KYRGYZSTAN: STUDY ON THE SOCIOECONOMIC EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON RETURNEES

Mitigating Socioeconomic Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Migrants and Communities in Central Asia and the Russian Federation
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INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM)

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This report is part of the outputs under the project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation "Mitigating Socioeconomic Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Migrants and Communities in Central Asia and the Russian Federation". Overall, project objective is to mitigate the socioeconomic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants and their families and help governments of the Central Asian states and the Russian Federation address operational challenges of migration management due to the current global health crisis.

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All the maps used in this report are for illustration purposes only.

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List of Acronyms

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
IOM	International Organization for Migration
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic was declared a public health emergency by the World Health Organization on 11 March 2020. The global impact of COVID-19 on public health and mobility across the world's population is immense. The emergency directly impacted on global health and mobility of the world's population. COVID-19 containment policies and measures to restrict people's mobility to prevent spread of the virus have affected various population categories, including migrants.

As the pandemic continues to pose myriad challenges, Governments of Central Asia and the Russian Federation have adopted early preventative measures to increase preparedness for COVID-19 outbreak. As a result, hundreds thousand migrants have been stranded abroad and uncertain about their future. Regardless of whether migrants have managed to return home or have remained stranded abroad, both migrant groups continue to face different yet significant challenges. In most cases they are not covered by state social protection systems either in the countries of destination or in the countries of origin. The current COVID-19 emergency is exacerbating all pre-existing migrants' vulnerabilities, which can intersect with other factors such as sex, age and disability, as well as nationality, status or ethnic origin.

To better understand how the pandemic affects global mobility and migrants particularly, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been monitoring COVID-19 related mobility restrictions imposed by countries, territories, and areas and its effect on different population categories, including migrants.

IOM in collaboration with national partners from Central Asia and the Russian Federation, has launched a regional initiative "Mitigating Socioeconomic Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Migrants and Communities in Central Asia and the Russian Federation".

The initiative is supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). It aims to reduce the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants and their communities, and to assist the governments of Central Asia and the Russian Federation in addressing the operational challenges of managing migration in the current global health crisis.

This initiative is a response to the IOM Regional Appeal for Central Asia and the Russian Federation. As such, it contributes to the overall goal of the IOM COVID-19 Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan to halt the further spread of the COVID-19 and reduce the social and economic impact of the pandemic. In line with the COVID-19 Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan, IOM is supporting governments and partners to understand population mobility trends and reinforce public health that aims to minimize disruption to society and the economy. While the efforts are initially focused on preparedness and response, IOM considers the need for recovery equally important. This includes the aim of "Leaving No One Behind" as well as incorporating elements of social cohesion and programming throughout.

The project covers all Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation. The stakeholders of the project are the governments of the Central Asian countries and the Russian Federation, civil society organizations, labour migrants, returnees, vulnerable migrants and communities of origin and destination.

The 10-months project works towards the achievement of the following Outcomes:

> Outcome 1. Governments of Central Asia and the Russian Federation implement targeted and evidence-based responses to the COVID-19 impacts on migrants and returnees.
>
> Outcome 2: Protection and assistance needs of migrants are mitigated and addressed.
>
> Outcome 3: Central Asian and Russian policymakers adapt their policies towards more financial inclusion through enhanced remittance digitalization.

Within the Outcome 1, IOM collected critical multi-layered information on the mobility, needs and vulnerabilities of returning and stranded migrants in the Central Asian countries and the Russian Federation.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, migrant workers started to return to Kyrgyzstan after March 2020. As reported by the local media, from the date of the lock down in March 2020 to August 2020, around 25 000 labour migrants returned home.[1] It is important to note that there are no reliable or official statistics on the total number of migrants that returned to Kyrgyzstan due to COVID-19.

The current study aims to gather evidence on the migration dynamics, COVID-19 impacts, and livelihood situation of host communities, returnees, and stranded migrants living in Kyrgyzstan. This assessment was conducted in December 2020 by using the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) methodology. Data was gathered on returning migrants to provide critical information for humanitarian actors and the government on their location and needs to deliver services and respond to needs in a timely manner.

The DTM is a system to track and monitor displacement and population mobility. It is designed to regularly and systematically capture, process and disseminate information to provide a better understanding of the movements and evolving needs of displaced populations, whether on site or en route. The DTM plays an essential role in providing primary data and information on displacement, both in country, at regional and global levels. IOM utilizes the DTM to gain in-depth knowledge on the development of the migration process.[2]

DTM includes four standard components – each comprising various tools and methods – that can be applied, adapted and combined as relevant for a particular context. The standard components are: (i) mobility tracking; (ii) flow monitoring; (iii) registration and (iv) surveys. Mobility tracking and survey components were adapted and utilized in Kyrgyzstan.

The country office of IOM in Kyrgyzstan surveyed 885 returning migrants under this project. The DTM survey tool was adapted to the country context and tailored to the target population. This report presents the findings of the survey conducted in Bishkek and Osh cities in December 2020. The findings of the study can be used to understand new migration patterns and common challenges faced by migrants returning to home country.

1 Ernist Nurmatov, «Migrants are returning en masse to Kyrgyzstan. Unemployment is expected to rise», April 23, 2020 https://rus.azattyk.org/a/30571881.html (accessed 10 December 2020).
2 "About DTM" the International Organization for Migration, accessed 29 November 2020, https://dtm.iom.int/about.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Sociodemographic profile

The surveyed returnee population was mostly represented by young males aged between 24 and 29 years old. Overall, the proportion of male respondents was 55 per cent and female 45 per cent. Most of the respondents reported being married and having children who were with them at their current location. All respondents have completed some level of formal education with the majority having completed secondary education or higher. Eight out of 10 returnees arrived from the Russian Federation, following by comparatively smaller percentage from Turkey, Kazakhstan, and other countries. Half of the surveyed migrants have spent anywhere between one to three years, in their reported countries of destination. For seven people out of 10 this was the first migration experience, the rest had previous migration experience.

Reasons for migration

Economic factors were reportedly the main ones influencing migration decision. Among the push factors, the most frequently cited were low wages and lack of employment opportunities in Kyrgyzstan and family problems. The pull factors for the surveyed returning migrants were higher incomes, availability of more jobs, existing social network at destination and geographical proximity. For 55 per cent of the surveyed returnees, COVID-19 directly impacted the duration of stay in the destination country.

Out of those respondents who reported changing the length of their migration due to the pandemic, nine in 10 reported that they stayed less than planned previously.

Reasons for return

The study investigated reasons for return of the migrants and challenges they faced after returning to Kyrgyzstan. Among the main reasons were pressure from the migrant's family to return, jobs loss, COVID-19 related reasons linking to economic factors or imposed restrictions. At the same time, four in 10 migrants reported experiencing challenges after they returned to the country. The share of males (41%) who faced challenged was slightly higher comparing to females (39%). Among the challenges that the migrants reported facing upon return were finding jobs and housing in Kyrgyzstan, willingness to migrate again but having no possibility to do so, and repayment of debts.

Employment situation

Employment status of the respondents were studied prior, during migration and after COVID-19 outbreak. As revealed, employment rate of the surveyed population was the highest during their migration period in the countries of destination. Comparing the employment situation before migration, and during COVID-19 pandemic, the analysis shows that employment rate of the migrants dropped almost twice comparing to pre-migration period and three times after the virus outbreak. For example, seven in 10 respondents were employed in Kyrgyzstan either in private/public sectors or self-employed prior to their migration. After returning to the country during COVID-19, only three in 10 people reported having employment. As the data shows, it is more challenging to find employment for female returnees (72% have no jobs) in comparison to male returnees (58%). Location wise, more returning migrants in Osh face hardships in finding employment (74%) in comparison to Bishkek (55%). The following barriers were cited by the respondents as challenging: no job openings, high level of unemployment, less opportunities, lack of connections, low education level and high level of competition, low work experience. Four in 10 returning migrants who have been employed currently work less hours, at the same time six in 10 people earn less. More females have experienced a decrease in the level of income (64%) in comparison to males (58%).

Humanitarian assistance to a vulnerable migrant and his family affected by COVID-19, Osh. © IOM 2021

COVID-19 impacts

Sixty three per cent of the returnees reported that over the last three months their income was insufficient to meet their household needs. As the gathered data shows, the pandemic changed the financial situation of 33 per cent of the returning migrants, while 4 per cent experienced total income loss and 18 per cent accumulated debts. As a coping strategy, 42 per cent reportedly borrowed money to cover monthly expenses for the last three months of the pandemic (October–December 2020). In addition, the study revealed that 84 per cent of all respondents reduced food quantity at some level and 82 per cent compromised on food quality. For 50 per cent of returnee migrants, the pandemic has negatively affected the financial situation in either lower salaries, higher debt or total loss of income. The major reason for worsening financial situation of the respondents was reported loss of employment (54%), decreased wages (42%), not receiving remittances (12%).

