



## YOUTH ASSESSMENT: Kyrgyz Republic

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*Prepared by:*  
Daniel Oliver  
Karin Akins

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Finally, we would like to thank the young people who participated in focus groups and individuals from donor offices, government ministries and civil society organizations who all participated in formal interviews during the two weeks of fieldwork. Our understanding of youth was greatly informed by their insights. These insights are represented throughout this report and are featured prominently in our recommendations for programming.

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>AUCA</b>	American University of Central Asia
<b>CBO</b>	Community Based Organizations
<b>FGs</b>	Focus Groups
<b>KAB</b>	Know About Business
<b>IFC</b>	International Finance Corporation
<b>ILO</b>	International Labor Organization
<b>IWPR</b>	Institute for War and Peace Reporting
<b>KR</b>	Kyrgyz Republic
<b>MSMEs</b>	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Program
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>UNV</b>	United Nations Volunteers
<b>PISA</b>	Program for International Student Assessment
<b>UCA</b>	University of Central Asia
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>USG</b>	United States Government
<b>SOB</b>	Start Your Own Business
<b>YON</b>	Youth of the Nation
<b>YOO</b>	Youth of Osh

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this youth assessment was to collect and analyze data on youth (e.g., defined in this report as between 15 to 30 years of age) in Kyrgyzstan. IYF collected data in Kyrgyzstan between 22 August and 4 September 2010. Analysis of these data began while in-country and continued upon return, through 16 September. Data included interviews with public sector officials, staff at universities, donor offices, private businesses and civil society organizations. Additionally, IYF conducted seven focus groups with young people, totaling a sample of 61 persons. These young people were drawn from diverse backgrounds, including sex, ethnicity, educational background and geography. The assessment draws conclusions based on these data that will be made available to USAID in determining future programming priorities and development investments. Using rapid assessment methods, IYF was charged with gathering and analyzing data on young people that would provide a “snapshot” of youth issues in Kyrgyzstan. These issues coalesced around two primary themes: citizenship and economic opportunity. Within these larger themes, numerous sub-themes emerged from the data, each of which is discussed below. Taken together, these findings provide useful information for future youth programs in-country. IYF will use these data to design a youth program that is customized to the expressed needs of young people in Kyrgyzstan and that reflects the interests and priorities of the United States government.

IYF’s data, as well as myriad studies on youth in Kyrgyzstan, suggest two priority areas, citizenship and economic opportunity. The two areas are linked, in that it is difficult to sustain active engagement with one’s community when basic needs are difficult to obtain. Youth in Kyrgyzstan represent nearly a third of the population and face multiple challenges as they transition from school into holding the rights and responsibilities characteristic of full, active citizenship. In reaction to poor governance in the post independence period, many youth are disenfranchised and disillusioned about the promise of democracy, a significant obstacle to building a more stable and unified country. While active youth citizenship encompasses the quality and quantity of youth participation within and across various socio-political settings including family, community, work places, and government, limited investment has been directed at engaging youth as partners for their own development, let alone the country’s. To ensure youth practice the key life and leadership skills necessary for active citizenship, investments in formal and non-formal citizenship experiences are critical. In this report, we discuss the various patterns that emerged from IYF’s data collection, as well as provide reference points from other data sources and analyses of youth engagement and active citizenship in Kyrgyzstan.

In the face of high unemployment and low wages, young people must become active agents in building their capacities and creating economic opportunities for themselves through business creation. As detailed below, young people in Kyrgyzstan face very difficult circumstances as it concerns employment. Having received poor training within elementary and secondary schools, vocational schools and universities, young people are often thrust into a job market with few marketable skills or realistic expectations of professional life. In subsequent sections, we reveal the dominant themes that emerged from the data. The picture that is painted is of a youthful population that possess anxieties about their future, yet generally lack the tools (e.g., practical technical skills, life skills, entrepreneurial skills, and also citizenship skills) to change their circumstances. This report discusses the challenges, but also the opportunities young people have in determining their economic futures. This analysis occurs through an examination of un- and under-employment; migration; salary expectations; workforce preparation; and corruption.

## I. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF ASSESSMENT

The purpose of this youth assessment was to collect and analyze data on youth in Kyrgyzstan. IYF collected data in Kyrgyzstan between 22 August and 4 September 2010. Analysis of these data began while in-country and continued upon return, through 16 September. Data included interviews with public sector officials, staff at universities, donor offices, private businesses and civil society organizations. Additionally, IYF conducted seven focus groups with young people, totaling a sample of 61 persons. These young people were drawn from diverse backgrounds, including sex, ethnicity, educational background and geography.

The assessment draws conclusions based on these data that will be made available to USAID in determining future programming priorities and development investments. Through rapid assessment methods, IYF was charged with gathering and analyzing data on young people that would provide a “snapshot” of youth issues in Kyrgyzstan. These issues coalesced around two themes: citizenship and economic opportunity. Within these larger themes, numerous sub-themes emerged from the data, each of which is discussed below. Taken together, these findings provide useful information for future youth programs in-country. IYF will use these data to design a youth program that is customized to the expressed needs of young people in Kyrgyzstan and that reflects the interests and priorities of the United States government.

## II. CONTEXT

Kyrgyzstan’s 1991 independence from the Soviet Union ushered in periods of both hope and disaffection. While moves towards democratic change and transparent decision-making were pledged under Askar Akayev’s early leadership, these promises were short-lived. Unable to maintain power, Akayev reverted to nepotism and repression. As seen elsewhere in the post-Soviet republics, popular discontent ushered in a period of protests and demands for change. In response, the 2005 Tulip Revolution led to the removal of Akayev and brought Kurmanbek Bakiyev to power. The hope of the revolution was momentary, however. Bakiyev soon began to consolidate presidential power, repress media outlets, stifle political opposition and install family members in critical governmental positions.

The Tulip Revolution visibly unraveled on April 6 and 8, 2010, when violent protests erupted in the city of Talas and spread to Bishkek. With 88 dead and more than 1,600 injured, Bakiyev fled to Belarus and a Provisional Government was put in place. On June 9, violence erupted in Osh and Jalalabad, where ethnic Uzbeks accused Kyrgyz of vandalism and harassment. Tensions quickly elevated with violent clashes between the two ethnic groups lasting for nearly a week. While official results are not known, many expect the final death toll to reach over 1,000 persons, with more than 400,000 temporarily displaced.

Anecdotal and eyewitness accounts suggest that many of those involved in the April uprising and June violence were young people. With limited social services, reduced political voice and meager economic opportunities, young people in Kyrgyzstan are often marginalized. With over 30% of the population between 10 to 25 years of age<sup>1</sup>, the result is a large population that distrusts the government and the promises of democracy. Nihilism of this sort poses particular challenges to the economic and political development. As witnessed in the June violence, young people in Kyrgyzstan have increasingly become targets of political manipulation and extremist movements. This purpose of this assessment, therefore, is to document the challenges that young people face in Kyrgyzstan and highlight those areas where youth are supported to become politically and economically engaged citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme, (2010) National Human Development Report, Kyrgyzstan.

### III. RAPID ASSESSMENT DESIGN

#### A. Methodology

The findings provided through a youth assessment are most informative when collected through a cross-sectoral process, conducted in collaboration with local partners, and use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Organized in this fashion, youth assessments have the ability to provide evidence-based findings that can be fed directly into the design of relevant interventions. IYF employed three primary data collection strategies:

1. Targeted extant data collection: The central/chief statistical agency and international data sources (e.g., World Bank; UN System; IFC) were identified and consulted for national statistics on economic growth, education, employment and health. These data provide the macro picture that framed the environment in which youth operate (e.g., economic trends, health trends, education trends, etc.).
2. Interviews/Focus groups: Interviews and focus groups were conducted with young people, government officials, civil society organizations, USAID grant recipients, donor agencies, private sector leaders, and others active in youth development. Interviews and focus groups were conducted using semi-structured instruments. Participants were guided through a series of questions, but encouraged to expand and go beyond the scope of questions when relevant.
3. Rapid surveying: Focus group participants were given short surveys, to collect both basic demographic and substantive information.

The resulting qualitative and quantitative data underwent separate, but complementary, analyses. While there are myriad analytical techniques that could be used on these data, IYF used strategies that were relevant to the data collected, but also to the purposes of the assessment (i.e., to establish baseline knowledge on youth in Kyrgyzstan and to use data to inform the design of a larger youth development intervention). As it concerns qualitative data, there were four analytical components: (1) data reduction (i.e., open coding, focused coding, axial coding), (2) displaying data, (3) drawing conclusions, and (4) verification through data triangulation (e.g., comparing qualitative and quantitative findings)<sup>2</sup>. Similarly and when suited to the data collected, IYF employed a variety of descriptive statistical analyses on the survey data.

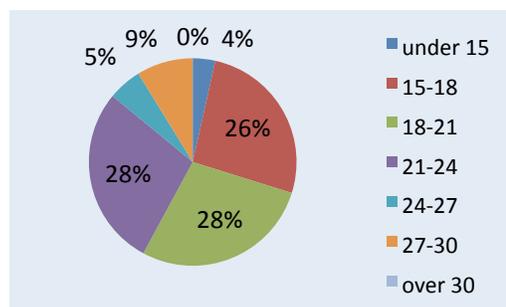


Figure 1: Age

#### B. Research Sample

The sample used for this assessment included young people and members of the public, private and civil society sector of Kyrgyzstan. There were 61 young people included in the sample, spread over seven focus groups. All focus group participants were asked to fill out a rapid youth survey. These data are presented throughout this report.

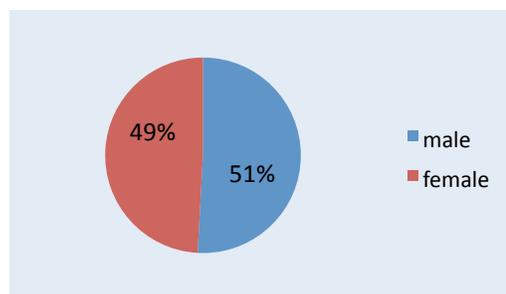


Figure 2: Sex

Figures 1-3 present the general profile of the young people surveyed and recruited into focus groups. More than half of the sample was between the ages of 15-21. Gender was

<sup>2</sup> Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (2000). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Second Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

nearly even, with slightly more men participating in the assessment than women. Finally, in terms of education level, participants were divided nearly evenly into “some secondary”, “secondary”, “some post-secondary”, and “post-secondary”.

### C. Limitations

There are limitations with all research activities, especially as one attempts to condense years of lived experience into a short field work exercise. In the case of this assessment, there are three limitations:

- i. **Time:** USAID requested that IYF conduct a rapid youth assessment. By nature, rapid assessments occur over very limited durations, ranging from several days to several weeks. Field work for this activity lasted two weeks during which 61 surveys were administered; seven focus groups were conducted; as well as 30 individual interviews. This represents a substantial dataset by which to draw findings. However, datasets of this size and structure cannot be used to examine changes over time or to measure impact. In the future, USAID may consider extensive activities that would include longitudinal surveys and/or impact evaluations.
- ii. **Sample:** Rapid assessments typically use two types of sampling strategies: strategic and convenience. Strategic sampling is the process of collecting data from those that are most informed on a given topic, so to get the most information on the topic. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling, which involves the sample being drawn from that part of the population closest at hand. Both strategies allow the researcher to collect as much information as possible in the shortest amount of time. The advantages of using these two strategies are: 1) they are the quickest to implement; 2) the data collected tends to be rich and of high quality; and 3) the costs are less prohibitive compared to large, randomized control trials. In this assessment, IYF worked with its local consultants to ensure that focus groups included a suitable gender balance, socio-economic status balance, and ethnic balance. In the future, USAID may consider a wider study that employs a large and randomly selected sample. This would allow USAID to make stronger generalizations about the impact of programs or to measure change over time.
- iii. **Local sensitivities:** The assessment team arrived in Kyrgyzstan two months following the ethnic conflict that erupted in the south. Wanting to ensure appropriate representation of southern views, the team spent three nights in Osh and Jalalabad oblasts. While tensions remained quite high, the team was interested in speaking with both Kyrgyz and Uzbek youth. The Uzbek population was visibly absent from daily life in Osh and Jalalabad cities. As such, there were concerns that it would be difficult to recruit young Uzbeks to sit on focus groups. While it proved challenging to recruit an ethnic balance, the team was successful in speaking with Kyrgyz and Uzbek focus groups and several individual interviews with young Uzbek leaders. While these local tensions made the field team collect data with a heightened awareness of human subjects procedures and protections, it did not limit the quality or quantity data collected.

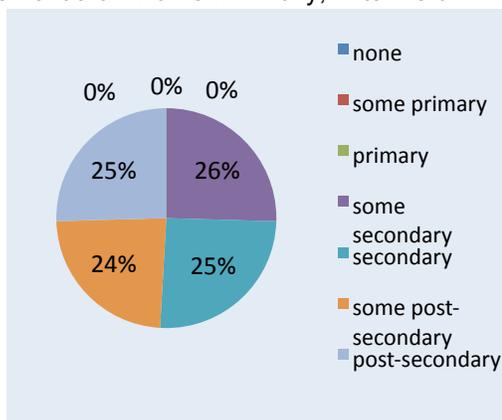


Figure 3: Educational attainment

Despite these limitations, the assessment team feels strongly that the findings presented here are valid. Validity was ensured in three ways:

**Triangulation:** In order to confirm our findings, IYF employed a variety of methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups, surveys) from a variety of sources (e.g., youth, donors, civil society, private sector, public sector, and extant data). These data were examined across and within topics so to confirm or nullify hypotheses.

***Peer debriefing:*** This is a process whereby the researcher convenes a group of knowledgeable colleagues to review data analysis at all stages, from a preliminary review to the final production. The purpose of the peer debriefer is to provide an opportunity to “reality check” findings, assessing whether results converge or diverge from commonly accepted understandings. In the case of convergence, it is important to employ the peer debriefer as a “devil’s advocate”, examining to see if there were analyses that were ignored. In the case of divergence, the peer debriefer is used to examine the specific reasons for the difference, to suggest reanalysis and/or to confirm the credibility of new understandings of the data. IYF employed a peer debriefing team to review all results.

