



UNITED NATIONS
KYRGYZ REPUBLIC



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**COMMON COUNTRY
ANALYSIS**
for the Kyrgyz Republic

Updated 2023

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ACRONYMS

ADP	Additional Drug Package
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
CSO(s)	Civil society organization(s)
DPCC	Development Partners Coordination Council
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EDF	Eurasian Development Fund
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
GHG	greenhouse gas
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex
ICT	Information and communications technology
IFIs	International financial institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
LLDCs	Land-locked developing countries
MDBs	Multilateral development banks
MSL	Minimum subsistence level
MSMEs	Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
NCDs	Non-communicable diseases
NCPT	National Center for the Prevention of Torture
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NGO(s)	Non-Governmental organization(s)
NSC	National Statistical Committee
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OOP	Out-of-pocket payments
PwD	Persons with disabilities
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SGBP	State Guaranteed Benefit Package
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SOEs	State-owned enterprises
SPECA	UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia
TRACECA	
TVET	Technical and vocational education training
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Common Country Analysis (CCA) is an independent, integrated, and evidence-based joint analysis of the context for sustainable development. The analysis is the foundation for the design of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for 2023-2027. Annual revisions of the CCA, such as this current 2023 update, are premised on the fact that throughout each year of the programme cycle, changes that impact the development landscape happen or can be anticipated, including through the availability of additional data. Annual Updates also spot and examine the key dynamics and emerging challenges, opportunities, and risks vis-à-vis the country's achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to anticipate and undertake meaningful changes to programming.

The political context in 2023 was marked by a continuous shrinking democratic and civic space, as a result of a curtailment of fundamental freedoms, particularly the freedom of expression, the media, peaceful assembly, and association. This included arrests and trials of civic activists and opponents, pressures on the independent media, and discriminatory tendencies, particularly affecting vulnerable groups. The pace of deterioration accelerated in 2023, with the introduction of legislative initiatives further restricting civil society organizations and the media, coupled with an increased polarization of political narratives. The development community was particularly concerned over draft legislative initiatives such as new draft laws on non-commercial organizations and the media, potentially impacting operations and service delivery of civil society and development partners, including the UN, thereby possibly affecting progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Kyrgyzstan's national development

plans and the country's human rights obligations and commitments.

An agreement on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border signed in January 2023 not only led to the opening of additional crossing points at the border but also spurred bilateral trade and economic and cultural cooperation, helping to significantly enhance regional stability and good-neighbourly relations. Working groups on border demarcation met at the technical level during the year. The border with Tajikistan remained calm with reported significant progress in the border delimitations talks by the end of 2023, details of which are yet to be disclosed. Working groups of government and law-enforcement delegations of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan held meetings at the technical level throughout 2023, building momentum towards a possible border deal.

On the economic front, the year was marked by strong economic growth of 6.2 percent, driven predominantly by the service sector, particularly wholesale and retail trade, which expanded by 17.7 percent. However, while exports increased, a negative trade balance continued to negatively impact growth, while the annual inflation rate averaged 7.3 percent. There was a 12.3 percent drop in remittances, mainly as a result of a drop of Kyrgyz migrant workers in the Russian Federation by 30% in 2023 compared to 2022. At the same time, the number of returning migrants increased.

Despite the economic growth in 2023, the poverty rate remained stagnant at 33 percent, indicating that more than two million people live near or below the poverty line. In 2023, 10 percent of households were food insecure, while a substantial 56 percent were only marginally food secure. Most of the vulnerable and poor households are in precar-

ious economic circumstances, with low and unstable earnings and high exposure to environmental and economic shocks. The most vulnerable and marginalised groups that identified in this update include poor households, including those led by women, children and adolescents, unemployed youth, youth working informally, labor migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons, conflict-affected populations, prisoners and ex-prisoners, and persons living with HIV.

Kyrgyzstan, a mountainous country, faces significant vulnerabilities to climate change, natural disasters, and natural resource degradation, which exacerbate risks for rural populations reliant on these resources. Despite its minimal global share of Green House Gas (GHG) emissions, the country's heavy coal usage for heating results in one of the highest winter air pollution rates worldwide, adversely affecting health of citizens. Addressing these challenges requires more efficient natural resource management, investment in adaptation, and emissions reduction in energy and agriculture. These measures are crucial not only for enhancing livelihood and ecosystem resilience but also for fostering diversified, sustainable growth, particularly through agriculture and renewable energy sectors.

In line with its national development priorities, Kyrgyzstan presented its national commitments at the SDG Summit in September 2023: Inclusive quality education and green economy, both underpinning the overarching objectives of poverty alleviation and the reduction of inequality. As an immediate follow-up, a Development Forum was organized in partnership with the UN. The President re-

affirmed eradication of poverty and inequality as the state's top priority and the Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers outlined the following five strategic approaches for realization:

1. Strengthening the institutional capacity of the state in the field of financial management and administrative reform.
2. Improving the quality of education and healthcare services as the basis for innovative development and social well-being.
3. Promote sustainable economic growth and job creation. Particular attention will be paid to the development of regions.
4. Expanding cooperation with international partners to mobilize resources, develop new technologies and knowledge. Access to global financial markets, significant emphasis on promoting exports and attracting foreign investment.
5. Promote environmental sustainability, mitigation and adaptation to global climate change to ensure sustainable development of the country.

Kyrgyzstan has also formally submitted its intention to conduct the second National Voluntary Review in 2025. Kyrgyzstan also participated at United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC's) COP 28 where the President reaffirmed commitment to carbon neutrality by 2050 and the Agenda for Sustainable Development of the Mountainous Regions, initiating an expert dialogue on mountains and climate change within the COP framework.

1. DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

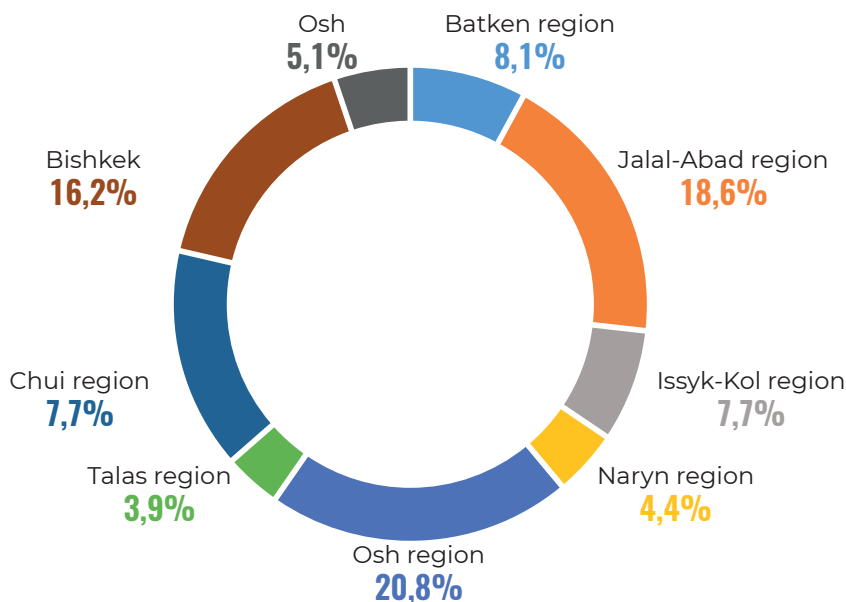
1.1. DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Demographic trends

According to the National Statistics Committee, the population of Kyrgyzstan reached seven million people by 19 October 2022.¹ Overall, the population is “young”, with half of the country’s residents under the age of 22, and a median age of 28 years. Preschool children (under 7 years of age) make up 17 percent of the population, and about 21 percent are school-age children (7-17 years old) with specific nutritional, healthy transition, and infrastructure needs.² Over a third of the country’s population is between 15 and 25 years old (49 percent women and

51 percent men), representing an opportunity to benefit from a demographic dividend. An important characteristic of the population is the ratio of age groups younger than working age, of working age, and older than working age. As of the beginning of 2023, children and adolescents made up 34.6 percent of the total population, those of working age constituted 57 percent, and 8.9 percent were older than working age. The highest population density is in Chui Oblast. 31.4 percent of the total population lives in the territory of the Chui Valley, including residents of Bishkek. More than 774,300 citizens are migrant workers abroad.³

Distribution of the population by the regions



Source: NSC, 2022 Population Census

¹ National Statistics Committee, available at <http://www.stat.kg/ru/news/v-kyrgyzstane-rodilsya-semimillionnyj-zhitel/>

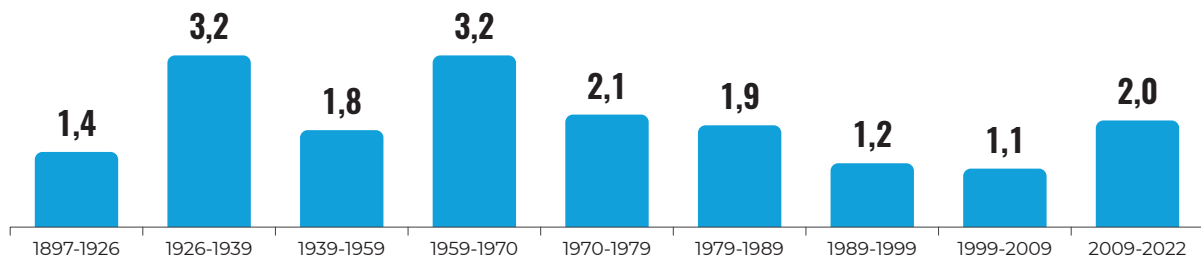
² Ibid.

³ UN Migration (worlddata.io)

The data of the 2022 Population Census indicates that the population trajectory is on an upward trend, maintaining a consistently high growth rate over the past decades.⁴ The population increase to seven million is accompanied by a notable shift in the age

demographics, with a rising proportion of individuals both younger and older than the working-age population. Kyrgyzstan remains a diverse nation with representatives from over 80 ethnicities.

Average Annual Population Growth Rate (in percent)



Source: NSC, 2022 Population Census

The main groups include Kyrgyz (77.6 percent), Uzbeks (14.2 percent), Russians (4.1 percent), Dungans (1.0 percent), Tajiks (0,9 percent), Uyghurs (0,4 percent), Kazakhs (0.4 percent), and other ethnicities. Government estimates indicate that around 90 percent of the population self-identifies as Muslim, with the vast majority adhering to the Sunni branch. About seven percent of the population is estimated to be Christian, with approximately 40 percent of them identifying as Russian Orthodox, while the remaining 60 percent are comprised of Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, and Adventists. Jews, Buddhists, Baha'is, and unaffiliated groups collectively make up roughly three percent of the populace. Tengrism boasts an estimated 50,000 followers in the country. The government also reports the existence of over 3,000 registered religious organizations, with approximately 87 percent being Muslim and 12 percent Christian.

Population dynamics and fertility

Over the past decade, the birth rate has varied with small fluctuations averaging around 3.14 births per woman aged 15-49 years. This translates into an increase in the population of more than 1.1 million people over the past decade, representing the largest population increase in the country's history. In the coming decades, population growth will also remain very significant. The high growth rates are explained by high fertility and low mortality, as well as the relatively small contribution played by changing migration patterns.⁵ The growth of permanent population by regions between 2009 to 2022 is uneven. The largest growth of permanent population was observed in Osh city - by 36.8 percent and Bishkek city - by 34.1 percent, in Chui oblast - by 31.6 percent, in Batken oblast - by 31 percent, while in other regions it was insignificant - by 18.9 percent in Naryn oblast and by 19.4percent in Talas oblast.

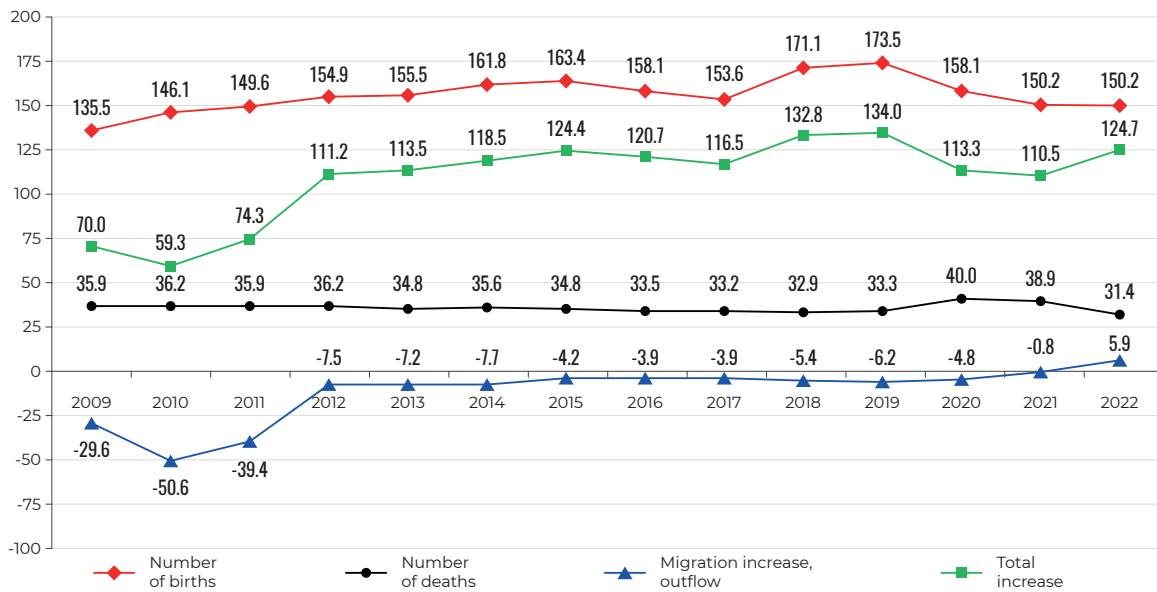
⁴ 2022 Population Census for the Kyrgyz Republic was conducted between March and May 2022.

⁵ A. Avdeev (2021). Population Situation Analysis in Kyrgyzstan: 2020 update: Demographic Challenges for the Development of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Another demographic trend observed is the persistence of high marriage rates, indicating that the majority of the population is married even though there is an emerging trend of an increasing number of women who have never been married. The birth rate continues to be high, which contributes to

the sustained expansion of the population. Moreover, the census highlights a positive indicator of child welfare: nearly all children under the age of 18 have been issued birth certificates, underscoring successful measures in civil documentation and recognition.

Population growth rates between 2009 and 2022 censuses (in thousands of people)



Source: NSC

Despite rapid population growth, the country remains sparsely populated, with concentration of the population around the two cities Bishkek and Osh. This creates serious threats of deterioration of the environmental situation and reduction of agricultural areas. The quality of sanitary living conditions is a particular challenge for the growing population.

According to the latest UN forecasts, the fastest growth period will be in the next 25 years, with the population exceeding nine million people by 2050. In 2050, the growth rate is projected to slow down. As part of this trend, the number of school-age population in the next decade will inevitably increase – from 1.35 million in 2020 to 1.67 million in 2029. This growth will increase pressures on both the general compulsory education system and quality healthcare, requiring additional

investments in school infrastructure, teachers and support staff, and the healthcare system.

Migration impacts

Kyrgyzstan is a country of origin of migrants, mainly labor migrant. While Kyrgyzstan's migration policy is aimed primarily at Kyrgyz migrant workers abroad, with a focus on protecting their rights and legitimate interests, in recent years, Kyrgyzstan has, however, become a country of destination for migration.

Migration significantly impacts the demographic landscape, particularly due to the high emigration rates among the youth, those of reproductive age, and skilled professionals. Most Kyrgyzstan's migrant workers abroad are within the economically

active age bracket of 18 to 45 years⁶, and a large number of them relocate alongside their families⁷. In the latest census conducted in 2022, the National Statistics Committee reported that approximately 1.1 million people (16 percent of the total population) were temporarily absent from the country. The National Statistics Committee notes that 80 percent of these external migrants leave the country to work abroad. Notably, women comprise 53 percent of these migrants⁸ and face particular challenges in securing fair employment and social protection in the host countries, underlining the gender-specific vulnerabilities within the migration experience. Migration, both ex-

ternal and internal, significantly influences the demographic trends within districts and regions. In the last five years, only the cities of Bishkek and Osh, along with the Alamedun, Sokuluk, Moscow, and Jayilk districts in the Chui region have experienced a positive migration balance, indicating more people are moving in than out. In stark contrast, the central urban areas witness the most substantial external migration outflow.

In 2023, the number of migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan in the Russian Federation dropped by 30% while the number of returning migrants increased, leading to pressures on the local economy and labour market.

1.2. POLITICAL CONTEXT, GOVERNANCE, AND INSTITUTIONS

Key political developments

In 2023, Kyrgyzstan's ratings across global democratic governance and rule of law indices further dropped. Freedom House's Nations in Transit defines Kyrgyzstan as a "consolidated authoritarian regime" since 2018. Freedom House's Freedom in the World report classifies Kyrgyzstan as "not free" since 2022, with declining civil society and independent media ratings in 2023, following downward trends in democratic governance, electoral process, and independence of judiciary in 2022.⁹ The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index downgraded Kyrgyzstan's status from a "hybrid" to an "authoritarian regime" since 2022, ranking it 109th out of 167 countries in its 2023 report, noting that in 2023, the

ruling tandem of the President and Chairman of the State Committee for National Security sought to consolidate their position, invested in the state security apparatus, a top-down presidential system, and clamped down on dissent.¹⁰ Transparency International ranked Kyrgyzstan 141st out of 180 countries in its 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index,¹¹ its CPI score declining by five points since 2020, noting that it has turned into a consolidated authoritarian regime that uses its justice system to target critics, contributing to higher perceived corruption levels. The country ranked 152nd out of 196 in the Global Risk Profile's Global Corruption Index.¹² In Reporters Without Borders' press freedom ranking, the country dropped 50 ranks to 122nd place in 2023, due to increased attacks and restrictions on free media.¹³

⁶ NSC, 2022 Population Census

⁷ <https://migranty.org/novosti/trudovaja-migracija-kasaetsja-3-mln-kyrgyzstancsev-deputat-zhk-kunduzbek-sulajmanov/?ysclid=log-p5hb11177994775>

⁸ NSC, 2022 Population Census

⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/nations-transit/2022> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-world/2023>

¹⁰ <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2023/>

¹¹ <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023/index/kgz>

<https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2023-eastern-europe-central-asia-autocracy-weak-justice-systems-widespread-enabling-corruption>

¹² https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2023.pdf

¹³ <https://rsf.org/en/country/kyrgyzstan>

In 2023, CIVICUS re-classified the state of civic space in Kyrgyzstan from “obstructed” to “repressed”.¹⁴ Kyrgyzstan also recorded the lowest score since 2015 in the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, with lowest scores on corruption and criminal justice.¹⁵

Government and governance

Under the new Constitution of April 2021, the President exercises powers of appointment of the Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers, Deputy Chairs, and all Cabinet Ministers. The presidential authority of appointment spans across all levels of the public administration. The President now appoints the heads of provincial, district and local administrations (akims) as well as city mayors. These used to be elected, either directly during mayoral elections in Bishkek and Osh cities, or indirectly by elected councils (kenesh-es) at the sub-national governance levels.

The country has embarked on Administrative Territorial Reform (ATR), with the aim of making sub-national governance more efficient, primarily by reducing the number of rural and urban municipalities from 484 to 268. In the new set-up, the lower capacity municipalities are planned to be linked to those delivering better, as part of a rationalization process. The outcomes of the pilot implementation of the ATR in 6 select municipalities carried out in 2023 have not been made public yet. Administrative boundaries will be redrawn across the country in early 2024. While this process is supposed to take into account local demographic contexts, including minority populations, the reduction of administrative centres and of local civil servants, could affect access to public services, notably for vulnerable and under-represented groups, especially those residing in remote areas distant from the regrouped administrative centres, and who may as a result come under increased risk

of exclusion. This risk may be exacerbated by the reduced direct accountability of local governments, given that their leaders now are appointed, according to the new constitution. The previous practice presumed a higher role for locally elected councils in appointing the heads of the local government, as well as to hold them accountable.

On 29 November 2023, Parliament approved the Law “On the Abolition of the Law on Public Councils under State Bodies”,¹⁶ despite numerous appeals from civil society. Public Councils, established in 2010, were meant to serve as citizen advisory bodies, to monitor the implementation of public policies, and provide recommendations, oversight and consultation to ministries, agencies and local authorities at various governance levels. From civil society’s perspective, the move to dismantle Public Councils is seen as a further indication of the shrinking space for public participation in decision-making processes, vital for ensuring transparency, accountability, and public input in governance.

Women’s representation in government is generally low. In 2023, women only held three of 21 (or 14 percent of) ministerial positions (Ministers of Education and Science, Labour, Social Security and Migration, and Digital Development). Women are notably absent from top leadership positions in the Cabinet of Ministers, among presidential representatives in the provinces, and heads of districts. One of the five current Deputy Mayors of Bishkek city is a woman. Women’s representation in public service has marginally increased from 40.7 percent in 2021 to 41.4 percent in 2022, and in municipal services from 35.6 percent to 35.7 percent, with substantial disparities across regions and sectors. Women employed in policy and specialist positions made up 31.4 percent of civil servants in 2022, whereas women at employed at the administrative level made up 42.2 percent.¹⁷

¹⁴ Kyrgyzstan was one of seven countries in the world that were downgraded in CIVICUS Monitor’s 2023 People Power Under Attack report: https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings_2023/europeandcentralasia/#kyrgyzstan

¹⁵ <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2023/Kyrgyz%20Republic>

¹⁶ https://24.kg/english/283992_Kyrgyzstan_abolishes_public_councils_under_government_bodies/

¹⁷ <https://stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/4379def4-3fa9-4932-ae72-884f4b04b73b.pdf>

https://24.kg/spetsproekty/275433_neravnyie_pozitsii_pochemu_jenschin_nepuskayut_kupravleniyu_stranoy/

The role of elected bodies and political parties

In 2021, the electoral system was revised, introducing a mixed (parallel) electoral system for electing the 90 Members of Parliament (MPs), with 36 MPs elected through a majority-based system in single-mandate constituencies, and 54 MPs elected via a proportional representation preferential system. It retained a 30 percent gender quota, a 15 percent quota for ethnic minorities and youth, and a two percent quota for persons with disabilities, among candidates on the party lists.

The first parliamentary elections under the amended electoral law were held on 28 November 2021, with 21 parties participating. However, these elections were marked by low voter turnout of 34.61 percent and a significant number of spoiled ballots (9.63 percent). The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission reported that the parliamentary elections were competitive, but they lacked meaningful voter engagement due to a stifled campaign, constitutional changes weakening parliament and extensive legislative changes to key aspects of the elections.¹⁸ The elections were marred by a technical glitch on the CEC website, causing five parties not to accept the election results and triggering minor protests.

Six political parties passed the 5 percent threshold and won seats in Parliament: Around 70 percent of the MPs were first-time-elects. Despite the absence of a gender quota also for the majoritarian seats, the share of elected women MPs increased from 16.7 percent (20 out of 120 MPs) to 21.1 percent (19 out of 90 MPs) in the new convocation of the Jogorku Kenesh, indicating some progress towards greater female representation, although the 30 percent target remained unmet.

Kyrgyzstan's political party system remains very fragmented and weakly institution-

alized, with only a few exceptions. Political parties tend to serve as temporary vehicles for particularistic interests, rather than channels for representation. Their representative role was further weakened by the new mixed electoral system and diminished parliamentary powers, within a strong presidential system. Broadly speaking, MPs from Ata-Jurt Kyrgyzstan, Mekenchil, Ishenim and Yntymak, as well as Eldik, mostly, tend to be pro-government, while MPs from Alliance, Butun Kyrgyzstan and Yiman Nuru tend to be in the moderate opposition, with niche positions. That said, coalitions of MPs tend to form around key political actors with resources and influence. The executive branch's influence over the legislative body has continued to increase, albeit with some visible pockets of resistance demonstrated on issues of high importance, where Parliament has been able to delay or push back some legislative initiatives. This also reflects some pluralism of interests within the political elite.

Local elections were held on 11 April 2021. It was the first time they were held with a 30 percent gender quota, leading to significant progress in women's representation in local councils (keneshes) from 10 to 38 percent, achieved as a result of systematic advocacy for a gender quota by development partners, in a process led by the Central Election Commission.

People's Kurultai

The new Constitution also envisioned the creation of a People's Kurultai, a deliberative advisory council, meant to represent the country's regions, ethnic and religious groups, that makes recommendations on areas of social development, with right of legislative initiative and to petition the President to dismiss Cabinet members and heads of executive bodies. This raised concerns, including among MPs, about it potentially further weakening Parliament's role in law and policymaking. Parliament eventual-

¹⁸ <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/f/519087.pdf>

ly adopted a Constitutional Law more clearly determining its organization and functions in 2023, foreseeing a national People's Kurultai that meets only once a year, composed of 700 delegates (s)elected for each convocation, as opposed to a three-year term. The President determines quotas of delegates per region, sector, ethnicity, nationality and age (there is no gender quota). Delegates are (s)elected through an opaque mechanism defined in regulations drawn up by a national council, a permanent body of the People's Kurultai. As it has some attributes of an upper chamber of parliament, some believe that the institution retains the potential to overshadow the role of Parliament, whose authority already was diminished as a result of expanded presidential powers.¹⁹ The second convocation of the People's Kurultai took place in Bishkek on 15-16 December 2023.

Rule of law and Judiciary

Since 2021, Kyrgyzstan has experienced significant setbacks in good governance and the rule of law, reflecting increased perceptions of pervasive corruption, several insufficiencies with regards to the criminal justice system, due process and fair trial rights, access to justice and discrimination, and overall, a diminished independence of the judiciary.

The implementation of the ongoing legal and criminal justice reform, including the legal aid sector, is considered to be fragile, fragmented, resources-demanding, not properly monitored and undermined by concerns related to sustainability and low level of public engagement and civic participation. There is no comprehensive monitoring system of public service delivery with a focus on accessibility, availability, affordability, and quality of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) services for women and girls with multiple forms of discrimination.

On 17 July 2023 the Presidential Administration initiated the draft Law "On Amendments to the Constitutional Law 'On the Constitutional Court of Kyrgyzstan'". The President signed it into law on 3 October 2023. This permits the Constitutional Court's decisions to be reviewed at the suggestion of either the President or the Chair of the Constitutional Court. Granting the executive branch the power to propose revisions to the Constitutional Court's rulings contradicts the principle of judicial authority over legal matters²⁰ and undermines judiciary independence. Furthermore, this might unduly influence the Constitutional Court's judges²¹. One criterion for revising the Constitutional Court's decisions is if they conflict with "moral and ethical values" and "the public consciousness of the people", a highly subjective measure.