The analysis of the additional questions asked to returnees related to daily access to hygiene items suggests that most of the respondents have access to face masks (90%), soap (98%), hand sanitizer (88%) and water for domestic use (94%). Six out of 10 respondents have access to information on COVID-19 through different sources such as media, posters, web links, official sources. Nevertheless, the data suggests that access to hand sanitizer and information should be prioritized and improved.

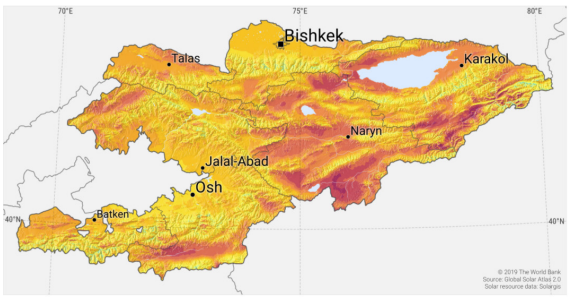
3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research and sampling method

Total population of Kyrgyzstan is 6,523,500 (2020), men: 3,237,600, women 3,285,900.[1] More people live in rural areas (4 292,500) in comparison to urban areas (2,231,000). There are two major cities in Kyrgyzstan, in the north – Bishkek (the capital) and in the south – Osh. These are also the cities with the highest population size. In 2019 the population of Bishkek was 1,053,900 people and of Osh was 312,500.

Due to absence of data on migrant population, the geographical scope for this study was limited to Bishkek and Osh cities to conduct the current survey. In Bishkek, the focus was given to residential settlements (novostroiki), which were selected randomly. In Osh, all municipal territorial units were targeted.

Map 1: Survey target locations in Kyrgyzstan: Bishkek and Osh



Source: World Bank 2019

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

This research study surveyed adult migrants who have returned from the country of destination after March 2020 and are currently living in Kyrgyzstan.

A randomized sampling method was utilized for this study. As compared to non-randomized sampling, this sampling method ensures high levels of internal validity and a sample population closer to the real population.

There are four administrative districts in Bishkek city which are Oktyabrsky, Pervomaisky, Sverdlovskiy and Leninsky districts. From each administrative district, four settlements were randomly selected for the survey. In total 16 locations were identified and surveyed.

There are currently seven municipal territorial units (six urban and one rural) in Osh city which are Turan, Sulaiman-Too, Kerme-Too, Manas-Ata, Amir-Timur, Kurmanjan-Datka, and Japalak village municipal unit. For Osh city, both rural and urban areas of the city were selected, the city was further divided into smaller administrative units. The field work was conducted by DTM enumerators assigned to specific city territories. The DTM teams searched for, identified, contacted and directly surveyed migrants in both target cities.

A stratified sampling strategy was selected for this study. To have a representative sample with a 9 per cent confidence level and 5 per cent margin of error, a total of 384 adult returning migrants with the citizenship of Kyrgyzstan needed to be interviewed. Based on registration data of the real population, these 384 individuals were proportionally stratified by sex and sub-districts. Additional 10 per cent was added to the proposed sample size to address the error margin. In total 384+10%=423 people in Bishkek and 423 people in Osh were proposed to be surveyed. Out of the total sample, 885 respondents were surveyed in Kyrgyzstan. The number of surveys used for this study is 772.

Twenty enumerators directly recruited by IOM were engaged in the survey: 10 in Bishkek and 10 in Osh. Each enumerator oversaw data collection for a specific sub-district. To ensure higher quality of data, enumerators were trained in a two-day workshop with the DTM Coordinator. All enumerators were nationals of Kyrgyzstan, who speak the local language and have experience working with migrants in these areas.

3.2. Limitations

The data presented in this report should not be considered as representative of all returning migrants living in Kyrgyzstan. The geographical scope of this study was limited to the country major cities Bishkek and Osh due to limited statistical information on migrant populations and other limitations.

The study was conducted during the major turmoil which the country went through following the parliamentary elections on 4 October 2020. This was the third unrest in the history of the country since independence in 1991. The security situation remained unstable during the period of October 2020–January 2021, especially in the major cities of the country–Bishkek and Osh. However, the study locations were further from the city centres where protest took place on a regular basis.

The study was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kyrgyzstan, however lock down measures were lifted by the time of the field work. All enumerators were provided with personal hygiene items such as face shields, face masks and gloves.

The DTM methodology was piloted in Kyrgyzstan by IOM for the first time. IOM Kyrgyzstan invested in building and sustaining capacity of the national consultant and enumerators involved in the study. The current study was a learning exercise for all parties involved.

1 «Kyrgyzstan in figures», the National Statistical Committee, Kyrgyzstan, accessed 29 November 2020, www.stat.kg/ru/publications/sbornik-kyrgyzstan-v-cifrah/.

3.3. Definitions

Returning migrants or returnees: nationals of Kyrgyzstan who returned to the country after living for a certain consecutive period abroad (for at least three months) and who returned after March 2020.

3.4. Sample distribution

During December 2020, IOM DTM teams in Kyrgyzstan conducted 885 surveys of returning migrants in two locations using the tools developed by the international DTM consultant. The total final sample size was 772 people in both target locations, Bishkek and Osh. Four residential settlements from each of the four administrative city districts were randomly selected in Bishkek to be surveyed which totaled to 16 locations. In Osh, all seven city municipal territorial units were selected for the survey which were further divided into smaller administrative units. The number of respondents surveyed for each location is presented below.

Figure 1: Number of respondents by location of the interview - Bishkek city

338 respondents
Bishkek

Ak-Bata:	9	Kalys-Ordo:	27
Ak-Bosogo:	30	Kara-Jygach:	21
Ak-Ordo:	26	Kelechek:	31
Ak-Orgo:	19	Kok-Jar:	26
Ala-Too:	36	Ruhiy-Muras:	14
Altyn-Ordo:	12	Tynchtyk:	27
Archa-Beshik:	16	Yntymak:	26
Bakai-Ata:	5	Zhenish:	13

Figure 2: Number of respondents by location of the interview - Osh city

434 respondents
Osh

Ak-Buura:	5	Kerme-Too:	17
Ak-Tilek:	53	Kurmanjan-Datka:	6
Alymbek-Datka:	27	Manas-Ata:	27
Amir-Timur:	59	Sulaiman-Too:	20
Dostuk:	28	Turan	52
Japalak Territorial Administration:	140		

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Sociodemographic profile

The study which was conducted during December 2020 collected data from 772 returnee migrants of whom 54 per cent were male and 46 per cent were female (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Number of total respondents by sex

772
Total respondents

45% 55%

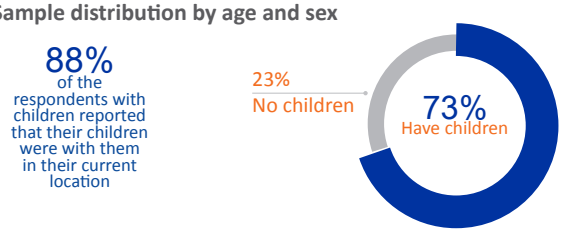
The age distribution of the respondents is presented in Figure 4. As seen, the major group (total 80%) constituted of 25–54 year old working age respondents with 43 per cent male and 37 per cent female respondents. The majority of females surveyed represented the age group of 35–44 year olds people (11%) followed by the age group of 25–29 year olds (10%), while the plurality of the males surveyed represented younger age group of 25–29 year olds (14%) followed by the age group of 35–44 year old respondents (12%). The cohort of 30–34 year old returnees constituted of 10 per cent male and 8 per cent female respondents.

Figure 4: Sample distribution by age and sex

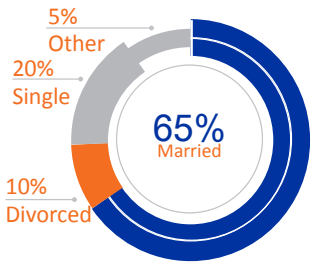
2%	55-64	2%
8%	45-54	7%
11%	35-44	12%
8%	30-34	10%
10%	25-29	14%
7%	18-24	9%

Overall, 65 per cent of the surveyed were married, 20 per cent single, 10 per cent divorced and 5 per cent widowed, engaged (Graph 2). Seventy-three per cent of the respondents have children (Graph 1).

