

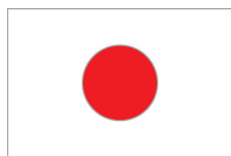


RAPID ASSESSMENT OF THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DECENT EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUTH FACING LONG-TERM EXCLUSION FROM THE LABOUR MARKETS IN SELECTED REGIONS OF KAZAKHSTAN AND TAJIKISTAN

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

NUR-SULTAN 2020





From
the People of Japan



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CPC	Educational and production complexes (Tajikistan)
CRTR	Centre for the Development of Labour Resources of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan
EBT	Electronic Labour Exchange (Kazakhstan)
GDP	Gross domestic product
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
LFS	Labour force survey
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OKZ	National Classification of Occupations (Tajikistan)
PEA	Private employment agency
PVE	Preventing violent extremism
RRP	Region of Republican Subordination (Tajikistan)
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USD	United States dollar

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INTRODUCTION

From November 2019 – January 2020 a sociological study was conducted in selected regions of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to identify socioeconomic vulnerabilities of women and young men as possible sources of grievance.¹ The study concluded that persons under 30, especially in rural areas of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, were more likely to be unemployed for long periods (exceeding 6 months) and that their insufficient qualifications and lack of necessary job experience deterred local employers from hiring rural youth. In turn, interviewed young women in Kazakhstan not only reported significantly longer period of joblessness than men but also could not access some positions meeting their qualifications due to absence of support, such as availability of preschool facilities.

Moreover, according to interviews with both young jobseekers, local community and religious leaders, few opportunities were found locally for decent employment that would match rising aspirations of youth. As a result, young people would either settle for precarious employment in informal economy, work for very low rates in order to gain any job experience or emigrate to accumulate assets necessary for supporting their newly established families. The growing mismatch between young people’s professional and economic aspirations and the limited opportunities found locally were concluded to be important factors fueling grievance among some of them.

The IOM national teams from Kazakhstan and Tajikistan resolved to investigate further the impact of the following factors that were found to limit the opportunities of the residents of selected regions of the two countries for securing decent employment. They were formulated as follows:

- Low supply of positions that would match youth’s rising aspirations and interests;
- Reliance on informal intermediaries for job search and recruitment;
- Insufficient experience and/or skills for job search either locally or abroad;
- Inability to document necessary qualifications that would be in local demand.

This combination of limited demand, ineffective job search strategies and non-transparent channels of intermediation have thus exposed some of the youth to further socioeconomic vulnerabilities, associated with prolonged inability to secure decent employment, and in cases of use of dishonest intermediaries, to additional costs and risks of unregulated work. Those determinants were therefore concluded by the researchers to expose young people to long-term socioeconomic vulnerabilities, and thus were hypothesized to serve as sources of grievance in some cases.

The team decided to focus on the practical implications of this State of affairs for two main categories: young people themselves, especially those in search of employment, unemployed or employed in temporary, low-paid positions; and employers as well as work intermediaries (State employment centres and private employment agencies). The researchers considered in particular the central role that State employment centres could play in addressing some of the barriers by incorporating the needs of the vulnerable groups (young men and women) in their work with job applicants and employers.

Rapid assessment of the opportunities for decent employment for youth facing long-term exclusion from the labour markets in selected regions of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan aims at:

- the determination of local labour demand and current terms of labour offered to young people (under 30 years of age);
- identification of structural barriers preventing youth with intersectional vulnerabilities to access jobs, which meet their skills and aspirations;
- the elaboration of practical recommendations for overcoming the barriers through proposing targeted activities, raising youth’s capacities for accessing desired jobs;
- the analysis of systemic gaps in job intermediation and job placement by State services and private employment agencies and the presentation of proposals for ethical measures in these areas.

These objectives have been realized by a combination of desk review (analysis of registered unemployment trends and of activities of State employment centres), interviews with young persons (under 30 years of age), with employers representing various sectors of local economies, as well as with work intermediaries (State employment centres and private employment agencies). The rapid assessment format limited the number of interviews to under 100 young people, and further adjustments had to be made in light of COVID-19 restrictions.

¹ “Socioeconomic vulnerabilities as a factor in long-term risk of radicalization: prevention potential of local communities and official assistance in selected Central Asian countries: Executive Summary”, IOM Nursultan 2020 [forthcoming]

This document presents results of the field research in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, carried out in June-August 2020 by two teams of national researchers, who interviewed the total of 93 respondents (including 45 women), aged 18–29, with different employment status (unemployed, jobseekers, employed) in several regions of the two countries (largely coinciding with those selected in the assessment, carried out from November 2019 – January 2020).

Three regions were selected in Kazakhstan: Karaganda, Aktobe and Turkestan. In Tajikistan, the sample was drawn from several locations in the Khatlon region, Districts of Republican Subordination and the capital city of Dushanbe. In addition, a total of 21 local employers (9 in Kazakhstan and 12 in Tajikistan) and 21 specialists of employment centres (State bodies and private intermediaries) (10 in Kazakhstan and 11 in Tajikistan) were interviewed. Details of the national samples are presented at the beginning of the country sections.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 significantly affected the design and implementation of the assessment. Economic impact of the mobility restrictions, introduced in Kazakhstan and closure of some businesses, providing employment to youth, became of interest to the assessment team. As the interviews were conducted in the wake of these developments, questions on the respondents’ outlook for the future were further elaborated, taking into account both the short- to mid-term impact and the long-term forecasts.

The analysis has been conducted with particular attention to gender aspects of investigated issues at all stages of the assessment (design, data collection and analysis, development of recommendations). Firstly, three of the four national consultants are women, and they carried out interviews with female respondents. Secondly, the requests for statistics, forwarded to national State institutions, indicated the sex disaggregated data. Next, in the course of analysis, the consultants considered various drivers that could result in unequal treatment of women in the labour markets (legal, economic and socio-cultural). Finally, recommendations were developed with the above consideration in mind, seeking to address key drivers of gender-based inequalities as well as to mainstream some of the issues to other policy areas (e.g. education).

This document has been developed by two national assessment teams, led by international IOM consultant, Piotr Kazmierkiewicz: in Kazakhstan (Aigul Sadvokasova, senior researcher and Bauyrzhan Baglay, field researcher) and in Tajikistan (Alisher Yarbabaev, senior researcher, Saodat Mutieva, field researcher and Malika Yarbabaeva, assistant to senior researcher). The project has been co-ordinated by Svetlana Zhassymbekova, National Programme Officer at the Subregional Coordination Office for Central Asia of the International Organization for Migration. We would also like to acknowledge kind support provided by Bahrom Rahmatjonov of the IOM Mission in Tajikistan.

This research was commissioned as part of UNDP’s regional “Strengthening Community Resilience and Regional Cooperation for Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Asia” project (2018–2020), made possible by the generous contribution of the Government of Japan. The project aims to improve the resilience of communities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan to violent extremism through supporting young people’s socioeconomic inclusion in their communities through participation in local decision making, trainings on soft and hard skills, and employment/entrepreneurship opportunities. The project’s regional component that includes Uzbekistan focuses on facilitating knowledge exchange in the region through action-oriented research on PVE, regional dialogues among PVE stakeholders and exchanges among young people in the region.

The report is made up of two national case studies, which were prepared on the basis of a single methodological framework, covering the main research questions, which however reflect the countries’ specific legal, institutional and socioeconomic features. Each case study has been approached from two angles:

- **local** perspective of selected regions of each country, contained in the interviews with small samples (39 in Tajikistan and 54 in Kazakhstan) of local jobseekers, workers and students under 30 years old, complemented by interviews with local employers and specialists of State employment centres and private employment agencies. This perspective, focusing on the scope and depth of vulnerabilities and assessment of local mechanisms of recruitment, is presented in the national “Country findings” sections. It is preoccupied with comparing and contrasting the different *perceptions* of the main barriers to employment of young women and men, held by the different groups of respondents.
- **national** perspective, derived from the analysis of statistical data, review of legal and strategic documents and consultations with main central State bodies. This perspective, included in the national “Conclusions and recommendations” sections, offers firstly a set of *operational* guidelines as to the main issues, identified in the national policies, legal norms and in the local mechanisms of implementation (organized into introductory paragraphs opening each thematic bloc). Secondly, a series of specific measures, allocated to various State institutions on both the national and local levels, is presented in italicized lists, indicating, wherever possible, also areas where donors or partners might usefully offer support for institutional capacity-building toward attainment of those specific objectives.

KAZAKHSTAN

KAZAKHSTAN

METHODOLOGY

The assessment was carried out in three regions of Kazakhstan: Karaganda, Aktobe and Turkestan regions. The latter two areas had been selected in the 2019–2020 assessment while the Karaganda region was selected due to its significant unemployment.

The total of 72 interviews were carried out in the three regions of Karaganda, Aktobe and Turkestan: 54 with young people aged 18 to 29 (27 men and 27 women), 9 employers and 9 representatives of employment centres. Differentiation was also made according to family status of interviewed young people: out of the total of 54 respondents, 22 had set up their own families (among them 15 women). The sample of employers included 2 from the industry sector, four from the agriculture, and three from the service sector. Six respondents were employees of State employment centres and three – non-State ones.

Three regions of Kazakhstan were selected based on the level of socioeconomic development, as well as geographical location. Karaganda region is located in the centre of Kazakhstan, is a major industrial centre with agriculture playing an important role. Of the total population of 1 376 882 people (or 7.4% of the country's population), 19.3 per cent (266,081 people) are young people aged 14–28 years. Young people predominantly (77.3% or 205,701) live in urban areas.² Aktobe region is located in the western part of Kazakhstan and is a major oil and gas and industrial region. With a population of 881 651 people, it holds the 6th place in the country. Youth make up the total of 178,712 people, or 15.7 per cent of the total population. 67.0 per cent of young people or 121,128 people live in urban areas.³ Turkestan region is a predominantly agricultural region located in the South of Kazakhstan. It has the largest population – 2,016,037 people, including 465,699 young people or 23.1 per cent of the total population of the region. The region is dominated by rural youth – 82.2 per cent (382,789 people).⁴

Nearly half of the interviewed youth in three regions of Kazakhstan (24 persons out of the total of 54) were inactive. 12 of them are currently not looking for work as they are on parental leave, continue to be supported by their parents, or have not been able to find a job for a long time. The sample also included three students who were not working. The other 12 unemployed respondents continue looking for employment.

The official (administrative) unemployment data covers only those who formally registered with the employment authorities. Nevertheless, it reflects certain trends recorded also in the interviews with local residents and employers. The unemployment rate among young people aged 15 to 28 years rose from 3.7 per cent in 2019 to 4.0 per cent in the 2nd quarter of 2020. Furthermore, the statistics and the fieldwork reveal a significant gender gap: while registered unemployment is merely at 3.5 per cent among young men, it stands at 4.6 per cent among women.

The field research indicates a far higher share of young persons who are not *de facto* employed. Employers who took part in this study note a high level of unemployment among the local population. Furthermore, none of the 12 participants in our study who remained jobless while continuing to look for work were officially registered as unemployed. They referred to cumbersome registration procedure and conditionality for accepting job offers made by employment centres as reasons not to register. They stressed that the refusal of the offered job placements would result in the removal from the register of active jobseekers.⁵

When selecting youth, equal samples were selected in each region: thus, in each geographical area, 9 men and 9 women were interviewed. Further distinction was made according to employment status, as shown in the table. Young people engaged in unskilled work were selected in the category of employed. The category of inactive includes those who are not looking for work. Students were also divided into those who study and work, and those who study and do not work.

Table 1. Employment status of the sample of respondents in each region of Kazakhstan

	Workers	Inactive		Students		TOTAL
		Seeking work	Not seeking work	Seeking work	Not seeking work	
Men	2	2	2	2	1	9
Women	2	2	2	2	1	9
TOTAL	4	4	4	4	2	18

The study considered the employment status of youth with various levels of educational attainment. The sample included 7 people with secondary education (completed 11 classes of secondary school), 15 – with secondary special (technical school, College), 12 people with incomplete higher education (three University courses) and 11 University graduates. “Family circumstances” were indicated as the reasons secondary school leavers could not pursue further education. These circumstances meant that either the parents could not afford such expense or that the young people felt obliged to help the family earn money.

Open-ended questions were asked to verify the level to which interviewed local employers were aware of the services rendered by local employment centres to employers in their regions and how they assessed their effectiveness. The open-ended character of the questions and the limited number of respondents (three per region) does not allow for quantitative comparisons.

Surveys in the regions within the study were conducted in compliance with sanitary and hygienic standards during the quarantine period and with the creation of safe and favorable conditions for respondents. In-person interviews were conducted in cities and in rural areas at Respondent's place of residence.

The study involved specialists with experience in conducting interviews with young people, women and vulnerable segments of the population. At the request of the Respondent, remote / telephone interviewing was also used (which was included in the research plans). This did not cause difficulties in communication among young people, and the respondents were open and free in their responses. Statistical data, as well as interview text received from women and men, were carefully considered from the point of view of language, metaphors, emotions, to exclude subjectivity in the interpretation of data.

² www.stat.gov.kz/official/industry/61/statistic/8/ Демографическая статистика / Динамические таблицы/численность молодежи /% рассчитан по показателем Карагандинской области на начало 2020 года.

³ www.stat.gov.kz/official/industry/61/statistic/8/ Демографическая статистика /Динамические таблицы/численность молодежи/% рассчитан по показателем Актобинской области на начало 2020 года.

⁴ www.stat.gov.kz/official/industry/61/statistic/8/ Демографическая статистика / Динамические таблицы/численность молодежи/% рассчитан по показателем Туркестанской области на начало 2020 года.

⁵ The interviewed jobseekers stressed that employment centres offered low-paying positions. They noted that in cases when the applicant turns down three successive offers, the employment centre will remove her or him from the roster of applicants.

COUNTRY FINDINGS

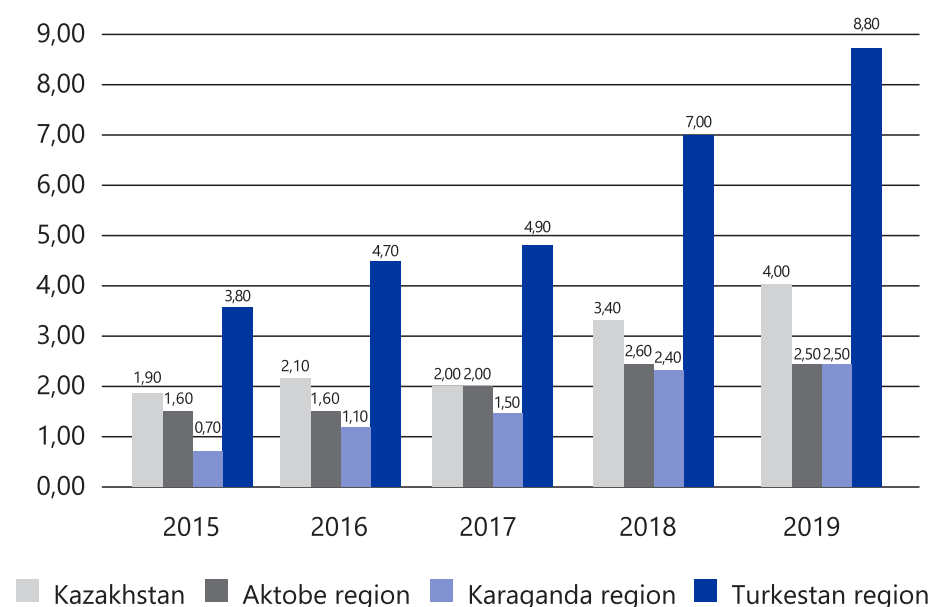
1. Socioeconomic status and outlook of youth

1.1. Economic welfare of young women and men in the regions in the eve of the pandemic

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic divided the respondents into two groups: households that have maintained a satisfactory standard of living and those reporting an unsatisfactory standard of living. The employment status of family members turned out to be the key predictor for the economic position of the household.

Available statistical data show that already in the period preceding the COVID-19 pandemic economic vulnerability of young people was higher than average and rose significantly in some of the investigated regions in 2018 and 2019. Official data on the share of local population, living below subsistence minimum,⁶ indicate that youth⁷ are slightly below the national poverty headcount ratio (Figure 1). In 2019, 4.0 per cent young people were included in that category, compared to 4.3 per cent for all age groups. The highest rate was recorded in the Turkestan region where as many as 8.8 per cent of the young residents lived in poverty (relative to 10.8% for the entire population of the region).

