Asian Survey*, June 2005, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 191–202.

88. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 34.

[families] try to get their hands on brides before they come of age, not giving them a chance even to get a full secondary education.”⁸⁹ The national census conducted in 2009—although the minimum legal age for marriage at the time was 16—recorded 92 unregistered marriages to 15-year-old girls and one to a girl younger than 15.⁹⁰ As these figures are self-reported, it is possible that the true number nationwide is higher.

It is important to point out that the force of “traditional” gender stereotypes can have as detrimental an effect on young men as young women. In its recent report on youth, the UNDP noted that local media propagate “traditional images of masculinity, including a cultural norm that real men should be in good physical and sexual shape. [. . .] This leads to the neglect of illnesses among boys and young men, including parasitic infections, STDs, iodine deficiencies, etc.”⁹¹ Moreover, “men refrain from showing their feelings in public, keep their problems to themselves and visit doctors more rarely than women. This leads to considerable degradation of their quality of life and affects their ability to work and their psycho-emotional status.”⁹²

Traditional notions of masculinity can also undermine the sustainability of young families because they sometimes limit spouses’ earning power. One study in 2004 found that Kyrgyzstani men who were not working, and thus did not “fit the image of a successful man and breadwinner,” were far less likely to help their wives with housework and child care.⁹³ The self-esteem of unemployed men appeared to be too hard-hit to allow them “to break the gender-role boundaries” and engage in activities perceived as non-masculine.⁹⁴ But this unwillingness of men to participate in household chores and child care could severely hamper women’s ability to find paid work and contribute to the family income. (According to a 2007 household survey by the National Statistics Committee, the percentage of women

89. Subsection on “Early Marriages” (in Russian), Project Description: “Developing Mechanisms to Provide Women with Social and Legal Protection Against Violence.”

90. National Statistics Committee website. Accessed Oct. 28, 2011, <http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/node/23>.

91. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” pp. 35–36.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

93. “From Patriarchy to Egalitarianism: Parenting Roles in Democratizing Poland and Kyrgyzstan,” p. 164.

94. *Ibid.*

among employed youth, then classified as 14-to-35 years of age, was 39.3 percent.⁹⁵)

Meanwhile, in terms of popular perception, traditionalism and its attendant “hierarchy of social status based on sex and age”⁹⁶ are often seen as a bastion of stability and family values protecting people against the confusing onslaught of challenges and ideas that have come with Kyrgyzstan’s exposure to globalization. In the words of a Kyrgyz movie director whose 2007 feature film glorified the abduction of young women for marriage, “the West condemns bride-kidnapping, but they offer us nothing that we can follow [instead], except gay and lesbian marriages, HIV infections, divorce, orphan kids, brutality, violence, and drugs. All of these things are coming from the West; we never had that before.”⁹⁷

2.6 Religion

According to various studies, the number of young people drawn to religion—perhaps in search of an operational system of moral values in an environment of injustice and ethical disorientation—is growing.⁹⁸ Some research has indicated that “young people view Islam as not only a cultural identity, but as a political identity” and have expressed interest in the creation of “political parties with ties to Islam.”⁹⁹ While both of these tendencies fit into a larger trend of the country’s post-Soviet re-Islamization, authorities worry that exposure to certain teachings could radicalize the young and draw them into extremist activity.

The traditional variety of Muslim thought prevalent in Kyrgyzstan since at least the 18th century, though suppressed to a considerable extent in

95. Daniel Oliver and Karin Akins, “Youth Assessment: Kyrgyz Republic,” International Youth Foundation, October 2010, p. 15.

96. “From Patriarchy to Egalitarianism: Parenting Roles in Democratizing Poland and Kyrgyzstan,” p. 152.

97. Interview with Ernest Abdyjaparov in Thomas Morton, “Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan—Part 1,” Vice.com, Dec. 5, 2011. Accessed Dec. 6, 2011, <http://www.vice.com/vice-news/bride-kidnapping-in-kyrgyzstan-part-1>.

98. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 53; “Kyrgyz Youth Thinks That US Is a Threat to Islam, but Dreams About Living and Studying There.”

99. “Youth Assessment: Kyrgyz Republic,” p. 14.

Soviet times, has been the moderate Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, and most Kyrgyz observe a “relaxed version” that is “best understood as a syncretic combination of Islam and earlier shamanistic practices.”¹⁰⁰ For example, drinking alcohol is widely accepted throughout Kyrgyzstan. Since the liberalization of policy concerning religion in the 1990s, however, more conservative Muslim groups, “nontraditional” in the Kyrgyz context, like Salafis and Wahhabis, have made inroads in the country. While there have been unquestionable indications of radical Islamist activity in Central Asia, and some locally active groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, openly oppose the existence of a secular state, very little is known about the true size and scope of such organizations and their activities in the territory of Kyrgyzstan. “The government keeps focusing on legal [religious] organizations,” a law professor specializing in religion told our team, but “we don’t study the underground movements.”¹⁰¹ He added that young people are often attracted to radical groups because extremist positions fit well with youthful maximalism.

The religiousness of young people should be neither disregarded nor exaggerated and deserves further study from multiple angles. The number of officially registered mosques in the country has reportedly grown from 39 in 1991¹⁰² to 1,500 in 2006, and 1,886 in 2008.¹⁰³ According to national polls conducted in 2011, between 85 percent and 88 percent of Kyrgyzstanis self-identify as Muslim, yet only 24 percent said they had attended a religious service within the month preceding the poll.¹⁰⁴ Among young people surveyed in 2009, 73.9 percent said they view religion positively, while 19.6

100. Laurence Mitchell, *The Bradt Travel Guide: Kyrgyzstan* (Bucks, England: Bradt Travel Guides, 2008), p. 23.

101. Interview, Bishkek, November 2011.

102. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 53.

103. A. Murataliyeva, “In Kyrgyzstan the Number of Mosques Has Caught Up to the Number of Schools” (*V Kyrgyzstane kolichestvo mechetei sravnialos s kolichestvom shkol*), reprint of report by Kabar news agency, Oct. 13, 2008. Accessed Oct. 30, 2011, <http://www.for.kg/ru/news/73760/>.

104. Kyrgyzstan National Opinion Polls carried out by SIAR-Bishkek for Baltic Surveys/Gallup on behalf of IRI, funded by USAID: April 25–May 13, 2011, poll, p. 59; Aug. 24–Sept. 10, 2011, poll, p. 54.

percent viewed “religious sects” positively.¹⁰⁵ A 2008 Gallup poll found that 10 percent of youth aged 15–24 and 16 percent of those aged 25–34 said they pray five times a day.¹⁰⁶ And about one-third of the young people surveyed in 2009 said they supported marriages “conducted according to religious rites only,” without state registration.¹⁰⁷ A youth assessment in 2010 found that, contrary to adults, who harbored “a suspicion of Islam and its local leaders, young people [in a set of small focus groups], particularly those of poorer backgrounds, expressed great reverence.”¹⁰⁸

It seems that Islam in today’s Kyrgyzstan has the potential both to unite young people and to isolate them. A small, nonrepresentative survey among 15-to-25-year-olds in 2008 showed that 62.8 percent identified themselves first as Muslim and only then as Kyrgyz; this result was particularly intriguing since about 53 percent of the respondents identified themselves as nonreligious, suggesting that their “Muslimness” reflected a sense of general self-identification more than faith per se.¹⁰⁹ The following year, a much larger, nationwide, representative study among young people found that 68 percent felt the state should be secular,¹¹⁰ but the smaller 2008 survey had found that 51 percent of respondents believed the secular state should include “Islamic values”—as in Malaysia or Turkey. Even among respondents in this smaller study, most of whom were students of secular educational institutions in Bishkek and Osh, 14.3 percent saw Kyrgyzstan’s political future as “purely Islamic” (like Iran or Saudi Arabia), and only 1.3 percent (4 out of 307) saw the country becoming a full democracy like the United States.¹¹¹

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105. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 97.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

107. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

108. “Youth Assessment: Kyrgyz Republic,” p. 13.

109. “Kyrgyz Youth Thinks That US Is a Threat to Islam, but Dreams About Living and Studying There.”

110. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 23.

111. “Kyrgyz Youth Thinks That US Is a Threat to Islam, but Dreams About Living and Studying There.”

A number of possible fault lines, including fissures based on ethnicity and gender, separate those young people who adhere strongly to Islam and those who don't. One can be found in education. According to data from 2008–2009, Kyrgyzstan had 7 Islamic institutions of higher learning and about 50 to 70 madrasahs,¹¹² plus an unspecified number of unregistered religious schools.¹¹³ The madrasahs do not receive accreditation from the Ministry of Education and Science; they do not have standardized curricula or teaching methodologies and their diplomas are not recognized outside the religious community, thus creating barriers to young people's future employment.¹¹⁴ Another potential minefield is the intersection of religiousness and ethnicity. Ethnic Uzbeks, who make up Kyrgyzstan's largest minority and are concentrated in the country's south, are widely considered to be more religious than ethnic Kyrgyz. Against the backdrop of that stereotype, at least two powerful government officials have leveled accusations of extremism at Uzbeks without rigorous investigation or sufficient evidence.¹¹⁵ Such allegations have been particularly divisive in the aftermath of the interethnic bloodshed between the two groups in June 2010. Finally, some women's rights activists fear that "the growing presence of conservative religious institutions can strengthen patriarchal norms and may later create additional barriers to women's participation in political processes, education, and paid work."¹¹⁶

112. "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," p. 28; "In Kyrgyzstan the Number of Mosques Has Caught Up to the Number of Schools."

113. "Youth Assessment: Kyrgyz Republic," p. 13.

114. "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," p. 28; interview with law professor specializing in religion, Bishkek, November 2011.

115. David Trilling, "Kyrgyzstan: Bishkek Announces 'Terrorist' Haul," EurasiaNet.org, Oct. 10, 2011. Accessed Oct. 10, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64293>; "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Events in Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010," Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC), April 2011, p. 80.

116. Interview with Dr. Nurgul Djanaeva, "What Is the Status of Women in Kyrgyzstan?," Association for Women's Rights in Development, June 11, 2009. Accessed Dec. 12, 2011, <http://www.awid.org/Library/What-is-the-status-of-women-in-Kyrgyzstan>.

2.7 Language

One of the thorniest and least-often mentioned challenges for youth policy involves the issue of language proficiency—a major factor determining young people’s access to information and opportunities, including employment and education. Over the past two decades, as described under the “Demography” rubric in Chapter 3, Kyrgyzstan’s ethnic composition has changed dramatically, particularly in terms of the diminishing size and influence of its ethnic Russian population. After independence, policymakers were eager to cast off the yoke of colonialism and reassert a cultural identity not dictated by Moscow. In 2004, Kyrgyz became the country’s state language, while Russian was declared its “official language.” The education system, however, was not sufficiently prepared for this new emphasis on Kyrgyz—teaching materials and methodologies were inadequate. Young people have been shortchanged by this poorly planned policy redirection. Worse, language proficiency is often invoked in populist political rhetoric, making it more significant as a marker of identity than a practical tool for enhancing opportunities. As noted in one recent youth study, “many students do not view their lack of knowledge of Russian as a problem of a purely educational nature, from the view of language as a skill or educational tool; instead it is transferred into the sphere of ethnic identification and justified on these grounds.”¹¹⁷

According to 2009 census data, Russian remains the most widespread second language among young people. Of the 930,000 people aged 14–28 who speak Russian, only 12 percent are native speakers; by comparison, 92 percent of the more than 1.3 million young people who speak Kyrgyz are native speakers and 88 percent of the 270,000 or so who speak Uzbek are native speakers.¹¹⁸ Just over 40 percent of young people speak only one language.¹¹⁹ For those whose sole language is Kyrgyz or Uzbek, monolingualism often limits access to reliable information and promising employment. Russian is more useful than either for acquiring and having ready access to

117. “Giving Youth a Voice,” p. 13.

118. National Statistics Committee website. Accessed Oct. 28, 2011, <http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/node/23>.

119. *Ibid.*

various sorts of knowledge—from academic and technical to cultural and current affairs—and being bilingual is naturally more marketable than being monolingual.¹²⁰ In the case of labor migrants, a lack of foreign language ability relegates them to menial jobs and makes them more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. In Russia, which is the prime destination for Kyrgyzstan’s migrants, the Federal Migration Service recently cited research estimating “that more than 20 percent of migrants from Central Asia do not speak Russian and 50 percent cannot independently fill out a simple form in the language.”¹²¹

Kyrgyzstan’s incoherent and shortsighted language policies—discussed in greater detail in Section 4.5—have created numerous obstacles to young people’s education. The primary language of instruction in schools varies. A large number of schools have Kyrgyz as the main language of instruction,¹²² but Russian-language schools are often believed to provide a superior education because of “better access to textbooks and an older generation of Soviet-trained teachers.”¹²³ Also, teaching at institutions of higher learning is primarily in Russian, which causes big problems for students without sufficient Russian-language proficiency.¹²⁴

Despite official policies promoting ethnic harmony and tolerance, lawmakers and other politicians regularly stoke ethnocentric sentiments, particularly where the sensitive topic of language is concerned. In June 2011, for example, two parliament deputies from the then-ruling coalition (and from the same party as President Atambayev) announced that they would no longer consider bills or other documents written in Russian: “We’ve decided that all documentation must be prepared only in the state language,

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120. Britta Korth, “Language Attitudes Towards Kyrgyz and Russian: Discourse, Education and Policy in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan,” Peter Lang Publishing, 2005, p. 242. Accessed via Google Books: <http://bit.ly/tcUG1F>.

121. Rachel Van Horne, “Russia: Central Asian Labor Migrants Face Language Barrier,” EurasiaNet.org, Oct. 21, 2011. Accessed Oct. 21, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64348>.

122. “Giving Youth a Voice,” p. 13.

123. Kate Lapham, “Kyrgyzstan: Minority Children Need More Than State Language,” EurasiaNet.org, June 21, 2011. Accessed June 21, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/63717>.

124. “Giving Youth a Voice,” p. 13.

and the agenda must be in the state language,” one of the lawmakers was quoted as saying. “And why on earth do speakers deliver their presentations at faction meetings in Russian? It’s time to end this practice.”¹²⁵

As pointed out by a group of youth researchers, “in this context, fluency and linguistic competence in Kyrgyz are seen [by young people] as a manifestation of citizenship and associated with patriotism, leading to disagreements or minor clashes of an interethnic nature on a day-to-day basis.”¹²⁶ Our research team saw an example of this during one of our youth focus groups, when a young man who lacked proficiency in Russian justified his choice of Kyrgyz as the language of our discussion not because he would feel more comfortable expressing himself but by citing several politicized slogans, like “it is our state language.” It is worth noting that language proficiency does not always match ethnicity, particularly in Bishkek, where a considerable number of ethnic Kyrgyz speak Russian more proficiently than they speak Kyrgyz. Some scholars studying Kyrgyzstan even make a distinction between “Russified Asians” and “non-Russified Asians” and have noted some behavioral differences between the two groups.¹²⁷

2.8 Access to Information

All of Kyrgyzstan’s youth policies propagate the idea that young people should have improved access to information; however, in practice, there are major hurdles to achieving this objective, including low-quality content, a tradition of secrecy, inefficient dissemination, and taboos. Reliable information is in short supply, in part because of a dearth of well-funded public research institutions and no tradition of strong, independent media. Press reports are filled with rumormongering and one-sided, sometimes paid for

125. Darya Podolskaya, “Kyrgyzstan’s Parliament Deputies from the SDPK Faction Are Once Again Raising the Language Issue” (*Deputaty parlamenta Kyrgyzstana ot fraktsii SDPK vnov podnimauiut iazykovuiu temu*), 24.kg, June 15, 2011. Accessed June 22, 2011, <http://www.24kg.org/parlament/102695-deputaty-parlamenta-kyrgyzstana-ot-frakcii-sdpk.html>.

126. “Giving Youth a Voice,” p. 14.

127. Lesia Nedoluzhko and Victor Agadjanian, “Marriage, Childbearing and Migration in Kyrgyzstan: Exploring Interdependences,” *Demographic Research*, Vol. 22, Art. 7, Feb. 2, 2010, p. 170.

“news.” Moreover, the country still suffers from the Soviet relic of official secrecy. Despite two major laws guaranteeing citizens access to information,¹²⁸ public officials often withhold documents and data that should be publicly available. In one recent example pertaining to young people, the prosecutor general’s office issued a decree in January 2010 classifying information about hazing in the army as secret, although this directly violates the legal stipulation that “facts threatening the rights and legal interests of citizens, and also posing threats to their personal safety,” cannot be classified.¹²⁹ Another example of state secrecy is that—despite long-running efforts to reform the police and boost public confidence in law enforcement—the number of police officers in the country remains a state secret.¹³⁰

Disseminating information is challenging for a number of reasons, including low Internet penetration, language proficiency, and the remoteness of many populated areas. Only 19 percent of Kyrgyzstanis say they have ever used the Internet.¹³¹ This suggests that email and other forms of online communication, which are both inexpensive and critical to youth awareness in developed nations, reach but a small minority of young people. (Mobile phones, however, are ubiquitous, offering an alternative means of spreading information among the young.) Moreover, as noted above, a significant number of young people in the country, especially outside major cities, are growing up speaking only their native language, predominantly Kyrgyz, thus never gaining access to much larger bodies of information available in other languages. Even for those who do access the Internet regularly and can speak English or Russian, rights-related information is sparse. Government websites—including the president’s, parliament’s, and the Justice Ministry’s—are seldom comprehensive or search-friendly and do not offer free databases of legislation, youth-related programs, and other relevant policy directives. (For example, the Ministry of Social Protection directs visitors of its website interested in reading the Law On the Fundamentals of

128. Law On Guarantees and Freedom of Access to Information, Dec. 5, 1997; Law On Access to Information in the Domain of State Bodies and Bodies of Local Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, Dec. 28, 2006.

129. “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” p. 10.

130. Yefimov, “Kyrgyzstan: Bishkek Looks to Georgia as Role Model for Justice Overhaul.”

131. Kyrgyzstan National Opinion Poll, pp. 39 and 48.

Public Social Services in the Kyrgyz Republic to a paid database service.¹³²) The Youth Ministry website, www.jashtar.kg, which took nearly a year to become operational despite major donor support, does not have clear, easily identifiable sections on youth rights or programs.

Equally troublesome is the problem of taboos—inherited in part from the Soviet past. Officials often resist addressing ticklish issues, such as sex education—covered in greater detail in Section 4.1—and interethnic relations, an extremely painful topic since the bloodshed of June 2010. Despite their stated intentions of supporting conflict resolution, officials have failed to promote meaningful discussions of ethnicity and have sometimes manipulated the topic in populist campaigns. In 2011, during a UNICEF survey on youth attitudes, the deputy head of a district administration in Jalalabad Province objected to asking young people questions about ethnicity, considering them “dangerous.”¹³³

2.9 Conclusions

In designing policies to help improve young people’s access to rights, opportunities, and information, Kyrgyzstan’s policymakers must contend with numerous, far-reaching problems that affect the overwhelming majority of the country’s population, regardless of age. Many of these have resulted from the Soviet collapse—the abrupt end of a troublesome but integrated system of economy, politics, social services, and ideology. Today, Kyrgyzstanis young and old face low-quality health care, inadequate opportunities for employment, pervasive corruption, a deeply dysfunctional justice system, and spotty access to information. The country is also struggling with the deteriorating quality of education, which has a particularly immediate effect on young people but bodes ill for the future of Kyrgyzstan as a whole, as does the rest of its crumbling infrastructure. Public trust in government, among people of all ages, is very low.

Young people’s eagerness for change is evident; however, they need far more effective mechanisms for achieving it by peaceful means than

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132. Ministry of Social Protection website: <http://www.mlsp.kg/project/law/96--q-q.html>.

133. “Youth, Livelihoods and Peace Promotion,” p. 5.

currently exist. In addition to the general problems enumerated above, the end of the Soviet Union, with its rigid ideology and propaganda, has also muddied the waters in terms of the values young people embrace. Various studies show a curious, sometimes paradoxical mix of greater religiosity, greater individualism, a strong dependence on extended personal support networks, and a resurgence of traditionalist social mores. While the challenges of modernity require young people to become more autonomous, cultural expectations dictate they be obedient and passive; meanwhile, gender stereotypes, high unemployment, and low-quality education—including poorly planned language policies that are periodically hijacked by populist politicking—impede their chances for economic self-sufficiency. In the absence of rule of law and other types of stability, young people tend to replicate the same pernicious practices—for example, insufficient diligence, corruption, and disregard for the public good—that have stymied Kyrgyzstan’s development over the past two decades.



Youth and
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The Policy Context

3

3.1 The Broader Context

3.1.1 Geography: Mountains and the North-South Split

Kyrgyzstan, located in the middle of the Eurasian landmass, borders China to the east-southeast and three former Soviet republics: Tajikistan to the southwest, Uzbekistan to the west, and Kazakhstan to the north. A landlocked country, it serves as a transit hub for goods manufactured in China and lies on a major drug-trafficking route from Afghanistan. About 75 percent of its territory, which totals nearly 200,000 sq. km., is covered by mountains, while most of the population lives in three major valleys—Chui, Fergana, and Talas. The country comprises seven provinces (oblasts) and two cities with an administrative status equivalent to that of provinces, Bishkek and Osh; these nine constituent territories are further subdivided into 40 districts (raions).¹³⁴

One of Kyrgyzstan's salient features—both geologically and, in its consequences, sociopolitically—is a mountain range that slices the country obliquely into two halves: the northeast, known simply as “the north,” and the southwest, called “the south.” Only one major road, over a high mountain pass, connects the two. Because of physical accessibility, the north has traditionally had more interaction with Kazakhstan and Russia and the south with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.¹³⁵ The south has about 10 percent more people than the north and a significantly higher population density,¹³⁶ but lags behind economically. In 2009, the north—dominated by the relatively wealthy capital and home to the country's largest gold mine—

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134. National Statistics Committee website. Accessed Oct. 28, 2011, <http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/>.

135. Interview with political scientist Murat Suyunbaev, October 2010. (Conducted by the research team's International Advisor in her capacity as a journalist prior to the start of the review pilot project.)

136. According to National Statistics Committee data for January 2011, the permanent population breaks down as follows. In the north: Bishkek (859,800), Chui Province (814,900), Issyk-Kul Province (444,500), Naryn Province (262,100), and Talas Province (231,800). In the south: City of Osh (255,800), Osh Province (1.13 million), Jalalabad Province (1.037 million), and Batken Province (441,100). Population density was about 21.5 people per sq. km. in the north and 29.9 in the south.

accounted for 72 percent of GDP and 86 percent of industrial output.¹³⁷ Although the north is more industrialized than the south, in 2009 it accounted for 56 percent of agricultural output.¹³⁸ Despite its greater wealth, the north has pockets of deep poverty: Two of the four provinces with the highest poverty rates in 2010, Naryn and Talas,¹³⁹ are in the north. In terms of social profiles, the country's two halves are also difficult to pigeonhole: The south, considered more conservative in its practice of Islam and its social mores, also has pockets of liberalism, while the stereotypically more liberal north is likewise home to some very conservative communities. The two regions have some differences in the dialects of Kyrgyz spoken therein and in the specifics of certain traditional rites, like weddings and funerals.

In the post-Soviet period, the north-south divide has taken on a political dimension. In part, this has to do with the personalized nature of power in Kyrgyzstan and its informal patronage networks: When someone reaches a position of influence, it is expected, not without reason, that this individual will grant positions and favors to kith and kin, who are often concentrated in a particular geographic area. In 2010, the north-south split was thrown into relief by a survey gauging public reactions to that year's tumultuous political events, beginning with the ouster of then-president Bakiyev, whose main support base lay in his native south. Asked about the interethnic violence in June, some 65 percent of northerners blamed Bakiyev and his supporters, but only 4 percent of southerners did; meanwhile, 40 percent of southerners blamed the interim government, which was made up of opposition politicians popular mostly in the north, while only 1 percent of northerners shared that view.¹⁴⁰ A similar difference in perception concerned the reasons for Bakiyev's downfall: 67 percent of northerners ascribed it to "a spontaneous uprising by a population driven to despera-

137. "Regional Socioeconomic Disparities in Kyrgyzstan: Are They Shrinking?" UNDP Office of the Senior Economist, Dec. 1, 2011. Accessed Dec. 5, 2011, <http://europeandcis.undp.org/senioreconomist/show/C4378032-F203-1EE9-BB353D54710A3B75>.

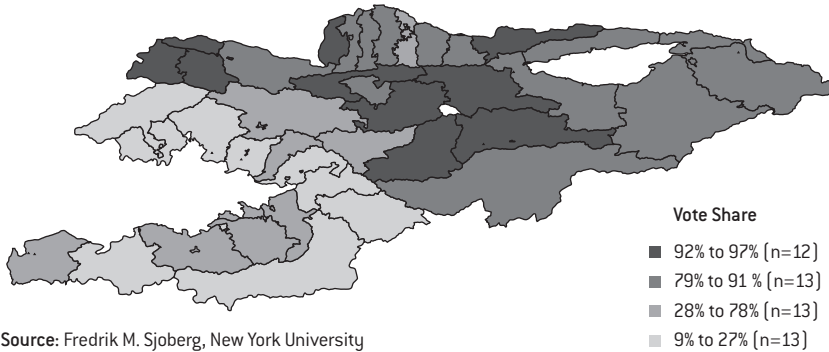
138. *Ibid.*

139. *Ibid.*

140. Kyrgyzstan: North-South Split Poses Political Risk-Poll," EurasiaNet.org, Oct. 8, 2010. Accessed Oct. 8, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62116>.