***Confirmability:*** Confirmability is the degree to which findings are the product of the inquiry rather than the biases of the researcher. IYF’s evaluation methods ensured confirmability through the production of an *audit trail*, which is evidence and examples of raw data that can be reviewed. While USAID has full ownership of these data and associated products, IYF will make the following data resources available for review:

- Raw data: Including interview and focus group recordings, transcripts, observation notes, video, still photos and original surveys;
- Data reduction and analysis products: field notes, preliminary code lists, preliminary data analyses, generated reports (i.e., from SPSS, Atlas.ti)
- Peer debriefing: meeting notes from all meetings with the peer debriefers;
- Instrument development information: Drafts of instruments, forms and any preliminary schedules.

Given these safeguards, IYF feels confident that the findings presented in this document are valid and trustworthy<sup>3</sup>.

## **IV. MAJOR FINDINGS**

### **A. Citizenship**

Youth in Kyrgyzstan, aged 10 to 25, represent nearly a third of the population and face multiple challenges as they transition from school into holding the rights and responsibilities characteristic of full, active citizenship<sup>4</sup>. According to the PISA report, poor quality secondary and higher educational experiences present a major obstacle to youth in Kyrgyzstan. Further, disparities between teachers’ capacity and access to educational materials in urban and rural schools exacerbate achievement gaps between youth. Abuse of illicit substances and risky sexual behavior are rising at alarming rates<sup>5</sup>. The UNV reports that institutional mechanisms and structures facilitating young people’s participation in public life are practically absent.

In reaction to poor governance in the post independence period, many youth are disillusioned about the promise of democracy, a significant obstacle to building a more stable and unified country. While active youth citizenship encompasses the quality and quantity of youth participation within and across various socio-political settings including family, community, work places, and government, limited investment has been directed at engaging youth as partners for their own development, let alone the country’s. To ensure youth practice the key life and leadership skills necessary for active citizenship, investments in formal and non-formal citizenship experiences are critical. In this section, we discuss the various patterns that emerged from IYF’s data collection, as well as provide reference points from other sources of data and analysis on the topic of youth engagement and active citizenship in Kyrgyzstan.

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<sup>3</sup> Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (2000). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Second edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Programme, (2010) National Human Development Report, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>5</sup> Sterland, B. 2007. UNV Support to Strengthen Youth Volunteerism in Kyrgyzstan.

## 1. Values

A 2010 study by the United National Development Programme states, “Youth attitudes revealed that almost one-third of young people are afraid of the future or uncertain about tomorrow, and that one-fourth are dissatisfied with what is happening and want to change the situation, while 13 percent are apathetic and fatalistic <sup>6</sup> (see Figure 4). These findings corresponded very closely with what youth focus group

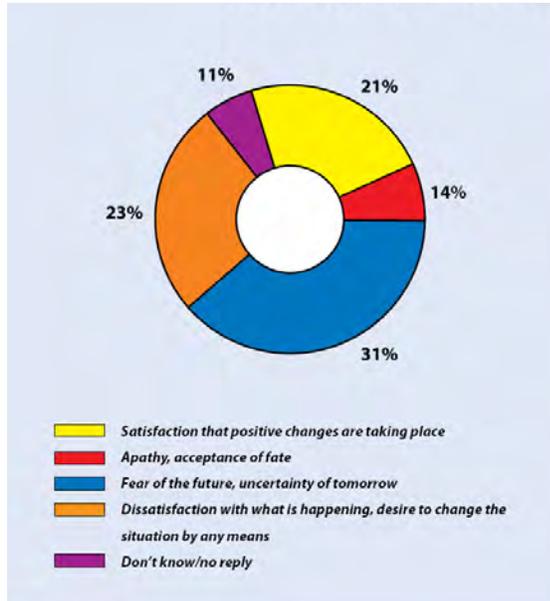


Figure 4: Prevailing attitudes in Kyrgyzstan today

participants shared. Although most state and civil society actors recognized that “the further development of Kyrgyzstan as a state depends on the official approaches to youth, on public perception of the place and role of youth in the society, and on the ability of the state to offer a unifying civil identity for its young citizens” <sup>7</sup>, there are few documented examples of ways youth are being engaged to form or extend their identity and values in alignment with the foundational principles of democracy, effective governance or responsible citizenship. There are some notable exceptions, particular the Summer School of Democracy, implemented by UNV and other leadership trainings offered through donor support. One encouraging finding was, following on the political upheaval and violence earlier in 2010, youth surveyed shared that a momentum and eagerness was beginning to build around bolstering a new Kyrgyzstani identity and a more democratic culture. These programs, while promising, lack scale, with only a select group of active young people recruited to participate.

Research by the University of Exeter concluded “people’s hopes and fears for the future influence what they are prepared to do in the present and what they are prepared to work towards” <sup>8</sup>. Building on this insight, the situation of youth in Kyrgyzstan is complex. Their primary orientation to society was pessimistic and their dominant social priorities center on securing professional status and earning high incomes. Further, most respondents could not identify a contemporary role model, suggesting a disconnection between youth and others (e.g. peers, adults, pride in the country). When probed about role models, examples ranged from popular celebrities (e.g., Jennifer Lopez, Princess Diana) to historical figures (e.g., Manas). In many cases, young people could not provide a specific role model and instead provided broad categories such as “bankers” and “businessmen”. Also common was the simple answer on “No one.”

## 2. Views on participation

The majority of interviews and focus groups contained significant numbers of active and motivated youth. Of those surveyed, 64% reported being involved in some way in their community (see Figure 5). For example, they described past episodic charitable or volunteer activities they engaged in through secondary school. It was not clear how many youth sustained volunteer commitments regularly throughout university, which would be interesting to explore in future evaluation efforts. For the majority of youth who reported they had not volunteered, they noted having no time or interest to participate (see Figure 6). One university student from Bishkek explained, “Many young people have to work and don’t have time for volunteering.” Upon

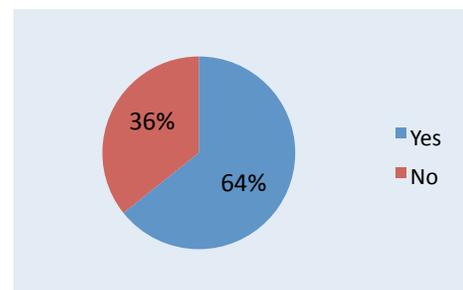


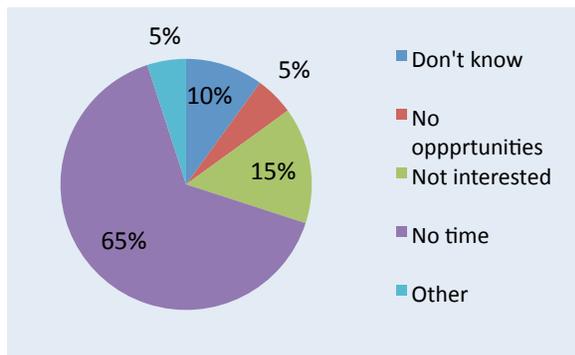
Figure 5: Are you involved with your community?

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Development Programme, (2010) National Human Development Report, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>7</sup> Musabaeva, A. The Youth Policy of Kyrgyzstan: Old Approaches for a New Generation. IPP

<sup>8</sup> Holden, C. 2009. “I would like to say that things must just get better.” Ethos, Term 3 - Civics and Citizenship.

further analysis of the focus group data, it was clear that a substantial number of students take on irregular work which limits the amount of time they have free to choose volunteering. That noted, it is important to address the issues of inertia and apathy as potential obstacles to active youth participation.



Moreover, youth require pathways to participation like active programs in their communities and schools, without which an expectation of large-scale self-initiated service is inappropriate.

The data indicated that young people struggle with a lack of voice. As stated elsewhere, such stifling is seen to be the result of government and parents not being interested in hearing from young people or valuing their opinions. Many young people stated that this lack of interest in youth opinions, or opinions in general, is a vestige of Soviet culture. Young people

stated that under the Soviet system, it was not encouraged, in fact actively discouraged, from expressing independent thought or choice. One young man from a *novostroika* (new settlement) said *“It is different now than when our parents grew up under Soviet times. Young people are very expressive now but it is difficult to express our ideas to adults. Maybe the values and culture is different.”* With this current cohort of young people being raised nearly entirely after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a feeling was expressed that there is a generational gap between youth and adults, with adults not wanting to hear or include young people, and youth demanding to express themselves and be heard. It should be noted, however, that this lack of voice and demands for inclusion do not necessarily translate into successful outcomes. Many young people spoke about being regularly shut out of political discussions within their communities or at a regional or national level. More often than not, however, the result was not increased pressure for inclusion, but rather acceptance and apathy.

### 3. View on politics and the state

As reported by the UNDP, Kyrgyzstan has developed and adopted a multitude of social legislation since independence including “its “Conception for the Development of State Youth Policy in the Kyrgyz Republic Until 2010,” its laws “On the Bases of State Youth Policy,” “On Education,” and “On Elementary Vocational Training,” and a whole set of other laws on health and social protection for young people<sup>9</sup>. The current population of youth grew up as the country underwent various political, social and economic transitions; and today they are faced with creating a new vision of well-being and thriving in their families, communities and work places. The State Youth Policy covers six comprehensive youth development areas, but their corresponding policy measures were not as robust. It is imperative that youth gain positive experiences of civil society and government if they are ever expected to activate as responsible citizens.

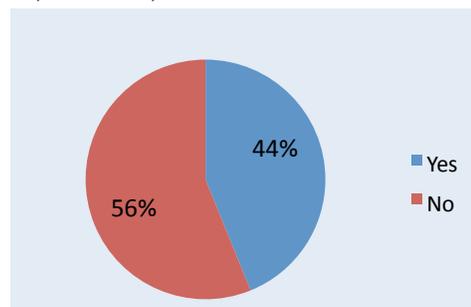


Figure 7: Are you politically active?

More than 40% of youth reported being politically active, while most all youth shared negative views on political actors and state institutions (see Figures 7-9). One youth from a *novostroika* near Bishkek shared that *“Politics is a dirty game. You make good money, but live a short life.”* Youth choice to be active does not translate into feelings of satisfaction around citizenship, with 86% reporting they do not feel government listens to youth. Most youth surveyed distrusted political and law

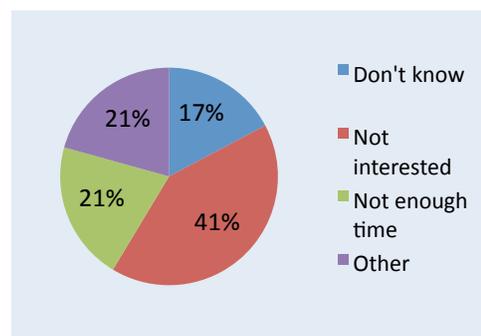
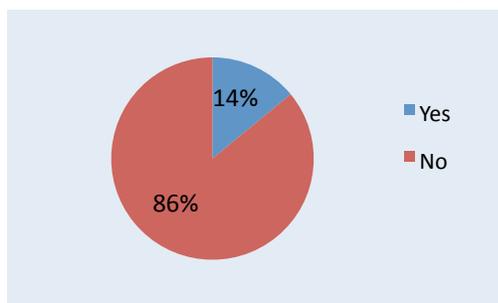


Figure 8: Why aren't you politically active?

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Development Programme, (2010) National Human Development Report, Kyrgyzstan.

enforcement institutions. There was a general acceptance of the ineffectiveness and corruption present in both institutions.



Focus groups revealed that youth’s primary forms of political participation included involvement with parties, voting, and holding local government accountable. However, participants shared that they had uneven access to political participation or representation. During interviews, representatives from various youth-serving organizations, including Youth of the Nation- Karabalta and the Youth of Osh, described programs designed to hold local governments accountable on budgets

and spending; however, these programs did not generally engage youth in direct or substantial ways. According to youth focus groups, although youth have a solid understanding of the country’s political context, adults typically do not create space for them to propose solutions on local or state issues. For example, youth wings of political parties are not given much access to decision-making or authority. Instead, youth are merely engaged around elections then neglected other times. A youth leader stated, *“Youth in Osh are not politically active, although they get more active as the election period starts. But this activity is just for these two months before the election. Parties are just interested in increasing their numbers.”*

#### 4. Views on community involvement

Just under two thirds of focus group respondents (61%) reported participating in community service activities, which was very encouraging (see Figure 10). Among more passive youth, there was a tendency to acknowledge that community needs existed but to argue that it was the responsibility of state, not public, actors to create and implement solutions. Of note, civil society has grown rapidly over the last two decades, albeit with mixed results. An interviewee from AUCA stated that, *“NGOs do not have public trust.”* In spite of this, there are some encouraging trends. *Central Asian Survey* reported that *“NGO activists have the independence to pursue local development agendas and that, recently, NGO activists have been attempting to adapt their roles to resolve their difficulties and better suit the current Kyrgyzstani context<sup>10</sup>”*. It remains critical for young people to explore community level service as it may motivate them to pursue careers in civil society. Most interview and focus group participants acknowledged critical issues and needs in their communities; conversely, they expressed that state actors should generate solutions. As an alternative example to that mentality, one young person in Karabalta explained, *“No, there are no local councils. People crowd around their buildings when things need to happen. People get involved in their small residential areas.”*

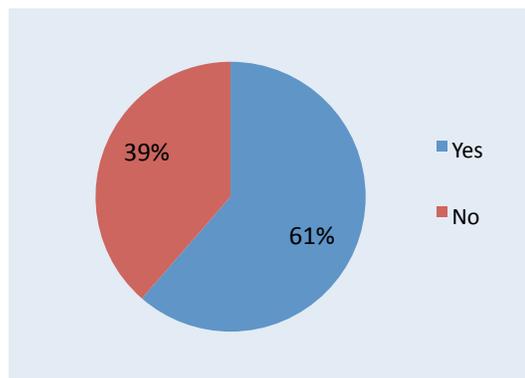


Figure 10: Do you participate in community service activities?

#### 5. Views on crime

As reported by the UNDP, *“Modern youth live with violence and aggression experiencing a range of feelings about it, from concern for their safety to approval and desire to join the criminal world<sup>11</sup>.”* The table below illustrates the majority of youth crimes, including banditry, theft, disorderly conduct, robbery and homicide, are committed by young people aged 18-24. Youth participants suggested that increasing extracurricular activities, leisure time activities and creating access to employment opportunities were the most significant investments necessary to reduce the incidence of youth crime.

<sup>10</sup> Paasiaro, M. (2009). Home-grown strategies for greater agency. *Central Asian Survey*. 28(1): 59-57.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Development Programme, (2010) National Human Development Report, Kyrgyzstan.