Graph 1: Sample distribution by age and sex



Graph 2: Marital status of the respondents

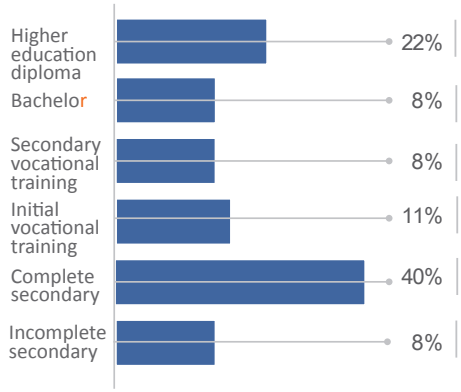


In general, 88 per cent of respondents reported that their children were with them in Kyrgyzstan, 16 per cent reported that their children were elsewhere in the country and 9 per cent reported that their children were outside the country (50 children of the returnees). Most of the children who are not with their parents and outside of Kyrgyzstan, reside in the Russian Federation (30 children), in the United States of America (5 children of the returnees), the rest are in the following countries: Republic of Korea, Italy and Poland. In total, 546 respondents reported having 1,541 children.

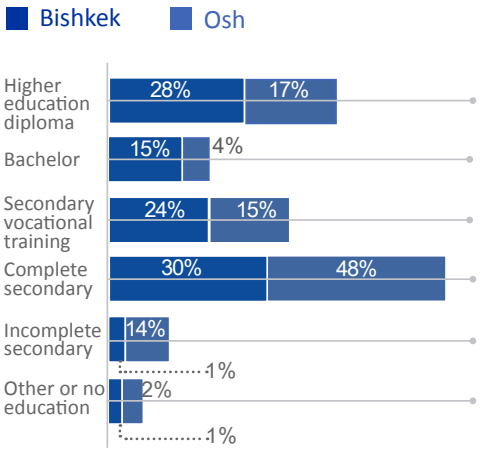
4.2. Education

As for the education level of the returnees surveyed during the study (Graph 3), the majority completed secondary education (1–11 grades, 40%), followed by higher education (22%) and initial vocation education (11%). Others have incomplete secondary education (1–9 grades, 8%), secondary vocational training (8%), bachelor degree (8%). In general, one per cent of the respondents have a master's degree (7 people) and 1 per cent other forms of education (9 people). Only three people reported that they have no education (out of 768 respondents). The education level of the returnees by the locations (Graph 4) reveals that in Bishkek 30 per cent of respondents have completed secondary education followed by higher education graduates (28%). In Osh, on contrary, 48 per cent of returnees surveyed have completed secondary education while 17 per cent have higher education. The proportion of migrant returnees with higher education levels is observed in Bishkek.

Graph 3: Percentage of respondents by education level



Graph 4: Percentage of respondents by education level and interview location

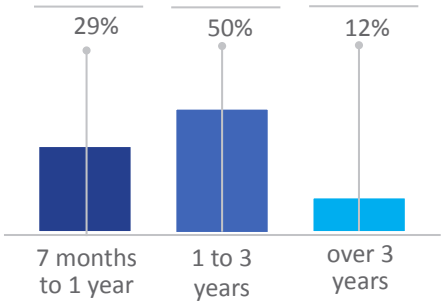


In terms of countries of return, 84 per cent arrived from the Russian Federation, 7 per cent from Turkey, 4 per cent from the Republic of Kazakhstan and the rest returned from other countries (4%) such as the Republic of Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Hungary, the People's Republic of China, Pakistan and Poland.

Figure 5: Percentage of respondents by country of last migration

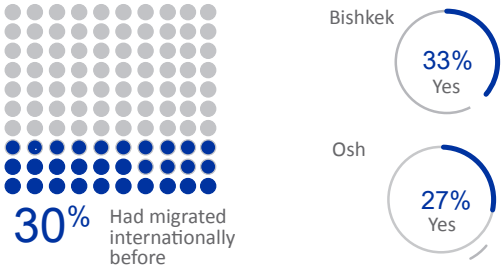
The study revealed that half of the returnees (50%) have spent one to three years, 29 per cent from seven months to one year, 12 per cent over three years and only 9 per cent have been staying in the destination locations from one to six months (Graph 5).

Graph 5: Percentage of respondents by length of last migration



For the majority (69%) of surveyed respondents this was the first migration experience (Graph 6). Slightly more people had previous migration experience in Bishkek (33%) in comparison to Osh (27%).

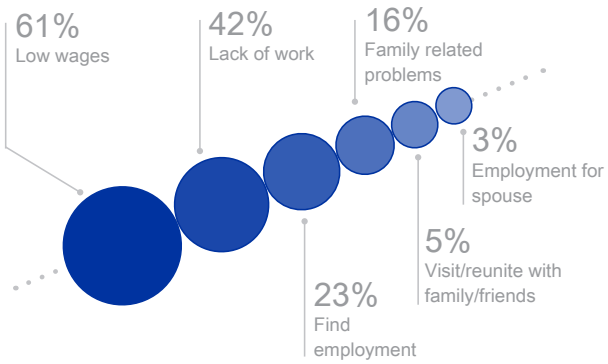
Graph 6: Percentage of respondents by education level and interview location



4.3. Reasons for migration

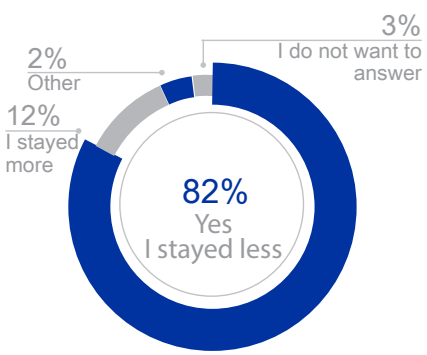
The study investigated the reasons of migration of the returnees and revealed a variety of factors. Among the initial reasons for migration, 61 per cent of the returnees indicated economic related factors such as low wages in Kyrgyzstan and lack of work (42%), to find employment for himself/herself (23%) and 16 per cent migrated because they had problems in their families of all types (Graph 7). Among other reasons for migration were cited: reunite with family/friends (5%), employment for his/her spouse (3%), for the purpose of trade (3%), other reasons as health problems, escape food and water insecurity, education, marriage (from 1 to 2% in each category).

Graph 7: Percentage of respondents by main reason of migration (multiple answer question)



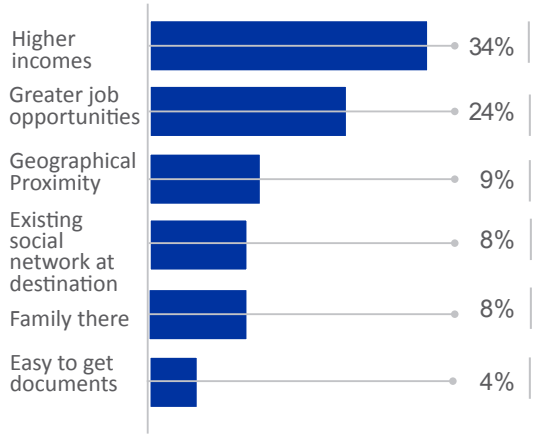
More than half of the returnees (55%) reported that COVID-19 influenced the duration of their stay in the destination country. Out of those returnees who were compelled to come back to Kyrgyzstan 82 per cent stated that they stayed less than planned in their countries of destinations because of the COVID-19 restrictions (Graph 8).

Graph 8: Proportion of respondents changes to their migration plans



The study also asked the respondents about the reasons for selecting a specific country for migration. Among the most important pull factors were higher incomes (34%), more jobs (24%), geographical proximity (9%) that attracted the migrants in the country of destination, see Graph 9. Other reasons included such factors as family and friends who live there (16%), easy to get documents (4%), other migrants who live there (3%), migrants treated better (3%), better work conditions (2%) and other reasons.

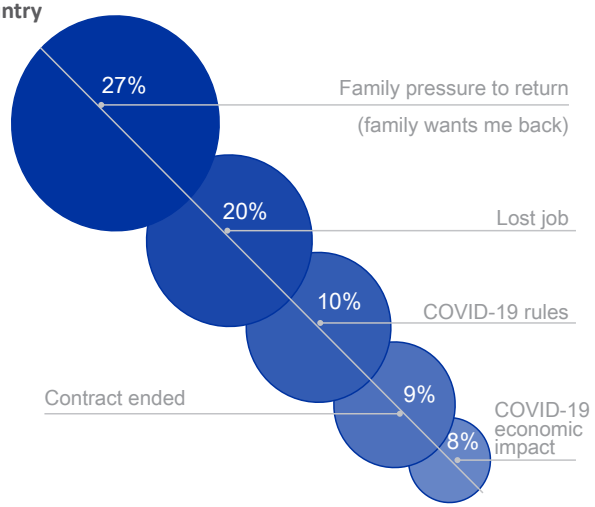
Graph 9: Percentage of respondents by reason for selecting a specific destination country



4.4. Reasons for return

The reasons behind the migrants' motivation to return to Kyrgyzstan were studied. Graph 10 shows the top five reasons for returning to Kyrgyzstan reported by the surveyed returnees. Among the most frequently cited were the following reasons: family pressure to return (27%), lost job (20%), COVID-19 restrictions (10%), contract ended (9%) and COVID-19 economic impact.