Figure 1

Winning Candidate's (Atambayev) Vote Share per District (raion)



Source: Fredrik M. Sjöberg, New York University

tion,” while 47 percent of southerners said it was the doing of opposition politicians acting “together with other countries.”¹⁴¹

The north-south political divide continued to play a role in the presidential election held October 30, 2011. The map above graphically shows the proportion of votes won by Atambayev, a northerner: The imaginary diagonal line separating the darkly shaded districts where his share exceeded 60 percent from those where it was less coincides roughly with the mountain range dividing the country. Many southerners perceive the distant northern capital, Bishkek, with a measure of skepticism and mistrust. And, many politicians have tried to exploit regional divisions, sometimes mobilizing young people in doing so. But it is worth noting again that north and south do not always lend themselves to easy categorization. For example, one elderly man in Osh, known as “the southern capital,” told our research team that he voted for Atambayev because a close relative had long worked with the politician: “So how could I not vote for him?” said the man.

141. Ibid.

3.1.2 Demography: Youth Bulge and Ethnic Tensions

Since the summer of 2009, “youth” has been defined in Kyrgyzstan by the age range of 14 to 28. According to the census taken that year, this group made up 31.2 percent of Kyrgyzstan’s population, or just under 1.7 million out of nearly 5.4 million people.¹⁴² Officially, young men outnumber young women by about 13,000, or less than one percentage point,¹⁴³ but men also make up a much larger share of labor migrants than do women,¹⁴⁴ which may, in some areas, shift the gender balance in the opposite direction. As of January 1, 2008, the percentage of young people had been about the same in each of the provinces, and their distribution between cities and countryside matched that of the population at large: two-thirds rural and one-third urban.¹⁴⁵ It is not clear whether this ratio reflects the significant migration flows among Kyrgyzstan’s young people. As noted in Chapter 1, about 60 percent of the entire population is under 29.¹⁴⁶

Marriage begins at a relatively young age. In 2007, the mean age of first registered marriage was 23.4 for women and 26.8 for men.¹⁴⁷ This was an increase over 1991, when the ages were 21.7 for women and 24.4 for men, suggesting a post-Soviet trend of postponing marriage.¹⁴⁸ At the same time, an ever-greater number of young people are opting for unregistered marriages: According to the 2009 Census, the number of 14-to-28-year-olds in registered marriages was 391,464, while the number in unregistered unions was 61,032, or 13.5 percent of the total, as compared with only 6 percent

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142. National Statistics Committee website. Accessed Oct. 28, 2011, <http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/node/23>.

143. Ibid.

144. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 34.

145. Ibid., p. 19.

146. National Statistics Committee website. Accessed Oct. 28, 2011, <http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/node/23>.

147. Lesia Nedoluzhko and Victor Agadjanian, “Marriage, Childbearing and Migration in Kyrgyzstan: Exploring Interdependences,” *Demographic Research*, Vol. 22, Art. 7, Feb. 2, 2010, p. 165.

148. Ibid.

among those older than 28.¹⁴⁹ Total fertility rates have dropped from 3.1 in 1995 to 2.8 in 2008.¹⁵⁰ Average ages for marriage and childbirth may be lower in the south: A recent study of two southern provinces, Osh and Jalalabad, showed that 23-year-old women, on average, already have one child.¹⁵¹

Three major ethnic groups live in Kyrgyzstan. At the start of 2011, the population comprised 71.7 percent Kyrgyz, 14.4 percent Uzbeks,¹⁵² and 7.2 percent Russians; more than 20 other ethnicities made up the remainder.¹⁵³ This represents a major shift since the Soviet period, with the share of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks growing, while the number of Russians declined precipitously: In 1989, Kyrgyz made up only 52.4 percent of the population and Uzbeks 12.9 percent, while Russians—many of whom emigrated after the Soviet collapse—made up 21.5 percent.¹⁵⁴ While Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are overwhelmingly Muslim, Orthodox Christianity predominates among Russians.

The geographic distribution of the three main ethnic groups is not uniform. This patchiness, insofar as it applies to the Uzbek population of Kyrgyzstan, played a significant part in the interethnic violence of June 2010. Around the time of the clashes, about 96 percent of the country's ethnic Uzbeks lived in the south; they constituted a majority in a number of important districts, including two just outside Osh, and more than 40 percent of the population of the city itself.¹⁵⁵ This gave the Uzbek community the potential to emerge as a strong political force, particularly after Bakiyev's

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149. National Statistics Committee website. Accessed Oct. 28, 2011, <http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/node/23>.

150. "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," p. 76.

151. "Youth, Livelihoods and Peace Promotion," p. 8.

152. After the interethnic conflict of June 2010, there were reports of a significant out-migration by ethnic Uzbeks, particularly men, from the south of the country, but no official or reliable data is yet available.

153. National Statistics Committee website. Accessed Oct. 28, 2011, <http://212.42.101.124:1041/stat1.kg/images/stories/docs/Kyrgyzstan%20v%20zifrah/Demo/6.pdf>.

154. *Ibid.*, accessed Dec. 12, 2011, <http://www.stat.kg/stat.files/census.pdf>.

155. "The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan," *Asia Report* No. 193, International Crisis Group, Aug. 23, 2010, p. 1.

fall unleashed a new battle for power and influence in his native south, and made Uzbek aspirations seem threatening to local powerbrokers.¹⁵⁶

The violence that tore through the cities of Osh and Jalalabad and the surrounding provinces has left a deep scar in southern Kyrgyzstan. Although it directly affected only a small minority of youth, “it seems to have affected attitudes profoundly.”¹⁵⁷ Mistrust between the two communities—cousins both ethnically and linguistically—remains stark. Kyrgyz and Uzbek social networks are quite segregated¹⁵⁸ and representatives of the two groups often perceive, explain, and interpret June’s bloodletting in very different ways.¹⁵⁹ According to one report, “many now believe the violence was the orchestration of powerful criminal and political clans rather than an organic expression of ethnic hatred among ordinary residents. But that hasn’t stopped a lingering resentment from poisoning once neighborly relations.”¹⁶⁰ (Some rights-related consequences of the conflict for young people are discussed in greater detail in Section 4.3.)

While the scale and fury of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek conflict has eclipsed other interethnic tensions, the country has experienced both sustained and isolated hostilities between other combinations of ethnic groups as well. Often, these disputes—like the first instance of large-scale, deadly violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in 1990—have focused on land rights. In April 2010, a group of Kyrgyz internal migrants living around Bishkek clashed with Meskhetian Turks in a nearby village, at least in part over land,¹⁶¹ and Kyrgyzstan’s poorly demarcated border with Tajikistan has led to numerous

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156. For a compelling and detailed discussion of circumstances under which ethnicity can become a significant factor in political conflict, see Daniel N. Posner, “The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 98, No. 4, Nov. 2004, pp. 529–545.

157. “Youth, Livelihoods and Peace Promotion,” p. 3.

158. *Ibid.*

159. David Trilling, “In Osh, Easier to Dig Up Corpses Than Truth,” EurasiaNet.org, July 5, 2010. Accessed Dec. 23, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61466>.

160. Daisy Sindelar, “Portraits of Osh: Betrayed by the State,” RFE/RL, Oct. 27, 2011. Accessed Dec. 23, 2011, http://www.rferl.org/content/portrait_of_osh_betrayed_by_the_state/24373412.html.

161. David Trilling, “Inter-Ethnic Tension Rattles Bishkek,” EurasiaNet.org, April 20, 2010. Accessed Dec. 10, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/60891>.

disputes, some of them violent, between neighbors along the frontier, particularly in and around Batken Province.¹⁶² The most recent such conflict, in December 2011, reportedly left a number of homes burned to the ground.¹⁶³

3.1.3 Political Context: Unpredictability as a Constant

In terms of its political developments, Kyrgyzstan can justly be called the least stable country in formerly Soviet Central Asia. Public protests over oppressive rule, corruption, and bread-and-butter issues have led to the ouster of two regimes, Akayev's in 2005 and Bakiyev's in 2010. While Akayev's overthrow passed quietly, Bakiyev's involved the violent death of nearly one hundred civilians, followed by June's fatal interethnic clashes that killed more than four hundred people.¹⁶⁴ The Constitution has been changed numerous times since 1993, most recently via national referendum on June 27, 2010, when presidential powers were curtailed in favor of a stronger parliament. That vote also confirmed Roza Otunbayeva, a compromise figure from the anti-Bakiyev opposition, as interim president until new elections, which took place in October 2011. While Otunbayeva herself has seemed refreshingly "clean" as far as Central Asian politicians go, analysts fear that each new rotation of political elites brings a new redistribution of revenue sources carried out through opaque patronage networks.

Much of Kyrgyzstan's youth policy in the past seven or more years has been reactive—a response to political events, rather than the enactment of a strategic vision. Because young people had been so active in the "revolutions" of 2005 and 2010, each of the new regimes, soon after coming to power, introduced policies meant to address their discontents. Most prominently, in late April 2010, Otunbayeva's interim government established the

162. Alisher Khamidov, "Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan: Clashes on Volatile Border Growing Vicious," EurasiaNet.org, April 20, 2011. Accessed Dec. 10, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/63336>.

163. "Houses Burned in Clash Between Kyrgyz and Tajiks in Lyailyak (Kyrgyzstan)" (*V Liailiake [Kyrgyzstan] v hode proizoshedshei stychki mezhdu kirgizami i tadjhikami sozhzheny doma*), 24.kg, Dec. 30, 2011. Accessed Dec. 30, 2011, <http://www.24kg.org/incidents/117848-v-lyajlyake-kyrgyzstan-v-xode-proizoshedshej.html>.

164. Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Events in Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010, Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC), April 2011, p. 44.

new Youth Ministry.¹⁶⁵ The man appointed to head it, Aliyasbek Alymkulov, had few obvious qualifications: He had been a businessman unhappy with the regime who, earlier that month, had led a youth contingent in the anti-Bakiyev protests; after state security forces opened fire on the crowd, he survived two bullet wounds to the head.¹⁶⁶ The circumstances of the ministry's creation led many to regard it as political window dressing without policy-related substance.

Thus far, the ministry's existence has not translated into a cohesive, comprehensive, or effective youth policy. Challenges specific to the new agency, including underfunding and understaffing, are discussed in Sections 4.2 and 4.5 below, but some of its shortcomings fall into a broader pattern: Across government bodies, a weak tradition of public service and frequent changes in leadership preclude any strategic vision for development. Institutional weakness, along with widespread corruption throughout society, results in ineffectual mechanisms for designing, monitoring, and implementing policy. Most laws and regulations are declarative in nature, without effective means for on-the-ground enforcement.

Meanwhile, government officials seem to engage in a perpetual, often uncritical, and poorly coordinated process of reconsidering and rewriting major policy documents, such as the Country Development Strategy, ministerial strategies and sector-specific concepts. Although our research team began its work a year after the Youth Ministry was created, most of the official youth-related policy documents available to us were draft versions still at the stage of inter-ministerial coordination or consideration by the government or parliament. Many of these drafts recycle unmet objectives from previous youth policy documents. As noted by the UNDP in 2009, "there is no system for collecting and processing information, no analysis and prioritization of problems that are identified, no classification, no forecasting, no alignment of policies with forecasts, and no coordination of work among ministries and agencies."¹⁶⁷ Technical expertise from external consultants,

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165. Decree No. 25 of the Interim Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, April 26, 2010.

166. Interview with Minister for Youth Affairs Aliyasbek Alymkulov, April 2011, Bishkek. (Conducted by the research team's International Advisor in her capacity as a journalist prior to the start of the review pilot project.)

167. "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," p. 14.

including international organizations, has sometimes been helpful. Nonetheless, policy design is poor, non-implementation is rife and genuine reform is lacking, highlighting a wasteful and fruitless expenditure of financial and human resources.

Prior to the creation of the Youth Ministry, responsibility for youth policy had bounced around from agency to agency, while funding—as those who work in the youth sector often say—came in the form of “leftovers” from other state spending. This history included a Department for Youth Affairs at the State Committee on Tourism, Sport and Youth Affairs in 2004, which then became a Department for Youth Affairs at the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth Affairs in 2005. In 2006, a new strategic document on youth policy, the Concept of the Development of State Youth Policy in the Kyrgyz Republic Until 2010, decried the practice of constantly overhauling, disbanding, and reviving the central government agency responsible for youth policy.¹⁶⁸ However, in 2007, the Department for Youth Affairs was moved once again, this time to the State Agency for Physical Culture, Sport, Youth Affairs and Child Protection, and, finally, in 2009, it resurfaced at the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Migration.¹⁶⁹

Despite explicit acknowledgments by officials that shifting responsibility for youth policy from agency to agency has undermined the effectiveness of policy design and implementation, Bishkek continues this practice. Its latest restructuring of the government ultimately led to the Youth Ministry’s partial merger with the Labor Ministry, a measure that had been under consideration since the summer of 2011.¹⁷⁰ Minister Alymkulov’s argument that youth policy must take precedence within the new body¹⁷¹ seems to have been heeded. But uncertainty hung over his agency for months, underscor-

168. Concept of the Development of State Youth Policy in the Kyrgyz Republic Until 2010, Introduction (Section I).

169. “State Youth Policy in the Kyrgyz Republic,” Ministry of Youth Affairs presentation, March 11, 2011.

170. Aizada Kutueva, “In the New Structure of Kyrgyzstan’s Government, the Number of Ministries Will Be Reduced from 20 to 17” (*V novoi strukture pravitelstva Kyrgyzstana kolichestvo ministerstv budet sokrashcheno s 20 do 17*), 24.kg, June 23, 2011. Accessed Oct. 30, 2011, <http://www.24kg.org/community/103495-v-novoj-strukture-pravitelstva-kyrgyzstana.html>.

171. Presentation of annual report by Ministry of Youth Affairs, June 30, 2011.

ing the impression that the unstable, unpredictable nature of Kyrgyzstan's political environment hamstrings both state institutions and non-state organizations working in the area of youth policy. Moreover, early in 2012, parliament's Committee on Youth Policy and the Development of Physical Culture and Sports, whose members had been quite critical of the Youth Ministry, was disbanded and replaced with an amalgamated Committee on Education, Culture, Science and Sports.

3.1.4 Socioeconomic Context: Migration vs. Dependency

Kyrgyzstan continues to struggle with enormous socioeconomic challenges, including stark disparities in wealth and development between the capital and the provinces. Currently, the country's economy is recovering from major setbacks in the preceding three years: a spike in global food prices in 2008, a drop in migrant remittances in 2009, and the political upheavals of 2010. Rising world prices for gold, the country's main export alongside labor, have contributed to the comeback. In the first nine months of 2011, real GDP grew by 8.7 percent year over year and inflation declined significantly, from more than 20 percent in July to 9.5 percent in October, with projections for the end of the year at 7.5 percent.¹⁷²

Nonetheless, as noted in Chapter 2, unemployment has long remained high, "most notably for the youth," who, according to some counts, make up about half the country's jobless population.¹⁷³ As a result, young people must often choose between seeking their fortune abroad and remaining economically dependent on their families. According to the 2009 Census, 53 percent of Kyrgyzstan's young people fully depend on someone other than themselves for financial support, while less than 43 percent earn money through work.¹⁷⁴ (These data are not disaggregated by age group, so it is difficult to determine what portion of the dependents are students, but some indication may lie in the fact that more than 22 percent of Kyrgyzstanis

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172. "First Review Under the Three-Year Arrangement Under the Extended Credit Facility and Request for Modification of Performance Criteria," pp. 4–5.

173. *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

174. National Statistics Committee website. Accessed Dec. 17, 2011, <http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/node/23>.

aged 18 and older are financially dependent on someone other than themselves.¹⁷⁵) Perhaps even more telling is the fact that a very high number of young people continue to live with their families well into their 20s.¹⁷⁶ One recent survey conducted among young people in three provinces showed that a majority of respondents—between 42 percent and 45 percent—do not want to leave their native towns and villages, but a significant number—30 percent to 34 percent—do.¹⁷⁷

State labor policies seem disjointed and weak, exhibiting no sense of urgency in seeking long-term solutions to the problem of youth unemployment.¹⁷⁸ One reason may be that—with hundreds of thousands working abroad—remittances sent home by labor migrants account for a huge part of the country's economy. In 2010, remittances equaled more than \$1 billion,¹⁷⁹ or about 22 percent of that year's GDP. A World Bank study published in 2011 found that Kyrgyzstan's remittances as a portion of GDP were the fifth highest in the world.¹⁸⁰ The country's massive scale of labor migration has both pros and cons: On the one hand, it mitigates economic hardship and relieves the social pressures that would arise if all those people, mostly able-bodied men, stayed in-country with no work; on the other, it lulls the government into complacency, exposes migrants to abuses, contributes to "brain drain," and rips apart families and communities. Some troubling preliminary research suggests that money received from labor migrants is seldom invested in the education and the health of children.¹⁸¹ Moreover, current policy does not make it easy for labor migrants to contribute to the

175. *Ibid.*

176. "Youth, Livelihoods and Peace Promotion," pp. 3 and 7–8.

177. Surveys conducted in three provinces (Chui, Issyk-Kul, and Jalalabad) by the Labor Ministry in the middle of 2011; results provided by Dr. Hannelore Kress, senior advisor on labor market policy.

178. Interview with labor and migration expert, Bishkek, November 2011.

179. Aizada Kutueva, "Labor Migrants Remit Over \$1 Billion to Kyrgyzstan in 2010," 24.kg, Oct. 5, 2011. Accessed Oct. 13, 2011, <http://eng.24.kg/politic/2011/10/05/20731.html>.

180. Sanket Mohapatra et al., "Migration and Development Brief 17," Migration and Remittances Unit, World Bank, Dec. 1, 2011, p. 3.

181. Antje Kroeger and Kathryn Anderson, "Remittances and Children's Capabilities: New Evidence from Kyrgyzstan, 2005–2008," Discussion Paper 1170, German Institute for Economic Research, Oct. 14, 2011, pp. 1–2.

state-run health care and pension funds that are meant to ensure them a measure of social protection once they return.¹⁸² On balance, the state's inability to promote opportunities for young people within its own borders—or to funnel remittances into long-term development—seems to hurt its capacity for modernization and future prosperity.

In addition to migration abroad, labor migration within the country occurs on a massive scale and poses an even larger set of policy challenges relevant to young people. Reliable data for the number of internal migrants are difficult to come by, but estimates fall in the hundreds of thousands, concentrated mostly in and around the capital.¹⁸³ Official statistics in 2002 showed that 40 percent of Bishkek's residents and 30 percent in nearby Chui Province had been born elsewhere in Kyrgyzstan and about two-thirds of those migrants had moved during the post-Soviet period.¹⁸⁴ Because of an outdated system of residency permits (*propiska*), internal migrants have difficulty accessing a number of public services, including free medical care, schooling, and even libraries.¹⁸⁵ Bishkek is ringed by 47 improvised suburbs populated by migrants—the young people living there are often isolated, cut off from access to opportunities and events in the nearby capital.¹⁸⁶ Some NGOs estimate that up to one-fifth of the city's residents lack proper residency permits; a 2009 study found that nearly half the “*propiska*-less” adults surveyed in Bishkek had encountered problems registering their children for school and resolved those problems by paying bribes.¹⁸⁷ Because of bureaucratic red tape, ignorance, low trust in authorities and

182. Interview with labor and migration expert, Bishkek, November 2011.

183. “About 200,000 Internal Migrants Live in Bishkek” (*V Bishkeke prozhivaiut okolo 200 tysiach vnutrennikh migrantov*), Centrasia.ru, Sept. 29, 2009. Accessed Dec. 17, 2011, <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1254205860>.

184. Lesia Nedoluzhko and Victor Agadjanian, “Marriage, Childbearing and Migration in Kyrgyzstan: Exploring Interdependences,” *Demographic Research*, Vol. 22, Art. 7, Feb. 2, 2010, pp. 164–165.

185. Interview with anti-*propiska* activists, Bishkek, November 2011.

186. Interview with activist working with internal migrants, Bishkek, November 2011.

187. Yekaterina Ivaschenko, “Without a Paper, You’re a Nothing. Kyrgyzstan’s Civil Society Is Calling for the Repeal of the Institution of Residency Permits” (*Bez bumazhki, ty bukaška. Grazhdanskoie obshchestvo Kyrgyzstana prizyvaet otmenit institut propiski*), FerganaNews.com, Oct. 17, 2011. Accessed Oct. 21, 2011, <http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=7134>.

other factors, a significant number of internal migrants do not obtain birth certificates for their children, which hinders access to services down the line.¹⁸⁸ Most of the internal migrants hail from rural areas and behavioral differences sometimes result in frictions with their more urban neighbors.¹⁸⁹

The scope of internal migration is largely explained by regional variation in poverty levels and opportunity structure. The country's money is concentrated in Bishkek, with a small trickle reaching adjacent Chui Province. In 2010, the poverty rate in the capital stood at just 8 percent and in Chui at 22 percent, while in the other six provinces it ranged from 34 percent in remote, southern Batken, with its "considerable socioeconomic tensions," to 54 percent in remote, northern Naryn.¹⁹⁰ Even Issyk-Kul Province, the country's prime tourist destination and site of its largest gold mine, has a poverty rate of 38 percent.¹⁹¹ Human Development Index ratings—which measure education, income, and life expectancy—reflect the disparity between Bishkek and the rest of the country as well, with Bishkek's figures exceeding those of the most "developed" province, Issyk-Kul, by nearly 20 percent.¹⁹² Throughout the country, infrastructure is desperately weak. In national opinion polls in May and September 2011, respondents identified water and poor roads as the top problems faced by their town or village, more pressing even than jobs.¹⁹³ The draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015—sent by the Youth Ministry for consideration to the government in late October 2011—states that "youth policy measures must first and foremost be aimed at the development of young people in the regions,"¹⁹⁴ who make up 83 percent of the country's youth.¹⁹⁵

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188. Interview with chief doctor at provincial hospital, Chui Province, November 2011.

189. Interview with city mayor, Chui Province, November 2011.

190. "Regional Socioeconomic Disparities in Kyrgyzstan: Are They Shrinking?" UNDP Office of the Senior Economist, Dec. 1, 2011. Accessed Dec. 5, 2011, <http://europeandcis.undp.org/senioreconomist/show/C4378032-F203-1EE9-BB353D54710A3B75>.

191. *Ibid.*

192. "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," p. 8.

193. Kyrgyzstan National Opinion Poll, August–September 2011, pp. 21–22.

194. Draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015, Section VII, "Principles."

195. 2009 Census, National Statistics Committee website. Accessed Oct. 28, 2011, <http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/node/23>, <http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/node/98>.

In raising revenues and allocating funds, the government contends with numerous fiscal problems. Not least of these is a sizeable shadow economy, which remains untaxed. According to one report, off-the-books economic activity in 2007 had reached more than \$740 million, or 18.3 percent of GDP, and this concerned only legal activities like family farms, retail trade, and repair shops,¹⁹⁶ not criminal activity such as drug trafficking. People's confidence in government is so low, and enforcement of laws so shoddy, that, according to official data, only about half of working people pay into the country's state-run system of pensions and health insurance.¹⁹⁷ This burgeoning informal economy both deprives the state of revenue and makes the lives and livelihoods of workers quite precarious, jeopardizing their eligibility for social protection, especially in old age. A recent study among young people in the southern provinces of Osh and Jalalabad found that "most of the labor force operates in an informal sector where, instead of permanent jobs, individuals work on short-term contracts, or do seasonal work, or are self-employed."¹⁹⁸

While official poverty rates have been declining for most of the past decade, many Kyrgyzstanis' earnings and standards of living are still low enough that severe economic policies can trigger immediate responses by large groups of citizens, forcing politicians to tread lightly. This confronts policymakers with a genuine dilemma: On the one hand, tough economic measures—including highly unpopular ones like price hikes for utilities—are crucial to the country's long-term economic health; on the other, the potent mix of bona fide economic hardship and expectations left over from the paternalistic Soviet economy leads to widespread popular demands for increased benefits or, at least, the maintenance of old ones. Interestingly, a number of youth researchers have noted that young people, who did not experience the Soviet era themselves, often display a certain nostalgia for

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196. "Kyrgyzstan's National Statistics Committee: The Shadow Economy Has Grown to 26 Bln Soms" (*Natsstatkom KR: Obyem tenevoi ekonomiki dostig 26 milliardov somov*), reprint of a report by 24.kg, Jan. 9, 2009. Accessed Dec. 15, 2011, <http://www.for.kg/ru/news/80898/>.

197. Eppu Mikkonen-Jeanneret et al., "Off the Grid: Exploring the Expanding Informal Economy and Threats to Old-Age Social Protection in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," *HelpAge International*, 2011, p. 5.

198. "Youth, Livelihoods and Peace Promotion," p. 3.

the “ideal society” of the past, most likely reproducing attitudes expressed by their elders.¹⁹⁹

The political volatility of this poverty-paternalism tandem became evident in 2010: A key catalyst of the popular unrest that brought down the Bakiyev regime was its attempt to significantly and abruptly increase charges for electricity and heating. Although the proportion of people living in poverty has been shrinking—dropping, by some counts, from 46 percent in 2004 to 35 percent in 2007²⁰⁰—the official line of poverty is so low that even those living above it struggle to make ends meet. In short, among the country’s numerous poor, Bakiyev’s price hike forced a choice between electricity and essentials such as food. Once the interim government came to power, it immediately rolled back the hikes. And, in early 2011, after hundreds of teachers went on strike to demand better pay, the country’s new leaders—preparing for elections later that year—substantially raised the salaries of public sector employees²⁰¹ despite a considerable budget deficit.