This change might further undermine independence of the judiciary and encourage the government to shape policies and practices, in favour of national traditions, customs, national values, and morals, rather than on universal human rights. This is likely to further weaken checks and balances in the political system, reinforce existing stigmatization of already vulnerable groups, deepen polarization along liberal-conservative or secular-religious lines and over gender norms, with negative effects on gender equality, women empowerment, and gender-based violence.

In March 2023, the Ministry of Justice proposed amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code to allow online trials for individuals in pre-trial detention, or appealing convictions. The UN expressed concerns, referencing ICCPR provisions on the right to in-person trial and judicial review of detention legality. Parliament passed the amendments in early 2024.

¹⁹ <https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstan-peoples-assembly-lambasted-as-power-grab>
<https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstan-flag-tinkering-another-japarov-nation-building-exercise>

²⁰ <https://constsof.kg/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/11-tilek-k.e.-osmonaliev-a.m.-1.pdf>

²¹ <https://kyrgyzstan.un.org/en/248422-un-special-rapporteurs-have-urged-government-kyrgyz-republic-reconsider-and-withdraw-draft>

Amendments to the law “On the Bar Association/Advokatura”, effective from 15 November 2023, foresee the inclusion of two Ministry of Justice representatives in the Ethics Commission of the Advokatura, overseeing complaints against defence lawyers. This contradicts international standards for lawyer independence.

Positive developments in the legal system include an increase from 34 to 44 legal aid centres nationwide, each staffed with a full-time member. That said, the quality of both primary and secondary legal assistance remains a critical area for improvement. Efforts are underway to develop and implement quality monitoring and assessment mechanisms for legal aid services. However, the Law “On State Guaranteed Legal Aid” restricts qualified legal assistance in civil and administrative proceedings to citizens only, excluding foreign citizens and stateless persons, including women asylum-seekers, refugees, and applicants for recognition as stateless or forced migrants. These groups often face complex legal challenges and typically lack the financial means for legal aid. Additionally, while state legal assistance is available to those with incomes below a certain threshold, proving such levels of income can be particularly challenging for vulnerable groups like those applying for various protected statuses, necessitating a potential revision of these criteria.

The representation of women in the judiciary is dwindling, standing at 36.7 percent in 2022,²² compared to 38 percent in 2019. A reduction in female legal students²³ signals potential future challenges for women’s judicial representation.

Civic space

Kyrgyzstan has a vibrant civil society, with thousands of registered civil society organizations (CSOs)²⁴ operating openly, receiving

funding from both national and international sources. CSOs, with their close links to communities, play a crucial role in addressing social, political, and economic vulnerabilities. Women’s rights organizations have been instrumental in driving efforts to end discrimination against women and girls, achieve gender equality, and women’s empowerment.

However, CSOs are facing an increasingly hostile operational environment, against the backdrop of a deterioration in legislative and law enforcement practices that weaken established human rights protections. This decline is marked by a rapidly shrinking democratic and civic space, evidenced by both practical and legislative measures imposing limitations on fundamental freedoms. Many state officials dismiss human rights principles as alien “western notions”, incongruent with traditional culture, morals and values. Such an attitude contributes to a further erosion of fundamental freedoms.

In 2023, there were numerous cases that threatened freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, expression and the media. Several journalists, bloggers, civic activists, and media outlets faced criminal investigations or civil suits due to reports or social media posts critical of government policies or positions. They were often charged under severe Criminal Code offenses such as incitement of hatred on various grounds, calling for mass riots, or public calls to violent seizure of power.

Throughout the year, prominent independent media representatives reportedly faced threats, with regular public attacks on social media. These attacks often involved stigmatization of independent journalists and human rights defenders as ‘foreign agents’, accusing them of disseminating false information aimed at discrediting the country and its authorities.

²² <https://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/197e5d29-1a02-4078-b91d-782be10c9ded.pdf>

²³ Research by Kyrgyz Association of Women Judges, 2022

²⁴ 29,130 non-commercial organizations registered by the Ministry of Justice. https://24.kg/obschestvo/270279_tsifra_dnya29tyisyach_130_nekommercheskih_organizatsiy_rabotayut_vkyrgyzstane/

The ongoing emblematic case of the Kloop Media Foundation, pending since August 2023, highlights these challenges. It involves a suspended criminal case against Kloop, the use of the Law on False Information to block Kloop's website, and an ongoing civil trial initiated by the Bishkek Prosecutor to forcibly liquidate Kloop for alleged charter violations.

In April 2023, a court ruled in favour of the Ministry of Culture to terminate Azattyk (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Kyrgyz service), alleging it failed to remove a video report on border hostilities allegedly containing "war propaganda" and "hate speech". In July 2023, a settlement was reached, and the court reversed the decision, as the video was no longer accessible on Azattyk's site due to content retention protocols. Azattyk resumed operations. Some media representatives criticized the settlement with the Ministry of Culture, concerned it established a troubling precedent for media freedom²⁵.

Other cases saw defamation lawsuits against independent media, demanding compensation for purported moral damages. These cases, including the state TV channel EITR's lawsuit against PolitKlinika, and Vecherniy Bishkek's suit against Kaktus Media, raised concerns about using defamation suits to pressure and financially strain independent media outlets.

In mid-September 2023, the Supreme Court dismissed an appeal for a full acquittal and revocation of the deportation order against the investigative journalist Bolot Temirov to Russia in November 2022, and upheld the deportation.

In October 2022, authorities detained 26 individuals, including activists, politicians, and journalists, who protested against a border deal with Uzbekistan, involving the Kempir-Abad reservoir. Throughout 2023, many were held in pre-trial detention. Several detainees, including five women activists, were later placed under house arrest due to

health concerns. The trial that began in July 2023 has been criticized for lack of transparency and due process, with proceedings conducted behind closed doors, challenging the defendants' rights to an effective defence. On 4 October 2023, the court suspended 11 defendants of the Kempir-Abad case from taking part in court sessions until the trial's end, citing disruptive behaviour.

In 2023, while various peaceful assemblies occurred without interference, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly was significantly undermined by judicial bans on all such gatherings in central Bishkek, except those organized by authorities.

Civil society and the international community have raised concerns about various recently adopted or proposed legislation affecting the media, access to information, freedom of expression, internet regulations, and civil society organizations. By November 2023, the Law on Protection against Unreliable (False) Information, enacted in August 2021, had been used five times to ban independent media outlets critical of the authorities through actions by the Ministry of Culture. Efforts by the media community to contest the law's legitimacy in the Constitutional Court have failed.

The proposed draft Law "On Foreign Representatives" seeks to amend the Law "On Non-Commercial Organizations" (NCOs) and the Criminal Code, imposing stringent restrictions that could significantly curb civil society, which could endanger many organizations engaged in service delivery or human rights advocacy. The draft law provides that NCOs, including foreign NGOs' representative offices, engaged in so-called "political activities" and receiving foreign funding, must register as "foreign representatives". This term is synonymous with "foreign agent", carrying negative connotations and potentially leading to stigmatization, mistrust and hostility towards CSOs and human rights defenders. If enacted, it

²⁵ <https://kloop.kg/blog/2023/07/12/bektur-iskender-azattyk-poshyol-na-sdelku-s-vlastyami-i-eto-porazhenie-dlya-vsego-medijnogo-soobshhestva-kyrgyzstana/>

would grant state authorities the power to intrude into the internal affairs of NGOs, impose excessive control and onerous reporting requirements, and potentially subject NGO founders, members and supporters to criminal prosecution and liability. The draft's vague definitions could lead to selective prosecution of legitimate human rights advocacy. In anticipation of these risks, several prominent human rights NGOs have pre-emptively decided to dissolve themselves or re-register as commercial entities or private entrepreneurs to avoid the looming threats to their operations and freedoms. The UN Resident Coordinator on behalf of the UN Country Team, UN Special Rapporteurs, and the OHCHR spokesperson have publicly stated that the draft Law, in its current form, does not meet international human rights standards and risks to affect progress towards SDG achievement. Concerns from civil society and the international community, including at a Parliamentary hearing, were not addressed.

A working group set up under the Presidential Administration has been developing another draft Law "On Non-Commercial Non-Governmental Organizations", which includes disproportionate restrictions on NGOs, such as a ban on the right to informally associate and burdensome rules for registration, functioning, and reporting for NGOs, along with excessive state control over their activities. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) reviewed it in December 2022 and recommended against its adoption, citing violations of provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Both draft laws represent a worrying trend of increasing government control and potential suppression of civil liberties.

The proposed draft Law "On the Mass Media" imposes restrictive measures on journalists and stringent registration for online media, risking severe constraints on free-

dom of expression and media freedom. The comments provided by media and civil society in the working group established by the President in November 2022, have not been considered. The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, ODIHR, and Venice Commission have all expressed concerns over its compliance with international human rights laws in their formal reviews of the draft law. These opinions were discussed during technical consultations initiated by the Ombudsperson's Institute. However, these were not addressed in the draft law submitted to Parliament.

Gender equality

In the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, Kyrgyzstan's ranking moved up from 108th in 2020 to 84th out of 146 countries in 2023 (partly due to more women holding senior positions), but it still ranks only 107th out of 146 in its political empowerment sub-index²⁶. It ranked 82nd among 162 countries in UNDP's 2022 Gender Inequality Index. It continued to rank last among Central Asian countries in the global Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Index 2023/24.²⁷

Since independence, Kyrgyzstan made significant advancements in gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) by ratifying international covenants like Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and adopting key legislation and action plans. Despite these legal frameworks and the establishment of councils to support gender equality, women still face human rights challenges, including discrimination, violence, and procedural violations in judicial process. In the past decade, Kyrgyzstan progressed in legislating against gender-based violence, forced marriage abductions, and other key gender issues, yet numerous challenges persist. Entrenched patriarchal norms²⁸ continue to obstruct the enforce-

²⁶ <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/in-full/benchmarking-gender-gaps-2023/>

²⁷ <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/kyrgyzstan/>

²⁸ In November 2021, UN CEDAW recommended the country to "provide capacity-building to women politicians and candidates on political campaigning, leadership and negotiation skills, and raise awareness, in concert with the media, among politicians, the media, religious and community leaders and the general public, on the importance of the full, independent and democratic participation of women on an equal basis with men in political and public life to guarantee the implementation of the Convention."

ment of laws and limit the rights and access to justice for women and girls, particularly affecting their political and economic participation²⁹.

Over the past five years, public views on social norms and gender roles have become increasingly polarized, negatively impacting the status of women and girls. There is a growing perception that gender equality and women's empowerment are "alien" or pro-Western, with a resurgence of traditional views that confine women's roles to family and household duties. This trend is compounded by the constitution's emphasis on traditions, customs, and national values, as well as a rising focus on patriotism, which may potentially conflict with human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Gender parity in women's representation at state and municipal authorities has not been achieved. The National Women Leadership Program 2024-2027, aimed at promoting women's leadership, is pending Cabinet of Minister's endorsement.

Women and girls have higher rates of not being in employment, education, or training (NEET) and unemployment compared to their male counterparts, reflecting limited opportunities and entrenched gender roles³⁰. While girls may have higher secondary school enrolment, lower NEET rates for boys could be due to earlier transitions into work or migration. This disparity underscores the need for targeted efforts to overcome institutional and societal barriers and promote gender equality in all aspects of life³¹.

Societal pressures for women to marry and bear children are intense, often limiting their autonomy, including in matters like contraception. This environment fuels harmful practices such as child and forced marriage, bride kidnapping, and polygamy,

underscoring the urgent need for public attitude shifts and legal reforms to safeguard women's rights. Additionally, women and girls with disabilities are often unaware of their rights, with 17 percent experiencing various forms of violence in the past year. As religiosity and conservatism grow, gender-discriminatory practices, including early and unregistered marriages, polygamy, and rights deprivation, have unfortunately become normalized. These practices result in adverse physical and psychological impacts, especially for wives of migrants living with in-laws.

Maternal mortality remains high, standing at 27.3 deaths per 100,000 live births. Despite a gradual decrease, significant challenges remain in reducing these rates. The Ministry of Health prioritizes reducing maternal mortality, but obstacles persist, including inconsistent record-keeping for emergency obstetrics care, substandard maternal and emergency obstetric care, and a deficient emergency referral system, particularly in rural areas. The government's Family Planning 2030 initiative underscores commitment but faces limitations, especially in budget allocation for contraceptives provision for high-risk women, with only 8.2 million soms allocated in 2023. Dependency on the private sector for a wider range of contraceptives remains high due to limited availability and affordability, disproportionately affecting disadvantaged populations. Consequently, abortion continues to be a prevalent method of fertility control, contributing to some maternal deaths. The rate of modern contraceptive use is declining, with contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) decreasing from 28 in 2015 to 14.1 in 2022, and short birth spacing under two years among women at 30 percent in 2022. These factors collectively emphasize the need for enhanced strategies and resources to improve maternal health outcomes.

²⁹ In November 2021, UN CEDAW recommended the Government to "review its the electoral legislation to reach parity of women and men in political life and to that effect take targeted measures, including temporary special measures, such as increased quotas, to strengthen the representation of women at all levels of government, in the Jogorku Kenesh and in local councils, in the judiciary and in academia, in particular at decision-making levels."

³⁰ UNICEF and NSC, Monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators in the Kyrgyz Republic, National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, 2020.

³¹ UNICEF, Gender Counts: Central Asia, 2019.

Gender-based violence remains a critical issue. Domestic violence survivors nearly tripled from 2015 to 2021. In 2023, figures continued to increase, with 13,104 registered victims, 95 percent women.³² Sadly, 90 percent of domestic violence survivors end up returning to their abusers due to a lack of economic independence and social pressure to keep the family together. A recent study by UN Women found that only 11 percent of women feel safe in their own homes. Additionally, 28 cases of abduction for forced marriage were registered in 2022 on the Unified Register of Crimes and Misdemeanours. Of these, 18 cases were taken to court, 5 are still ongoing, and 5 were dismissed due to lack of evidence. The case of Asel Nogoibaeva from September 2023³³, whose ex-husband repeatedly raped her in 2022-2023 and later mutilated her while on probation, underscores systemic issues

in addressing domestic and gender-based violence. Despite numerous appeals to the court and law enforcement over two years regarding rape and physical violence by her former spouse, the system failed to provide adequate protection or assistance. This case highlights the lack of recognition for sexual violence within marriage (marital rape) as a crime, often normalized due to prevailing gender stereotypes, and indicates a critical need for legal and societal changes to ensure the safety and justice for survivors. Discrepancies in domestic violence statistics between the National Statistical Committee (8,725 registered cases³⁴) and Ministry of Interior (9,880 registered cases³⁵), alongside low prosecution rates (63 registered cases were prosecuted)³⁶ and a prevalent reliance on reconciliation, indicate a need for clearer policies and stricter enforcement to combat impunity and ensure justice for victims.

1.3. PEACE AND CONFLICT

Kyrgyzstan's ratings further dropped across peace indices in 2023. The Global Peace Index (GPI) ranked Kyrgyzstan 101st out of 163 countries, downgraded by 16 places compared to the previous year.³⁷ The Fragile States Index (FSI) placed Kyrgyzstan in the "elevated warning" bracket again, ranking it 69th out of 179 countries, down by three places.³⁸

Although largely peaceful, Kyrgyzstan has witnessed major upheavals and conflicts over the last 30 years. These have included violent changes of power in 2005, 2010 and 2020, incursion of terrorist fighters in 1999, and inter-ethnic conflicts in 1990 and 2010,

in which some 470 people died.³⁹ There were two major escalations of violence at the border with Tajikistan, on 29 April–1 May 2021 and on 14-17 September 2022. The latter resulted in 269 casualties, including 63 killed, over 140,000 internally displaced persons, and hundreds of houses and a dozen social facilities destroyed.

In 2023, the main developments impacting the country's peace context were a quieter but still uncertain situation on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, with entrenched enmity and border closures affecting trust and livelihoods in local communities. However,

³² https://24.kg/english/286402_Over_13000_people_suffered_from_domestic_violence_in_Kyrgyzstan_in_2023/

³³ https://24.kg/english/276109_Man_who_tortured_his_ex-wife_sentenced_to_8_years_in_prison_for_rape/

³⁴ <https://www.stat.kg/ru/opendata/category/4246/>

³⁵ <https://mvd.gov.kg/rus/domesticViolence/reports/17>

³⁶ <https://www.prokuror.kg/statistics>

³⁷ <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/GPI-2023-Web.pdf>

Kyrgyzstan also got a lower score in the Positive Peace Index (PPI) in 2023, ranking 105th out of 163 countries: <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Positive-Peace-2023-briefing.pdf>

³⁸ https://fragilestatesindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/FSI-2023-Report_final.pdf

³⁹ Report of the independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Events in Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010.

hope emerged due to reported progress made in bilateral border delimitation and demarcation talks; and some initial economic and cultural cooperation dividends from the re-opening of crossing points on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. Also, the potential effects of climate change on existing conflict and peace issues became more noticeable, in terms of exacerbating competition over access to natural resources, fuelling existing and new tensions in the country and region. Thirdly, an acceleration of the backsliding in human rights and rule of law, further eroding democratic governance and shrinking civic space, put further pressures on the wider civil society, with negative effects on peace and social cohesion.

Border conflicts

Unresolved border conflicts continue to pose risks, though there has been notable progress in Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations following the conclusion of the bilateral border delimitation agreement in December 2022, which was formalized as part of a wider cooperation package that was signed during the President of Uzbekistan's visit to Kyrgyzstan in January 2023. The parties proceeded to the demarcation process in the course of 2023. The agreement led to the reopening of more bilateral border crossing points, facilitating people-to-people contacts and creating opportunities for cross-border trade, economic and cultural cooperation, helping to significantly enhance regional stability and good-neighbourly relations. However, these developments are still in their early stages and will require further strengthening and cementing.

The situation on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border remains uncertain, despite reported progress in the bilateral border negotiations. The escalations of violence in 2021 and 2022 have negatively affected the local populations in border communities, fostering a language of enmity and mistrust, exacerbated by an effective closure of the border for over 2.5 years, which hindered local trade and people-to-people contacts. Increased military spending on both sides also suggests potential for greater impact in future conflicts. Despite this, the

situation on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border was calm for most of 2023, laying the foundation for significant reported progress in the bilateral talks on border delimitation and demarcation. These accelerated following the signing of a protocol by the heads of the security/border services, agreeing on a joint approach, with reports that the parties agreed on over 90 percent of the borderline, a significant advancement compared to last year.

The will to resolve the dispute was evidenced by 147 bilateral meetings on border delimitation and demarcation in 2023. This has raised hopes for a potential border deal in 2024. However, the timing of such an agreement remains uncertain. Support from border communities will be crucial for its sustainability and to prevent the resurgence of localized conflicts, especially in restoring mutual trust, fostering cross-border contacts, and rejuvenating economic ties, including developing trilateral ties between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the Ferghana valley.

Climate, peace and security

The impacts of climate change have become increasingly noticeable, affecting both the government and the people. The summer of 2023 highlighted the rapidly intensifying effects of melting glaciers and growing droughts, reducing water resources essential for irrigation and hydropower. Water scarcity strained relationships between upstream and downstream communities and countries, such as parts of Kazakhstan reliant on Kyrgyzstan for water for irrigation. Locally, water shortages are directly impacting livelihoods, particularly in agriculture. Reduced electricity supplies are hindering businesses, and rising energy prices are driving inflationary pressures, potentially leading to public discontent. Insufficient winter preparedness can exacerbate energy shortages and trigger social unrest.

Climate change is intensifying competition for natural resources, especially water, between communities and countries at different elevations. The country faces stability risks due to climate change combined with

inadequate natural resource management. Disputes over shared natural resource management have historically triggered conflicts, notably on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border. The possibility of retaliation from downstream countries suggests that water-related disputes could increasingly become a significant source of tension in Central Asia. These tensions are likely to be exacerbated by the ongoing effects of climate change in the medium term, with heightened exposure and vulnerabilities to climate-related security posing potential regional stability risks. Addressing these challenges requires dedicated attention through both national and regional strategies, tackling not only climate adaptation and mitigation, but also the peace and security nexus.

Social cohesion

The shrinking democratic and civic space, characterised by a stigmatization of civil society and rights-based approaches, has widened vertical mistrust between the state and society, as well as affected horizontal trust between communities. This has led to an increasing polarization along existing and new dividing lines (liberal-conservative, secular-religious, etc.) and over gender norms, with negative effects on social cohesion, affecting in particular vulnerable groups in society, including in terms of inter-ethnic, inter-confessional and inter-generational relations, as well as on GEWE and S/GBV.

1.4. ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The economy displayed resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and regional conflicts, with real GDP growth of 6.2 percent from January to December 2023. GDP growth was driven by the sectors of commodity production, services, and product taxes. The service sector experienced a growth rate increase of 6.2 percent compared to the previous year, while commodity production grew by 3.6 percent and taxes on products saw a growth rate of 12.7 percent. In the GDP structure, services accounted for 50.8 percent. The goods-producing industries contributed 32.3 percent to the GDP, with industry making up 16 percent and agriculture accounting for 9.7 percent. Domestic consumption also saw a boost, supported by fiscal policy measures and an increase in consumer lending within the banking sector. This, coupled with a significant 10.7 percent increase in real wages largely driven by the public sector, led to a 6.7 percent increase in household incomes in real terms for the first half of 2023 compared to the previous year.

In January-December 2023, Kyrgyzstan's foreign trade turnover amounted to USD 16 billion, a 29.9 percent increase compared to

the same period in 2022, according to the National Statistics Committee. Export supplies increased by 46.8 percent, while imports increased by 26 percent. The volume of mutual trade with EAEU member states was USD4.4 billion, an 8.7 percent decrease compared to 2022. Additionally, the National Statistics Committee reported that the volume of foreign trade with third countries outside the EAEU in January-December 2023 was USD11.3 billion, a 1,5-increase compared to 2022.

According to the National Statistical Committee, the inflow of foreign direct investment in 2022 increased by 4% compared to 2021 and amounted to USD 1,046.1 million. At the same time, the inflow exceeded the outflow level by USD290.8 million. The largest shares of the total volume of foreign direct investment received came from Türkiye (30.7 percent), China (26.3 percent), the Netherlands (5.9 percent) and the United Kingdom (2.8 percent). While the US and European and donor countries do not individually hold large portions of Kyrgyzstan's sovereign debt, multilateral banks like the World Bank Group, EBRD, and EIB collectively manage around 28 percent.

In 2023, the volume of gold exports increased 69-fold compared to the data from 2022. By the end of 2023, Kyrgyzstan exported 20.2 tons of gold for USD1,284.3 billion. In December, the country exported 4.2 tons of gold to Switzerland. Additionally, 1.8 tons worth USD115.4 million were supplied to Hong Kong and 1.29 tons for USD80.3 million to the United Arab Emirates. The Kumtor mine, now under state control, has not significantly improved transparency or public openness in its operations. The mine's first-quarter report for 2023⁴⁰ indicates a decrease in budget contributions and rising operational costs. Despite government reassurances, concrete evidence of improvement is lacking.

The Russian Ruble depreciated by 17.5 percent in 2023, adversely affecting migrant workers' incomes in the Russian Federation and the volume of remittances sent back to Kyrgyzstan. Remittance inflows declined by 12.3 percent in 2023, compared to 2022. The drop in remittances also resulted from a reduction in the number of Kyrgyzstan's migrant workers in the Russian Federation. However, net inflows increased by 14.5 percent, due to the stabilization of outflows (which had spiked significantly in 2022 due to the arrival of Russian temporary migrants to Kyrgyzstan), and improved inflows in the last quarter of 2023. As per statistics of the National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic, there is an increase in remittances from new countries of destination, specifically from the UK since in March 2022 the government facilitated the opportunity for citizens of

Kyrgyzstan to participate in the Seasonal Workers Scheme to the UK.

The annual inflation rate reached 7.3 percent from January to December 2023. Inflation was largely attributed to global rises in food and fuel prices, but core inflation also reached double digits in the course of the year, significantly impacting poorer households. The cost of food and non-alcoholic beverages rose on average by 9.4 percent with fish products, fruits, vegetables, dairy, cheese, eggs, bakery products, cereals, and meat seeing the highest inflation rates. Non-food products and services also saw price increases, with utility costs such as electricity and water contributing significantly to the inflationary pressures.

The country also faced self-sufficiency challenges in several key commodities, including wheat and wheat flour, leading to market volatility. Globally, despite declining cereal and vegetable oil prices, risks persist, particularly for products imported outside the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Wheat is mostly imported from the Russian Federation and from Kazakhstan. In November 2023, Kazakhstan's export wheat prices were 22 percent higher than in July 2023 due to drought-induced low production, while Russian export prices were 2 percent lower compared to July 2023 pre-Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) cancellation. The non-renewal of the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) in July 2023 risks disrupting food supplies, potential new export restrictions, and continued increases in global energy prices.

Table 1. Commodity dependence

Commodity	Import dependency	Share of import countries
Wheat	30%	95% from the Russian Federation (RF) and 5% from Kazakhstan
Vegetable oil	84%	81% from the RF, 19% from Kazakhstan
Sugar	37%	99% from the RF, 1% from Kazakhstan and Iran

⁴⁰ <https://www.kumtor.kg/ru/deposit/reports/>.

The state budget reported a surplus of 2.9 percent of GDP in the first nine months of 2023, an increase from the 1.1 percent surplus in the same period of 2022. This improvement was primarily due to increased total revenues, which rose to 35.2 percent of GDP from 32.3 percent a year earlier, driven by higher tax receipts, particularly from VAT on imported goods. However, spending also increased to 32.4 percent of GDP from 31.2 percent mainly due to higher operational costs. Public debt reached over 57 percent of GDP as of September 2023, with more than half of this being external debt. In terms of investment, capital investments saw a 16.8 percent increase in the first ten months of 2023, supported significantly by contributions from the state budget. The mining sector continued to attract the majority of these investments. Overall, total investment has been recovering since a drop due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with rates to GDP growing back to 22-23 percent in 2022-2023, indicating a gradual return to pre-pandemic investment levels.⁴¹

In 2023, the industrial sector making up 16 percent of its GDP, matches regional averages but falls short in manufacturing value added (MVA) per capita when compared to other lower-middle-income countries. This discrepancy stems from low productivity, dominated by low-tech firms, scant innovation, and reliance on outdated technologies, alongside limited funding access and inadequate managerial and technological skills. Meanwhile, the apparel industry in Kyrgyzstan surged by 53.1 percent from September 2022 to September 2023, primarily in outer clothing, thanks to local manufacturers expanding into online marketplaces, which quadrupled garment exports in early 2023. Conversely, the food industry's growth slowed to 3.8 percent in the first ten months of 2023, down from 11.3 percent in the previous year, affected by sluggish flour production despite last year's 1.5-fold increase. Yet, the industry still saw moderate growth, driven by increased meat and vegetable oils and fats production.