When asked about the most pressing issues faced in their communities, many youth offered examples of criminal behavior in schools and other settings. One youth from Karabalta said, “Yes, [crime] is everywhere. Our city is not an exception. There are some dangerous places.” Racketeering and gangs were mentioned most commonly. Respondents provided multiple scenarios of ways criminals permeate communities. It is also important to note that young people spoke about organized crime in positive and negative ways. There were many young people, by far the majority, who stated criminals and gangs were a destructive force in Kyrgyzstan and for youth in particular. Myriad examples were shared about how gangs had infiltrated schools and caused corruption to flourish at the expense of learning. Of those that stated that they had friends with illegal jobs, when asked what sorts of illegal activities their friends participated in, the most common responses were drug dealing and prostitution. There was one mention of human trafficking. This being said, some youth spoke very highly of the protection and support offered to entire communities by criminals. A young man from a *novostroika* spoke about a gang leader near Issyk-Kul who provided significant funds to local businesses to support them during more austere times. This same criminal leader provided sports facilities that the young people in the area used extensively. This young man described this situation as an example of how criminals are not just a destructive force for the community, but fill a vacuum left by a lack of civil society or public-sector leadership.

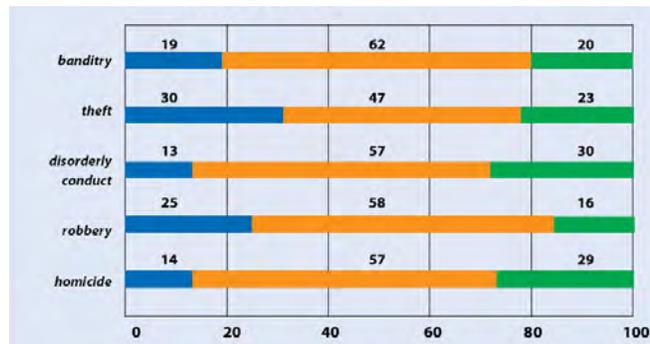


Figure 12: Crimes by age group, 2007 (%)

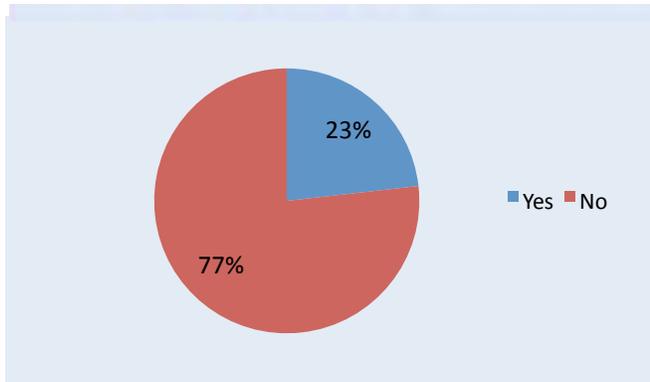


Figure 11: Do you have friends with illegal jobs?

## 6. Role of religion

In discussing the role of religion, opinions varied depending on the population group. Adult participants (i.e., staff of donors, the public sector, private sector and civil society), tended to view religion, particularly Islam, with a level of suspicion. Reference to bordering countries and their turn towards more austere forms of Islam were regularly mentioned as something that could come to the Kyrgyz Republic, and as something to be avoided. According to AUCA, the number of schools organized by mosques is increasing. An AUCA staff member stated, “Officially, there are 45 madrasas in the country that can provide teaching for children, although, the number of unregistered religious schools is extremely high.” With no one from the Ministry of Education or the State Religious Authority overseeing the situation, there is no way to guarantee the quality or content of these students. In contrast to a suspicion of Islam and its local leaders, young people, particularly those of poorer backgrounds, expressed great reverence. One young man from a *novostroika* north of Bishkek stated that he believed the local imam to be a very trustworthy man and someone that should be revered. Others echoed these statements, suggesting that religion was very important to them.

This growing sense of religiosity is echoed in other analyses as well. In the UNDP’s analysis of young people, 68% of respondents identified themselves first as Muslims and second as Kyrgyzstani. Of young people aged 15-24, 10% stated that they prayed five times per day. Of youth aged 25-34, 16% prayed five times per day. A research report<sup>12</sup> from AUCA provided detailed information about the religious and

<sup>12</sup> Malikov, K. (2009). Political Islam: Ideological orientations of youth in Bishkek. AUCA.

political orientations of young people in Bishkek. Based on survey and interview data collected on 307 young people aged 16-26, the authors provide several key findings:

- Young people view Islam as not only a cultural identity, but as a political identity as well;
- Youth perceived political Islam as an alternative to the leadership vacuum currently visible in Kyrgyz government;
- Young people expressed their knowledge of political Islam as superficial and largely gathered from Western media sources. There were expressions that “less biased” information be provided on political developments in the Islamic World;
- Young people expressed an interest in creating political parties with ties to Islam. Many young people believed that future political partners will include secular parties with a pro-Islamic platform as an alternative to the current political party options;
- The majority of respondents saw Kyrgyzstan as a secular state with Islamic values, similar to Turkey or Malaysia. A smaller proportion saw Kyrgyzstan as a pure Islamic state, such as with Iran. Finally, only 1.3% of respondents saw a future Kyrgyzstan as a democratic country.

## **7. Trust in mass media**

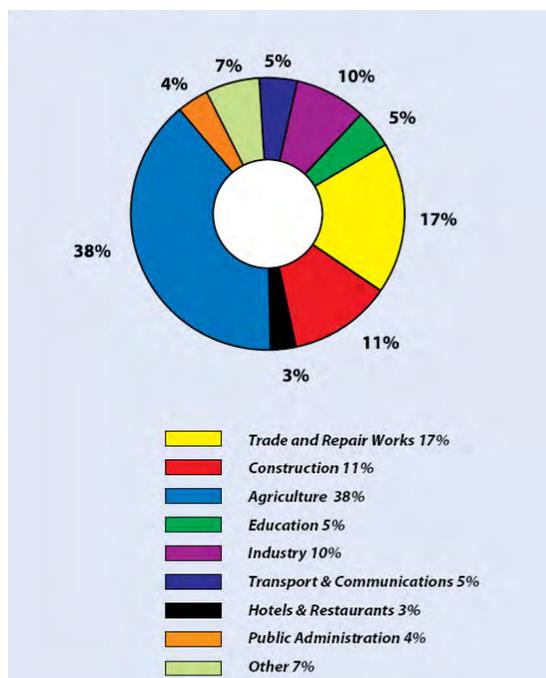
Youth noted a lack of access to credible information through public media channels (e.g., government television, radio, internet), although most respondents expressed a desire to trust media. Following the June events in the south, one young person shared that “*The city was divided and neighborhoods blocked off. Lots of rumors and misinformation fueled tensions.*” Much of this misinformation, it was suggested, was produced by local television programs. While possible to stay abreast of civic happenings by following the key national channels, it was suggested these same channels failed to provide accurate information about the violence in the South. More so, local stations were accused as actively providing disinformation on the conflict. In response, young people expressed an interest for more accurate and engaging media options. In general, youth serving organizations were not effectively utilizing new media; however, some organizations are ahead of the curve. The Youth of Osh (YOO), a volunteer organization, uses new media such as Facebook, Twitter and a blog to keep their membership abreast of news. Additionally, YOO volunteers make short films as awareness raising and recruitment tools. Many creative communications strategies around use of new and alternative media could be adapted for Kyrgyzstan on a campaign to shift public perception of the role of youth.

## **B. Economic opportunities**

IYF’s data, as well as myriad studies on youth in Kyrgyzstan, suggest two priority areas, citizenship and employment. The two are linked, in that it is often difficult to sustain active engagement with one’s community when basic needs of food and shelter are difficult to obtain. For this reason, young people must be provided the means to secure employment or to create the conditions to create their own opportunities through business creation. As detailed below, young people in Kyrgyzstan face very difficult circumstances as it concerns employment. Having received poor training within elementary and secondary schools, vocational schools and universities, young people are often thrust into a job market with few marketable skills. Additionally, given the demographic pattern common to many developing countries, Kyrgyzstan has a large population of young people. The result is an oversupply of labor that is generally not prepared for the domestic workforce. In the subsequent sections, we reveal the dominant themes that emerged from the data. The picture that is painted is that of a youthful population who have anxieties about their futures, but lack the tools (e.g., practical skills, life skills, entrepreneurial skills, but also citizenship skills) to change their circumstances.

### **1. Analysis of the labor market**

Labor market analyses compare labor supply versus labor demand. In best cases, one finds relative equilibrium between these two forces, where employers have access to suitably trained employees in sufficient numbers. Kyrgyzstan's labor market does not currently have such balance and is characterized by an oversupply of labor, both trained and untrained. This oversupply is largely due to a demographic condition that has created a large youth population. This "youth bulge" has, in turn, flooded the labor pool



**Figure 13: Distribution of employment among Kyrgyzstani aged 15 to 34 in 2007 (%)** (Source: UNDP, 2010)

with large numbers of young people looking for work. Young people in the Kyrgyz Republic constitute 51% of the labor supply<sup>13</sup>. The employment rate for young people (56 percent) is lower than the employment rate for the country overall (60 percent). The percent of women among employed youth is 39.3 percent. The employment of young people by sector, as visible in Figure 13, reflects the structure of Kyrgyzstan's economy, that is, primarily agriculture although with a significant proportion involved in trades and repair work<sup>14</sup>.

For urban youth, the primary sectors of employment are in the trade and services sector. However, given the more rural nature of Kyrgyzstan's population, the majority of young workers (65%) live in the non-urban regions of the country. In these areas, the agricultural sector is the dominant employer. Jobs in these areas include work on family farms or in medium to large, agribusinesses (e.g., livestock, fruits and vegetables). In most cases, this type of work is seasonal, and at its peak during active cultivation and harvest times. It is important to note that employment in both "unregistered" and "illegal" activities are not included in these figures. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these two sectors represent significant sectors of employment. For

example, Osh and Jalalabad Oblasts are known for their connections to drug trafficking originating in the opium fields of Afghanistan. Additionally, mafia and other organized crime syndicates flourish in Kyrgyzstan and are known to employ significant numbers of young people in various capacities. While difficult to capture, future analyses should attempt to collect data on these sectors. Doing so will provide a more complete picture of youth employment<sup>15</sup>.

According to a 2007 study by the State Committee for Migration and Employment, the workers in highest demand are those with a higher and secondary education (22.6 percent), qualified technical workers (20.4 percent), equipment operators and engineers (22.3 percent) and laborers (17.7 percent). The report indicated, however, that the need for blue collar professions is two to three times greater than the need for highly-trained office workers and specialists. The result is that young people who obtain university degrees, instead of entering blue collar professions, end up waiting for more prestigious jobs to be made available. As will be noted later in this report, this has created underemployment problems, as highly educated young people often expressed an unwillingness to work in positions that were seen as "below" their perceived status or skill-level or did not offer sufficiently high salaries (e.g., between 5,000-10,000 som/monthly or 108 – 215 USD/monthly).

## 2. Youth employment

<sup>13</sup> Results of Integrated Examination of Households in 2007. National Statistical Committee (2007).

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Development Programme, (2010) National Human Development Report, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>15</sup> E. Marat (2006). Impact of drug trade and organized crime on state functioning in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*. 4(1): 93-111.

The IYF assessment asked a sample of young people about their employment type. Jobs in Kyrgyzstan typically fall into three primary categories: contract (i.e., full time and legal), irregular or seasonal (i.e., part time and often “under the table”) and *night work* (i.e., illicit work, often considered a euphemism for prostitution). Of those surveyed, 50% stated that they were currently working with a contract (see Figure 14). For most, this was the preferred employment status, as it often translated as long-term and more formal in nature. Sixteen percent stated that they are engaged in some type of irregular or seasonal employment. Of those that were surveyed, this was largely employment within markets and bazaars or in restaurants. No respondents stated that they were engaged in “night work” as their exclusive means of employment. However, when aggregating the various combinations of employment (i.e., respondents could choose multiple employment types if they had multiple jobs), the survey results show that 28% of the sample were engaged in some form of “night work”. Taken at face-value, this represents a significant percentage of people engaged in very risky employment. There is some documented evidence to suggest that prostitution is not an uncommon occupation in Kyrgyzstan, with Bishkek and Osh being known for a higher incidence. For example, a 2004 study<sup>16</sup> conducted by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) reported that prostitution was 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. According to the IWPR,

human traffickers in Kyrgyzstan have sold or are involved in prostitution of more than 4,000 women, many of them younger than 16. While the results of IYF’s survey seem to suggest that “night work” is indeed a common source of employment, some caution should be paid to this result. In further exploring these data, 17% of employed men (n=5) reported being engaged in “night work.” This rate could suggest either a too narrow definition of what is considered “night work” or simple confusion over the term. While “night work” was defined to respondents prior to filling out the survey, it could be that there was a lack of clarity around its definition, with respondents including other types of work in this category. The high percentage could also suggest that there are men engaged in sex work, as the IWPR suggests. Regardless, this is an area that warrants further exploration. In the recommendations section of this report, IYF has made suggestions for areas of further research, which includes investigation on the role of sex work among youth in Kyrgyzstan.