In light of the difficult overall socioeconomic situation in the country, funding for youth policy has typically gotten short shrift. These inadequacies are discussed in greater detail in Sections 4.2 and 5.4.

Another significant factor in Kyrgyzstan’s socioeconomic situation since independence has been the country’s dependency on foreign aid and loans. After the upheavals of 2010, the international donor community pledged more than \$1 billion in aid; while a significant amount did pour in, it was not nearly as much as promised.²⁰² One recent estimate put the amount of direct foreign grants and loans to the government for 2011 at about \$300

199. Interview with sociologist, Bishkek, April 2011; “Giving Youth a Voice,” pp. 12–13.

200. “Kyrgyz Republic: Recent Economic and Policy Developments,” World Bank, August 2009, p. 8. Accessed Oct. 30, 2011, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTKYRGYZ/Resources/Econ_update_Aug09_eng.pdf.

201. Ministry of Economic Regulation website. Accessed Oct. 30, 2011, http://mert.kg/index.php?option=com_ashimkan&view=article&article=836&Itemid=24.

202. “Analysis: How to Spend a Billion Dollars in Kyrgyzstan,” IRIN News, Aug. 9, 2010. Accessed Dec. 3, 2011, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/90109/Analysis-How-to-spend-a-billion-dollars-in-Kyrgyzstan>.

million, or 21 percent of state revenue.²⁰³ A study presented by a parliament member in July 2011 calculated that Kyrgyzstan's overall foreign debt burden was \$2.7 billion, larger than its state budget and equivalent to nearly 60 percent of GDP.²⁰⁴

3.1.5 Culture and Gender: Working Women, Sustainable Families

As noted elsewhere in this report, Kyrgyzstani society bears heavy traces of ageism, patriarchal attitudes and paternalism, and relies more heavily on personal connections than on laws, formal rules, and the sort of “far-reaching networks of weak ties”²⁰⁵ that serve as resources for young people in many Western countries. These trends have a direct impact on young people's access to rights, opportunities, and information—often, the ramifications differ depending on gender, as discussed, to some extent, in Section 2.5. While equality of the sexes in Kyrgyzstan is theoretically guaranteed by numerous policy documents, and women's access to education and health care is largely comparable to men's,²⁰⁶ disparities between the two become most evident in the areas of earning power and leadership positions, with women lagging far behind.

National legislation on gender equality begins with the Constitution, which says that “men and women have equal rights and freedoms, and equal opportunities to realize them.”²⁰⁷ There are also separate laws: On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women, On Social and Legal Protection Against Family [Domestic] Violence, and On Reproductive Rights of Citizens. Three national programs for the ad-

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203. National budget 2011, breakdown by Central Asian Free Market Institute; project funded by the Budget Transparency and Accountability Program of Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan.

204. Daniyar Karimov, “Dastan Bekeshev: Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Debt Amounts to 59.8% of GDP, While Its Total Sovereign Debt Makes Up 63.6% [of GDP]” (*Dastan Bekeshev: Vneshnii dolg Kyrgyzstana sostavliaet 59,8 protsenta VVP, a v tselom gosudarstvennye obiazatelstva—63,6 protsenta*), 24.kg, July 28, 2011. Accessed Aug. 5, 2011, <http://www.24kg.org/economics/105884-dastan-bekeshev-vneshnij-dolg-kyrgyzstana.html>.

205. “Youth, Livelihoods and Peace Promotion,” p. 3.

206. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” pp. 8–9.

207. Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 16.4.

vancement of women have been adopted since 1996: Ayalzat (1996–2000) and two national action plans to achieve gender equality for 2002–2006 and 2007–2010. In the international arena, Kyrgyzstan has signed on to the main conventions and political instruments related to the rights of women, including the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the Millennium Development Goals, the third of which is to promote gender equality and empower women.

At the same time, opportunities for women in politics, administration, and business are wanting, though the country's leadership achieved a major gain in this area in 2007 by introducing a quota for women in parliament. According to the UNDP, not a single woman was elected to the Jogorku Kenesh in 2005 or 2006, but by the following year the share of female MPs had reached 27 percent.²⁰⁸ The law governing parliamentary elections declares that one sex cannot account for more than 70 percent of any party's candidate list and includes a provision ensuring that at least one-fourth of seats will go to women.²⁰⁹ In its 2009–2010 report on youth, the UNDP noted that the parliament quota was the main policy action to have a positive effect on an indicator called the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) because it boosted the share of women in legislative bodies, while other touchstones of women's professional growth were less encouraging.²¹⁰

A particularly troubling sign for young women in Kyrgyzstan is that women's workforce participation and salaries relative to men's are not just much lower than in wealthier countries, but have declined since the mid-1990s. According to UNDP data, the proportion of women in the labor force dropped from 46.4 percent in 1995 to 42.2 percent in 2007²¹¹—lower than the average across the rich world was in 1970, and about half the rate in two of today's booming economies, China and India.²¹² Likewise, women's salaries

208. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 9.

209. Constitutional Law On Elections of the President and Deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh [Parliament] of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 60.3.

210. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 9.

211. Ibid.

212. “Working Women: Still Struggling,” *The Economist*, Nov. 25, 2011. Accessed Nov. 25, 2011, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2011/11/working-women>.

had fallen from 73 percent of men's in 1995 to 67.3 percent in 2007.²¹³ A major stumbling block for women's ability to work since the collapse of the Soviet Union has been greatly reduced opportunities for child care outside the home.²¹⁴ The 2009 Census found that less than 15 percent of 6-year-olds and only 9 percent of children under 6 attend some form of preschool.²¹⁵ Since the bulk of child care duties fall on the shoulders of women, this dearth of early childhood programs makes it difficult for them to seek employment. As noted in Section 2.3, Kyrgyzstan's young people are generally not well informed about family planning techniques.

3.2 Key Definitions Underpinning Policymaking

The legal definition of “youth” in Kyrgyzstan now encompasses the age range 14 to 28, introduced in 2009 by amendments to the Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy. Earlier, “youth” had been defined as those aged 14 to 35, and some legislation still refers to this upper age limit. For example, in establishing a youth quota for parliamentary candidates, changes made to electoral law in 2010 require that a minimum of 15 percent of any party's candidates be 35 or younger.²¹⁶ In 2011, the Youth Ministry briefly proposed raising the youth age threshold back to 35,²¹⁷ but later withdrew the suggestion.²¹⁸

This broad age bracket includes a tremendously diverse group of nearly 1.7 million people, which policymakers periodically try to segment. In its 2009–2010 report on youth, the UNDP criticized Kyrgyzstan's youth policies for being “overly broad” and said they “don't address the specific needs

213. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 9.

214. Summary of gender-related challenges, UNDP-Kyrgyz Republic website, 2010. Accessed Dec. 12, 2011, <http://www.undp.kg/en/what-we-do/cross-cutting-themes/gender>.

215. National Statistics Committee website. Accessed Oct. 28, 2011, <http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/node/23>.

216. Constitutional Law On Elections of the President and Deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh [Parliament], Article 60.

217. Draft decree of the Youth Ministry. Accessed on October 20, 2011, <http://www.gov.kg/?p=3147>.

218. Telephone conversation with Youth Ministry official, Bishkek, November 2011.

of different youth groups.”²¹⁹ Perhaps in response, the draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015, submitted for consideration to the government in October 2011, identifies nine separate categories of youth: schoolchildren; students at institutions of higher learning; migrant youth; rural youth; army youth; youth in civil service; youth with special needs; marginalized and deviant youth; and working youth.

The 2009 version of the Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy—the primary legislative act in effect today that explicitly pertains to youth policy—includes a different set of categories altogether.²²⁰ The most general is “young citizens (youth),” defined simply as all Kyrgyzstani citizens and stateless persons aged between 14 and 28. Another is “young family,” defined as “a circle of young citizens connected by established, mutual rights and responsibilities resulting from kinship ties or marriage in which both spouses or one of them has not reached the age of 28.” The law also includes “young professionals”—those who are under 28 and who have been working in their field of specialization for under three years—and “talented youth,” which refers to young people with “great creative, intellectual and cultural potential that can be used to raise the level of development of society and the state.” Three more groups of young people identified by the law are youth organizations, which must include at least 75 percent young people among their members, informal youth groups, and “unorganized” (or unaffiliated) youth. A final, broad category is youth in “difficult life situations.” These include: those unable to take care of themselves because of disability; those without legal guardians; those with close relatives who are their dependents; low-income youth; victims of armed or interethnic conflict, environmental or technological accidents and natural disasters; refugees and displaced persons; institutionalized youth; victims of violence; and those without opportunities for social adaptation after serving time in prison.

De jure, young people also fall into age categories that determine certain benefits, liabilities, rights, and responsibilities. For example, at the age of 16, young people are legally allowed to work, with some exceptions made

219. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 14.

220. Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy, Article 2.

for 15-year-olds and, with a guardian's permission, 14-year-olds.²²¹ At 16, they can also be arrested,²²² though liability for some particularly severe crimes begins at the age of 14.²²³ After 9th grade, usually attended at the age of 15–16, teenagers are allowed to leave school.²²⁴ At 16, young people are allowed by law to enter into consensual sexual relations²²⁵ and, at 18, or in some cases “with good reason” (usually a euphemism for unplanned pregnancy) at 17, they can marry.²²⁶ Young men between the ages of 18 and 27, with some exceptions, must complete military service.²²⁷ At 18, young people can vote.²²⁸ Section 3.4 includes a more detailed discussion of young people's rights, while Section 3.3 considers some of the categories into which young people divide themselves but that aren't necessarily reflected in policy.

Based on a number of evaluations, the values and principles most evident in today's youth policy stem from the Soviet tradition of paternalism. Young people, for the most part, are seen by policymakers not as autonomous actors, but as objects of action, a group unable to take care of themselves: “While young people can address issues on their own, some stereotypes and myths perpetuated by adults and prevalent in Kyrgyz culture, according to which young people are considered objects in need of support, care and control, restrain these self-organizing processes and prolong the period during which young people are still considered immature.”²²⁹ One analysis of Kyrgyzstan's youth policy noted that this approach has predominated quite consistently over the years, with the government focusing on providing young people with social services, many of which are more gen-

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221. Labor Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 18.

222. Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 48.

223. *Ibid.*, Article 18.

224. Law On Education, Article 16.

225. Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 132.

226. Family Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 14.

227. Law On Universal Conscription of Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic and on Military and Alternative Service, Preamble.

228. Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 2.4.

229. Suiunbek Syrdybaev et al., “Youth: A Strategic Resource for Kyrgyzstan” (White Book), UNDP, Bishkek, 2008, p. 26.

erous on paper than in practice:²³⁰ “The state strives to serve as a guardian to young people instead of actively involving them in the process of decision-making and thereby raising their level of responsibility for the development of their regions and the country as a whole.”²³¹

Another Soviet-era strain of youth policy still present today is the emphasis on promoting “talented youth.” During the Cold War, this trend was part of Moscow’s competition with the West, when the state dedicated considerable resources to training award-winning athletes and performers who would bring their country prestige. Independent Kyrgyzstan lacks the funds, infrastructure, and superpower ambitions of the Soviet Union, but some old policy habits live on, albeit in a diluted form. “Talented youth” is the only category of young people with its own separate article in the Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy; however, the mechanisms for supporting them are enumerated in greater detail than are ways to support their peers.²³² Likewise, the State Agency for Physical Culture and Sports devotes most of its energy to preparing young athletes for international competitions and other major achievements rather than promoting a healthy lifestyle among the country’s youth in general.²³³ Some state-run initiatives for gifted young people, like a study-abroad program called Cadres of the 21st Century, have drawn intense criticism for their lack of transparency, monitoring, or evaluation.²³⁴

As in Soviet times, policymakers demonstrate a longing to indoctrinate young people ideologically, but, in the absence of a state ideology, these attempts seem amorphous and superficial. Existing youth policy documents, as well as policies in progress, emphasize the cultivation in young people

230. “Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan: Report on Study Results,” p. 8.

231. Ibid.

232. Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy, Article 9.

233. Interview with official from the State Agency for Physical Culture and Sports, Bishkek, July 2011.

234. Aizada Kutueva, “Natalya Nikitenko: In Kyrgyzstan, There Has Yet to Be an Analysis of the Effectiveness of the Cadres of the 21st Century Program” (*Natalya Nikitenko: V Kyrgyzstane do sikh por ne proveden analiz effektivnosti gosudarstvennoi programmy “Kadry XXI veka”*), June 10, 2011, 24.kg. Accessed June 13, 2011, <http://www.24kg.org/parlament/102417-natalya-nikitenko-v-kyrgyzstane-do-six-por-ne.html>.

of unspecified “spiritual-moral values”²³⁵ and a sense of patriotism.²³⁶ The draft Targeted State Program in the Sphere of Youth Policy Until 2015, put up for consideration by the Youth Ministry in 2011, identifies as a top priority “improving the upbringing of the young generation to respect the national-cultural heritage and traditions of its people” and “raising [young people’s] level of civic consciousness and patriotism.”²³⁷

At the same time, the latest generation of youth policy documents espouses some new principles, geared toward greater autonomy for young people. Even the 2009 law on youth policy calls for involving young people in the design of programs pertinent to their needs and for state support of youth initiatives beneficial to society at large.²³⁸ Far more revolutionary in its language is the draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015, mentioned above. It calls for partnership, with all stakeholders of youth policy taking part in decision making and implementation, and a “client-oriented” approach to policy that takes into account the specific needs of particular youth subgroups.²³⁹

In a tacit acknowledgment that the paternalistic model of youth policy is outdated, the strategy also declares the principle of “mutual responsibility,” whereby the state would maintain its obligation to provide young people with a “guaranteed level of social services, while young people take on responsibility not only for realizing their rights, but for actively participating in all the processes of youth policy.”²⁴⁰ The document proposes this be done by means of “state social orders,” apparently referring to government tenders for youth-related programs to be carried out by NGOs. Another new strategic policy document, the draft Targeted State Program in the Sphere of Youth Policy mentioned in an earlier paragraph, is even more explicit, calling for “a transition from the social/paternalistic youth policy currently

235. Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy, Article 4.2.

236. Draft Targeted State Program in the Sphere of Youth Policy Until 2015.

237. *Ibid.*, Section 3.

238. Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy, Articles 3.3 and 3.4.

239. Draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015, Section VII, Principles.

240. *Ibid.*

in effect to one based on investment and partnership.”²⁴¹ At the time of this writing, the government was in the midst of restructuring and reshuffling personnel in the wake of the presidential election, so it was not yet clear whether either of these draft policy documents would be approved and, if so, what impact they would have on policy implementation.

3.3 Visibility of Youth in Society

In social and political discourse, youth are most often referred to in one of two ways—either with highfalutin words about their significance for the country’s future or as objects of paternalistic protection in need of guidance and instruction by elders. In an example of the former, the 2006 Concept of the Development of State Youth Policy in the Kyrgyz Republic Until 2010 stressed the “innovative potential” of youth and said that young people “bear the special function, irreplaceable by other social groups, of responsibility for the preservation and development of our country.”²⁴² Former president Otunbayeva, about two months before the end of her term, told the UN General Assembly that “youth is not just the future; it is also [the] today of humanity.”²⁴³ Her slapdash creation of the Youth Ministry²⁴⁴ has been presented as an attempt to address young people’s needs. At the same time, policymakers of Otunbayeva’s generation seem unwilling to support young people in gaining their autonomy. They often speak of protecting them from dangerous influences, be that criminal gangs or religious groups.²⁴⁴ In November 2011, for example, two lawmakers proposed banning international dating advertisements to protect young Kyrgyzstani women from marrying foreigners.²⁴⁵ Some of the government’s latest youth policy documents

241. Draft Targeted State Program in the Sphere of Youth Policy Until 2015.

242. Concept of the Development of State Youth Policy in the Kyrgyz Republic Until 2010, Section I.

243. Statement by then-president Otunbayeva at the 66th session of the UN General Assembly, Sept. 22, 2011, New York. Accessed Oct. 28, 2011, http://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/66/KG_en.pdf.

244. Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy, Article 7.1.8.

245. Aizada Kutueva, “MPs Offer to Prohibit Advertising of Marriage Abroad in Kyrgyzstan,” 24.kg, Nov. 14, 2011. Accessed Nov. 14, 2011, <http://eng.24.kg/politic/2011/11/14/21501.html>.

point out that youth are both objects and agents of policy, but for now this position remains largely theoretical.

Young people perceive themselves from a broad range of angles. At the most positive end of the spectrum, they see themselves as innovators, introducing “nonstandard solutions for standard problems.”²⁴⁶ A booklet produced by a coalition of young, Bishkek-based rights activists in early 2011 begins with the words: “Youth. That word resounds with the energy of change, the love of freedom, a striving to take action. ‘We can!’—for many, this is more than just a phrase. With their daily work they prove the ability of the new generation of Kyrgyzstanis to make the country better, help their fellow man, defend rights and fight discrimination.”²⁴⁷ At the most negative end of the spectrum, however, young people feel helpless, stymied by their lack of access to significant decision-making processes,²⁴⁸ as well as knowledge and capital.²⁴⁹ Some researchers have found Kyrgyzstani youth to be passive and pessimistic, particularly outside the capital, because “to a large extent, young people in the regions still have a lack of faith in themselves and a feeling of powerlessness in the face of the problems in their lives.”²⁵⁰ Often, they ask for support in their endeavors: According to one recent study, “many young people aspire to the more skilled and specialized jobs that define a modern economy,” but they “have little confidence in their ability to acquire the capital, credentials, and connections needed to succeed in the careers they want, and feel they need help.”²⁵¹

As almost anywhere else in the world, young people in Kyrgyzstan are well aware of the differences between them. Here are some of the stark-

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246. Interview with youth activist, Osh, November 2011.

247. “Content: Young, Strong, Free” (a collection of articles about young people by young people, in Russian), published jointly by the Alliance of Liberal Youth “Free Generation,” Youth Rights Defenders Network, Club Kebel, and Club of Liberal Youth, Bishkek, April 2011, p. 3.

248. Chinara Satkynaliyeva et al., “Improving the Participation and Role of Youth in the Process of Decision-Making at the Local Level” (in Russian), Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan and Lawyers of Kyrgyzstan Association, Bishkek, April 2011, p. 18.

249. “Youth Assessment: Kyrgyz Republic,” p. 19.

250. “Report on the Results of Monitoring Respect for the Rights of Students in Institutions of Higher Learning” (in Russian), Youth Human Rights Group, Bishkek, 2010, p. 7.

251. “Youth, Livelihoods and Peace Promotion,” p. 3.

est dividing lines they seem to notice: rural/urban; educated/uneducated; rich/poor; religious/secular; employed/unemployed; with Kyrgyz language capacity and without; with Russian language capacity and without; radical/moderate; youth with special needs and without; minorities/majorities (by ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious views); criminal youth/law-abiding youth; sick/healthy; northern/southern; from Bishkek/from elsewhere; scholarship students/paying students.²⁵²

3.4 Rights and Responsibilities Addressed by Policies Pertaining to Youth

Any discussion of human rights and policy in Kyrgyzstan must, unfortunately, begin with a restatement of the fact that the declaration of rights and responsibilities in legislation, regulations, and other policy documents does not consistently translate into their actual enactment and enforcement. The judiciary and larger legal system, once subjugated to the ruling one-party political system, have not become an independent, powerful force for the protection of the public good. Instead, they are influenced by external forces, self-interest, and/or lack of professionalism and, as mentioned in Section 2.4, enjoy little public trust. As noted by a longtime participant in the country's woefully ineffective police reform program, "to this day, according to opinion polls and public perception, the police still stand sentinel for the bodies of state, rather than to protect human rights."²⁵³ In fact, the loyalties of police, prosecutors, judges, and other officials responsible for protecting citizens' rights may lie not so much with institutions as with powerful individuals, personal networks, or themselves; rule of law and respect for human rights seem to guide the legal system's actions and decisions only sporadically. Yet, it is not clear how aware young people are of these shortcomings: A representative national youth study in 2009 found

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252. List compiled from three sources: materials from a roundtable called "Coordinating Activity in the Sphere of Developing Youth Policy," held in Bishkek March 11, 2011 (provided by the Youth Ministry); "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country"; and authors' observations of and interactions with young people.

253. Yefimov, "Kyrgyzstan: Bishkek Looks to Georgia as Role Model for Justice Overhaul."

that only 24 percent of young people “were not satisfied with the level of legal protection available to citizens.”²⁵⁴

Imperfections notwithstanding, Kyrgyzstan has enshrined all fundamental human rights and freedoms in its national laws. Section 2 of the country’s Constitution, titled “Rights and Freedoms of Humans and Citizens,” is based almost entirely on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Between 1994 and 2003, Kyrgyzstan acceded to seven of the nine core international human rights instruments identified by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.²⁵⁵ On September 21, 2011, it signed an eighth, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,²⁵⁶ leaving only one major human rights treaty to which it is not a party—the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.²⁵⁷

The civic and political, or “first-generation,” rights of young people are guaranteed by law. Usually, these assurances fall under the blanket protections afforded to Kyrgyzstanis in general, but sometimes young people are referred to specifically. As mentioned in Section 3.2, citizens are allowed to vote beginning at the age of 18.²⁵⁸ This franchise was expanded a bit in the summer of 2011 to allow voting by those who turn 18 on or before the day of elections; previously, young citizens were eligible to vote only if they had turned 18 by the date elections were officially called.²⁵⁹ Age limits are also explicitly stated in legislation on the right to run for office. At 21, young people can vie for seats in their local representative councils²⁶⁰ and, thanks

254. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 20.

255. International Law, UN OHCHR website. Accessed Dec. 10, 2011, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/>; UN Treaty Collection, accessed Dec. 10, 2011, <http://treaties.un.org/Pages/Treaties.aspx?id=4&subid=A&lang=en>.

256. UN Treaty Collection, accessed Dec. 10, 2011, http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-15&chapter=4&lang=en.

257. *Ibid.*

258. Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 2.4.

259. Bermet Mambetshayeva, “CEC [Central Elections Commission] Has Changed Procedures for Voting by Young Voters” (*TsIK izmenil poriadok golosovaniia molodykh izbiratelei*), K-News, Aug. 3, 2011. Accessed Oct. 30, 2011, <http://www.knews.kg/ru/vybory/1442/>.

260. Law On Elections of Deputies of Local Keneshes [Councils], Article 3.4.

to lobbying in the spring of 2010,²⁶¹ in the national parliament.²⁶² Political parties running for seats in the national legislature, as noted in Section 3.2, must now give people aged 35 or younger at least 15 percent of the slots in their candidate lists.²⁶³ (To run for president, on the contrary, a Kyrgyzstani citizen must be not younger than 35 and not older than 70.²⁶⁴)

In addition to rights associated with elections, Kyrgyzstani law promises young people numerous other rights and freedoms unconnected to age, including both first-generation rights and those known as “second-generation,” related mostly to equality of socioeconomic opportunity. The Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression,²⁶⁵ a fair trial,²⁶⁶ freedom of religion,²⁶⁷ freedom of movement,²⁶⁸ peaceful assembly,²⁶⁹ freedom of association,²⁷⁰ and freedom of thought and conscience.²⁷¹ It likewise provides for freedom from discrimination,²⁷² as does the Labor Code²⁷³ and the Code on Administrative Accountability,²⁷⁴ and for the right to social security.²⁷⁵ The right to self-defense is guaranteed by the Criminal Code.²⁷⁶ Chapter 4 of this report considers in greater detail some of the other rights assured to young people by law, including the rights to education, work, health care, and housing.

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261. “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” p. 6.

262. Constitutional Law On Elections of the President and Deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh [Parliament] of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 59.1.

263. *Ibid.*, Article 60.3.

264. *Ibid.*, Article 50.3.

265. Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 31.2.

266. *Ibid.*, Articles 16.3, 20.5.8, 24, and 26.

267. *Ibid.*, Articles 20.5.5, 20.4.7, and 32.

268. *Ibid.*, Articles 25.1, 25.2, 20.5.10, and 51.

269. *Ibid.*, Article 34.1.

270. *Ibid.*, Article 35.

271. *Ibid.*, Articles 20.5.4 and 31.1.

272. *Ibid.*, Article 16.

273. Labor Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 2.

274. Code on Administrative Accountability, Article 313.

275. Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 53.

276. Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 36.

A number of impressive youth organizations focusing on human rights operate in Kyrgyzstan, predominantly in the capital. One of the oldest is the Youth Human Rights Group (YHRG), created in 1995 by a group of Bishkek college students to raise young people's awareness about their rights and provide them with instruments for defending those rights.²⁷⁷ Since 2006, the organization has been stimulating the formation of youth initiative groups in the regions to solve pressing problems identified by young people themselves; today the network, called the Student Human Rights Movement, numbers about 120 members, plus several hundred more volunteers who have worked on specific projects.²⁷⁸ Issues tackled by the initiative groups in six cities in 2006–2010 included: extortion by college instructors; bride-kidnapping; access for people with disabilities to educational institutions; child labor; collection of money from students as punishment for missing classes; participation in decision making by college students; student access to information about university contractual obligations to them; access to potable water; violation of the rights of students living in dormitories; and a lack of textbooks and library services.²⁷⁹

Another energetic group of young activists is the Youth Rights Defenders Network of Kyrgyzstan (MPSK), a coalition that unites a number of youth groups, including the Alliance of Liberal Youth “Free Generation,” the Amity Youth Foundation, the Club of Liberal Youth, Club Kebel, and others.²⁸⁰ For two years running, MPSK has contributed assessments of the status of young people's rights to the country's human rights ombudsman for inclusion in his annual report, “On Respect for Human and Civic Rights in the Kyrgyz Republic.”²⁸¹ In its research, MPSK has identified and docu-

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277. “Report on the Results of Monitoring Respect for the Rights of Students in Institutions of Higher Learning” (in Russian), Youth Human Rights Group, Bishkek, 2010, p. 7.