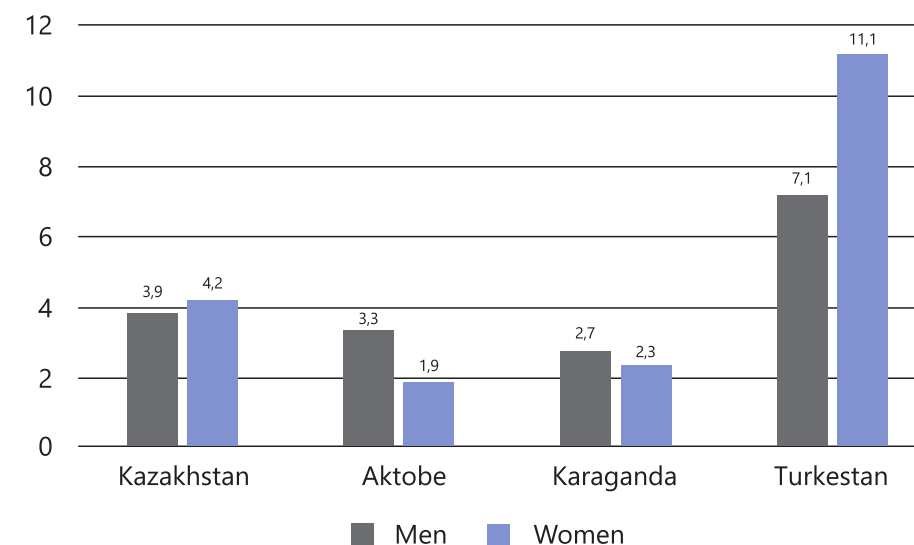
Figure 1. Poverty levels among young people in regions of Kazakhstan per cent of region's population with incomes below subsistence minimum



Source: Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available at: Main indicators of the differentiation of population's incomes [Основные показатели дифференциации доходов населения], www.stat.gov.kz.

Out of the three investigated regions, Turkestan region reported a significantly higher share of women living below subsistence minimum than men – 11.1 per cent compared to 7.1 per cent respectively (Figure 2). The gender poverty gap in this region continues to widen – in 2017, 6.1 per cent women (compared to 3.9% men) were in poverty, which was significantly higher than in 2015 (4% women compared to 3.5% men).⁸

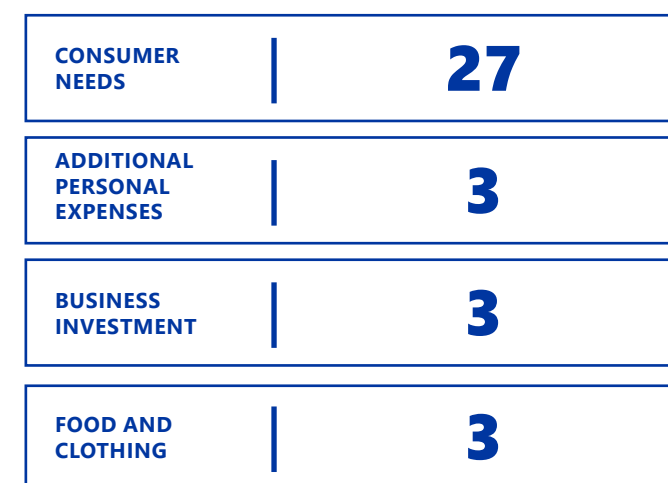
Figure 2. Poverty levels by gender in selected regions of Kazakhstan, 2019 (%)



Source: Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available at: Основные показатели дифференциации доходов населения [Main indicators of differentiation of population incomes], www.stat.gov.kz.

Of the total of 54 respondents in the three regions, nearly three-quarters (40 persons) reported general satisfaction with their standard of living.⁹ The positive outlook was declared by respondents from families where some family members had a permanent job before the quarantine and the households managed to maintain a satisfactory standard of living. Most often, these are families with family members employed as medical workers, teachers government employees or other in-demand professions. Also, during this period, many students returned to their parents' home, which reduced their daily expenses.

Figure 3. Reasons cited by respondents in Kazakhstan for taking loans, number of answers



1.2. Impact of the pandemic on employment opportunities and household welfare

Youth's opportunities for employment and sustainable incomes were put at risk in spring and summer 2020 by the new factor – the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 lockdown affected in particular the sectors popular among young people (HORECA services, retail commerce) for employment. Following a significant drop in both supply and demand for employment in April 2020, resulting from the application of lockdown measures, a recovery was observed in May.

⁶ Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available at: Main indicators of the differentiation of population's incomes [Основные показатели дифференциации доходов населения], www.stat.gov.kz.

⁷ Defined as persons between 18 and 29 years of age.

⁸ Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available at: Main indicators of the differentiation of population's incomes [Основные показатели дифференциации доходов населения], www.stat.gov.kz.

⁹ The variation among regions coincides with the statistical results: 17 out of 18 respondents in the Karaganda region expressed satisfaction compared to 13 out of 18 in the Aktobe region and only 10 out of 18 in the Turkestan region.

The economy of Kazakhstan decreased by 1.8 per cent in the first half of 2020.¹⁰ According to Forbes Kazakhstan, trade was the leading sector of youth employment (18.1% of the total number), followed by agriculture, forestry and fisheries (12%) and education (11.5%).¹¹ The COVID-19-associated lockdown resulted in a temporary spike in the number of persons who were not able to carry out their job activities. At a media briefing given in July 2020 the Minister of Labour informed that the number of actually unemployed reached 4,200,000 persons in April, which in May dropped to 1,145,000 persons due to lifted lockdown and eased restrictions, it and approximately 735,000 in June 2020.¹²

According to the Centre for workforce development of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population, the sectors of construction, transportation and industry accounted for 43 per cent of all vacancies registered with the State institutions in the second quarter of 2020. According to the data from the Enbek.kz Electronic Labour Exchange (EBT) the number of CVs posted during the lockdown (April–May 2020) decreased by 35 per cent while the number of vacancies dropped by 23 per cent compared to the same period in 2019. Moreover, the labour market slowly recovered in May, as the State of emergency and strict coronavirus quarantine ended. The number of posted CVs increased by 1.6 times in May compared to April while the number of vacancies placed on EBT increased 3.5 times over that period.

Rising living costs have dented family budgets across the board and compelled the poorer households to accumulate debt, in some cases to the point of default. Nearly 39 per cent of the respondents reported poor economic situation, associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of the respondents in fact saw their welfare deteriorate in that period. The loss of wages during the lockdown required adjusting in some families of the professional and family roles. As many as 23 out of 54 interviewed households responded to the crisis-induced income loss through employment of both spouses.

While most families reported maintaining a satisfactory standard of living, their economic position remained precarious as the respondents within that category stated that they could not save money because the earnings were spent on food and clothing, care for children and older family members. Accumulating debts and loans, taken before quarantine, were in particular indicated as factors limiting their ability to set aside savings. Of the 18 respondents in each of the two regions – Aktobe and Turkestan – 17 reported indebtedness. All the nine women interviewed in each of the two regions reported they took on credits.¹³

Interviewed local residents reported four main reasons for taking credits. Half (27 out of 54) had taken loans that were issued 1–3 years before the pandemic for buying household goods or for apartment repairs. Prior to the pandemic those had been drawn in expectation of continued revenue but became an unbearable burden as earnings decreased during lockdown.¹⁴ The most difficult situation was reported in three families who use credit for daily needs (buying food, clothing, etc.), as well as for debt repayment. These respondents declared not having enough funds to buy daily food and clothing and said they had to purchase food from stores on credit.

While out of the total of 54 respondents in the three regions, only 14 reported generally unsatisfactory standard of living, a significantly higher number (21) were not satisfied with their living standards during the pandemic period. Overall, the majority (28 out of 54) reported deterioration of their economic situation in the course of the pandemic, and 24 of them directly associated it with the consequences of the pandemic.¹⁵

Half of the interviewed students who were currently unemployed (6 out of 12) had worked prior to the pandemic. As they were staying with their parents during the pandemic, they were interested in becoming employed again in an attempt to cover their daily expenses independently and thus reduce the costs for their parents.

The negative impact was particularly hard on female respondents. The majority of women reported worsening of their economic situation (16 out of 27).¹⁶ The survey participants who saw their household welfare deteriorate pointed to a number of factors: the temporary or permanent termination of the employment of one or more family members, the increased expenditures for medicines and higher prices for medicines and food. The difficulties in ensuring liquidity and meeting rising living costs were reported in particular by women whose husbands did not have permanent jobs, which created serious financial difficulties in the jobless period.

10 In June 2020, the World Bank predicted a 3% decline in Kazakhstan's GDP in 2020, with the largest GDP losses being incurred by the service sector – 5.6%.

11 www.forbes.kz/news/2020/06/29/newsid_228380.

12 www.inform.kz/ru/mintruda-vyskazalsya-ob-urovne-bezraboticy-v-period-pandemii_a3672658.

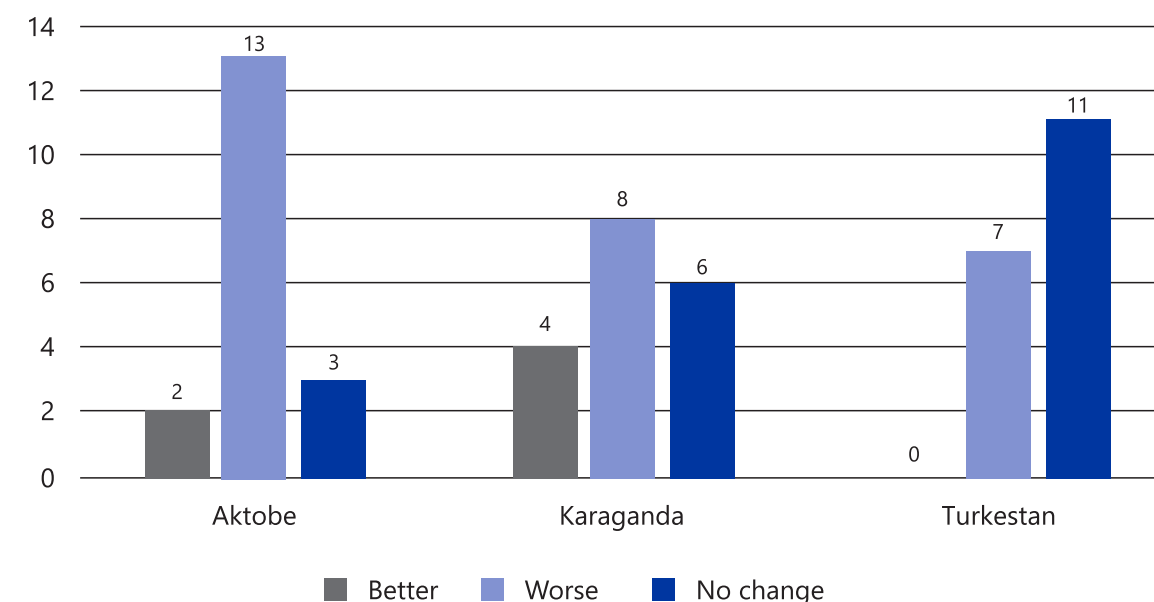
13 The debt burden was relatively less common in the third investigated region, Karaganda, where 8 out of 18 respondents confirmed that they had loans to repay.

14 Other reasons were much less frequent (cited by three respondents each): additional expenses, associated with particular life circumstances (weddings, education, medical treatment for the child); investment in own business (purchasing equipment, supplies or a taxi cab).

15 A significant regional variation was observed, however – out of 18 respondents in each region, 7 in Turkestan region, 8 in Karaganda and as many as 13 in Aktobe region reported deterioration of economic situation during the period of pandemic.

16 Their plight is well illustrated by the case of a woman (28 years old, Turkestan region) who stated that “the situation is getting worse, because there is not enough for food, because everything is getting more expensive, they are barely making ends meet”. In comparison, there were as many men who reported deterioration as those who perceived no change in their economic situation (12 in each group out of 27).

Figure 4. Reported change in economic situation by region of Kazakhstan, number of respondents



The economic vulnerability of households during the pandemic was related to the number of persons who provided family. In our sample, 23 out of 54 families were more resilient to economic shocks as both the husband and wife were reported to be the breadwinners. In those families, women would work along with their spouses and some other family members while grandparents would take care of the children.¹⁷

The quarantine period negatively affected the economic situation of respondents' families, where one or two household members were left without work, which significantly reduced their income. Men were reported to be the main breadwinners in nearly half (25 out of 54) of the surveyed families. These families became more vulnerable during the period of pandemic. Young men's livelihoods were mostly affected by the temporary closure of workplaces and loss of income from seasonal work or from employment in the service sector such as shopping centres, retail and restaurants closed during lockdown.¹⁸

Table 2. Breadwinner in the family of respondents in Kazakhstan by gender

	Aktobe	Karaganda	Turkestan	TOTAL
Both spouses	9	4	10	23
Man only	9	10	6	25
Woman only	0	4	2	6

The loss of wages required sometimes a change in the breadwinner roles. In some families, where women had an opportunity to take up employment, the unemployed men looked after the children. Only six families were supported solely by women.¹⁹

Women were reported to be employed in low-wage sectors.²⁰ Moreover gender pay gap was evident within sectors. For example, daily rates offered to agricultural workers varied between men (3,500–4,000 tenge a day or 8–9 USD depending on physical hardship) and women (3,000 tenge or 7 USD per day during the harvest).

17 Such a scenario was most widespread in the sample in the Turkestan region (10 out of 18 surveyed households) and Aktobe region (9 out of 18) but was much less frequent in the Karaganda region (4 out of 18).

18 The employers tended to retain the workers without providing them with remuneration and the workers would apply for state social benefits.

19 Geographic variation was observed: while in the Aktobe region, half of the families were supported by men only (9 out of 18) while the other half reported both spouses to be the breadwinners, the sample in the Turkestan region featured six households supported by men and two households with women as the only breadwinners while the majority (10) declared both spouses to be employed.

20 Respondents indicated personal services as an example – a worker at a beauty salon could earn 60,000–70,000 tenge (140–164 USD).

2. Local labour demand (employers' and officials' views)

2.1. Demand for labour among local employers and recruitment methods

Interviews with local owners of small- and medium-sized companies reported high flexibility with respect to hiring and firing of their workers largely determined by the changing demand and seasonality. The fieldwork revealed a demand predominantly for workers with a low level of qualification but with willingness to acquire new skills on the job place. Difficulties in identifying workers with required qualifications and skills were reported already in the period preceding the COVID-19 pandemic both in manufacturing and agricultural sectors.

Nine small and medium-size employers (two representatives of industry, four in agriculture and three in the service sector) were interviewed in three regions. They pointed to two main factors, determining their demand for additional labour:

- *market situation*: need for rapid employment was declared in the service sector in cases of a temporary increase in demand from customers;
- *field of activity*. For medium-sized enterprises in the production sector, low-skilled workers are required (handymen, movers, sales representatives, merchandisers, supervisors). In the agricultural sector, there are more small businesses (sole proprietors) that require workers for seasonal work (harvesting, weeding, etc.). The service sector, on the other hand, requires workers with particular aptitude in narrow profiles who do not need to complete higher education but should demonstrate the desire and ability to learn on the work place. In the city, young people are more likely to get a job as waiters, sushi chefs or sales representatives, hair stylists, specialists in manicure or eyelash care, etc.

The respondents, representing enterprises of various sizes, reported difficulties in matching the supply with the specific demand. Interviewed human resource officials at larger companies noted the increased demand for teachers and medical workers, which cannot be met due to lack of suitable candidates with required work experience. The surveyed employers also pointed to the difficulty of finding suitable workers, both for seasonal employment and for work in production. The seasonal nature of agricultural work makes it difficult to retain qualified workers and finding workers with suitable skills every new season was also a challenge (Turkistan region) due to strong competition from other farms. In recent years, manufacturing companies in the Aktobe region, bordering the Russian Federation, reported facing a challenge of identifying qualified workers who seek employment opportunities in the Russian Federation and other foreign destinations.²¹

Both in the agricultural and low-skill labour (e.g. manual transportation of merchandise), the employers indicated that they did not expect the applicants to demonstrate specialist qualifications. Instead, work commitment, abilities to cope with and perform the duties on the job were stressed by the employers in the Aktobe region. Hiring young people for 1–2 – day trial period is thus common to test these qualities. On the other hand, employers from the Turkistan region declared that they did not hire students, citing lack of practical experience.

The surveyed employers declared using three methods for hiring employees: searching through Internet sites, placing ads on social networks; recruiting in places where potential employees are waiting for job offers; and using personal channels of acquaintances. Generally, the employers selected those channels on account of their low cost (no need for additional investment) as well as broad reach as the job applicants also use them. All methods were selected to ensure that the applicants demonstrated needed work commitment and, for low-skilled jobs, physical stamina.

The choice of specific channels of communication largely depends on the sector and geographic location. The first method – *online search* ("Head Hunter", "OLX", "Instagram") is more often used by manufacturing enterprises located in the city. Jobseekers submit their CVs and cover letters online, which upon positive review are invited to a personal interview. This route is also used by service organizations, which offer the candidates paid internships.

Recruitment in the places where jobseekers gather is mainly carried out for seasonal work by enterprises in the agricultural sector. This form allows private farm owners to assess the qualities sought from mainly young people – their physical endurance and dexterity needed to perform hard labour as mowing grass, pulling weeds (in case of men) or during the harvest (men and women). Men are engaged for heavy tasks since small farms do not use machinery. A significant factor in selecting workers for this type of employment is the need to visually verify the physical abilities.

²¹ For instance, an Aktobe entrepreneur highlighted particularly strong demand for workers with technical qualifications (electricians, welders) alongside unskilled hard-labour workforce.

2.2. Awareness and assessment of support measures by employers

Only nine of interviewed employers in the three regions were aware of the range of State support Programmes, and their choice of particular instruments depended on the geographic region and sector of operation. Overall, the respondents appreciated the role that the employment centres play in identifying candidates, particular noting the importance of having a financial support for creating job opportunities for the first-time entrants. However, some criticism was voiced regarding the limited duration of financial support or the unsuitable skills of referred candidates with the job requirements.