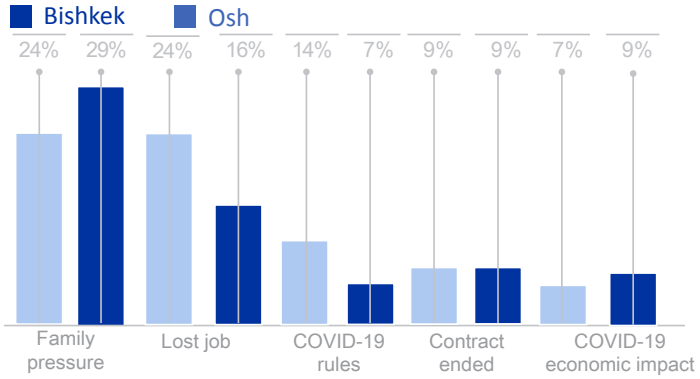
Graph 10: Percentage of respondents by reason to return to the home country



The remaining 26 per cent mentioned other reasons for migration.

When comparing between the surveyed locations (Graph 11), the respondents both from Osh (29%) and Bishkek (24%) indicated as the primary reason of their return the choice Family pressure to return. Twenty four per cent in Bishkek and 16 percent in Osh of the respondents returned as they lost their jobs in the country of destination. Third common reason for return was COVID-19 regulations, cited by 14 per cent in Bishkek and 7 per cent in Osh. Contract termination or End of contract period was indicated as the next fourth reason for return to home country by 9 per cent of the returnees in each location. The final of the top five reasons was the COVID-19 economic impact with 7 per cent in Bishkek and 9 per cent in Osh citing it as a reason.

Graph 11: Percentage of respondents by reasons for return to the home country and interview location



Overall, the return related challenges experienced 42 per cent of the respondents. There were significant disparities comparing two target locations: in Bishkek 53 per cent informed that they faced return related challenges while in Osh 32 per cent.

When looking at the correlation between education level of the returnees (Graph 12), the returnees with Bachelor (and higher) degrees (66%) were the most who faced challenges, following by 63 per cent of the respondents with secondary (complete and non-complete) education who faced constraints. Followed the returnees with higher education (54%), vocational training (initial or complete, 51%), and with other or no education (45%) who faced return related challenges.

Graph 12: Percentage of respondents challenges and education level

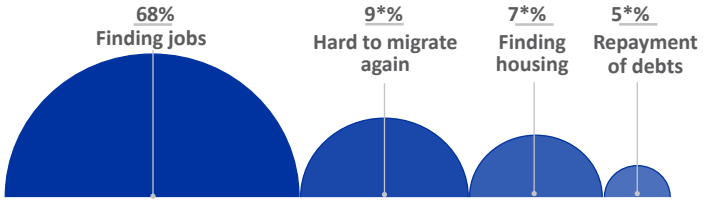
It is worth noting that female returnees (39%) reportedly faced slightly lesser return-related challenges in comparison to males (41%).

Figure 6: Percentage of respondents by return related challenges and sex

The respondents also were asked if they return to the same location where they had been living before. In Bishkek, 73 per cent of the returnees returned to the same location, while in Osh, it was 97 per cent who returned to the same location.

Those returnees who experienced challenges upon return (n=309 respondents) were asked the type of challenges they face. The data analysis indicated that the most common challenge was finding employment for 68 per cent respondents. In addition, among other reasons reported were the difficulty to migrate again (9%), difficulty to find housing (7%) and to repay debts (5%). However, the sample size of these latter three indicators with lower percentages is less than 20 people (Graph 13).

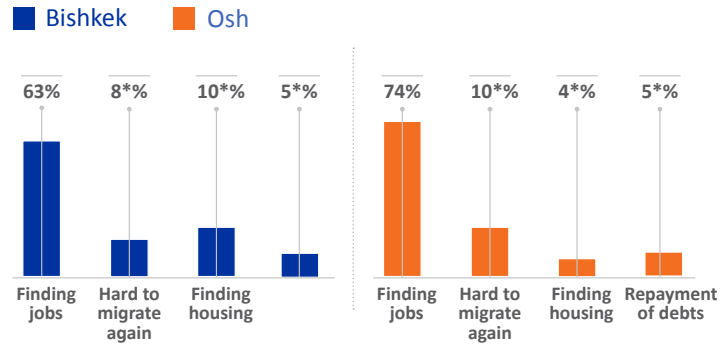
Graph 13: Percentage of respondents by type of return related challenges and education level



* The sample size for this percentage is lower than 20 respondents.

Additionally, Graph 14 shows return related challenges by interview location. As seen, in Osh higher number of the respondents reported on lack of jobs after returning to Kyrgyzstan (74%) while in Bishkek the same reason was reported by 63% per cent of respondents.

Graph 14: Percentage of respondents by type of return related challenges and interview location

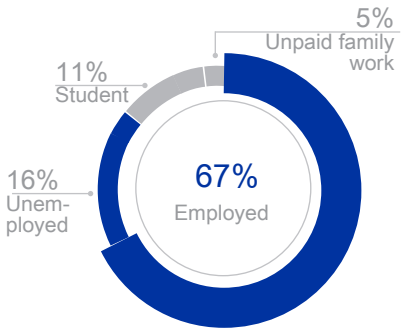


4.5. Employment situation

4.5.1. Employment situation before migration

The study investigated the employment status of the returnees in Kyrgyzstan before migration to the country of destination. As it was revealed, 67 per cent of the respondents were employed either in private/public sectors or self-employed prior to migration. Only 16 per cent were unemployed, while 11 per cent were students or apprentices, and 5 per cent engaged in unpaid family work (Graph 15).

Graph 15: Percentage of respondents by employment status prior to migration



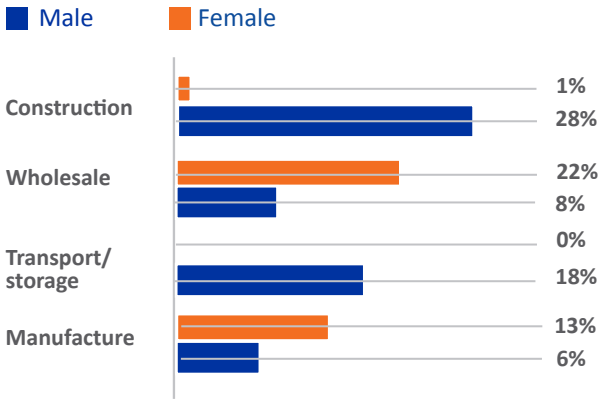
Those of employed respondents before migration, 57 per cent (n=515) of the migrants work in the informal sector. More male respondents (60%) were engaged in the informal sector comparing to female respondents (53%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Percentage of respondents working in the informal sector and sex

Note: This question was asked only to respondents who reported being employed prior to migration.

The data analysis indicates that the most common sector of female migrants (22%) was wholesale and manufacture (13%), while male migrants mostly worked in construction (28%) and transportation/storage(18%), Graph 16.

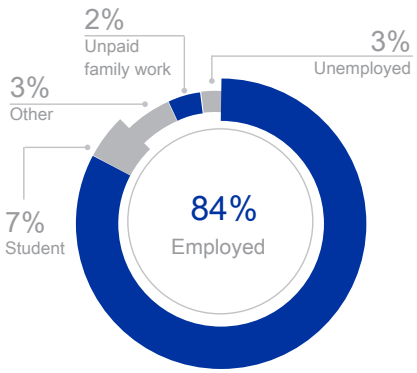
Graph 16: Percentage of respondents by sector of employment prior to migration and sex



4.5.2. Employment situation during migration

The respondents were asked about the sector of employment during migration in their country of destination. The data indicated that the highest level of employment was during migration with many returnees reportedly employed in private/ public sector or were self-employed earning daily wages (84%). Further, unemployed migrants constitute 16 per cent including students (7%), unemployed (3%), and those who do unpaid family work (2%, n=19 people) of the migrants (Graph 17).