Despite its small share in total GDP, agriculture remains important for the livelihoods of rural population, which constitutes 65 percent of total population in Kyrgyzstan. Over the last decade, it contributed more than 14 percent to the country's annual output and employed more than 25 percent of the economically active population on average. Leading agricultural products include grain and forage crops (80 percent of cultivated area), meat and dairy. Dominated by over 90 percent peasant farms and households—totaling around 500,000 in 2023—the sector employs inefficient practices, making it vulnerable to climate change and limiting domestic and export growth. Challenges such as water scarcity, land degradation, financial access, and lack of scale persist. The adverse weather slowed agricultural growth to just 0.1 percent in January-October 2023, down from 7.3 percent the previous year.

Kyrgyzstan is gaining global recognition for its sustainable tourism potential, evidenced by its rise from 116th to 90th in the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Sector Competitiveness Index from 2015 to 2021. The country boasts several unique attractions, including Lake Issyk-Kul, the world's second-largest alpine lake, the Tian-Shan mountains, and a part of the historic Silk Road, all of which have the potential to draw more international visitors. In 2020, Kyrgyzstan's tourism sector saw a significant downturn due to the global pandemic, with a 72.46 percent decline and the total tourist count falling to 195,000. Nonetheless, the country has shown consistent recovery efforts, evidenced by a 29.2 percent increase in tourist numbers in the first half of 2023, compared to 2022.

The country's startup ecosystem is booming, notably since the "Law on Innovative Activity" was enacted in March 2023. In 2023, the residents of the High Technologies Park (HTP) witnessed remarkable growth, generating revenue of 7.8 billion KGS (USD 87 million), a significant increase from the 4.2 billion KGS (USD50 million) recorded in 2022.

⁴¹ IMF World Economic Outlook October 2023.

This financial achievement was largely driven by exports, which constituted 95 percent of the total revenue, with HTP's global reach expanding from 28 countries in 2022 to 60 countries. The number of resident companies within the park also saw an impressive rise, growing from 228 in 2022 to 383 in 2023. This expansion contributed to a substantial increase in employment opportunities, with the number of jobs rising from 1,877 in 2022 to 2,417 in 2023, reflecting the HTP's growing influence and contribution to the tech industry both locally and internationally⁴². However, challenges in attracting long-term investments and developing the angel and venture capital market remain. Further, there's a need for better collaboration and education within the ecosystem.⁴³

Kyrgyzstan faces a complex set of challenges related to its energy security, primarily arising from its heavy reliance on hydroelectric power, which constitutes up to 90 percent of its total production capacity. Additionally, the country is a net importer of fossil fuels. These challenges are closely linked to natural and climatic factors, particularly the presence of low water levels. In recent years, Kyrgyzstan has transitioned into a net importer of electricity. Over the span of ten months in 2023, the total electricity imports reached 2 billion 907.3 million kilowatt-hours, marking an increase of 305.6 million kilowatt-hours compared to the previous year. A significant portion of these imports, 1.6 billion kilowatt-hours, came from Turkmenistan. Additionally, Kyrgyzstan procured 832.9 million kilowatt-hours from Kazakhstan, 326.5 million from Russia, and 145.6 million from Uzbekistan. The financial expenditure for these

electricity imports exceeded 7 billion soms (USD79 million). To address this pressing crisis, an emergency regime was set to be implemented in the energy industry from 1 August 2023, until 31 December 2026. In 2023, Kyrgyzstan made significant efforts towards addressing its power shortages by commissioning five small hydropower plants (HPPs) with a combined capacity of 71 MW, alongside five solar power plants. Additionally, the country marked a major milestone in its energy sector with the commencement of operations at the second hydro unit of the Toktogul HPP, the largest hydropower plant in the republic. These developments are part of broader efforts to enhance its energy independence and sustainability by diversifying its energy sources and expanding its renewable energy capacity.

The economic outlook presents a mixed picture, with varying forecasts from the IMF, ADB, and EBRD influenced by diverse economic factors. The IMF predicted a GDP growth slowdown to 3.4 percent in 2023, improving to 4.3 percent in 2024, with inflation decreasing from 11.7 percent to 8.6 percent. The ADB's estimates were slightly more conservative, with growth expected at 3.8 percent in 2023 and 4 percent in 2024, aligning its inflation forecast with the IMF. In contrast, the EBRD was more optimistic, forecasting growth at 4.6 percent in 2023 and 7 percent in 2024, despite challenges in key sectors but highlighting growth opportunities in textiles, tourism, and retail. Overall, these projections indicate a cautiously optimistic economic path for Kyrgyzstan, with expectations of gradual growth amid uncertainties.

⁴² https://www.instagram.com/p/C3pTO78lJMp/?hl=ru&img_index=1

⁴³ Startup Central Eurasia Ecosystem Ranking. ITU, 2023 <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/CIS/Documents/Publications/SCE-percent20reportpercent20Enpercent20-percent20updpercent2029percent20Sep.pdf>

Table 2. Key economic indicators, 2020-2025

	2020	2021	2022	2023e	2024f	2025f
Real GDP growth (at constant market prices)	-7.1	5.5	6.3	3.5	4.0	4.0
<i>Private consumption</i>	-8.3	20.9	6.4	1.3	3.4	3.9
<i>Government consumption</i>	0.9	0.4	1.6	1.4	0.4	0.4
<i>Gross fixed capital investment</i>	-16.2	8.2	22.2	17.8	17.4	15.8
<i>Exports – goods and services</i>	-27.3	16.4	-7.3	27.0	15.5	16.4
<i>Imports – goods and services</i>	-28.0	39.3	62.1	13.3	13.5	14.0
Real GDP growth (at constant factor prices)	-7.1	5.5	6.3	3.5	4.0	4.0
<i>Agriculture</i>	0.9	-4.5	7.3	2.0	2.5	2.5
<i>Industry</i>	-6.5	6.5	12.2	3.8	5.3	6.0
<i>Services</i>	-13.7	14.4	3.0	4.7	4.5	4.2
Inflation (Consumer Price Index)	6.3	11.9	13.9	12.0	10.0	7.0
Current account balance (percent GDP)	4.5	-8.0	-47.0	-29.1	-10.4	-10.6
Net foreign direct investment (percent GDP)	-7.0	6.1	6.5	3.9	4.0	3.9
Fiscal balance (percent GDP)	-4.0	-0.3	-1.4	-1.6	-2.6	-2.1
Revenues (percent of GDP)	29.0	31.8	36.2	34.5	34.1	33.4
Debt (percent GDP)	63.7	55.7	49.2	48.9	48.2	47.2
Primary balance (percent of GDP)	-2.8	1.2	-0.1	-0.4	-1.6	-1.2

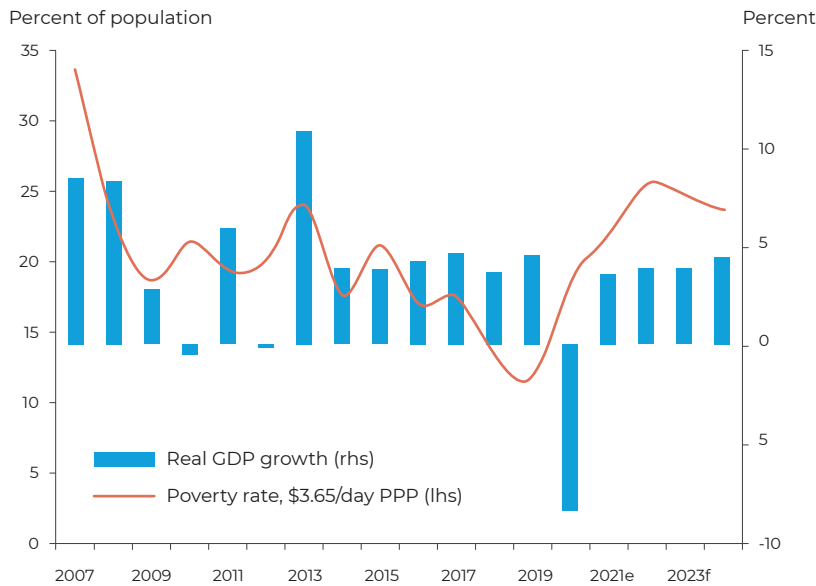
Source: World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook, October 2022

Poverty and economic performance

The graphic below illustrates the correlation between real GDP growth rates and the poverty rate. It becomes evident that poverty rates were steadily declining until 2018-2019 when they began to exhibit a sharp up-

ward trajectory, despite positive economic growth during the same period, with the exception of a brief period of negative growth in 2020-21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, economic growth is neither inclusive nor equitable.

GDP growth and poverty, 2007-2023



One significant factor contributing to the rising poverty rate is food price inflation. In January – November 2023, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased by 10 percent for staple foods, 13 percent for non-food items and 10 percent for services compared to the same period of 2022⁴⁴. The country still retains the second place in the EAEU region in terms of inflation. However, high food inflation in the EAEU region (Kazakhstan (+7.5 percent), Russian Federation (6.6 percent), Belarus (5.2 percent) may spark further increases in food prices, given the high share of imports from these countries in the long term, adding to the cost of living. This inflationary trend has had a detrimental impact on the poorest quintile of the population, who typically allocate approximately 70 percent of their income to food expenses. It has also affected the affordability of a nutritious diet, with 44 percent of households reporting that they had to reduce their food spending as a coping mechanism. This situation has led to difficulties in purchasing essential items such as vegetable oil (38 percent), sugar (38 percent), and wheat flour

(42 percent). The primary reasons cited for these challenges are the high commodity prices (86 percent) and a lack of financial resources (12 percent). Furthermore, this scenario has resulted in the depletion of costly assets, making households more vulnerable to future economic and natural shocks. Women, in particular, bear a significant burden due to food price inflation as they manage household expenditures.

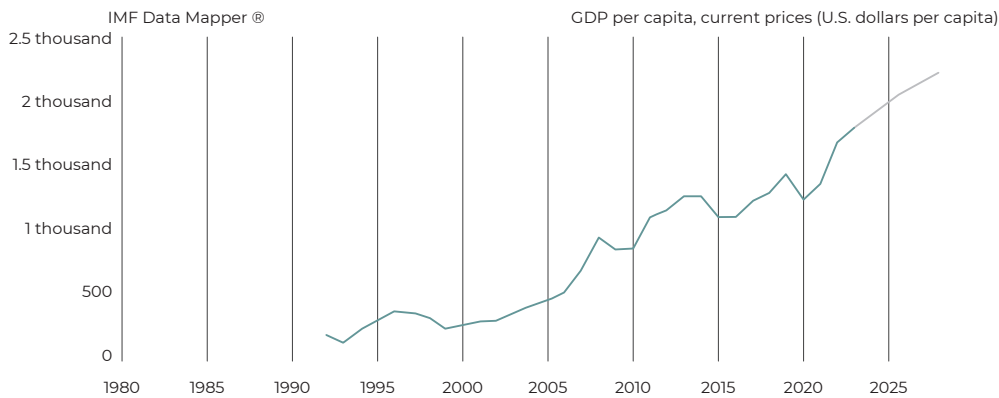
Another significant indicator reflecting poverty from a broader economic standpoint is GDP growth per capita. The figure below indicates that, except for the year 2020, GDP per capita has consistently grown, albeit modestly, on an annual basis. Remarkably, this growth has occurred concurrently with an increase in the poverty rate, as illustrated in the previous graphic. This apparent paradox highlights the nature of income inequality within the country and underscores the difficulty of alleviating poverty among substantial segments of the Kyrgyz population through existing support programs and services. It emphasizes the need for a more

⁴⁴ WFP Price Monitoring for Food Security in the Kyrgyz Republic

nuanced approach that considers the intricacies of income distribution and poverty reduction initiatives. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of targeted policies

and interventions aimed at addressing the root causes of poverty and income inequality, ensuring that economic progress benefits all strata of the population.

GDP per capita (current prices US dollars)



Source: IMF Datamapper/KG

Labor migration

Kyrgyzstan’s potential workforce is growing at about two percent per annum—faster than some of its neighbors in Europe and Central Asia⁴⁵. An estimated 50,000 new entrants join the labor market each year. In 2023, the number of the working-age population reached 3.9million people (57 percent)⁴⁶ and by 2030, the working-age population is expected to reach around 4.6 million people. Job creation, though, has not kept pace with the increasing population. Between 2009 and 2019, job growth averaged only 0.9 percent per annum. This has contributed to nearly one-third of the working population to be inactive or not part of the labor force: 38 percent of these persons are in school, while the other 62 percent are neither in school nor working, which leaves 640,000 working age adults who are not engaged in productive activity and are not investing in their own human capital. Job productivity,

or output per worker, in Kyrgyzstan is the lowest in Europe and Central Asia. Furthermore, labor productivity growth has been averaging 4.3 percent per annum since 2005, which is low relative to other countries in the region. Increases in informality in the low productivity sectors of services and industry have contributed to the deterioration of national productive growth.

The limited economic opportunities in Kyrgyzstan contribute to a mass labor migration: approximately one million people, out of a total population of seven million, work abroad. They often select countries with familiar historical contexts, languages, and existing migrant communities for better integration. Despite economic sanctions and the risks of mobilization, Russia is the predominant destination for Kyrgyz labor migrants, hosting an estimated 500-700,000⁴⁷ Kyrgyz nationals as of August 2023. Kazakhstan, Türkiye, and other countries

⁴⁵ Jobs in the Kyrgyz Republic, World Bank 2018.

⁴⁶ Kyrgyzstan Population Census 2022.

⁴⁷ As per the 2023 data from the Kyrgyz Embassy in Russian Federation, the number of officially registered labor migrants in Russia is 408 448.

also attract Kyrgyz migrants⁴⁸. The majority of citizens seeking opportunities abroad hail from the economically significant regions of Bishkek, Chui, and Osh. This trend has important implications for regional development and urban planning, as it may affect labor markets, housing, and social services in both the areas of departure and those witnessing population increases. In 2022-2023, a notable outflow of labor migrants from Russia was registered. As evidenced by the UN mobility trackers, this trend was explained by several reasons, these include the deterioration of the economic situation in Russia due to international sanctions, the fear of military mobilization announced in Russia, and various family reasons. Notwithstanding the challenges caused by the war in Ukraine, the outflow of migrants is unlikely to become a massive trend due to the limited economic opportunities in their home countries.

Kyrgyzstan's working migrants serve a dual role that affects the economic and demographic fabric. On the economic front, their remittances are a lifeline, particularly in rural areas where such funds often represent the primary, if not sole source of income, thereby making a substantial contribution to the GDP. Conversely, the demographic impact is less favorable; their long-term absence introduces challenges, potentially leading to shifts in local demographics and leaving gaps in the domestic economy. In Russia, a substantial portion of Kyrgyz workers are employed across a range of industries: 39 percent in manufacturing, 24 percent in construction, and sizable percentages in services and IT. They engage in diverse fields such as trade, construction, hospitality, education, science, logistics, and technology. These varied experiences could enrich Kyrgyzstan's economy, as a significant majority, 66.4 percent, express a desire to return home, with another 21.5 percent still undecided. The migration phenomenon represents a potential 'brain gain' opportunity for Kyrgyzstan, considering many of these mi-

grants possess high levels of education and skills. A vast majority of male (87.8 percent) and female (74.4 percent) migrants surveyed by the UN in 2021 are eager to apply their acquired expertise to the development of their homeland. Kyrgyzstan stands to benefit from this diaspora's human capital if it can create enticing conditions for these professionals to return and invest their knowledge in burgeoning sectors like tourism, entrepreneurship, and investment.

Investment and business climate

Kyrgyzstan is actively pursuing foreign direct investment (FDI), with the government openly acknowledging its critical role in economic growth. Despite enacting laws designed to draw in foreign investment, several challenges hinder these efforts. The nationalization of the Kumtor gold mine, the application of criminal probes in business disputes, burdensome administrative processes, frequent changes in government personnel, and a failure to safeguard investors' assets have all emerged as significant obstacles. Specifically, government actions such as demands for renegotiating existing contracts, exhaustive and protracted audits, the imposition of substantial fines retroactively, and contentious license issues serve as major barriers to attracting foreign investment.

After a 50 percent decline in foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2020 due to economic and political uncertainty, FDI levels were nearly restored in 2022. However, according to the National Statistical Committee, the influx of foreign direct investment into Kyrgyzstan decreased by 31.7 percent in the first nine months of 2023, amounting to USD 654.6 million. This decline can be attributed to several factors, including a lack of effective reforms and improvements in the ease of doing business, which would enhance Kyrgyzstan's attractiveness for investment. Furthermore, a significant drop in press freedom rankings in 2023 has contributed to the reduction in

⁴⁸ <https://kginfo.ru/v-kakih-stranah-bolshe-vsego-migriruyut-kyrgyzstanczev/?ysclid=logqj5knei806877433>.

investment. Additionally, investment from countries outside the CIS, particularly China and Türkiye, in manufacturing and mining industries has decreased.

The investment rates are expected to remain low, partly due to the Kyrgyz Government's nationalization of the Kumtor gold mine, bureaucratic hurdles, and frequent turnover among government officials. These factors continue to raise concerns about operational risks for foreign businesses and deter foreign investment.

SDG financing needs and priorities

Kyrgyzstan is at a critical point, needing a new, more ambitious approach to finance sustainable development. Despite progress, the long-relied-upon model, characterized by dependence on gold mining exports, remittances from migrant labor, and international aid, is insufficient for the country's sustainable development. The limitations of this model are more pronounced with additional pressures from the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, indicating the urgent need for a comprehensive overhaul of the financial paradigm to better meet sustainable development objectives.

International assessments have stressed the need to strategically overhaul its economic model. Despite managing growth through ad-hoc responses to market conditions, there is a recognized need for a cohesive, forward-looking financial strategy to sup-

port sustainable development, as highlighted by the World Bank's Systematic Country Diagnostic in 2018 and the UN's Development Finance Assessment (DFA). These reports stress the limitations of the current model and its underperformance relative to its potential. The urgency of this transformation is underscored by IMF estimations⁴⁹, which suggest significant financing gaps, particularly in infrastructure, health, and education, hindering the achievement of SDGs by 2048. The IMF identifies a financing gap of 27.5 percent of GDP, with road infrastructure, health, and education as the primary areas needing attention. This situation calls for immediate, high-level political and technical efforts to instigate a transformative shift in the country's development finance paradigm.

The financing scenario for sustainable development in Kyrgyzstan is characterized by opportunities and the necessity for structural reforms. The DFA provided a detailed breakdown of the country's key finance variables, totalling USD 15.637 billion in 2021. A notable aspect of Kyrgyzstan's financial landscape is its heavy reliance on remittances, constituting nearly 30 percent of GDP, exceeding the total state budget revenue of 29 percent of GDP. This significant dependency on remittances underscores the imperative for the country to diversify its financial sources and reduce vulnerability, aiming for a more sustainable and balanced economic structure conducive to long-term development.

⁴⁹ IMF SDG costing exercise 2019

1.5. SOCIAL CONTEXT

Kyrgyzstan's social context is multifaceted and marked by significant challenges. The country is struggling with persistent poverty issues, significantly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Two decades of developmental progress were dramatically reversed within two years, catapulting the poverty rate from 20.1 percent in 2019 to 33.3 percent in 2022, placing an additional 10 percent on the brink of poverty. Extreme poverty also surged to six percent in 2022 from a mere 0.5 percent in 2019. Without the remittances, poverty and extreme poverty rates would have soared to 43 percent and 18 percent, respectively, in 2022. Notably, urban poverty has steadily increased, rising by 0.7 percentage points in 2022. Poverty disproportionately affects children. The poverty rate among children aged 0-17 increased from 31.8 percent to a staggering 40.3 percent in 2022.

In December 2023, the UN vulnerability assessment revealed that 10 percent of Kyrgyz households were food insecure, while a substantial 56 percent were only marginally food secure. A significant two-thirds of the population resorted to coping strategies to meet essential needs, including borrowing money, spending savings, or reducing expenses for agriculture, health, and education. Such strategies, while immediate, have detrimental long-term impacts on both household well-being and broader developmental goals. This situation marked a worsening from 2020, when around 45 percent of the population consumed less than the daily adequate energy requirement of 2,100 kcal. Additionally, the minimum subsistence level in 2021 was 1.6 times higher than the national poverty line, essentially at USD 2.50, significantly diminishing purchasing power and further restricting access to nutritious food and resources for improved livelihoods. This precarious scenario places

a significant portion of the population in a vulnerable bracket, emphasizing the need for urgent and sustained interventions in food security and poverty alleviation.

The geographic distribution of poverty in Kyrgyzstan has shifted in recent years, with an increasing number of urban poor due to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on jobs and lack of agricultural assets to fall back on, leading to concentrated pockets of poverty. Migrants, often working in the informal sector or in unstable employment, are left without essential social protections, including healthcare, which became critically important during the pandemic. They also often lack access to basic social services and may experience heightened inequality, especially those who are low-skilled, women, and older workers. Post-pandemic trends indicate a significant movement of returned migrants to urban areas, attracted by the potential for more job opportunities, networks, and services, thereby intensifying rural-to-urban migration. This shift underlines the need for targeted support and inclusive policies to address the vulnerabilities of both rural and urban poor populations, particularly migrants, in the evolving economic landscape.

The National Multidimensional Poverty Index, annually measured by the National Statistics Committee, reveals significant levels of deprivation across five critical dimensions of well-being: monetary poverty, education, health, food security, and living conditions, assessed by 11 indicators. In 2022, a staggering 47.4 percent of the Kyrgyz population was considered multidimensionally poor, with the condition being even more prevalent among children, as 56.8 percent of them live in multidimensional poverty. These figures highlight the structural challenges in public service provision, alongside pervasive monetary and food poverty, posing serious

⁵⁰ See: <http://www.stat.kg/ru/news/v-2020-godu-kazhdyj-chetvertyj-zhitel-kyrgyzstana-prozhival-v-usloviyah-bednosti/>

threats to the nation's current and future well-being. Addressing these challenges is crucial to improving living standards for

every citizen, ensuring that no child is left behind, and mitigating the high inequalities prevalent across the country.

Social indicators at a glance

Human Development Index ranking (2024)	117 out of 193
Human Development Index value (2024)	0.701
Life expectancy – female (2021)	74.4
Life expectancy – male (2021)	65.8
Expected years of schooling - female (2021)	13.4
Expected years of school – male (2021)	13.0
National poverty rate (2022)	33.3 percent
Working poor at PPPUSD 3.20/day - percent of working population	13.7 percent
National multidimensional poverty rate (2022)	47.2 percent
Youth aged 15-29 not in education, employment or training (NEET)	20.5 percent
Gross National Income per capita (2021)	USD1410
Gini coefficient index (2020)	29.0
Human Capital Index (2022)	0.8

Source: UNDP, World Bank

Social protection

The coverage of social protection indicates that 41.7 percent of the population receives at least one form of social protection cash benefit, which is slightly lower than the global average of 47 percent. Additionally, a more significant portion, 73.6 percent, is covered by social protection healthcare programs, reflecting a relatively more extensive healthcare safety net compared to cash benefits.⁵¹ Nationwide, the adequacy of social protection benefit programs in Kyrgyzstan falls short of ensuring income security and satisfactory living conditions as per national benchmarks. This inadequacy stems from the significant gap between

the national poverty line and the minimum subsistence level (MSL), which includes both food and non-food items. Additionally, there are notable gaps in program design, especially for children and working-age individuals. Although the average pension size is 124 percent of the MSL, a substantial 36 percent of pensioners receive pensions below the MSL. Moreover, unemployment benefits are markedly low, offering only USD 3 per month. This discrepancy highlights the need for comprehensive reform in social protection schemes to better support income security and living standards across various demographics.⁵² In reality, recipients of social benefits often receive only 15-30 percent of the MSL. To bridge this gap, the govern-

⁵¹ ILO, 2021 World Social Protection Database <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/WSPDB.action?id=13>

⁵² Social fund of the Kyrgyz Republic (2021). data

ment has enacted three indexations over the past two years to adjust the size of social benefits. Consequently, the average monthly social benefits now equate to approximately 80 percent of the MSL. This measure indicates a governmental effort to enhance the adequacy of social benefits in relation to the cost of basic living necessities, aiming to improve the welfare and standard of living for beneficiaries.

The *Ui-buloogo komok* (UBK) is the primary social assistance benefit aimed specifically at reducing the risk of child poverty among low-income families with children. In 2022, the UBK amount was increased from 800 to 1,200 Kyrgyzstani Som (KGS) per child each month. Despite this recent enhancement, the benefit is still narrowly targeted at ultra-poor families—those with per capita income below the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) of KGS 1,000 (USD 12 approx.)—thus leaving out many children in merely poor households. Additionally, the benefit's value, constituting only 25 percent of the subsistence minimum for children, is insufficient to significantly impact child poverty, including its extreme forms. The processes for enrolling in UBK are notably complex, and its targeting mechanism is restrictive, often rationalized by the belief that receiving benefits might discourage adults from seeking employment and foster dependency. Nonetheless, given the national labor market and economy's prolonged struggle to generate adequate, quality jobs, the concern of inducing 'passivity' among working-age adults seems misplaced and not entirely pertinent to the situation in Kyrgyzstan. These issues point to a critical need for revising the assistance program to make it more inclusive and impactful, addressing the broader spectrum of poverty and ensuring a more effective support system for the vulnerable child population.

Since October 2022, the Social Fund initiated an increase in the base component of pensions, aiming for the minimum pension to reach 52 percent of the Minimum Subsistence Level (MSL) and the average pension to be about 123 percent of MSL. Now, citizens who are eligible for social protection benefits have the flexibility to apply based on their actual place of residence, rather than their registered location, enhancing accessibility for internal migrants. In Kyrgyzstan the demographic pressure on the working-age population is expected to stay relatively stable in the near term. However, the composition of this demographic burden is anticipated to evolve due to the unavoidable aging of the population.