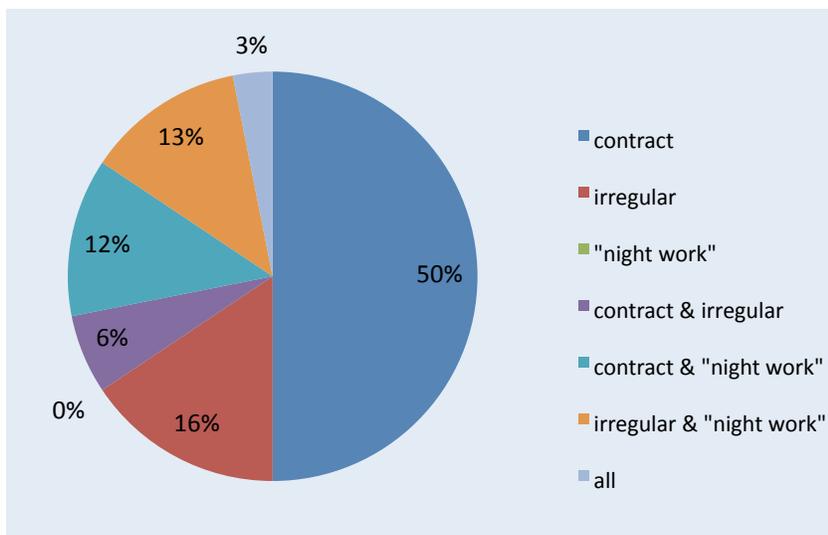


Figure 14: Employment type

### 3. Youth under- and unemployment

In all interviews and focus groups, youth unemployment was listed as one of the most significant obstacles facing young people in Kyrgyzstan. It was described as a primary point of instability within the country and as a contributing factor to the April and June events. Interviewees suggested that due to unemployment, young people have been made increasingly vulnerable and easily manipulated. The phenomenon of “rent-a-gang” was repeated throughout interviews and focus groups, a phenomenon where gang leaders, politicians or other anti-government elements would provide modest sums of money (e.g., 200 - 500 som or 4 - 11 USD) to young people to join protests, strikes or violent confrontations. Many respondents suggested that the young people involved in the April revolution were largely paid for

<sup>16</sup> *Lost Children of Central Asia*, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, January 2004.

by anti-Bakiyev supporters. It was additionally suggested that the young people involved in the June events were likewise paid small amounts of money to destabilize the southern regions and, as a consequence, the provisional government in Bishkek.

As stated above, youth represent the majority of economically active persons in the country. However, despite this large supply of workers, there are not sufficient domestic employment options. This condition produces two results: un- and underemployment and international migration. Within the wide category of “youth” (i.e., typically defined as aged 15-34), there are populations that are more at risk of unemployment. As Figure 15 details, those aged 15-24 represent those most vulnerable for unemployment. Within the 15-19 age group, 33.7% of the population were unemployed. In the 20-24 age group, 25.3% were unemployed. It is worth noting that in all age group categories, women represented significantly higher percentages of the unemployed. For example, of women aged 15-19, 36.2% were listed as unemployed<sup>17</sup>.

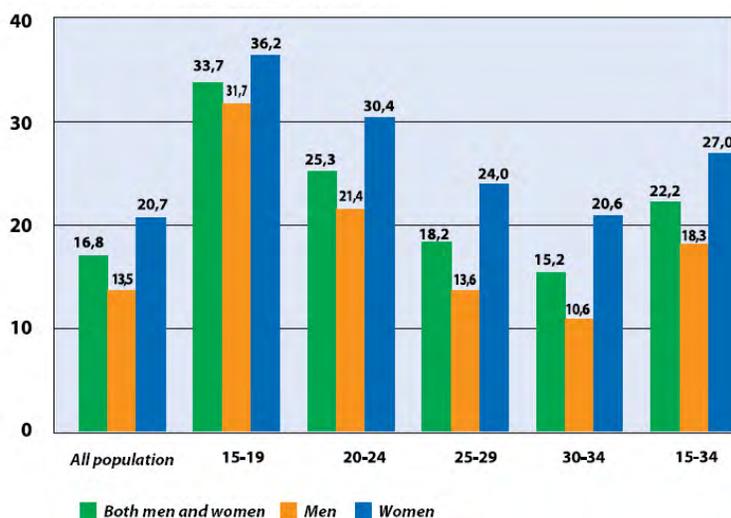


Figure 15: Unemployment by age group (%) (Source; UNDP, 2009)

In that young people face particular problems in finding employment in Kyrgyzstan, there is a wide belief that well-paid employment can be found in nearby countries, particularly Kazakhstan and Russia. Issues of migration were less apparent in IYF’s assessment data. Among young people, there were few mentions of migration as an employment possibility. This result could be accountable to the sampled population or the phrasing of questions, rather than an indication of relative interest or importance. Secondary data and interviews

with the civil society organizations, the private and the public sectors suggest that migration is a real employment option for many people, young and old, in Kyrgyzstan. As such, it is examined below in greater depth.

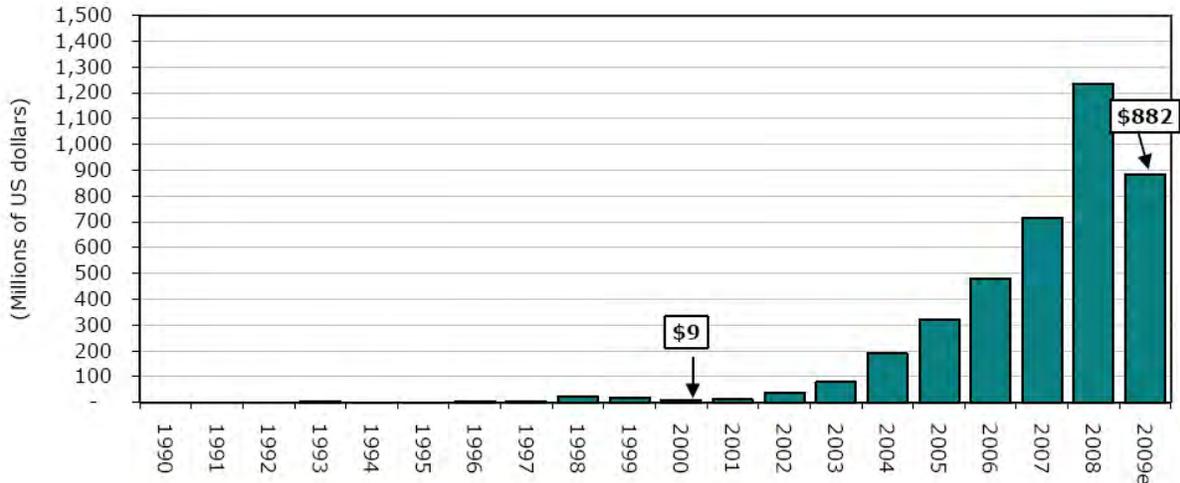
#### 4. Migration

There are positive and negative aspects of labor migration. In considering the positive, first, migration eases the oversupply of labor and offers opportunities for young people to gain decent work<sup>18</sup>. Second, in many cases, young people build their professional capabilities while abroad. On-the-job training provides the migrant greater chances to qualify for well paid jobs either in Kyrgyzstan or elsewhere. Third, Kyrgyzstani émigrés send significant portions of their salaries back in remittances. According to the World Bank (2010) (see Figure 16), Kyrgyzstan’s remittance inflows totaled \$882 million in 2009, down from the \$1.2 billion in 2008 and represented 28% of Kyrgyzstan’s GDP in 2008<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Development Programme, (2010) National Human Development Report, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>18</sup> “Decent work” is a term used by the ILO, which refers to work that is secure, respects labor rights, provides an adequate income, offers social protection and includes collective bargaining and participation. [www.ilo.org/public/english/region/ampro/cinterfor/publ/sala/dec\\_work/ii.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/ampro/cinterfor/publ/sala/dec_work/ii.htm)

<sup>19</sup> Migrant Remittance Flows: Findings from a Global Survey of Central Banks. World Bank (2010).



**Figure 16: Remittance inflows for the Kyrgyz Republic** (Source: World Bank, 2010)

There are negatives associated with migrancy as well, including separating families and potentially exploitative labor practices (e.g., including human trafficking). According to the UNDP, 700,000 to 1,000,000 Kyrgyzstani citizens currently work abroad. Labor migrants are primarily aged 20-29 and have at least a secondary education. Women represent 27% of labor migrants. Seventeen percent of the surveyed population in the UNDP study reported that within the next 12 months, they were planning to leave Kyrgyzstan. Of those, 73% were preparing to migrate abroad to find work. Respondents stated that their reason for labor migration was a lack of jobs, but more specifically, the lack of well-paid jobs perceived as commensurate to their training. A respondent from the UNDP study stated, *“It is difficult to be young in Kyrgyzstan... It is difficult to make a living. There are no opportunities to build a foundation for yourself. Out of those who studied with me, only 10 people found jobs close to home – the others became labor migrants.”* This discussion of labor migrancy leads to a larger discussion about why young people feel the need to migrate. For most migrants, especially young migrants, the push to work abroad is based on their real and/or perceived inability to find work that pays well or work that suits their perceived qualifications. The assessment now turns to these issues, with special reference to attitudes with work and salaries and career preparation.

## 5. Employment and salary expectations

Despite country context, job seekers look for employment that provides extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Extrinsic rewards are generally remuneration in the form of salary and benefits, whereas intrinsic awards are more often affective notions of self-worth and professional pride. These sorts of rewards were expressed often among youth respondents. Although quite varied depending on social groupings (e.g., middle class university students versus poorer youth working as laborers in the bazaars and market stalls), young people had firm opinions about the types of jobs they wanted and the salary levels they believed appropriate to their training.

When young people were asked about their career aspirations, answers varied by socio-economic status. Focus groups with poor and less educated young people tended to focus more on daily subsistence. There were minimal references to their search for increasingly complex or skilled work or for jobs with significantly higher salaries. One young man that worked at a bazaar in Bishkek simply stated, *“We are just trying to survive.”* When asked what their futures might look like, poorer youth discussed ensuring that they had enough money to support themselves and their families (e.g., their wives, children and ageing parents). In most cases, these young people were not able to articulate how they would create this future and instead limited their career and salary horizons to satisfy their immediate needs. In some cases, however, they did express career aspirations. One young man, who worked in a bazaar removing cardboard boxes from stalls, stated that in the future he hoped to create a small craft stall of his own.

Another young man stated, *“I’d like to go back to my village, to a clean, quiet place, and open a small fishery or chicken farm. That’s what I want.”* When asked what prevented them from creating these or other opportunities, young people from this group stated they lacked knowledge about running a business and start-up capital.

In contrast to these modest, and at times non-existent, career aspirations, university students had grand ideas. In the University of Central Asia’s (UCA) recent youth assessment<sup>20</sup>, the authors indicated that material benefits and job security were the primary factors in defining career aspirations for young people in Kyrgyzstan. When a university student was asked about her career aspirations, she stated that she hoped to *“graduate from university and get a job in my field. I want to be a good specialist”*. When asked what her field was, she stated *“Finance”*. Elsewhere, students spoke about wanting to be bankers, diplomats and as high as the president of Kyrgyzstan. In their research on Kyrgyzstani youth, the UNDP cautioned that young people, particularly those with higher education, have inflated expectations for jobs and salaries. In their survey, when young people were asked their expected salary, respondents reported a minimum average of 5,400 som per month (116 USD), well above the average for entry level positions in Kyrgyzstan. These salary expectations correspond to data IYF collected from young people. When asking university educated young people what their salary expectations were, was amounts ranged from 5,000 to 15,000 som per month (or 108 to 323 USD per month). It is important to note that these expectations did not necessarily flow from an inflated sense of their own market value. Rather, these were the salaries that they believed the market would bear for someone at the beginning of their career. A university student stated in a focus group, *“I believe most salaries are 6,500 som (140 USD) per month. But maybe 10,000 (215 USD) should be the minimum.”* It, therefore, emerged from these data that young people lacked accurate information about the market value for their skills and training. Future youth programming should provide young people with information about salary scales and realistic salaries to expect from entry level positions.

Despite high career and salary expectations, both university students and more marginal young people had a shared sense that employment prospects were bleak in Kyrgyzstan. A young woman who attended university in Bishkek stated, *“Many young people do not believe that there is a future. Many have high hopes, but then they don’t find jobs.”* The lack of immediate work in one’s field and with an appropriate salary often leads the young person to forgo stable (e.g., contract) employment in an entry level position. Instead, the strategy is to wait for a position that better matches their expectations. The result is significant youth underemployment. Staff at higher education institutions suggested that this reflects the wider issue that young people are not given adequate information on the realities of employment in Kyrgyzstan nor provided suitable training to find or create jobs domestically. UCA notes that young people, particularly those with a university credential, also tend to disregard the idea that lower paid jobs, or ones with less perceived prestige, provide opportunities to build one’s capacity in life skills (e.g., team work, communication, conflict management, creativity) that are essential to employment.

## **6. Preparation for the workforce**

There were numerous reasons provided as to why young people are unable to find decent work in Kyrgyzstan. Young people and staff in relevant Ministries, donors and NGOs provided various reasons, including unrealistic expectations for job prospects, diminished job opportunities and poor training. In their own search for these answers, the ILO (2009) conducted an impact evaluation of their employability training programs. In this study they asked young people what they viewed as their major obstacles to employment. Nearly half of respondents stated that the largest obstacle was their lack of practical skills (see Figure 17). The UNDP supports this claim by suggesting that one of the major hindrances to youth employment is the lack of “socioeconomic adaptation skills” (UNDP, 2010: 34). UNDP defines these largely as life and employability skills that allow one to find and keep a job. These include such things as a desire to do high quality work, the ability to adapt to change in the work place, team working skills, self-motivation, responsibility, entrepreneurialism, and positive attitudes towards competition.