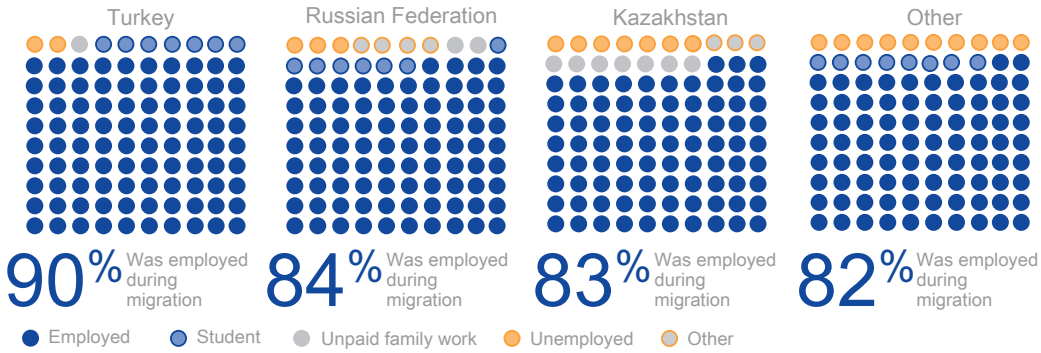
Graph 17: Percentage of respondents by employment status during migration



Those who were employed in their countries of destination (n=644) worked in the informal sectors of Kazakhstan (79%), followed by the Russian Federation (56%), Turkey (44%) and other countries (32%) such as the Republic of Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Hungary, China, Pakistan and Poland (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Percentage of respondents by work in the informal sector and country of last migration

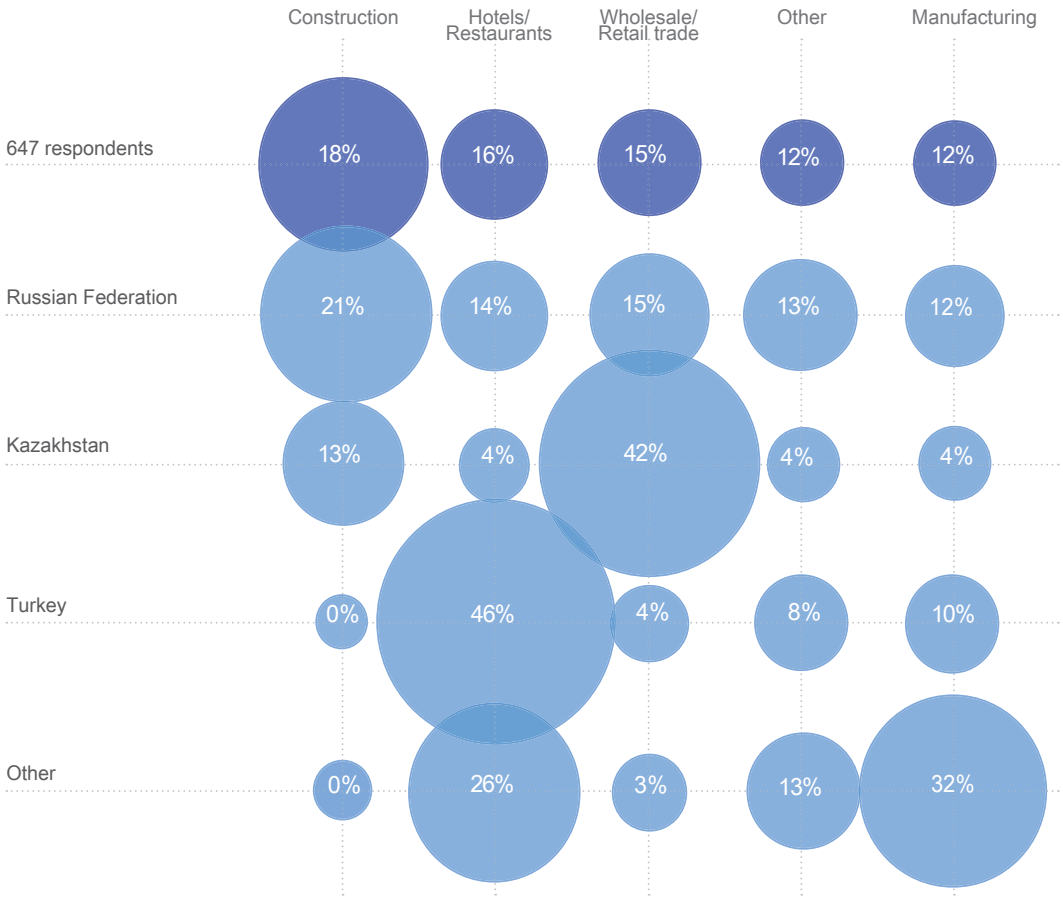
Graph 18: Percentage of respondents by employment status during migration and country of last migration



Note: This question was asked only to respondents who reported being employed during migration.

Those respondents who were employed in their country of destination were asked about their employment sector. The total sample size of 647 returnees worked in various sectors including construction (18%), hotels/restaurants (16%), wholesale/retail trade (15%), other (cleaning, beauty industry, security, etc., 12%), manufacturing (12%), transport and storage (11%), domestic work (9%), and other sectors. In the Russian Federation, 21 per cent of the migrants worked in construction. In Kazakhstan 42 per cent were engaged in wholesale or retail trade. In Turkey 46 per cent were employed in hotel/restaurant sector. When looking at other countries, majority (26%) worked in manufacturing sphere. For details, please see Graph 19.

Graph 19: Percentage of respondents by sector employment during migration and country of last migration



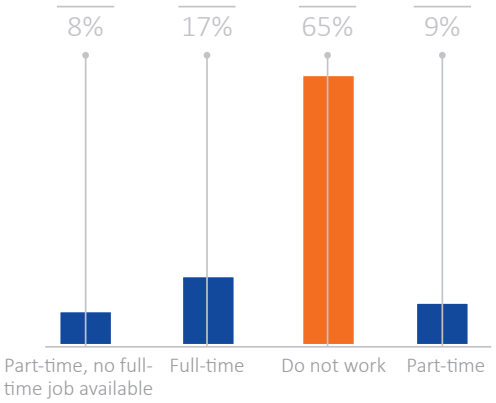
Note: This question was asked only to respondents who reported being employed during migration.

Migrant affected by COVID-19 lock-down, Osh. © IOM 2021

4.5.3. Current employment situation

To compare the economic situation, during migration and after return, as well as understand the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, returnees were also asked questions on their current employment situation. Sixty five per cent do not currently work (see Graph 20, n=499). Comparing this to the period prior to migration, the unemployment rate was 16 per cent and during migration was 3 per cent. From this information, it could be concluded that COVID-19 had severely impacted on the employment status of the returning migrants. It is observed that 72 per cent of them are females and 58 per cent are male; 74 per cent of the respondents are from Osh and 55 per cent from Bishkek. Thus, after returning, mostly female respondents have no employment, and location wise, mostly returnees in Osh have no jobs.

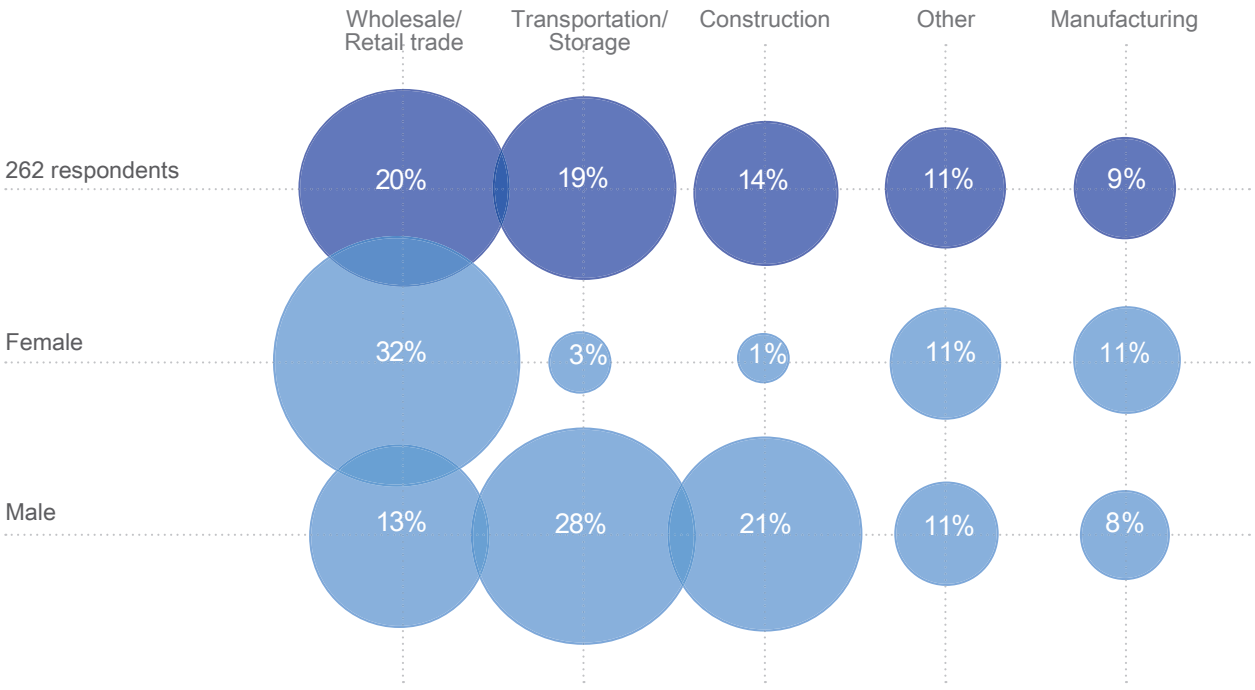
Graph 20: Percentage of respondents by current employment situation




Interview with a returnee affected by COVID-19, Osh. © IOM 2021

The respondents who have jobs (part-time, full-time, n=262) were asked about the current sector of employment. Graph 21 presents information of the current sector of employment of the returnees by sex. As seen, 32 per cent of female respondents are engaged in wholesale/retail trade, while 28 per cent of male respondents work in transportation/storage sector. It is worth stating that there is no substantial difference between sectors of employment in Osh and Bishkek.