Equally concerning is the limited coverage of the national social protection system, which fails to encompass all categories of vulnerable individuals. Specifically, among the urban poor and vulnerable – the bottom 40 percent of the population – only 2.3 percent receive the monthly child benefit for low-income families (UBK).⁵³ Over half of all poor and vulnerable urban households are not receiving any form of social transfers, remaining invisible to government targeting systems. Despite escalating unemployment and poverty rates, active labor market programs are scarce, representing just 0.9 percent of total government expenditure and aiding about 40,000 individuals. Legal obstacles further restrict self-employed individuals living below the poverty line from accessing these programs. Nonetheless, the government is taking initiatives to enhance Active Labor Market Programs.

Unpaid care work, important to the economy's sustenance, often remains unaccounted for and overlooked. If given a monetary value, women's unpaid labor could represent 10 to 39 percent of GDP. Recognizing

⁵³ *Ui-buloogo komok* chronically suffers from very limited coverage, low transfer value and targeting errors emerging both in the design and implementation stages. The UBK utilizes a hybrid targeting method, consisting of a categorical element (the presence of a child under the age of 16), a filter and a means-test. Such design comes with high administrative costs due to the capacity required to carry out individual assessments. Families also bear costs during the application process (e.g., collecting required documentation for verification), which in turn contribute to exclusion errors.

⁵⁴ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures#notes>

and valuing this contribution is essential to understanding the full economic landscape and promoting equitable economic policies⁵⁴. Approximately 36.7 percent of households were headed by women in 2017⁵⁵, highlighting the need for inclusive policies. The burden of unpaid care disproportionately affects rural women, limiting their access to both on- and off-farm employment opportunities. Addressing these challenges is essential for equitable economic development and social inclusion. The provision of productive employment opportunities is crucial to reduce household dependency on remittances and to accommodate the needs of the 14 percent of poor and vulnerable households that include at least one family member with disabilities.⁵⁶

Moreover, the health system's social benefits do not offer sufficient financial protection, leaving individuals and families vulnerable. Healthcare coverage is primarily regulated through the State-Guaranteed Benefits Programme (SGBP) and the Additional Drugs Package (ADP), with expanded services funded by mandatory health insurance contributions. However, while approximately 66 percent of the population contributing to the mandatory health insurance fund can access outpatient medicines at reduced prices and lower co-payments for inpatient care, a significant 34 percent – mainly comprising vulnerable groups – can only access the SGBP, hence they cannot benefit from subsidized outpatient medicines and reduced hospital care co-payments which are provided under the ADP. Overall, these gaps along with others result in high levels of out-of-pocket spending on healthcare, predominantly on medicines and medical products. In 2021, out-of-pocket spending on health accounted for 40.7 percent of current health expenditure, or approximately 2.2 percent of

GDP, with approximately 60 percent of out-of-pocket spending going towards medicines and medical products.^{57 58}

In light of the increase in the poverty rate to 33.2 percent, including urban poverty which is now at par with rural poverty levels for the first time in a decade, a reassessment of the predominantly rural-centric social benefits is necessary. A glaring gap exists in the urban setting, where only 2.3 percent of the urban poor and vulnerable receive the monthly child benefit (UBK), and over half of these urban households are devoid of any social transfers. This oversight is partly due to many belonging to the informal economy, earning just enough to disqualify from targeted social assistance programs, yet without stable income or access to contributory social protection schemes. The informal economy's prevalence, accounting for an estimated 70 percent of the working-age population, highlights the widespread lack of access to both non-contributory and contributory social protection, underscoring the need for systemic reform to expand coverage and inclusivity.

Early childhood development

Early childhood, up to the age of eight, is critical for the development of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical aspects. Achieving optimal development during these years necessitates a supportive environment enriched with stimulating experiences, interactions with attentive caregivers, access to learning materials, adequate nutrition, quality early childhood education, and a safe and protective setting. Educational coverage during these years also significantly varies with household income levels. Data indicates that 50 percent of households in the wealthiest quintile have access to ear-

⁵⁴ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures#notes>

⁵⁵ <https://stat.kg/ru/news/cifry-i-fakty-o-nas-zhenshiny-i-muzhchiny-v-kyrgyzstane/#:~:text=Эта%20разница%20становится%20еще%20более,хозяйств%20с%2097%20составляют%20женщины.>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Jakab M, Akkazieva B, Habicht J. (2018) Can people afford to pay for health care? New evidence on financial protection in Kyrgyzstan, Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, p.26-7 (<https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/329444/9789289053648-eng.pdf>).

⁵⁸ https://apps.who.int/nha/database/country_profile/Index/en – the country profile for Kyrgyzstan is the source for the OOP / GDP figures in this sentence.

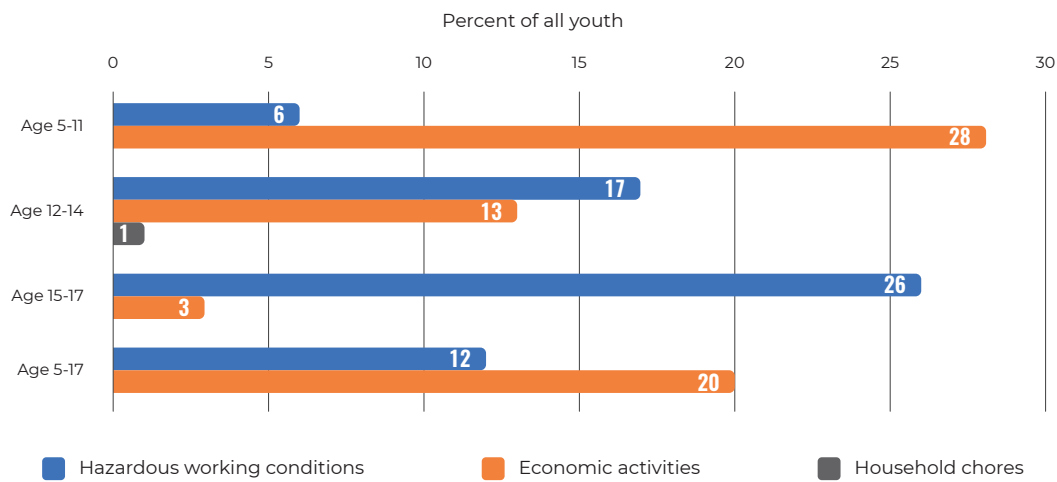
ly childhood education, compared to just 11.7 percent in the poorest quintile. Additionally, a pronounced disparity exists between urban and rural areas; only 17.5 percent of rural children have access to pre-school education compared to 34.4 percent of urban children.

Children in Kyrgyzstan face numerous risk factors that hinder their development, such as poverty, poor health, violence, abuse, exploitation—particularly those left behind by migrant parents—and inadequate educational opportunities. In 2020, the World Bank estimated that about 40 percent of future workforce productivity is already lost due to incomplete education and sub-optimal health conditions. Early childhood investments are crucial and cost-effective means to mitigate disparities, particularly for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Poor nutrition, coupled with insufficient quality education and

vocational training, can deprive many children of sustainable livelihood opportunities, perpetuating inequality and heightening risks of social and political instability and religious extremism.

According to the 2018 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 26.7 percent of children are engaged in child labour. The prevalence of child labour is higher among boys as compared to girls (33.6 percent vs 19.0 percent). Despite some progress, including the adoption of a policy package that established a national referral mechanism for victims of human trafficking, the adoption of the 2022-2025 Programme and Action Plan to combat trafficking in persons and the development of a new National Action Plan for 2020–2024 on the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor, Kyrgyzstan made only minimal advancements, in particular because it delayed passage of laws eliminating the worst forms of child labor.⁵⁹

Snapshot of child labour conditions



Source: UNICEF, MICS, 2018

⁵⁹ ILO (2019). See <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/kyrgyz-republic>.

Nutrition

Kyrgyzstan is struggling with a triple burden of malnutrition, marked by persistent levels of stunting and anemia among children and women of reproductive age, despite significant strides in reducing stunting since 1990. Poor dietary habits, characterized by high consumption of starchy staples and a rising intake of processed, energy-dense foods rich in fats, sugars, and salts, are prevalent and contribute to undernutrition, malnutrition, and obesity. As of 2020, at least 38 percent of the population could not afford a nutritious diet, a situation exacerbated by a 34 percent rise in the cost of a nutrient-adequate diet by 2022, likely worsening due to inflation. Current data indicates that 12 percent of children under five years are stunted, with higher rates in rural and impoverished households, affecting boys more than girls. Additionally, anemia affects 38.3 percent of children under five, 36.2 percent of women of reproductive age, and 39.8 percent of pregnant women. The country also faces rising overweight and obesity rates among both genders, particularly in women, where it affects about 20 percent of adolescent girls, nearly 45 percent of non-pregnant women aged 15-49, and over 75 percent of women aged 45-49. Addressing these nutritional challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including improving dietary habits, enhancing access to nutritious foods, and strengthening health and nutrition interventions.

The most recent National Integrated Micro-nutrient Anthropometric Survey (NIMAS) conducted in 2022 indicates a reduction in child stunting rates from 11 percent in 2021 to 7 percent for children aged 6-59 months. Despite this progress, stunting remains a medium public health concern for specific sub-groups, including children with low birth weight, those living in Batken, and children from the lowest wealth quintile or house-

holds with inadequate sanitation or unsafe drinking water. Wasting and underweight in children are infrequent, with a prevalence of less than 1 percent. Overweight and obesity in young children are of “medium” public health significance. Anemia is moderate among non-pregnant women at 25 percent and milder among children aged 5-9 years and adolescent girls. Regionally, over 30 percent of children in Talas, Issyk Kul, and Naryn are affected by anemia. Vitamin A deficiency in young children is moderate at 15 percent, while folate deficiency is significantly high among adolescent girls and non-pregnant women, affecting over 83 percent in both groups. These findings underscore the need for targeted nutritional interventions and health programs, especially for vulnerable sub-groups and regions with higher prevalence rates.

Education

The education sector has undergone several reforms with mixed outcomes. While there has been an increase in teacher salaries and a surge in pre-primary education enrollment to around 90 percent, the gross enrollment ratio at the pre-primary level remains relatively low at 40 percent. Despite the state budget's substantial increase in education funding—18-fold since 2001, amounting to KGS 54 billion in 2022—the quality of education continues to be a significant concern. Foundational reading and numeracy skills are lacking in less than half of the children attending Grade 3. Moreover, children with disabilities are particularly disadvantaged, often falling behind in fundamental learning skills and facing limited access to mainstream educational facilities. Between 40 to 60 percent of children up to 14 years old exhibit basic functional difficulties in learning, hindering their ability to acquire essential reading skills⁶⁰, pointing to a need for targeted support and inclusive education strategies.

⁶⁰ UNESCO (2020). Global Education Monitoring Report 2017-2019

⁶¹ UNESCO (2020). ICT Teacher Readiness Report.

As of 2023, the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to influence the quality and accessibility of education⁶¹. Although recovery efforts have been made, the pandemic's impact lingers, especially in under-resourced areas. While there has been progress in integrating technology in education and improving digital literacy among students and teachers, gaps remain. Infrastructure enhancements and teacher training in ICT have been prioritized, yet disparities persist in rural and remote areas where digital resources are still limited. The Ministry of Education and Science notes improved efforts in training educators for online teaching, but the need for comprehensive support for students, particularly in self-directed learning, remains critical. Gender disparities have also been addressed, with initiatives aimed at reducing the burden of household chores on girls to ensure equal learning opportunities. Despite these efforts, the satisfaction levels with remote learning vary, with many parents and students expecting further improvements in the quality and effectiveness of online education. The focus has shifted to building a more resilient education system that can better withstand future disruptions and offer equitable, quality learning experiences for all.

As the country prepares for participation in PISA-2025, the focus is increasingly on enhancing teacher capacity, integrating soft and transversal skills into the curriculum, and ensuring quality learning and teaching materials for all. Enhancing teacher competencies, particularly in ICT, along with ongoing professional development, remains crucial and demands further attention and investment. At the professional education level, priorities include quality assurance and international recognition, aiming to elevate the country's standing in international rankings and increase the employability of students and graduates. Efforts are being made to align education standards with global benchmarks and to foster an environment of continuous improvement and innovation in teaching methodologies and curriculum development.

The Growing influence of religion is a contributing factor, in particular in some re-

gions, that an increasing number of girls are dropping out of school prematurely. This trend reflects broader societal shifts and poses challenges to gender equality and empowerment, often resulting in early marriages, limiting girls' future opportunities and contributing to a cycle of poverty and reduced agency. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including community engagement, education reform, and the promotion of gender equality.

On 4 May 2021, Kyrgyzstan launched the "Education Development Programme for 2021-2040" along with its initial Action Plan for 2021-2023, focusing on three primary areas: First, it aims to enhance equitable access to education for all, emphasizing increased coverage, inclusive education, and fostering safe and effective learning environments. Second, it seeks to promote quality learning by improving education content, advancing digitalization, continuing professional development for educators, assessing learning outcomes, and enhancing teaching and learning materials. Third, it strives for more effective education governance and financing, reinforcing sector reforms, increasing the autonomy of educational organizations, streamlining accreditation and licensing, and improving strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation, and the Education Management Information System (EMIS). This comprehensive approach aims to uplift the education sector by ensuring inclusivity, quality, and efficient governance.

In September 2022, a Kyrgyz delegation led by the President and accompanied by the Minister of Education and Science took part in the UN Transforming Education Summit in New York, where Kyrgyzstan outlined its education commitments up to 2030. These commitments were based on national consultations addressing key educational challenges such as inclusive education, life skills development, teacher competencies, digital learning, and adequate financing. Following up, at the SDG Summit in September 2023, the President emphasized the importance of transforming the education system and adopting green economy principles as essential strategies for reducing poverty.

1.6. ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

Persistent geophysical and human-induced factors continue to exacerbate environmental degradation in Kyrgyzstan. The country ranks 126th out of 180 in the 2022 Environmental Performance Index, indicating major challenges in environmental governance. The current system, characterized by disjointed and often contradictory environmental programs, largely caters to donor priorities rather than national needs, with little support from the national budget.

Environmental policies in Kyrgyzstan predominantly rely on punitive measures such as taxes and fines, rather than incentives for sustainable practices. Decision-making is generally not rooted in sound science or expert advice, further hindered by outdated, incomplete, or inaccurate environmental data due to inadequate monitoring and infrastructure. This situation underscores the urgent need for a more coordinated, science-based approach to environmental governance, emphasizing positive incentives and improved data management to better address the country's environmental challenges.⁶²

Established in 2021, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Technical Supervision was entrusted with comprehensive mandates for policy-setting, implementation, and oversight. In 2023, the Ministry underwent significant turbulence due to corruption allegations involving the distribution of the National Nature Fund's resources, leading to high-profile detentions, staff changes, and restructuring.

Kyrgyzstan's second Environmental Performance Review (EPR) was conducted and published in 2009. A request for a third EPR was made in 2015 by the State Agency on Environmental Protection and Forestry, but it was postponed to 2016. The process

resumed only in March 2021, with a review mission conducted in May 2022, leading to the adoption of the third EPR at the 28th session of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy in November 2023. Its publication is expected in 2024.⁶³

The government is urged to intensify its efforts under the Aarhus Convention, enhancing access to environmental information through regular National State of the Environmental Reports and automated data platforms, strengthening public participation procedures, and increasing judiciary and law enforcement awareness of the Convention's obligations. Additionally, robust Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) systems are necessary for supporting sustainable development goals and legitimizing planning and decision-making processes. While Kyrgyzstan is a party to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, it has yet to ratify the SEA Protocol and needs to finalize EIA and SEA legislation.

Kyrgyzstan also focuses on enhancing its National Disaster Risk Reduction strategic documents, including action plans addressing technological and industrial accident risks under the Industrial Accidents Convention. This includes managing chemical installations and tailing management facilities, considering natural and technological hazards and transboundary cooperation.

Climate change

Kyrgyzstan, despite its low greenhouse gas emissions, is the third most vulnerable country to climate change in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. This vulnerability largely stems from its mountainous terrain with glaciers and a significant agricultural

⁶² UNDP BIOFIN (2019). Environmental Finance Policy and Institutional Review in the Kyrgyz Republic

⁶³ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/CEP-28_decisions_as_adopted_03.11.2023.pdf.

sector. Climate change exacerbates risks in key areas like water access, energy, agriculture, infrastructure, and tourism, all of which impact mountain ecosystems and dependent communities.⁶⁴

Over the past 12 years, climate-induced natural disasters have increased 1.5 times, with significant economic and societal impacts. For instance, in 2023, mudflows and floods accounted for 31.7 percent of all emergencies, particularly in regions like Batken, Jalal-Abad, Osh, and Talas. Meteorological hazards contribute to 11 percent of all emergencies, often triggering other hazardous processes. The country has experienced a significant rise in average annual air temperature and annual precipitation. These climatic shifts have adverse health effects, exacerbating nutritional deficiencies, heat-related illnesses, and the spread of infectious diseases, alongside negative impacts on mental health⁶⁵.

2023 was recorded as the warmest year ever globally, primarily due to human-induced climate change, further intensified by the natural El Niño weather phenomenon. The EU's climate service reports that the average temperature last year was approximately 1.48°C higher than pre-industrial levels, a period before significant fossil fuel combustion began. Projected climate trends indicate that Kyrgyzstan will continue to experience warming rates significantly above the global average. Extreme temperatures, potentially exceeding 40°C, are expected to become more common in its low-lying and densely populated regions. Mountain glaciers are recognized as key indicators for climate change and as important water storages on a seasonal, mid-term and long-term time scale⁶⁶. The glaciers melting poses a significant concern for Kyrgyzstan, where over 8,000 glaciers are essential sources of freshwater for the country and the region's major rivers⁶⁷.

The government's allocation of resources for climate activities, policy development, and legislative frameworks is limited, continuing a trend of environmental subsidies that negatively impacts environmental sustainability and hinders green economic growth. There has been a notable increase in net greenhouse gas emissions from 2007-2017. The country's delayed ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2020 signals the low prioritization of climate issues among policymakers. Furthermore, the frequent restructuring of climate-related agencies, with four changes in 2021-2022 alone, indicates instability in climate governance.

The legislative and financial strategies for climate response and mitigation have not adequately addressed the needs of vulnerable groups, including women, pensioners, persons with disabilities, youth, children, and migrants. The existing gap in data and analysis related to gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) in climate change underscores the need for inclusive and comprehensive climate policies that consider the diverse impacts on all community segments⁶⁸.

In 2015, the government committed to its intended nationally determined contribution (INDC), setting forth adaptation and mitigation goals. The initial targets included a reduction in Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) by up to 13.8 percent by 2030 compared to a business-as-usual scenario, and up to 31 percent with international support. By 2021, Kyrgyzstan elevated its ambitions, presenting a revised NDC with specific mitigation and adaptation targets and a financial implementation plan. It committed to reduce GHG emissions by 16.63 percent unconditionally by 2025, and by 36.61 percent with international aid. The updated NDC incorporates strategies for promoting gender equality and better safeguarding vulnerable populations, such as youth, individuals with

⁶⁴ Based on: 'Climate Investment Programme. Operational Framework for Managing and Accessing Climate Finance in the Kyrgyz Republic', 2018.

⁶⁵ World Bank and Asian Development Bank (2021). Climate Risk Profile: Kyrgyz Republic.

⁶⁶ Hagg et al., 2013

⁶⁷ <https://www.undp.org/kyrgyzstan/blog/glaciers-kyrgyzstan-how-they-are-disappearing>

⁶⁸ UN Women 'Gender Analysis of Climate Change Policy and Actions in Kyrgyz Republic', 2021

limited mobility, and those below the poverty line. Moreover, the adaptation component was strengthened, introducing 15 specific adaptation actions across six sectors highly susceptible to climate change impacts. In 2023, at COP 28, Kyrgyzstan committed to the carbon neutrality by 2050.

Mountain Agenda

In recent years, the Government of Kyrgyzstan has inspired international efforts as an advocate for sustainable development of mountainous regions on a global scale. The United Nations General Assembly declared 2022 as International Year of Mountains, following a proposal from the Government of Kyrgyzstan, with 94 governments co-sponsoring the initiative. In November 2022, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a Resolution on sustainable mountain development, which designated 2023–2027 as the “Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions,” also proposed by the Government of Kyrgyzstan. This Resolution garnered the co-sponsorship of 110 governments. The Kyrgyz Government subsequently prepared the “Five-Year Action Plan on Mountain Development”, which Kyrgyzstan presented at the margins of the 2023 High-level Political Forum in July 2023, and which was further spelled out through national consultations with relevant stakeholders including the donor community, leading to the adoption of a Roadmap underpinning the Action Plan by the Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers in December 2023.

UNFCCC COP 28

At COP28, the Kyrgyz delegation, led by President Sadyr Japarov, emphasized the importance of addressing the impact of climate change on mountains. He called for global support, especially from mountainous countries, for initiatives focused on

mountain-specific climate challenges to boost global climate resilience. Kyrgyzstan’s advocacy at COP28 was instrumental in integrating an Expert Dialogue on Mountains and Climate Change into the agenda of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA)’s Sixtieth Session in June 2024 in Bonn.

The Government has taken significant steps in the global climate action arena by becoming a signatory to several key declarations. These include the Coalition of a High Ambition Multi-Level Partnership for Climate Action⁶⁹, UAE COP28 Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Sustainable Food Systems, and Climate Action⁷⁰, COP28 Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery, and Peace⁷¹, UAE COP28 Declaration on Climate and Health⁷². Additionally, there is a commitment to renewable energy and energy efficiency. While some declarations with substantial potential for Kyrgyzstan were not signed, such as the COP28 Joint Statement on Climate, Nature, and People, and the Gender-Responsive Just Transitions and Climate Partnerships, they represent important areas for future engagement and development.

Biodiversity and ecosystems

Kyrgyzstan is rich in biodiversity, with more than 50,000 species of living organisms across 26 ecosystem classes and 160 landscape types. The Red Book of Kyrgyzstan lists 57 species of birds, 23 mammal, 2 amphibians, 8 reptiles, 7 species of fish, 18 arthropods, 83 higher plant species and 4 mushrooms. Some species have disappeared, while others are endangered, all as a result of human activity, including culturally significant ones like the snow leopard. Less than 40 percent of the country’s biodiversity areas are officially protected, yet over 90 percent of these areas are under high to medium threat levels⁷³. Ecosystem functions are increasingly

⁶⁹ <https://www.cop28.com/en/cop28-uae-coalition-for-high-ambition-multilevel-partnerships-for-climate-action>

⁷⁰ <https://www.cop28.com/en/food-and-agriculture>

⁷¹ <https://www.cop28.com/en/cop28-declaration-on-climate-relief-recovery-and-peace>

⁷² <https://www.cop28.com/en/cop28-uae-declaration-on-climate-and-health>

⁷³ https://www.ibat-alliance.org/country_profiles/KGZ

stressed due to climate change and human activities, leading to fragmented habitats and diminished biodiversity. Mountain ecosystems, critical in the region, are especially vulnerable, affecting glaciers, snow, and water resources vital for the country.

The country's agricultural land is predominantly meadows and pastures (48 percent), with a smaller portion allocated to arable land (7 percent) and an even smaller percentage to forestland (3 percent). Despite their limited area, forests significantly contribute to water regulation, soil conservation, and the support of dependent communities. The Government continued the Zhashyl Muras campaign throughout 2023. However, the reduction in forest areas is concerning as they harbor at least half of the nation's species diversity and are integral for maintaining an environmental balance. They reinforce slopes, regulate water flow, and improve air quality. Forests also serve recreational, aesthetic, cognitive, and educational purposes and are a source of valuable non-timber forest products such as mushrooms, berries, and nuts.

The absence of innovative and eco-friendly economic policies and appropriate pricing mechanisms for natural resource use has led to excessive exploitation and further habitat degradation. Over half of the population relies on meadow ecosystems for livelihood, with an additional 18 percent being dependent on forest ecosystems. This high reliance on natural resources highlights the urgent need for sustainable management practices. Efforts to improve forest policy and management have led to the development of guidance for Forest Policy and Management Support Information Systems (FPMSIS), enhancing the capacity of policymakers and forest service specialists. This initiative aims to bolster countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe in crafting robust forest information systems tailored to their specific needs.

The country has made significant progress in biodiversity conservation through the enactment of regulations aimed at establishing ecological corridors and micro-reserves to protect natural migration routes and culturally important areas. However, the effective implementation of these measures is hampered by the lack of comprehensive methodologies. Land degradation is a growing concern, with 20 percent of the land showing declining or stressed productivity. Efforts are underway to improve grassland, forest, and agricultural land management, particularly focusing on sustainable pastureland practices through rotation systems and enhanced infrastructure.

Despite these efforts, substantial gaps in biodiversity and ecosystem management persist, largely due to limited natural capital accounting capabilities. The lack of formal mechanisms for ecosystem health monitoring, inadequate use of remote sensing technologies, and insufficient policy implementation at the landscape scale further exacerbate biodiversity and land pressures. The improvement of the biodiversity status is hindered by a lack of funding, equipment, and infrastructure, underscoring the need for increased resources and commitment to environmental sustainability.

Air pollution

Air pollution has become a significant concern in recent years, seriously affecting health, the environment, and society. Official data indicates a nearly 65 percent increase in emissions from stationary sources between 2010 and 2020. In Bishkek, the country's capital, air pollution exceeds WHO air quality guidelines by up to 30 times in winter⁷⁴. Annual mean PM_{2.5} concentrations are around 30 micrograms per cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), with a rise to 80 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ on average in winter, and even up to 150 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in one area north of the city.⁷⁵ In contrast, the WHO recommends⁷⁶ limiting annual mean

⁷⁴ Joint ADB, GIZ and UN Policy Brief "Tackling Air Pollution in Bishkek: A Road Map to Cleaner Air

⁷⁵ UNDP and UNEP. 2022. Air Quality in Bishkek: Assessment of Emission Sources and Road Map for Supporting Air Quality Management.

⁷⁶ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240034228>

exposure to $5 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.⁷⁷ Data is lacking for other cities in the country, but geoclimatic conditions and reliance on coal for heating suggest these cities also face unsafe pollution levels.