The respondents in the *Aktobe region* referred to trainings for their staff as they could name instances, in which other employers cooperated with employment centres to improve the skills of their employees. Among the references were short-term courses, run local centres for support of youth development as well as internships or advanced trainings implemented by local vocational schools. They appreciated the information about available subsidies and State assistance valuable for both the employees and employers. They also believed that as many as half of the young people were informed of such Programmes. According to interviewed employers in the *Turkistan region*, the lockdown did not reduce availability of State Programmes facilitating youth employment. They noted in particular that during the pandemic, assistance to employees was provided in the form of masks, sanitation, and wage preservation.

The employers interviewed in the *Karaganda region* named the widest range of State services, which they had experience of using and were overall satisfied. At the same time the local employers admitted that frequent turnover of specialists in employment centres occasionally creates difficulties in the cooperation.²² When assessing individual initiatives, references were made in that region to the national Programme "Enbek-2020"²³, youth internships and public works, which were appreciated as they could provide jobs for young people without requirements for work experience, in accordance with the specialty.²⁴ Manufacturing enterprises in that region favourably reported about the "First workplace" Programme, targeting college and university graduates, which helped them obtain practical work skills by subsidizing work positions. On the other hand, youth internships and public works were criticized for supplying candidates without required qualifications or who did not match the profile of their businesses.

3. Barriers to employment

3.1. Barriers to youth employment

Structural features of the local labour markets (limited demand for high school graduates and untransparent hiring procedures for application, perceived by young people to be widespread corrupt schemes) were identified by youth as major obstacles to securing enough jobs to meet their aspirations. In turn, the interviewed employers and specialists of employment centres focused on what they saw as young people's unrealistic expectations regarding conditions of first-time employment.

The first set of factors, which were brought up in the interviews, as limiting youth's opportunities for employment locally had a *structural* character. A limited number of vacancies, especially those for specialists with technical and higher education, was identified as a fundamental obstacle by both the interviewed young people and employers or officials. These two groups of respondents differed, however, in their assessment of other barriers. While the interviewed youth considered nepotism and corruption as a major issue, the employers and employment centre officials concentrated on the expectations and qualities of young people themselves that could not be met under current terms of the local labour market. In turn, corruption was named as a common issue in the local labour market, which limited young people's ability to finding a well- paid job, also corresponding to their field of study. According to the interviewed youth, it is necessary to "pay" the prospective employer to secure employment. Interviewed youth believe that at a young age people without work experience are unable to get such a suitable job without offering payment.²⁵

²² This may be attributed to low wages in the public sector, which are disincentives to remaining in these demanding positions.

²³ See section 4.2 for further details.

²⁴ Some criticism was raised by one respondent of the limited period, in which wages are subsidized by the state, which in his view provided an incentive for the dismissal of the experienced worker once the subsidy coverage expired and for hiring of a new employee to be covered by another subsidy.

²⁵ According to a 2019 monitoring, carried out by Transparency International Kazakhstan in 2019, bribery when applying for a job was the second most common scenario of corruption.

The interviewed employers also confirmed that women are more likely to be unemployed. *Entry into the labour market has been often made difficult by employers' discriminatory practices, in particular refusal to hire of the married or soon-to-be married women.* This was highlighted in particular with regard to rural areas where cultural expectations differ sharply by gender: while young men are encouraged to leave for regional urban centres in search of work, single women could only leave if permitted by their parents. At the same time, the closure of kindergartens during the COVID-19 pandemic reduced the chances for employment of young women with children in urban areas who could not secure daytime care.

Another set of barriers concerned the *expectations and attitudes* of the young people themselves, and was mainly raised by employers and specialists of employment centres. Interviewed employers consider that unrealistic *expectations* regarding the entry wage levels were a major barrier to hiring. In their opinion, wages could be raised over a period of 2–3 years, once the employee can display their potential. However, some employers felt that young people did not persevere to upgrade their skills on the job and failed to recognize the value of acquired know-how, instead concentrating on getting a good salary. The interviews also revealed the sharp differences among wage levels that could be offered to workers in various sectors of the economy and between smaller and larger enterprises.²⁶ Employers and employees of employment centres also referred to young people's negative personal qualities and *attitudes*. They consider young people unwilling to work at full capacity or to take on responsibility. As a result, entrepreneurs prefer to hire workers above 30 years. In their view, the fact that those persons set up families, raise children and have been able to serve their loans is indicative of their ability to perform their duties faithfully.²⁷

3.2. Barriers to decent work and employment matching qualifications

Young people's and employees' perspectives were also at odds regarding the certified skills and qualifications as prerequisites for employment. Young people noted that employers required from them a record of practical on-the-job experience, which proved difficult to meet for graduates. In turn, the employers were skeptical of the job preparation that the students received during their courses and preferred to provide training in the workplace.

Regardless of the level of educational attainment, the respondents *highlighted that finding a job, which matches their qualifications remains a main challenge*. Five respondents with higher education could not find a job that matches their qualifications and remained unemployed at the time of the survey. Others were employed in jobs, which do not correspond to their field of study. Respondents with higher pedagogical education declared that they were in the process of getting additional competencies in another area. At the same time, respondents with secondary special education named lack of higher education an obstacle in securing high-paid jobs, especially when trying to find work through employment centres.

All the respondents (youth, employment centre officials and employers) highlighted an issue with the recognition of competence among graduates. Employers believe that universities and colleges provide theoretical knowledge that is not suitable for practical work. Some of the interviewed employers doubted whether young people made an informed choice when entering a school, and pointed to instances when graduates would not want to work in the chosen field due to dissatisfaction with offered wages. Absence of certified work experience was named by youth respondents as main obstacle to get employed. Both college graduates and respondents with secondary special (technical) education underscored that employers are interested in acquiring employees with work experience, however, they noted that such experience could only be gained over several years.

²⁶ Larger industrial or food processing companies offer from 100,000 tenge (234 USD) upwards while small agricultural farms could pay between 80,000 and 100,000 tenge (187–234 USD).

²⁷ At the same time, an interviewed employer from the Aktobe region expressed the opinion that an 18-year old could be hired as long as he or she demonstrated personal responsibility.

4. Job search strategies and forms of support

4.1. Local youth job search strategies – description and assessment

In the period preceding the pandemic, applicants were already increasingly using online platforms to present their professional profiles (placing resumes for a fixed period) or to respond to specific vacancies. Employers and some jobseekers stressed that online forms were best complemented by in-person contact in order for testing the personal qualities and skills. The duration of the job search is primarily dependent on the type of job wanted (permanent and better-paid jobs taking longer).

Job search is mostly done via the Internet and the respondents reported using both nationwide sites (Head Hunter, OLX, and Instagram) and regional online resources in the Aktobe and Karaganda regions. The jobseekers used online resources to post vacancies or post their resumes. The latter option was preferred in case the applicant wanted to target a specific position requiring specific level of education.²⁸

Respondents were in agreement that it takes on average a couple of months to a year to find a job. The period of search depends, however, on the applicant's expectations. It may be limited to as little as one week or be extended to 1–2 months in cases of students who are satisfied with temporary and low paid employment on a flexible schedule. Those who want to have a good stable income and good working conditions have to look for work longer. The longest periods (2–3 years) were believed to be needed for locating jobs matching the applicant's qualifications and therefore offering higher wages on entry. Family status was in turn cited as a factor determining the period of job search among young women. While single women (e.g. students) who look for temporary part-time employment can find a job just as quickly as their male peers, the job search takes much longer among married women. Married girls with children spend more time looking for employment as employers were reported to refuse their applications due to fear that the female employees would go on maternity leave. This concern was in fact raised by one of the employers.

Employers and some jobseekers stressed that to be successful, online ads must be complemented with face-to-face contact with the potential candidate, which became difficult at the time of the lockdown. A survey participant noted that to ensure that the employers respond to the offer, the applicant needs to visit a company and hand the resume to the prospective employer. Employers in turn are interested in being able to verify the personal qualities of potential employees through in-person contact.²⁹ A major criticism of applicants' job search strategies by employers concentrated on the lack of persistence among young people. The respondents cited cases in which young people would leave resumes but then would not follow up with questions regarding details of employment. Some of the interviewed young people, however, doubted whether perseverance would allow them to get the job they were looking for.

4.2. Forms of available State support to jobseekers.

In their employment facilitation Programmes, State employment centres have acknowledged some of the identified barriers – need for retraining, subsidizing job creation and matching employers with workers meeting their particular needs. These imply the need for Programmes helping develop soft skills among youth.

Interviews with local officials of State employment centres (first established in 2011) served to identify some of the available Programmes, aiming to facilitate employment of youth in the regions. Employment centres implement a number of Programmes and services aiming to increase professional competences of youth, and provide a platform for matching vacancies with work applications (an electronic labour exchange).

Local State employment centres aim to **disseminate information** about State employment Programmes. For example, mobile groups were organized in order to inform the population in villages of local district about available State Programmes. This form of contact had to be suspended during the lockdown and information was provided on centres' websites.³⁰ In the Turkestan region, young people are asked to register in employment centres and fill out a questionnaire, then contact employers who offer vacancies. In the Aktobe region, employment centres directly send candidates for a personal interview and discussion of working conditions as well as salary.

²⁸ The respondents revealed that they would pay 700–800 tenge (1.6–1.9 USD) per month or 350 tenge (0.8 USD) per week to place their resumes on local online platforms. It should be noted, however, that according ILO Conventions even private sector job intermediaries must not charge jobseekers for their services. All charges should be borne by the employer.

²⁹ For instance, the owner of a beauty salon in Turkestan considers candidates in terms of cleanliness, ability to communicate with clients and other employees

³⁰ www.enbek.kz/docs/ru/feature-articles/933.

State support measures for facilitating employment were provided in a form of employment mediation and job placement, referrals for vocational and advanced training, provision of preferential micro-loans and grants, referrals to subsidized employment, support for voluntary relocation and other measures. A major initiative of the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan was adopted in 2017. The State Programme for the development of productive employment and mass entrepreneurship for 2017–2021 “Enbek” was launched to provide Programmes for obtaining professional skills and qualifications that are in demand on the labour market, developing mass entrepreneurship, and creating an effective model of employment mediation. Under the Programme employers are given financial incentives to hire new workers and provide them with necessary practical job experience. Under the “Enbek” Programme, since 1 September, 2017, approximately 53,000 young people have received free professional and technical education to date. Participants of the Programme are provided with a scholarship, hot meal and transportation. From 2017 to 2019, 170 thousand people attended short-term professional training of workers in professions and skills that are in demand on the labour market.³¹

Another notable employment facilitation initiative is the “youth internship” Programme. The scheme targets young people under 29 years of age, graduates, or those who graduated from universities within last three years. Young people are placed for six months in positions matching their line of study while employers receive a subsidy from the employment centre to pay for interns’ salary.³² In 2019, 34,651 young people took part in youth internship Programme. Due to the pandemic, between 1 January and 1 September 2020, the Programme has covered 26,424 beneficiaries.³³

The interviewed employment centre officials also pointed to some other **dedicated schemes, aiming to facilitate first-time employment for youth**. Starting in 2020, the “First job” Programme is being introduced under which college and university graduates and unemployed persons under 29 may be provided with guaranteed full-time employment for the period of 2 years. Another State Programme “First place of work” was launched in the second half of 2020, targeting those who have not yet worked in their specialty after graduation.³⁴ Only a few regions reported data of assistance under this initiative (e.g. Kostanay region).

According to respondents’ reports, employment centres conduct career guidance among schoolchildren and graduates of colleges and universities. In particular, there is a practice of calling personal phone numbers, working with teachers of schools, colleges, and universities. Periodically, job fairs are organized for employers and potential employees, and resumes are posted on the Electronic Labour Exchange.

A separate line of centres’ activities targets young women after maternity leave. Employment centres can offer them a job in their specialized field for a year and provide short-term courses to raise their qualifications.³⁵ In addition, women’s entrepreneurship is facilitated through organization of training on how to start own business and provision of grants of 200 monthly calculation indexes.³⁶

4.3. Awareness and use of support services among youth.

Following the decline in labour demand during the lockdown, interest in employment intermediation picked up by June 2020. In general, youth respondents have been aware of the available Programmes and have applied to a number of them. However, they were critical of the terms of employment they have been offered, in particular, low wages and temporariness of jobs.

Relatively few of the jobseekers turned to State employment centres. In the period between 1 January and 1 June of 2020, the total of 273,798 people used State intermediation services.³⁷ Of the total of who applied, only 23 per cent (63,800) were under 30 years old. In the investigated regions, the largest number of applicants was observed in the Turkestan region – 44,158 people, followed by the Karaganda region (14,950 people) and the Aktobe region, where 14,063 people applied (Table 3).

31 As part of monitoring, local authorities are required to report the share of beneficiaries who are employed within 12 months since completing trainings. See www.adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P1800000746#z1038.

32 Under the terms of the youth practice, a three-way agreement is concluded between the employer, the program participant and the employment centre. Wages are paid at the expense of employment centres. Thus, the employer does not bear the costs.

33 Including 5,242 in Turkestan region, 2,624 in Aktobe region and 1,177 in Karaganda region. See www.prz.enbek.gov.kz/ru.

34 Implementation of the Program of Developing Productive Employment and Large-scale Entrepreneurship 2017-2021 [Реализация Программы развития продуктивной занятости и массового предпринимательства на 2017-2021 годы] www.egov.kz/cms/ru/articles/job_search/zanyatost_2020.

35 Those include learning new professions, such as hairdresser or seamstress or acquiring entrepreneurial skills.

36 Kazakhstan’s monthly calculation index is an amount used for determining the amount of public payments. It is set annually, and increased from 2,525 tenge in 2019 to 2,651 tenge in January 2020. It was further increased to 2,778 tenge effective 1 April 2020.

37 This represented a continuation of the long-term trend. In the period from 2015 to June 1, 2020, a total of 3.2 million people applied to employment centres for labour mediation in the Republic.

Table 3. Users of State-provided employment intermediation services in regions of Kazakhstan

Region	2019	1 Jan-1 June 2020
Akmola	23 121	8 665
Aktobe	44 000	14 063
Almaty region	57 056	27 559
Atyrau	23 446	11 410
East Kazakhstan	41 056	18 618
Zhambyl	37 857	18 614
West Kazakhstan	29 274	13 562
Karaganda	55 479	14 950
Kostanay	28 540	11 226
Kyzyl-Orda	34 488	14 489
Mangystau	44 640	14 780
Pavlodar	28 401	10 770
North Kazakhstan	23 667	8 505
Turkestan	106 503	44 158
Almaty city	48 032	25 928
Nur-Sultan city	19 502	6 713
Shymkent city	41 481	9 788
KAZAKHSTAN	686 543	273 798

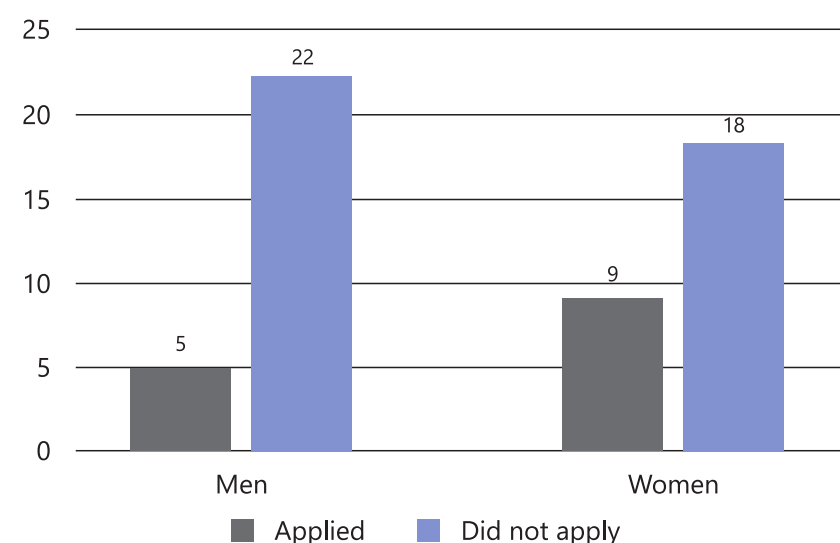
Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of Republic of Kazakhstan.

Interviewed specialists of employment centres and private agencies indicate continued interest in employment intermediation, offered by various entities.

- In the Karaganda region, 50–60 people apply per month, most of them women. Compared to January and February 2020, the number of jobseekers increased in March due to introduced quarantine and leave without pay. The number of people looking for temporary work has also increased: if around 700 people were registered in all of 2019, a comparable number was registered in the first six months of 2020.
- Continued demand was also observed in the Aktobe region. A local specialist of the regional employment centre Stated that about 40–50 people left their resumes every month during 2020. Of those, 25–30 people were employed. Approximately half of these applications came from young people under 29 years of age while women made up about 30–40 per cent of the applicants.
- In turn, a specialist of a private Agency in the Turkestan region reported that 250 people had applied to that agency since the beginning of this year.