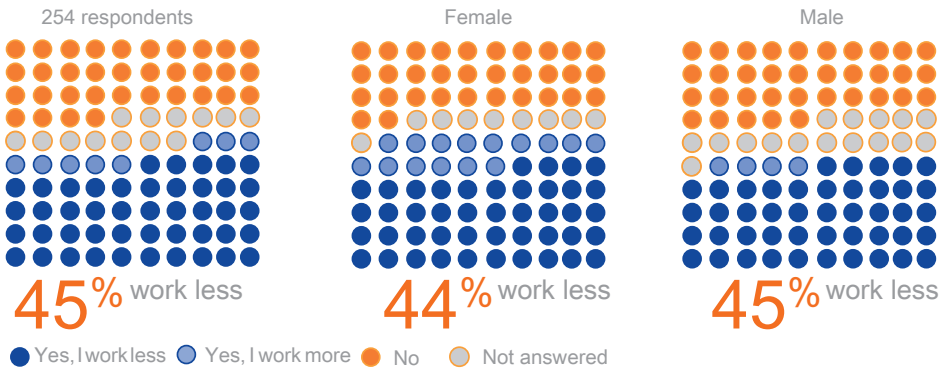
Graph 21: Percentage of respondents by current employment and sex



Note: This question was asked only to respondents who reported being currently employed.

Returnees that were employed during the assessment period also reported changes in working hours as a result of the pandemic. (n=254). Results indicated that for 45 per cent of returning migrants working hours has changed (Graph 22). In addition, to 44 per cent female and 45 per cent male returnees working hours decreased after the pandemic. For 15 per cent female returnees and only 4 per cent of male returnees working hours has increased after the pandemic. For 32 per cent female and 35 per cent male returnees working hours has not changed. Also, 9 per cent of female and 16 per cent of male respondents did not answer this question.

Graph 22: Percentage of respondents by changes in working hours after the COVID-19 outbreak and sex

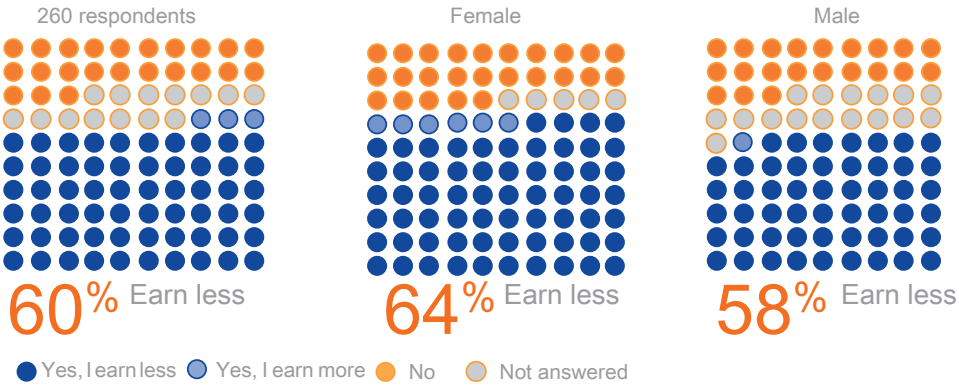


Note: This question was asked only to respondents who reported being currently employed.

Additionally, those respondents who were currently unemployed were asked if they had been employed before COVID-19 in Kyrgyzstan (n=472). A notable portion of the respondents (67%) informed that they did not work before COVID-19. Data also shows 10 per cent difference between female and male respondents who were not employed before COVID-19, indicating that more female respondents were unemployed (female-72%, male-62%,). At the same time, only 28 per cent female respondents worked before COVID-19 in comparison to 38 per cent of male respondents who were employed.

Sixty per cent of the respondents reported (n=260) that they have earned less after the pandemic (Graph 23). In relation to sex, slightly more females (64 %) have started to earn less comparing to male respondents (58%). There was not a significant difference among females (25%) and males (23%) whose salaries did not change. Very small percentage of respondents reported increase in their earnings (6 % female - 6 respondents and 3 % male - 3 respondents).

Graph 23: Percentage of respondents by changes in work the salary after the COVID-19 outbreak and sex

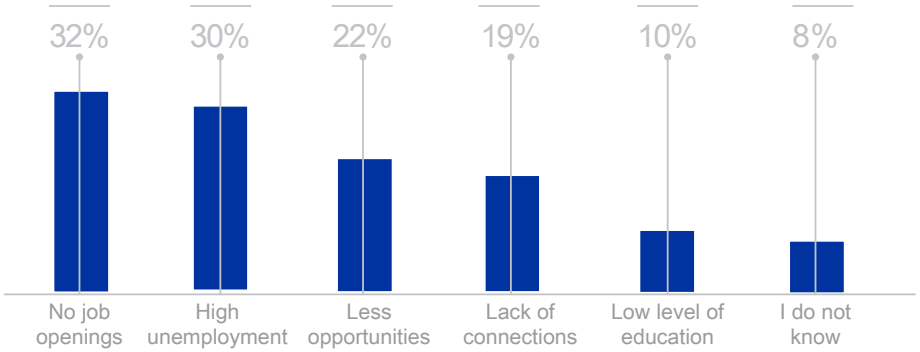


Note: This question was asked only to respondents who reported being currently employed.


Panorama of Osh city. © IOM 2021

With regards to current barriers for employment in the surveyed locations, the respondents indicated the following reasons: no job openings (32%), high level of unemployment (30%), less opportunities (22%), lack of connections (19%), low levels of educations (10%), lack of patronage (6%), low work experience (5%), high number of graduates and low jobs available (5%), lack of skills (4%), and other (see Graph 24).

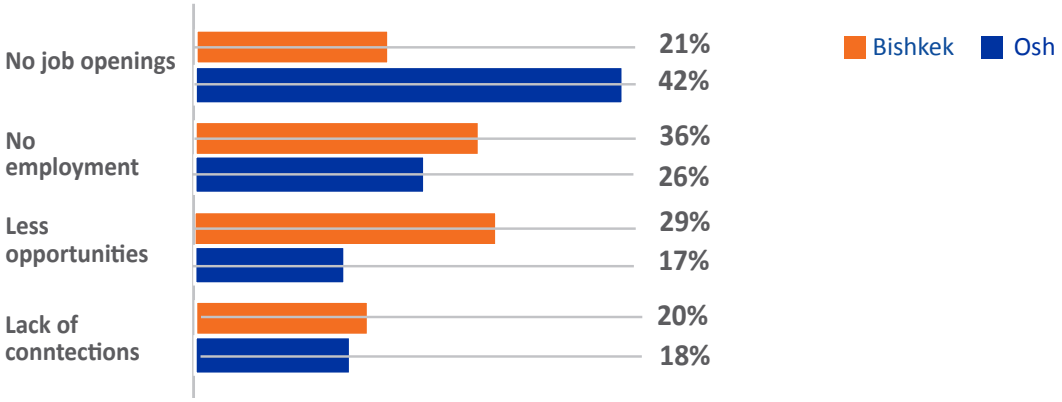
Graph 24: Percentage of respondents by reason of unemployment after the COVID-19 outbreak and sex



Note: This question was asked only to respondents who reported not being currently employed, and being employed previous to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Main barriers for employment by the location is presented in Graph 25. No job openings was indicated as the main barrier for both locations but higher in Osh (42%) in comparison to Bishkek (21%). Lack of employment was also reported the second highest challange with 36 per cent in Bishkek and 26 per cent in Osh. Less of opportunites as a barrier was more cited by the respondents in Osh (29%) in comparison to Bishkek (17%). In addition, lack of connections was also reported as a barrier by 20 per cent of returnees in Bishkek and 18 per cent in Osh.