Air pollution generates more than USD 20 million in annual economic losses from premature death and ill-health in Bishkek, plus losses from non-health effects. In the country as a whole, air pollution causes more deaths and ill-health than all other environmental risk factors combined.⁷⁸ These impacts concentrate on the elderly and children in the first days of life as air pollution raises risks of premature birth. The resulting burden falls disproportionately on women as they are most often responsible for care taking. In Bishkek, the UN analysis estimated that PM_{2.5} caused around 112 deaths over 12 months from July 2021 to June 2022. The UN report also estimated that PM_{2.5} pollution caused the loss of 3,568 disability-adjusted life years over this 1-year period, translating in an economic loss of USD 20.8 million.⁷⁹ Besides health impacts, air pollution also limits the attractiveness of Bishkek for tourists and investors; and NO_x and SO₂ emissions generate acid particles and droplets which cause vehicles, buildings, and infrastructure to age prematurely.⁸⁰

The 2022-2023, UN and World Bank analyses have found that residential heating accounts for approximately half of the annual PM_{2.5} emissions, with this share increasing significantly during winter. Transport, particularly diesel trucks and minibuses, contributes about a third to annual emissions. Other sources include industrial activities, emissions from the Combined Heat and Power Plant (CHP) coal power plant and, district heating coal boilers, as well as solid waste burning and dust. However, the impact of these emissions on air quality varies. Emissions dispersed from high stacks, like

those from the coal power plant CHP, have a lesser effect on ground-level concentrations compared to emissions released near the ground, such as those from domestic coal heating and diesel vehicles. Compounding the issue, winter often brings a temperature inversion layer that traps pollutants near the ground.

Without proactive intervention, pollution levels are projected to escalate significantly. Under a 'business as usual' scenario, key pollutant emissions will substantially increase by 2040. A detailed emissions inventory for Bishkek reveals a concerning trend in air pollutant volumes from various sources. PM_{2.5} emissions are expected to surge by 60 percent, mainly due to residential combustion. NO_x emissions might rise by 63 percent, predominantly from increased transport emissions, particularly petrol-powered vehicles. Additionally, SO₂ emissions are anticipated to grow by 50 percent, with contributions from combined heat and power sources. These projections highlight the urgent need for effective pollution mitigation strategies to avert further environmental and public health deterioration.⁸¹ In February 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted a Plan of Priority Action for Air Quality Improvement in Bishkek in 2024-2025. Recently some functions within the air quality management mandate were also transferred from the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision to Bishkek Mayor's Office. An interagency emergency government commission on air quality has also been active throughout 2023.

Addressing air pollution requires an integrated approach, involving urban planning, promotion of alternative heating technologies, and capacity building among state institutions. As air pollution and climate change are interconnected, strategies should include transitioning to clean energy sources, espe-

⁷⁷ WHO. 2021. WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines. Geneva.

⁷⁸ Air pollution causes 1.6 times more deaths and 1.9 more losses of disability-adjusted life years than non-optimal temperatures, unsafe water, and other environmental risks combined. See Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. 2020. Global Burden of Disease Study 2019 Results. Seattle.

⁷⁹ UNICEF. 2023. Health and Social Impacts of Air Pollution on Women and Children in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Bishkek.

⁸⁰ C. Eusébio et al. 2021. The Impact of Air Quality on Tourism: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Tourism Futures* 7(1).

⁸¹ UNDP-UNEP "Air quality in Bishkek. Assessment of emission sources and road map for supporting air quality management", October 2022

cially in residential heating. This could involve improving energy efficiency in buildings and transitioning to cleaner technologies like large heat pumps. Such measures not only address air quality but also contribute to climate change mitigation by reducing fossil fuel use and CO₂ emissions. Civil society's role in tracking air quality and advocating for transparent planning is vital, but it needs to be matched by institutional capacity and resources. Investing in climate action can yield immediate benefits through improved air quality and health sector savings, as well as co-benefits for other sectors.

Water

With summits surpassing 4,500 meters and home to over 8,000 glaciers, the majority of Kyrgyzstan's water resources originate from the Tien Shan Mountain ranges. These mountains serve as crucial temporary water storage, distributing flow evenly throughout the year and supporting irrigation and hydropower not only in Kyrgyzstan but across Central Asia, including the Aral Sea basin. Kyrgyzstan is unique in Central Asia for almost exclusively generating its water resources within national boundaries, making water one of its most critical natural assets. The country's water volume stands at approximately 2,458 km³, of which 650 km³ is contained in glaciers. Currently, Kyrgyzstan utilizes around 10 to 25 percent of its water resources, with the actual renewable water resources per inhabitant estimated at 3,578 m³ in 2020, down from 4,379 m³ in 2011.

Water is predominantly used for irrigation and agriculture, accounting for over 94 percent of total usage. Around 3.7 percent serves domestic and drinking needs, with the remainder allocated to production and miscellaneous requirements. Despite 94 percent of the population having access to clean drinking water, only 31.4 percent rely on piped water, and about 6 percent depend on untreated sources like springs and rivers. The country faces significant wastewater challenges, with only 31.5 percent of the population connected to sewage systems, leading to widespread environmental pollution.

Irrigation infrastructure, largely outdated and in disrepair, results in water losses ranging from 25-40 percent. Despite the critical need for modernization, the irrigation sector suffers from chronic underfunding, as water supply tariffs are significantly below the production costs – 7-8 times. Water management is predominantly focused on irrigation, which increasingly conflicts with the demand for hydropower due to agricultural expansion, population growth, and rising energy needs. These internal challenges are compounded by the implications for downstream countries reliant on Kyrgyzstan's water flows.

Participating in the second monitoring of SDG indicator 6.5.2, Kyrgyzstan reported that, as of 2020, only 29.9 percent of its transboundary river and lake basins area was governed by operational agreements or arrangements for water cooperation. Notably, there are no such arrangements covering transboundary aquifers. While there has been an improvement in the availability of data on transboundary groundwater, the country recognizes the need for more comprehensive efforts to improve understanding and establish cooperative management of shared aquifers.

Waste management

Kyrgyzstan confronts with inadequate waste recycling and reuse systems. Out of 406 landfill sites in 2018, only 107 were officially sanctioned. Most of these landfills are unsanitary and cause uncontrolled environmental pollution. The lack of fencing around many landfills leads to the spread of contamination and potential infectious diseases. The common practice of covering waste with soil, leading to anaerobic decomposition, significantly contributes to air and soil pollution, affecting not just nearby areas but also extending to districts close to Bishkek. Additionally, the drainage and seepage of landfill leachate present serious threats to both surface and groundwater sources, with these risks largely unmitigated in current landfills.

In 2019, only 67.1 percent of Kyrgyz households utilized organized waste collection services, while the remainder resorted to burning or burying their waste. In urban areas, plastic comprises approximately 21 percent of landfill waste, and about 8 percent in rural areas. This plastic waste is either incinerated, leading to harmful emissions, or left to decompose, posing long-term environmental risks. A significant legislative step towards environmental protection is the prohibition of the production, sale, and free distribution of plastic film bags and plastic products in Kyrgyzstan effective from January 2027. Furthermore, in specially protected natural areas, a ban on the production of plastic products and bags, except for certain exceptions like biodegradable materials and export items, started from January 2024. These regulations aim to reduce the detrimental environmental impact associated with plastic waste.

According to a recent UNITAR study developed with support from UNEP, the electronic waste collection and recycling sector in Kyrgyzstan is currently undeveloped, with only a few individual companies that collect and dismantle e-waste and then transfer it for recycling. The country faces various challenges in the field of e-waste collection and recycling, including the lack of specific legislative requirements for e-waste management, the lack of developed infrastructure for collection of e-waste from the population and for e-waste recycling technologies, environmental and health hazards associated with the e-waste recycling informal sector, the lack of support measures for e-waste collection and recycling enterprises, the low level of public awareness of the importance of separate collection and recycling of e-waste, and the lack of a system of collection and processing of statistical data on e-waste collection and recycling, which further complicates the process of monitoring and control of this activity. According to UNITAR data, the annual growth of e-waste generation will be approximately 500 tons and will reach almost 26 kt per annum by 2050, more than double that of 2019, which was estimated in a 2021 study at 10 kilotons (kt) per year, or 1.5 kilograms (kg) per per-

son per year. This emphasizes the importance of taking decisive measures to improve e-waste management in Kyrgyzstan to reduce the negative impact on the health and environment and effectively use the resource potential of e-waste.

Industrial waste in Kyrgyzstan, a significant source of pollution, includes hazardous materials such as radionuclides, heavy metals, and toxic substances. A critical step towards mitigating this issue is the implementation of the Strategic Masterplan for the remediation of uranium legacy sites in Central Asia, supported by a €23 million grant from the Environmental Remediation Account for Central Asia (ERA), managed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). This funding is pivotal in stabilizing and securing over 2 million cubic meters of radioactive tailings along the Mailuu-Suu River, with plans to relocate approximately 350 thousand cubic meters of tailings to safer locations. This initiative is crucial in preventing the spread of toxic material into the river system and the densely populated Fergana Valley. Additionally, the country grapples with the storage and processing of industrial waste, as enterprises typically store it on-site due to inadequate infrastructure. Over 5.4 thousand tons of obsolete and POP pesticides still reside in the country, posing risks from burial sites, warehouses, and contaminated soil. Sites in Kyrgyz Republic where pesticides were disposed in the past fall into two types: major and smaller disposal sites. The major disposal 'polygons' are sites where pure POPs pesticides (mostly DDT but also containing technical grade Hexachlorocyclohexane HCH) are buried at depths of 3-4m below the ground. At the second category of sites, smaller amounts of pesticides and POPs wastes may be found in much more high-risk situations with exposure pathways to populations, as well as to surface and groundwater.

Supported by the GEF, a five-year project is being implemented to build National and regional capacity for the Environmentally Sound Management of hazardous waste including DDT and other POPs in line with the

requirements of the Basel and Stockholm conventions. The regional project (that is also being implemented in Tajikistan) started in 2020 with feasibility studies on disposal technology options and a supporting programme of enabling and capacity building activities. In Kyrgyzstan, the project primarily focuses on risk reduction at the major burial site of concern Suzak A in the Jalalabad Oblast. The project is being implemented in close cooperation with the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision.⁸² Despite available data on waste generation and management, the quality and analysis are hindered by the lack of an integrated waste monitoring concept in national legislation, highlighting the need for improved waste management strategies and data reliability.

Numerous tailings management facilities containing substantial mining waste present significant environmental risks. A failure of these facilities could lead to catastrophic water pollution, threatening water secu-

rity both domestically and in neighboring countries through transboundary rivers. The country's climatic and geographic conditions further exacerbate these risks. Recognizing the potential for environmental disasters, the government has actively engaged in enhancing its capacity to manage technological and industrial accident risks. This includes strengthening dialogue and cooperation with neighboring states, particularly around the transboundary Syr Darya River Basin, and harmonizing national policies and legislation with the standards of the UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents. Key efforts include improving disaster risk understanding and conducting an inventory and mapping of the associated disaster risks in a transboundary context. Despite these strides, Kyrgyzstan has yet to accede to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, a step that would further bolster its capabilities in preventing, preparing for, and responding to industrial accidents.

⁸² UNEP GEF Project Demonstration of non-thermal treatment of DDT wastes in Central Asia (Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan (GEF ID 9421)

2. LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Poor rural households with high dependency ratio

Poor rural households and smallholder farmers in Kyrgyzstan face substantial inter-sectional deprivation. Although agriculture contributed a mere 16 percent to the GDP in 2022, it remains a vital source of employment, income, and food security, engaging around 20 percent of the workforce. The burden is particularly heavy in the southern provinces, where access to land is limited. Households with a high dependency ratio, about 28 percent of which are impoverished and a third are led by women, are acutely vulnerable to climate-related shocks due to inadequate services and economic opportunities. Securing a nutrient-adequate diet has become a challenge, with the cost rising by 34 percent from KGS 294 (USD 3.79) in 2020 to KGS 394 (USD 4.69) in 2023 per household per day. This surge in food prices is uniform across all seven regions, including Bishkek and Osh cities. The affordability of a nutritious diet varies, from KGS 340 (USD 4.05) in Issyk Kul to KGS 431 (USD 5.13) in Batken, with Bishkek city exceeding the average at KGS 417 (USD 4.97). In 2022, 38 percent of the population could not afford a nutrient-adequate diet, and with a 34 percent cost increase in 2022, affordability has likely worsened due to inflation. Costs are higher for households with adolescent girls and pregnant or breastfeeding women, highlighting their economic and nutritional vulnerabilities. An important factor affecting the poverty rate is the age of the household head. The largest share of the poor in 2022 was in households headed by persons aged 35-45 years (38.1 percent), and in households headed by persons aged 55-59 years old,

the poverty rate was 16.7 percent. The level of education of the head of the household is also a factor affecting the poverty rate. Among households headed by persons with higher education, 81.7 percent are non-poor, while among households headed by persons with primary education, 30.5 percent are categorized as poor⁸³. Families without a breadwinner or unable to meet essential needs become dependent on social protection systems, which are currently overstretched. In rural areas, healthcare facilities are under-resourced and facing severe health workforce challenges in terms of both skill mix and distribution, with negative impacts on key primary health care (PHC) performance indicators such as immunization rates. This ultimately forces residents to seek medical care in urban centers, incurring additional time and costs. This situation underscores the pressing need for equitable resource distribution and stronger social support networks in Kyrgyzstan.

Rural women and poor female headed households

The significant intersectional vulnerability of rural women is recognized nationally, prompting the prioritization of their economic activities in the national gender agenda. Unpaid care duties limit these women's access to employment opportunities. In 2022, only 41 percent of rural women were employed compared to 72 percent of rural men, with the lowest rates in Naryn (24.8 percent) and Batken (26.7 percent). Employed women are predominantly in lower-paid sectors, earning 75 percent of men's salaries. This disparity is critical, given that 38.9 percent of households are wom-

⁸³ Standard of Living of the Population of the Kyrgyz Republic 2018-2022

en-led, with 18 percent of these families experiencing food insecurity. Additionally, only 43 percent of women of reproductive age meet the minimum diet diversity. Rural women face unequal access to productive assets, including land and financial capital, and often lack technical agricultural skills, limiting their output. They work longer hours than men, both paid and unpaid, with rural women dedicating significantly more time to domestic duties. Women's economic participation is low at 48.2 percent compared to 75.7 percent for men, with a wage gap of 24.5 percent in 2022. In terms of representation, only 39.2 percent of civil servants and 24.3 percent in political and special posts are women. They also rely more on social assistance, with 52 percent of social benefit recipients being women. Rural women, especially those with disabilities, face compounded discrimination, impacting their access to various services. In the informal sector, particularly agriculture, rural women's lack of contributions to health and pension funds leads to financial insecurity and health disparities. Additionally, access to safe abortion services is limited for those unable to afford private care, with only 25-28 percent of public facilities providing such services compared to 68-85 percent in private ones, exacerbating inequalities.

Children and adolescents

The 2022 Integrated Household Survey revealed that 40.3 percent of children aged 0-17 live in poverty, with 8 percent experiencing extreme poverty⁸⁴. In rural areas, the child poverty rate stands at 37.8 percent, which is 7.6 percentage points lower than in urban areas. Notably, the poverty rate among children in impoverished households surpasses the general population's poverty rate. Children make up 38 percent of Kyrgyzstan's population, every second child (58 percent) lacking sufficient nutrition, health, education, WASH services, and protection from violence. The number of children benefiting

from the poverty-targeted *Ui bulogo komok* (UBK) benefit is decreasing despite growing child poverty. School-aged children, over a fifth of the population, face challenges like food insecurity and unequal access to health and education services, impacting the country's future productivity. Violence, child labor, early marriage, and poor mental health and wellbeing are prevalent among children and adolescents. Immunization coverage remains high but was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, though recovery is ongoing. The national response includes developing new immunization strategies to improve coverage and address post-pandemic challenges. In 2019, the Kyrgyz government ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities CRPD⁸⁵ and adopted a program to develop inclusive education. Over 33,000 children with disabilities and up to 3,500 children with special needs are enrolled in 35 boarding schools across the country. Children with disabilities face difficulties accessing health and education services and are often discriminated against. Reliable data is scarce, with estimates suggesting 8.7 percent of children aged 5-17 years have functional difficulty. More than half of the children lack adequate health, nutrition, and protection, with many not attaining basic literacy and comprehension skills⁸⁶.

Urban and peri-urban poor households

Urban and peri-urban poor households have generally been overlooked by government-targeted programs. Over the last 15 years, the disparity between rural and urban poverty rates has decreased from a 21-percentage point gap in 2006 to none in 2021, indicating a need to also focus on urban poverty. In 2022, the poverty rate in urban areas was slightly higher at 34 percent compared to 32.6 percent in rural areas. Similarly, food security and nutrition are more critical issues in urban settings, with undernutrition rates at 48.2 percent versus

⁸⁴ Standard of Living of the Population of the Kyrgyz Republic 2018-2022

⁸⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

⁸⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/reports/situation-analysis-children-and-adolescents-disabilities-kyrgyzstan>

43.6 percent in rural areas. Among the urban poor and vulnerable, only 2.3 percent receive *Ui-bulogo komok*, much lower than the national average of 14.1 percent and over half of these households do not receive any social transfers, rendering them invisible to government aid. Urban poverty drives both outdoor and indoor urban air pollution as poor citizens cannot afford clean energy solutions for heating and cooking. Almost 36 percent of Bishkek's population lived under the poverty line in 2022, with 9.5 percent in extreme poverty. Health service disparities across the country have left underserved areas behind, particularly in PHC. Although PHC is more accessible in urban areas, staffing varies significantly, with cities like Bishkek and Osh relatively over-staffed, and regions such as Osh, Chui, and Jalal-Abad Oblasts understaffed. This uneven distribution highlights the need for equitable health resource allocation to ensure all areas have adequate access to healthcare services.

Unemployed youth, youth working informally and young households

Young people from impoverished, rural, marginalized, or high-risk groups face considerable challenges in integrating fully into the social, economic, and political life of Kyrgyzstan. They constitute approximately 15 percent of the population, creating a significant influx into the labor market each year. The active inclusion of this ethnically diverse youth is vital for achieving the 2030 Agenda. However, in 2020, a staggering 83.9 percent of youths aged 15-24 were employed in the informal sector, placing them at high risk during economic crises. Their informal employment status often effectively excludes them from the additional coverage provided by the mandatory health insurance fund excludes them from health service copayments and sick leave benefits, leading to continued work during illness and potential public health risks, as well as increasing their risk of experiencing poor mental health and well-being. . The employment rate among young men is consistently higher than that of young women, particularly in the 20-34 age group. This disparity is largely attributed to young women exiting the workforce due

to childbirth, exacerbated by a shortage of kindergartens and only 25 percent coverage of preschool education. Community consultations by WFP in April-May 2021 highlighted that young households, especially those with infants and unsupported by extended family, are especially vulnerable. This is compounded by high youth unemployment rates, informality in the labor market, and a high rate of teenage/early pregnancies.

Returned and internal migrants, migrant workers, and households dependent on remittances

Of the one million Kyrgyz migrant workers are abroad, approximately 76 percent of these migrants are under 35, and around 53 percent are women, most of whom work within the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member countries. These economic migrants and their families often encounter multiple vulnerabilities, including poverty. Many households depend on remittances as their primary income source, leaving them vulnerable to any disruptions in these funds. The propiska registration system strains the health system and complicates access to health and social services when migrants return. Over 277,000 children have at least one parent working abroad, often resulting in alternative care arrangements that may impact their psycho-social development and increase risks of being exposed or subject to violence, abuse, and child labor. The proportion of women among migrants is growing, now at 53 percent as they seek employment individually or with family due to economic pressures, though not always by choice. These women face multiple layers of discrimination, primarily working in Kazakhstan, Russia, Türkiye, and other countries. Migration has become a survival strategy for many, highlighting the need for supportive measures and protections, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women and children left behind.

Refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons

While the legal situation of convention refugees improved slightly, the situation of man-

date refugees and asylum-seekers continued deteriorating. Economic factors affected their livelihoods, like that of other vulnerable segments of the population, increasing humanitarian aid needs. By the end of 2023, Kyrgyzstan hosted 1,206 asylum-seekers, including a significant number from Afghanistan. Under national laws, the refugee status determination should conclude within a year, yet most decisions are delayed until the end of this period, increasing pending and rejected cases. Government authorities refouled three asylum-seekers to their country of origin and recognized only five as refugees. Despite legal safeguards against unlawful rejection, the appeal process often merely upholds initial decisions. The country hosts 113 mandate refugees, primarily from Afghanistan, who, despite long-term peaceful residence and cultural integration, lack legal status and access to socio-economic rights and services. Parliament progressed in aligning legislation impacting statelessness with international standards. Only 21 persons remained registered as stateless at the end of 2023.

Conflict affected populations, internally displaced persons, host families and returnees

The violence along the Kyrgyz-Tajik border in September 2022 led to over 142,000 individuals being internally displaced from Batken, Leilek, and Osh districts. By late September, 126,890 people had returned to Leilek and Batken, with 12,516 staying with host families and 2,665 in temporary shelters. Women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and female heads of households were particularly vulnerable, many displaced by government evacuation. Additionally, those with legal and documentation issues required support. Access to food and necessities was significantly hindered for internally displaced persons (IDPs). About 38 percent reported food accessibility issues, with 20 percent going day and night without eating and 11 percent eating less or skipping meals. The affected often resided close to conflict zones or with host families, with 36 percent of interviewees having no cash savings and 13 percent having very

limited funds. Nearly a third of the affected population relied on external assistance for their basic needs.

Prisoners and ex-prisoners (deprivation of liberty and alternatives to imprisonment)

As per the International Centre for Penal Studies (ICPS) 2020 report, Kyrgyzstan ranks 97th in the world's prison population, with 161 prisoners per 100,000 people and a total prison population of 8,817. Currently, the SIZO (pre-trial detention facilities) holds 1,503 individuals, with the total prison population at 7,487. The country has undergone extensive judicial and legal reforms which contributed to a decrease in the prison population from 11,163 in 2018 to 7,405 in 2023. Over 30 legislative and regulatory changes since 2018 have improved conditions and support for specific prisoner groups, such as maternity benefits for convicted women and increased allowances for juvenile convicts, pregnant women, and those recently released. The reforms also introduced provisions for parole, employment for convicts, and established probation councils for reintegration efforts. The transition of monitoring functions from the military to civilian sectors in September 2019 marked a significant move towards the demilitarization and humanization of the penal system. Women, constituting approximately 4.3 percent of the prison population, face specific challenges due to the male-oriented design of prison facilities. Imprisonment disrupts family structures and social cohesion, particularly affecting those in poverty. Families lose income and incur additional costs due to a member's imprisonment, perpetuating cycles of poverty, marginalization, and recidivism. Moreover, the right to health in detention facilities is inadequately protected, with medical personnel still under the Ministry of Interior or the State Penitentiary Service. Despite recommendations, the transfer of medical personnel to the Ministry of Health's jurisdiction has not been implemented, affecting the care of terminally ill prisoners and their potential for early release or transfer to civilian hospices. These systemic issues highlight the need for continued reform and attention to the rights and reintegration of prisoners.

Key population and people living with HIV continuing facing high level stigma and discrimination

Considering recent legislative developments in the country, including draft laws “On Foreign Representatives,” “On the Mass Media,” and the recently adopted “On the Protection of Children from Harmful Information,” there are increasing restrictions on the dissemination of LGBTIQ+ related information, with a ban already in place for children. These laws have led to significant challenges for civil society groups working with vulnerable populations, prompting some to self-liquidate as part of their security measures. The proposed law “On Foreign Representatives”, if passed, could lead to criminal

liability for NGOs and associated individuals under broad provisions. Additionally, the Law “On the Mass Media”, in its current draft, aims to prohibit media reporting on LGBTIQ+ issues, potentially further marginalizing the community and hindering access to vital information and support. These legislative changes reflect a tightening environment for LGBTIQ+ rights and representation, as well as for the organizations that support them. Furthermore, this may hinder HIV prevention activities among general population, especially youth, who mostly take risky behavior and subject to acquiring infectious diseases as per the national statistics. That evidences the epidemic is among ages of 20-39 with 60 percent in male and 40 percent in female population.

3. GLOBAL, CROSS-BOUNDARY, REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Since gaining independence, Kyrgyzstan has actively engaged in international cooperation, joining the United Nations in 1992 and the World Trade Organization in 1998. Key international partners include China, the European Union, Russia, Türkiye, and the United States. Simultaneously, the country maintains robust engagement with the other Central Asian states, addressing a broad spectrum of security, economic, and political matters. These relationships are crucial in determining Kyrgyzstan's developmental direction.

Kyrgyzstan has also formed several bilateral development funds through collaborations with countries like Hungary, Russia and Uzbekistan. The Hungarian-Kyrgyz Development Fund supports projects in education, culture, and healthcare. The Russian-Kyrgyz Development Fund assists in financing joint investment projects across various sectors, including energy, transportation, and agriculture while the Uzbek-Kyrgyz Development Fund aims to bolster economic ties between the two nations.

The Russian Federation

For the past three decades, the Russian Federation has continued as Kyrgyzstan's foremost geostrategic, military, economic, and political partner. The Russian language, designated as an official language, is widely spoken across the country, with most media available in Russian, reflecting the strong, historical cultural ties. Over 130 agreements form the basis of this extensive bilateral cooperation.

The Russian Federation serves as a principal security guarantor for Kyrgyzstan, hosting a unified military base, including the Kant airbase which is playing a crucial role as part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization

(CSTO) Collective Rapid Reaction Forces. Russia supplies both donated and purchased military equipment, along with military training and joint military exercises. Kyrgyzstan's participation in the CSTO and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) solidifies this strategic alliance. The foundational agreement on military cooperation, established on 5 July 1993, underpins the military and technical cooperation between the two nations. Russia's support extends beyond equipment supply to strengthening Kyrgyzstan's external borders. Servicemen from both countries regularly engage in joint and international military and anti-terrorism exercises, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to regional stability and security. In February 2021, defence ministries enacted a bilateral program aimed at cultivating a strategic military partnership from 2021 to 2025. This collaboration highlights the depth of military ties between both countries, encompassing a wide array of strategic, operational, and logistical facets.

In 2014, Kyrgyzstan became a member of the Russia-initiated Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), marking a significant move towards integrated trade cooperation, which includes a Customs Union with key trading partners such as Russia and Kazakhstan. Over the years, Russia has consistently been Kyrgyzstan's largest trading partner, with trade volumes generally showing an upward trend. However, in 2023, trade turnover with the Russian Federation decreased by approximately 25 percent, totalling USD 2.2 billion. Specifically, Kyrgyzstan's exports to Russia dropped by about 35 percent to USD 534 million, while imports from Russia fell by approximately 20 percent. Despite these decreases, Russia has increased its overall share of Kyrgyz trade within the EAEU. The total trade volume between Kyrgyzstan and EAEU member

nations reached USD3.3 billion from January to October 2023, reflecting a decrease of about 15 percent compared to the same period in 2022. Among EAEU member states, Russia accounted for the largest share of bilateral trade with Kyrgyzstan in 2023, with 64.69 percent, followed by Kazakhstan with 32.8 percent⁸⁷. Russia primarily exports commodities such as oil, gas, metals, emergency vehicles for ambulance and fire services, medicines, textiles, non-ferrous metals, and agricultural products to Kyrgyzstan.