278. Presentation by YHRG representative at youth forum on “Interaction of Youth Organizations with the Aim of Protecting the Rights and Advancing the Interests of Young People,” Nov. 18, 2011, Bishkek.

279. “Report on the Results of Monitoring Respect for the Rights of Students in Institutions of Higher Learning” (in Russian), Youth Human Rights Group, Bishkek, 2010, pp. 8–9.

280. “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” p. 4.

281. *Ibid.*

mented numerous violations of young people's rights. For example, in the first few months of 2010, prior to the ouster of former president Bakiyev, one of the most prominent infringements was the de facto ban on freedom of peaceful assembly; activists attempting to organize protests against the price hikes for electricity and cell phone service were denied permission to do so, while some were harassed and intimidated by police or detained on questionable premises.²⁸²

Despite some outstanding efforts, human rights do not seem to have much cachet among the young, who report mixed feelings about democracy and the freedoms that come with it. A small study conducted by YHRG in 2006 found that young people were generally not well informed about their rights, and, "fairly often, they mixed up concepts, confusing rights with rules and obligations."²⁸³ In Kyrgyzstan, as in some other former Soviet republics, many ordinary people have grown vastly disappointed in democracy, which appeared in their countries abruptly, lacking the institutions or traditions necessary to make it work. As a result, most Kyrgyzstanis have had little experience with the positive ways in which a legal emphasis on rights can manifest itself in daily life. One small study in 2010 concluded that "many youth are disenfranchised and disillusioned about the promise of democracy,"²⁸⁴ and another, mentioned briefly in Section 2.6, found that less than 1.3 percent of the young people surveyed (4 out of 307) believed Kyrgyzstan could ever become a full-fledged democracy.²⁸⁵ At the same time, a representative, nationwide youth study conducted in 2009 reported that, emotionally, 61 percent of respondents displayed positive feelings toward democracy; rationally, 63 percent felt that "individual rights and freedoms cannot be limited, even for the good of society and/or the state," and 42 percent believed "democracy is the best existing form of government," while 34 percent said "democracy has more cons than pros."²⁸⁶

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282. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

283. "Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan: Report on Study Results," p. 18.

284. "Youth Assessment: Kyrgyz Republic," p. 5.

285. "Kyrgyz Youth Thinks That US Is a Threat to Islam, but Dreams About Living and Studying There."

286. "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," p. 22.

3.5 Needs of Young People Considered in Policies Pertaining to Youth

In recent years, policymakers' consideration of youth needs has too often been limited to a statement of goals on paper, without the creation of functioning mechanisms for achieving those goals. Nonetheless, efforts to invest in youth capacities and to make the best of young people's potential have been officially acknowledged as necessary. The 2009 Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy calls for the creation of a Republican Youth Initiative Support Fund to back projects designed by young people and deemed "beneficial to the public." As of autumn 2011, the establishment of such a fund was under consideration by the government;²⁸⁷ it is not clear how the recent semi-merger of the Youth Ministry with the Labor Ministry will affect its creation.

The partial fusion of the two ministries in and of itself reflects an acknowledgment of youth needs: As noted by the authors of a 2010 youth assessment, "in all interviews and focus groups, youth unemployment was listed as one of the most significant obstacles facing young people in Kyrgyzstan."²⁸⁸ By merging the national agencies in charge of youth and labor policies, by appointing the minister of youth affairs to head the new body, and by placing the word "youth" first in the list of the ministry's obligations, the government—at least symbolically—has attested to its awareness of the problem's significance for young people. The midterm Country Development Strategy for 2012–2014, approved by the government in September 2011, likewise acknowledged the country's larger socioeconomic problems, which have a strong negative impact on the opportunities available to young people. These include the uncompetitive economy and its outdated structure, low levels of productivity, a generally low level of workforce competence, the "brain drain" of qualified labor, and the degradation of infra-

287. Telephone conversation with Youth Ministry official, Bishkek, November 2011.

288. "Youth Assessment: Kyrgyz Republic," p. 16.

structure.²⁸⁹ However, critics have argued that the development strategy is too ambitious and out of sync with the 2012 budget;²⁹⁰ in addition, it makes only three cursory mentions of young people.

The reflection of youth needs in policy includes some noteworthy gaps, particularly in terms of implementation, that are discussed in the following chapter. Observers hope that Kyrgyzstan can gradually improve its track record in meeting young people's needs through policy, which has fallen short of expectations in the past. In its assessment of the Jashtyk youth program adopted in 2000 (and cancelled in 2006), the YHRG concluded that “many aspects of this program seem to have been inherited from Soviet traditions and many areas of programmatic activity elicit doubts as to their necessity in modern society.”²⁹¹ In short, said the report, Jashtyk “did not address the needs of young people.”²⁹² Several concrete examples of the mismatch between needs and policy were cited. One was the creation of unarmed youth militias to help patrol neighborhoods and preserve public order: “It is dubious,” wrote the authors, “that the creation of such militias really addresses young people's needs”—nor was it clear why young people should be supplementing the work of law enforcement.²⁹³ The program likewise emphasized “military-patriotic” indoctrination over tolerance or human rights and declared certain inherently discriminatory goals, for example, “developing ‘a program of gender education for future women,’” instead of promoting gender-related programs for young men and women

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289. Draft Country Development Strategy for 2012–2014, Section II—Unresolved Problems (adopted by Government Decree #540 in September 2011), Ministry of Economic Regulation website. Accessed Oct. 20, 2011, <http://mert.kg/files/19%20сентября%20финал%20СПР%20на%202012-2014%20г.doc>.

290. Bermet Mambetshayeva, “Azamat Akeleyev: ‘The Draft Budget for 2012 and the Mid-Term Development Program for 2012–2014 Are Not in Accord’” (*Azamat Akeleyev: “Proekt biudzhet na 2012 god i Srednesrochnaia programma razvitiia na 2012–2014 gody ne soglasovany*), K-News, Oct. 5, 2011. Accessed Dec. 7, 2011, <http://www.knews.kg/ru/econom/3995/>; Bermet Mambetshayeva, “Parliament Continues Discussing the Mid-Term Development Program for 2012–2014” (*V parlamente prodolzhauiut obsuzhdenie Srednesrochnoi programmy razvitiia na 2012–2014 gody*), K-News, Oct. 24, 2011. Accessed Dec. 7, 2011, http://www.knews.kg/ru/parlament_chro/4897/.

291. “Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan: Report on Study Results,” p. 9.

292. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

293. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

alike.²⁹⁴ The Youth Ministry has also been the target of extensive criticism for devoting much of its energy to youth entertainment and mass “actions,” like patriotically themed tree planting, instead of more substantive activities.²⁹⁵

3.6 Conclusions

The context within which Kyrgyzstan’s youth policy gets designed and implemented is rife with complicated geopolitical and socioeconomic variables. The country is extremely poor and unemployment runs high, particularly among the young. The population is about two-thirds rural and many populated areas are remote, with poor infrastructure and services, while most money—large portions of it swirling in a shadow economy—is concentrated in the capital. This leads to widespread internal migration, particularly to Bishkek and its environs, where migrants are often isolated or encounter problems accessing social services. Hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyzstanis—again, many of them young—likewise travel abroad in search of work, with total remittances equivalent to as much as one-fifth of GDP. While this money helps alleviate poverty at home, it also damages communities’ social fabric and often relegates migrants to dangerous, low-skilled work. Meanwhile, these socioeconomic pressures are compounded by festering interethnic tensions, which periodically explode into violence.

Young people, officially defined as aged 14 to 28, make up nearly one-third of the population, while people under 29 make up about 60 percent; however, the young find achieving upward mobility extremely difficult. The bleak employment situation causes young people to continue to rely economically on their parents and other relatives for protracted periods. Although Kyrgyzstanis marry and have children relatively early in life, building independent, sustainable young families is complicated both by material hardship and by certain gender stereotypes, which keep women from participating fully in the workforce, while preventing men from playing a more active role in the home. In this environment, young people vary

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294. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

295. Interviews with youth activists in Osh, November 2011; “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” pp. 5–6.

greatly in their perceptions of their place in society, with assessments ranging from “innovative vanguard” to “helpless incompetents.”

In response to these challenges, Kyrgyzstan’s government tends to adopt youth policies that are reactive rather than proactive or visionary. This fits into a larger pattern of poor planning and weak, unrealistic policymaking—inherited in part from the Soviet past; as a result, many policies exist on paper only. Responsibility for youth policy has been shifted around among six different national agencies in the past eight years. Even the Youth Ministry, hastily created in April 2010, was merged with another ministry after less than two years of operation, while many of its activities were criticized by youth activists—as were the youth policies that came before it—as ineffective or off the mark. Although youth-sector bureaucrats have justifiably complained of underfunding, many of the weaknesses plaguing youth policy lie elsewhere: It lacks reliable needs assessments, measurable goals, coherence, accountability, cross-sectoral cooperation, and creative approaches to engaging young people. It also retains several leftovers from Soviet times, including a paternalistic approach to young people, an emphasis on “talented youth,” and a desire to indoctrinate the young ideologically rather than focus on their needs and future roles in society. Although considerable rights and freedoms are guaranteed by law, the lack of a functioning legal system and the rigidity of certain social mores confine many of these to theory.



Youth and
Public Policy in

Kyrgyzstan



Policy Realities

4

4.1 Existence of Policies

While Kyrgyzstan has a raft of policies that concern young people, few of these seem to directly intervene in, influence, or control young people's lives. Too many of the laws, regulations, and conceptual documents reflecting youth policy are declarative in nature, lacking effective mechanisms for implementation. In its 2009–2010 report on youth, the UNDP concluded that “youth policy remains ineffective, poorly targeted and formalistic, and is treated as a low priority among the state's domestic policies.”²⁹⁶ A similar assessment was given in 2006 by the YHRG, whose analysis of youth policy said: “There has not been, nor is there now, a comprehensive, systemic approach to existing problems; state policy pertaining to youth is only proclaimed, but it does not provide for either a clear, definitive strategy or mechanisms for implementing the programs that have been developed.”²⁹⁷ Unfortunately, that state of affairs has not changed significantly in the years since, despite some attempts to involve youth in policymaking and the creation of the Youth Ministry (which has now been fused with the Labor Ministry).

As noted in previous chapters, many of the country's most explicitly youth-focused policies are now undergoing revision, or being created anew, because the old policies were deemed ineffectual. Currently, the most significant piece of legislation laying the legal groundwork for youth policy is the Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy of July 31, 2009, which replaced a law of the same name passed in 2000. The latest version of the law reads much like a policy framework, calling for details of its implementation to be worked out in the future. It requires the passage of additional regulations and assumes the development of so-called targeted youth programs at the national and local levels.

The law's overall stated aim is “the creation of legal, economic, social and other conditions aimed at realizing the rights and interests of young citizens and youth organizations, and their potential, in the interests of the state and society.” The law also sets a general goal of “shaping an active civic position and reference points for values among youth, which will ensure

296. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 14.

297. “Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan: Report on Study Results,” p. 8.

the stable, innovative development of the country, its territorial integrity and the cultural identity of the people of Kyrgyzstan.” In pursuit of this goal, the law identifies eight sub-goals pertaining to young people:

1. To create conditions for socialization;
2. To shape spiritual-moral values and culture;
3. To improve health and provide access to medical services;
4. To create conditions for getting an education and professional training;
5. To facilitate employment and provide social protection;
6. To realize proposed initiatives beneficial to the public;
7. To facilitate and create conditions for leisure activity and to develop creative potential;
8. To involve [young people] in the activities of society and the state and to cultivate civic responsibility.

Beyond the realm of youth policy per se, one set of policies that does directly influence young people’s lives concerns education. The Constitution guarantees free public-school education through 11th grade²⁹⁸ and makes it mandatory through 9th grade.²⁹⁹ The Law On Education, last amended in 2003, reiterates these provisions and also declares that all citizens have an equal right to education. In reality, apart from the generally low quality of primary and secondary education, Kyrgyzstan’s schoolchildren suffer from a number of violations of their rights. Most important of all, de facto, public education is not free, despite the legal guarantees: Underfunding and corruption in the education system force families to pay for schooling; families routinely face demands by teachers and other education officials for money to supplement meager operating budgets. The most vulnerable groups in this respect are the poor and those without residency registration. Despite a specific provision in the Law On Education that the right to a free public education shall not be affected by a citizen’s place of residency, municipalities, particularly Bishkek, often limit the access of people without local residency registration to the public schools. As noted in Section 3.1, a 2009 study among internal migrants found that nearly half of adults surveyed

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298. Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 20.5.9.

299. Ibid., Article 45.2.

in Bishkek who did not have official residency in the city had encountered problems registering their children for school and resolved those problems by paying bribes.³⁰⁰

Another problem undermining schoolchildren's rights, opportunities, and autonomy is the practice of pulling students out of class to have them take part in political rallies and campaigns, although electoral law forbids the participation of minors in this type of activity,³⁰¹ and the Law On Education promises social and legal protection for students. A group of youth human rights activists documented such violations during the parliamentary race of October 2010. They found that students from a number of schools in Osh were sent to rallies in support of political parties instead of attending class and schoolchildren in Jalalabad were "specially excused from classes" to tie a party's campaign ribbons along streets in the city and along a major road to its suburbs.³⁰²

The Law On Education likewise guarantees the right to free primary vocational schooling, usually begun after the 9th grade, and competitive access to higher education. For the latter, a limited number of state-subsidized, tuition-free spots are available at public institutions of higher learning. According to the education minister, the state annually allocates 5,705 such slots, yet in the summer of 2011, more than 16,000 young people applied for them, while 22,000 more applied for paid study.³⁰³ Admission is supposed to be based on merit and objective criteria; however, as suggested in Section 2.2, the post-Soviet transition from free higher education for a small elite to a much-larger-scale, mixed system of commercial degree programs and state subsidies has both lowered the quality of education and fueled corruption, giving an unfair advantage to those with wealth and connections.

300. "Without a Paper, You're a Nothing. Kyrgyzstan's Civil Society Is Calling for the Repeal of the Institution of Residency Permits."

301. "Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic," "Content: Young, Strong, Free," p. 8.

302. Ibid.

303. "Summary of the Week of July 18–23" (*Itogi nedeli, 18–23 iul'ia*), Ministry of Education and Science website. Accessed Oct. 24, 2011, http://edu.gov.kg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=173:--18-23-&catid=171:--18-23-&Itemid=157.

In an attempt “to ensure equality of access to higher education and support for rural youth,” who typically are less wealthy and have poorer access to opportunities than their urban peers, in 2002–2004 Kyrgyzstan introduced standardized national testing for college applicants.³⁰⁴ Recent research has found that, although the testing has not eliminated disparities between the quality of education available to rural and urban students, it has benefitted many young people by increasing access to higher education for academically strong applicants “regardless of geographic and social background” and has “succeeded in minimizing corruption in university admission procedures.”³⁰⁵

At the same time, some current policies hinder scholarship students’ attempts to achieve autonomy. In a throwback to Soviet times, those who study at the expense of the state are often funneled into professions that the state deems necessary, rather than study disciplines of their own choosing. Today, more than half of scholarship slots, also known as “budget grants,” are reserved for “future teachers,” but, because the profession offers “low salaries and limited future opportunities, [. . .] those students who can afford to pay tuition fees refuse state grants and choose professions other than teaching.”³⁰⁶ Similarly, in 2005, Kyrgyzstan reintroduced mandatory postings of young doctors to rural areas: Amendments to the relevant legislation “stipulated that students who received state scholarships for their medical studies must serve in assigned rural areas for a minimum of two years.”³⁰⁷

Furthermore, youth activists point to a number of ways in which students’ rights are violated after they have been accepted to institutions of higher learning. One of the most common, in contravention of the “norms of pedagogical ethics” stipulated by the Law On Education, is instructors’ sale of various items to students, particularly around exam time.³⁰⁸ A 2008

304. Shamatov, “Impact of Standardized Tests,” p. 8.

305. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

306. *Ibid.*, p. 13, n38.

307. Ainura Ibraimova et al., “Kyrgyzstan: Health System Review,” *Health Systems in Transition*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2011), p. 71.

308. “Report on the Results of Monitoring Respect for the Rights of Students in Institutions of Higher Learning” (in Russian), Youth Human Rights Group, Bishkek, 2010, p. 26.

survey in the small southern city of Kyzyl-Kiya showed that 55 percent of students had felt pressured to buy books, lottery tickets, magazines, and cosmetics from instructors; asked why they made the purchases, 60 percent said they feared refusal would hurt their grades or otherwise elicit the professor's ill-will.³⁰⁹ Another problem has been the widespread practice of charging students for missing classes. Sometimes the money is paid officially to the school, with a receipt, and other times it goes directly into the hands of the instructor; in either case, as activists point out, this practice does not stimulate students' interest in their studies or contribute to their personal growth via education.³¹⁰ One more difficulty identified by the youth activists was access to institutions' founding documents, or charters, which regulate the rights and responsibilities of the school administration. Charters lay out such basic information as a school's list of services, its budget, and its rules for expelling students. In one case, a member of a student group was threatened with expulsion for demanding to see the charter and received a copy only after a year-long lawsuit initiated by YHRG.³¹¹

Another policy area that should affect young people—but seems not to—is health care. The Constitution promises: the universal right to public health; state support for conditions in which public and private health care can thrive; and some availability of free and discounted medical services, as determined by the government.³¹² In addition to the Constitution, the main legislation governing health care in Kyrgyzstan is the Law On the Protection of the Health of Citizens, which took effect in 2005. This law does not explicitly identify young people as a separate category of beneficiaries, but it promises certain services regardless of age, including free primary care by family doctors and general practitioners.³¹³ A number of other services, including care for pregnant women, are free under certain conditions laid out in the “Program of State Guarantees.”³¹⁴ In its design and ethos, the health-protection law is rights-based: Its primary stated goal is “the reali-

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309. Ibid.

310. Ibid., pp. 5–6.

311. Ibid., pp. 14–15.

312. Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 47.

313. Law On the Protection of the Health of Citizens, Article 22.

314. Ibid., Article 67.

zation of citizens' inalienable right to the defense and protection of their health and life."³¹⁵

However, as described in Section 2.3 and elsewhere in this report, the public health care system is not living up to this objective. While young people are generally optimistic about their health, they are often simply unaware of underlying problems. Presenters at parliamentary hearings in 2007 claimed that "the underdevelopment of health-improving forms of leisure [...] has led to a situation in which more than 69 percent of young people of pre-conscription age are not fit to serve in the military."³¹⁶ As of April 2007, according to a European study comparing different countries' policies for promoting physical activity, Kyrgyzstan was found to have no policy documents in this area.³¹⁷ Likewise, the Health Ministry, in developing its draft strategy for 2012–2016, has expressed alarm over the significant rise in the number of deaths from cardiovascular disease among people in their 30s and 40s, which suggests that serious health problems are accumulating while people are young.³¹⁸

As noted in previous chapters, a particularly significant issue for young people is reproductive health. Kyrgyzstan has a 2007 Law On Reproductive Rights of Citizens and Guarantees for Their Realization. Like the broader law on health care, this one also does not refer to youth as a separate category. It assigns many responsibilities, including reproductive health education, to the "authorized state body in the sphere of protecting citizens' reproductive health" (presumably, the Health Ministry), which is supposed to coordinate its activities with other state agencies.³¹⁹ However, reproductive health education is not a part of school curricula, and no teaching methodologies or specially trained instructors are available to teach young

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315. Ibid., Article 3.

316. "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," p. 53.

317. Signe B. Daugbjerg et al., "Promotion of Physical Activity in the European Region: Content Analysis of 27 National Policy Documents," *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 2009, No. 6, p. 808. Accessed Nov. 10, 2011, http://www.politiquessociales.net/IMG/pdf/Promotion_of_physical.pdf.

318. Draft of the Den Sooluk National Program for the Reform of Healthcare in 2012–2016, Sept. 12, 2011, p. 17.

319. Law On Reproductive Rights of Citizens and Guarantees for Their Realization, Art. 7.

people about the subject.³²⁰ A straightforward teacher’s manual on reproductive health was used in schools for four years until 2003, when a group of activists filed a lawsuit against the authors to defend the “honor and dignity” of the Kyrgyz people, claiming the book did not “correspond to the mentality and traditions of the Kyrgyz.”³²¹ Teachers, particularly from vocational schools, have acknowledged to youth specialists that they cannot bring themselves to discuss sexual topics with students.³²² Moreover, health care system reforms have abolished the category of adolescents’ doctors, further eroding young people’s access to age-specific health services and counseling.³²³ In its 2009–2010 report on youth, the UNDP pointed out that Kyrgyzstan “lacks ‘youth-friendly’ [medical] services—especially sexual health services.”³²⁴ At the same time, the draft program on health care reform for 2012–2016 identifies reducing risky behavior among young people as one of the key services to be provided.³²⁵

A number of major international donors, UNICEF in particular, have contributed significantly to the Health Ministry’s attempts to combat problems that afflict young people very early in their lives and have a lasting impact, among them micronutrient deficiency and maternal mortality. This assistance often comes in the form of pilot projects that, if proven successful, may be scaled up, but will likely continue to rely on foreign funding and expertise for design, implementation, and monitoring.

Another crucial element of youth policy concerns the availability of paid work. As noted above, the 2009 Law On the Fundamentals of Youth Policy sets the goal of facilitating employment for young people; however, analysts say the state has no strategic vision or clear policy in this area and does not know whether to prepare workers for the domestic labor market or

320. “Preventing HIV Among Young People” (in Russian), UNFPA-Kyrgyzstan, 2010.

321. Solto Temir, “Shapiro Will Teach the Kyrgyz Sex. Trial to Be Held Over ‘Healthy Way of Life’ Textbook” (*Shapiro nauchit kirgizov seksu. Za uchebnik “Zdorovi obraz zhizni” budut sudit*), Centrasia.ru, July 25, 2003. Accessed Oct. 31, 2011, <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1059114420>.

322. Interview with youth expert in Bishkek, July 2011.

323. *Ibid.*

324. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 37.

325. Draft of the Den Sooluk National Program for the Reform of Healthcare in 2012–2016, Sept. 12, 2011, p. 32.

for migration abroad.³²⁶ Early in 2011, the Labor Ministry presented a strategic document, developed together with the International Labor Organization (ILO), called “Roadmap: The Kyrgyz Republic’s Policy of Employment Through Decent Work (2011–2015).” This plan proposes linking labor regulations with economic development by analyzing and forecasting the economy’s need for labor resources. Heretofore, that kind of thinking has been missing from the country’s labor policies: Data collection and analysis have been very weak;³²⁷ also, in the structure of the government, the Labor Ministry had fallen within the “social welfare bloc” rather than the “economic bloc.”³²⁸ It is not yet clear how the government will classify the new Ministry of Youth, Labor and Employment.

In the meantime, the state tries to help young people find jobs through its Youth Labor Exchange, an employment service under the auspices of the Labor Ministry established in 1996 with assistance from the German government’s international aid arm, now called GIZ. The ministry says the exchange, since its inception, has fielded requests for employment from more than 75,000 young people and has found jobs for nearly 36,000 of them—an average of about 2,500 jobs a year.³²⁹ (For comparison, the number of students enrolled in institutions of higher learning in 2007 was 231,000.³³⁰) Unfortunately, as described in Section 4.2 below, recent studies have indicated that young people are not widely aware of such services, and many of those who do know of them do not consider them helpful.

In 2011, government officials responded to popular discontent over a lack of trickle-down wealth from foreign investment in the country’s lucrative gold-mining sector by promising job creation: Then–youth minister Alymkulov said in April that his ministry was developing a program jointly with the Natural Resources Ministry to ensure that 70 percent of all jobs

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326. Interview with labor and migration expert, Bishkek, October 2011.

327. Comments by Labor Ministry official, conference on “Employment in the Kyrgyz Republic: Problems and Policy Choices,” Bishkek, Nov. 11, 2011.

328. Interview with labor and migration expert, Bishkek, October 2011.

329. “Information About the Youth Labor Exchange,” Ministry of Labor, Employment and Migration of the Kyrgyz Republic. Accessed June 25, 2011, <http://mz.kg/news/view/id/190>.

330. Shamatov, “Impact of Standardized Tests,” p. 6.

at new mines would go to local residents, presumably young ones;³³¹ five months later, authorities said they expected more than 25,000 new jobs to become available between 2012 and 2014 with the start of extraction at new sites.³³² It remains to be seen whether the estimate is accurate and what effect such future jobs will have on youth unemployment. None of the officials promoting this idea has mentioned any plans for assessing what types of workers may be needed for the newly created jobs.