Graph 25: Percentage of respondents by barriers to employment and interview location



4.5.4. COVID-19 Impacts

In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, additional questions were asked to all returnees to understand their coping strategies, and their knowledge of COVID-19. As seen in Figure 9, six out of ten returnees (63%) face difficulty in meeting their household needs. In Osh, this is higher (68%) in comparison to Bishkek (58%).

The data collected indicates that as a coping strategy 42 per cent of the returnees borrowed money to cover monthly expenses for the last three months (October–December 2020) of the pandemic (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Percentage of respondents by insufficient income to provide for family basic needs and interview location

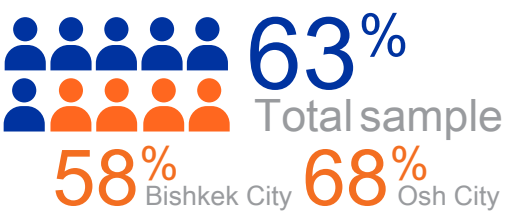
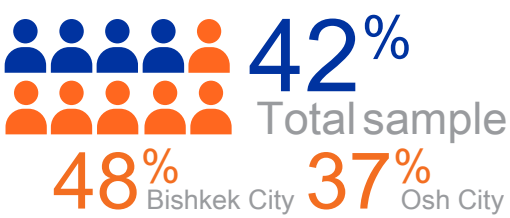


Figure 10: Percentage of respondents by borrowing money to cover monthly expenses and interview location



IIn terms of other coping strategies employed in relation to the COVID-19, data from the sample size shows that 34 per cent had to reduce their food quantity. Of this, 4 per cent reduced their food quantity very often and 30 per cent did so often. Furthermore, 86 per cent had to reduce their quantity of food consumed in the last three months. Of these, 34 per cent reduced their food consumption quantities often/very often, while 39 per cent did so sometimes and only 13 per cent did so rarely.

Between Bishkek and Osh coping strategies, Osh reported higher levels of food quantity reduction (89%) in comparison to Bishkek (83%). However, in both locations the impact is notably high. (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Percentage of respondents by how often they reduced food quantity over the last three months and interview location

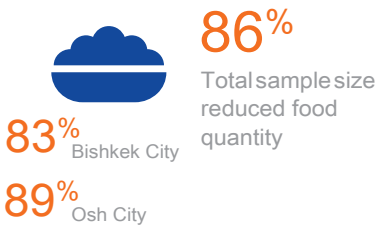
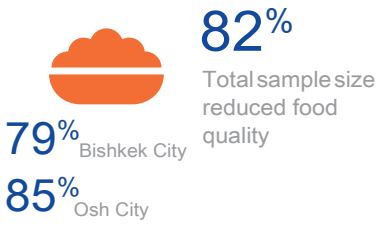


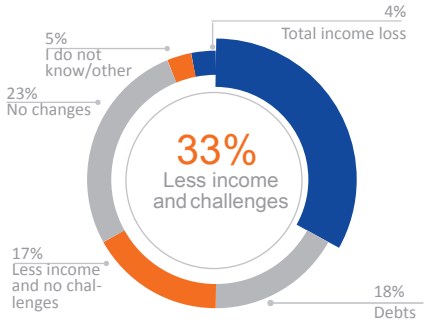
Figure 12: Percentage of respondents by how often they reduced food quality over the last three months and interview location



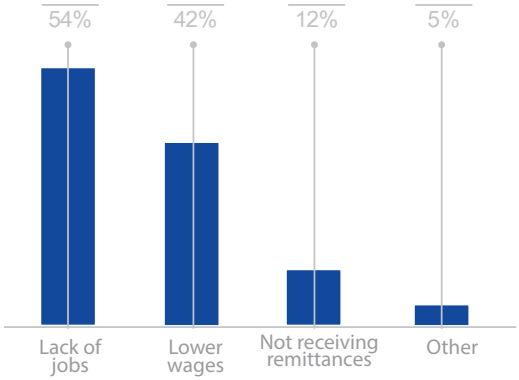
As for food quality, data from the sample size show that 30 per cent of returning migrants had to reduce their food quality. Of this, 5 per cent reduced their food quality very often and 25 per cent did so often. Overall, 82 per cent of the respondents had to reduce their quality of food consumed in the last three months (Figure 12). Of these 30 per cent reduced their food consumption qualities often/very often, while 32 per cent did so sometimes and 20 per cent did so rarely. The comparison between the two target locations suggests that in Osh (85%) the respondents reduced the quality of food more often comparing to Bishkek (79%).

In terms of changes to returnees financial situation, data shows that the pandemic has changed the financial situation of at least 50 per cent of returning migrants, with 4 per cent completely losing their income and 18 per cent accumulating debts. (Graph 26). The major reason for worsening financial situation of the respondents was loss of employment (54%). Other reasons recorded were lower wages (42%), not receiving remittances (12%) and other reasons (5%,), please see Graph 27.

Graph 26: Percentage of respondents by sector employment during migration and country of last migration



Graph 27: Percentage of respondents by reason for having less income



Note: This question was asked only to respondents who reported having less income or debts due to COVID-19.


Female migrant affected by COVID-19 lock-down, Osh. © IOM 2021

The analysis of the additional questions asked to returnees which relates to daily access to hygiene items suggests that the vast majority of total sampled respondents have access to face masks (90%), soap (98%), hand sanitizer (88%) and water for domestic use (94%). Most of the respondents have access to information on COVID-19 (64%) through different sources such as media, posters, web links, official sources, etc. (Figure 13). The data presented in the context of Bishkek and Osh does not represent much difference from the total sample size trend (Figure 14 for Bishkek, Figure 15 for Osh city).

Figure 13: Percentage of respondents by daily access to hygine items - Total sample size