Out of the total of 54 respondents who were interviewed in our study, 14 (9 women and 5 men) had experience in applying to employment centres (Figure 6). Four people in this group were unemployed at the time of the interview. They said that they had learned about the work of employment centres from friends, through advertising.³⁸ The respondents who applied to employment centres confirmed they received offers for unskilled work, which did not require professional training (such as street sweepers, street cleaners, landscape gardeners, driver, workers in the areas of housing and utilities, etc). Three men who had experience in applying to employment centres said that the offered work, while low-skilled was low-paid (with salaries ranging from 30,000 to 60,000 tenge or 70–140 USD per month). They were also critical of the fact that the jobs were merely temporary and seasonal and gave no prospects for professional growth.

38 A woman (26 years old, Karaganda region, self-employed) applied through the “Enbek” e-gov platform.

Figure 6. Respondents with experience of applying to State employment centres in Kazakhstan, by gender

None of the respondents mentioned any institutional forms of external support other than State assistance, but some pointed out external migration as a means of overcoming difficulties in securing decent employment. Instead, personal efforts were stressed as essential parts of interviewed young people's coping strategies. When asked for means of support other than State support, only work outside Kazakhstan was identified by three respondents, while one participant from the Aktoke region had experience working abroad. The main sources of information on opportunities of work abroad is the Internet, employment sites, and online forums. Some interest in going abroad was identified among respondents in the Karaganda and Aktoke regions who said they would leave if they could locate "a decent job", providing sufficient wage or, in case of a student from the Aktoke region, ability to pursue a course of study while working part time.

5. Outlook for the future

5.1. Among youth

A split was observed among the surveyed young people between optimists and pessimists. In the short run, the stability of income was decisive, while the long-run key factors were the educational levels and age.

Local youth were queried as to their concerns for the future. Those were related to two main criteria: the stability of the socioeconomic situation at present and to the prospects of securing stable sources of income in the long run. The first distinction could be observed in the group of young men. Married men who were primary breadwinners expressed more concerns about the socioeconomic situation of their families than single men who had a more optimistic outlook as they could rely on their parents for financial support.

Long-term prospects were assessed differently depending on the age group and educational status. Pessimism was expressed mainly by the older group of respondents with higher education who were concerned that they would not be able to get a job in their specialized field. They consider current physical, unskilled labour as merely temporary employment, which does not provide opportunities to improve their skills. In fact, they believe that the time spent at university served as a handicap as they did not accumulate experience to demonstrate technical qualifications. Furthermore, they believe that the period of three or four years of unsuccessful job search further sets them back as the educational certificates lose some of their relevance, not being supported by practical experience.

Optimism was found among the people in the younger age group (18–21 years) who believe they have good prospects of finding a decent job. This category includes in particular students who study in specialized field or have a job work in accordance with in the field of their education. At the same time, they seek to develop additional skills and acquire more knowledge in their field and are oriented toward self-development. Unlike the previous group, this group of young people consider the temporary job merely as a means to meet their daily expenses.

Apart from considering their own situation, interviewed young people believe that eliminating corruption, establishing stable trusted State institutions, and ensuring equal rights to access education and work, could help overcome some of the barriers youth is facing and open up their opportunities.

5.2. Among employers and officials

While pessimists among employers stressed the long-term negative consequences of the crisis, optimists focused on the adjustment that both themselves, employers and the workers had to make to respond to the evolution of the labour market. Employment centre officials focused on the shift that has to take place in young people's job search strategies and attitudes in the workplace.

The employers' outlook for the future varied depending on their confidence in facing the current difficult economic conditions. Some of the employers who took part in the survey admitted that the crisis had become a difficult period for entrepreneurs as many companies stopped working and eventually went bankrupt. They noted that the trade sector was particularly affected. Others, on the contrary, focused on the opportunities and discussed their plans to adjust to new conditions by automating and mechanizing work processes, and establishing new types of services (product handling, delivery and storage). This group of employers stressed the need for additional personnel and specialists and expressed hope that under new circumstances prospects are opening up for young people so they can acquire new knowledge and master a new specialty.

Interviewed employers concluded that there is a need to adjust State employment promotion Programmes so they would take into account the changes on the labour market. An opinion has also been expressed that it is necessary to introduce more professional training in popular specialties so that young people can find work that is in demand in the labour market.

Specialists of employment centres concentrated on the implications of the changes on the labour market for young people's professional choices, which should be, in their view, more deliberate and conscious. They believe that prospective workers need not just be informed of the market developments but also develop skills that would help them adjust and act quickly in response. However, the specialists consider many young people unprepared for this evolution, noting their anxiety in the face of such challenges. They also stressed the need for young people to develop a different attitude to work – responsibility and self-discipline.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Reducing negative impact of the pandemic on the employment of young women and men

In March 2020, Kazakhstan introduced a State of emergency in connection with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited economic activity. During the 1st half of the year the economy of Kazakhstan decreased by 1.8 per cent. The largest losses were recorded in the service sector – 5.6 per cent. In June 2020, the World Bank predicted a 3 per cent decline in Kazakhstan's GDP in 2020. During the quarantine period, small and medium-sized enterprises, services, trade, and public entertainment centres, where young people were mostly employed, were affected.

The temporary suspension of many economic activities had profound effects on the labour market. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as many as approximately 4,200,000 stayed out of the labour market in April 2020. The easing of the lockdown measures helped reduce the number of unemployed to 1,145,000 persons in May and about 735,000 in June, but due to reintroduction of restrictions the estimated number of unemployment reached almost 1 million people in July.³⁹

At the same time, the registered unemployment rate remained at 4.8 per cent.⁴⁰ Youth unemployment at the end of 2019 (i.e. those officially registered and registered with the employment authorities) aged 15 to 28 years was 3.7 per cent.⁴¹ According to the results of the 2nd quarter of 2020, the unemployment rate among young people aged 15 to 28 years was 4.0 per cent, i.e. increased by 0.3 per cent. This figure showed, however, a significant gender gap – registered unemployment standing at 3.5 per cent for men and 4.6 per cent for women.⁴² Interviewed Kazakh experts suggested that official statistics only take into account the formal sector ("white unemployment"), believing that joblessness levels were much higher in the informal sectors, reaching around 30 per cent. A concern was expressed by one expert that it might grow even higher in the wake of the lockdown.

In the context of the pandemic, there has been a sharp decline of employment in the service sector, especially in hospitality, hair and beauty sectors (hairstylists, specialists in manicure, chefs, waiters), which primarily affected the employment of young people and women. It should be taken into account that in the pre-pandemic period, young people and women remained among the socially vulnerable categories of the population.

- Within the framework of administrative measures and labour legislation, it is necessary to clarify the conditions of part-time employment, remote work (Article 138 of the Labour Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan) in terms of labour safety and working conditions (working hours).
- It is necessary to constantly *post information about changes in demand for jobs in the light of the pandemic*. Young people could make use of up-to-date information reflecting trends in the local labour market placed on the websites of employment centres.
- The State Programme facilitating setting up of businesses also needs updating given the pandemic. It is in particular necessary to provide dedicated grants for businesses which create jobs making use of young people's skills and qualifications.
- The scope and contents of professional trainings, offered by educational organizations (colleges, universities) and local employment agencies should take into account the changing demand for employment in various sectors, taking into account the reduction of services, shopping and entertainment centres.

II. Providing young women and men with current information on all vacancies, recognizing changes in demand

At the same time, relatively few offers (resumes) have been placed through official channels, which shows the untapped potential of the State employment services and electronic labour exchanges to facilitate employment for young women and men. Measures must be therefore firstly taken by the authorities to reach out to youth with comprehensive information on vacancies.

The structure of the workforce demand has been assessed based on the data provided by the Centre for the Development of Labour Resources of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan (CRTR) regarding the vacancies announced by Kazakhstani employers in the country's regions. In the second quarter of 2020, **the largest number of vacancies (43%) was announced in construction, transport, and industry**, demanding workers, bricklayers, concrete workers, painters, and carpenters as the growth was observed in the volume of construction work and the implementation of infrastructure projects under the national Employment Roadmap.⁴³ CRTR data show that the **second most demanded job category includes professional specialists**—there are more than 42,000 vacancies for workers with the highest level of skills and competencies in their industry. These are key specialists – research engineers, analysts, doctors, teachers, etc. CRTR reports consistently high demand for these highly qualified employees. They continue to represent a major share in the official labour market – ranging from 18 to 47 per cent, depending on the region.

According to CRTR experts, the lockdown restrictions have pushed some employees to seek positions in other professions. The analysis of resumes that were submitted in the "Electronic labour exchange" system indicates that the largest number of applicants have expressed interest in taking up a position of office managers (more than 5,000), lawyers and environmentalists. At the same time, the number of vacancies for such personnel is five times lower.⁴⁴

- *Electronic labour exchanges and State employment centres need to expand the channels for providing information and services to include digital forms* (Telegram channels and bots, SMS mailing lists). This will help meet the demand among young people who want to be provided with full description of the position, including working hours, wages, location, availability of social facilities, etc. In turn, collecting feedback through online comments (Telegram bots) will also be an opportunity to provide career guidance to a wider audience of young people. By using these channels, State services could post videos, video messages, and demonstrate the positive results of employment Programmes.
- *Employment centres are advised, together with employers, to conduct transparent competitions to fill vacancies and train specialists based on the results of the current monitoring of demand for specific specialists*. The centres could further assist unsuccessful applicants by introducing a mandatory procedure of providing the applicant with a comprehensive assessment of the strengths and weaknesses, delivered by the members of the selection committee or the employer. The results of the study show that young people do not receive feedback following the job interview, which prevents them from remedying the identified shortcomings.
- There is a need for strengthening employment centres' services provided to employers, in particular with regard to identification of employees with needed skills. The centres need to *develop a system for comprehensive profiling and case management* which will assess not only suitability of technical skills, but also soft skills and other individual vulnerabilities which may be a barrier for employment.
- *Employment centres ought to organize online or remote job fairs*. Such job fairs should feature employment guarantees, facilitated by the centres: written contracts could be concluded between employers and potential employees, confirming prior oral agreements between the parties.
- Assisted by universities and colleges, *employment centres should hold fairs for young people's start-up companies*, attracting potential investors and helping establish business partnerships.

³⁹ www.inform.kz/ru/mintruda-vyskazalsya-ob-urovne-bezraboticy-v-period-pandemii_a3672658.

⁴⁰ No information on labour market surveys has been identified by the assessment team.

⁴¹ Уровень молодежной безработицы (в возрасте 15–28 лет) // Информационно-аналитическая система МНЭ РК «Талдау» www.taldau.stat.gov.kz/ru/NewIndex/GetAnalytics/3782164.

⁴² www.stat.gov.kz/official/industry/25/statistic/6.

⁴³ When compared to the supply, it becomes evident that the most scarce profession in Kazakhstan has become a road worker – the country needs more than 12,000 workers to build and repair roads, while those who want to do this are four times less.

⁴⁴ A possible reason for the increase in the number of applicants in these professions, according to CRTR experts, may be the release of employees temporarily closed during the quarantine of enterprises (cinemas, banquet halls) and their desire to find another job.

III. Improving mechanisms of recruitment of employees among young women and men

In general, the study showed that local employers and employees relatively rarely use State employment services, instead preferring direct contact, increasingly via online channels. Interviewed young people generally do not apply to State employment promotion agencies, considering vacancies of limited appeal on account of low salaries and temporary nature of the offered work. The assessment revealed that young people are more likely to turn to commercial job search sites ("Head hunter", OLX, Instagram as well as local sites) for either viewing vacancies or posting resumes. The latter option was reported to be convenient because it allowed employees to present their profiles directly to employers. The effectiveness of that method was confirmed in interviews with some local employers. Manufacturing enterprises, located in urban centres as well as service providers, reported using various types of online services, which were also used by employees for advertising. Other forms used by employers include placing ads on social networks; recruiting in places where potential employees are waiting for job offers; and using personal channels of acquaintances.

In contrast, existing online platforms of State services are limited in nature, because information is dispersed between different sites. For example, the sites of the Programme for the development of productive employment and mass entrepreneurship⁴⁵ and the website of the Electronic Labour Exchange⁴⁶ they supplement or, in some cases, duplicate information. However, neither of them has direct contacts with the organizers of a particular Programme, there is no list of specialties for which training is conducted, etc.

Employment centres need support to step up their cooperation with employers, who play a crucial role in providing adequate terms and conditions of employment. To move away from their current role as information providers toward a genuine intermediation between potential employees and employers, employment centres need to be assisted by both government agencies and international donors.

- To widely disseminate information about State employment promotion Programmes, it is advisable for *employment centres to use new methods of informing young people*. For example, creating more interactive, multi-format, interactive online platforms, telegram channels, etc. Employment centres use information from various sources, including non-Governmental ones, to expand the database of offered vacancies. Creating an online platform to advise young people, in particular young women, on employment opportunities, including training.
- To *provide services to youth according to the principle of "one window" in the job search*. This will allow young people to quickly assess opportunities and use the employment assistance provided by the State.
- It is in particular advisable to *offer participated in trainings, organized by employment centres at the request of employers, contracts with those employers* on the basis of a framework agreement between the centres and manufacturing enterprises.
- Small and medium enterprises often rely on private intermediaries for recruitment, which increases the cost to the employees, and thus may further marginalize some of the vulnerable youth. It is important that State employment centres *promote the free-of-charge services among young jobseekers, raising their awareness of the benefits of ethical recruitment and of legal guarantees against charging fees for intermediation and work placement*.

IV. Eliminating specific barriers to employment, faced by young women and men

Respondents who participated in the study, named four main barriers to employment for young women and men. The first two were indicated mainly by young respondents while the next two were pointed out by employers and employees of employment centres.

- (1) *Shortage of open vacancies in the labour market for specialists with special and higher education*. So, according to the employer from the agricultural sector, many people come to the village with a diploma of specialists, but there is no corresponding work in the village.
- (2) *Nepotism and corruption*. According to the sociological study among the population of Kazakhstan "monitoring the State of corruption in Kazakhstan", which was conducted by transparency international Kazakhstan in 2019, bribery to secure a job is the second in the TOP 10 reasons for corruption (open question).
- (3) *Unwillingness of young people to work at full capacity and apparent lack of commitment*. Entrepreneurs expressed preference to hire people in their 30s and above, believing that those persons who had families to support and loans to pay, could be expected to be highly motivated to perform their duties.

⁴⁵ www.prz.enbek.gov.kz/ru/frontnews.

⁴⁶ www.enbek.kz/ru.

- (4) *Desire of young people to receive high wages, suitable for the level of qualification and complexity of work*. For their part, employers are ready to raise wages and promote such an employee after successful work of a young person for 2–3 years. The interviews revealed not only a significant variation of wages among sectors (significantly higher in industry but lower in services and agriculture) but also a gender gap.⁴⁷

- Employment centres should be encouraged to *hold meetings and conversations with students at high schools, colleges and universities to provide up to date information on the current needs of the labour market (including changing skills needs and trends)* as well as provide guidance on long-term career planning.
- *To overcome difficulties in accessing decent employment, young people must be helped in developing "soft skills"*. Employment centres and educational organizations should organize trainings for young people focused on the development of communication skills, ethics and personal responsibility, and emotional intelligence. Implementation of the principles of lifelong learning will promote flexibility, retraining, and practical skills needed to adjust quickly to the changing labour market demand.
- The Anti-Corruption Agency should consider *conducting special research on the level of corruption in the hiring procedures and the field of labour relations*.
- Local State employment agencies, employment centres and units of the Prosecutor's Office should be tasked with raising awareness on the application of the Law of RK "On State guarantees of equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women" (8 December 2009). In particular, they need to *alert employers as to their responsibility to ensure equal rights and equal opportunities of men and women in the field of labour relations*.
- Capacity-building projects, targeting employers, especially in SME sector, need to *focus to a greater extent on development of human resource management*, in particular identifying and assessing skills and competences of new entrants and methods of coaching and mentoring.
- *To reduce barriers to young women, introduce a norm on subsidizing the wages of social jobs occupied by young women*. Such jobs can be organized on the basis of paragraph 3 of article 20 Of the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On employment". Local employment agencies can conduct an analysis of supply and demand among young women and employers in social jobs and draw up a list of organizations that can organize social jobs for young women.

V. Facilitating employment, corresponding to skills and qualifications through improving effectiveness of systems of career guidance and professional training

While education could serve as a form of human capital that raises professionals' chances to find a job, the current statistics show that the higher the level of education, the higher is the level of competition in Kazakhstan's labour market. This has **pushed many graduates to accept lower skilled positions or remain outside of the labour market**.⁴⁸

Respondents with higher education point to the lack of work experience as the reasons for failure to find a job, since employers consider training in educational institutions to be theoretical, respectively, graduates do not have practical work skills. At the same time, respondents with secondary special education often name the lack of higher education as a barrier to employment, in particular, affecting young people who are trying to find higher-paying jobs through employment centres.

In the Kazakhstani labour market, a discrepancy between the level of qualifications and the remuneration has been observed, the so-called education dividend.⁴⁹ An important response to this issue could be the expansion of opportunities for on-the-job trainings with employers that have been verified as offering decent employment.

- *Targeted career guidance in secondary schools should be offered starting from the middle classes*. Orientation courses for young people should be implemented by youth resource centres with the invitation of job counsellors from employment centres.