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<sup>20</sup> “Giving youth a voice in youth policy.” University of Central Asia (2010)

The lack of suitable training surfaced in IYF's data as well. In speaking with young people and members of the education community, a common refrain heard was that young people are not appropriately prepared for Kyrgyzstan's labor market demands and that training institutions, particularly universities, are not providing opportunities to receive this training. Staff at UCA and the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) stated that the higher education system was misaligned to labor market demands. It was expressed that the primary mission of many of Kyrgyzstan's private and public universities was to produce "high quality specialists." Upon further investigation with young people, however, the specialties for

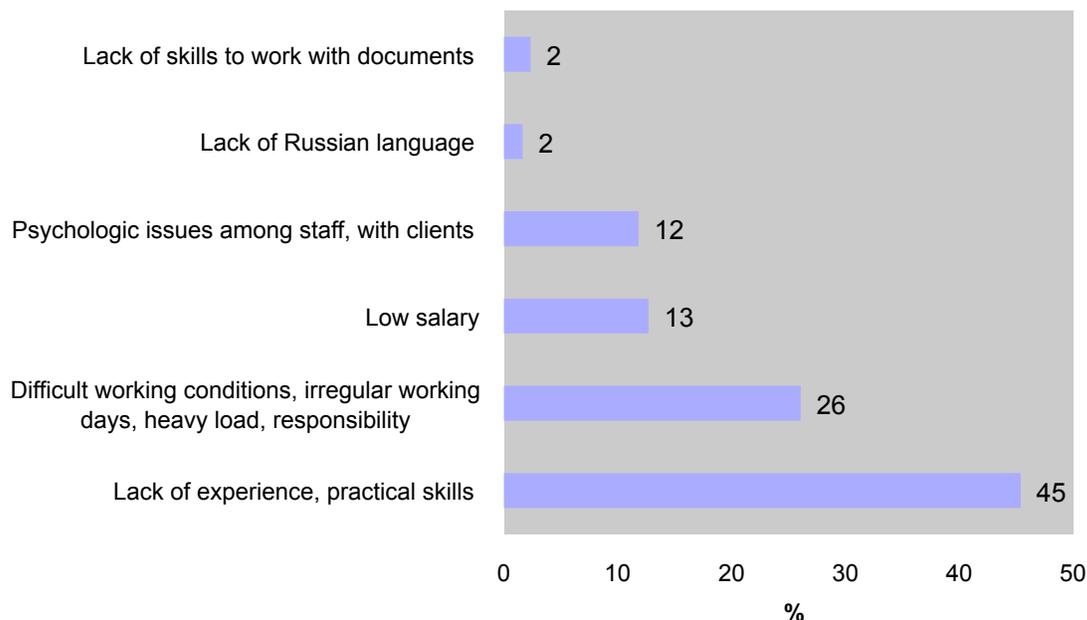


Figure 17: Main challenges faced when starting the job (Source: ILO, 2009)

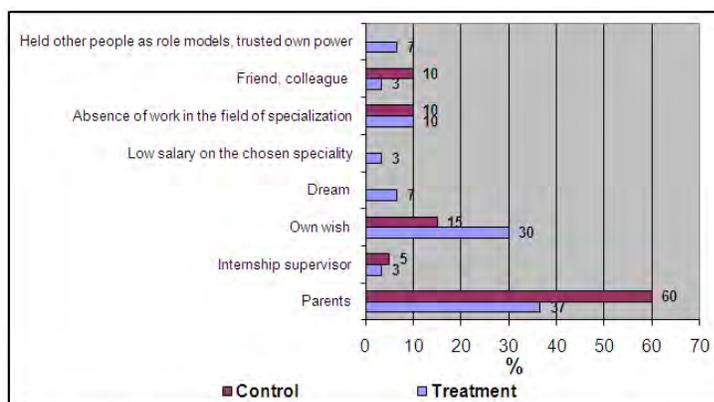
which they were being trained tended to dominate two primary fields: law and finance. This conflicts with a national labor market that is flooded with lawyers and accountants.

When young people were asked which sort of positions they were hoping to find upon graduation from university, many echoed this desire to be a "highly qualified specialist." When probed about which industries or sectors such "specialists" were in demand, the response was generally a bank, a law firm or a NGO. The reality, however, is that these positions are increasingly rare and highly competitive. In general, new graduates from a university, or those with a secondary education or below, will not qualify for the positions available at the few companies or agencies that have job openings. Among staff of AUCA and UCA, the belief was that many of Kyrgyzstan's universities are not preparing young people for jobs that are actually available, nor are they preparing them to create their own opportunities through entrepreneurship training. Lacking both technical and life skills puts young people in Kyrgyzstan at a significant disadvantage for finding employment at home. The result is often underemployment or migration.

This misalignment of labor supply and demand can be traced to two complementary misperceptions. First, young people regularly spoke about their search for a job as a qualified specialist. A young man from the *novostroikas* north of Bishkek stated that his hope was to "graduate from school and become a lawyer and be a good specialist in my area." The reality, however, is that it is unlikely that this young person will actually find stable employment as a lawyer in Kyrgyzstan. A young woman from Karabalta stated that young people want to obtain training for a prestigious career. When probed about an area of work that was interesting to her and of need to her country, she stated that there was a lack of qualified kindergarten teachers in Kyrgyzstan. When asked if she would be interested in being trained as a teacher she quickly responded "No. It's not prestigious enough." These sentiments were echoed

repeatedly by young people, namely that they hoped to study and secure a position as a “specialist”, denoting a position that provides both the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards associated with high-level careers. A young woman from Osh, however, countered this compulsion. She stated, “Kyrgyzstan has a culture of specialists. We think we don’t have enough specialists. So every year we produce thousands of lawyers, even if we don’t need them. We have lots of accountants and lawyers but we need more farmers! We need to pay attention to the labor market.”

The second misperception that stifles youth employment is the belief that Kyrgyzstan’s public and private universities are the only way to secure decent work. Numerous staff from civil society and education institutions stated that many of Kyrgyzstani universities feed into this *specialist culture* by offering degrees in subjects where there were few job openings while requiring young people to take highly theoretical courses with little practical value. Staff from UCA and AUCA emphasized that higher education in Kyrgyzstan is misaligned to labor market demands. That is, instead of training young people for the careers that are available, be that farming, IT, teaching, etc, a young person is led, both through social pressures but also through sheer course quantity, to programs with few job prospects. A senior staff member from UCA stated that Kyrgyzstan’s higher education system is currently “bursting at the seams [with young people]. However, it provides neither a good education nor skills and know-how that could be used in a work context.” He further expanded to discuss the inefficiencies that affect career training within a university. He stated, “If a young person wants to be an IT administrator, they have to go to the university for five years of quite theoretical training. After five years they graduate but aren’t qualified. The institution is not designed to provide practical training. If I am a young person that wants to be a teacher or an accountant, I’d have to go through five years of training. There are no other options.” The result is a population of young people that are educated with the belief that they will find employment in their area of specialty only to find that their skills are either comparatively low, out-dated or suited for positions where there are few vacancies. A young woman from Osh stated, “We have a stereotype that only the educated person will succeed. So we think we have to go to the university to get trained. But the university does not offer professional training.” Finally, a university student from Bishkek stated simply, “Our education is not applicable to real life.”



**Figure 18: Factors and the people that had an impact on the decision for business startup** (Source: ILO, 2009)

There are examples of successful workforce preparation practices in Kyrgyzstan, including at several universities (UCA and AUCA) as well as through bilateral and multilateral donor programs. Of the many that have been attempted, the ILO’s has been rigorously evaluated and shows signs of impact. The ILO’s Know About Business (KAB) program has been implemented in the Kyrgyz Republic since 2002. The main objective of the course is to provide vocational school students with opportunities for professional training in entrepreneurship and self-employment.

KAB provides students with the essential knowledge seen as necessary to development a business, manage operations and to solve common problems encountered during start-up. Since the beginning of the program, over 120 teachers in 118 vocational schools throughout Kyrgyzstan have been trained with the support of the ILO and the number of students that studied in the KAB Program continues to increase.

Students in the KAB program are given the opportunity to receive training in general employability workshops and/or in more specialized entrepreneurship training (i.e., Start Your Own Business, or SOB). ILO’s survey indicated that three years following intervention, 72% of graduates had opened a small business<sup>21</sup>. Of these, 44% had opened their business in the agricultural sector. When asked their

<sup>21</sup> There were no measures on the sustainability of these youth-led businesses. Future evaluations should examine the extent that businesses survive and for how long.

motivations, graduates from the ILO program stated that their parents were the greatest source of encouragement, but also financial assistance (see Figure 18). It is important to note, however, that next to parental support, graduates expressed a level of self-confidence as well. The ILO program provided them the ability to capitalize on their business idea (“own wish”), but also provided appropriate behavior change training to ensure self-confidence and motivation. One graduate from the ILO program stated, “*At school, I [had] very little interest in entrepreneurs and considered them as from another world...[When] the KAB lessons taught us that this or that businessman from our village [had] succeeded, I realized that I am able to do that too. It is very important to show real examples. I am ready to come to [my vocational school] and show what can be achieved if there is a right attitude, using my own example.*”

## 7. Presence of corruption

Discussions of corruption filtered through every element of this assessment, employment being no exception. The space provided to corruption in this document is limited by the amount of data collected in the short time available. That being said, corruption figures prominently in the lives of young people and creates obstacles to creating economic opportunities. Students expressed that they were particular targets of corruption, both in secondary schools and universities. At secondary school, the problem of racketeering was noted as particularly problematic. Young people expressed that large, organized crime outfits had infiltrated the secondary school system, where students are employed to extort money from younger students. This money then filters up through the crime syndicate’s structure. Young people revealed how they had been victim to these pressures and how it often impacted the ability to stay in school. A young man from Jalalabad stated “*School rackets are flourishing and the police don’t care. Rackets also exist at the university level. We are really pressed here.*” One young man from a *novostroika* north of Bishkek stated that some of his peers often missed school for extended periods of time because neither they nor their families could afford the bribes and extortion fees. In other contexts, it should be noted that reduced access to education and early departure from the formal education system has well documented negative impacts upon future earnings and career outcomes<sup>22</sup>.

University students provided numerous examples of how corruption infiltrated their education experiences as well. In most cases, this was through paying bribes to lecturers for passing grades or for admittance into certain courses. A young woman from a *novostroika* explained “*When I was in university, I saw that there were no jobs in my area of study. So I decided to attend a different college. When I got there I realized there were no vacancies in the courses I needed, so the administration asked for bribes for a seat. I couldn’t afford to pay so I had to return to my original university.*”

While there were negative perceptions of corruption, university students also express how corruption suits their lifestyles at times. In UCA’s study<sup>23</sup>, university students spoke about how students used bribery to their advantage. Students would pay bribes to instructors to pass them in certain classes which they felt had no value to them. In doing so, they gained more free time for other types of activities. UCA quotes one student who stated, “*There is corruption at the university....I will say that it is a very useful thing. It solves problems. For example, there are things that I don’t need in my profession, and there are also teachers who [will] give me a grade [if] I pay them. It is no problem for me to pay because I don’t want to waste my time on unnecessary things. My time is more important for me than money.*”

### C. Gender Analysis

Although gender was not an explicit focus area for this assessment, both primary and secondary data suggest it is not a topic to be overlooked. Gender dynamics in Kyrgyzstan occupy a complicated position. As the authors of a recent Gender Assessment<sup>24</sup> in Kyrgyzstan write, gender occupies a number of paradoxical positions. While women are gaining greater responsibility within civil society organizations and government, domestic violence is increasing. While bride kidnapping is increasing, women are graduating from higher education institutions in increasing numbers. And finally, while many women may advocate the wearing of headscarves, so too are women pushing for greater political rights. In this

<sup>22</sup> Pascarella, E. and Terenzini, P. (1991). *How college affects students*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

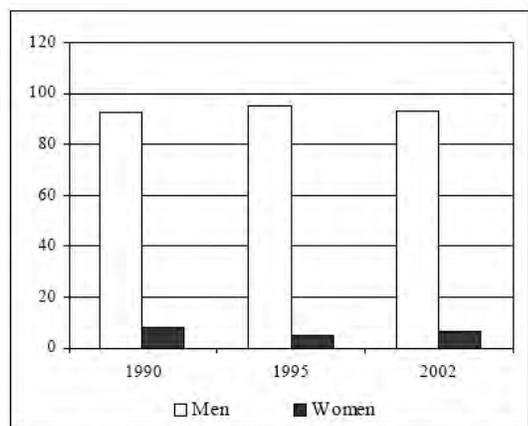
<sup>23</sup> “Giving youth a voice in youth policy.” University of Central Asia (2010)

<sup>24</sup> Gender Assessment: USAID/Central Asian Republics. March 2010

section we first examine this complicated position in relation to democracy and citizenship and then move to a discussion of employment and economic development.

## 1. Gender Dimensions of Democracy and Citizenship

Under the Soviet system, women in Kyrgyzstan enjoyed relative equality with men in a variety of spheres. Soviet policies maintained this equality by providing women with jobs outside the home, access to childcare and roles in politics. During the Soviet period, Kyrgyzstan, and other “Muslim Soviet republics”, were subjected to an “intensive and forceful campaign for the emancipation of women as part of the Soviet effort to uproot the influence of Islam”<sup>25</sup>. Religious practice was outlawed, culminating in 1928 with the pronouncement that the wearing of the *hijab* (headscarf) was forbidden<sup>26</sup>. Women’s rights as wage earners were delineated in law and a social protection system was established to support this, namely health care, child care and education services for all.



**Figure 19: Men and Women Elected to Parliament, 1990-2002** (Source: ADB, 2005)

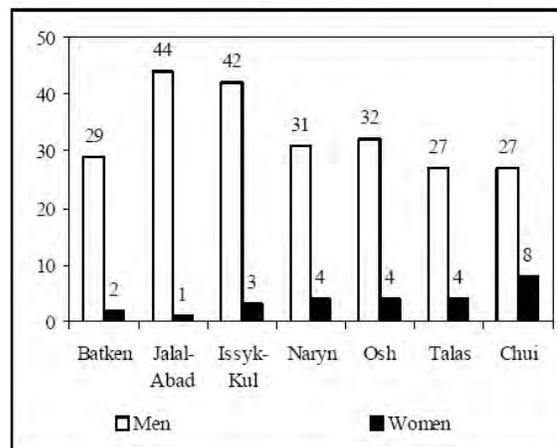
Despite this legislation, the reality is that women still occupy fewer positions in government at national and oblast levels. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) reports<sup>28</sup> that since independence, women’s participation in political processes has significantly decreased. This corresponds to the information revealed in IYF’s youth assessment. Of female respondents to the youth survey, only 36% stated that they were politically active. Additionally, only 14% percent of female respondents stated that they felt the government listened to young people.

The ADB additionally reports that female representation within elected and legislative bodies has also significantly decreased since independence. Under the Soviet system, 33% of places in elected power structures (including Parliament) were reserved for women. Following the 2002 elections, women made up only 6.7% of deputies in Parliament. By 2005, this had decreased to 1.3% (see Figure 19). This low level of representation is also reflected at oblast and rayon levels.

As Figure 20 reveals, in 2003 women’s representation in oblast government was consistently below that of men, with the largest discrepancy existing in Jalalabad and Issyk-Kul oblasts.

While the system of Soviet entitlements was uprooted with independence, gender policy remains a feature of Kyrgyz law. Kyrgyzstan has ratified all the multilateral conventions on human rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on Abolition of All forms of Discrimination in Respect of Women. The constitution of Kyrgyzstan specifies equal rights for men and women and provides for a number of laws on gender equity<sup>27</sup>.

Despite this legislation, the reality is that women still occupy fewer positions in government at national and oblast levels. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) reports<sup>28</sup> that since independence, women’s participation in political processes has significantly decreased. This corresponds to the information revealed in IYF’s youth assessment. Of female respondents to the youth survey, only 36% stated that they were politically active. Additionally, only 14% percent of female respondents stated that they felt the government listened to young people.