The Eurasian Development Bank, predominantly owned by Russia with a 66 percent share, handles 14 percent of Kyrgyzstan's sovereign debt. In 2014, the Russian-Kyrgyz Development Fund was established to drive the modernization of Kyrgyzstan's economy and its integration into the EAEU. Over the past eight years, the Fund has injected more than USD520 million into Kyrgyzstan's economy, including USD160 million in the first nine months of 2023 and over USD 265 million between 2020 and 2023. For 2023-2027, the Fund's strategy includes financing projects totalling USD630 million, concentrating on industry, the agro-industrial complex, renewable energy, logistics, IT, infrastructure, and more. Besides financial aid, Russia significantly influences the Kyrgyz economy through investments from major Russian companies like Gazprom, Rosneft, and Russian Platinum. These investments, covering various sectors, play a vital role in Kyrgyzstan's development and modernization.

On 12-13 October 2023, the Russian President made an official visit to Kyrgyzstan, participating in the Council of CIS Heads of State held in Bishkek. Earlier that year, the Kyrgyz President conducted an official visit to Russia from 8-9 May 2023, followed by a working visit later that month. These high-level exchanges underscore the close diplomatic ties between the two nations.

Besides the highlighted visits, the Russian-Kyrgyz Intergovernmental Commission

on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical, and Humanitarian Cooperation met in Bishkek on 29 March 2023. This commission is instrumental in enhancing bilateral cooperation across a range of sectors. Furthermore, the 10th Russian-Kyrgyz Conference, a pivotal event strengthening these interregional ties, took place in Jalal-Abad on 11 October 2023. The conference convened government officials, business leaders, and experts from various regions of both nations, fostering a platform for comprehensive discussions and joint initiatives in diverse fields. These interactions and institutional involvements underscore the sustained commitment to reinforcing the strategic partnership between the Russian Federation and Kyrgyzstan.

In the field of education, for the 2023/2024 academic year, the Russian Federation has allocated 1,000 quota places for Kyrgyz students to attend Russian universities free of charge. Additionally, a significant infrastructure development is the construction of a 950-student capacity school in Bishkek, financed by Gazprom. Furthermore, the "Russian Teacher Abroad" program, initiated by the Ministry of Education, is effectively in operation. Through this program, 120 Russian educators are actively teaching in various schools across Bishkek and Osh for the 2023/2024 academic year, thereby enriching the educational experience with diverse expertise and fostering cultural exchange between the two nations.

People's Republic of China

The People's Republic of China stands as an increasingly vital partner to Kyrgyzstan, contributing significantly to its development. Following the completion of a 1,063 km shared border demarcation in 2009, economic and strategic ties have deepened. Kyrgyzstan reached 38.1 percent of external debt almost meeting the limit of "not more than 40 percent", owing approximately USD 1.705,85 billion to China Exim Bank, according to the data from the Kyrgyz Ministry

⁸⁷ <https://stat.kg/ru/publications/vzaimnaya-torgovlya-tovarami-kyrgyzskoj-respubliki-s-gosudarstvami-chlenami-evrazijskogo-ekonomicheskogo-soyuza/>

of Finance. A substantial portion of this debt has financed critical infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), including new railroad infrastructure. China was a key investor in Kyrgyzstan in 2023, contributing USD157.8 million during the first nine months of 2023, and nearly USD1.7 billion in total for the last 15 years. These projects are varied, covering trade and industrial development, cultural and educational engagement, connectivity through rail and road, and energy infrastructure.

According to the National Statistics Committee, the volume of Kyrgyzstan's foreign and mutual trade in goods in January-November 2023 amounted to USD 13.9 billion and increased by 29% compared to January-November 2022.⁸⁸ Kyrgyzstan's primary exports to China include raw products like fruits, metals, and ores. A notable project is the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway (CKU), a collaboration aimed at creating direct trade routes that will link China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan to Central and Eastern Europe via Iran and Türkiye. Introduced in the 1990s, CKU realization has been impeded by diverse technical, political, and geopolitical challenges – from funding issues to disagreements on the track layout, and concerns from Moscow about its geopolitical and economic implications. During the recent China-Central Asia Summit in Xi'an in May 2023, the Presidents of China and Kyrgyzstan agreed upon commencing the construction of the CKU railway "at an early date".⁸⁹

Republic of Türkiye

Türkiye has maintained a dynamic diplomatic relationship with Kyrgyzstan since establishing formal relations on 29 January 1992, with embassies reciprocally established in Bishkek and Ankara that same year. Türkiye's share in Kyrgyzstan's trade turnover amounted to 4.8 percent in the first six months of 2023. According to official data

from the National Statistical Committee, over the last six months of 2023, trade turnover with Türkiye amounted to USD 324 million and increased by 10.7 percent compared to the same period in 2022. Of these, exports amounted to USD84.2 million and increased by 16.5 percent, while imports amounted to USD239.5 million and increased by 8.8 percent.

In November 2023, the heads of State met during a working visit to Astana. The meeting underscored the dynamic evolution of their strategic partnership, particularly through mechanisms like the Kyrgyz-Turkish Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation. Since 1992, Türkiye has been offering technical support to Kyrgyzstan via the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), under Türkiye's Ministry of Culture and Tourism. From 1993 to 2018, TIKA's contributions amounted to approximately USD80.99 million.

Türkiye emerged as the leading investor in Kyrgyzstan's economy with investments totalling USD 341.6 million.⁹⁰ Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers-Head of the Administration of the President of Kyrgyzstan, Akylbek Zhaparov disclosed at the Kyrgyz-Turkish Business Forum in Ankara on 9 February 2024 the ratification of the agreement on the establishment of a Turkish Investment Fund, which aims to finance major infrastructure projects. These investments, constituting 30.7 percent of the total foreign direct investment, surpassed those from China and Russia in 2022. Türkiye's investments were notably channelled into sectors like construction and transport.

European Union

The European Union plays a significant role as investment partner for Kyrgyzstan, though political and trade cooperation remains comparatively limited. Political dialogue between the EU and Kyrgyzstan occurs through various platforms such as

⁸⁸ <https://en.kabar.kg/news/external-trade-turnover-of-kyrgyzstan-for-11-months-of-2023-amounts-to-usd-13.9-bln/>

⁸⁹ http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgyw/202305/t20230521_11080836.htm

⁹⁰ https://24.kg/english/286442_Eight_memorandums_signed_as_a_result_of_Kyrgyz-Turkish_Business_Forum/

the EU-Kyrgyzstan Cooperation Council⁹¹, and the EU-Kyrgyz Republic human rights dialogue. According to the National Statistics Office, the EU's total trade volume with Kyrgyzstan reached USD 1,008 million in 2023. Notably, EU imports to Kyrgyzstan (USD 964 million) increased by 83 percent compared to 2022 (following a 300 percent surge in 2022 compared to 2021). Exports from Kyrgyzstan to the EU (USD 45 million) increased by 41 percent.⁹²

Other key partnerships

Other donor countries are the United Arab Emirates, Germany, Japan, Kuwait, South Korea, United Kingdom and United States, which provide development cooperation funding for a broad array of socio-economic development projects.

The country's active participation in the regional UN economic commissions, including UNECE and UNESCAP, and as a founding member of SPECA since 1998, highlights its commitment to international cooperation in areas like water, energy, environment, sustainable transport, trade, and technology, along with gender issues. These engagements reflect Kyrgyzstan's broader integration into the global community and its pursuit of sustainable development and cooperation.

Central Asian states and other partners

Kyrgyzstan, sharing a rich common history and cultural ties with its Central Asian neighbours, enjoys a robust cooperative relationship with these states. However, despite the potential for regional and 'horizontal integration' within Central Asia, there is still untapped potential in enhancing connectivity and regional cooperation.

Despite the overarching cooperative spirit, several issues strain relations between Kyrgyzstan and its Central Asian neighbours. Border delimitation disputes with Ta-

jikistan and Uzbekistan occasionally lead to conflicts, contributing to political tensions. Water resource management is a critical concern in the region, with the Government proposing to reestablish the Naryn-Syrdarya basin agreement to introduce a compensatory mechanism for water use. The Government has also withdrawn from the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, emphasizing that 45 percent of the region's water resources originate in Kyrgyzstan's mountains. The combination of climate change, demographic shifts, economic policy changes, and ineffective water management threatens to exacerbate regional tensions over water resources.

The Government advocates for reducing trade barriers among Central Asian countries and actively supports peace and cooperation initiatives, including those with Afghanistan under the Heart of Asia process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA). Additionally, the government engages in various areas of cooperation with Central Asian states through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, and other organizations, covering economic cooperation, security, counter-terrorism, and military aspects.

Kazakhstan stands as the fourth largest investment partner for Kyrgyzstan, having invested USD1.5 billion over the past 15 years. Kazakhstan remains a key trade partner and provider of humanitarian aid, also playing a crucial role in facilitating the transit of goods.

Trade and cooperation with Uzbekistan have seen considerable growth, supported by mutual regional policies encompassing humanitarian aid, joint ventures, and investments. A pivotal moment in regional diplo-

⁹¹ EU holds annual political dialogues with Kyrgyzstan. Cooperation Council, at the level of Foreign Ministers, focuses mainly on political matters, trade, economic and investment issues, as well as regional and international issues. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/kyrgyz-republic/european-union-and-kyrgyz-republic_en?s=301#9574

⁹² <https://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/b965bc9d-ab47-4930-ad00-b944fac00df0.xlsx>

macy occurred with the President of Uzbekistan's visit to Kyrgyzstan in January 2023. This visit, significant for being the first leader-level meeting between the two countries since 2000, resulted in a formalized border agreement, greatly bolstering regional stability and bilateral relations. It opened a new chapter in regional cooperation, leading to further reciprocal visits and collaborations.

These interactions were enhanced by participation in the Central Asian Leaders' Meetings, as well as cooperation through organizations like the SCO and the Organization of Turkic States. Key initiatives like the CKU railway project emerged from these engagements, representing a strong commitment to regional connectivity and partnership. The geopolitical situation in the wider region has highlighted the crucial role of connectivity initiatives, prompting countries to enhance their strategic partnerships. One such endeavour is the commitment to the Kambar-Ata Hydroelectric Power Plant Project, which was reaffirmed during President of Uzbekistan's visit. This project is aimed at supplying electricity and addressing the water needs of Central Asia, representing a significant step not only in economic cooperation but also in the potential creation of a unified energy market that could boost the global standing of the Central Asian economy.

Trading relationships of Kyrgyzstan with other Central Asian countries like Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are notably uneven, partly due to their non-membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Since the April-May 2021 and September 2022 border conflict escalations, the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has remained closed.

The situation in Afghanistan impacts regional trade, connectivity, and regional energy projects like CASA-1000, illicit drug trafficking, and may affect violent extremism. The stance and internal control of the de facto authorities in Afghanistan, as well as the re-

sponse of global and regional actors, may significantly influence future developments in the broader Central Asian region. The Government has been proactive in establishing contacts with the de facto authorities, providing humanitarian support and advocating for ongoing aid to the Afghan people.

Regular consultative meetings among the leaders of the five Central Asian countries are being held since 2018, underscoring a renewed commitment to regional cooperation. They are aimed at discussion and potential resolution of various issues pertaining to regional security, trade, and infrastructure, among others. The Fifth Consultative Summit of the Leaders of Central Asian States was held on 14-15 September 2023 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The President of Azerbaijan was invited as an honorary guest. The summit discussed expanding multifaceted cooperation in the region, developing political dialogue, promoting joint programs and projects in the fields of trade, investment, transport, energy, agriculture and ecology, enhancing cultural and humanitarian exchange, as well as responding to modern challenges and security threats. Furthermore, they adopted the Roadmap for Health and Well-being in Central Asia 2022-2025, developed jointly with the WHO.⁹³

The 2023 SPECA Economic Forum, marking the Programme's 25th anniversary under Azerbaijan's chairpersonship, focused on reflecting the SPECA region's future and enhancing energy connectivity towards sustainable sources. Discussions throughout the week addressed environmental sustainability, climate change, and the importance of cooperation on transboundary waters and climate-induced migration challenges. For the first time, the forum was attended at the level of heads of State, with the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan, attending the meeting, which adopted the Baku Declaration, outlining

⁹³ <https://www.newscentralasia.net/2023/09/15/5th-consultative-meeting-of-the-heads-of-state-of-central-asia-in-tajikistan-outcomes/> and <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/364330/WHO-EURO-2022-5905-45670-65601-eng.pdf>

a digitalization roadmap for the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor and announcing plans for a SPECA Multi-Partner Trust Fund to support regional initiatives. It was also decided to create a Forum of Cities within SPECA to facilitate urban collaboration. Emphasis was placed on accelerating gender equality and women's economic empowerment as transformative forces in the region. This event underscored a collective commitment to sustainability, innovation, and cooperation for the region's future⁹⁴.

2020 marked the launch of the Central Asian Women Leaders' Caucus (CAWLC)⁹⁵, a significant initiative backed by both regional states and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) in partnership with UNDP and UN Women to amplify women's roles in politics, economy, and society and bolster their influence in peace, stability, and sustainable development matters. This platform not only seeks to enhance regional collaboration but also aims to provide role models and advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment. Various meetings of the CAWLC were held in 2023, culminating in an international conference on "Countering Gender-Based Violence in the Region" in Astana, Kazakhstan, on 4 December 2023. Kazakhstan handed over its chairpersonship in 2023 to Kyrgyzstan, which will be chairing in 2024.

C5+1 platforms

Recent years saw the emergence of meetings using the C5+1 diplomatic format, between the five Central Asian countries and one major external power, usually held at foreign ministerial level, and increasingly at heads of state level. Meetings in this format are now held between the Central Asian five and several countries/regional blocs, such as China, European Union, Germany, Gulf Cooperation Council, India, Japan, Russia, South Korea, United Kingdom, and the United States.

On 18-19 May 2023, the first China-Central Asia Summit (C+C5) was held in Xi'an, China, chaired by the President of China and attended by the heads of the five Central Asian states. They signed a large number of cooperation documents and a joint declaration, focusing on economic partnerships, notably through the Belt and Road Initiative, trade and investments, including intensified cooperation in new sectors such as digital commerce and the green economy, as well as on defence and security. The joint declaration foresees that such C+C5 summits will be held every two years.

The second EU-Central Asia Summit was held on 1-2 June 2023 in Cholpon Ata, Kyrgyzstan. It gathered the leaders of Central Asian states, with Turkmenistan represented by the Deputy Chair of the Cabinet of Ministers, and the European Council President, to discuss prospects of regional cooperation between Central Asia and the EU, regional and international developments. They touched upon a range of priorities, including Afghanistan, combating extremism and terrorism, trade and connectivity, and the Aral Sea. The second EU-Central Asia economic forum took place in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 19 May 2023, focusing on sustainable economic development in Central Asia, emphasizing green recovery, digitalization, and improving the business environment. Luxembourg hosted the 19th EU-Central Asia ministerial meeting on 23 October 2023.

On 21 September 2023, the Presidents of the five Central Asian countries met the President of the United States, for the first-ever C5+1 Presidential Summit with the US, held on the margins of the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly. The inaugural summit yielded the New York Declaration, reaffirming a commitment to regional cooperation and outlining key principles and initiatives to foster resilience through partnership in the areas of security, economy, energy, and combating climate change, as well as in the human dimension. It was

⁹⁴ <https://unece.org/media/SPECA/press/385812>

⁹⁵ [1] <https://www.undp.org/eurasia/press-releases/launch-first-women-leader's-dialogue-central-asia>

followed by the first C5+1 Regional Connectivity Ministerial in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, attended by the USAID Administrator and relevant government ministers from the five Central Asian states, on 24 October 2023. They focused on collaboration on issues of regional economic development, such as supporting sustainable green energy, transport sector development, and strengthening customs and border management.

The first leaders' summit in the Central Asia-Federal Republic of Germany format took place in Berlin on 29 September 2023. On the sidelines of the event, the five Central Asian leaders attended the Economic Forum of the German Eastern Business Association. As a result of the summit, a Joint Statement was declared between the Central Asian countries and Germany, mentioning elevation of a 'strategic partnership' to be continued in this format. The next one planned in 2024. Other meetings held in the C5+1 format included a Summit between the Gulf and Central Asian leaders in July 2023, focusing on energy investments, especially in renewables.

A South Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum was held at ministerial level in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, on 1 November 2023, addressing cooperation in transport and logistics, healthcare and medicine, climate change and environmental protection, information and communication technologies, education and science, and tourism.

Regional connectivity

Kyrgyzstan, strategically located at the borders with China and Kazakhstan and as a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) alongside Kazakhstan, has placed a high priority on international cooperation to maximize its transit capabilities. The government has consistently emphasized the country's strategic potential as a bridge between Europe and Asia at the highest levels.

Exemplarily, on 19 May 2023, the President addressed the "China-Central Asia" summit, emphasizing the importance of regional collaboration, especially in the transport sector, and suggested that Central Asia could act as a "geopolitical mediator" among "global centers of influence".⁹⁶ The National Development Strategy for 2018-2040 envisions the country evolving into a significant transit hub for both passengers and cargo by 2040, necessitating numerous initiatives to develop its transit potential, primarily through international cooperation across various organizations and agreements.

Road transportation constitutes the mainstay of Kyrgyzstan's infrastructure, carrying up to 95 percent of all cargo and passenger transportation. This sector requires significant investment: According to the Ministry of Transport and Communications, 70 percent of roads necessitate major capital works and reconstruction. The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index reported a decline in the quality of Kyrgyzstan's roads, ranking it 122nd out of 137 countries in 2017, a drop of 18 ranks since 2007⁹⁷. The railway network in consists of disconnected segments, divided geographically into northern (323.4 kilometres) and southern (101.2 kilometres) sections, linking to the railway networks of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. While international railways primarily transport goods such as fuels, lubricants, building materials, and raw materials, domestic rail freight is limited and includes only small quantities of commodities like coal and sugar.⁹⁸

Kyrgyzstan's rugged landscape presents significant challenges to developing transport infrastructure. The mountainous terrain in the east has necessitated the construction of circuitous routes or passages through dangerous mountain passes. Additionally, the vast distances between cities and sparse population across deserts and steppes contribute to the low density of the transport

⁹⁶ China-Central Asia: outcomes of the summit in Xi'an.

⁹⁷ ESCAP. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan: Transport connectivity, the impact of and policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic

⁹⁸ Ibid

network. As estimated by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)⁹⁹, Kyrgyzstan's infrastructure needs rank among the highest in the region, with financing requirements estimated at about 19 percent of GDP annually for 2018-2030. This need is particularly acute in the transport sector, followed by energy, ICT, and water supply and sanitation. A significant portion of infrastructure investment, accounting for 95.5 percent, comes from external sources, with only 4.5 percent funded by the state budget. As a result, major transport-focused initiatives are primarily financed by international institutions, including the Islamic Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Asian Development Bank, China, World Bank, JICA, and the Eurasian Development Bank, among others, reflecting a heavy reliance on foreign investment and aid for the development of the nation's transport infrastructure and overall development.

Digital development

Achieving universal and meaningful digital connectivity is vital for SDG achievement in Kyrgyzstan, particularly for the rural population, which constitutes two-thirds of the country. While there is a relatively high mobile broadband penetration with 85 percent 4G coverage¹⁰⁰, about 9 percent of the population, primarily in rural areas, lacks access to mobile broadband internet, and less than 1 percent have no mobile connectivity¹⁰¹. Despite increasing fixed internet adoption and prioritized investments in backbone and middle-mile infrastructure, especially under the Digital Central Asia South Asia (Digital CASA) project, ensuring last-mile connectivity to households remains a challenge. Fixed internet is predominantly available in urban

areas and often unaffordable for rural households, with over 70 percent experiencing low-speed access. Legislative frameworks and the lack of incentives for connectivity financing continue to hinder investment in necessary infrastructure to improve connectivity across all regions. The cost of 2 GB of data as a percentage of monthly GNI per capita continued to fall short of the 2 percent target set by the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development's for 2025¹⁰². According to the ITU ICT Digital Development Index of 2023, Kyrgyzstan scored 84.7 and placed 64th among 169 participating countries and 5th among its regional peers, outpacing Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan.¹⁰³

Furthermore, nearly half of the population, a figure exceeding the global average of 41 percent and among the highest in the region, is covered by mobile internet but does not use it. Despite high smartphone adoption 98.9 percent of households owning a mobile phone, with smartphones making up 73 percent of total connections and data affordability surpassing global standards, this usage gap primarily arises from a lack of digital skills awareness and training, hindering the population's ability and willingness to effectively use digital technologies. While some acquire basic digital skills informally, the most vulnerable, particularly in rural communities, often lack the opportunities and resources to become digitally literate. Only 14.4 percent of women aged 15-49 years in rural areas demonstrate basic digital skills, compared to 31.4 percent in urban areas¹⁰⁴. Additionally, the limited relevance of digital content and services at the local level deepens digital exclusion, with digital content and services relevance in Kyrgyzstan scored at 53 out of 100¹⁰⁵. High fragmentation of digital skills learning initiatives, limited capacity for designing and implementing inclusive

⁹⁹ ESCAP. Infrastructure Financing in Kyrgyzstan. 2022

¹⁰⁰ <https://datahub.itu.int/data/?e=KGZ&i=100095>

¹⁰¹ *ibid*

¹⁰² Closing the digital divide in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, pg.22

¹⁰³ ITU ICT Development Index, 2023, p. 12. Access link: <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/idi2023/> Note: Tajikistan and Turkmenistan did not participate in the Index.

¹⁰⁴ MIC Survey 2018

¹⁰⁵ MCI 2023

digital skills programs, and inadequate communication about digitally enabled opportunities contribute to uneven economic and political empowerment, leaving the most vulnerable behind. Therefore, policies and programs aimed at expanding connectivity and access must include investments in comprehensive and universal citizens' upskilling based on regular assessment of the level of digital literacy of the population to bridge these digital divides.

The ongoing digital transformation is intensifying the gender digital divide, a reflection

of broader gender inequalities. Women in the ICT field encounter various challenges, primarily restricted access to ICT education and skills, hindering their full engagement with digital technology. Societal norms and domestic responsibilities further curtail their participation, with those from rural areas facing compounded limitations due to entrenched roles and obligations¹⁰⁶. Addressing this divide necessitates gender-disaggregated ICT data, which is currently insufficient in the country, to develop targeted strategies for inclusivity and empowerment in the digital sphere.

¹⁰⁶ Gender digital divide research. ITU, 2023.

4. MULTIDIMENSIONAL RISK ANALYSIS

Over the last two years, Kyrgyzstan has seen a decline in democratic space, rule of law, and social cohesion, as well as cross-border issues. Government actions have undermined the separation of powers, eroding the autonomy of the legislative and judicial independence, and restricted media and civic freedoms, with increased pressure and legal actions against critics. The judiciary system lacks impartiality, independence, and accountability. These developments further weakened checks and balances in the political system, increased polarization, and the potential for marginalization of vulnerable groups. Additionally, Kyrgyzstan faced external threats due to unresolved border conflicts, climate change, and economic dependencies. Domestic challenges, such as water scarcity, energy shortages, and the potential for social unrest, underscore the country's complex set of risks and vulnerabilities.

Democratic space

Kyrgyzstan's democratic space has significantly diminished, marked by a consolidation of the executive's power and a strengthened national security apparatus. Political opponents, civic activists, and journalists faced increased pressure, arbitrary detentions, and legislative initiatives that curtail fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly, and the media. The trend of using the legal system against political adversaries has accelerated since 2021, also indicating a dependence of the judiciary and law enforcement on the ruling administration. High-profile political arrests continued, further fragmenting the opposition. The shrinking civic space risks to impact achievement of the SDGs and undermine the LNOB principle, in particular if the ability of local NGOs and implementing partners of the UN system and other development part-

ners to operate is further curtailed by the adoption of restrictive legislation on NGOs currently at an advance stage of adoption at the Parliament.

Justice and the rule of law

The judicial system was further weakened by regressive legal reforms, diminishing its independence and accountability, particularly with recent legislative changes that allow the President to review Constitutional Court decisions based on subjective criteria like 'moral and ethical values' and 'public consciousness.' This shift potentially prioritizes traditions and moral values over international human rights commitments. The rule of law is further compromised by the ongoing centralization of power within the executive, alongside the use of defamation charges and criminal suits against political opponents, civil society activists, and independent journalists and bloggers. A lack of judicial impartiality has affected due process and fair trials, equal access to justice and trust in the legal system. To address these issues, Kyrgyzstan needs to reinforce judicial independence, tackle corruption, and enhance access to justice. Cultivating respect for human rights and rule of law is crucial for building a just, stable society and ensuring governance systems are fair and effective.

Social cohesion, equality, and non-discrimination

The persistence of ethno-centric narratives and a renewed emphasis on 'traditional values' in policymaking can contribute to the stigmatization of vulnerable groups, and potential discrimination against ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities, and the reinforcement of entrenched patriarchal gender norms. This environment limits progress on inclusive policies, such as civic identity

concepts, and can deepen social divisions and polarization, including along liberal-conservative or secular-religious lines, for example on language, and affect efforts to prevent sexual and gender-based violence. Continued cases of discrimination and hate speech against minorities, including the LGBTQI+ community, are persistent issues. Moreover, limited fiscal space, inadequate participation and transparency, and poor accountability in governance structures fosters a wider distrust in institutions. There are also significant concerns regarding Kyrgyzstan's adherence to its international obligations, including access to asylum and non-refoulement for refugees, the politicization of migration, and the lack of recognition of refugees, being of particular concern. These factors collectively hinder social cohesion, equality, and non-discrimination in the country.