⁴⁷ For example, in rural small businesses, women are paid 3,000 tenge (7 USD) per day during the harvest compared to men who receive 3,500 – 4,000 tenge (8–9 USD) per day, depending on the physical hardship associated with the activity.

⁴⁸ According to the Ranking.kz data, 37.1% of the persons aged 15–28 who are registered as unemployed have higher education – and their number increased by 6.9 % between 2018 and 2019. Another 4.8% of the unemployed young people (about 4,100 persons) have incomplete higher education. The largest number of unemployed young people (approximately 33,600 or 39.7%) have secondary vocational (special) education.

⁴⁹ For example, an analysis of the vacancies listed on the "Electronic labour exchange" reveals that sellers are offered a salary from 50,000 tenge to 150,000 tenge (117–350 USD) without education requirements. In contrast, primary school teachers with higher or special education are offered salaries ranging from 45,000 to 100,000 tenge (105–234 USD).

- To take short-term courses or receive technical and vocational training, an unemployed person must register at the employment centre. However, this opportunity is rarely taken up as young people do not view employment centres as paths toward securing permanent and decent employment. Thus, they do not see training as an incentive to get a job in the future. In this regard, it is advisable to *organize professional training at the request of employers with those potential employees from among youth and women who are candidates for the existing job.*
- Employment centres, together with educational organizations, need to *conduct systematic professional orientation of young people in the field by immersing them in their future profession.*
- It is also recommended to strengthen the work of the Committees on Youth Affairs of higher education institutions in matters of employment, career guidance and employment. This may involve, for instance, providing methodological assistance to young people in techniques of resume preparation, job interviews, online communication or developing online tools for self-assessment of career aspirations.
- The capacity of youth and women's organizations needs to be built for attracting young people. In particular, *trainings for youth resource centres that operate in the regions are needed to develop their ability to coach young people in choosing a profession, meeting their qualifications and skills.*

VI. Reviewing effectiveness of public employment Programmes

Public employment Programmes allocate resources for training and job creation to measures facilitating mainly temporary employment. Despite significant efforts in this area, these Programmes do not fully support the provision of permanent professional employment for young people. The assessment also has made a preliminary conclusion that the funds allocated by the State for the "youth practice" and "first workplace" Programmes do not have a long-term effect, i.e. they are used by employers only during the period of payment of subsidies and do not lead to lasting employment. Thus, there is no involvement of a young specialist in the labour sphere on a permanent basis.

- It is necessary to *create a map of existing Programmes and mechanisms for their implementation at the local level for purpose of analysing the effectiveness of all implemented State employment promotion Programmes.* It is advisable first to develop a methodology for analysing and evaluating the effectiveness of project implementation with the involvement of domestic and foreign specialists.
- There is a further *need to evaluate Programmes based on international experience for the relevance and involvement of youth and women in these Programmes, with subsequent adjustments to take into account the changes on the labour market.* It is in particular necessary to analyse the effectiveness of the Programmes "Youth practice", "Public works", "First workplace" for further employment of those who have passed these Programmes.

VII. Establishing sustainable long-term State support Programmes through institutional capacity-building

In general, to create long-term Programmes for effective employment and reproduction of human capital for the economy, it is necessary to build a State system of career guidance, training and employment in the labour market. This requires an analysis of the effectiveness and involvement of educational organizations, employment agencies, and employers in employment promotion Programmes.

- *Youth Policy Council under the President of Kazakhstan should initiate the process of developing a framework for national policy on employment of young women and men and mechanisms to support policy implementation at the local level needs.* For this purpose, it is necessary to run dedicated meetings of the Council dealing with youth employment. The framework will need to be further harmonized with key stakeholders.⁵⁰
- There is a need to *improve coordination of the area of youth employment at national and local levels, combining the efforts of key government agencies.* These activities involve several units of key government agencies and the identification among them of a single lead agency, serving as a single operator for youth development.⁵¹
- In the long run, *a single "State administrator for youth employment" needs to be established* at the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population in the form of a department or unit at national level responsible for collaborative policy development within the government. The administrator could also facilitate the involvement of non-State actors in the process of joint policy development and implementation.

⁵⁰ The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population, the Ministry of Education and Science as well as the Council on Family and Demographic Policy under the President of Kazakhstan as well as local administrations (akimats).

⁵¹ The following institutions need to be engaged: The Committee on Youth and Family Affairs (Ministry of Information and Social Development), the Committee of Labour, Social Protection and Migration (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population), the Committee for Control in the Sphere of Education and Science (Ministry of Education and Science).

TAJIKISTAN

TAJIKISTAN

METHODOLOGY

In this fieldwork, the total of 64 respondents were interviewed in Tajikistan. The sample included 39 youth respondents (aged 18–29): 21 men and 18 women, living in the following regions, districts and cities: Khatlon region: Kulyab, Vose district, Hamadoni district, Bokhtar city, Evon city; Districts of Republican Subordination (Vakhdat, Rudaki district) and the capital city of Dushanbe.

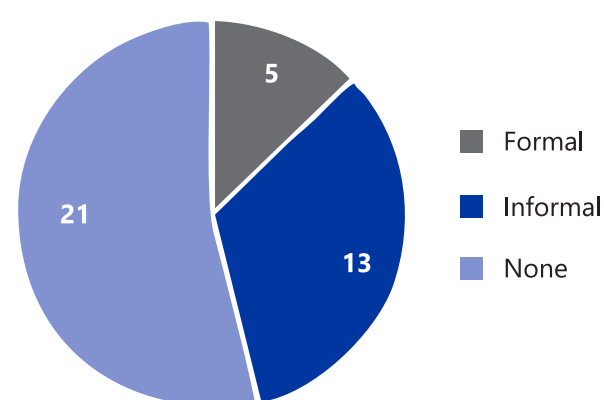
One of the largest regions in the Republic, with a population of 3,274,900 people (accounting for 36% of the country's population), Khatlon region ranks second in the number of registered unemployed in the country at the beginning of 2020, amounting to 15,000 people (0.45% of the total population of the region). Of these, 7,500 are women (50%). and 8,000 are young people under 30 (53.3%). While the RRP is the third most populous region in the country (population of 2, 120,000 – representing 23% of the country's total), it ranks first in the number of registered unemployed in the country. At the beginning of 2020, 16,600 people (0.78% of the total population of the region) were registered as unemployed with the Agency for Labour and Employment. Of these, 7,000 are women (42%), and 10,000 are young people under 30.⁵²

It is worth noting that jobless youth is significantly overrepresented in all three areas– accounting for 53.3 per cent of the registered unemployed persons in the RRP and 60.2 per cent of the registered jobless persons in the Khatlon region, while making up 28 per cent of either region's population. The share of young people among the officially unemployed is as high as 77 per cent in Dushanbe, which is more than twice the share of persons under 30 in the population of the city (33.1%).

Although official unemployment data fail to capture all persons remaining outside the formal labour market, registration data overrepresent youth relative to its share in the general population. The numbers of persons officially registered as unemployed are relatively low. They do not capture several categories, which were identified as either outside the formal labour market (working in the informal sector or traveling abroad for seasonal employment), performing non-remunerated work (majority of women, especially in the rural areas, working as homemakers) or being self-employed.

Out of the total of 39 respondents, 18 were *de facto* employed, but only 5 of them (13%) were formally employed with 13 others (33%) reporting being engaged in informal work (Figure 9).

Figure 7. Employment status of the respondents in Tajikistan, number of persons



Qualitative selection of respondents, taking into account their actual vulnerability as defined in the research methodology, was carried out through the Agency of labour and employment of the Ministry of labor of the Republic of Tajikistan and their regional divisions, local women's and youth NGOs working with vulnerable categories, employers in the capital and in the regions.

The selection criteria included the following parameters: gender, age, working (both in the formal and informal labour market), unemployed, and students. Young people, both qualified and unskilled, also participated in the survey. Among the unskilled, it is worth noting the category of "mardikors"

(temporary workers) in informal employment. The category of inactive included those who are looking for work, as well as those who are not looking for work. Among the students, there were also those who study and work and those who study and do not work.

Table 4. Employment status of the sample of respondents in Tajikistan

	Workers				Students		TOTAL
	Qualified	Unqualified, temporary workers	Unemployed seeking work	Inactive not seeking work	Working	Not working	
Men	2	4	4	3	4	4	21
Women	1	4	4	4	3	2	18
TOTAL	3	8	8	7	7	6	39

The respondents who participated in the survey represented different groups of young people: those with only secondary education, those with vocational education, and those with higher education. Also, many of the respondents had additional skills obtained as a result of training in short-term courses, such as driving courses, computer, accounting, language and seamstress courses.

32 out of 39 (82%) of respondents live in large families of 6 to 12 people, where the main breadwinner is the father or older brothers. Over two-thirds of breadwinners are self-employed (running small and medium-sized businesses). Many families have land and homesteads where they grow vegetables and fruits for their own consumption, and sell the surplus on the market.

Attention was paid to the representation of women in the sample as well as to the role of family status as a possible determinant of socioeconomic vulnerabilities and a barrier to employment. Sampling was made with the help of several stakeholders with long-standing experience of assisting vulnerable categories, in particular youth and women – the Labour and Employment Agency and its local offices as well as NGOs working with these groups of population.

Table 5. Family status of respondents in Tajikistan

	Married	Single, never married	Divorced	Widowed	TOTAL
Men	14	5	2	0	21
Women	7	6	3	2	18
TOTAL	21	11	5	2	39

In addition, 12 employers were interviewed in the sectors of industry, agriculture and services, of which 7 were men and 5 were women. Representatives of 12 employment centres also participated in the survey, including both the Labour and Employment Agency, the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population and its representative offices in the regions, the Agency for Employment Abroad of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population and private employment agencies. A high-ranking official of the State industry sector was also interviewed.

Despite the complexity of the current situation related to the pandemic in the country, the national team of experts did their best to meet with respondents both in the capital and in the regions in compliance with sanitary and hygienic standards during the pandemic. Remote/telephone interviewing as originally planned by the research team was not effective, due to the lack of communication facilities (phones, Internet, computers) for some respondents in rural areas, as well as for a number of employers and employment centres. There was also a unwillingness of respondents to participate in remote / telephone interviews. The first telephone interviews showed their inefficiency. Respondents behaved stiffly, with distrust, not giving detailed answers, embarrassed by the fact that they do not see the person interviewing them in the face. Therefore, it was decided to conduct interviews in the traditional format with field visits. The main part of the interviews was conducted in the selected areas of the regional offices of the Agency for labour and employment of the Ministry of Labour of Tajikistan, in offices of local committees (Mahal and jamoats) and of employers.

⁵² Agency on Statistics at President of the Republic of Tajikistan [Агентство по статистике при Президенте РТ], Statistical Handbook: Labour Market in the Republic of Tajikistan [Статистический сборник Рынок труда в РТ], 2019, pp. 21–26, 53.

COUNTRY FINDINGS

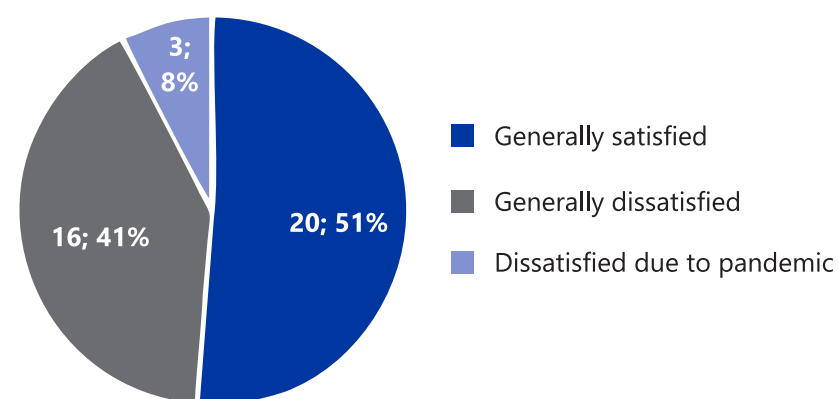
1. Socioeconomic status of youth respondents

1.1. Self-assessment of household welfare: pre-pandemic and impact of COVID-19

The majority of the youth respondents considered the economic position of their households to be “satisfactory”, mainly comparing their welfare to that of their neighbours, friends and relatives. Holding a steady job was acknowledged as a major factor ensuring social stability, especially for some of the more vulnerable categories (women with children who had lost financial support).

Out of the total of 39 respondents, over half (20 persons) described the general economic situation of their families as “satisfactory” (Figure 8). This referred to the position, held prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. While they were aware that there could be a better level of well-being, they considered that the current incomes were sufficient to meet the average needs of the family (food, utilities and secondary education for children). This Statement might be interpreted as relative to the economic situation of the respondents’ neighbors, friends, or relatives. At the same time, those who considered their economic welfare as good overall, added that it was not possible to put aside any savings.

Figure 8. Self-assessment of household welfare in Tajikistan, number of respondents



The respondents who were currently employed (18 out of 39) saw relatively minor economic impact of employment on their welfare but underlined the overall security that a regular salary and social benefits⁵³ as well as legal protection of their rights as major factors helping them attain social stability. They also noted that holding a steady job has had a positive impact on their social status. Some of the respondents who were not satisfied with their earnings mainly belonged to the category of divorced women with children,

as well as young couples who do not have the opportunity to separate from their parents and independently start their own household.

1.2. Impact of the pandemic on household assets

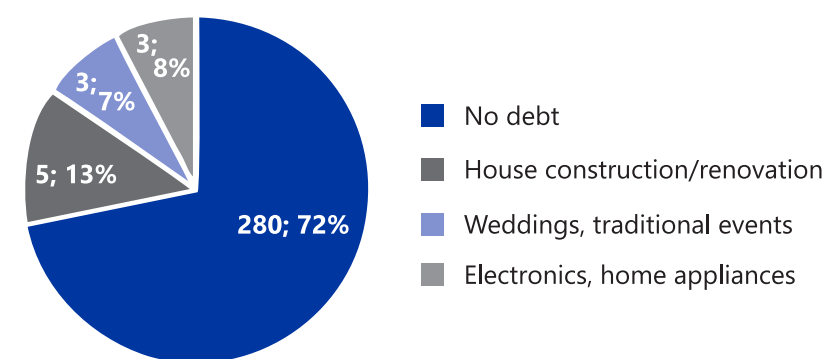
While incomes of some of the respondents were seriously affected by the lockdown in the The Russian Federation and resulting drop in remittances, a definite majority of the interviewed members of households did not report any debts.

Deterioration of the family’s economic welfare was observed during the period of the pandemic first of all among families who had been receiving regular money transfers from the Russian Federation from family members. The lockdown announced in the The Russian Federation forced many breadwinners for those families to stay in quarantine and were no longer able to remit funds. The Central Asian media reported that there was a reverse outflow of money transfers from Tajikistan to the Russian Federation during the pandemic, due to the fact that Tajik migrants who do not work in the Russian Federation themselves needed help in paying for housing and food.

Another directly affected group was that of young women, living in cities, who did not want to lose their jobs and needed to hire nannies for taking care of their children. This was a consequence of the discontinuation of temporary closure of school and preschool institutions (schools and kindergartens) until 17 August, 2020, announced as an epidemiological safety measure. As a result, a significant part of the family budget was reported to be allocated for the services of nannies. In rural areas, this problem was not observed, since it was possible to leave children under the supervision of other family members.

⁵³ A standard set of benefits includes: paid sick and annual leaves, pension contributions, official work and seniority record. Female employees are moreover entitled to 18-month-long paid maternity leave, which can be extended on an unpaid basis for another 18 months when the mother is guaranteed a return to her work position.

Figure 9. Reasons cited by respondents in Tajikistan for taking loans, number of answers



The definite majority (28 out of the total of 39 or 70%) of the respondents had no debts, and they had no experience in obtaining a loan from financial institutions in the country (Figure 9). One-fifth had small debts for the purchase of phones and computers and some respondents reported that their parents had taken small loans (a few thousand dollars) for studies abroad or for the construction and repair of houses or household appliances. Only two respondents (5%) noted that the family incurred additional debts during the

pandemic, due to the fact that they were forced to borrow from relatives to buy medicines for treatment of COVID-19. Those respondents who noted that they had a loan from a Bank before the outbreak of the pandemic could not make payments on the loan, due to the high cost of treating a family member from COVID-19. In line with the presidential decree of 5 June 2020, the banks postponed payments from those customers who were unable to repay the loan due to reduced income and high medical costs until 1 October 2020.

Additionally, the government of Tajikistan, with the financial support of the World Bank, started paying a one-time emergency social assistance in the amount of 500 somoni (48 USD) to 50,000 low-income families with children under the age of three. Cash transfers paid to bank accounts will be administered by the State Agency for Social Protection of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan in close cooperation with regional and district Departments of Social Protection. None of the respondents received the cash assistance, which was not launched at the time of the survey. However, two of the interviewed women reported being in process of collecting documentation, intending to apply.

2. Local labour demand (employers’ and officials’ views)

2.1. Registered job applications and vacancies

Official data showed a temporary decline in both the numbers of registered job applications and vacancies. Although the dynamics of demand and supply of jobs remains slightly below the figures for the corresponding period in 2019, a more serious decline has been observed in the number of persons who were employed by the State Agency for Labour and Employment – 18.2 per cent less in June 2020 than in June 2019.