**Figure 20: Men and Women Parliamentarians at Oblast level, 2003** (Source: ADB, 2005)

<sup>25</sup> Ngo, T. (2008) “Microfinance and Gender Empowerment in Kyrgyzstan”. World Bank.

<sup>26</sup> Akiner, S. (1997). “Between Tradition and Modernity: The dilemma facing contemporary Central Asian women.” In *Post Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia*. M. Buckley (ed.): pp. 261-304.

<sup>27</sup> Gender Assessment: USAID/Central Asian Republics. March 2010

<sup>28</sup> The Kyrgyz Republic: A Gendered Transition. Soviet legacies and new risks. Asian Development Bank. December 2005

## 2. Gender Dimensions of Economic Development

The social protections that were seen as entitlements to Soviet Kyrgyz citizens collapsed with independence in 1991. Women fared particularly poorly during this transition. The early 1990s witnessed mass privatizations of state-run farms and the closure of pre-schools, kindergartens and health care facilities. The impact upon women was a push towards informal sector activities, increased unemployment and occupying the precarious “triple burden” common to many women in the developing world (i.e., responsibility for child/elder care, household food production and small-scale income generating activities).

Despite a history of Soviet emancipation and a legal framework to establish gender equity, women continue to face obstacles and disadvantages. The Asian Development Bank reports<sup>29</sup> that between 1996 and 2002, wage parity between men and women in Kyrgyzstan fell by nearly 10 percent (see Figure 21). Although a legal framework for equal wages for equal work exists, the ADB attests that significant vertical and horizontal gender segregation exists. That is, occupations and positions have been attached to certain genders, with women traditionally occupying the

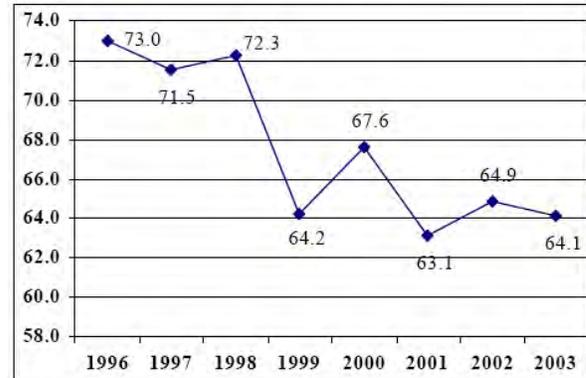


Figure 21: Ratio of Female Wage to Male Wage, 1996-2002 (%) (Source: ADB, 2005)

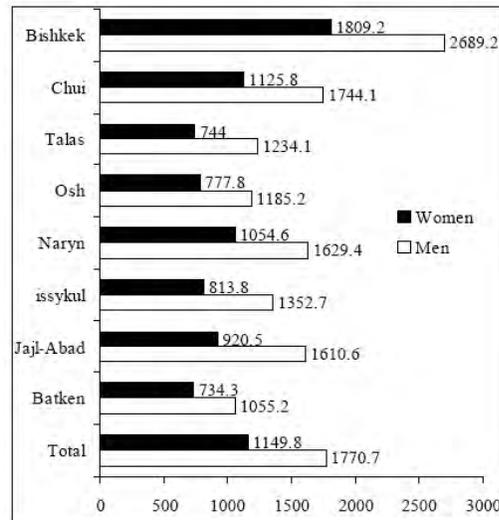


Figure 22: Average wage (som) of women and men by region, 2002 (Source: ADB, 2005)

women could find jobs in small stalls or by selling goods imported or smuggled from neighboring countries.

For other women, especially those moving from rural regions with few familial connections or training, are often lured into the sex trade. Kuehnast (1998) quotes a young woman who describes the trajectory from job seeker to prostitute:

As shown in Figure 22, salaries for women were consistently lower than their male peers throughout the country, with the largest variation existing in Bishkek.

Young women are not immune to these problems, with the ramifications still felt some twenty years after independence. Of young people, young women face the highest unemployment rates in Kyrgyzstan. As captured in Figure 15, for every age category, young women are more likely to be unemployed than young men. It is likely, that much of this unemployment actually masks informal employment. As Ngo (2008) attests, one result of the transition from policies that required female participation in the labor force was the push of women out of the formal economy and into the informal economy. Kuehnast (1998)<sup>30</sup> spoke about just this issue in her highly-cited ethnography of young, female entrepreneurs in post-independence Kyrgyzstan. She writes that for young women that grew up following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the bazaar became a respectable place for young women to find employment. In these areas, young

<sup>29</sup> The Kyrgyz Republic: A Gendered Transition. Soviet legacies and new risks. Asian Development Bank. December 2005

<sup>30</sup> Kuehnast, K. (1998). “From Pioneers to Entrepreneurs: Young women, consumerism, and the ‘world picture’ in Kyrgyzstan”. *Central Asian Survey*, 17: 4: 639-654.

*I have friends who left their villages thinking they were going to Bishkek to go to school...Instead, they found out they couldn't even afford the tuition, much less the books, since these things are no longer free. Even though my friends continued to tell their parents that they were in school, two of them started to work as prostitutes. They made great money - \$30 a day, sometimes even \$60! (pp. 648)*

A young prostitute in Bishkek spoke with Kuehnast about the reasons she had for turning to prostitution.

*The reason I became a prostitute was that I was unemployed. I was laid-off at the radio factory in Tokmok. I didn't work for six months and I needed the money. I tried to find work in my training as a kindergarten teacher but many schools have been closed. Because I even type well I tried to find work in an office, but there are few jobs for secretaries these days. I registered at the unemployment office and qualified for benefits. But after three months, the benefits ended. [A friend] told me about her work [as a prostitute], well, I guess I had few choices left to me. (pp. 649)*

These stories are very typical of many rural migrants that come to the larger cities of Bishkek and Osh looking for work. As mentioned earlier in this report, IYF's survey results indicate a high percentage of respondents are currently engaged in some form of "night work", or illicit employment. Additionally, when IYF asked respondents if they had friends that were involved in such occupations, many reported friends that were involved in either human trafficking or prostitution.

## **V. OPTIONS TO INFORM USAID'S YOUTH STRATEGY AND INVESTMENTS**

Based on these data and subsequent analysis, the assessment team has developed a set of preliminary design options that USAID can consider when developing its youth strategy and when investing in the youth sector. These design options have been developed through the many discussions with young people, from staff at Ministries, donors and NGO offices, as well as from policy and research documents that informed this report. These options fit within three major themes: 1) Inspiring active citizenship; 2) Preparing youth for the marketplace; and 3) Creating an environment of positive youth development.

IYF shares the following guiding principles in common with USAID: 1) Youth are a solution and an asset; 2) Youth-led and experiential approaches lead to more impactful programming; 3) Technology can extend the impact of programming in positive ways; 4) Programming should advance learning and leadership across various sectors; and 5) National networks should be encouraged to inspire more momentum and to further promote the exchange of learning and experience. These principles will be woven through all program activity proposals developed for this initiative.

IYF suggests a geographic focus that prioritizes investments in rural areas, the post-conflict south and novostroika settlements in order to target this investment at the most vulnerable youth. Activities targeted at these youth may present one of few or the only youth program options in their communities; whereas, some urban areas are saturated with activities. It will also be valuable to establish activities in select urban hubs, including Bishkek, Osh and Issyk-Kul. IYF will defer to USAID on defining geographic reach based on their priorities and existing program portfolio.

IYF suggests a target age range of 15 – 25. While young people 15 – 34 make up close to a third of the population of Kyrgyzstan, it will be critical to set a sub-target in order to create developmentally appropriate programming that maximizes the effectiveness of this investment. It is possible to target multiple age segments in the 15 – 34 range for different roles in program design, implementation and evaluation. IYF will defer to USAID on defining target age range based on their priorities and existing program portfolio.

## **Inspiring active citizenship**

### *1. Engage Young People on Creating a National Call to Action*

Youth in Kyrgyzstan are calling for proof that positive social change is possible and sustainable in their country. They require an opportunity to voice their visions for political, economic and social development. Following the events of April and June, we are presented with a critical moment for deepening youth understanding of the importance of their role as active and responsible citizens in realizing that development.

IYF suggests convening regional youth dialogues through which youth will offer their opinions, ideas and expectations around the future development of Kyrgyzstan. These dialogues should be conducted at youth-friendly venues; and integrate a social media component in order to tap as many youth voices as possible. Youth's contributions should be rolled up into a national call to action that may feed into an awareness raising campaign and the development of a virtual youth space to continue the dialogue. These events will be vehicles for sharing information with youth about ways they can immediately and thoughtfully exercise civic participation and leadership to strengthen their communities. Youth leaders should be engaged to author user-friendly guides on steps for promoting more dialogue, visioning and partnership in communities. This effort should be carried out in partnership with a selection youth leaders, regional youth-serving organizations (registered and unregistered) and any appropriate Ministry representatives (e.g. Ministry of Youth).

### *2. Develop a New Model of Citizenship for Kyrgyzstan with Youth Leaders*

Building on the results of the youth dialogues, IYF recommends creating a partnership with a diverse cross-section of youth leaders to define a new model for citizenship in Kyrgyzstan that encompasses all the key indicators for active and responsible youth citizenship. For example, the model would present the main tenets of youth citizenship. It would also showcase ways youth can participate in their communities, including: conducting needs assessments; designing service projects focused on community needs; partnering with local service organizations to address needs; building relationships with local authorities to engage in decision-making; and, connecting with media to express opinions and raise awareness. All resources developed in complement to the new youth citizenship model could be disseminated among youth development stakeholders across the country as a working document meant to inform future development of civic education materials for use in formal and non-formal education settings.

### *3. Recognize and Leverage Existing Youth Leaders*

Through this rapid youth assessment, it was clear that there are a significant number of motivated, active young people in the country. Many of these youth leaders have experienced previous skill building programming and are ready to practice higher-level leadership. Therefore, IYF suggests identifying and engaging a cadre of 20 – 25 year old youth leaders to serve as regional ambassadors that promote youth participation in community development. These youth can complete certification trainings that equip them to offer skill building to their peers on community service project design and management. Further, these youth ambassadors can be connected with mentors at local civil society organizations for any additional technical assistance or support they may need. All selected mentors would also complete certification training to ensure they are prepared to model and exercise best principles and practices in their assistance of the youth ambassadors. The entire youth ambassador effort could be documented to showcase best practice in promoting youth leadership and youth adult partnerships in Kyrgyzstan.

### *4. Organize National Youth Service Day*

National Youth Service Day is a proven model for mobilizing young people to raise awareness about the power of youth service. Youth groups develop informally for the purpose of completing a one-day service

project in their home communities. A national coordinating agency transfers resource guides and provides technical assistance. Additionally, the event may prompt multiple organizations to contribute cash and in-kind resources. A National Youth Service Day event in Kyrgyzstan would spark youth interest and motivate young people to express their ideas for strengthening communities.

IYF recommends that USAID coordinate with the Ministry of Youth and/or a credible national youth serving organization to lead annual National Youth Service Day event in Kyrgyzstan. These events are excellent vehicles for raising awareness, promoting civic and service learning education, and generating momentum around youth service in their communities. There are exciting ways to integrate new technology and alternative media. And, finally, the momentum generated could be leveraged to extend youth service commitments further into each year.

#### *5. Coordinate a Youth Service Fund*

IYF suggests the establishment of a national fund to support innovative youth-led initiatives that address critical community needs. Competition criteria would define innovation and frame expectations for community level impact. Formal and informal youth groups could be invited to compete. All applicants would be encouraged to use non-traditional approaches to present their ideas (e.g. video applications through which they demonstrate the needs their project would address). As part of the selection process, USAID might connect with a cross-section of youth development stakeholders in order to model transparency. This national fund could be structured to offer ten awards each year. All participants would be required to attend and complete two trainings (before project start up and halfway through implementation). Participants would form an alumni network following the completion of their projects. All those projects with sustained impact could be considered for replication.

#### *6. Develop a School-based Service Learning Model*

IYF recommends the development or replication of a School-based Service Learning Model for urban and rural schools. There are civic education resources being used in Kyrgyzstan now that require update and expanded dissemination. It would be valuable to convene all interested stakeholders around updating these materials. Further, they could be engaged to design or adapt a service learning model to pilot over one year at up to 25 schools across the country. Clubs could be established at each school with two teachers designated and trained as facilitators. Clubs would meet weekly and follow a curriculum on civic participation. They would also implement one service activity each quarter. Following the pilot year, the model could be refined and replicated at 75 more schools.

#### *7. Build Capacity of Youth Service Organizations (registered and unregistered)*

There have been multiple assessments conducted demonstrating institutional challenges youth serving organizations face in Kyrgyzstan. Building on these collected findings, it would be useful to create and disseminate a set of standards of excellence in quality institutional and program management. A collection of e-training modules could be offered to all interested youth serving organizations covering various topics, such as: strategic visioning; taking leadership on being accountable to beneficiaries and stakeholders; procedures for quality design and implementation; rigorous and relevant performance measurement; evaluation for impact; and planning for sustainability. In addition, USAID and other donors could collaborate on offering more considerable investment in professional development for youth development practitioners in the areas of certification based trainings and educational content creation.

#### *8. Develop a Virtual Public Collection of Educational Resources on Youth Citizenship, Civic Engagement and Volunteerism*

It would be a great service to the field of youth development in the Kyrgyz Republic to create an information portal where current, high quality educational resources (curricula, training methodology, etc) on youth citizenship, civic engagement and volunteerism were stored and publicly accessible. These resources could be promoted among teachers and youth development practitioners. Investing in the

development of youth focused, user-friendly electronic materials would extend people's access to good practices on which to build programming and other youth learning experiences.

*9. Create youth-led media campaign to raise public awareness of the critical role of youth in shaping a more positive future for the country*

Multiple participants in this assessment stressed how important it is to coordinate a communications campaign to promote new visions of youth citizenship and potential for quality livelihoods in the country. A shift in perception of what a quality life involves is urgently needed to encourage more youth to invest their considerable talents and energy into building the future of Kyrgyzstan, as opposed to pursuing their aspirations of success by leaving the country. Engaging youth in a dialogue around their vision of the future may inform a very creative and relevant media campaign design. Further, coordinating learning exchanges (whether virtual or in-person) with youth from other countries where youth-led efforts are being supported to generate positive responses to corruption, crime and other community issues may result in some creative themes to pursue.