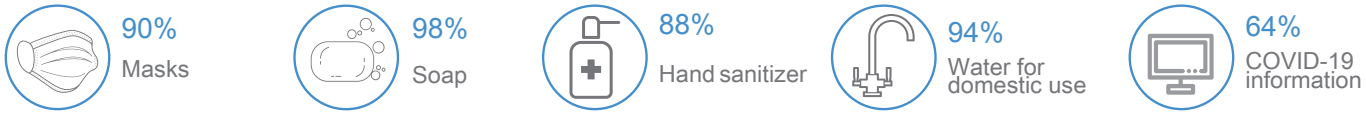


Figure 14: Percentage of respondents by daily access to hygine items - Bishkek

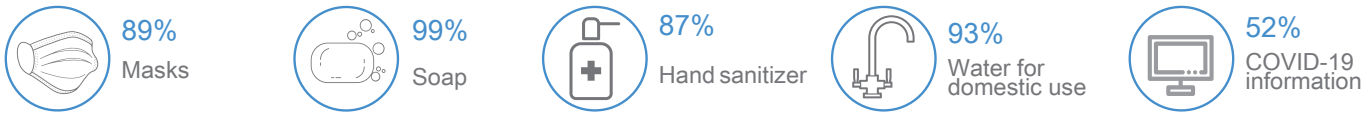
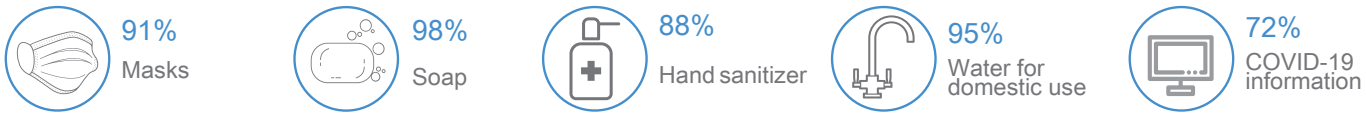
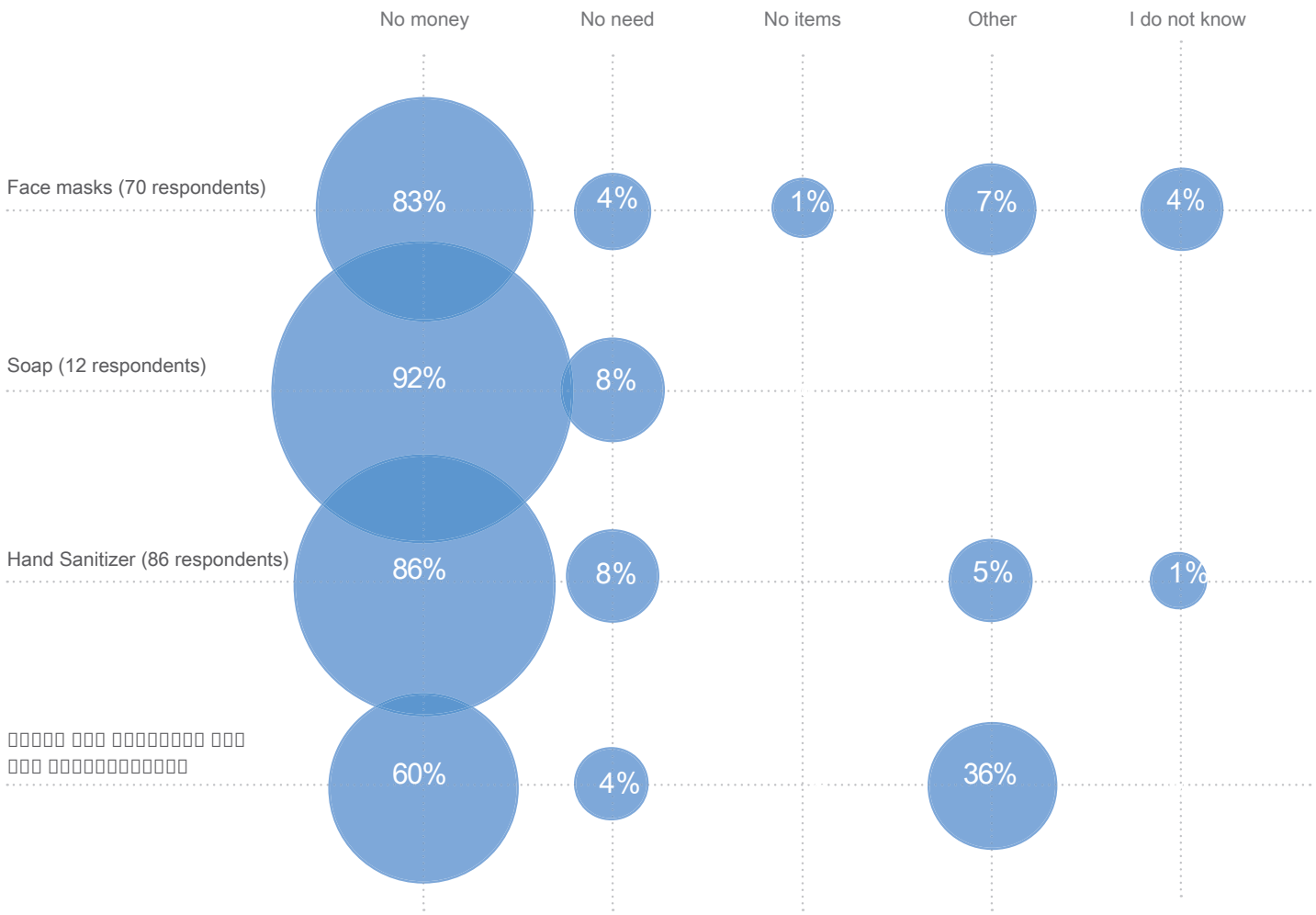


Figure 15: Percentage of respondents by daily access to hygine items - Osh



Graph 28 shows that those respondents who reported not having enough daily access to at least one of the items above relate this to having no money to buy them.

Graph 28: Percentage of respondents by problems related to the lack of access to personal protective equipment and hygiene products

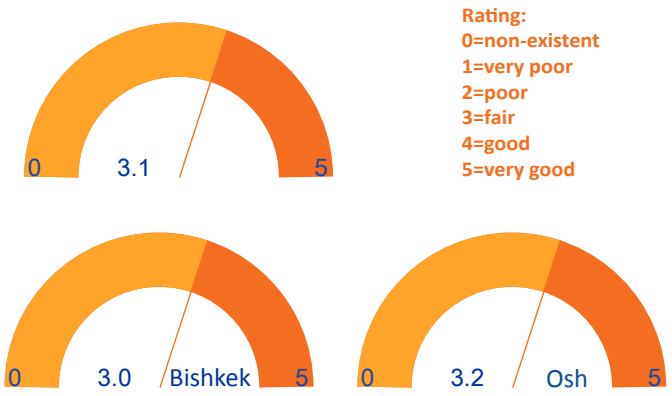


Note: This question was asked only to respondents who reported not having enough daily access to at least one of the items listed above.

4.6. Service quality index

Kyrgyz returnees were asked to rate the services present in their communities of origin. By averaging the ratings given to the different services a service quality index was created for each city of origin. Overall, the service quality index for Kyrgyzstan indicates a score of 3.1 meaning that quality of services is perceived by the respondents as fair (Graph 29). In Bishkek the quality of services was rated 3.0 (fair) and in Osh a slightly higher point was given, nevertheless, leaving the quality rating at the same range and perceived as fair with the score of 3.2.

Graph 29: Service quality index Kyrgyzstan

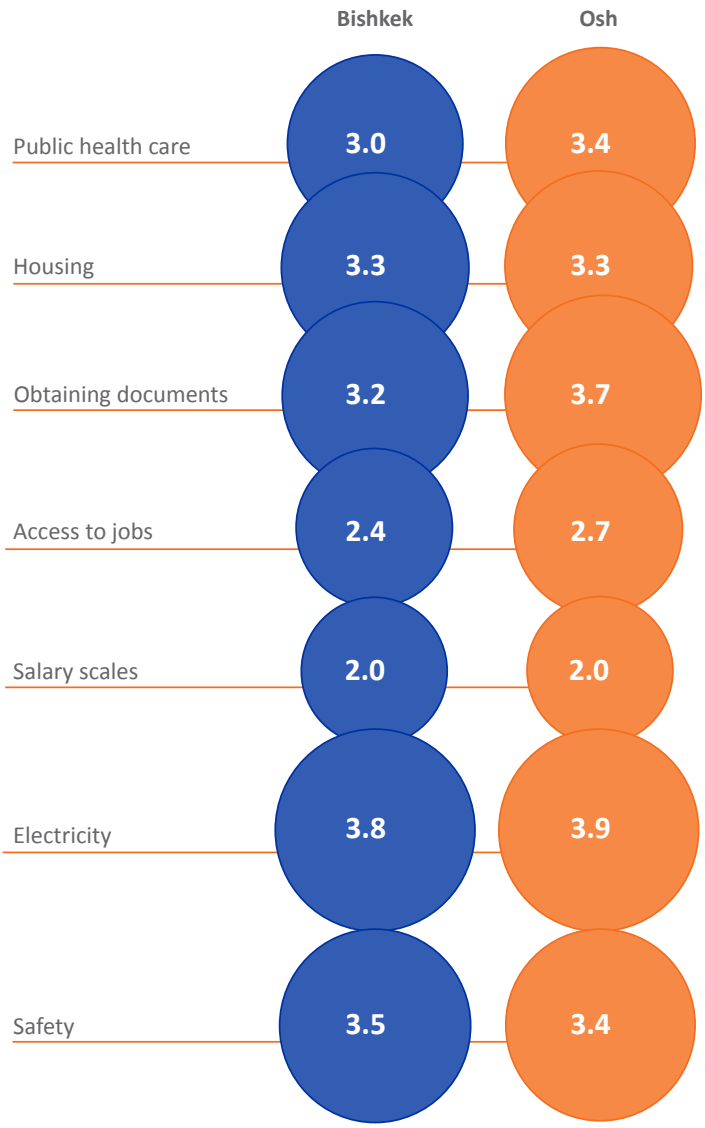


The detailed overall rating for each service is presented below. The lowest rating was given to the salary scales in the target communities (2.0 - poor) which does not correspond to cover the basic needs of people in that communities and access to jobs (2.5 - poor). Both these items were cited as well as reasons for migration and challenges upon return. The highest average score was given to access to electricity (3.8 - fair). None of the services were rated as “good” or “very good”.

Graph 30 presents a detailed rating for the services present in their communities in Bishkek and Osh. As seen, there is no striking difference in the given ratings between Bishkek and Osh. All services rated stay at poor and fair rating levels.

The highest score (rated as fair) was given to access to electricity (Bishkek-3.8 points, Osh-3.9 points) and the lowest which was rated as poor to salary scales in their communities (Bishkek and Osh - 2.0). Another, second lowest score was given to access to access to jobs in their communities which was rated poor as well (Bishkek-2.4, Osh-2.7). The quality of public health care services was rated as fair (Bishkek-3.0, Osh-3.4). Access to housing was rated as fair as well (Bishkek/Osh-3.3). Obtaining documents was rated at the level of 3.2 points in Bishkek (fair) and 3.7 in Osh (fair).

Graph 30: Service quality matrix by location



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