The number of applications for employment, directed to the Agency for Labour and Employment in 2018 stood at around 92,600 (16% higher than in 2017 and 28% higher than in 2014). Youth applications to employment services also increased by 38 per cent in 2018 compared to 2014 and amounted to about 46,600.⁵⁴ The steady rise was attributed by the Agency’s officials to the implementation of the work Programme for the reintegration of returned migrants.⁵⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic diminished the volume of job applications at the Agency. At the end of June 2020, 75,000 job applicants were registered, which was 3.2 per cent less than the corresponding period in 2019 (although the number rose by around 700 compared to May 2020). The drop in applications was particularly clear in the monthly registration figures – in June 2020, 9,300 people applied for employment (20% fewer than in the corresponding period in 2019). These trends resulted in the lower chances for employment of the jobseekers. Data from the Agency indicate also a decline in demand for workforce from employer. As of the end of June 2020, approximately 10,200 vacancies were registered with the Agency. This indicator, although 8.8 per cent higher than a month before, was still 6.3 per cent lower compared to the same period in 2019. About 7,300 people were employed, which is 18.2 per cent less than the corresponding period last year.

⁵⁴ According to the data of the labor and employment Agency of the Ministry of labor, migration and employment of the Republic of Tatarstan provided on request in June 2020.

⁵⁵ The ads of the state employment services mainly show vacancies in the education, health, and housing and communal services sectors. They offer positions of nurses, pharmacists, doctors, accountants, teachers of secondary, secondary-special, higher educational institutions, janitors, engineers and technical staff.

2.2. Impact of the pandemic on youth employment opportunities

Interviews with officials and employers suggest a turnaround following a temporary closure of many of the workplaces, where especially urban youth tended to work – mainly in the service sector. Optimism about mid-term chances for employment was mainly based on the relatively mild impact of the pandemic on the young people and on the opening of jobs in selected sectors of the economy. However, persisting difficulties in attracting local workforce with required skills indicate a need for establishing partnerships between private sector, education and employment institutions.

Interviewed employment centre officials pointed to the immediate negative effect on youth employment of the pandemic in Tajikistan. While official lockdown was not declared, many businesses in the service sector (in particular, hairdressers, markets, restaurants, and shops, except for grocery stores) were temporarily closed. Other employers began to be affected a bit later, and starting with August, began to place their employees, including young people, on unpaid leave. The impact was not as pronounced in the public sector, where a number of government agencies released their employees on State-funded sickness leave or on remote work, while maintaining their place of work and wages. The situation also quickly stabilized in the sectors of medical and detergent manufacturing where rising orders helped maintain production and ensure continued payment of wages to workers.

Additional employment opportunities during the pandemic were also noted, with particular relevance for young people. The interviewed officials referred to instances where some businesses expanded their production by reorienting toward new types of products. Thus, food factories began to manufacture antiseptic and antibacterial agents (both for the internal market and for neighboring Afghanistan) while textile companies launched production of protective masks and medical clothing. In turn, the rising demand for medicines created incentives for many pharmacies to work in multiple shifts, which required expanding their staff with young people with secondary and higher medical and pharmaceutical education. This included also some students studying outside the country who returned due to the pandemic. Some interviewed employers, however, found it difficult to attract workforce to meet the new demand.⁵⁶

The officials were split in their opinions regarding mid-term prospects for youth employment in the regions. Some raised concerns about the impact of large-scale return of migrant workers on the labour market, which might become even more competitive. Many employment centre workers were, however, more hopeful regarding relative chances of employment for young people as opposed to the older residents. They pointed to the tendency of some companies to retain or even hire young people while sending older employees on vacation. The rationale for this was the lower risk of serious illness due to COVID-19 for young people.

2.3. Strategies of employers to locate needed labour. The choice of channels for identifying necessary labour resources is largely determined by the size and sector of the enterpris

The total of 12 employers were interviewed in three regions. Their strategies of seeking employers vary according to the size of the company. Those respondents, representing mainly smaller companies, tended to search and hire employees independently through their HR departments, employees as well as acquaintances. This was preferred as it was believed to reduce the risk of hiring unscrupulous and irresponsible employees. Some employers would actually search for unskilled workers at open-air marketplaces (this mainly concerned simple or temporary tasks, such as cargo loading or repair work).

Interviews with employers, in turn, revealed that State institutions and larger enterprises, especially those who seek a large number of employees, especially for large industrial and construction projects, tend to turn to employment agencies, advertise on radio, television and newspapers. They are also more likely to refer to the Agency for Labour and Employment, which enables them to reach many more potential candidates by posting their vacancies on the site www.kor.tj, on Bulletin boards outside Agency buildings, during job fairs, radio ads, and on a ticker on national and regional television. However, interviewed employment centre officials and local employers noted that even with greater use of those channels, a major challenge is overcoming the gap in expectations regarding wage levels and terms of employment between prospective employers and employees. One problem is the underdevelopment of specialized human resource platforms, which could provide tools for matching the supply and demand for specific skills and competences.

Some differences were also observed in hiring strategies between sectors. Interviewed employers in the service sector reported hiring through ads on the increasingly popular site www.somon.tj. They also were prone to seek employees through the Agency for Labour and Employment, in particular targeting graduates of trainings offered by vocational lyceums. On the other hand, interviewed employers (in both retail trade and services) expressed a rising interest in students on account of their high levels of literacy, competence, and responsibility, which they may demonstrate working on a part-time basis, offering a good salary and helping them relieve the financial burden from their parents.

⁵⁶ One entrepreneur noted that during the pandemic, he had the financial means to open a sewing shop in his area when he saw a great need for masks and medical protective clothing. He purchased equipment and supplies, but did not find enough seamstresses, and had to close his shop.

In turn, students working in the restaurant business were often provided with some non-monetary benefits, such as a free lunch or dinner, which helped them reduce the high cost of urban living.

In large companies, mainly in the industry and construction sector, applicants themselves apply for vacancies, leaving their CV. They follow up on the information in the media about the company's achievements, or about the construction of a particular object. One of the employers noted that they are called about employment to the number indicated on the packaging of their goods for orders and accepting complaints and suggestions. These numbers also become numbers for job search among the population. Some employers also spoke of holding meetings in local communities, where information about possible employment and working conditions in manufacturing would be provided to community leaders, who in turn then informs the population about the possibility of employment in a particular enterprise.

2.4. Use and assessment of support measures by employers

State services for locating necessary workforce tend to be mostly used by large enterprises, especially to employ workers with necessary technical qualifications. Smaller businesses remain cautious, preferring to search for employees directly.

Smaller enterprises, especially in the cities, relatively rarely seek out employees through State employment agencies. Employers of private enterprises and organizations, especially in cities and the capital, are more likely to search for employees themselves through friends, employees, media, social networks and popular local Internet platforms.⁵⁷ On the other hand, employers from the regions, as well as employers from State institutions (health, education, culture, and housing and communal services), mostly reported close ties with employment services.

Employees of employment services noted that private employers do not often contact employment services to find employees and often find employees themselves, or among their friends or through new private online platforms, such as www.somon.tj. On such platforms, job ads are more diverse. There you can find such vacancies for such modern specialties as marketer, distributor, designer, financial or business analyst, promoter, and so on. In other words, this site has become a place to search for jobs among more advanced youth. Interviewed officials also attribute smaller businesses' reluctance to use their services to their unwillingness to conclude official employment contracts or to pay due tax contributions. An interviewed employer said that he was concerned that hiring of additional employees would result in increased inspections to detect violations of taxes and other payments.

Note was made by the employment centre officials of seasonal jobs in rural areas when young people (including women) are hired directly by owners of large farms during the sowing or harvesting periods. As these jobs offer very low wages (daily rates of around 30 somoni or 3 USD), they for the most part are not attractive enough to draw men who continue to leave for abroad in search of employment. Women tend to be employed for the season of arable fieldwork (spring-autumn) to do manual tasks (uprooting, harvesting, etc.) while men occupy a better-paid niche of mechanized work (combines, tractors, trucks).

Employment contracts were concluded by those employers who had official registration and were formal organizations. During interviews, references were also made to instances in which private companies hired employees informally.⁵⁸ These informal arrangements unfortunately prevent workers from being able to demonstrate formal employment record.

Employment services try to reach out to large enterprises, offering their services not only to search for employees, but also to train them and / or retrain them before hiring. Interviewed employers acknowledge efforts made by the employment services to employ graduates of vocational and technical schools in large enterprises by arrangement with the enterprises. However, they view such initiatives as of limited impact, attributing it to the attitudes of young people with their high expectations from the employer and insufficient commitment. They argue that young people do not work for a month and leave the enterprises in which they were employed by employment services in the framework of joint initiatives with enterprises.

Out of the total of 12 respondents, four interviewed employers also indicated that they had collaborated with some international projects as project beneficiaries, through recommendations from employment services, government agencies, or local authorities. They reported no long-term sustainability of the trainings, crediting it to the limited awareness and capacity of local and international experts, project managers and staff to take into account the realities and conditions of the country, especially in the regions as well as absence of proper impact monitoring framework.

⁵⁷ Only one respondent had experience, not entirely successful, of hiring through this channel. Out of 150 graduates of the local vocational school accepted for manufacturing training, only four turned out to be professionally suitable, but they also eventually left production because they got married.

⁵⁸ A 2019 report "Diagnostic analysis of informal employment in Tajikistan and ways to reduce it" revealed that "approximately half of all employees (87 people) said that there are no signed contracts between them and employers. 89 employees (52%) said that their employment records are not opened at their place of work."

3. Barriers to employment

3.1. Barriers to youth employment: employers' preferences (specialists' view)

Smaller employers appear to be concerned about the costs they have to incur to bring young people to the professional level required for the tasks assigned while risking an early departure of the qualified workers.

The respondents from employment services identified limited supply of vacancies as a persisting problem. The situation deteriorated with the COVID-19 when a decline in the volume of job offers from employers, especially in the service sector, was observed. Another issue that the specialists identified is the mismatch between the needs of employers and supply of labour on the local market, which reflect the discrepancy between the effective demand for certain professions and the recent educational and training trends. Over the past decade, young people have been attracted to several prestigious professions (lawyer, economist, and financial specialist), and the country's labour market has become crowded with these specialists, who in turn cannot find a job in their specialty, since jobs in these fields are limited, especially in rural areas.

Employment specialists also referred to the employers' demands on applicants to demonstrate a certain mandatory length of service and work experience when applying for a job. They were concerned that such conditions compelled young people with higher and secondary specialized / technical education to accept informal employment or migrate. In their view, young people were losing their basic qualifications obtained in the country's educational institutions, which had invested time and resources into the training.

At the same time, some employers, mainly owners of small enterprises in garment industry, expressed anxiety about hiring promising talented employees for fear of losing invested time and resources into training when the worker leaves the company.⁵⁹

Finally, the specialists identified a major obstacle to hiring young unmarried women. They claimed that employers were reluctant to take on this category of applicants as they were convinced that the female employees would quit employment after marriage. Employers were therefore averse to bearing internship and training costs, believing that they would not bring return in case of early departure of the worker.

3.2. Barriers to youth employment: young people's strategies and preferences (specialists' and employers' views)

Especially urban male youth, who have migration experience or are exposed to information on the wage conditions elsewhere, are unwilling to take up jobs at the rates offered by local employers.

According to specialists of employment services, youth unemployment is further perpetuated by low wages that do not meet the needs of young men and women. Many of the interviewed young people also identified the lack of appropriate vacancies, offering attractive enough wages as a major deterrent to employment. The interviewed officials found a particularly wide gap in the employers' offers and the expectations as to wages and working conditions on the part of urban youth. In their view, particularly affected are graduates of secondary vocational and higher education schools who are forced to retrain because of the discrepancy between wages and their expectations and needs. Retraining was observed also among those who could not find a job matching their field, due to scarcity of jobs in this specialty.

When asked about the expected salaries of male youth, many employers agreed that the salary that young people expect is certainly higher than that expected by the older generation, both men and women. They connected this attitude with the cultural expectations that the young men should support their parents, as well as with the rising consumer aspirations of this group (including, purchasing personal items such as mobile phones and fashionable clothing). The older generation's, especially women's lower salary requirements were attributed to the fact that the earnings constituted only an additional contribution to the family budget, but not the main one. Experts noted, however, that sometimes young people with vocational secondary or higher education agree to go to work with a small salary in local government institutions, provided that they can be additionally supported by their parents and family. In this case, the attraction for them is a stable salary, and career opportunities in the future.

Another barrier, indicated by the officials, was the inactivity of graduates of secondary schools who cannot decide on the choice of profession for a long time upon leaving school. The specialists gave two reasons for this: absence of vocational guidance in secondary schools, and the attitude of insufficient perseverance and commitment.

⁵⁹ A particular concern was raised about instances, in which a former employee (such as a seamstress) who acquired specialized skills establishes a rival business operation and creates competition.

3.3. Opportunities and barriers to employment matching qualifications

Interviewed employers acknowledged several positive qualities of current youth, but remained skeptical about the technical qualifications and personal attitudes of many young applicants, especially those with higher, non-vocational education. A major cited factor was the absence of vocational guidance or of practical skill trainings in schools. These shortcomings indicate an urgent need for developing Programmes for soft skills ad competences as well as greater use of internship Programmes and initiatives allowing for coaching and mentoring of job entrants.

Respondents mostly worked in their specialty, however, there were those who were employed or were ready to be employed not in their specialty, but with the prospect of further employment in their specialty. Most of the respondents showed interest in professional development. Some of them actually raised their professional qualifications, attending courses, either at employers' cost or pursued independently.⁶⁰ These trends intensified during the pandemic. An exception was the group of *mardikors* (daily-rate unskilled workers, hired informally), since they do not need to provide a document confirming their qualifications and skills during temporary employment.

Employers' opinions on the competence and skills of young men and women varied. The majority of employers believed them to be inadequate to the tasks in the workplace. Both employers and employees of employment services considered school graduates not to be prepared for the realities of working life. They attributed this to insufficient preparation (or even absence of preparation in some regions) among school leavers in the field of career guidance. As a result, in their view, graduates often do not know what profession to choose after graduation and how they should prepare for entering a given profession. A related criticism was raised by the interviewed employers regarding lack of opportunities for their involvement in the process of training of young personnel in vocational schools (lyceums and colleges). Furthermore, the employers pointed to low level of technical qualifications of graduates of such schools, which placed additional cost on the employers to improve young employees' skills.

Another concern raised by many employers relates to work attitudes of youth, which they compared unfavourably with those demonstrated by older workers. The respondents were critical of what they perceived as "lack of self-discipline" or of necessary work ethic, in particular the patience to go through certain stages of professional growth. In their view, this common set of attitudes contributes to a large turnover of young employees and their eventual departure into labour migration.

However, several employers noted that youth nowadays displays certain skills, which were not as common in earlier generations. These include creativity, entrepreneurship, communication skills, high-quality performance of some manual tasks, such as plumbing, welding, beauty services. They also noted a rising level of entrepreneurial skills among young people with vocational education. Also, some employers noted that the current youth are more active and have greater ability to grasp any information on the fly than previous generations of youth. Some employers also expressed optimism regarding opportunities for youth to acquire skills.⁶¹

Interviewed employees of local employment services noted significant differences in the level of skills, competencies and knowledge of young people and women applying to employment services. Apart from the level of education, work experience, family upbringing and personal qualities, a major factor is in their view place of residence and the different opportunities that it offers to young people. The respondents associated urban youth with both greater awareness of opportunities for decent employment abroad and with a set of skills and attitudes, helping them meet the demands of the current labour market: proficiency in foreign languages and in IT skills as well as higher self-confidence and goal-orientation in life. This stands, in respondents' view, in contrast with limited or no knowledge of information technologies and foreign languages found among many young people from rural areas. At the same time, the interviewed specialists noted that rural youth often work harder while their expectations regarding wages and work conditions are lower.

⁶⁰ 5 out of 39 respondents reported using free Internet platforms.

⁶¹ They referred to the support of the state for training in high-quality performance of handicraft works, such as jewelry, pottery and ceramic products, through a revival of the traditional method of "mentoring". The method involves the master of a certain craft passing on professional skills to a student.

4. Job search strategies and forms of support

4.1. Propensity for labour migration

While migration remains a strategy of choice for accessing livelihoods to some young people, especially those from rural areas who did not enter university, for a significant part of youth (in particular, graduates or students) also represents an essential method of accumulating necessary assets (both financial and experience) before returning home.

Few of the young people surveyed chose the strategy of employment abroad, often leaving it as the last option. Of the 39 respondents surveyed, only three students declared having interrupted their studies to leave temporarily for employment abroad while four young men (one with higher education, and three without any qualifications) considered employment abroad. Many answered that having a higher education, they would not want to work in unskilled jobs in the Russian Federation, while constantly being subjected to insults and violations of their rights by both law enforcement agencies and employers.⁶²

Search for work abroad (in particular, in the Russian Federation) has been named by some employment centre specialists as still the main strategy, pursued by young men who have graduated from high school in a rural area and do not have the opportunity to enroll in universities and colleges. This group, which has been in long-term migration, is not expected to settle back in the rural regions of Tajikistan, where economic prospects of agricultural work still are not competitive with the wages in migration. According to the specialists, this category of migrants is awaiting opening of border and relaxation of lockdown measures in the The Russian Federation to re-migrate. Specialists referred to another category of Tajik migrants who consider migration as a path for professional growth. It includes those who initially work in the Russian Federation in unskilled positions (as handymen) but who are lucky to be promoted and assisted in legalization of residence and employment by their employers. Tajik diasporas, which have established good relations with local employers or legalizing structures, also sometimes assist in promoting employment in their fields and related legalization. If a young person with a higher education chooses a strategy to stay and continue to move up the career ladder in the Russian Federation, then this strategy will have a long-term character with the prospect of accepting The Russian Federation citizenship, which will provide them with additional benefits and prospects for development.