Gender equality

Kyrgyzstan continues to struggle with gender inequalities, and widespread exclusion of women from decision-making processes. The country faces a myriad of gender issues, such as domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (S/GBV), forced and early marriages, human trafficking, rape, and physical and mental abuse. Negative re-interpretations of cultural and social norms and practices are increasingly limiting women's rights and autonomy, also affected by particular interpretations of tradition or imported extremist religious ideologies. The shrinking civic space also risks affecting women-led CSOs working on human rights and GEWE. The UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls emphasized the critical role of independent women's organizations in promoting democracy and human rights after its visit in April 2022. It advocated for their inclusion in policymaking, access to adequate resources, and a safe working environment free from intimidation and harassment. The group urged against

activists to be investigated, with perpetrators held accountable and victims compensated. Recognizing and supporting the role of women's and girls' organizations is essential for advancing human rights and freedoms in the country.

Internal security

The role and influence of organized crime, encroaching on business and politics, is a rising concern for law-enforcement, linked to the trafficking of illicit drugs, weapons and people, and the proximity of Afghanistan. Socioeconomic vulnerabilities and the marginalization of certain social groups could affect the potential for radicalization and for further offline/online recruitment by violent extremist/terrorist actors.

Economic stability

The ongoing impact of the war in Ukraine presents significant uncertainties and potential asymmetric economic shocks. While 2023 saw the country manage to evade many expected consequences, concerns emerge over a potential economic slowdown in Russia and a subsequent drop in remittance inflows, potentially leading to reverse migration of Kyrgyzstani workers. This could strain social services and increase poverty due to lost income and employment challenges. In 2023, Kyrgyzstan saw increased imports from the EU and the US, and a rise in exports to Russia. However, the potential re-export of sanctioned goods to Russia through Kyrgyzstan has drawn scrutiny from the EU, the UK and the US, risking secondary sanctions that could severely impact vulnerable populations and exacerbate challenges like poverty and unemployment. Kyrgyzstan also faces energy security challenges, heavily reliant on hydroelectric power, which is affected by low water levels and climate factors. The significant decrease in hydropower generation has led Kyrgyzstan to become a net electricity importer, impacting economic growth and develop-

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2022/04/end-mission-statement-working-group-discrimination-against-women>

ment. An emergency regime in the energy industry is planned from 2023 to 2026 to address the crisis, highlighting the risk of conflicts over transboundary water resources.

Food security

Kyrgyzstan's heavy reliance on imports for key commodities, including staple foods, leaves it highly susceptible to shocks and trade disruptions. The country's complete dependence on imports for mineral fertilizers is critical, especially as global prices surged by 300 percent in the past two years, affecting agricultural productivity and potentially leading to long-term food price increases. Compounding this, rising food and fuel prices are diminishing the purchasing power of vulnerable populations, affecting their access to nutritious food. With higher food inflation and fuel prices, a potential reduction in remittances could further increase poverty levels and compromise household ability to meet essential needs, threatening dietary diversity and nutrition. These combined factors intensify the economic vulnerability and food security challenges facing the population, disproportionately affecting women-led households and vulnerable groups.

Natural disaster and climate change risks

Kyrgyzstan's susceptibility to climate change is significantly amplified by its topography and inadequate infrastructure. The country has experienced a 150 percent increase in the scale and frequency of climate-induced natural hazards like heatwaves, floods, and droughts since 2010, with 412 natural disasters recorded between 2015 and 2021. It is seismically active, with over 3,000 earthquakes annually, including significant ones in the Osh region. There is a looming risk of a catastrophic earthquake of 8-9 magnitude in many areas. The country also faces increasing mudslides and seasonal flooding, accounting for 33 percent of all emergencies, and regular droughts. With temperatures expected to rise over 5°C by 2090 and significant glacial melt anticipated, water resources are under threat. Epidemic risks like brucellosis and measles are prevalent,

and technological hazards, including dam breaches or industrial accidents, pose additional threats. Climate change's multidimensional risks affect livelihoods, water and food security, and peace, especially in border areas. In 2023, water shortages for agriculture were evident in southern Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, indirectly leading to cross-border tensions. Climate change exacerbates competition over the access to natural resources. Water scarcity and droughts affect irrigation for agriculture and impacts the livelihoods of farmers. It can imperil economic, social, and cultural rights, including access to green infrastructure and natural resources, with potentially unfair resource distribution exacerbating minority issues and regional tensions. The government has initiated a multifaceted emergency response system to the disasters under the Ministry of Emergency Situations, focusing on legislation, policies, and risk mitigation. However, challenges in planning, budgeting, implementation, inter-sectoral coordination, and community resilience remain, alongside the need for improved disaster preparedness and risk assessment capabilities. The community's vulnerability to natural disasters underscores the urgency for enhanced emergency preparedness and effective response strategies.

Public health

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the vulnerabilities of Kyrgyzstan's underfunded health system, highlighting its impact on society and the economy. The public health-care sector's underdevelopment hinders the effective containment of diseases, risking hospital overloads in future outbreaks. A significant concern is the number of doctors who are past and near retirement age coupled with the exodus of younger, underpaid doctors seeking better opportunities abroad. This depletes the country of essential health workforce capabilities necessary to prevent and address future pandemics, particularly in rural and remote areas. Poor health indicators, inadequate tracking, and insufficient responses to reform health services, could worsen the access to quality healthcare. Additionally, a low level of digitalization in health

services compromises disease surveillance capabilities, potentially delaying the detection of early outbreak cases. The health sector's limited capacity to counteract health-related misinformation can lead to mistrust and social unrest in response to public health measures, including vaccination efforts. Public health risks could be affected further by climate change, natural and man-made disasters, renewed border escalations, humanitarian crises, or the effects of air pollution, with health impacts on livelihoods and effects on social cohesion. Collectively, these factors indicate that the health sector may struggle to effectively respond to and manage future health crises due to inadequate human and material resources.

Regional and global influences

Kyrgyzstan's political, economic and security dependencies on several regional powers, most notably China and Russia, for instance as a source of investments or a destination for labour migrants, amid a changing geopolitical environment, with risks related to the adherence to sanctions regimes, can in-

fluence decision-making processes and regional stability.

The situation at the Kyrgyz-Tajik border remains volatile with potential conflict risks, despite ongoing border delimitation negotiations, due to a latent feeling of enmity and distrust, and with both countries reportedly increasing their armaments. Climate change affects access to and competition over natural resources, notably water, exacerbating the exposure and vulnerabilities to climate-related security risks, especially between upstream and downstream countries and communities. The situation in Afghanistan has led Kyrgyzstan to bolster its security arrangements, in view of the risks of illicit drugs and human trafficking, as well as the proliferation of small and light weapons (SALW), and potential refugee flows, also affecting the country's stance on non-refoulement obligations. Amid the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, there is a continued risk of Kyrgyzstani nationals being recruited into the Russian armed forces, and political pressures to repatriate Russian nationals seeking asylum in Kyrgyzstan.

5. KYRGYZSTAN'S INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITMENTS AND OBLIGATIONS

On 14 October 2022, Kyrgyzstan was elected to the Human Rights Council for the term 2023-2025, marking its third tenure on the Council. The Voluntary Pledges submitted as part of this process represent additional political commitments by the country. Throughout 2023, these pledges have been frequently referenced by the United Nations System, highlighting the country's ongoing commitment to human rights and underscoring its responsibilities as a member of the Human Rights Council.¹⁰⁸

Kyrgyzstan has ratified or acceded to eight of the nine core UN human rights treaties and all eight fundamental ILO human rights conventions. The Government still needs to address various recommendations from the UN human rights mechanisms¹⁰⁹ (UN HRMs), including those related to the fair administration of justice, judicial independence, elimination of torture and gender-based violence, non-discrimination (particularly concerning sexual orientation and gender identity), freedom of expression, media rights, protection of human rights defenders and journalists, and peaceful assembly. Additionally, there is a need to align with international labour standards on freedom of association, non-discrimination, child and forced labour, and safe working conditions.

The country has accepted two individual complaints procedures under UN Human Rights Treaties: the First Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Polit-

ical Rights (OPI-ICCPR) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (OP-CEDAW). Collectively, these bodies have adopted 49 Views, identifying violations in areas such as arbitrary arrest, torture, unfair trials, inhuman treatment, non-refoulement, right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and gender-based discrimination. As of March 2023, new violations concerning freedom of assembly, fair trial rights, prohibition of torture, and forced confessions were recognized in two new Views adopted by the UN Human Rights Committee. Despite these findings, the country struggles with implementing these Views effectively and legally, with only five Views partially implemented (through payment of different (deemed inadequate) compensation to the victims of torture), showing both the need for and the challenges in aligning national legislation and implementation mechanisms with international human rights standards. Furthermore, as of November 2023, the government has not adopted the adequate regulatory procedure for implementing these Views, while indicating ongoing efforts towards legal compliance and victim compensation in human rights cases.

Generally, Government authorities maintain an active dialogue with the UN human rights mechanisms, including the Treaty Bodies,¹¹⁰ the Universal Periodic Review, and Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.un.org/en/ga/77/meetings/elections/hrc.shtml>

¹⁰⁹ including recommendations of the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Committee against Torture from November 2021, as well as recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee from November 2022.

¹¹⁰ In November 2021, the Committee against Torture and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reviewed the human rights situation in the Kyrgyz Republic. In October 2022, the Human Rights Committee considered the third periodic report of Kyrgyzstan.

In September and November 2023, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families reviewed the human rights situation in the Kyrgyz Republic.

¹¹¹ In addition, the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls and the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights visited the Kyrgyz Republic in February and May 2022 respectively.

In September and in November 2023, the Government's periodic reports on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (CMW) were reviewed by the respective UN Committees. Following the review, new Concluding Observations with recommendations for the country have been issued by both committees that will require concerted efforts to ensure their implementation.

The CRC in its Concluding Observations expressed concerns about the proposed Law "On Foreign Representatives", emphasizing the critical contribution of independent civil society and human rights defenders in promoting human rights. It strongly recommended the Government to amend the draft Law to ensure the independence of civil society in human rights endeavours. The Government was urged to foster an environment conducive to the functioning of NGOs by eliminating excessive registration hurdles and maintaining their access to foreign funding. Moreover, the CRC advised that civil society and human rights defenders, including those focusing on children's rights, should be able to advocate for human rights and freely express their opinions without facing undue restrictions. The CMW in December 2023 also encouraged cooperation of the state with civil society organizations on the protection of rights of migrant workers and their families. These calls to action highlighted the essential role of a vibrant civil society in advancing and protecting all types of human rights.

In September 2024, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights will review Kyrgyzstan's fourth periodic report under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In October 2024, the UN Committee against Torture will adopt a List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LoIPR) – replies to these Issues will constitute Kyrgyzstan's fourth period report on the implementation of the UN Convention against Torture.

The Government is also gearing up for the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review

(UPR), with a deadline for the national report set for 1 February 2025, and is encouraged to involve civil society and other stakeholders, including the Parliament, in its preparation throughout 2024. Meanwhile, the first periodic report under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities awaits its review. Concurrently, towards the end of 2023, civil society initiated a national advocacy campaign urging the national authorities to join the Optional Protocol to the CRPD, enabling individuals within Kyrgyzstan's jurisdiction to file individual complaints to the relevant Committee.

In November 2022, the Government reportedly embarked on preparing its inaugural voluntary mid-term report to on the implementation of the recommendations from the 2020 Third Universal Periodic Review (UPR). A year later, in November 2023, this report was not yet submitted. Contrary to the Human Rights Council's guidance to hold extensive consultations with National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on the UPR implementation, the Government is proceeding without such inclusive dialogue. The fourth UPR cycle is due in May 2025. In 2023, both the CRC and the CMW urged the Government to significantly involve civil society – from policy development and implementation to monitoring and evaluation – of state's efforts to uphold rights enshrined in the related Conventions. Overall, more inclusive stakeholder engagement in preparation for the review by the UN human rights mechanisms and during follow up to the received recommendations is a potential area for improvement in the country's human rights commitment and practices.

In September 2020, during the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Kyrgyzstan committed to comprehensive measures to enforce legislation against violence towards women and girls, emphasizing thorough investigation and prosecution of violence cases. The country also agreed to establish mandatory training for judicial and law enforcement personnel on handling such crimes. Despite these commitments, challenges outlined by the

CEDAW recommendations persist. These include ending all forms of discrimination against women, fostering an educational and social environment free from stereotypes and violence, addressing the roots of gender and pay inequality, modifying cultural norms, enhancing women's health-care, particularly in sexual and reproductive health, increasing women's involvement in peacebuilding, and bolstering their political representation in decision-making. Addressing these areas remains crucial for the country's progress in gender equality and women's empowerment.

The CEDAW's Concluding Observations on Kyrgyzstan's fifth periodic report¹¹² expressed concern over gender-based violence and hate speech against women candidates during elections and political rallies. It urged the government to implement effective measures to protect women candidates from such violence and hate speech, including online, during elections. Furthermore, CEDAW underscored the need for national educational programs to emphasize the criminal nature of abduction for forced marriage and child marriage, as well as the negative implications of these practices. In its 2023 Follow-up recommendations, CEDAW reiterated the critical issues of access to justice for women and girls, the necessity of free legal assistance, and the urgency of reducing forced marriages. It also emphasized the need for special measures to support women's human rights defenders. These recommendations highlight ongoing challenges and the essential steps needed to enhance the rights and protections of women and girls in Kyrgyzstan.

On 28 November 2022, the Government approved the National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP) for 2022-2024. However, it did not incorporate key recommendations from human rights mechanisms focusing on civil and political rights and fundamental freedoms. This omission suggests a continued challenge in addressing some of the most critical human rights issues in the country.

During 2023, civil society members repeatedly voiced to the Coordination Council on Human Rights (CCHR) their readiness to engage with the authorities on preparation for the 2025 fourth UPR cycle, on finalization of a national action plan on 2021 recommendations of the UN Committee against Torture (CAT), and monitoring implementation of the NHRAP. Unfortunately, there was little outreach by the CCHR to civil society experts.

Torture investigations continued to be ineffective; out of 95 reported complaints in the first half of 2023, 78 were dismissed as unsubstantiated, and only four out of ten of the opened criminal cases reached trial. In June 2023, amendments to criminal legislation shifted the investigative responsibility of torture from the General Prosecutor's Office to the State Committee on National Security and Military Prosecutor's Office, casting doubts on the future efficacy and impartiality of probes. Additionally, many torture complaints are dismissed prematurely during the pre-investigative checks introduced into the 2021 Criminal Procedure Code, a practice criticized by the UN Treaty Bodies for undermining legal protections. These issues point to significant gaps in accountability and the fight against impunity for torture and ill-treatment in the country.

On 3 May 2023, the Ombudswoman was dismissed by the Parliament, following her annual report to Parliament on 19 April 2022. Her dismissal was criticized by several international organizations as a manifestation of the lack of independence of the Ombudsperson's Institute ('Akyikatchy'). In 2012, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI)' Sub-Committee on Accreditation noted that the provision allowing for the dismissal of the Ombudsperson in the event of non-approval of a report submitted to Parliament has the potential to affect the ability of the Ombudsperson "to submit independent and unbiased reports on the human rights situation in the country" and could impact on the security

¹¹² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/concluding-observations/cedawckgzc05-concluding-observations-fifth-periodic-report>

of tenure of the Akyikatchy. In 2020, during the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review, Kyrgyzstan supported recommendations to strengthen the independence of the Akyikatchy in accordance with the UN Paris Principles relating to the Status of National Human Rights Institutions (“Paris Principles”).

On 17 May 2023, a new Ombudswoman was elected by the Parliament. She proclaimed her plans to improve her Institute’s capacity to monitor and report on human rights violations, and her determination to push through adoption of the new Constitutional Law “On the Ombudsperson” that would be fully aligned with the Paris Principles and would strengthen legal safeguards for the independence of the Institute. On 16 August 2023, OSCE/ODIHR issued an urgent interim opinion, endorsed by OHCHR on the draft Law “On the Ombudsperson”. In September 2023, OHCHR supported public consultations on the draft Law. By the end of 2023, the draft Law was not yet formally initiated by members of the Parliament. In August 2023, the Ombudswoman endorsed a new Strategy for her Institute’s development until 2028. On 7 October 2023, the Venice Commission adopted opinions on the draft “On the Ombudsperson” developed by the Ombudsperson’s Institute to align with the Paris Principles and enhance its independence and effectiveness. The draft was reviewed with expert input from OSCE/ODIHR, APF, and OHCHR and discussed in a September Public Hearing. Its incorporation of these bodies’ recommendations and parliamentary registration status remains uncertain.

Moreover, in order to comply with the Paris Principles, the Ombudsperson’s Institute was recommended to engage more actively with civil society and the UN human rights mechanisms (UN HMRs). In September 2022, the previous Ombudsperson submitted a first alternative report of the NHRI to the UN Human Rights Committee, focusing on sexual and gender-based violence against women and children. The same re-

port was shared with the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), also under the previous leadership. Another important NHRI operating in Kyrgyzstan is the National Centre for the Prevention of Torture (NCPT). In 2022, the UN Sub-Committee on Prevention of Torture regards this model of an NCPT, separate from the Ombudsperson’s Institute, as exemplary. While additional funding and four new posts have been allocated to the NCPT’s budget for 2024, its effectiveness continues to be constrained by insufficient budget for travel and experts’ fees. The separate Children’s Rights’ Ombudsperson under the President works without clear delineation of mandates between it and the Parliamentary Ombudsperson’s Institute. The 2021 Constitution introduced the role of Commissioner for Child Rights, appointed by and reporting directly to the President. The Commissioner’s responsibilities include monitoring the implementation of child rights, aiding the functioning of the state system for child rights protection, and contributing to the development of strategic and program documents concerning child rights.¹¹³

In January 2023, Parliament passed a Law introducing oral and written warnings for parents if a student insults a teacher, with a fine of 1000 KGS (around 11 USD) imposed on adults or parents who insult teachers, including through media. Initiated following an incident where a teacher attacked a female student, allegedly provoked by the student’s disrespectful behaviour, MPs supported the teacher, sparking societal debate about instilling moral values in children and enforcing respect for schoolteachers. However, there is concern that the law might infringe on children’s freedom of expression and grant teachers and school administrations excessively broad powers to penalize students arbitrarily.

On 15 August 2023, the President enacted amendments to laws, aiming to protect children by promoting a safe informational environment and their overall well-be-

¹¹³ <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/430505>

ing. Yet, the law has sparked debates over potential censorship and children's rights infringement, as it allows legal guardians to decide content appropriateness, possibly conflicting with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Critics worry it might unduly restrict access to essential information on gender, health, and human rights, leading to random limits on expression. Despite international concerns and calls for revision from bodies like the European Parliament and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the law was implemented on 30 August 2023, with a six-month deadline for the Cabinet of Ministers to align its legal acts.

In late 2022 and early 2023, legislative proposals by various MPs raised concerns over potential reinstatement of the death penalty and compulsory surgical castration for convicted sex offenders against minors. The proposals, including constitutional amendments for the death penalty for sex crimes against minors, await a ruling from the Constitutional Court. The UN Country Team raised its concerns, highlighting the inconsistency of these amendments with international human rights standards.

In 2019, the country eliminated statelessness by granting or confirming nationality to all identified stateless individuals, earning global recognition and an award from the High Commissioner for Refugees. Despite this achievement, Kyrgyzstan has not become a party to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, which are instrumental in preventing statelessness. The government is actively working on implementing its 2019 High-Level Segment pledges on statelessness, focusing on birth registration, preventing childhood statelessness, endorsing by-laws on statelessness determination procedures, and considering accession to the STA Conventions. The implementation of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees in Kyrgyzstan is facing challenges. At the start of 2023, the country was home to 670 asylum-seekers. However, the number of asylum-seekers recognized as refugees by the authorities has significantly declined

over the years, from 25 in 2019 to just one in 2022. In 2023, only five asylum-seekers have been granted refugee status. Notably, in 2023, the Ministry of Labour, Social Security, and Migration negatively decided on the refugee claims of 114 asylum-seekers, 109 of whom were from Afghanistan. This is concerning given the drastic negative changes in Afghanistan, yet only four Afghan asylum-seekers have been granted refugee status from 2021 to the present, contrary to UNHCR guidance. In December 2023, the Government participated at the Global Refugee Forum and submitted 5 pledges related to refugee and stateless persons' protection.

In July 2023, proposed amendments to the "On Citizenship" law, recently updated, would eliminate the provision granting citizenship to children born in Kyrgyzstan to foreign parents if the parents' country does not grant citizenship, citing national security concerns. If passed, this could render the affected children stateless.

In May 2023, the law "On Refugees" was amended to grant refugees healthcare access equivalent to nationals and other rights akin to permanently residing foreigners. It also introduced a definition for refugee travel documents, with government-issued regulations forthcoming. However, a bylaw amendment tied asylum-seeker status to registration by a state body, significantly restricting access to non-refoulement protections. Particularly, asylum seekers in detention face challenges in registering applications, undermining access to asylum procedures. This bylaw is currently under review by the Presidential Administration.

In 2023, the UN intervened in a case of an asylum-seeker from Belarus/Ukraine facing extradition and refoulement, urging amendments to strengthen non-refoulement guarantees, however, was not successful as the person was extradited. Despite interventions, from June to September 2023, two asylum seekers in detention were denied effective access to the asylum process due to bureaucratic handoffs. In October 2023, an asylum-seeker disappeared, indicating on-

going challenges in protecting asylum seekers' rights. In December 2023, another asylum-seeker awaiting access to the national asylum procedure was extradited.

The United Nations supports Kyrgyzstan in its efforts to implement the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, ratified on 2 October 2003, under the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). In 2022, Kyrgyzstan launched a 2022-2025 Anti-Human Trafficking Program and Action Plan to bolster anti-trafficking initiatives, advocate for victims' rights, and enhance inter-agency and international cooperation. Despite the pandemic's challenges, the government improved victim identification, updated laws to protect victims, established standard operating procedures for national referral mechanisms, and repatriated children from conflict zones. However, the country faces reduced investigations and prosecutions, lack of trafficker convictions, and a heavy reliance on international aid for victim services.¹¹⁴

By the end of October 2023, 168 children and 70 mothers had been repatriated from Syria to Kyrgyzstan, while approximately 450 Kyrgyzstani children and mothers remained in Syria. The CRC recommended that the Government take effective measures to repatriate all children from camps in Syria and ensure their prompt and child-friendly reintegration into their respective communities.

Over recent years, the government has persistently aimed to control trade unions, leading to systematic interventions and critiques of overreach. The Jogorku Kenesh initiated a commission in June 2022 to scrutinize the Law "On Trade Unions", later calling for significant structural changes within unions, viewed as an infringement on their autonomy. In October 2023, a proposed draft Law sought government sway over union finances, contradicting both national and international labour standards. Additionally, local

governmental pressures have intensified, notably in Bishkek, with strategies seemingly aimed at dismantling independent trade union leadership. These developments have drawn criticism from the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), Industrial Global Union, and the International Labour Organization (ILO), all of which demanded a halt to government intrusions and support for the preservation of independent unions. This scenario underscores a critical juncture for labour rights and union independence in the country, contrary to their freedom of association.

A decade after the 2010 interethnic violence in the South, authorities have yet to take significant steps to provide justice for the victims of human rights violations recorded during ensuing criminal investigations and trials.

Moreover, there has been no advancement in enhancing the representation of ethnic minorities in political and decision-making roles, notably within the judiciary and law enforcement sectors. Additionally, the current state language requirements for all civil servants pose a significant barrier to the nomination of candidates from ethnic minorities. The draft Law "On the State Language" drafted by the State Language Commission at the end of 2021, after no progress during 2022, was eventually adopted in May 2023 and came into force on 17 July 2023.¹¹⁵ This was followed by the adoption of the new Law on Education¹¹⁶ on 11 August 2023. The State Language Law restricts multilingual education, while the Education Law allows for more flexibility, stating that "educational services may be provided in a foreign language" and that the state will facilitate learning of the state, official, and a foreign language at all educational levels. However, the specific foreign languages are not clearly defined. Despite these inconsistencies, the ambiguity between the two laws may provide opportunities to advocate for

¹¹⁴ See: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/kyrgyz-republic/>

¹¹⁵ <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/112618?cl=ru-ru>

¹¹⁶ <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/112665/edition/1273902/ru>

children from ethnic groups to use their native languages in education. Although the Kyrgyz Zharany civic identity Concept continues to advocate for the Kyrgyz language as a unifying force for national civic identity, linguistic experts and civil society organizations consistently point out the need for further development in the methodology and materials for Kyrgyz language instruction. In the context of events in Ukraine, the emphasis on promoting the Kyrgyz language has intensified, evidenced by numerous MPs, including the new Speaker, and judges demanding to hold related discussions and court proceedings in the Kyrgyz language. During 2023, presentations of state officials in the Parliament in the Russian language were rejected on several occasions, indicating the political will to switch to the state language completely during all deliberations in the Parliament.

In July 2023, MPs introduced the draft “On Ensuring the Right to Equality and Protection from Discrimination”, aiming to ban all

forms of discrimination and establish a national mechanism for protecting discrimination victims. On 10 October 2023, UNDP and OHCHR facilitated public discussions on the draft, which has been registered in the Parliament. While the draft does not explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), it includes a broader, open-ended formulation for potential discrimination “based on other characteristics”. The discussion event attracted participation from MPs, state officials, the Ombudsperson’s Institute, civil society, including Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, and UN/International Organizations. Recommendations were offered by entities like the Supreme Court, Ministry of Justice, and Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration, as well as the Ombudsman Institute and civil society. In December 2023, the draft law on equality and non-discrimination was reviewed by the Cabinet of Ministers, which rejected it, claiming that it is declarative and duplicates provisions in existing legislation.

6. NATIONAL VISION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The National Sustainable Development Strategy of Kyrgyzstan 2018-2040 serves as a cornerstone document, charting a strategic vision for the country's socio-economic progress over two decades. The strategy is structured around four key pillars:

1. Human Development: This dimension emphasizes the significance of universal access to societal engagement. It prioritizes health, education, decent work, culture, science, and civil integration as fundamental to personal and collective progress.

2. Economic Well-being and Business and Finance Promotion: This aspect focuses on fostering a competitive economy that leverages human capital and formal labor markets. It aims to enhance investment potential and regional development bolstered by quality infrastructure. Critical economic sectors like agro-industry, light industry, and sustainable tourism are targeted for growth, with environmental sustainability and climate change adaptation considered essential for durable economic expansion.

3. Public Administration: The strategy underlines the need for robust and stable govern-

ance. It calls for a balanced state power system, a just judiciary, enhanced local self-governance, and strengthened national and regional security. Furthermore, it advocates for economic and diplomatic integration and the advancement of a digital economy.

4. Transformation of the Development System: This pillar advocates for a thorough review and reform of the existing development management systems, including policies preceding the National Development Strategy 2040. It envisages reorganizing the National Council for Sustainable Development and harnessing improved capacities and technologies for better coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of development efforts.