## **Preparing youth for the marketplace**

*1. Providing holistic training in youth employability*

Young people must advocate for and assist in the creation of programs to develop their knowledge, skills and abilities as productive economic citizens. They need access to adequate training in suitable vocational trades that are in demand by the private sector. Vocational-technical skills need to be suitably capable to offer training that meets industry standards and labor demands. Equally important are life skills. Life skills are a set of abilities that allow a person to handle problems and questions encountered in their daily personal and professional lives. Based on interviews and focus group data, it is evident that Kyrgyzstani youth need life skills training in the following core topics: self-confidence; managing emotions; personal responsibility; respecting self and others; team work; communication; creative thinking; critical thinking; decision making; and conflict management. Future interventions should work with key stakeholders, including a cadre of active youth, to develop programs that support such training and demand that existing training institutions provide services that prepare young people for economically active lives.

*2. Provide training and support for youth enterprise development*

Given Kyrgyzstan's oversupply of labor, young people require access to support mechanisms that allow them to create their own jobs through enterprise development. Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) tend to fail due to a lack of entrepreneurial capacity or capital. As such, youth programs should ensure that the following three elements are present:

- **Entrepreneurship training:** Young people should be competitively selected for admittance into entrepreneurship programs, recruiting those that express or illustrate business aptitude and skill. Trainees should be provided a series of courses/workshops on: generating business ideas; conducting market research; marketing principles; product costing; business law; creating business plans human resources management; financial management; and customer service.
- **Microfinance:** Young people should be provided access to microfinance, preferably loans, at low-interest rates and with appropriate repayment terms. It will be important to provide the young entrepreneurs with sufficient training in securing financing and managing debt. Data from the assessment revealed that young people viewed loans and debt as highly risky. However, through relatively low-risk loans (e.g., low interest, low principal and long repayment plans) and appropriate financial literacy training regarding debt management, young people are able to gain both financing for their MSMEs, while learning important business and life skills, such as personal responsibility, managing debt, managing risk and financial literacy.

- Linkages to private sector mentors: Young entrepreneurs need to receive on-going support during start-up. Linkages should be made with existing private sector leaders to serve as mentors for young people. Mentors should provide additional training, business plan development assistance, marketing plan development, packaging solution advice, business location consideration, legal advice and general troubleshooting.

### 3. *Establish alumni networks*

Young entrepreneurs should be connected through virtual and physical alumni networks. These could be formal networking events, where past graduates are brought together to present their businesses, share ideas, collaborate on new ventures and discuss ways to support future business leaders. These alumni can be linked in with the many existing networks of young leaders that have been supported through USG assistance to Kyrgyzstan. Such networks will create a critical mass of active youth, that can advocate for policy and programs that meet the needs of young people and provide forums for active youth to advocate for active youth engagement in the economy. Furthermore, alumni can be used resources for other interested young people, serving as mentors and role models to illustrate that through perseverance and hard work, all young people are able to achieve successful outcomes.

### 4. *Provide formal career and professional guidance at universities, vocational schools and secondary schools*

USAID should consider the creation, and or reinvigoration, of Career Centers at universities, vocational schools and secondary schools. Career centers can serve three primary purposes:

- Serve as a physical venue for life skills and entrepreneurship training;
- Serve as a repository for available jobs for young people. Career center staff should regularly liaise with the private sector to determine current and future job openings. Staff should work closely with employers to determine their needs and then liaise with university administration to ensure that there are appropriate numbers of suitably trained graduates to meet these needs.

It is important to recognize that due to the oversupply of labor, all young people will not find a job. Therefore, Career Centers should be viewed less as a place to be “handed a job” or even given a job lead, but rather a place that raises awareness about a job search, typical career trajectories (e.g., entry-level, to mid-level to senior-level) and salary expectations. The Career Centers should provide accurate and useful information on migration. It should provide students with the skills to properly vet intermediary “employment services” as well as providing assistance in reviewing labor contracts and information on their rights as foreign workers. Those interested in migrating should be provided the opportunity to meet with former migrants, to learn about the problems and opportunities migration can create.

### 5. *Provide outreach to elementary students (ages 10-15) on career choices*

Students in elementary grades should be provided exposure to career options, including entrepreneurship. Providing information about career choices, job prospects and ideas about opening a business would prepare younger students to the world of work prior to entering secondary school. In that students in Kyrgyzstan chose their track (i.e., vocational versus college preparatory) prior to entering secondary school, it would be beneficial for there to be a greater sharing of information with students and their parents about job and employment options at this point in their education.

### 6. *Encourage the private sector to play a stronger role in creating opportunities for young people*

The private sector should be encouraged to play an active role in providing employability and entrepreneurship training for young people. There should be a focus on including the private sector in an effort to share what their labor needs are, as well as the characteristics they require of their employees (e.g., team management, creativity, initiative, entrepreneurialism). The private sector should also be encouraged to provide internship and apprentice opportunities for young people. When such

opportunities incur costs to the employer (i.e., through additional training requirements), attempts should be made to limit these costs to business. This could occur through agreements with the government to lift certain tax payments based on the number of interns recruited. Additionally, such training that typically is provided by the employer could be taken on by the training institution itself, thereby limiting private sector expense. Finally, entrepreneurs should be encouraged to serve as mentors for young people. Mentors will provide ongoing support for young people that are interested in starting a business, have started a business and/or are looking to improve upon or expand their business.

*7. Use new media to provide information for job seekers and young entrepreneurs*

New media, such as web-based clearinghouses and social networking, can be very useful tools to inform and connect young people. Information on career planning and job searching are easily included on websites and allow a wide dissemination of information. Job openings can also be collected and posted on youth-employment website, which would allow a young person a “one stop shop” for information on potential employers and job openings. In communication with the UNDP, the [www.jashtar.kg](http://www.jashtar.kg) website serves a similar purpose as outlined above. In that UNDP is looking for an outside organization to support and manage this website, this presents an opportunity to build on the site’s past success and plan for its expansion and increased usability.

*8. Build the capacity of faculty in elementary, secondary and vocational institutions in educational methods and practical knowledge skills.*

Schools represent an important access point to prepare students for future careers. However, teachers and school leaders need to have adequate training to offer students this knowledge. While USAID is currently investing in pre and in-service teacher preparation, additional training should be offered in areas of career guidance and career preparation. Teachers should be provided the skills to offer their students with grade and age-appropriate lessons on career choices, career preparation and the realities of work life. Central to this should be the early introduction of life skills courses, to include team management, problems solving, creativity and conflict management.

*9. Develop diverse higher education options that are held to high standards of accountability and transparency*

Kyrgyzstan’s higher education system is currently mis-aligned to the needs of the labor market. Students are provided little practical training in marketable skills with the result being extended periods of underemployment. Working closely with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor and Migration, attention should be paid to creating a competitive, higher education environment that includes modular courses (e.g., students are able to pick and choose courses, rather than be subject to an extensive list of major requirements), short-term vocational training courses and other professionally-oriented degrees. Tied to these should be a robust career counseling center that provides students with the knowledge and skills to compete in the domestic, regional and international job market.

*10. Fight corruption and violence within educational institutions*

Particular efforts should be paid to ways to fight the extensive corruption that currently exists within schools and universities. Teachers and school leaders should be provided training on reducing the prevalence of school gangs and the influence of organized crime within schools. National corruption hotlines should be established that provide whistleblowers the ability to anonymously report problems of corruption within schools. Furthermore, there should be enforceable penalties when cases of corruption are proven as well as rewards for reforming corruption within educational structures. The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic should be supported to initiative a social marketing campaign that advocates for a culture that is intolerant of corruption and supports the fair and honest treatment of citizens, particularly its young and more vulnerable populations.

## **Creating a culture of positive youth development**

### *1. Support the development of a knowledge base on youth in Kyrgyzstan*

In order to better understand the needs of young people in Kyrgyzstan, it is important to build the quantity and quality of data on young people, as well as build internal capacity within the public and civil society to conduct sophisticated analyses. Attention should be paid to establishing valid baselines on a number of youth indicators, including health, education, labor variables.

### *2. Develop annual meetings with key stakeholders, thought leaders and active youth to present findings and best practices in youth development*

In order to develop a shared sense of positive youth development in Kyrgyzstan and a wider understanding of the needs of young people, regular learning and information sharing events are essential. These meetings should emphasize the role of young people in decision-making. Young people should serve as keynote speakers and provided opportunities to express their ideas and develop programming options.

### *3. Provide organizational capacity building to youth-serving organizations*

There are numerous youth-serving organizations in Kyrgyzstan. These organizations are staffed by committed young people, often volunteering their time to focus on diverse issues including education, human rights, conflict resolution and the environment. To create a sustainable youth movement in Kyrgyzstan, the capacities of youth-serving organizations should be built, specifically in areas such as organizational management, human resources, fundraising and advocacy.

### *4. Assist Ministry of Youth and key national youth development stakeholders with creating a National Youth Strategy for 2010 and beyond*

There is a precedence for youth policy in Kyrgyzstan, namely its “Conception for the Development of State Youth Policy in the Kyrgyz Republic until 2010”, its law “On the Bases of State Youth Policy”, “On Education”, and “On Elementary Vocational Training.” However, it has become clear that these policies are not being effectively implemented. A new policy dialogue should be initiated, spearheaded by the Ministry of Youth. A new youth policy should focus on the following key areas:

- Improving the management and coordination of youth programs;
- Improving the youth friendliness of services delivered by the Ministry;
- Ensuring the participation of youth in dialogues about youth issues at the national, Oblast and local level.
- Designing programs that focus on developing civic pride and creating of economic opportunities for young people;
- Fighting corruption and creating “safe spaces” for young people that are free of corruption and violence (e.g., in elementary, secondary and vocational schools, and universities)

## **ANNEXES**

## Annex 1: Youth-led Assessment Report

Number of respondents: 17;

Age of respondents: 15 to 27 years;

### Methodology:

For the study, the authors compiled a questionnaire that was administered to 17 respondents. In addition to administering the questionnaire, the authors also conducted interviews and/or focus groups with participants. In total, 17 Kyrgyz respondents were interviewed and two Tajik citizens (students at a university in Kyrgyzstan). The contributions of the Tajik citizens were not taken into account when analyzing the questionnaires, as they had not been in Kyrgyzstan for sufficient time to draw reliable conclusions. In this report, we share the three most frequent responses from participants. As a rule, each respondent provided several answers to each question. In these cases, therefore, the analysis takes into consideration the total number of responses.

Below we present the questions and response frequencies:

#### *Question 1. What do you like about the Kyrgyz Republic?*

Response	Frequency
Nature, location, climate	6
People, relationships	5
Freedom of action	2

The majority of respondents stated something about the physical aspects of Kyrgyzstan in their responses. By and large, a majority of respondents provided positive qualities about Kyrgyzstan.

#### *Question 2. What you do not like about the Kyrgyz Republic?*

Response	Frequency
Politics	10
Corruption	5
Poor culture, poor role models	3

The majority of respondents are opposed to the current political situation in the country, as well as to actions taken by public authorities. Many respondents believe that the cause of the recent events in April and June are rooted in political instability.

**Question 3.** *What challenges do young people face?*

Response	Frequency
Unemployment	11
Bad habits (e.g., smoking alcohol and drug abuse)	2
Low quality education	5

Most respondents indicated that the main problem facing Kyrgyzstan's youth is unemployment and difficulties in finding decent work. There are a number of reasons for the difficulties in finding a job, including an educational system that does not adequately prepare young people for the requirements of employers, a labor market that has an oversupply of laborers and corrupt employers. Many respondents added that these produce feelings of uncertainty in young people regarding their futures and their ability to plan for their future.

**Question 4.** *What are the challenges you face, personally?*

Response	Frequency
Unemployment	7
Low quality education	6
Corruption	2
Lack of confidence in the future	2

In answering this question, many respondents connected two challenges: "unemployment" and "low quality in education", calling the second one of the main reasons for the first. Responses to this question elicited the largest range of opinions. Respondents additionally provided challenges that included family and relationships problems, and problems of society as a whole, such as an increase in food prices, corruption of state structures.

**Question 5.** *What do you want to achieve in your life?*

Response	Frequency
Employment and decent wages	8
Becoming a "Good Specialist"	5
Open a business	3

Most respondents indicated that it is important for them to work and earn decent pay. The second most popular response was "to become a good specialist." For many, this goal is important as a form of self-realization that will benefit for the country and society, in general.

**Question 6.** *What prevents you from achieving your goals?*

Response	Frequency
Insufficient education	6
Lack of demand	5
Lack of resources	5
Negative personal qualities	5
Political instability	3

Most respondents indicated that to achieve their goals they need a quality education. The education that respondents had obtained up to the point of the interview was not considered sufficient for the realization of their plans and ideas. Quite a number of respondents indicated that they would like to continue their education abroad.

**Question 7.** *In what areas could youth contribute to Kyrgyzstan's development?*

Response	Frequency
Through opening a business	8
Working in an NGO	2
Working on policy reform	2
Working in the science/education/information sector	1

Most respondents stated that young people can support Kyrgyzstan in many fields. When asked a more precise answer, the majority of respondents indicated that the most promising spheres for youth to support development would be in the private sector. Responses included developing their own business or being employed by a large business.

**Question 8.** *Do you wish to leave the country?*

Response	Frequency
Yes	11
No	6

Many respondents indicated that they wanted to leave the country for a period of time, after which they would return to Kyrgyzstan. Most did not want to leave the country forever. Rather, many respondents expressed a desire to see the world, study abroad and perhaps live for some time in another country.

**Question 9.** *How much are your monthly expenses?*

- The minimum amount named – 1,000 som (22 USD);
- The maximum amount named – 31,000 som (667 USD);
- On average - from 6,000 to 10,000 som (129 to 215 USD);

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

1. Most respondents agree that they do not like the instability in the country and the low level of culture and education of the people around them. In the survey, many respondents said that they could not make any plans for the short and medium term, as the next wave of political instability could happen at any time. The Provisional Government and its policies do not inspire any confidence in the future. Moreover, respondents have a negative attitude regarding the political elite and do not expect anything positive from leaders in the near future. It is worth mentioning that youth do not trust the Ministry of Youth, which is not perceived as being active. It is seen as a regular bureaucratic state body with characteristic sluggishness, lack of transparency and low efficiency.