Other categories of young people, in specialists' view, leave for migration on a seasonal basis and do not consider work abroad as prospects for development and career growth. This refers first of all to students or graduates who cannot gain economic independence by finding jobs, offering adequate means to support their parents and their family, if they are already married. When the family is in an economic crisis – a decrease in family income, lack of opportunities to pay for studies, loss of the breadwinner, loss of the breadwinner's job, some young people get an academic leave and migrate to earn money and pay for their studies. Another category consists of young people who migrate in order to save funds for establishing themselves – buying or building their own homes, conducting weddings, and covering costs of higher education. It should be noted that the problem with purchasing housing was noted by the majority of respondents, especially those who live in the capital and cities. On the other hand, families in the countryside often have large courtyards and are able to allocate a small part of the yard for building new housing for their sons.

4.2. Local youth job search strategies-description and assessment

A variety of strategies was reported, ranging from informal work to seeking official assistance from State institutions. The job search could range from a few months to over 2 years, depending on the level of expected remuneration and whether the job matched the field of study.

Many respondents noted that they were looking for a job on their own, turning directly to the employer. At the same time, some young people in the capital searched for work via the Internet, through various specialized sites.⁶³ Family ties and acquaintances were reported to be also used frequently. Respondents noted another unintended consequence of some of the employers' hiring strategies. Smaller enterprise owners' preference to hire employees through acquaintances and personal recommendations discouraged some young people from taking active measures to look for work, instead relying on their parents, relatives or friends.

Both young people and employees of employment services indicated the same period of job search, from 3-6 months. In that period, however, some jobseekers had the opportunity to have an informal income through self-employment, such as repairing houses and apartments, and selling surplus agricultural products grown on household plots. Much longer period was required to find a job matching one's field of study. The young people interviewed noted that employers require at least one year of work experience confirmed in the employment record, which often made applicants accept low-paid jobs with low positions (even in informal economy) in order to meet this requirement.

62 One of the respondents was in seasonal labour migration in order to pay for their studies at home.

63 For example, "www. Somon.tj" and "www. kor.tj".

The duration of job search was, according to various respondents, largely determined by the applicants' attitudes and strategies. For instance, employment service officials believed that young women took a shorter time as they were more likely to accept low wages, while their male peers tended to continue to search for work until they could settle for more favorable wages and conditions. They interpreted this difference by pointing to different priorities: women would forego higher wages on entry as long as the organization was established, offering prospects of career growth and increased earnings over time.

4.3. Target groups for State employment-facilitation assistance

State employment services (both targeting local and foreign employment) have been extended to several vulnerable groups – prospective and returning migrant workers, women, ex-soldiers, who have been offered different types of support – from information on vacancies through intermediation for employment to raising and certifying qualifications.

Due to the pandemic and the return of a large number of migrants from the The Russian Federation and Kazakhstan, there are a lot of applications to employment services. At this stage, employees of the employment service offer either training, retraining or certification of skills to returning migrants. At the moment, a special anti-crisis employment Programme for the reintegration of migrants is being developed by the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population, under which migrants will be offered additional services in the form of issuing interest-free loans, involving them in training Programmes for creating a business, and further employment abroad. Due to the construction boom in the country over the past 5–8 years, the demand for construction specialties has sharply increased in the country (which, however, has been dampened at the pandemic period). The Agency for Labour and Employment with the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population undertook measures targeting this group of workers within the framework of Programmes toward re-integration of returning re-entry banned migrants. The objective was to provide opportunities for Tajik construction companies to employ this category of citizens with construction skills at construction sites in the country. The Agency, if necessary, carried out the certification of the skills of these workers through the platform of the Adult Education Centre of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Employment service specialists were aware that a significant part of youth would continue to opt for labour abroad. They cited some initiatives, undertaken by Tajik authorities to facilitate the process of organized recruitment.⁶⁴ The Foreign Employment Agency also employed young people in Turkey for seasonal work at tourist sites. Employees of the Foreign Employment Agency noted that at the moment the possibility is being discussed for Tajik agricultural students to complete an internship in agricultural companies for a year in Denmark and Sweden through one international student association. If the relevant agreements are signed, young agricultural specialists will have a good opportunity to earn money and gain good experience and knowledge.

One of the categories often referred to by the employment service during interviews is former military personnel who have served in the Tajik army and are provided with re-integration assistance so that they can easily integrate into civilian life. This category of young people during their service has the opportunity to get some professional skills, such as driving special or military vehicles, some technical skills, and so on. Also, the level of labour discipline, sense of responsibility and self-confidence among them is very high. The survey involved young people (4 people) who had recently completed their service in the Tajik army, who were redirected to employment services after completing their service for further employment, vocational training / retraining, and temporary financial assistance in the amount of the minimum wage in order to support the reintegration of former military personnel.

Employees of the Agency for the Khatlon region noted another vulnerable category of the unemployed population – mardikors (workers hired to do physical work for a daily rate), who continue to be a priority target group in their efforts. The respondents noted a challenge insofar as young men and women from this category do not want to register as unemployed, and in many cases they refuse to take short-term courses and certify skills, since employers often do not ask for documents confirming their specialization. Mardikors often find the jobs offered by employment services of little interest to them, since these jobs pay a relatively low rate. While their occupation is not regular or stable, they are accustomed to being paid on a daily basis.

Specialists also referred to some State activities aiming to reduce vulnerabilities of workers in the workplace. For timely control over the payment of wages, the State Supervision Service in the field of Labour, Employment and Social Protection of the population operates a helpline. Also, local State bodies of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous region, Sughd and Khatlon regions, the city of Dushanbe, cities and districts of Republican subordination have established headquarters to eliminate the wage arrears of enterprises and organizations due to employees.

64 One group consisting of 130 people was successfully employed in 2018–2019 at poultry-processing plants in Poland and interest was expressed in as many as 5,000 workers.

4.4. Awareness and use of State employment services among youth

Activities of the State Employment Agency have been widely recognized, especially in the regions of the country. Use of the Agency services is limited among some groups (e.g. young city dwellers or mardikors) as those groups are not always interested in a longer progression toward higher wages – unlike, for instance, rural youth (in particular, women).

Employees of employment services in all the studied regions noted that they regularly inform the population and young people about the availability of vacancies in local organizations and services provided by the services of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan through bulletin boards, job fairs, live tickers on local TV and Radio.⁶⁵ At the same time, interviewed employment centre officials noted that they had to put up the same vacancies for several months as they did not attract sufficient interest. In their view, even though the vacancies offered stable wages, young people did not consider them because of relatively low salaries, preferring instead either work in cities and the capital, or employment in the The Russian Federationonn Federation.

Newspapers, television (in particular, ticker with available vacancies on local and regional channels), radio and attendance of job fairs as well as friends and relatives were named as channels of information about State employment services. Respondents also mentioned the Employment Agency's website www.kor.tj, where job vacancies are placed. Some respondents were also aware of the activities of the Agency for Employment Abroad of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan, and some used the Agency's services in organizing recruitment for employment abroad.

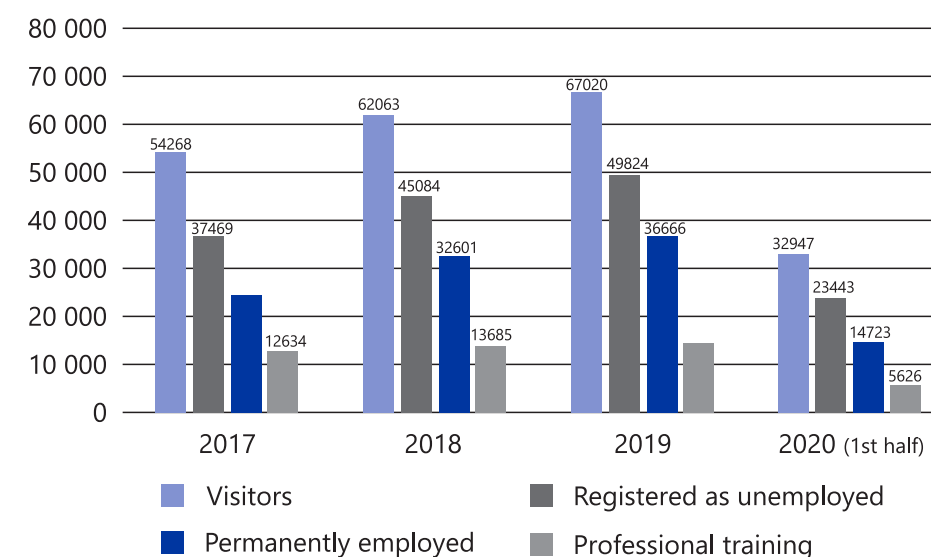
Interviewed youth, asked whether they knew of the activities of the local employment services of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population, were able to indicate several forms of support. Respondents mentioned holding job fairs, registering temporarily unemployed people, and providing material support to young people who have served in the Tajik army, as well as those who have been released from prison. Greater awareness was recorded among the respondents in the regions than in the capital city. Those respondents who answered about the activities of the above agencies applied for employment, training, retraining, certification of skills and obtaining interest-free loans to support their business. The main sectors in which vacancies are offered are the education, health and public services sectors. They considered unsatisfactory wages as the main disadvantage of the proposed vacancies in employment. In turn, the main advantage was the fact that the offered employment is official with the conclusion of an employment agreement and the provision of a social package. Some respondents also noted various training activities conducted by State, international and non-governmental organizations on topics related to their field of activity.⁶⁶

4.5. Use and effectiveness of assistance targeting women

While the interest in the services of State employment agencies has risen fast among women, female applicants have found it more difficult to secure permanent employment recently. Interviews revealed also some cultural determinants of especially rural young women's decisions to choose certain support Programmes.

According to official statistics, released by the State Agency for Labour and Employment of Population, a notable increase in the interest of women in the Agency's services was observed between 2017 and 2019 (Figure 10). The number of female visitors to the Agency rose by 23 per cent in that period. Even more impressive was the increase in the number of women who found permanent employment through the Agency: up from 24,150 in 2017 to 36 666 in 2019 (50% rise). The interest did not abate in the first half of 2020 when 32,947 women (out of the total of 71,275 persons) turned to the Agency. However, the number of women who were offered permanent employment dropped significantly to 13,792 in that period.

Figure 10. Use of State employment assistance by women in Tajikistan, 2017–2020



Source: Agency on Labour and Employment of Population

At the same time, young women were less likely to seek employment through State employment services than men. While the overall numbers of job applicants to the Agency of Labour and Employment steadily rose between 2014 and 2018, the number of women applying for employment was continuously decreasing every year – around 22,600 female applicants were recorded in 2018 (21.2% decline compared to 2014).

Interviews with local youth revealed some cultural barriers to the women's decisions to seek employment. All the women who are the male respondents' spouses are homemakers whose opportunities for formal employment are limited by the fact that they often lack special vocational or in some cases secondary education. Most of the women supplement family budgets by working in private land plots while some of them take sewing and tailoring orders. When asked about their attitudes toward their wives' potential employment, 16 of the interviewed young men (41%) did not reject that option but stressed the condition that any job should offer decent working conditions and wages. Although the country is adopting State Programmes to promote education among rural girls, creating professional courses, new specialized vocational colleges, and Presidential quotas for rural girls to enter universities and colleges in the country, girls after finishing secondary schools do not often use these opportunities, preferring to start a family. This decision is often influenced by the traditional foundations of the family, and first of all the decision of the male members of the family.

In contrast, women are reported to make significant use of opportunities for acquiring practical skills, which allow them to work at home. These include first of all short-term courses offered by the Adult Training Centre of the Agency for Labour and Employment of the Republic of Tajikistan throughout the country. The courses cover over 60 professions with dressmaker, pastry chef, accountant and computer specialist among them. However, interviewed officials pointed out that the primary reason for the popularity of the courses is that, for instance, the sewing and confectionery courses increase young women's prospects as a potential bride, since these skills are traditionally valued in the regions. Nevertheless, the experts brought up another argument – with the skills of sewing and baking, a girl can provide these services to neighbors and friends, making a contribution to the family budget. Also, to get such skills, the family is not hindered, but rather supported, realizing the benefits for their daughters. In addition, sewing and baking courses are popular among girls in high school, during the summer holidays, as well as girls studying in the vocational education system and at universities.

4.6. Support from non-State sources. Informal assistance within the close network of co-workers or family and friends remains preferred form of support while institutional schemes have not been reported or have drawn criticism

- Although there are a number of private employment agencies operating in the country, whose activities are mainly aimed at employment abroad, none of the respondents knew or mentioned them. Only one respondent, who has more than 20 years of experience as a local activist, mentioned non-governmental assistance in improving the professional skills and knowledge of young people and women.
- Interviews with employers revealed that many employers provided assistance when employees applied. The youth respondents also confirmed that they could turn to the working team or informal leaders of the working team for help and advice.
- Several respondents and employers mentioned unsatisfactory experience of cooperation with international projects that included educational activities that were not thought out and ineffective in their opinion.

⁶⁵ These are mainly vacancies in medical institutions, housing and communal services, educational institutions and local authorities, as well as the availability of professional courses.

⁶⁶ They expressed interest in studying in the newly established Academy of Public Administration Management under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan (based at the Institute of Advanced Training of Civil Servants under President of the Republic of Tajikistan), because in their opinion the training in the Academy will help in their future career.

5. Outlook for the future

While young respondents are aware of the challenges associated with the pandemic's impact, they expressed general optimism about their personal employment prospects. At the same time, they pointed to the need for the State to help them through targeted support. Employment service workers and employers also expected growing opportunities for youth employment, and saw relatively large resources of working-age population in the country as its asset. However, they saw the need to prepare the youth to be more competitive by adjusting the vocational education offer to the changing terms of the national and global labour market.

5.1. Among youth

Almost all the youth respondents were optimistic about the future, being confident that their career plans would succeed as they clearly knew what they needed to achieve their objectives (professional development courses, self-development, and labour discipline). Some saw labour migration as a form of investment, allowing them to accumulate assets that could be used to establish own business at home.

At the same time, the interviewed young people were aware of the risks, associated with the impact of the global economic crisis on Tajikistan, which put in jeopardy both the prospects of finding and retaining employment and maintaining current earnings. In this context, the respondents expressed hope that young people could be better protected in the future by creating new jobs in the country, paying decent wages, and improving legal literacy and the general level of education and professional skills. They also pointed to limited access to affordable housing as one of the main problems facing young people. They would like to see targeted support, consisting of special Programmes for young people helping them acquire own housing. The respondents also showed interest in greater support for young people (educational, legal and financial) to start their own businesses, which would also help them gain sufficient experience, skills and knowledge.

5.2. Among employers and officials

On the whole the interviewed *employers* had a positive outlook. They acknowledged that the pandemic exacerbated Tajikistan's economic challenges as many organizations and private companies felt immediate negative effects of the global trends. However, many employers, citing some media sources, noted that among all the Central Asian countries, the pandemic had the least negative impact on the economy of Tajikistan. They attributed it to the country's decision not to introduce general lockdown, thereby enabling at least some part of the economy to function. The employers also recognized positive impact of the urgent mitigating measures that the State and the international community took so far, and some of the respondents believed that the government would continue to take measures to improve the investment climate.

At the same time, the employers recognized the necessity for many companies to reorient their business activities. This might, for instance, be an issue to be faced by the tourism and handicraft sectors. Many entrepreneurs believed that agriculture, food industry, biotechnology, IT technologies and online services would grow. In response to the expected changes, according to employers, it is necessary to think about supplying young people with high-quality education to enter the growing sectors. They also highlighted the need to develop online education in the country in the coming years, and this will provide an opportunity for young people from distant regions to receive education without leaving their native places.

Respondents among *employment service workers* were generally hopeful about employment trends for young people. While the outcome of the pandemic is not clear, they were convinced that due to the lower risks of being exposed to the COVID-19 virus, young people would be more in demand in the labour market among employers both at home and abroad. They acknowledged, however, that to improve chances for decent employment, it is necessary to change approaches to youth education, information, vocational guidance and vocational education, as well as special Programmes for socioeconomic support of young people. In particular, the interviewed specialists looked forward to the prospects for the development of online services as these would enable the Tajik youth to work for a foreign employer in the future without leaving the country but instead maintaining close family ties with your family and homeland. They saw this as a particularly promising solution to the current problem for young women who could not leave home for regular employment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Ensuring efficient use of Tajikistan's labour resources

Statistical data on the national labour market in the country are limited and they do not provide an opportunity to fully depict the situation. The data provided by the Employment Service on the unemployment rate do not correspond to reality, since they are calculated based on the number of unemployed registered in this Service. In recent years, the labour market in Tajikistan has undergone major changes, caused by both external and internal factors. These include the economic crisis, the tightening of The Russian Federation migration legislation, which led to an increase in the number of migrants with the status of a ban on entry to the The Russian Federation, as well as the pandemic contributing to the outflow of Tajik migrants from the Russian Federation.