The President of Kyrgyzstan has also endorsed the National Development Strategy until 2026, which lays out specific actions within seven critical priority areas, designed to operationalize and achieve the long-term goals set by the overarching 2040 strategy. These strategies aim to navigate the country towards a more inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous future.

Priorities of the National Development Strategy until 2026

Anti-crisis measures	Governance reform	Establishing the environment for development	Economic development	Social development	Foreign policy and national security	Special priorities
Combating the COVID-19 infection	Reform of the executive branch	Investment and business climate, export promotion	Hydropower	Socio-cultural development, strengthening civic identity.	Ensuring key national security priorities	Modernization of cities
Restoring economic activity	Digitalization of the governance and development of digital infrastructure	Transport and logistics infrastructure	Agriculture and processing	Healthy Nation	Ensuring military security	Environmental sustainability and climate change
Quality and accessibility of education in a COVID-19	Administrative-territorial reforms	Clean drinking water	Tourism development	Educated Nation	Border security	
Governance in a crisis	Fiscal reform	Labor market and employment	Mining	Inclusive growth	Foreign policy	
	Judicial and law enforcement reform	Financial market	Light industry	Social services		
		Public finance				

In 2023, Kyrgyzstan reconfirmed its dedication to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In September 2023, at the SDG Summit organized in the margins of the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly's, the Kyrgyz President lauded the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the ultimate guide to securing a peaceful, healthy, and safe existence for the present and future generations. He ambitiously set forth the objective for Kyrgyzstan to rank among the top 30 countries by 2030 in terms of SDG achievement.

The President highlighted that the foremost SDG – eradicating poverty – had seen significant progress within Kyrgyzstan before the strike of the COVID-19 pandemic which, along with other subsequent events, has adversely affected the poverty reduction mo-

mentum. To address this, he emphasized that fortifying fair and inclusive social protection systems is vital for reversing the adverse trend and resuming progress towards poverty alleviation.

At the SDG Summit, Kyrgyzstan announced the following national commitments:

1. Transforming of the system and reforms for inclusive and quality education.

“Kyrgyzstan will aim to comprehensively transform a system that promotes inclusive and quality learning for long-term sustainable development by increasing access to early education, expanding inclusive learning pathways, including multilingual education, improving the quality, accessibility, including financial

accessibility, of learning facilities and monitoring progress to address all forms of inequalities; while also Kyrgyzstan aims to improve the quality of students' educational attainment, developing basic skills and ensuring the participation of young people, regardless of ethnic, social or other background, in decision-making processes; in addition, Kyrgyzstan aims to improve the quality of teaching by improving the preparation and use of digital technologies, their accessibility for all children, as well as increasing transparency and autonomy for adequately funding the education."

2. Promotion of an inclusive green economy.

"Kyrgyzstan will aim to achieve sustainable socio-economic growth by transitioning to a new economic model that combines economic reorientation with global efforts to combat climate change and sustainable development, which implies the introduction of an inclusive green economy through various strategies, including expanding financial access for MSMEs in green sectors, promoting climate-smart agriculture, ensuring the active participation of women, returning migrants, PWDs, multiplicity of ethnic groups and other minority groups, promoting digitalization, bridging of the digital divide, faced by those who are left behind, attracting financial resources to achieve the SDGs, increasing resilience in mountain regions, developing climate information, boosting biodiversity conservation, reforming water management, expanding access to renewable energy, all of these aim to harmonize economic development with climate action and inclusion".

Also at the SDG Summit, the Government announced its intention to conduct the second National Voluntary Review in 2024 for presentation in 2025. The Government has since formally submitted its intent.

Additionally, during the National Development Forum 2023 on Poverty and Inequal-

ity, the first follow-up to the SDG Summit, the Head of the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan outlined five national priorities that will set a course towards a resilient and prosperous future in 2024:

1. Strengthening State Institutional Capacity: There is a continuous commitment to fortify the state's institutional capacity, particularly in financial management and administrative reform. This goal reflects an understanding that robust institutions are the backbone of a functioning, progressive state.

2. Enhancing Education and Healthcare: The quality of education and healthcare services is to be elevated as they are considered the foundation for innovative development and the social well-being of Kyrgyzstan's citizens. Investment in these areas is seen as an investment in the country's future human capital.

3. Promoting Sustainable Economic Growth: Strategies will be developed and enacted to stimulate sustainable economic growth and job creation, with special focus on the development of regional areas. This approach aims to decentralize development and ensure balanced growth across the country.]

4. International Cooperation and Resource Mobilization: The goal is to expand cooperation with international partners to mobilize resources and acquire new technologies and knowledge. This includes accessing global financial markets, enhancing exports, and drawing foreign investment, crucial for integrating Kyrgyzstan into the global economy.

5. Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change: Kyrgyzstan is dedicated to promoting environmental sustainability and taking actions to mitigate and adapt to global climate change. Recognizing the importance of protecting the environment to ensure the sustainable development of the country, this goal aims to align economic growth with ecological balance.

7. STRATEGIC ENTRY POINTS FOR UN PROGRAMMING

Kyrgyzstan faces multifaceted political, economic, social, environmental, and regional challenges that necessitate strategic interventions by the United Nations to support the country's sustainable development.

The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023-2027 (UNSDCF) is the key strategic document for the planning and implementation of the UN development system's programme in the Kyrgyz Republic. It was signed by the UN and the Government of Kyrgyzstan in June 2022. Anchored in the Kyrgyz national development priorities, the UNSDCF is first and foremost

informed by Kyrgyzstan's development opportunities and challenges and designed to address the country's specific development demands. The UNSDCF is furthermore rooted in the normative agenda of the UN and pursues the principle of "Leaving No One Behind". Reaching those most marginalized, protecting and promoting human rights, advancing gender equality, deepening resilience, ensuring sustainability, and upholding accountability, represent the core principles of the UNSDCF. Both the UNSDCF's four priority areas and the specific entry-points for programming remain valid:

The four priority areas of the UNSDCF and their alignment with the SDGs:

<p>PRIORITY AREA 1: Equitable access to quality social services (education, health, social protection) and decent work</p>	
<p>PRIORITY AREA 2: Inclusive green socio-economic development</p>	
<p>PRIORITY AREA 3: Inclusive approaches to climate action, disaster risk management and environmental protection</p>	
<p>PRIORITY AREA 4: Just, accountable and inclusive institutions and a civil society for peace, cohesion and human rights</p>	

The UN is well positioned to offer multidimensional and context-specific support targeting Kyrgyzstan’s unique barriers to sustainable development. By leveraging its expertise across these domains, the UN continues assisting Kyrgyzstan to advance progress towards the SDGs amid its complex

development challenges, highlighted in the CCA update of 2023.

The **potential country-specific entry points for the UN programming** will therefore include a need for targeted assistance in the following key areas:

Political stability, Governance and Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening political diversity, institutions, and civic freedoms. • Promote access to information and media freedom. • Judicial reforms and enhancing accountability. • Reducing gender inequalities and fostering women participation in the political, social and economic processes.
Peace and Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating inter-ethnic community dialogues. • Developing early warning and response mechanisms. • Promoting non-violence, conflict resolution and confidence building education. • Support confidence building measures
Economic Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting structural reforms towards sustainable economic growth, economic diversification and private sector development. • Creating a transparent, predictable investment climate. • Advancing financial inclusion and access to financial resources. • Strengthening climate-resilient infrastructure.
Social Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening inclusive policies and legislation in the areas of social protection, health and education. • Building capacity of social service providers. • Improving food security and nutrition programs.
Protecting environmental and strengthening resilience to climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving climate adaptation infrastructure, with focus on the mountain regions. • Enhancing environmental data collection capabilities. • Supporting sustainable land, water and forest management. • Funding renewable energy and energy efficiency programs. • Assisting community-based disaster risk reduction efforts.

At the global level, SDG accelerators have been identified to reach the targets by 2030. These transformative entry points – called “six transitions” - that can have catalytic and multiplier effects across the SDGs include:

(1) food systems; (2) energy access and affordability; (3) digital connectivity; (4) education; (5) jobs and social protection; and (6) climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/six-transitions-investment-pathways-deliver-sdgs>

Within each area, four so-called “engine room” actions have been identified that define the “how” of the implementation of the six transitions: First, shifts are needed across policy and regulatory frameworks, going beyond the standard sectoral approaches. Second, pipelines of bankable and market-ready national projects with participation of both public and private sectors, should be developed. Third, it is crucial to convene all relevant actors to attract the needed financing from all sources – traditional donors, development banks, capital markets, philanthropic foundations, and remittances, to help develop the ‘deal room’ – a financing mix with innovative instruments – for each of the transitions. Fourth, progress will require a focus on capacity-building at a scale to support public institutions and civil society in this process, ensuring a steady increase in capacities over time to reinforce and sustain these investments.

Rooted in the 17 Goals, the “six transitions” and associated “engine rooms” can serve as analytical frameworks for identifying common SDG acceleration pathways. The UN will continue exploring with the Government and other development partners which of the identified pathways most resonates with the specific Kyrgyz country context to guide the UN programming and targeted investments and partnerships.

The UN will continue focusing on the most marginalized by working closely with vulnerable groups, such as children facing difficulties, youth, women, rural smallholder farmers, informal sector workers, migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless persons, persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and people living with HIV, and refugees. Constructive collaboration with national and local authorities, civil society, women’s groups, and other partners is essential for impactful programming.

ANNEX A. PROGRESS TOWARD THE 2030 AGENDA

The Sustainable Development Report 2023¹¹⁸ by Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) ranks Kyrgyzstan 45th out of 166 countries with a score of 74.4, slightly above the regional average of 71.8. This position shows a marginal improvement from its 47th rank in 2022 out of 165 countries, reflecting a global trend of stagnation in SDG progress. The full impact of recent crises, including COVID-19, may not be entirely captured due to data lags. Kyrgyzstan also scores 81.5 on the Statistical Performance Index.

In the Central Asian context, Kyrgyzstan holds the highest position among its peers,

ranking 45th globally. The report indicates that Kyrgyzstan is on track with SDG6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities), showing moderate improvement in several other SDGs, but stagnating in areas like hunger, gender equality, decent work, and several others.

It is noteworthy that SDSN's SDG index, which utilizes 99 indicators, may differ from the National SDG tracker¹¹⁹, as 35 of these indicators are not used or produced by national official statistics but are sourced globally. This variation highlights the importance of considering different data sources and methodologies when assessing SDG progress.

SDG dashboards and trends¹²⁰



SDG Profile for Kyrgyzstan (based on the National SDG Tracker¹²¹)

¹¹⁸ <https://dashboards.sdindex.org/static/profiles/pdfs/SDR-2023-kyrgyz-republic.pdf>

¹¹⁹ <https://data.unescap.org/dataviz/country/KGZ-qjijptkt/en/>

¹²⁰ <https://dashboards.sdindex.org/static/profiles/pdfs/SDR-2023-kyrgyz-republic.pdf>

¹²¹ <https://data.unescap.org/dataviz/country/KGZ-qjijptkt/en/>

Despite setbacks from the COVID-19 pandemic and regional conflicts, the country is persevering in its efforts to reduce poverty (SDG1). The government has enacted various poverty alleviation measures, including expanded social assistance cash transfers and employment schemes. However, as of 2021, one in three people in Kyrgyzstan live below the national poverty line, a stark increase from the 20.1 percent rate in 2019. Rising inflation has further impacted the population's well-being, leading to a 33.3 percent poverty rate in both rural and urban areas in 2022. Specifically, the poverty rate increased by 8 percent to 33.3 percent or 2.244 million people, with the extreme poverty rate also rising to 6.0 percent. Notably, without remittances, the poverty rate would surge to 42.8 percent and the extreme poverty rate to 17.1 percent, significantly impacting various regions. Despite a decrease in consumption level disparities over the past five years, spending inequality remains pronounced, with the top 20 percent of the population outspending the poorest 20 percent by 4.2 times. The Gini coefficient, an indicator of income inequality, has increased from 0.211 in 2017 to 0.345 in 2021, underscoring persistent and widening income disparities (SDG10).

Regarding food security (SDG2), the country is grappling with significant food inflation, largely due to regional conflicts, disproportionately affecting poorer households. One key target (2.2.1) aims to halve the proportion of stunted children under five. In 2018, 11.8 percent of Kyrgyzstan's children under five were stunted, a slight improvement from 12.9 percent in 2014. However, stunting rates vary with household wealth, being 14.0 percent in the poorest households compared to 9.2 percent in the richest. Additionally, about half of the population consumes less than 2100 kcal per day. Persistent malnutrition, poor dietary habits, and inadequate access to services and healthcare have resulted in a high prevalence of anaemia among pregnant women, with

three out of ten affected as of 2021. There is an alarmingly high level of anaemia among pregnant women and significant folate deficiency among adolescent girls¹²². While the salt iodization program has yielded positive results, the flour fortification program needs significant improvement, as only 2 percent of households consume adequately fortified flour.

In healthcare (SDG3), maternal mortality rates have improved but remain high at 33.3 per 100,000 live births in 2021, though over 99 percent of births are attended by skilled health workers. Neonatal mortality decreased to 11.9 cases per 1,000 live births in 2021. Vaccination coverage and routine immunization have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, WUENIC data suggests that vaccine coverage at the national level is at about 90 percent (DTP3 – 87 percent; POL3 – 87 percent; IPV1 – 86 percent; MCV1-92 percent; MCV2 – 93 percent; RV – 52 percent; PCV – 90 percent), and the country has experienced measles outbreaks in 2023. Overall, NCDs are the leading cause of death and disability, costing Kyrgyzstan's economy approximately 3.9 percent GDP each year. Cardiovascular disease accounts for half of overall mortality and is the main driver of premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs).¹²³ Public healthcare quality, substantial out-of-pocket payments, and the concerning decline in the number and distribution of qualified medical professionals present significant concerns and challenges to the health system and must be addressed.

In education (SDG4), the country has made strides in expanding access and enrolment at all levels, particularly for women and girls. Pre-school coverage surged from 10 percent in 2010 to 80.9 percent in 2021, with a significant increase in children attending various forms of pre-school education, including short-stay kindergartens. Despite these improvements, quality issues persist, particularly in vocational training and school availa-

¹²² UNICEF Kyrgyzstan's National Integrated Micronutrient and Anthropometric Survey (NIMAS) 2022

¹²³ <https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1469624/retrieve>, p. 6

bility, with only half of all children achieving a minimum literacy level. Literacy rates for children aged 7-14 stand at 57.9 percent, while numeracy rates are at 51.3 percent.

Despite strides in gender equality, the country still faces challenges in ensuring greater gender equality (SDG5) and women's empowerment. Kyrgyzstan has implemented special legislative measures, including a 30 percent female quota for candidate lists with UN support. However, the representation of women in Parliament has fluctuated, decreasing from 25 in 2015 to 18 in 2021. A legislative norm ensures gender continuity in parliamentary seats upon departure. Initiatives like the national action plan on gender equality aim to address disparities, but gender-based violence remains prevalent, with early marriages and 'bride-kidnaping' continuing as acute social issues.

For SDG 6, access to improved drinking water sources in Kyrgyzstan reached 95.1 percent in 2021, with urban areas having higher access (99.7 percent) compared to rural areas (92.4 percent). However, there are substantial regional disparities, notably in the Batken (88.2 percent) and Osh (90.2 percent) regions, highlighting the need for more equitable distribution of water resources.

Regarding SDG 7, about 71 percent of the population has stable access to electricity, which drops to around 62 percent in rural areas. The country has observed an increase in the use of clean cooking fuels to 74.9 percent of households. Additionally, there has been a notable rise in renewable energy consumption, from 31.6 percent in 2016 to 36.7 percent in 2020. The significant growth in hydroelectric power production reflects Kyrgyzstan's commitment to implementing carbon-free energy policies.

For SDG 8, Kyrgyzstan reported a low unemployment rate of 5.3 percent in 2021, yet informal employment remains high at 79 percent, particularly among women (66.5 percent). A third of the population aged 15 or older has a bank account or similar financial institution access. Despite reforms, there is a significant gap in the social

protection system, with only 41.7 percent of the population covered by at least one social protection cash benefit and 73.6 percent by healthcare programmes, indicating a need for more comprehensive and effective coverage.

In working towards SDG 9, Kyrgyzstan has demonstrated varying levels of progress. Notable improvements have been made in one area, while another has seen some advancement. As of 2020, there has been a regression in developing quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure, and in achieving inclusive and sustainable industrialization (Target 9.1). However, there has been steady growth in the number of researchers per million inhabitants. Furthermore, significant progress has been made between 2015 and 2021 in expanding access to information and communications technology (Target 9.c), with broad coverage now a reality. The percentage of the population with mobile network access is close to reaching the SDG target, signalling considerable advancements in this sector.

The UN Network on Migration is supporting the Government to implement SDG 10. Number of new or revised development or sectoral policies that integrate migration and recognize migrants as contributors to sustainable development is increasing. In 2021, the Government adopted the Concept of State Migration Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2021–2030 through Enactment No.191 and in April 2022 approved the Action Plan for 2022–2025, which details the tasks and activities to ensure good migration governance, including integration of foreign migrants, and reintegration of returned migrants. In September 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted Enactment No. 513 on the National Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for Achieving Gender Equality until 2030 and the National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2022–2024, which includes measures related to migrant women and adaptive leadership in the field of women's entrepreneurship and support for women migrant workers. In November 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers, by Enactment No.655-r endorsed a new National

Human Rights Action Plan for 2022–2024 which includes specific measures on human rights of migrants and on development of reintegration and re-skilling programs for migrants returning to the Kyrgyz Republic. By its Resolution of the National Development Forum “Poverty and Inequality” held in November 2023, the Government recognized the positive role and contribution of migrants, including return migrants, to economic growth, poverty reduction, inequality reduction and sustainable development in countries of origin, transit and destination, including through the enrichment of societies through human, socio-economic and cultural capacities.

Globally, there are significant challenges and stagnant progress in meeting the goals of SDG 11, underscoring the need for more comprehensive initiatives to foster sustainable cities and communities. In the UNECE region, the progress towards creating safe and sustainable urban spaces is varied. The ECA region has seen positive developments, though it is important to note that data for assessment was limited, with only two of the ten targets evaluated and sufficient data available only up to 2019. Within this context, Kyrgyzstan has exhibited substantial progress in achieving SDG 11.

For SDG 12, Kyrgyzstan shows moderate progress. The economy’s underdevelopment results in low overall material consumption, but there are challenges, including inefficient energy systems and high biomass use in rural areas. Integrating sustainable consumption and production practices in sectors like agriculture, mining, and natural resources is crucial, necessitating improved data usage and national accounting systems.

Under SDG 13, Kyrgyzstan is committed to addressing climate change and promoting climate-resilient, low-carbon development. Since joining the UNFCCC in 2000 and rat-

ifying the Paris Agreement, the country has been actively contributing to global climate efforts. Its 1st Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in 2021 sets goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 16.63 percent by 2025 and up to 43.62 percent by 2030 with international support.

Regarding SDG 15, Kyrgyzstan’s predominantly mountainous terrain, accounting for 94 percent of its land, is vital for water supply but is impacted by global temperature rise. In response, the United Nations declared 2022 the International Year of Sustainable Mountain Development, led by Kyrgyzstan. The country initiated the “Five Years of Action for the Development of the Mountain Regions” plan to protect its terrestrial ecosystems.

SDG16 indicators in Kyrgyzstan reveal mixed outcomes. National Human Rights Institutions face pressures, and safety perceptions have slightly decreased. Child labour remains high, and human trafficking incidents have reduced significantly. There is an increase in the proportion of unsentenced detainees in prisons, while birth registration rates are high. Perceptions of bribery in businesses have declined, but the country’s Corruption Perceptions Index score remains low. Government expenditure alignment with approved budgets has improved, but data for other SDG16 aspects like illicit flows and inclusive decision-making is lacking. The country’s Press Freedom Index ranking has dropped, indicating challenges in civic space.

Under SDG17, Kyrgyzstan, along with other Developing Economies, faces severe debt challenges. As of February 2023, it is classified as “borderline” debt-affected, with a debt ratio of 61.1 percent of GDP and significant shares held by China and the Paris Club. The poverty rate in the country stands at 33.3 percent.

ANNEX B. VOLUNTARY COMMITMENTS TO HUMAN RIGHTS

Voluntary pledges and commitments of Kyrgyzstan on human rights pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

Kyrgyzstan is committed to the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Kyrgyzstan supports the universality of human rights and their application on an equal, non-discriminatory and non-selective basis.

Kyrgyzstan firmly believes that the Human Rights Council is one of the most important bodies of the United Nations and is a unique global platform for the discussion and development of recommendations in the field of human rights.

Kyrgyzstan has already been a member of the Human Rights Council twice, between 2009 and 2012, and between 2016 and 2018, and, drawing on its previous experience, intends to continue contributing to the work of this vital and in-demand United Nations body. In this connection, Kyrgyzstan has submitted its candidacy to the Council for the period 2023–2025.

Kyrgyzstan's achievements in the field of human rights

In Kyrgyzstan, the processes of forming a strong democratic form of Government, building the rule of law, bringing national legislation into conformity with applicable norms of international law, and major reform of the judicial and law enforcement systems continue to develop dynamically.

In this connection, a large-scale inventory of the legislation of the country has been under way since 2021; systematic work has

been undertaken on the humanization of criminal legislation, and implementation of the following is ongoing:

the 2018–2040 National Strategy for Sustainable Development; the 2021–2024 State strategy for combating corruption and eliminating its causes; the 2019–2022 dedicated State programme for the development of the judicial system of Kyrgyzstan; the 2018–2023 strategy for the development of the penal correction system of Kyrgyzstan; the 2019–2025 Plan of Action to Improve the Quality of Life of Older Persons; the 2018–2028 Programme of the Government of Kyrgyzstan to Support the Family and Protect Children, and the National Development Programme of Kyrgyzstan for the period up to 2026.

In the period from 2019 to 2021, the human rights action plan was actively implemented. Currently, final preparations are in progress for the adoption of a new action plan for 2022–2024 based on the recommendations of the third cycle of the universal periodic review of the treaty bodies and of the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, and the National Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in Kyrgyzstan for the period up to 2030.

There have been significant achievements in the process of reforming and democratizing the electoral law and process of Kyrgyzstan. As part of a successful reform of the electoral system, election credibility, transparency and competitiveness have been achieved, and conditions have been created to ensure the full realization of the political rights of citizens in elections, both as candidates and as voters.

Those efforts will continue, as ensuring free democratic elections is important for the implementation of the paramount international standard of democracy and constitu-

tional obligation – the principle of citizens' power and the expansion of civic engagement.

Further steps will be taken to make the electoral process more inclusive by improving conditions for the full exercise of active and passive suffrage of citizens, including women, youth, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and internal and external migrants.

Kyrgyzstan is a party to eight of the nine major universal United Nations human rights treaties (the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), having submitted more than 28 national reports to United Nations treaty bodies since 1992. Kyrgyzstan engaged in its third universal periodic review cycle in January 2020, and in December of that year it extended a standing invitation to all thematic United Nations special procedures. A total of 12 special mandate holders visited Kyrgyzstan on country visits between 2001 and 2022. Kyrgyzstan has also officially recognized the competence of the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to receive individual communications.

Kyrgyzstan regards partnership as an effective way of promoting human rights issues in the country, and has therefore been creating the necessary conditions for the establishment of a reliable platform for equitable dialogue and cooperation. Kyrgyzstan has more than 6,000 non-Governmental organizations, human rights defenders, the Ombudsman Institute, the Commissioner

for the Rights of the Child of Kyrgyzstan, the Council for Persons with Disabilities reporting to the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan, the National Council for Women and Gender Development reporting to the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan, and the National Centre for the Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

A Coordinating Council on Human Rights reporting to the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan has been operating since 2013. It monitors the activities of State bodies to implement United Nations recommendations on human rights.

Further action by Kyrgyzstan to promote human rights:

- Making every effort to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and democracy at both the national and international levels;
- Actively participating in efforts to strengthen the Council's role in improving international cooperation to achieve universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- Supporting the work of the United Nations Human Rights Council's treaty bodies and special procedures and their mandates and responsibilities;
- Maintaining the universal character of the universal periodic review and participating constructively in the review process;
- Promoting at international level the rights of women, children, migrant workers and persons with disabilities;
- Contributing to international cooperation and dialogue in the Human Rights Council by promoting the fight against discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance;
- Continuing to support the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in fulfilling his or her mandate.

Kyrgyzstan also intends to:

- Maintain a standing invitation to all special procedures mandate holders and engage in constructive dialogue aimed at improving the country's human rights protection system;
- Continue to cooperate with United Nations treaty bodies, ensure timely submission of national periodic reports, and follow up on review recommendations;
- Strengthen and enhance the capacities and capabilities of national human rights institutions to enable them to fulfil their mandates effectively and independently, with adequate financial and human resources, in accordance with the Paris Principles;
- Strengthen the independence of the Office of the Ombudsman, in compliance with the Paris Principles;
- Ensure the effective functioning of the Coordinating Council on Human Rights reporting to the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan;
- Continue to build the capacity of civil society and work in partnership with civil society organizations in the development of national policy;
- Continue efforts to strengthen anti-corruption measures in line with the international campaign to strengthen good governance;
- Continue to work actively and consistently to bring the national legislation of Kyrgyzstan on birth registration into compliance with international standards in order to ensure that every child born in the territory of Kyrgyzstan is registered;
- In cooperation with international organizations and representatives of civil society, continue activities to raise awareness of human rights among the population through information campaigns, as well as training in this area for law enforcement and judicial officials;
- Promote the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of citizens, with due regard for the rights of the most vulnerable groups;
- Increase efforts to eradicate poverty, including through the implementation of the Labour and Social Protection Development Programme;
- Introduce the "Accessible Country" programme, to address the issues of persons with disabilities and other low-mobility population groups in Kyrgyzstan.
- Continue to ensure gender mainstreaming in all areas of public policy, based on the constitutionally enshrined concept of gender equality;
- Continue to work to create the conditions for the realization of women's and girls' economic, political, social, and cultural rights, including the establishment of a functional education system, increasing women's access to justice, and supporting women's political leadership at all levels, as well as elections and governance;
- Continue efforts to improve the well-being of children, including through family support and the protection of children from all forms of violence, and increase access to quality, multilingual and inclusive education for children, especially children with disabilities, ethnic minorities and children in difficult circumstances.