Corruption is one of the main causes of the existing mistrust. This corruption affects all levels of management and spheres of modern Kyrgyzstan. In particular, corruption among political elites and leaders, as well as their negative image in society, play an important role in developing youth distrust of the government.

2. Respondents attributed the majority of youth problems to unemployment, unhealthy habits (e.g., smoking, alcohol, drugs), poor quality of education, as well as the high cost of higher education.

3. The majority of respondents indicated a low level of education and culture in today's youth, and society as a whole. Young Bishkek residents repeatedly noted this fact during interviews. Respondents attributed this to the migration of young people within the country, the crisis of the education system in the Republic, and the low economic development of regions of Kyrgyzstan (as a motive for migration). This is especially evident in Bishkek, as it is the destination for marginalized youth in the regions.

According to the survey respondents, as well as our personal assessment of the situation, the priority areas of work with youth should be in education and youth employment.

### **I. Education.**

Many negative comments about today's youth are directly or indirectly related to poor quality education. It's no secret that the education system of Kyrgyzstan is in crisis and continues to deteriorate. This decline began in the 1990s and has resulted in catastrophically low levels of education in rural regions and villages, as well as the decline of quality and credibility of higher education. As a consequence, there is a lack of a culture of ethics, a lack of mercantile values and interests, a lack of interest in spiritual and aesthetic development, and a belief that everything can be bought. The mass riots and looting after the April events are a vivid

illustration of the level of consciousness of today's youth: you can steal with impunity, break and destroy, and there is nothing to be ashamed about. The moral and ethical threshold for the majority of today's youth is frighteningly low. Changing this situation is necessary today.

Accordingly, we believe that the main efforts of the state and donors should be aimed at reforming the public education system. Transformation must involve all levels: from preschool to higher education. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring that schools and universities lay the foundation for all knowledge and skills youth need for their lives. This will better prepare future generations of workers in all fields.

The following are possible strategies can be considered in designing a youth program:

1. Work with government agencies on the modernization of existing educational standards, introducing new learning technologies to improve the methods, materials, and technical equipment of educational institutions. Additional work is needed to change attitudes to education, from the Ministry of Education, teachers, students and their parents.
2. Employability and life skills training are now developing, but still not a widely available resource. Basic knowledge and skills in modern business (e.g., leadership, teamwork, business etiquette, the basics of working with the Internet and finding information, etc.) should be provided to young people.
3. To date, only a few schools actively support student government associations. Most schools remain under the control of school administrators. The development of student government bodies and structures in the secondary and tertiary schools could be used to promote and strengthen democratic processes among young people and support students as agents of change within their schools and communities.

## **II. Employment.**

The unemployment problem is linked to the educational challenges facing Kyrgyzstan: today's schools do not adequately prepare youth for the demands of the job market. Some schools in Bishkek and Osh provide minimally competitive education. The level and quality of this education decreases with each passing year. A graduate of a university in Kyrgyzstan is not guaranteed to get a job in their field. This is one of the main reasons youth are increasingly migrating to neighboring countries to find jobs.

Respondents noted in this context that young people need to realize their potential mainly in the following areas: business, sports, IT-technology, volunteerism, creativity and culture.

1. Business. Youth business can be one of the priority areas to stimulate the Kyrgyz economy. The country does not currently have support structures in place for youth entrepreneurs. Creating free economic zones (especially in the southern regions of the country - in the light of

events in the past), business incubators, and preferential tax status will help strengthen and develop youth entrepreneurship in the medium term.

2. Civic activism and volunteering. For several years, Kyrgyzstan has enjoyed an active youth volunteer sector. Based on this foundation, many youth organizations (led by youth and youth membership), have conducted numerous socially relevant initiatives. But at the same time, youth organizations have a number of problems hindering their effective development and the influence they have on the situation in the country. In particular, youth projects and programs are mainly financed by international donors. Furthermore, most youth organizations do not possess sufficient skills in organizational administration to work effectively with the public or manage their offices on a daily basis. Kyrgyzstan does not have youth centers or specialized sites for the development of these youth institutions. Joint government and donor efforts in this area could give powerful support to the development of youth civic sector in Kyrgyzstan and enhance the effect of their activities aimed at addressing problems of youth.

3. Sports, IT-technology, creativity and culture. The majority of respondents noted these areas as potentially conducive to supporting youth in their development. These areas are not currently well supported by the government or international donors. But the creation of favorable conditions in these areas could play an important role in the development of young people, influencing their decision making skills and engaging them with their community.

## Annex 2: Data collection instruments

### Rapid Youth Survey

1. Location where focus group is taking place: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Age:

Under 15 <input type="checkbox"/>	15 - 18 <input type="checkbox"/>	18- 21 <input type="checkbox"/>	21- 24 <input type="checkbox"/>	24 - 27 <input type="checkbox"/>	27-30 <input type="checkbox"/>	Over 30 <input type="checkbox"/>
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3. Sex:

Male <input type="checkbox"/>	Female <input type="checkbox"/>
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4. Where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Where do you live now? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Highest grade of formal education completed:

None <input type="checkbox"/>	Some primary <input type="checkbox"/>	Primary <input type="checkbox"/>	Some secondary <input type="checkbox"/>	Secondary <input type="checkbox"/>	Some university <input type="checkbox"/>	University <input type="checkbox"/>	Some graduate school <input type="checkbox"/>	Graduate school <input type="checkbox"/>
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7. Are you currently working? (If no, skip to question #9)

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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a. If yes, how long?

Less than 3 months <input type="checkbox"/>	3 months – 6 months <input type="checkbox"/>	6 months – 1 year <input type="checkbox"/>	Over 1 year <input type="checkbox"/>
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8. Describe this work. Is it...? (If you are working multiple jobs, check all that apply)

...on a contract or patent?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
...seasonal or irregular (EX. agriculture, helping out a friend/relative, day laborer)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
...night work (ALL ANSWERS KEPT STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

**9. If you are not working, how long have been unemployed?**

Less than 3 months <input type="checkbox"/>	3 months – 6 months <input type="checkbox"/>	6 months – 1 year <input type="checkbox"/>	Over 1 year <input type="checkbox"/>
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**10. How many paid jobs have you had in your lifetime?**

0 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2-4 <input type="checkbox"/>	Over 5 <input type="checkbox"/>
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**11. What are your future employment goals?**

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**12. Do you have friends that are involved with illegal activities to earn money?**

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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a. If yes, please describe (EX: drug trafficking/dealing, human trafficking, prostitution, etc).

**13. Are you involved in your community?**

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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a. If yes, how: \_\_\_\_\_

b. If no, why not?

DK <input type="checkbox"/>	No opportunities <input type="checkbox"/>	Not interested <input type="checkbox"/>	Not enough time <input type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>
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c. If "other", please explain.

**14. Do you consider yourself politically active?**

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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a. If yes, please describe.

b. If no, why not?

DK <input type="checkbox"/>	Not interested <input type="checkbox"/>	Not enough time <input type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>
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c. If "other", please explain.

**15. Do you feel the government listens to young people?**

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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a. Please explain why or why not.

**16. Do you participate in community service activities?**

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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**17. Please provide additional recommendations for future programs designed to support youth in Kyrgyzstan.**

a. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

c.

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## YOUTH FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Facilitator welcomes group and thanks youth for their participation. Facilitator then explains purpose and methodology of FGs:

- We are here to conduct some research around the realities of young people.
- We are confident that your voices and thoughts will lead us to better support youth.
- We plan to use your thoughts and ideas – not your names.
- We encourage everyone to be honest and open.
- We will be using a *koosh* to help us manage the dialogue (throw it around and explain)
- If you have any questions, please feel free to ask at the end of our time.
  
- If you don't want to answer, you don't have to do so.

Finally, we have a short survey (anonymous) for you to fill out after the FG.

<b>Key Question</b>	<b>Probing Questions</b>
(1) Tell us about the most important accomplishments thus far in your lives?	What assets, skills, knowledge allowed you to do this?  Where did you obtain these skills?
(2) What are today's most pressing issues or realities that prevent youth from making positive gains?	Does violence and crime affect your lives? Are some places more dangerous than others?  Are there any problems unique to either males or females?
(3) Are today's youth motivated to become employed?	Why or why not?  What is the least amount of money per hour youth will readily work for?  What options do they have?
(4) How and where do most youth you know earn money?	Do you and your colleagues earn money working in formal or informal jobs?  How would one typically go about finding a job?
(5) In your daily lives, what resources / programs currently exist to positively support young people?	What policies or programs exist for young people or their parents?  Do any of these mentioned programs work together?

<p>(6) Describe how engaged you feel in your community?</p>	<p>What services are there for you in your local area?</p> <p>Are you involved with civic groups?</p> <p>Do you ever volunteer your time to help your community?</p> <p>Do you keep up with the news? If so, how do you do this?</p>
<p>(7) Do you feel pressured by your friends/peers to join groups engaging in violence, ethnic hatred, or minor crimes?</p>	<p>What is your good/bad impression of criminal organizations?</p> <p>Do they provide youth in this country an alternative?</p> <p>What types of support do these groups provide to their members?</p> <p>Do you trust the police?</p>
<p>(8) Do you consider yourself politically active?</p>	<p>How are you political active?</p> <p>Why are you active?</p> <p>What sorts of activities do you do?</p>
<p>(9) If you were to design a program for youth in this country: (a) What key areas would it address? (b) What are your ideas on how such a program would look like?</p>	<p>Which key areas / resources / policies should a youth program focus upon?</p> <p>What could this program look like: youth centers, internships, increased formal educational opportunities, sports/leisure projects?</p>
<p><b>Close:</b></p> <p>A. Ask if there are any questions the youth have.</p> <p>B. Be sure to leave some sort of in-country contact information w/ youth: youth assessors, facilitators or USAID staff.</p> <p>C. Distribute the rapid demographic surveys and have youth assessors walk around to help youth fill out!</p>	

## **NGO INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Person interviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

NGO name: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Mission**

1. What youth-oriented activities is your organization currently conducting in KG? Who are your implementing partners?
  2. Can you describe the profile of your youth beneficiaries?
  3. Can you describe the impacts of your youth development programs?
  4. What do you see as the major challenges facing young people in KG?
  5. Who are leading local NGOs and CBOs working in employability and citizenship?
  6. What obstacles do NGOs face in implementing programs in these sectors?
  7. Overall, how well do you think donors like USAID, UNDP and others are doing to make life better in KG?
- 

### **Economic Opportunities**

8. What legal economic activities are youth involved in? (e.g., sectors and industries)
    - a. Are these activities stable, seasonal, or highly irregular?
  9. To your knowledge, are youth able to maintain employment or generate a steady income from self-employment for at least 90 days? Why or why not?
  10. Of those youth that obtain employment, how do their wages differ after having been involved in livelihoods programming?
  11. What informal sector activities are youth involved in?
    - a. Are these activities stable, seasonal, or highly irregular?
  12. What illegal, or black market, activities are youth involved in?
  13. To what extent are youth at risk of exploitative labor conditions in certain sectors?
  14. What are the challenges that youth face when seeking formal, informal and self-employment opportunities?
    - a. How do these challenges vary for female and male youth?
- 

### **Citizenship**

15. What assets and obstacles exist within particular communities that impact the lives of young people? (EX: active community centers, active youth groups, high levels of substance abuse, low quality schools, political corruption)
16. Are youth active in civic groups?
  - a. If yes, what are some of the more popular/active groups?
17. Are volunteer opportunities available for young people? If so, can you name some of the more popular volunteer programs?
18. Are there groups that prevent young people from becoming active within their communities? (EX: gangs, mafias)

19. To what extent are youth involved in crime or politically–motivated violence? (EX: April and June events)
20. What types of crime are most common among youth?
21. What programs have been put in place to combat youth crime?
22. What programs might be able to address political disaffection and/or politically motivated violence?
23. What policies or public sector entities exists to support youth? Describe.

**PUBLIC SECTOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

- 1. Agency name: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Specific office: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. What is your office's mission?
- 4. Please describe programs and projects that are sponsored by your office that focus on youth development.
- 5. Can you provide some examples of impact (i.e., success stories) regarding your work with young people?
- 6. What are some of the major challenges facing young people in Kyrgyzstan today?
- 7. What are the 1-2 primary areas of service that young people need services? (EX: employment, education, health, etc.)
- 8. As a public entity, what challenges does your office face in delivering services to young people?
- 9. Would your agency be interested in discussing a strategic partnership with a future program designed to support youth?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If yes, what could this look like?

- 10. Additional recommendations for future programs designed to support youth:
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# DONOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Person interviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Donor name: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Mission**

1. What youth-oriented activities is your organization currently conducting in KG? Who are your implementing partners?
2. Can you describe the profile of your youth beneficiaries?
3. Can you describe the impacts of your investments in youth development?
4. What do you see as the major challenges facing young people in KG?
5. Who are leading local NGOs and CBOs working in employability and citizenship?
6. What obstacles do donors face in implementing programs in these sectors?
7. Overall, how well do you think donors like USAID, UNDP and others are doing to make life better in KG?

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## **Economic Opportunities**

8. What legal economic activities are youth involved in? (e.g., sectors and industries)
  - a. Are these activities stable, seasonal, or highly irregular?
9. To your knowledge, are youth able to maintain employment or generate a steady income from self-employment for at least 90 days? Why or why not?
10. Of those youth that obtain employment, how do their wages differ after having been involved in livelihoods programming?
11. What informal sector activities are youth involved in?
  - a. Are these activities stable, seasonal, or highly irregular?
12. What illegal, or black market, activities are youth involved in?
13. To what extent are youth at risk of exploitative labor conditions in certain sectors?
14. What are the challenges that youth face when seeking formal, informal and self-employment opportunities?
  - a. How do these challenges vary for female and male youth?

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## **Citizenship**

15. What assets and obstacles exist within particular communities that impact the lives of young people? (EX: active community centers, active youth groups, high levels of substance abuse, low quality schools, political corruption)
16. Are youth active in civic groups?
  - a. If yes, what are some of the more popular/active groups?
17. Are volunteer opportunities made available to young people? If so, can you name some of the more popular volunteer programs?
18. Are there groups that prevent young people from becoming active within their communities? (EX: gangs, mafias)
19. To what extent are youth involved in crime or politically-motivated violence? (EX: April and June events)
20. What types of crime are most common among youth?
21. What programs have been put in place to combat youth crime?

22. What programs might be able to address political disaffection and/or politically motivated violence?
23. What policies or public sector entities exist to support youth? Describe.