Kyrgyzstan does not seem to have any incentive programs for young people to engage in business or for established business owners to create jobs for young people.³³³

While Kyrgyzstan's regulatory environment has improved over the past five years, it still poses many obstacles to small-scale entrepreneurship. The latest "Doing Business" report by the World Bank gives Kyrgyzstan high marks for the ease of getting credit, starting a business, and registering property; however, the country ranks 181st out of 183 for ease of connecting a business to the electricity grid, 171st for ease of trading across borders, and 162nd for ease of paying taxes, with recent reforms in that area raising the costs of doing business rather than cutting them.³³⁴ The number of state agencies allowed to inspect businesses—and thus extract bribes—was increased recently from 20 to 21.³³⁵ For young people who want to start their own businesses, poor access to start-up capital is another significant roadblock.³³⁶ The Labor Code makes no mention of young people other than

331. Ivan Marchenko, "Aliyasbek Alymkulov: Setting the Youth of Kyrgyzstan on the Right Path Isn't Easy, but We're Not Giving Up (*Aliyasbek Alymkulov: Nastavit molodezh Kyrgyzstana na verny put nelegko, no my ne sdaemsia*), 24.kg, April 11, 2011. Accessed April 11, 2011, <http://www.24kg.org/community/97526-.html>.

332. Farangis Najibullah and Ulan Eshmatov, "Many Kyrgyz Fail to Find a Glittering Future in Gold," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Sept. 25, 2011. Accessed Sept. 28, 2011, http://www.rferl.org/content/why_no_gold_rush_in_kyrgyzstan/24339470.html.

333. Interview with head of economic think tank, Bishkek, November 2011.

334. "Doing Business 2012: Comparing Regulation for Domestic Firms in 183 Economies," International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, 2012, p. 107.

335. "Relevant Parliament Committee Has Raised the Number of State Agencies with the Right to Inspect Businesspeople to 21 (List)" (*Profilny komitet ZhK uvelichil kolichestvo gosstruktur, imeiushchikh pravo proverki predprinimatelei do 21 [perechen]*), Tazabek, Nov. 2, 2011. Accessed Nov. 2, 2011, <http://www.tazabek.kg/news:247621/>.

336. "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," p. 34.

to establish legal age limits for employment and to ban discrimination on grounds of age. The government does seem to be aware of these problems, as the draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015 explicitly identifies support for young people engaged in small business as one of its objectives.

As noted elsewhere in this report, the above-mentioned draft State Strategy was one of two major youth policy documents under consideration by the government as of autumn 2011, the other being the draft Targeted State Program in the Sphere of Youth Policy Until 2015. While both of these documents are impressive in their emphasis on meaningful youth participation, they try to cover so much ground, sometimes in such abstract or even contradictory terms, that they recall to mind criticisms leveled against earlier youth policies—namely that they were overly broad and lacked specific, attainable goals, clear mechanisms for implementation, any mechanisms for monitoring implementation, and indicators for assessing effectiveness.³³⁷

The latest draft of the State Strategy, sent to the government for consideration in October 2011, places particular emphasis on health, education, and volunteer activities. In addition to the principles discussed in Section 3.2, it identifies the “focus and place” of youth policy as “the art of compromise, the ability to reach agreement and the ability to create common rules and norms of activity” for all relevant stakeholders. Its authors express the hope that their document will help turn young people into “a successful, progressive part of society” and “a key strategic resource, ensuring the country’s sustainable and modernized development.” They also write that one of Kyrgyzstan’s main problems is the “erosion and depletion of human capital,” particularly in the form of outbound labor migration and permanent emigration. To remedy this ill, the draft document recommends pursuing two directions of youth policy, both of them somewhat vague and idealistic: preparing young people for an active, autonomous role in the future of their communities “by means of self-realization through national programs and other state projects focused on young people’s health and education” and “ensuring the participation of young people in practical affairs of the present through the institution of volunteering.”

337. “Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan: Report on Study Results,” p. 9.

In both spirit and language, the draft State Strategy has much in common with the 2009 law on youth policy, including an emphasis on youth participation. In all, it lists nine objectives:

- » “To shape a generation of active citizens [. . .] capable of taking on responsibility for developing the country and [its] regions, as well as taking part in the process of managing and realizing youth policy”;
- » “To shape reference points for values (of a moral nature) among youth, which will ensure the stable, innovative development of the country, its territorial integrity and the cultural identity of the people of Kyrgyzstan”;
- » “To create and ensure legal, socioeconomic and other conditions for the development of active youth”;
- » “To support publicly beneficial initiatives of young people in the interests of the state”;
- » “To develop a system and mechanisms of effective measures for young people,” including initiatives that try “to involve young people in society’s socioeconomic, political and cultural life”;
- » “To create a single system of joint coordination, monitoring and evaluation of [. . .] sectoral policies (first and foremost, education, health and employment),” as well as other youth programs carried out by governmental and nongovernmental actors alike;
- » To ensure the implementation of relevant information and communication programs;
- » To ensure a guaranteed level of social services to young people and to implement targeted social programs for vulnerable and at-risk youth;
- » To create the institution of youth volunteering and ensure its functioning.

The draft State Strategy also lays out five priorities: youth participation, spread of information, state social services for all young people, national programs for particular categories of young people, and results-oriented management of government programs. Quite a few of the objectives outlined in this section seem nebulous or tautological—for example, access to secondary education is to be ensured “by working toward a reduction in the number of young people not covered.” Nonetheless, the strategy also lists

specific improvements for which to strive. These include an increase in the number of youth-friendly health facilities; the modernization and expansion of youth employment services; support for young people engaged in small business; and promoting tolerance.

The drafting of the Targeted State Program in the Sphere of Youth Policy Until 2015, finalized at about the same time as the draft State Strategy, was mandated by the 2009 law on youth policy. The body of the document covers much the same ground as the strategy, though in fewer pages and less detail. At the same time, it mentions three objectives not discussed explicitly in the strategy: a transition from the existing “social-paternalistic” model of youth policy to one based on “investment and partnership”; the cultivation of a sense of patriotism in young people; and the construction of a “single, vertical structure” of managing youth policy. The document explicates none of these topics.

The draft Targeted Program also lists five results to be attained: to increase the number of official organizations working with young people and to make young people more active in society and business; to improve the quality of prophylactic work among young people and improve their health; to expand young people’s access to information, particularly about existing youth policies; to improve the quality of young people’s civic and patriotic education; and to reaffirm and expand international cooperation in the area of youth policy.

4.2 Policy Implementation and Delivery

Strategies and commitments for achieving policy decisions across sectors have been inadequate because of frequent changes in leadership, an unsophisticated culture of policymaking, and insufficient—or inefficiently used—financial, human, and technological resources. Specific mechanisms for ensuring young people’s access to rights, opportunities, and information seem poorly defined and enforcement is lax. Most laws, bylaws, and regulations are declarative, neither spelling out how they are to be implemented nor foreseeing sanctions for non-implementation. For all the reasons mentioned above, programs targeting young people often depend on

international donors and rise and fall in tandem with their priorities and funding.

The draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015 tries to address these shortcomings by calling for “results-oriented management.”³³⁸ According to the document, this would require clear, easy-to-understand statements of measurable goals and the development of action plans as well as methodologies for evaluating the results and effectiveness of the government’s work.

Today, the structures and mechanisms that exist for the implementation and delivery of public policies include local government administrations, headed by political appointees, and local representative structures, elected by popular vote. While youth policy documents have traditionally placed a great deal of responsibility on local authorities, the funding to enact youth-related programs is often not in place. Tax reforms enacted in 2009 slashed the number of taxes payable into local coffers from eight to two, making city and village leaders ever more reliant on Bishkek for cash transfers.³³⁹ Despite this Bakiyev-era move toward recentralization, local leaders can play a crucial role in providing young people with information and opportunities. The head of one rural administration in Chui Province described how, through personal acquaintances, he arranged meetings at institutions of higher learning in Bishkek for students about to graduate from secondary school in his jurisdiction and took several busloads of them into the city to acquaint them with the capital and its schools.³⁴⁰

Most of the ministries responsible for youth-relevant policies have some sort of presence at a local level. In some cases, representatives or liaisons are based in provincial or district capitals; in others, they are at the town or village level in the form of service providers such as schools, clinics, and police stations. As of November 2011, the Youth Ministry planned to take over 17 UNICEF-established youth centers in Osh and Jalalabad provinces and to run them jointly with a USAID-funded youth project.³⁴¹ The draft

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338. Draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015, Section VI, Principles.

339. Interview with experts on local government, Bishkek, November 2011.

340. Interview with local administration head, Chui Province, November 2011.

341. Interviews with youth NGO officials, Osh and Bishkek, November 2011.

State Strategy also foresees creating a network of such centers in every provincial capital and some other major cities by 2015.

In terms of youth policy per se, the state's capacity for delivery has yo-yoed with successive restructurings of the sector. As noted in the draft Targeted Program, a reorganization of the government in 2005 and the elimination of provincial Committees for Youth Affairs led to a drop in the number of staff positions dedicated to youth policy at the province level from six to one and in each district from two or three to one. In November 2010, seven months after the Youth Ministry began its work, only 23 of 48 staff positions had been filled in its central apparatus; in the provinces, it had 7 people out of a planned 20.³⁴² By July 2011, the ministry had appointed 19 of 20 planned representatives at the provincial level, ranging from 1 to 4 per province.³⁴³ (Officials responsible for youth policy at more local levels of government typically combine their youth focus with other duties.³⁴⁴) The ministry staff in Bishkek tends to be quite young, with little professional experience; to be able to hire enough people, the ministry convinced parliament to waive certain minimum requirements for civil servants' previous professional experience.³⁴⁵

The Youth Ministry has also faced considerable challenges in securing state funding. In 2010, for example, when the ministry unexpectedly came into being, its budget allocations totaled a paltry 5.2 million soms (about \$113,000), but the ministry collected about 20 million soms more from international donors, including the UNDP, UNICEF, GIZ, and SFK. By the following year, state funding had increased tenfold to 51.5 million soms³⁴⁶ but was still among the smallest budgets for any national government body.³⁴⁷

342. Interview with Youth Ministry official, Bishkek, July 2011.

343. List of regional representatives provided by the Youth Ministry, July 2011.

344. Separate interviews with the heads of two local administrations, Chui Province, November 2011.

345. Interview with Youth Ministry official, Bishkek, July 2011.

346. "Aliyasbek Alymkulov: Setting the Youth of Kyrgyzstan on the Right Path Isn't Easy, but We're Not Giving Up."

347. National budget 2011, breakdown by Central Asian Free Market Institute (CAFMI); project funded by the Budget Transparency and Accountability Program of Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan.

Other sectors critical to youth empowerment have experienced a similar dearth of resources or their injudicious apportionment. In education, for example, the system of calculating and disbursing school funding seems woefully inefficient. A deputy minister of education said in 2010 that the country's schools had no more than 40 percent of the necessary textbooks.³⁴⁸ Some school buildings are drastically overcrowded and poorly maintained, while others, in rural areas, stand nearly abandoned. The teaching profession has become so unattractive that, according to one report, 41.5 percent of teachers are retirees with “no replacement generation on the horizon. Those who stay are harassed by their superiors and authorities,” who often recruit them to do extra work for no pay.³⁴⁹ In the fall of 2010, teachers' salaries were as low as \$26 per month;³⁵⁰ hundreds of educators went on strike that winter, forcing the government to raise pay despite a gaping budget deficit. Preliminary data suggest that this has attracted some young people to the profession.³⁵¹ Still, Kyrgyzstan's job situation is so dire and corruption so ubiquitous that 70 out of 83 aspiring teachers surveyed in Osh and Jalalabad provinces in 2011 said they expected to pay bribes to secure work.³⁵²

In some cases, authorities' low capacity to perform their policy implementation tasks has to do not so much with a lack of funds as with “fragmented financial flows and service delivery.”³⁵³ This problem has been pointed out quite often in the health care sector.

Responsibility for the implementation of policy is often unclear, diffuse, or assigned but not supported with necessary resources. The 2009 Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy declares that youth policy shall be implemented through an authorized state body responsible for such

348. Irina Pavlova, “In Kyrgyzstan, Schools Have No More Than 40 Percent of the Needed Textbooks” (*V Kyrgyzstane obespechenost shkol uchebnikami ne prevyshaet 40 protsentov*), 24.kg, Aug. 24, 2010. Accessed Oct. 21, 2011, <http://www.24kg.org/community/81159-v-kyrgyzstane-obespechenost-shkol-uchebnikami-ne.html>.

349. “Central Asia: Decay and Decline,” pp. 5 and 7.

350. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

351. Interview with education specialist, October 2011.

352. “Youth, Livelihoods and Peace Promotion,” p. 29.

353. “The World Health Report: Health Systems Financing—The Path to Universal Coverage,” WHO, 2010, p. 77.

policy,³⁵⁴ but nothing more. Sanctions for non-implementation rarely exist and, when they do, they are usually ineffective. For example, the Law On Education provides for reimbursement in the event of low-quality secondary vocational or higher education,³⁵⁵ but this provision has rarely, if ever, been taken advantage of. The draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015 calls for mandatory personal responsibility by officials in charge of implementing youth policy but does not identify any instruments for realizing this goal.³⁵⁶ Similarly, the draft Targeted State Program in the Sphere of Youth Policy Until 2015, in its action plan for implementation, assigns responsibility for most goals to multiple ministries, plus donors and NGOs. This practice, manifest in earlier youth policy documents, was criticized by youth activists as early as 2006, when YHRG wrote: “There must be a distinction between responsibility for implementing program measures, which must unquestionably fall in the sphere of government obligations, and involvement of young people on a volunteer basis in the process of decision-making.”³⁵⁷

Insofar as pathways for accessing youth support programs exist, they do not seem to be well known. Some provisions for providing information about youth-relevant policies to their intended beneficiaries are in place, but that information does not, for the most part, effectively reach those for whom it is meant. According to a set of surveys conducted in 2011, between 70 percent and 84 percent of young people expressed an interest in youth policy;³⁵⁸ however, a survey by youth activists in 2010 found that 72.7 percent of young people “had not heard anything about the functioning” of the Youth Ministry.³⁵⁹

354. Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy, Article 10.

355. Law On Education, Article 41.

356. Draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015, Section VI, Principles.

357. “Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan: Report on Study Results,” p. 9.

358. Surveys conducted in three provinces (Chui, Issyk-Kul, and Jalalabad) by the Labor Ministry in the middle of 2011; results provided by Dr. Hannelore Kress, senior advisor on labor market policy.

359. “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” p. 5.

The Youth Ministry has not been alone in its inability to inform young people of the rights, opportunities, and information available to them. In the city of Osh, for instance, a representative of the Youth Labor Exchange—subordinate, until the recent government restructuring, to the Labor Ministry—visits secondary schools once every three months to hold information sessions.³⁶⁰ However, recent research suggests that young people are not widely aware that such state-funded employment services exist or do not consider them dependable. Surveys in three provinces in 2011 found that 24 percent to 36 percent of young people knew of local organizations that could help them find work, but only 7 percent to 15 percent would consult state-run employment services in their search for jobs.³⁶¹ (Another 7 percent to 11 percent said they would seek counsel at their places of study and 6 percent to 9 percent said they would use the Internet in hunting for work. As noted in Chapter 2, an overwhelming majority—44 percent to 68 percent—said they would seek advice from their parents.³⁶²)

A series of focus groups in Bishkek in 2010 yielded similar results: “Students emphasize the poor work of career centers,” said the resulting report. “In students’ opinions, these centers offer work with low salaries and do not meet young people’s expectations.”³⁶³ Like their peers in the provinces, “to help them find employment, young people [in the capital] are more inclined to turn to friends, acquaintances and relatives, and use information obtained from mass media.”³⁶⁴ The reliance on personal connections seems to be something of a constant: A 2008 survey released by the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that “in deciding on future employment, the majority of young people in Kyrgyzstan (60%) are guided by their parents and 30 percent rely on their friends and neighbors.”³⁶⁵ Members of a

360. Interview with local Labor Ministry official, Osh, November 2011.

361. Surveys conducted in three provinces (Chui, Issyk-Kul, and Jalalabad) by the Labor Ministry in the middle of 2011; results provided by Dr. Hannelore Kress, senior advisor on labor market policy.

362. Ibid.

363. “Giving Youth a Voice,” p. 15.

364. Ibid.

365. “In Kyrgyzstan, Employment and Training Programmes Help Stem a Rural Exodus,” International Labor Organization, June 16, 2008. Accessed Nov. 1, 2011, http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/press-and-media-centre/insight/WCMS_094231/lang-en/.

small youth focus group held by our team in Chui Province in November 2011 did not know that a Youth Labor Exchange exists.

Lack of health-related information and services, particularly among young people in rural areas, poses a major challenge. One attempt to remedy the problem has come through so-called Village Health Committees. These groups of volunteers spread information about various health initiatives—from dental hygiene to sanitation—to every rural settlement in the country. The programs are designed by the Health Ministry and passed down the pipe by regional coordinators.³⁶⁶ Young people are not targeted as a separate group of beneficiaries,³⁶⁷ and it is difficult to judge the success of this work because its quality depends entirely on individual volunteers. According to a national poll in 2009, only 32 percent of young people knew that a healthy diet is part of a healthy lifestyle.³⁶⁸ One nurse-midwife in a village in Chui Province told our team that the questions asked by young people mostly focus on reproductive health, but she noted that young women were less shy about posing such questions to her, a fellow woman, while young men seemed far more reluctant to make inquiries.³⁶⁹ The UNDP’s 2009–2010 report noted that male reproductive health was a critical problem among young people in Kyrgyzstan, with experts noting “a high incidence of urological pathologies among men of working and reproductive age.”³⁷⁰ From a practical standpoint, “services in this field are underdeveloped, especially in rural areas. In order to visit a urologist or andrologist, young men from rural areas have to go to a provincial center or to Bishkek.”³⁷¹ This problem is compounded by the gender stereotypes prevalent in the country, as discussed in Section 2.5: Men are expected to be stalwart and tough, particularly in terms of sexuality, so young men often feel they have no one with whom they can discuss such sensitive problems.³⁷²

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366. Interview with health care official, Osh, November 2011.

367. Ibid.

368. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 42.

369. Interview with nurse-midwife, Chui Province, November 2011.

370. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 40.

371. Ibid.

372. Ibid.

4.3 Policy Coverage and Equity

Not all young people have equal access to the rights, information, and opportunities guaranteed by policy. The largest marginalized group, according to a young official at the Youth Ministry, is rural youth,³⁷³ or about two-thirds of the country's young people. As noted above, young people living in the countryside have much more difficulty accessing health care than their urban peers. Likewise, children from rural and mountainous communities receive a lower-quality education and "are also frequently distracted by agricultural work and other family responsibilities."³⁷⁴ Even when these students do well on the national standardized test for entry to institutions of higher learning, they "usually enter lower prestige universities and faculties because their scores are lower [than those of young people from the cities] and they cannot compete with the top scores of Bishkek students."³⁷⁵ As noted in Section 4.1, such students can be subjected to state pressure in choosing their profession.

According to teachers and education officials surveyed in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010, the most vulnerable group of young people in terms of access to education comprises those with physical or mental disabilities; this opinion was held by 57 percent of teachers and 39 percent of education officials.³⁷⁶ Indeed, the rights of disabled children are not explicitly mentioned in the Law On Education, except for a general reference to nondiscrimination. As concluded by the OECD in a 2010 report, "in practice, inclusive education is not a government priority, in terms of funding. There is still an expectation that NGOs and international donors will take the lead."³⁷⁷ The other vulnerable groups identified in the above-mentioned teacher survey included neglected and homeless children and working children, with a much smaller percentage of education professionals identifying ethnic

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373. Interview with Youth Ministry official, July 2011.

374. Shamatov, "Impact of Standardized Tests," p. 5.

375. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

376. "Report on Educational Needs Assessment in the Southern Provinces of the Kyrgyz Republic," prepared by Five Business Group Consulting Company for the SFK Education Support Program, 2010, pp.13–14.

377. "Reviews of National Policies for Education: Kyrgyz Republic 2010. Lessons from PISA," p. 209.

minorities and children of internal migrants and refugees as having poor access to education.³⁷⁸ As noted elsewhere in this report, the problems of unequal access that do affect internal migrants tend to be most prominent around Bishkek, which has a high concentration of this population group.

The inequities faced by internal migrants trying to access public services like education and health care have been enumerated in Sections 2.3 and 3.1, but this subgroup of young people also faces challenges in exercising their voting rights. Until recently, a citizen living inside the country could vote only at the polling station affiliated with his or her officially registered address. But cumbersome bureaucracy, lack of education, and distrust of government have led to a situation in which many people reside in one place but are registered in another. Thus, many internal migrants were not exercising their right to vote. The presidential election of October 2011 marked the first time that citizens could vote irrespective of residency registration, although election officials were not always accommodating.³⁷⁹

As noted in Section 2.4, Kyrgyzstan's system of law enforcement and courts is weak across the board, but several subgroups of young people are particularly vulnerable to disregard for their rights in getting access to justice. One is low-income youth, who cannot afford to hire good legal counsel or pay bribes to officials. Another is women who have suffered domestic abuse, as police often regard this crime as a family affair and shelters are in very short supply. (Female rape victims often face difficulties in prosecuting offenders as well, but this is largely because they do not report the crime for fear of stigmatization.³⁸⁰) A third group, since June 2010, is ethnic Uzbeks, especially young men in the south, who, according to human rights activists, have been disproportionately singled out for "threats, violence,

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378. "Report on Educational Needs Assessment in the Southern Provinces of the Kyrgyz Republic," pp. 13–14.

379. Julia Kostenko, "Members of Election Commissions in Kyrgyzstan Do Not Accept Applications of Citizens [Who Have] Decided to Vote at Address of Their Choice," 24.kg, Oct. 24, 2011. Accessed Oct. 24, 2011, <http://eng.24.kg/politic/2011/10/24/21107.html>.

380. Daisy Sindelar, "A Year On, Osh Rape Victims Still Live in Shadows," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, June 9, 2011. Accessed June 9, 2011, http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyzstan_osh_rape_kyrgyz_ubeks_ethnic_clashes/24229595.html.

and serious violations, such as arbitrary arrest, torture and ill-treatment.”³⁸¹ Youth activists likewise note that young people detained by police, regardless of ethnicity, can fall victim to brutality: Between August 2009 and August 2010, 69 victims of police torture aged 14–28, including two women and eight minors, turned for help to human rights defenders.³⁸² Furthermore, Kyrgyzstan is only gradually developing a system of juvenile justice; UNICEF has played an instrumental role in helping to educate officials and in developing policy,³⁸³ but for now rehabilitation programs are in short supply and young offenders often bear the stigma of their wrongdoing for years afterward, particularly among law enforcement officials.³⁸⁴

Child protection experts note that the 16-to-18 age group sometimes falls through the cracks in policymaking. Most often this concerns young people living in institutions such as orphanages, specialized boarding schools, or so-called children’s homes, all of whom lose a number of protections at 16.³⁸⁵ However, other subgroups in that age range can also fall into gray areas of policy, for example, teenage mothers. Until recently, the set of laws known as the Family Code, which establishes the legal age for marriage at 18, allowed marriage in exceptional cases for those as young as 16. In June 2011, lawmakers raised that age to 17, but did not make corresponding changes to the Criminal Code, which establishes the age of consent for sexual relations at 16. Accordingly, a young woman who becomes pregnant before her 17th birthday cannot legally marry, thus running the risk of stigma or lack of legal protections for her child.

381. “Distorted Justice: Kyrgyzstan’s Flawed Investigations and Trials on the 2010 Violence,” Human Rights Watch, June 8, 2011. Accessed June 12, 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/06/08/distorted-justice-o>.

382. “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” p. 10.

383. Interviews with youth specialists in Bishkek, July 2011.

384. Albina Meterova, “Kyrgyzstan’s Law-Enforcement System Stigmatizes Difficult Teenagers as Criminals—Study” (*Pravookhranitelnaia sistema Kyrgyzstana stavit na trudnykh podrostkakh kleimo prestupnika—issledovanie*), KyrTAG news agency, Aug. 2, 2011. Accessed Aug. 2, 2011, <http://www.kyrtag.kg/?q=news/8775>.

385. Interview with child-protection expert, Bishkek, July 2011.

4.4 Recognition of Youth in Policy

An analysis of existing legislation prepared for the Youth Ministry with the help of the UNDP in February–March 2011 found that a number of laws could be amended to cover young people more explicitly; many of the recommendations, however, adhere to a paternalistic tradition of policymaking, promising social benefits that, in reality, prove minimal. In one example, the author of the analysis proposed that the 2001 Law On the Fundamentals of Public Social Services, which currently identifies “needy student families”³⁸⁶ as a category of beneficiaries, should explicitly cover “young people and young families in difficult life situations.” He likewise proposed that the Law On the Protection of the Health of Citizens should be expanded to identify young people as a distinct population group. In September 2011, the Youth Ministry combined these suggestions and proposed an amendment to the health law, calling for “young people and young families in difficult life situations” to be given priority in receiving state-run medical and social services; under the bill, the list of concrete services and benefits would be determined by the government.³⁸⁷ While such an amendment seems well intentioned, the low quality of the services to which it would entitle vulnerable young people raises doubts about its effectiveness. Moreover, it does nothing to expand access to youth-friendly health care facilities.

In the sphere of education, the analysis calls for an amendment to the 2006 Law On Primary Professional [Vocational] Education. Currently, the law ensures that the government shall cover tuition payments for orphans and wards of the state until they come of age at 18. The analysis argues that this is “not entirely fair,” as such youngsters are unlikely to have the means to continue their education without further support. So, it proposes that the law be amended to ensure unconditional state funding for the duration of their primary vocational education. The analysis likewise argues that a number of laws should be amended to guarantee certain educational, health, and social protection services to those young people who have

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386. This seems to refer to low-income families in which one or both spouses are college students.

387. Draft Resolution “On Additions to the Law ‘On the Protection of the Health of Citizens of the KR,’” Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, Sept. 9, 2011. Accessed Oct. 26, 2011, <http://www.gov.kg/?p=3146>.

completed military service. This would include discounts or scholarships for vocational and higher education, as well as professional training.

Other policies mentioned in the analysis include the laws On Fundamental Principles of Budget Law (1998) and On Normative Legal Acts (2009), both of which require public discussion of government budgets and policy proposals but neither of which explicitly mentions the need to engage young people in such discussions.

In sectors beyond youth policy per se, the degree to which young people are recognized as a specific subset of the population varies. In addition to the official youth categories discussed in Sections 3.2–3.4, it is worth noting that the education sector concerns itself exclusively with children and youth but adheres to its own groupings and categories by age, institution of learning, and other criteria. The National Statistics Committee has acknowledged the 14-to-28 age group as a distinct category and gathered data about it in the 2009 Census, though not across all categories of survey questions.

4.5 Policy Coherence

One of the mandates and *raison d'être* of the Youth Ministry was to coordinate all government youth policy; however, it proved to be unable to do so. Throughout the 20 months of its existence, the ministry remained relatively weak both politically and financially. High-level officials from other ministries and branches of government openly disparaged it, speaking with condescension of its staff and policy documents and ignoring its meetings.³⁸⁸ The elevation of the youth minister to head the newly created Ministry of Youth, Labor and Employment certainly seems like a vote of confidence from the country's new leadership; prior to this restructuring, however, the Youth Ministry had been forced to fight—not entirely successfully—for funding, personnel, and real estate. An assessment by youth activists of the first six months of the ministry's work found that it lacked a systematic approach and a "clear understanding of its role and place in the system of state governance. [. . .] Until there is an intelligible plan and a clear un-

388. Interviews with state officials, Bishkek, July 2011.

derstanding” of the ministry’s purpose, said the evaluation, “its continued functioning seems like a senseless waste of taxpayer money.”³⁸⁹

The Youth Ministry has, to some extent, acknowledged its weakness in cross-sectoral coordination, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. It has helped lay legal groundwork for the creation of a new coordinating council, operating under the aegis of the cabinet of ministers, that would explicitly involve other agencies in developing and implementing youth policy.³⁹⁰ One senior Youth Ministry official likewise welcomed efforts to draft the State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015, intended as a cross-sectoral policy document, saying: If a strategy “is only ours [the ministry’s], then we’re the only ones who’ll be working. But if it’s a state [strategy], then everyone will be [working].”³⁹¹

Currently, policies pertaining to young people but beyond the purview of the Youth Ministry often contradict one another or fail to address realities that are important and relevant to young people’s needs and situations. For example, the 2009 law on youth policy calls for a number of measures intended to assist various categories of vulnerable young people, including low-income youth. The law requires local government bodies to develop regulations for providing assistance to these groups³⁹² and also calls for state-run tenders among social services providers to furnish vulnerable young people with assorted forms of assistance.³⁹³ However, changes introduced to Kyrgyzstan’s larger social policy framework in 2010 have in some ways deprived the poor of aid—most notably, the share of so-called categorical benefits (i.e., benefits not pegged to need) given to low-income households, including energy subsidies (which dropped from 46 percent in 2009 to only 20 percent in the first half of 2010; in 2008, the figure had been 65 percent).³⁹⁴

389. “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” pp. 5–6.

390. Interview with Youth Ministry official, Bishkek, July 2011.

391. *Ibid.*

392. Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy, July 31, 2009, Article 7.2.3.

393. *Ibid.*, Article 18.2.

394. Ben Slay, ed., “Energy and Communal Services in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: A Poverty and Social Impact Assessment,” Office of the Senior Economist, UNDP, 2011, p. 21.

Some of the youth policies currently under development do not openly acknowledge that measures proposed therein contradict existing practices and do not propose mechanisms for synchronizing policy and practice. The draft Targeted State Program in the Sphere of Youth Policy Until 2015, for instance, calls for young people to be integrated into international “scholarly and educational processes.” However, in reality, very few of Kyrgyzstan’s institutions of higher learning acknowledge degrees from foreign universities; on the contrary, they refuse to give instructors who hold them the pay increases given to holders of analogous degrees from Kyrgyzstani institutions.³⁹⁵ The authors of the Targeted Program seem either to be unaware of this or to feel comfortable proposing goals without developing procedures for achieving them.

Another example of inconsistent policymaking concerns language instruction, which has repeatedly fallen victim to political agendas instead of pursuing pragmatic development goals. As of mid-October 2011, the Education Ministry’s draft midterm development program for 2012–2014 identified “the development of multicultural and multilingual education” as a priority. But Kyrgyzstani officials, including former president Otunbayeva, have flip-flopped on the issue: In the spring of 2011, parliament was to consider a Concept of Ethnic Policy that called for primary school subjects to be taught in children’s native languages, with the gradual addition of parallel instruction in a second language, so that all children would be bilingual by the time they complete school.³⁹⁶ Otunbayeva had seemed to endorse the plan, but surprised early-childhood experts in June 2011 by saying that all primary school education should be in the Kyrgyz language only.³⁹⁷

A couple of days later, “she softened this position slightly in favor of parental choice for language of instruction and acknowledged the importance of [learning] Russian.”³⁹⁸ Within a few weeks, spearheaded by a nationalist faction, parliament passed a different Concept of Ethnic Policy altogether

395. Interview with assistant professor from Kyrgyz National University, July 2011.

396. Kate Lapham, “Kyrgyzstan: Minority Children Need More Than State Language,” EurasiaNet.org, June 21, 2011. Accessed June 21, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/63717>.

397. Ibid.

398. Ibid.

that a dissenting lawmaker denounced as discriminatory against Russian speakers. As of late 2011, a special commission was still working on harmonizing the two documents into a single policy.³⁹⁹

The draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015 recognizes that the lack of policy coherence must be remedied. It calls for a unified, integrated system of youth policy, which is mainstreamed across sectors and development strategies; the proposed mechanism for achieving this is a “sustainable” state body responsible for youth policy.⁴⁰⁰

4.6 Policy Alignment with Regional and International Frameworks

In its two decades of independence, Kyrgyzstan has shown great openness to international agreements and standards and, at times, even to international organizations’ involvement in policymaking. Sometimes such guidelines inform youth policy, but in certain significant ways their impact is limited. For instance, many of the 10 steps for developing a national youth policy proposed by the UN’s World Program of Action for Youth⁴⁰¹ have been taken only partially. The assessment of youth needs, the institutional structure for youth policy, and monitoring and evaluation have remained weak; stakeholder participation has not involved some of the country’s most active youth organizations; and definitions of “vulnerable groups” tend to exclude ethnic minorities and other politically or culturally sensitive categories of young people. The list of available resources compiled for the State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015 is very general and the study of past successes and failures has been superficial or incomplete. While the Youth Ministry has “engaged in partnerships for action” with

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399. Tolgonai Osmongaziyeva, “Zamira Derbisheva: The Kyrgyz Nation Is Undergoing a Period of Fragmentation” (*Zamira Derbisheva: Kyrgyzskaia natsia perezhivaet period razdroblennosti*), 24.kg, Dec. 7, 2011. Accessed Dec. 10, 2011, <http://www.24kg.org/community/116019-zamira-derbisheva-kyrgyzskaya-naciya-perezhivaet.html>.

400. Draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015, Section VI, Principles.

401. “Ten Steps to National Youth Policy Formulation,” *Youth at the United Nations: World Youth Report 2005*.

youth NGOs, many of the latter question the usefulness of such relationships and have occasionally criticized the ministry for duplicating the work of NGOs rather than complementing or coordinating this activity.⁴⁰² This seems to refer primarily to the ministry's reliance on outside grants and its work on a project basis. It is also worth noting that the bibliographical list of literature used in drafting the State Strategy includes Kazakh, Russian, Tajik, and Ukrainian youth policy documents but no European frameworks or international benchmarks.

In some policy areas affecting young people, the government has been unable or unwilling to enforce international standards. One example has involved Kyrgyzstan's accession to the Convention on the Rights of a Child—although this occurred in 1994, the relevant UN committee deemed the country's progress in conforming its practices to the convention unsatisfactory in 2000 and 2004; on both occasions, the committee stated that Kyrgyzstan's laws and practices on juvenile justice do not fully conform to international standards.⁴⁰³ A third review is expected in February 2012.⁴⁰⁴

4.7 Evaluation and Monitoring of Policy

Kyrgyzstan's Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy identifies one of the "principles of implementing state youth policy" as "the monitoring and evaluation of bodies of national government, bodies of local government, legal entities and individuals."⁴⁰⁵ In practice, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of policy implementation have been virtually nonexistent, in part because policies have rarely included measurable goals, but also because reliable research on youth—as on many other topics—is in very short supply. According to the UNDP, the Kyrgyzstan Jashtary youth program of 2006–2008 never included "plans to monitor the achievement of the goals

402. "Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic," "Content: Young, Strong, Free," pp. 5–6; interviews with youth activists in Osh, November 2011.

403. "Juvenile Justice System in Kyrgyzstan: Current Situation, Major Challenges, Commitments and Further Plans," UNICEF Presentation, 2011.

404. Email correspondence with UNICEF child-protection expert, Bishkek, Nov. 9, 2011.

405. Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy, Article 3.6.

and objectives of the program.”⁴⁰⁶ The Youth Ministry tried to remedy that, with international donors’ help, by creating action plans with particular targets, at least for its own activities. The draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015 calls for indicators to accompany all policy goals and activities, but the specific evaluation criteria proposed within the strategy itself do not seem entirely valid or realistic: For example, the two main indicators to determine the success of youth policy, says the document, must be “young people’s trust for the strategy’s results,” to be assessed via annual sociological surveys, and “the level of public trust for young people.”⁴⁰⁷ Monitoring and evaluating youth-related policies in other sectors—education, health care, culture, and labor—is difficult because the ministries and agencies responsible do not single out “the needs of youth as a separate target group” and “the structure of the budget makes it complicated to perform a holistic analysis of how much the government spends on youth and how effective such expenditures are.”⁴⁰⁸

The M&E mechanisms for youth policy are not nearly as rigorous as those in other policy areas, particularly economy and finance, where international financial institutions conduct periodic assessments and have the power to withhold funds in the event of noncompliance. The IMF recently praised the national agencies that collect Kyrgyzstan’s macroeconomic statistics, saying they “have legal and institutional environments that support statistical quality, and their respective staff are well-versed in current methodologies.”⁴⁰⁹ Still, the assessment pointed to some shortcomings in areas of statistics such as average wages and government finance.⁴¹⁰

One of the biggest challenges in both designing youth policy and assessing its effectiveness has been poor data collection. Here are some recent examples:

- » Despite legislation requiring the inclusion of children with disabilities in state-run schools, schools do not submit reports on this work and do

406. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 14.

407. Draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015, Section XI.

408. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 14.

409. “First Review Under the Three-Year Arrangement Under the Extended Credit Facility and Request for Modification of Performance Criteria—Informational Annex,” p. 24.

410. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

not make available data on the number of such children or their degree of involvement in the education process.⁴¹¹

- » In a discussion about children who drop out of school to earn money, a parliament member who previously served as a deputy education minister said in 2010, “There are no official statistics on children at work. [. . .] Many high-ranking officials, including regional education heads, fear that if they provide accurate figures, they’ll lose their jobs. So no one has counted these children.”⁴¹² The lawmaker’s concern is indirectly confirmed by the disparity in existing estimates of school dropouts: According to the Education Ministry, data submitted by its local branch offices for 2011 place the number of children and adolescents not attending school at 1,972, while the 2009 Census calculated the number at more than 29,000,⁴¹³ and some nongovernmental groups have estimated a figure four times higher.⁴¹⁴
- » While the official number of people with HIV/AIDS in Kyrgyzstan as of June 2010 was 2,951, UNAIDS estimated the real number to be at least five times higher.⁴¹⁵
- » Reliable statistics on jobs and unemployment are hard to come by—both because a significant number of Kyrgyzstanis work off the books and because the official definition of “unemployed” takes into account only those people who have registered with state-run unemployment services and are using them to search for work. However, relatively few unemployed or underemployed people sign up for these services. According to official statistics, registered unemployment stands at a paltry 62,000

411. “Special Needs and Disabled Students” (*Uchaschiesia s osobymi potrebnostiami i ogranichennymi vozmozhnostiami*), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009, p. 145.

412. Asyl Osmonalieva and Gulzat Abdurasulova, “Poverty Drives Child Labour in Kyrgyzstan,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Nov. 5, 2010. Accessed Oct. 23, 2011, <http://iwpr.net/report-news/poverty-drives-child-labour-kyrgyzstan>.

413. “Announcing One Month of School Attendance Monitoring.”

414. “Poverty Drives Child Labour in Kyrgyzstan.”

415. “Preventing HIV Among Young People.”

people,⁴¹⁶ but some experts have estimated the real number of unemployed people to be nearly ten times greater and the minister of labor acknowledged in late 2011 that the true figure is “much higher.”⁴¹⁷

- » Data disseminated to young people by the Labor Ministry about the demand for particular types of workers was based only on applications by employers looking to hire workers through the Youth Labor Exchange, not on a comprehensive assessment of market needs and opportunities.⁴¹⁸
- » In 2008, a group of international aid organizations monitoring maternal mortality included Kyrgyzstan in a list of 85 countries “lacking good complete registration data.”⁴¹⁹
- » After the presidential election of October 2011, it was impossible to find reliable statistical information on the youth vote and thus to measure young people’s political preferences and draw other important conclusions on youth perceptions or possible ramifications of the election results.

416. “Socioeconomic Situation of the Kyrgyz Republic, January–October 2011: A Monthly Publication” (in Kyrgyz and Russian), National Statistics Committee, Bishkek 2011, p. 66. Accessed Dec. 9, 2011, <http://www.stat.kg/rus1/common.files/obzor9k.pdf>.

417. Comments at conference on “Employment in the Kyrgyz Republic: Problems and Policy Choices,” organized by the Center for Public Policy, Bishkek, Nov. 11, 2011. One news report claimed that the Labor Ministry had released a statement on Dec. 19, 2011, saying 50% of Kyrgyzstan’s “economically active” population, or some 1 million out of more than 2 million people, was unemployed; however, no such statement could be found on the ministry’s website and its press department could not confirm the information in a timely manner. The statement was made at a time when the ministry, threatened with the major structural overhaul that led to its partial merger with the Youth Ministry, seemed to be trying to prove its indispensability.

418. Interviews with Labor Ministry officials, Bishkek and Osh, November 2011.

419. “Trends in Maternal Mortality,” p. 36.

4.8 Conclusions

While Kyrgyzstan has a raft of policies ostensibly benefiting the young, few of them have a positive impact on the problems faced by young people. For years, youth policy has remained declarative in nature, without effective mechanisms for implementation, and coordination across sectors has been exceedingly poor. Today, with the transition from the post-Bakiyev interim government to a leadership with a longer mandate, many policies are being revised or created anew. Unfortunately, such rewriting has become a perennial activity that seems to bear little fruit—in part because the goals of the policies are very broad and the means of implementation very vague, with no concretization of either later on. Worryingly, many of the policies that do achieve some positive results rely heavily on international donor funding and seem unlikely to continue without it.

Existing policies seldom support young people in exercising their human rights, accessing opportunities, or achieving autonomy. One area in which this is true is education, where students' rights, from primary school to university, are routinely violated or restricted and quality, as discussed in Chapter 2, is notoriously below par. In the health field, youth policies have neither helped compensate for the generally sorry state of medical care nor done much to encourage healthy lifestyles among the young. Youth-friendly health services and information on reproductive health are sorely lacking. Labor policy has likewise been incoherent, doing desperately little to address unemployment among the young.

Strategies and commitments for achieving policy decisions have been inadequate for a number of overlapping reasons: frequent changes in leadership, weak policymaking, abuse of power, poor coordination, and insufficient or inefficiently used resources. Despite vocal official commitments to young people, youth policy has remained a low priority for the government. Responsibility for implementation tends to be unclear, diffuse, or weakened by inadequate resources. Data collection and procedures for evaluation and monitoring of policy are extremely weak. Information about youth-relevant policies does not, for the most part, effectively reach the intended beneficiaries, while certain youth subgroups have a particularly hard time benefitting from existing policies. In various cases, these include: rural youth (who make up two-thirds of the youth population); physically

and mentally disabled youth; homeless, neglected, and institutionalized youth; young people who work; ethnic minorities; internal migrants and refugees; low-income youth; young women; and young people in the hands of law enforcement or military agencies.



Youth and
Public Policy in

Kyrgyzstan

Impact of Policies, Particularly
on Achievement of Human Rights
of Young People

5



5.1 Observations on the Outcomes of Policy Implementation

As noted in Chapter 1, the latest strategic documents concerned with youth policy have been in a state of constant redesign and revision since the creation of the Youth Ministry in April 2010, and, hence, their impact is impossible to assess. However, if past experience is any indicator of future success, the challenges loom large: The UNDP's analysis of Kyrgyzstan's youth policy in 2009–2010 showed that the majority of activities envisioned by two national youth programs, *Jashtyk* (planned for 2000–2010, but cancelled in 2006⁴²⁰) and *Kyrgyzstan Jashtary* (2006–2008), were never implemented, while those few that did take place were mostly of the “mass cultural” variety, including sporting events, dances, and other leisure activities and entertainment.⁴²¹ More important, many of the objectives outlined in youth policies of recent years have not been attained.

One unmet goal involves the right to health care. Protecting the health of young people and promoting healthy lifestyles were identified as one of six priorities in the Concept of the Development of State Youth Policy in the Kyrgyz Republic Until 2010.⁴²² While genuine success in these areas can be measured only after a number of years, we see worrying signs that the government has been doing too little. It has neglected to pass even so basic a measure as banning smoking in public places like cafes and restaurants. In addition, no sustained campaign of public service announcements has been put in place to inform young people about easy ways to improve their health. As noted in Section 4.2, a nationwide survey in 2009 revealed that only 32 percent of young people were aware that a healthy diet contributes to overall health.⁴²³ Meanwhile, public health reforms have gotten rid of doctors specializing in adolescents and state-run medical institutions do not systemically provide youth-specific services, according to reproductive rights activists. In a concept note released in November 2011, the UNFPA and a group called the Alliance for Reproductive Health wrote: “If the government does not begin paying heightened attention to young people’s

420. “Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan: Report on Study Results,” p. 8.

421. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 12.

422. *Ibid.*

423. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

needs in terms of protecting their health, then in coming years society risks encountering the constant reproduction of unsafe behavior by those in the population who are less healthy, in all age groups.”⁴²⁴

In some cases, legislation that could contribute to attaining youth-related health objectives has been passed, but is not enforced. For example, a 2009 law calls for the fortification of flour with micronutrients, including iron, which would improve young people’s health overall and could greatly reduce the number of women suffering from anemia—often a cause of complications during childbirth. However, the regulation has proved extremely difficult to enforce as most of the country’s 3,000 domestic flour mills are tiny private enterprises scattered across the mountainous terrain; in addition, a significant amount of flour is imported from abroad, with no testing at Kyrgyzstan’s borders.⁴²⁵

Another priority of the Concept of the Development of State Youth Policy in the Kyrgyz Republic Until 2010 was to ensure economic independence, vocational guidance, and labor rights for young people. These goals have not been met. Young people continue to list help in identifying potential careers as one of their top needs.⁴²⁶ Yet public schools do not offer career counseling, and young people are not well informed about the modest services offered by state agencies, such as the Youth Labor Exchange.⁴²⁷ The Concept’s ambitious policy goal of assisting young families with housing has also proved difficult to attain. A strategic document enacted in 2000, the Concept for Developing Residential Construction in the Kyrgyz Republic Until 2010, declares the goal of “speeding up young people’s acquisition of their own housing”;⁴²⁸ nonetheless, a substantial number of young people

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424. “Concept Note: National Conference on Sexual and Reproductive Health of Teenagers and Young People in Kyrgyzstan,” UNFPA/Alliance for Reproductive Health, November 2011.

425. “Kyrgyzstan: The Hidden Threat of Micronutrient Deficiency,” IRIN News, Nov. 17, 2010. Accessed Dec. 1, 2011, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=91119>.

426. Youth focus group, Chui Province, November 2011.

427. Youth focus groups in Chui Province and Osh, November 2011; surveys conducted in Chui, Issyk-Kul, and Jalalabad provinces by the Labor Ministry in mid-2011, results provided by Dr. Hannelore Kress, senior advisor on labor market policy.

428. Concept for Developing Residential Construction in the Kyrgyz Republic Until 2010, Section 1.2.

continue to live with parents well into their 20s. A 2011 survey in southern Kyrgyzstan showed that 85 percent of 25-year-old men and 62 percent of 28-year-old men live with at least one parent.⁴²⁹ (The numbers for women were lower, 58 percent and 40 percent, respectively, reflecting the cultural tradition that young wives move in with their husbands' families after marriage.⁴³⁰)

Two policy measures that were identified in the Concept but have not seen much headway are to reduce the gap in access to educational and cultural programs between urban and rural youth and to develop a network of specialized institutions for the “full-scale socialization of children and youth (such as boarding schools, orphanages and sports schools).”⁴³¹

Arguably, the one policy measure from the Concept that has been implemented to some extent—albeit with a focus on only one of the country's ethnic groups—is “cultivating respect among young people for their cultural heritage and national traditions.” Since 2010, especially after the deadly interethnic violence in the south, Kyrgyzstan has seen a resurgence of ethnocentric nationalism. This has been fueled by politicians, some of whom have spent considerable sums of money erecting monuments to ethnic Kyrgyz identity.⁴³² A leader of the party that won the most seats in parliament in October 2010 famously said in an interview during the election campaign that ethnic Kyrgyz “cannot be lower than other ethnic groups living in this country. Let them [non-Kyrgyz] respect our traditions, language and history; only then will people live peacefully. But if any ethnic group in our country, Russian, Uzbek, Turkish or Chinese, say they are on a par with the Kyrgyz or above them, then the state will collapse.”⁴³³ This sort of rhetoric

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429. “Youth, Livelihoods and Peace Promotion,” p. 8.

430. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

431. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 12.

432. Chris Rickleton, “Kyrgyzstan: Manas Rebranding Drive Stirs Worries About Money, Nationalism, Scorn,” EurasiaNet.org, Aug. 18, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64063>; “Monument to ‘Kyrgyz Nomadism’ Unveiled in Osh” (*V Oshe otkryli pamiatnik “Kyrgyzskomu kocheviu”*), RFE/RL, Dec. 19, 2011. Accessed Dec. 19, 2011, http://rus.azattyk.kg/archive/ky_domestic_News_in_Russian_ru/20111219/4795/7425.html.

433. Yekaterina Ivaschenko, “Kamchibek Tashiyev: ‘If Russians, Uzbeks or Turks Say They’re on a Par with the Kyrgyz or Above Them, the State Will Collapse,’” Fergana News, Sept. 16, 2010.

has not helped mend rifts left by the interethnic clashes. A study conducted among young people in the two worst-hit provinces almost a year after the violence found that 96 percent of Kyrgyz said their friends were other ethnic Kyrgyz and 97 percent of Uzbeks said theirs were ethnic Uzbeks.⁴³⁴

5.2 Access to Rights and Opportunities Guaranteed by Policy

As described throughout this report, policy in Kyrgyzstan guarantees youth access to rights, justice, information, and opportunities on paper, but the country has had considerable difficulty translating those commitments into concrete programs, actions, and mechanisms. Young people who try to fight for their rights by peaceful, legal means go against the grain of accepted social norms, which expect young people to be obedient and unassertive; sometimes, they face harassment and threats. Access to those rights and opportunities that do exist is not equal, but is affected hugely by such factors as place of residence, language proficiency, wealth, connections, gender, ethnicity, and disability status.

Young people's level of satisfaction with their situation and their subjective well-being varies. Some researchers have noted a generally high level of pessimism, particularly among those who live outside of Bishkek.⁴³⁵ A representative, national survey in 2009 showed slightly contradictory results: While 96 percent of young people were "satisfied with their lives in general," respondents also expressed a great deal of trepidation and worry.⁴³⁶ Nearly one-third of young people felt fear or uncertainty about the future, and 25 percent were dissatisfied with the existing situation and wanted to change it; 13 percent were "apathetic and fatalistic," while 20.7 percent felt that positive changes were taking place.⁴³⁷ The true level of anxiety among the young may be difficult to assess, as tradition frowns on complaining,

434. "Youth, Livelihoods and Peace Promotion," p. 39.

435. "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," p. 20; "Report on the Results of Monitoring Respect for the Rights of Students in Institutions of Higher Learning" (in Russian), Youth Human Rights Group, Bishkek, 2010, p. 7.

436. "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," p. 20.

437. *Ibid.*

particularly among men⁴³⁸ and in the south.⁴³⁹ As noted in Section 3.3, some studies have found that Kyrgyzstan's young people often feel powerless and lack confidence in their ability to attain their goals.⁴⁴⁰

Youth activists have argued that young people's awareness of their rights is generally low. This problem is sometimes compounded by a mix of apathy, hopelessness, and fear, which keeps young people from availing themselves of certain opportunities. Our research team encountered a number of examples of voluntary refusal by young people to pursue their rights. Frequently, these include decisions not to report crimes or file charges against assailants, whether by rape victims out of shame and fear of stigmatization⁴⁴¹ or by schoolchildren subjected to violence by their peers for fear of retribution. Another example was that of young religious couples choosing to forgo free micronutrient supplements for their infant children because of skepticism about the provenance of the powdered mix.⁴⁴²

A number of human rights problems affect specific subgroups of young people. One relatively high-profile example pertaining to young women—particularly, though not exclusively, in rural areas—is bride-kidnapping, which is forbidden by law, but very rarely prosecuted. Once an elaborate and accepted tradition in parts of Central Asia and the Caucasus, the practice was suppressed under Moscow's rule but made a comeback in Kyrgyzstan in the late Soviet period.⁴⁴³ Today, the abductor's motive often seems to be economic: Young men without the financial means to pay a bride price, or *kalym*, spirit away young women, who are then forced—not uncommonly by their own families, fearful of disgrace—to marry their captors. In the spring of 2011, two widely reported suicides by abducted brides spurred a

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438. Ibid., p. 40.

439. Interview with social-protection activist, Bishkek, February 2011. (Conducted by the research team's international advisor in her capacity as a journalist, prior to the start of the review pilot project.)

440. "Youth, Livelihoods and Peace Promotion," p. 3.

441. Daisy Sindelar, "A Year On, Osh Rape Victims Still Live in Shadows," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, June 9, 2011. Accessed June 9, 2011, http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyzstan_osh_rape_kyrgyz_ubeks_ethnic_clashes/24229595.html.

442. Interview with nurse-midwife in Chui Province, November 2011.

443. Interview with Russell Kleinbach in Thomas Morton, "Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan," Vice.com, Dec. 5, 2011.

wave of activism against the practice.⁴⁴⁴ Nonetheless, in a particularly perverse case that October, a female college student in the capital of Issyk-Kul Province was bride-napped on her way to a film denouncing bride-kidnapping; her family did not press charges.⁴⁴⁵ Finally, in November, Kyrgyzstan announced an official month-long campaign against the practice. Outgoing president Otunbayeva and human rights Ombudsman Tursunbek Akun publicly cited a study claiming that 15,000–16,000 women are kidnapped for marriage each year and half those marriages end in divorce.⁴⁴⁶

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of bride-kidnapping is the resulting inaction by law enforcement officials and the perception among large swathes of the population that it is a tradition, not a crime. According to Akun, under the Criminal Code, bride-snatching carries a punishment of up to 3 years in jail, as opposed to 10 years for other types of abductions, however “no one has ever been brought to account for bride-kidnapping” by a court of law.⁴⁴⁷ Akun’s deputy said in November 2011 that 68 such abductions had been registered in the first eight months of the year and 100 for all of 2010, but, of the latter, only 6 resulted in criminal charges and none reached trial: “Relatives withdraw their complaints and settle peacefully” out of court, the deputy told a press conference.⁴⁴⁸ Akun told journalists he would “try to make this crime equal to abduction.”⁴⁴⁹ His statement, however, shows a regrettable disregard for realities on the ground:

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444. “Kyrgyz Activists Plan Protest Against Bride Kidnapping,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 11, 2011. Accessed Oct. 30, 2011, http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyz-activists_plan_protests_against_bride_kidnapping/24097924.html.

445. Azat Ruziyeva, “Female Karakol Student Abducted on Way to Event Against Bride Kidnapping” (*Karakolskuii studentku ukrali po doroge na aktsiiu protiv krazhi nevest*), Kloop.kg, Oct. 20, 2011. Accessed Oct. 30, 2011, <http://kloop.kg/blog/2011/10/20/karakol-skuyu-studentku-ukrali-po-doroge-na-aktsiyu-protiv-krazhi-nevest/>.

446. “Kyrgyzstan: Stop Snatching Brides,” Agence France Presse, Nov. 28, 2011. Accessed Nov. 28, 2011, <http://www.news24.com/World/News/Kyrgyzstan-Stop-snatching-brides-20111128>.

447. Ibid.

448. Makhinur Niyazova, “Toktokan Borombayeva: In Kyrgyzstan Not a Single Case of Bride Kidnapping Has Reached Trial” (*Toktokan Borombayeva: V Kyrgyzstane ni odno delo o krazhe nevesty ne doshlo do suda*), 24.kg, Nov. 25, 2011. Accessed Dec. 5, 2011, <http://www.24kg.org/community/print:page,1,115028-toktokan-boronbaeva-v-kyrgyzstane-ni-odno-delo-o.html>.

449. “Kyrgyzstan: Stop Snatching Brides.”

If bride-kidnapping is currently illegal but not prosecuted, what makes the ombudsman think that increasing the severity of the criminal charge will raise prosecution rates?

Another set of human rights problems affects young people who fall into the hands of the so-called power bodies, a collective reference to the police, military, security services, and other agencies permitted by law to use force. As described in Section 4.3, young people have been subjected to torture in police custody, with the Uzbek minority suffering disproportionately after the clashes of June 2010. Military conscripts face ritualized physical abuse by their elders, i.e., hazing. One survey among young people found that 5.5 percent of them had experienced the practice personally, while 18.5 percent had heard of it from friends and relatives.⁴⁵⁰ Instead of investigating, prosecutors have chosen to restrict access to information about this violation of human rights by classifying it as secret.⁴⁵¹ In December 2011, a hazing-related scandal began after 15 soldiers simultaneously left their unit; while military officials claim “the soldiers left [. . .] after the unit’s leadership learned that they had beaten newly drafted conscripts,” the mother of one of the soldiers told journalists her son had called her before deserting and said “that he was no longer able to stand the intimidation by his commanders and he was even ready to die rather than continue in such a situation.”⁴⁵² Youth human rights activists have also criticized the authorities for “irresponsible behavior toward young people” in connection with the deployment of 64 police academy cadets to Bishkek’s central square during the violence that led to Bakiyev’s ouster; two of the students were killed.⁴⁵³

450. “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” p. 10.

451. *Ibid.*

452. “Group of Kyrgyz Army ‘Deserters’ Turn Themselves in to Military,” RFE/RL, Dec. 9, 2011. Accessed Dec. 9, 2011, http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyz_army_deserters_turn_themselves_in_to_military/24417153.html.

453. “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” p. 7.

5.3 Effectiveness of Policy Implementation

As noted throughout this report, Kyrgyzstan’s youth policies have rarely succeeded in improving young people’s access to information, services, and opportunities, largely because of a lack of specific strategies and mechanisms for achieving overly general goals. For instance, the Kyrgyzstan Jashtary program of 2006–2008 called for “inter-sectoral coordination” and “a systemic approach to addressing youth problems”,⁴⁵⁴ however, those goals have remained unfulfilled and continue to resurface in more recent policy documents. At the same time, aware of its dearth of resources, the government has, for the most part, been very open to international organizations whose activities have benefitted young people in various ways. Major donors include European governments, SFK, various UN agencies, USAID, and others. The successes, failures, and modes of operation of international aid projects related to youth deserve special investigation beyond the scope of this report.

Also worth noting is that some of the state-run mechanisms designed to improve young people’s access to information, services, and opportunities have failed utterly, especially when chances for profiteering were high. For example, to combat the deficit of school textbooks, the state cancelled an existing textbook-rental program in 2006 and later awarded a \$2 million publishing contract to a private company with reported links to then-president Bakiyev’s younger son.⁴⁵⁵ According to local media, the company raised textbook prices by 40 percent and appropriated a significant part of the allocated funds; four years after the policy change, a quarter of the new books had still not reached schools.⁴⁵⁶ As of December 2011, the scandal, which involved millions of dollars provided by the World Bank, and its consequences were being discussed in parliament.⁴⁵⁷

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454. Tatyana Tretyakova et al., “Analytical Note: Problems of Youth Participation in the Development of the Republic” (in Russian), published by the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth Policy, the Youth Project of UNV and the OSCE, Bishkek, 2006, p. 33.

455. “Central Asia: Decay and Decline,” p. 7.

456. Ibid.

457. Asker Sultanov, “Kyrgyz Discuss Improving Textbook Quality” (*Kirgizy obsuzh-daiut uluchshenie kachestva uchebnikov*), Central Asia Online, Dec. 13, 2011. Accessed Dec. 13, 2011, <http://centralasiaonline.com/ru/articles/caii/features/main/2011/12/13/feature-01>.

Many of the Bakiyevs' detractors demonize them as singularly unscrupulous, but corruption, as mentioned in other parts of this report, is a systemic problem in Kyrgyzstan, not the monopoly of one family.

5.4 Efficiency of Appropriated Resources

Like the short-lived Youth Ministry, whose funding gaps are described in Section 4.2, officials previously tasked with youth policy have complained that underfunding has been the main cause for the relative ineffectiveness of their work; however, in assessing the use of financial resources, the question "How is money spent?" is as pertinent as "How much is spent?" To be fair, state funding for youth policy has often fallen short of government promises. According to materials from parliamentary hearings in 2009, the Kyrgyzstan Jashtary program of 2006–2008 received only 6.5 million soms of a promised 30 million, or less than 22 percent, and only two of Kyrgyzstan's seven provinces, Osh and Talas, allocated their own funds for youth events.⁴⁵⁸ In its 2009–2010 report, the UNDP said of youth policy that "funds from the central government's budget primarily cover civil servants' salaries and the operating expenses of state agencies. The national budget provides only limited amounts for organizing events, and local budgets do not fund any events, let alone policy measures aimed at youth."⁴⁵⁹ The Youth Ministry's situation in 2010 was very similar.

In the area of education, despite low teacher salaries, funding has been relatively high and has increased steadily, but the spending is inefficient and fails to ensure a commensurately high level of quality. Between 2001 and 2007, the share of GDP spent on education rose from 3.9 percent to 6.5 percent; during that period, more than 20 percent of total public expenditure was reserved for education.⁴⁶⁰ But, as noted in the UNDP's report on human development, "funding for education is aimed at supporting the educational network itself, not its clients—the students."⁴⁶¹

458. "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," p. 12.

459. *Ibid.*

460. "Reviews of National Policies for Education: Kyrgyz Republic 2010. Lessons from PISA," p. 22.

461. "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," p. 24.

As with education, elements of the system for funding health care are outdated and inefficient. For instance, state-run hospitals often receive funds based on the number of available beds. This arrangement can create a disincentive for doctors to master and implement modern outpatient methods of treatment because doing so would lead to a reduction in the number of beds and, hence, in the amount of funding.⁴⁶²

The need to create a system for training youth policy specialists was identified as early as 2006 in an interim UNDP assessment known as the “Green Book”⁴⁶³ and remains a pressing problem to this day. The inadequacies of human resources in the youth policy sector are described in some detail in Section 4.2.

5.5 Youth Participation

Prior to the 2009 amendments to the Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy, Kyrgyzstan’s youth policies had been criticized repeatedly for their top-down approach to young people and a lack of input and feedback from the policies’ intended beneficiaries.⁴⁶⁴ While the number of nongovernment youth organizations is growing and young people are becoming increasingly active,⁴⁶⁵ the quality of youth participation is limited by a number of factors. These include: the diversity of the youth population and the variety of their needs; insufficient awareness among young people of their rights; lax enforcement of laws and regulations designed to ensure those rights; social norms and traditions not conducive to youth autonomy; corruption; the persistence of a top-down approach; and a feeling, among young people, of indifference toward public life or powerlessness to change it.

One group of researchers wrote in 2010 that young people’s lack of knowledge about the law and how to apply it, how to lobby, put together strategic action plans, and conduct advocacy campaigns is “a significant

462. “Central Asia: Decay and Decline,” pp. 2–3.

463. “Problems of Youth Participation,” p. 33.

464. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

465. “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” p. 5.

obstacle in advancing their interests at a local level.”⁴⁶⁶ Two more barriers to active youth participation noted in a different 2010 assessment were young people’s own “inertia and apathy” and adults’ lack of interest “in hearing from young people or valuing their opinions.”⁴⁶⁷ This study concluded that, “while active youth citizenship encompasses [. . .] youth participation within and across various sociopolitical settings including family, community, workplaces and government, limited investment has been directed at engaging youth as partners for their own development, let alone the country’s.”⁴⁶⁸ The authors cited the UN Volunteer Program as reporting “that institutional mechanisms and structures facilitating young people’s participation in public life are practically absent.”⁴⁶⁹

The groups of young people who participate actively in the country’s political, economic, and public life vary, but the easiest to identify fall into three general categories, which sometimes overlap: those involved in nongovernmental organizations; those involved in politics; and civil servants. Nevertheless, participation can be tricky to define and, hence, to gauge. For example, young people involved in religious movements might do charitable work, but little research is available about this for now. Also worth noting is that some youth-sector officials actively recruit young people to take part in activities designed or sanctioned by the authorities. For example, in Osh Province, the Youth Ministry has asked officials at the town and village level to delegate local young people as youth activists, while the mayoral Committee for Youth Affairs (described in more detail in Section 6.3) has formed its own network of young liaisons from each city neighborhood.⁴⁷⁰

The assortment of nongovernmental youth groups operating in Kyrgyzstan seems quite impressive, with one recent estimate putting the number above two hundred.⁴⁷¹ Their activities span a very broad range, from

466. “Report on the Results of Monitoring Respect for the Rights of Students in Institutions of Higher Learning” (in Russian), Youth Human Rights Group, Bishkek, 2010, p. 7.

467. “Youth Assessment: Kyrgyz Republic,” p. 11.

468. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

469. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

470. Interviews with youth sector officials in Osh, November 2011.

471. Youth activist’s presentation at forum on “Interaction of Youth Organizations with the Aim of Protecting the Rights and Advancing the Interests of Young People,” Bishkek, Nov. 18, 2011.

support for the disabled and for internal migrants to building youth NGO capacity and lobbying for libertarian economic policies. Some organizations that focus on related areas of activity form coalitions, such as the human rights network MPSK, described in Section 3.4. For the most part, however, the youth activist community seems atomized.⁴⁷² After the mass protests leading to the ouster of then-president Bakiyev in April 2010, some young people observed the emergence of “two major groups—those who rode the revolutionary wave and those activists who had entered the public arena long before the storming of the Government House” in central Bishkek,⁴⁷³ implying that a strain of political opportunism exists among young people just as it does among their elders. While some youth NGOs receive support from domestic sources, many rely on grants from international donors.

Young people likewise participate in various ways in the country’s political life, with as broad an assortment of views and roles as one would find among older citizens: liberal-democratic, ethnocentric-nationalist, strongly religious, criminalized, uninformed, and so on. The impact of this participation on youth needs and rights, however, is diminished by several characteristics of Kyrgyzstan’s political system, which is not generally geared toward the greater public good. First and foremost among these is the nature of the country’s political parties, many of which have youth wings: While the country’s political landscape is much more pluralistic than in other Central Asian nations, political parties, which began proliferating in the 1990s, have never served “the function that they do in Western democracies, aggregating the interests of society and translating those preferences into public policy.”⁴⁷⁴ In fact, few parties have genuine platforms; instead, they have been “vehicles for ambitious elites to gain or retain a seat in parliament,” and tend to be “regionally concentrated” and “weakly rooted in society.”⁴⁷⁵ In other words, those young people who work with parties often serve the interests of particular adults vying for power or propagate the focus on self-interest by pursuing their own personal advancement.

472. Interview with youth researcher, Bishkek, April 2011.

473. “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” p. 6.

474. “Weapons of the Wealthy,” p. 71.

475. *Ibid.*

In this context, young people involved in political activity have often been objects of manipulation rather than agents for positive change or the promotion of youth-specific issues. In addition to the examples noted in Section 4.1, youth rights activists have pointed to instances of pressure placed on students in institutions of higher learning: For example, 9 percent of students surveyed in 2010 said they had been forced to join particular political parties, while students at two universities in Bishkek and Batken Province reported being forced to take part in campaign events in support of two different parties, adding in one case that “the pre-election mobilization of [college] students and schoolchildren in September and October is business as usual.”⁴⁷⁶ The practice of using young people in pursuit of personal political ambitions has become well established in the post-Soviet period and is directly linked to the prevalence of personalized patronage networks. After the so-called Tulip Revolution of 2005, one student in a village in Jalalabad Province told an interviewer that he and his friends had taken instructions on participating in the protests from a local powerbroker and parliamentary candidate, Kamchibek Tashiev (the nationalist MP quoted in Section 5.1): “The students obeyed Tashiev because, ‘We look up to him, we respect what he says. He’s like the president for us. He has done so many things for our village.’”⁴⁷⁷

Another constraint on exercising political rights, regardless of age, is that many key officials, particularly in the executive branch, are not elected by popular vote. These include provincial governors, city mayors, and heads of local administrations, all of whom are appointed and, as a result, are not directly accountable to their constituents. Furthermore, as of 2007, votes for the national parliament cannot be cast for individual candidates (also known as “single-mandate” candidates); ballots can be cast only for parties, which then fill the seats they win with their supporters. This method of voting for “party lists,” rather than specific candidates, likewise makes it difficult for voters to demand accountability from specific individ-

476. “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” pp. 7–8.

477. “Weapons of the Wealthy,” p. 161.

uals ostensibly elected to represent their interests.⁴⁷⁸ Nonetheless, in 2012, the system of voting for party lists rather than individuals will be introduced for city and district representative councils as well.

As mentioned in Section 3.2, changes made to the country's election law in June 2010 introduced a youth quota in parliament, mandating that no fewer than 15 percent of every party's candidates be younger than 36. Although youth activists have pointed out that many parties viewed this as a formality and put young candidates at the bottom of their party lists, the requirement did raise the number of young politicians in the national legislature to 10 percent.⁴⁷⁹ Still, apathy toward politics remains common among young voters. A national opinion poll completed in September 2011 showed that 59 percent of respondents aged 18–29 classified their interest in politics as “low,” slightly higher than the proportion of respondents overall, which was 53 percent.⁴⁸⁰

A significant number of young people work in government, but programs to improve youth recruitment have foundered. The draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015 says that 18.8 percent of civil service positions are held by young people.⁴⁸¹ Some entry- and mid-level bureaucrats in their 20s have expressed dissatisfaction with their low salaries and hazy prospects. “People come here to get some experience and then leave,” one young official told our research team.⁴⁸² Less than four weeks after Bakiyev's ouster, the new interim government ordered the creation of a two-month training program for 2,500 new civil servants.⁴⁸³ The preamble

478. At least one scholar has argued that the 2007 change also undermined development in poor areas because it eliminated the incentive for wealthy individuals running for office to funnel money into locally popular projects to curry favor with voters.

479. “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” p. 7.

480. Kyrgyzstan National Opinion Poll, August 24–September 10, 2011, carried out by SIAR- Bishkek for Baltic Surveys/Gallup on behalf of the International Republican Institute (IRI), funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), p. 27.

481. Draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015, Section III.

482. Interview, Bishkek, November 2011.

483. Resolution of the Interim Government of the Kyrgyz Republic “On a Program to Recruit a New Generation of Managers to State and Municipal Service,” April 30, 2010; amended Sept. 9, 2010.

of the resolution establishing the program said young people had “proved their political maturity and willingness to serve the country” by taking part in “the April events,” but lacked “the necessary professional knowledge and skills for state and municipal management of the country.”⁴⁸⁴ Like the creation of the Youth Ministry, the program seemed too rapid a response to the upheavals of April 2010: The selection of participants was supposed to be completed within a month and training was to begin within six weeks.⁴⁸⁵ Later that year, youth activists reported that the program “was not fully realized,” the selection process was not transparent, and participants lodged complaints about nonfulfillment of the government’s obligations.⁴⁸⁶

Even those young people who have taken part in policymaking do not necessarily find such participation to be either gratifying or effective. One participant in a youth focus group in Bishkek in 2010 who had worked at the Department of Youth Affairs during one of its iterations, and had been invited to help shape the UNDP’s “Green Book” for policy improvement, called youth policy in Kyrgyzstan “almost absent,” even with the creation of the new ministry:

*I cannot say with certainty, but I assume that there is no definite direction in shaping youth policy. And if such attempts are made, and, moreover, if such a policy exists, then why do I, a fourth-year student and president of my university, not know about it? [. . .] Where is the youth policy formed, and the rights of young people read aloud? Probably somewhere at the top, they have developed and heard it, and did not say anything about its adoption.*⁴⁸⁷

While numerous barriers to effective youth participation in processes that affect the country, its policies, and young people’s lives have been discussed throughout this report, several groups of researchers have also pointed to obstacles that are related to youth attitudes. According to the UNDP’s latest “Human Development Report on Kyrgyzstan,” “the main obstacle to employment for young people, besides their lack of qualifications

484. Ibid.

485. Ibid., Section I.

486. “Rights of Young People in the Kyrgyz Republic,” “Content: Young, Strong, Free,” p. 5; interview with young activist, Bishkek, November 2011.

487. “Giving Youth a Voice,” p. 24.

and experience, is their lack of ‘socioeconomic adaptation skills,’ such as: a desire to do high-quality work, a positive attitude toward changes at work, an ability to work in a team, self-motivation, responsibility, entrepreneurialism and a positive attitude toward competition.”⁴⁸⁸ Young people, says the report, also have poor communication skills, which hinder their ability to “sell themselves,” present convincing arguments and build partnerships with new people.⁴⁸⁹

5.6 Conclusions

Because the latest youth policy documents have been caught up in protracted reconsideration and revision, their impact on young people and their rights cannot yet be assessed. However, the impact of past policies has been weak. Many components of the national youth agendas in place from 2000 to 2008 were never implemented, while those that were tended to focus on entertainment and mass gatherings, genres largely inherited from the Soviet past. Specific unmet objectives fall into the categories of health care, economic independence, vocational guidance, and bridging the rural-urban divide in accessing services and opportunities. Meanwhile, the policy goal of boosting patriotism among young people has too often mutated into divisive nationalism. Public officials involved in the youth sector have justifiably complained of underfunding; however, other factors—like inefficiency, corruption, lack of coordination, and lack of creativity—compound the sector’s objective dearth of financial, human, and technological resources.

Young people’s assertiveness in availing themselves of rights and opportunities is stymied by a number of factors, including a lack of knowledge, government dysfunction (and consequent public distrust), and cultural traditions that put little stock in young people’s opinions. Some researchers have also pointed to internal obstacles, such as a poor work ethic, weak communication skills, apathy, and fear. A number of human rights problems affect specific subgroups of young people, including young women who fall victim to bride-kidnapping and young men who fall into the hands of state agencies permitted to use force, such as the police, military, and

488. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 34.

489. *Ibid.*

security services. Policies meant to prevent such abuses and increase opportunities for young people often prove ineffective, lacking specific strategies and mechanisms for achieving their objectives and declaring overly general goals.

One positive shift in youth policy over the past three years has been the explicit commitment to increase young people's participation in decision making and public life. However, while the number of youth organizations seems to be growing and some groups of young people have shown ample energy in pursuing their aims, overall youth participation in vital sectors of the country's life remains limited. Such limited participation is the result of both young people's own lack of knowledge and capacity and a virtual absence of sustained institutional support for their meaningful participation. The most visibly active young people participate in three sometimes overlapping categories of activity: NGOs, politics, and civil service. The NGO sector includes many impressive projects but remains quite atomized. Young people involved in politics have often become objects of manipulation rather than agents of positive change or the advancement of youth-relevant issues. Meanwhile, though young people reportedly make up nearly one-fifth of civil servants, many of them complain that salaries are too low, future prospects are dim, and programs to train and recruit new staff have been deeply flawed.



Youth and
Public Policy in

Kyrgyzstan



Intersectoral Coordination and
Cooperation in the Youth Policy Field

6

With the collapse of the centralized Soviet system of youth policy, the successive governments of independent Kyrgyzstan have failed to develop a functional new system in this field. Youth-relevant policymaking has not been mainstreamed across sectors and the “youth question” has received little attention from the state, despite rhetoric to the contrary. In March 2005, through their participation in the so-called Tulip Revolution, young people showed themselves as a social force that could play an active political role. That prompted the adoption of major laws and concept papers on youth and the development of various youth programs and concepts—a process that continues to this day. The problem, as noted throughout this report, is that few of the objectives set out in these documents have been met, and, in essence, most programs and policies with a youth component have remained “declaratory.”

One of the reasons for this state of affairs is that mechanisms for cross-sectoral implementation have been poorly conceptualized, with ministries, state agencies, and bodies of local government getting no clear, realistic, enforceable mandates to integrate youth-relevant policies into their work. When broad new youth policies are adopted, they do not enter the policy bloodstream of relevant government sectors, most of which do not include a substantive youth dimension. Policymakers outside the youth sector do not single out the needs of youth as a separate target, much less consider the needs of different categories of young people. In other words, as yet no functional, cross-sectoral institutional mechanisms exist to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate youth policy.

6.1 Existence and Implementation of National Action Plans for Youth Policies

As mentioned before, the primary policy document now governing youth policy is the 2009 Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy. This legislation is not accompanied by an action plan. As noted in Chapter 4, many of its provisions remain vague, with details still to be worked out. Moreover, the law includes internal contradictions and does not always coincide with newer youth policy documents submitted for the government’s consideration by the Youth Ministry at the end of 2011. One inconsistency within

the document concerns its most basic aims. While the law's preamble emphasizes the promotion of young people's "rights and interests" in order to serve "the interests of the state and society," its definition of youth policy does not mention rights or society. Rather, the legislation defines state youth policy as "a system of measures aimed at creating legal, economic, social and organizational conditions for young people's self-realization and the development of their potential in the interests of the state, to be realized by state bodies and bodies of local government."⁴⁹⁰ Furthermore, as described in Section 3.2, the categories of young people identified by the law differ significantly from the categories identified in the draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015.

Several youth policy documents developed under the auspices of the Youth Ministry have included action plans, but their feasibility and usefulness have been questionable. One example is the draft Targeted State Program in the Sphere of Youth Policy Until 2015. Its action plan is divided into eight sections: legislative and institutional strengthening of youth policy; capacity building for youth-policy actors; civic education and formation of spiritual-moral values of young people; creating conditions for getting an education and professional training; fostering employment and ensuring social protection; promoting a healthy lifestyle; informational support for youth policy; and international youth cooperation. However, at least two logistical weaknesses stand out. The first is responsibility for implementation, which is very broad and diffuse. Nearly all the activities listed in the plan are to be carried out by the Youth Ministry (which no longer exists) in conjunction with one or two other state agencies, plus provincial, town, and rural administrations, donors and/or NGOs, without a specific delimitation of duties. The amount of funding necessary for each activity is not mentioned; funding sources are identified simply as the state budget, local budgets, or both, with occasional reference to donor funding. The plan's second logistical weakness is that most of the activities have no deadlines for implementation but are to be conducted "constantly."

In terms of content, the Targeted State Program's action plan likewise raises some doubts. Few of the planned activities address systemic problems hindering young people's access to rights, information, and opportu-

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490. Law On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy, Article 2.

nities. In the education section, for example, three of the seven proposed activities are aimed at talented youth, two focus on career counseling or professional training for rural youth, one is a campaign for corruption-free exams in institutions of higher learning, and one calls for supporting youth initiatives that help young people in “difficult life situations.” Of the six civic activities, only one seems to leave room for initiatives that can cast a critical eye on the work of government bodies, while most of the others call for patriotic cheerleading. The action plan does not call for any sort of needs assessments or research about youth, although these are desperately needed; instead, it proposes only two analytical activities—an evaluation of the implementation of youth policy “at all levels” and an assessment of schools’ healthy lifestyles curricula.

6.2 Existence and Implementation of Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks

As described in Section 4.7, M&E frameworks barely exist in Kyrgyzstan’s youth policy. In part, this is attributable to the low quality of policymaking: Policies rarely include measurable goals and are seldom based on reliable research. There is an insufficient differentiation of youth needs and confusion in the segmentation of young people into subgroups. These lacunae are even more glaring in non-youth-specific sectors that affect young people’s lives. For agencies working in these sectors, youth-specific goals, if they exist at all, are usually dictated by the needs and aims of the relevant agency, not by national youth policy. One minor example involves the information campaigns conducted by the Health Ministry through the Village Health Committees mentioned in Section 4.2: These campaigns include topics relevant to youth, such as reproductive health, but they do not target youth as a discrete population group and no mechanism exists for assessing how many young people have received such information.

Upon creating the Youth Ministry, the government assigned it the function of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of state youth

policy.⁴⁹¹ However, provisions included in two of the major youth policy documents developed during the ministry's existence tacitly acknowledge that M&E for youth policy does not yet exist, particularly at an intersectoral level. The draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015 calls for the creation of "a unified system of joint coordination, monitoring and evaluation of measures of sectoral policies (first and foremost, education, health care and employment), as well as targeted programs and projects in the area of youth policy, that are implemented by the state, young people, international organizations and other youth policy actors."⁴⁹² The action plan accompanying the Targeted State Program in the Sphere of Youth Policy Until 2015 likewise calls for the "introduction of a public and independent system of monitoring and evaluation of the program's implementation at national and local levels."⁴⁹³ Under the plan, such a system is supposed to be created in 2012–2013 and is intended to assess the effectiveness of spending and personnel policy. It remains to be seen whether functional M&E mechanisms will be developed: How will they be created and by whom? What resources will be allocated for their work? What exactly will they monitor and evaluate? What will be the consequences for failure to conduct meaningful M&E? All these questions remain unanswered.

6.3 Specific Intersectoral Coordination Mechanisms

In practice, intersectoral coordination among ministries and agencies whose work has a direct bearing on young people's lives is feeble. This reflects the low priority given to youth policy by the central authorities, the general weakness of governance and policymaking in Kyrgyzstan, and the weakness of the Youth Ministry, which was tasked, at the time of its creation, with remedying the lack of coordination. The problem was discussed at a round table entitled "Interaction and Coordination of State Bodies in Developing and Realizing State Youth Policy," organized by the Youth

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491. Resolution on the Ministry of Youth Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, approved by Government Decree No. 110 on July 1, 2010, amended June 2, 2011 (Decree No. 281).

492. Draft State Strategy for Realizing State Youth Policy Until 2015, Section VIII.

493. Draft Targeted State Program in the Sphere of Youth Policy Until 2015, Action Plan, Section II.

Ministry on May 20, 2011. The resulting event summary points to a lack of communication and an absence of coordinated action among ministries and calls for the creation of an intersectoral working group to discuss youth issues from various angles.⁴⁹⁴ However, experience suggests that making such a body effective is difficult: One person familiar with the work of the large, high-level, intersectoral working group created by the government in July 2011 to draft the State Strategy for the Realization of State Youth Policy Until 2015 confided to our research team that very few members of the group made any meaningful contributions to its work. Moreover, some of the challenges facing those responsible for coordinating the country's youth policies predate the Youth Ministry and reach far beyond it. The two levels of vocational education mentioned in Section 2.2, for instance, have been overseen for a number of years by different agencies—the Education Ministry and the erstwhile Labor Ministry—and, according to a 2010 report, a “continuity of pathways and interactions are largely absent between them.”⁴⁹⁵

As described in Section 4.5, one of the primary functions assigned to the Youth Ministry when it was created was to coordinate all aspects of youth policy, including the interaction of various government bodies, both at a national and a local level. It was unable to fulfill this role. The ministry lacked enforcement mechanisms and was weak both financially and politically, employing relatively young and inexperienced staffers, which gave it little leverage in dealing with other state agencies. Interviewees from several ministries said they had no clear understanding of the Youth Ministry's functions or how they differed from those of other state bodies with a youth component. When coordination did occur, it tended to take place in isolated cases, not in a continuous, sustainable pattern. In some instances, the Youth Ministry played a subordinate or auxiliary role. In one example, a representative of the State Agency for Physical Culture and Sports mentioned a case of cooperation with the Youth Ministry in planning a yachting competition at Lake Issyk-Kul. The sports agency wanted to draw young people's attention to the event and the Youth Ministry helped. This kind

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494. Minutes of the round table, provided by the Youth Ministry.

495. “Reviews of National Policies for Education: Kyrgyz Republic 2010. Lessons from PISA,” p. 238.

of interaction suggests the Youth Ministry may have been perceived as an intermediary in attracting young people to certain events or occasions, not a leader in the youth-policy field.

Similar weaknesses in youth-policy coordination can be seen outside Bishkek. The starkest example observed by our research team was in Osh, Kyrgyzstan's second-largest city. There, the mayor's office has its own Committee for Youth Affairs, which functions completely separately from the Youth Ministry's local representatives, although the two groups have offices in the same building. Although the mayor's committee focuses only on the city, while the Youth Ministry representatives are supposed to work with the entire surrounding province, as of November 2011, the former had more than twice the staff (10 people versus 4), a better office, and a bigger budget than its ministerial counterpart. Relations between the two are by no means hostile, but the city's youth workers, themselves under the age of 28, expressed skepticism about the ministry, saying that people outside Bishkek have not felt the impact of its work and that it does not branch out beyond a small, fixed set of partners. In a town and several villages in Chui Province, local leaders and young people expressed a similar feeling of disconnectedness from the ministry and unfamiliarity with its work. Considering that two-thirds of the country's young people live in rural areas, the problems of coordinating and implementing youth policy outside the capital—and particularly in Kyrgyzstan's many remote areas—promise to pose a major challenge. National youth policies must be designed in such a way that they can be incorporated into programs at the province, town, and village levels, with the necessary funding and sanctions in place to ensure implementation.

To succeed in these endeavors, Kyrgyz officials will have to fundamentally improve their policymaking and strategic planning, as past experience has shown that commitments made on paper do not necessarily translate into effective measures. As noted in Sections 5.3 and 5.4, the Kyrgyzstan Jashtary youth program of 2006–2008 called for “inter-sectoral coordination” and “a systemic approach to addressing youth problems,”⁴⁹⁶ neither of which exists today; it also required provincial and sectoral development

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496. “Analytical Note: Problems of Youth Participation in the Development of the Republic,” p. 33.

programs to incorporate a “youth” rubric, but that did not happen either.⁴⁹⁷ The program was likewise plagued by unclear divisions of financial and operational responsibility,⁴⁹⁸ which contributed in part to a huge funding shortfall, with only 6.5 million of an earmarked 30 million soms actually getting disbursed.⁴⁹⁹

A final piece of the coordination puzzle requires a look at the Youth Ministry’s relationship with youth NGOs. As part of its mandate, the ministry is expected to work closely with these groups in implementing youth policy. The relationship is not clearly defined in policy documents and has no strong legal basis, but with so many challenges facing Kyrgyzstan’s young people, a constructive relationship between the state and the NGO sector could benefit all stakeholders. During interviews with our research team, youth activists posed many of the same questions as government officials, wondering about the ministry’s exact mandate and role. Many members of youth organizations voiced the criticism that the ministry too often replicates the functions of existing youth NGOs, competing for donor funds in the process, rather than complement their work by undertaking tasks or projects they cannot. Quite often, the NGO staffers pointed out that the ministry’s activities tend to be showy or superficial. For example, when it organized impromptu deliveries of humanitarian aid to southern Kyrgyzstan after the interethnic clashes there, no one tracked whether the aid actually reached its intended beneficiaries. In one instance, an NGO representative in Osh complained of the unprofessionalism and poor behavior of a local ministry representative. (Indeed, the head of the ministry’s Osh Province office, with whom our meeting was originally scheduled, neither showed up nor called to explain, and his deputy’s availability to stand in for him was a fortunate happenstance.)

The draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015 contains a number of proposals for improving intersectoral cooperation, but, as is so often the case, the prospects for implementation remain hazy. The proposals include: the establishment of a joint council on youth affairs consisting of youth organizations’ representatives; the creation of a spe-

.....
497. Draft Targeted State Program in the Sphere of Youth Policy Until 2015, Section II.

498. *Ibid.*

499. “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country,” p. 12.

cial committee on youth affairs, operating under the aegis of the cabinet of ministers as a permanent consultative body, including representatives of ministries, parliament and the above-mentioned council on youth affairs; developing obligatory procedures for institutions of local government in their work with young people; developing procedures for interacting with the NGO sector on issues of youth policy; and introducing a youth expertise requirement (i.e., measuring the impact of draft laws on youth before they are adopted).⁵⁰⁰ Whether any of these suggestions will be effective remains to be seen, but there is already cause for concern, as many of the ideas have been written with the same lack of attention to detail that has prevented successful implementation in the past. For example, which agency will be responsible for developing the “obligatory procedures” mentioned above is unclear as is how adherence to them will be enforced. Moreover, what is far from certain is that introducing such rules of engagement is the way to ensure young people’s access to rights, information, and opportunities.

6.4 Conclusions

Cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation in the field of youth policy is virtually absent—in large part because of flawed policymaking: At the design stage, policies are not evidence-based and rarely include measurable goals, responsibility for implementing various measures is not clearly spelled out, and no sanctions are in place for non-implementation. As a result, monitoring and evaluating policy become nearly impossible. Moreover, national youth policy, insofar as it exists, does not get mainstreamed across sectors. The function of coordinating youth policy used to rest with the Youth Ministry, but the agency did not excel as this task. Prior to its re-configuration and partial merger with the Labor Ministry, it was politically and financially weak, and was looked at with a fair amount of skepticism by fellow government workers and NGOs alike. Often, the ministry was treated by other national agencies as a junior partner, while NGOs complained that it failed to complement their work. Neither group had a clear understanding of the ministry’s aims and functions. At the end of 2011, the Youth Ministry proposed a number of measures to improve coordination

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500. Draft State Strategy for the Realization of Youth Policy Until 2015, Section IX.

among sectors, but they are marked by many of the same policymaking flaws that have haunted Kyrgyz youth policy for at least a decade.



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Recommendations

7

Because of the broad scope of this research, the small size of the team producing it, and the limited resources available, this report does not provide specific, in-depth recommendations, as doing so would have required much more investigation into the inner workings of each sector. Nonetheless, below is a general list of possible directions to pursue in improving youth policy and heightening its impact. The list is neither exhaustive nor set in stone and is meant to spur a process of discussion and brainstorming rather than prescribe definitive solutions. While this chapter includes no explicit recommendations to youth-focused NGOs, donors, or international aid organizations, the authors hope that both this list and the report as a whole will serve as a basis for these groups to develop some action plans of their own.

7.1 Structural

Create a functioning hierarchy and coordinating mechanisms for the design and implementation of youth policy within the state bureaucracy. This should include personal responsibility for particular tasks and a working system of appointing youth focal points—i.e., individuals responsible for coordinating youth policy—in all relevant ministries and agencies.

Underpin mandates for youth policy with adequate funding and ensure the institutional sustainability of youth policy development. This would include improving the planning, managerial, and fiscal capacities of local government.

Focus on improving young people's access to rights, opportunities, and information, as well as expanding their meaningful participation in public, political, and economic life, by perfecting and enforcing existing legislation rather than continuing the trend of creating new legislation and regulations that exist mostly on paper.

7.2 Research-Related

Improve youth-related data collection so that policymaking can be evidence-based. This may require the creation of a small, dedicated unit within the new Youth, Labor and Employment Ministry, staffed by qualified

professionals, responsible for communicating and coordinating with the National Statistics Committee and the data-gathering operations of other relevant agencies, as well as international organizations and NGOs, to identify gaps in knowledge about youth needs, to prioritize them, and to track youth-relevant trends. It would also require explicit, valid assurances to officials that they will not be punished for delivering truthful information about young people, no matter how unpleasant.

Conduct or commission regular assessments of young people's needs in the vital areas of education, health care, employment, access to information, and leisure, while differentiating among particular subgroups of youth. Prioritize the identified goals and form efficient cross-sectoral steering committees to lead the work for achieving them.

Coordinate regularly with donors and youth-focused NGOs to have a better idea of which youth needs are being met, where and by whom, and which have been neglected.

Establish and maintain ties with youth-policy experts in other countries to exchange observations on challenges, opportunities, and best practices.

7.3 Public Trust & Meeting Basic Needs

In implementing youth-related policies, make a concerted effort to raise the level of public trust in government by increasing transparency, professionalism, and efficiency, while reducing corruption, nepotism, and waste. This would involve developing and implementing a detailed, long-term plan based on the study of successful programs in other countries.

End the practice of using public sector employees, like teachers and doctors, for government-mandated work (voter mobilization, for example) unrelated to their professional activities.

7.4 Education & Employment

Develop a comprehensive program for expanding and improving early-childhood education. This should include the active recruitment and rigorous training of teachers. Such a program would have the doubly positive

effect of better preparing children to excel academically and freeing young mothers to join the workforce.

Focus on improving basic education. This could involve focusing on improvements in just a few key areas such as the quality and availability of textbooks, school infrastructure (e.g., heating, electricity, indoor toilets), teacher training (including a focus on subject knowledge and proficiency in second-language-related methodologies) and teacher retention (through better pay, enhanced opportunities for in-service training, reliable social benefits, and fair evaluations).

Launch a concerted, cross-sectoral effort to combat youth unemployment. This could include the development of career counseling services for students and young people and the creation of incentives for youth-targeted job creation and youth entrepreneurship, as well as the design and implementation of apprenticeship programs.

Bring the newly created ministry, at least partially, under the jurisdiction of the deputy prime minister in charge of economic issues rather than solely the official in charge of social issues.

7.5 Health Care

Commission and facilitate the spread of simple, creative, far-reaching informational campaigns aimed at young people to promote basic knowledge of health and safety (e.g., eating a balanced diet, micronutrient needs, safe sex and reproductive health, regular exercise, first aid, and fire safety).

Develop and implement a detailed, realistic, pragmatic plan to improve young people's access to basic health care and youth-friendly medical services. (UNFPA and the Alliance for Reproductive Health have developed recommendations to this end.)

7.6 Access to Information

Simplify access to information held by government agencies on matters about which the public should be well informed to participate meaningfully in political and socioeconomic decision making.

Be creative and proactive in providing relevant information to young people. (For example, a migration specialist told our team that information on migrants' rights is usually supplied to those who have already migrated, rather than being targeted at potential migrants—like young people in 9th-grade classrooms or at bus stations, bazaars, and other obvious gathering places.)

Create incentives for public-private partnerships and/or private business to make vast improvements in the availability of Internet services throughout the country.

Reform the rules and procedures for library access to ensure that young people lacking permanent residency registration can have equal access to library stocks, while still safeguarding the materials from abuse, loss, or theft.

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Appendix I: Field Research Plan / Interviews and Meetings

2011 Timetable: Interviews and Meetings by the Research Team

April 21; July 5–14: Preliminary interviews in Bishkek

November 14–16: Osh field visit

November 17–18, 21–22, 24: Bishkek field visit

November 23: Chui Province field visit

Government Officials

Ministry of Youth Affairs

- » Narbek Almamat uulu: Senior Specialist, Osh Province Representative Office, Osh
- » Nurlan Dosaliyev: Undersecretary (equivalent of deputy minister), Bishkek
- » Mirlan Jokoyev: Head of the Directorate of Regional and Social Policy, Bishkek
- » Larisa Sosnitskaya: Deputy Minister, Bishkek
- » Eliza Turgunaliyeva: Lead Specialist, Directorate of Regional and Social Policy, Bishkek

Others

- » Jannat Chogolova: Acting Head, Southern Branch Office of the Republican Health Improvement Center (overseen by the Health Ministry), Osh
- » Natalia Demina: Principal, School No. 1, Shopokov (town), Chui Province
- » Patimat Isakova: Nurse-Midwife, Gavrilovka (village), Chui Province
- » Sononbek Junuspayev: Chairman, City Committee for Youth Affairs, Osh

- » Alexandra Korotkova: Acting Department Head, Dept. of Mass Sports Work, State Agency for Physical Culture and Sports, Bishkek
- » Narkiz Kulmanbetov: Leading Specialist, Ministry of Labor, Employment and Migration, Bishkek
- » Larisa Marchenko: Deputy Minister of Education and Science (informal meeting), Bishkek
- » Alymbek Omurzakov: Head Specialist, City Committee for Youth Affairs, Osh
- » Maya Ormonova: Director, Center of Family Medicine, Shopokov, Chui Province
- » Cholpon Sultanbekova: Chair, Parliament Committee on Youth Policy and the Development of Physical Culture and Sports, Bishkek
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- » Suleiman Umaraliyev: Head of Local Administration, Shopokov, Chui Province
- » Abas Usenov: Head of Local Administration, Gavrilovka, Chui Province

Local NGOs and Youth Activists

- » Asel Abdraimova: Project Assistant, Youth of Osh, Osh
- » Mirzat Adjiev: Director, Er-Ep Association (an NGO working with young people in the improvised suburbs surrounding Bishkek), Bishkek
- » Mavlyan Askarbekov: Member of the Jashtar Keneshi association, Bishkek
- » Ikbol Bakhramova: South Branch Manager, Development and Cooperation in Central Asia (DCCA), Osh
- » Ainura Balakunova: Expert on Local Economic Development, Development Policy Institute, Bishkek
- » Nadezhda Dobretsova: Director/Board Chair, Development Policy Institute
- » Akylai Karimova: PR Manager, Youth of Osh, Osh

- » Aizhamal Korganbaeva: Administrative Director, Public Foundation “Iret,” Osh
- » Gulgaky Mamasalieva: Manager, Interbilim Center, Osh
- » Janneta Murzakulova: Coordinator, Southern Representative Office, Youth Peer Education Network Y-PEER, Osh
- » Mirsuljan Namazaliev: Director/Co-Founder, Central Asian Free Market Institute (CAFMI), Bishkek
- » Timur Shaikhutdinov: Head of the Club of Liberal Youth, Bishkek
- » Aijan Toktosheva: Board Chair, Youth of Osh, Osh

International or Western Donor Organizations

- » Takhmina Ashuralieva: Law Program Coordinator, Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek
- » Marat Djanbaev: Senior Technical Specialist on Entrepreneurship, International Youth Foundation (USAID), Bishkek
- » Rajae Msefer Berrada: UNICEF Deputy Representative for Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek
- » Nazira Satyvaldiyeva: UNDP Youth Program Coordinator, Bishkek
- » Ulan Shabynov: Director, International Youth Foundation (USAID), Bishkek
- » Asel Turgunova: UNFPA Youth Specialist, Bishkek
- » Elena Zaichenko: UNICEF Child Protection Officer, Bishkek

Researchers and Other Experts

- » Nurlan Ismailov: Professor, Manas University, Bishkek
- » Alexander Koak: Program Director, Center for Public Policy, Bishkek; helps develop policy for the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Migration
- » Hannelore Kress: Senior Advisor on Labor Market Policy, Ministry of Labor, Employment and Migration of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek; sent as an advisor to the ministry by Germany’s Centre for International Migration and Development in cooperation with GIZ

- » Ainoura Sagynbaeva: Director, SIAR Consulting (Gallup partner in Central Asia), Bishkek; served as lead author of the 2009–2010 UNDP National Human Development Report “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country”
- » Alexander Tretyakov: Freelance management consultant, Bishkek; commissioned by UNDP to serve as lead author of the Youth Ministry’s strategy, the draft National Concept of Youth Policy and the draft State Strategy for the Realization of the Kyrgyz Republic’s Youth Policy Until 2015

Youth Focus Groups (November 2011)

- » Students from five institutions of higher learning, Osh
- » Teenage students from School No. 1, Shopokov, Chui Province
- » Young people forming a youth organization under the auspices of the Shopokov City Administration, Chui Province

Events Attended in Bishkek by Individual Team Members

May 18, 2011: Public Forum on “Modern Youth: Problems and Prospects,” co-organized by the Parliament Committee on Youth Policy and the Development of Physical Culture and Sports, USAID and UNDP–Kyrgyzstan.

June 30, 2011: Presentation of annual report by Ministry of Youth Affairs.

November 11, 2011: Conference on “Employment in the Kyrgyz Republic: Problems and Policy Choices,” organized by the Center for Public Policy.

November 18, 2011: “Ethnic Processes and Interethnic Relations in Kyrgyzstan,” a conference for instructors at institutions of higher learning.

November 18, 2011: Youth Forum on “Interaction of Youth Organizations with the Aim of Protecting the Rights and Advancing the Interests of Young People,” organized by the Youth Human Rights Group.

Appendix II: About the Authors

Chinara Esengul, Researcher

Chinara Esengul teaches at the School of International Relations at Kyrgyz National University (KNU), where she is a Ph.D. candidate. She has been with the university since 2007, after receiving her MA in international relations from the International University of Japan. In 2003–2004, she coordinated the debate program of a nongovernmental youth organization (a spin-off of the Soros Foundation-Kyrgyzstan) and, in 2004–2005, prior to her studies in Japan, she worked as an administrator at the regional office of the International Science and Technology Center. She earned her first degree from KNU's School of International Relations in 2003. A native of Naryn, Kyrgyzstan, Ms. Esengul has a strong interest in Japanese culture and martial arts; in 2007, she founded an iaido club in Bishkek.

Baglan Mamaev, Executive Director, Youth Program, Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan

Baglan Mamaev has headed the Youth Program of the Soros Foundation-Kyrgyzstan (SFK) since 2010, after having spent two years as its coordinator. In 2011, he served on the public oversight board of the newly created Ministry of Youth Affairs and was a member of the government's working group for developing an implementation strategy for national youth policy. Beginning in 1996, Mr. Mamaev held posts within numerous subdivisions of SFK, including programs supporting nongovernmental organizations, arranging conferences, seminars and internships and supporting media organizations, as well as its publishing program. In 1999–2000, he served as coordinator at a local NGO supporting democratic development and free media. Prior to joining SFK, Mr. Mamaev worked for two years as an IT engi-

neer at his alma mater, now called the Kyrgyz Technical University. A native of Bishkek, he is married and has three children.

Natalia Yefimova-Trilling, International Advisor

Natalia Yefimova-Trilling is a freelance journalist, editor and researcher based in Istanbul, Turkey. As a bilingual speaker of Russian and English, she has covered the former Soviet Union since the late 1990s. In 2010–2011, she spent a year living in Kyrgyzstan, writing for the news website EurasiaNet.org and the UN's IRIN news service. Over the course of 10 years in Moscow (1996–2006), she worked for the BBC, the *Moscow Times*, National Public Radio, and the *Los Angeles Times*. Later, she also held positions at the *New York Times* and New York City public television. Mrs. Yefimova-Trilling holds degrees in Russian and journalism from Columbia University. She was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, and immigrated to the United States as a child.

Research Team until September 2011

Mehrigiul Ablezova, Researcher

Emir Kulov, Researcher

Youth and Public Policy in Kyrgyzstan

Over the past decade, Kyrgyzstan has developed a raft of youth policies. This book assesses the impact of these policies on young people's access to information, rights, and opportunities in Kyrgyzstan.

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ISBN 9783944859057



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