- In order to continuously analyse the State of the labour market, employers' needs for labour by economic sector and its supply, as well as determine the real level of employment and unemployment among the population, *an annual labour force survey (LFS) should be conducted*. The frequency of the LFS could be further increased in the long run. In Tajikistan, with the support of the ILO, LFS was conducted twice – in 2009 and 2016. Thus, four years have passed since the last LFS while a comprehensive analysis of the labour force is needed for developing strategic documents in the field of planning national economic resources. This is particularly timely given the implementation of the country's overall development strategy, which is postulating a shift towards an industrial economy, necessitating changes in the structure of the national labour market. The LFS is also necessary for further development of the labour force balance and determining the need for training through higher education institutions, special educational institutions, and adult education centres.
- In this regard it would be useful if the international donor community assisted the Agency for Statistics under the President of Tajikistan and the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan in the implementation of a LFS. And in the future, it is advisable to institutionalize this process in the country, *creating a centre for monitoring the labour market under the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan*.

II. Strengthening the capacity of the State Employment Service

Interviews with respondents (young women and men, employers, employees of the employment service) showed that jobseekers often do not have accurate information about the activities of the Employment Service, the availability of available jobs and vacancies, opportunities for legal employment, accelerated training in new professions, temporary forms of employment, preferential loans for the unemployed. This prolongs the job search period, and sometimes contributes to their involvement in informal employment, where their labour rights provided for by the legislation of the Republic of Tajikistan cannot be guaranteed.

Employers are also often not informed about the Employment Service's activities and capabilities. The Service is mainly consulted by large enterprises and government agencies. Small and medium-sized businesses, as well as new businesses, usually do not cooperate with State employment services. This in turn has limited the employment centres' capacity for collecting complete data on available vacancies. As a result, it is not possible for the Service to monitor the situation on the labour market and prepare evidence-based proposals for training personnel for the sectors of the economy that experience current shortages. Given this, there is a need to reform the State employment service, which requires in particular:

- To *amend the Law on Employment* since the current one does not correspond to modern realities of the labour market. The current Law does not reflect the use of new concepts and definitions (remote, partial, remote employment, soft skills, online services, etc.) as well as some new forms and methods of activity of the organizations of employment of the population. For this purpose, it is necessary to recommend that development partners provide the necessary expert and technical assistance in the development of a new Law on Employment.
- On the basis of the State Employment Service, *create a national centralized electronic platform with a regularly updated database of information on the need for personnel (availability of available jobs and vacancies) subdivided by industry, profession, level of education and qualifications, as well as of the offers on the labour market, presenting resumes of all applicants for employment*. The platform should also contain information about vocational training opportunities in vocational schools, adult education centres, temporary forms of employment and obtaining preferential loans for running your own business. This will expand the employment opportunities and training of the population in professions that are in demand in the country's labour market and in Tajik migrants' destination countries (including young people and women), and make it easier for employers to find employees. To develop a national centralized electronic platform, we recommend that development partners provide expert and technical assistance to the State Employment Service.

- In order to ensure the mandatory submission of data on vacancies, it is necessary to make appropriate changes to the employment legislation, or recommend that the relevant paragraph be included in the annual General partnership agreement between the Government, employers and trade unions (this agreement is concluded in accordance with the law of the Republic of Tajikistan “On social partnership, agreements and collective agreements” and is prepared by representatives of these three structures). This will enable each job seeker to register online on this platform and receive regular information about vacancies. The employment service will also be able to notify the population about vacancies and training opportunities via popular social networks (Facebook, Telegram, Whatsapp, Viber, etc.).
- Due to the insufficient budget capacity of the country, the loan portfolio to support the unemployed who want to organize their own business is limited. At the same time, it should be noted that the business creation ensures the simultaneous creation of several jobs. In this regard, it is necessary to expand State support to vulnerable categories of the population in obtaining preferential (interest-free) business establishment loans. It is important to consider providing appropriate grants from international financial institutions, the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan, and to improve the staff capacity of the employment service in the education of borrowers to create their own business.
- To respond to the needs of employers, employment centres are advised to broaden the curricula of trainings offered to prospective job entrants. These need to incorporate to a greater extent soft skills and competences (featuring work ethic), and could be usefully matched with coaching and mentoring Programmes.
- Smaller enterprises, especially in the cities, prefer to use private employment agencies for recruitment, which increases the cost to the employees, and thus may further marginalize some of the vulnerable youth. It is important that State employment centres promote the free-of-charge services among young jobseekers, raising their awareness of the benefits of ethical recruitment and of legal guarantees against charging fees for intermediation and work placement.

III. Expanding employment opportunities abroad and protecting the rights and interests of Tajik citizens in receiving countries

While emigration continues to play a significant role in alleviating economic vulnerabilities of a significant part of Tajik population, some important factors have emerged that could reduce the outward movement. Currently, in the Russian Federation, the main country receiving migrant workers from Tajikistan, due to the economic crisis associated with the pandemic and international sanctions, the demand for labour from Tajikistan has been limited. In addition, according to IOM estimates, a large number (over 280,000) of Tajik migrants remain banned from re-entering The Russian Federation. Despite the efforts of the government of Tajikistan, international and human rights organizations, cases of discrimination and violations of the rights and interests of Tajik migrant workers continue to be noted in the The Russian Federation. At the same time, a number of countries in eastern Europe (Poland, Czechia, Romania) and the Middle East (Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait as well as Turkey) have expressed interest in accepting labour from Tajikistan.

- The existing opportunities for legal employment of the population, including young people and women, and protection of their rights and interests abroad are significantly limited due to the poorly developed network of private employment agencies and the lack of a legal framework for regulating their activities. At the time, a draft law on private employment agencies (PEAs) was developed, and after a long review, it was decided to include a separate section in the draft of the new law on migration. In this regard, the government of the Republic needs to speed up the adoption of the new law.
- The established Agency for Employment Abroad under the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan (hereinafter referred to as the Agency) is not fully able to perform its functions due to weak human resources and the lack of consular offices in the countries wishing to accept labour from Tajikistan. Taking this into account, it is advisable to recommend that the donor community assist the Agency in strengthening its human resources capacity in terms of training it in existing international standards and preparing agreements with foreign employers, taking into account the specifics of the host countries.
- Currently, the Agency is a budget organization and the remuneration of its employees is not related to the final results of work. Due to low wages, it is difficult for the Agency to attract qualified specialists who know foreign languages, international law and the situation on the international labour market. Given this, the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population should consider changing the status of the Agency and the principles of remuneration of its employees.
- Recommend that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan consider strengthening cooperation with countries interested in accepting labour from Tajikistan (countries of Eastern Europe and the Middle East) and organizing consular services with these countries, or providing consular services through private companies.

IV. Reducing barriers to access by vulnerable groups to the local labour market (with specific measures targeted at young people and women)

In the course of the assessment, it was revealed that employers are reluctant to hire young people (including women) who do not have sufficient work experience. Other barriers to the employment of young women involved employers' refusals to hire them in light of their concerns about female applicants' future marriage and the birth of children. The current labour legislation of the Republic does not grant employers the right to refuse employment on either of these grounds (the absence of work experience or family status). In fact, the Labour, Migration and Employment Control Service is obliged to take appropriate measures in such cases. However, practice shows that young people (including women) do not report violations of their labour rights in such cases. The main reasons for this are ignorance of their rights, lack of information about the availability of this Service, its functions, and limited confidence in the Service's capabilities to enforce their rights.

- In this regard, it is necessary to recommend to the Committee on TV and Broadcasting under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, other media, the Employment Service, women and youth human rights NGOs, trade union bodies to strengthen work on awareness-raising of the population, including women and young people about their employment rights and benefits under the labour law, and inform where to go in case of violation of rights. The Labour, Migration and Employment Control Service in particular needs to inform the population about the norms and requirements of labour legislation relying on online platforms and popular social networks to refer to the Service's helpline.
- During the fieldwork it became apparent that vulnerable segments of the population, including young women and men entering the labour market for the first time, often face the problem of securing a job. To solve this problem, there is a system of job quotas for these categories of citizens. To ensure employment guarantees for such categories of population, the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population needs to improve the system of work allocation within quotas, which includes increasing the size of quotas and to strengthen the control of their application. To be effective, integrated inclusive employment solutions and economic empowerments will have to be pursued as well.

V. Helping young people (and especially women) improve their capacity to achieve decent employment based on their skills and qualifications

Employers and employees of employment services in their interviews noted that the choice of profession by young people occurs unconsciously. Many young men and women cannot choose a profession that corresponds to their inclinations and individual characteristics, often do not know what opportunities exist for admission to universities, vocational schools, colleges and how to get a profession through the system of vocational education and vocational training. This indicates that there is insufficient work among school leavers in the field of career guidance and in some regions there is no work. The early system of vocational guidance in the education system is weakened.

- The Agency for Labour and Employment operates a career guidance centre, but its activities are not sufficiently linked to career guidance in schools. At the same time, it should be noted that career guidance is most effective in higher school grades (10–11). This fact needs to be considered in the reform of the Programme of vocational guidance of the population, which is currently being developed by the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population. The Programme ought to incorporate measures for strengthening the mechanisms for harmonizing the system of vocational guidance with the school curricula.⁶⁷
- The secondary education system of the Republic of Tajikistan used to rely on so-called educational and production complexes (CPC) for providing training in professions for students in grades 10–11 with the use of dedicated resources and infrastructure.⁶⁸ During the reform of the education system, the CPC system was abolished, which negatively affected the career guidance and training of young people. This is especially felt by school leavers who leave for labour migration (as they often do not have the opportunity and time to learn professions). In this regard, it appears expedient to restore the system of teaching professions in schools, taking into account modern realities, in particular, training in the basics of entrepreneurship. At the initial stage, it is advisable to recommend that the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Tajikistan study the possibility of its restoration as well as necessary resources for this measure. Improvement in the vocational education curricula and process could also involve closer cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population and international agencies working in this sector.

⁶⁷ New types of vocational trainings (e.g. WorldSkills) could be considered in this context.

⁶⁸ In the framework of the CPC system, young people could learn many professions that are in demand in production and in independent life. At the end of the secondary educational institution, in addition to the certificate of secondary education, they were additionally issued documents on obtaining the relevant specialties. Young people had the opportunity to apply for a job on the basis of this document.

- Taking into account that the majority of young people and women do not have the possibility of long-term training in professions, as well as the availability of labour skills for a significant part of returned migrant workers, *short-term courses at the Employment Service should be a priority in obtaining professions.*
- To address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market, the Agency for Labour and Employment and the system of vocational training of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan *need to adjust the volume and redesign the curricula of professional trainings offered to job applicants* given the reduced demand in the labour market for services, shopping and entertainment institutions.
- International organizations are advised to *improve the long-term sustainability of trainings* by introducing mandatory impact monitoring frameworks and to *tailor them better to the local realities* by requiring that inputs from beneficiaries as well as local stakeholders (employers, employer centre staff) are incorporated into the design and scope of trainings.

VI. Promoting the protection of workers in the workplace and ensuring their rights (as well as combating cases of discrimination, including on the basis of gender)

While Tajikistan has continued to adapt its labour legal framework to the new conditions of market economy, certain provisions of labour legislation and by-laws do not yet meet international standards or fail to respond to emerging problems.

- A priority is *strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan for introducing legal standards on occupational safety and*
- In this regard, it is necessary to *create a working group to review the issue of amendments and additions to labour legislation and the implementation of international standards in national legislation and bylaws with the involvement of national and international experts.*

In the course of the fieldwork, some respondents indicated violations of the rights of employees at enterprises (work without an employment agreement, late payment of wages, irregular working hours, non-payment of temporary disability certificates, failure to provide paid leave, violations in matters of admission and dismissal from work, etc.). These violations are mainly observed in private and joint-stock enterprises (in particular, in small and medium-sized businesses). The main reason for this situation is that these enterprises do not conclude collective agreements between employers and employees' representatives, which is stipulated by the law of the Republic of Tajikistan "On social partnership, agreements and collective agreements". These contracts should reflect the issues of remuneration, working conditions and life of employees, and other labour guarantees of employees. And in some enterprises where such agreements exist, they are actually violated.

- In the current labour legislation, the term "trade union bodies" has been replaced by "representatives of employers", while its status, rights and powers are not clearly defined, which limits their ability to properly use their powers. In this regard, at present, *there is a need to strengthen the partnership between the State, employers and trade unions (tripartite arrangement).* International Labour Organization (ILO), which is called upon to help implement the principles of tripartism, can help solve this issue. In addition, the support of local-level partnerships should help addressing practical challenges, faced by both sides: employers and employees, helping establish and disseminate labour protection standards.

One of the main functions of the Supervision Service in the sphere of labour, migration and employment is to monitor conditions, labour protection and safety. To perform these functions, the Service must have stationary and mobile laboratories, appropriate equipment for measuring the main production factors (light level, gas content, noise, vibration, radiation, humidity, etc.), and visual aids. However, due to limited financial resources, the Service does not have a sufficient number of laboratories, equipment and visual aids.

- *It is therefore recommended to raise the capacity of the of the Labour Supervision Service for addressing violations and instances of discrimination in the workplace.* In this regard, there is a need for financial support from donors in the technical equipment of the Supervision Service.
- The Service for Supervision of Labour, Migration and Employment, needs to *analyse the working conditions for part-time employment, remote work in terms of safety, working conditions and working hours.* These should be then reflected in the proposals for amending the labour legislation and introduction of necessary administrative measures to tackle emerging patterns of violation.

VII. Increasing the availability and effective use of non-governmental assistance for the integration of young people (including women) into the labour market

In the Republic, there is a practice of organizing educational/training centres and one-time trainings for various professions and work skills (accounting, languages, specialized computer skills, handicraft, household management, etc.), which are funded mainly from non-State sources, including international organizations, and implemented various State and non-State (NGOs and private) structures. While these activities have been often used by young women and men, it is impossible to judge the effectiveness and sustainability of this activity, as well as its impact on the process of ensuring youth employment. This is due to the lack of monitoring and proper impact assessment with necessary recommendations for modification.

- In this regard, it is necessary to lay down standard procedures for monitoring of this type activities. It is therefore recommended that *a framework should be established for monitoring to be conducted by the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population and the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Tajikistan, cooperating in the framework of the Coordination Council for the Development of Tajikistan.* The results of this monitoring will determine the effectiveness of these trainings, the range of occupations and skills for which it is advisable to continue training and also to identify the range of weak and strong stakeholders (government, non-government and private structures and individual trainers). In the future, more effective participants in the process will be invited to continue this type of activity within the framework of various State and non-State Programmes.
- *Information on the results of this monitoring should be brought to local employment centres, and through them to local media, to inform the population about additional opportunities for training professions and skills.* This will make it possible to increase to a certain extent the availability and effectiveness of assistance for the integration of young people (in particular women) into the labour market from non-State sources.

VIII. Widening partnerships between State and non-State institutions to help reduce barriers faced by young people (in particular women) in local labour markets

Recent conclusions of the Research Institute of Labour, Migration and Employment of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan on the interaction of employers and the vocational education system pointed to limited linkages between enterprises and vocational schools. This problem has also been reflected in the testimonies of some of the interviewed employers, who did not even perceive the benefit of closer cooperation with vocational schools. The lack of this interaction has led to a mismatch between the current manufacturing enterprises' needs and training curricula. In addition, during interviews with employers, it was noted that this disconnect affects the quality of training of specialists, since educational institutions do not know the requirements for trained personnel.

- Taking this into account, it is necessary to *strengthen the interaction of the Employers' Association and the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan in conducting awareness-raising among employers on the benefits and opportunities of better cooperation with educational institutions and employment services.* This in particular relates to activities that ought to focus on training personnel for enterprises based on the needs of employers and the labour market. This will require identifying the core businesses for each of the vocational schools, so that students can have practical training at these businesses, and businesses can participate in the development of plans and Programmes for these institutions.

In 2005, the State Research Institute of Labour and Social Protection has developed the National Classification of Occupations (OKZ), incorporating codes of International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) 1998 for compliance with the international standards of the period. The classifier reflects the requirements for the competencies of professions. Currently, new professions, specialties and occupations that are not specified in the current OKZ have appeared on the labour market, which makes it difficult to organize trainings in these professions and specialties or to determine the range of work operations and the level of remuneration depending on the complexity of the work and the employee's qualifications. Meanwhile, in 2013, a new international code (ISCO) was adopted, which takes into account new professions that have appeared on the labour market.

- In this regard, it is necessary to *assist the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan in developing a national classifier of occupational categories in accordance with the 2013 international code.*

In developed countries, professional standards are used for training personnel, which reflect the requirements of employers for each profession and specialty. A professional standard indicates qualifications required to perform a certain type of professional activity, including a certain work function. Tajikistan has started implementing some professional standards, but those have not yet been reflected at the legislative level.

- Therefore assistance is needed for the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies of the Republic of Tajikistan and Employers' Association in the *development of the legislative framework for professional standards, taking into account gender criteria* that will enable the training of qualified personnel drawn from among young women and men, helping them accelerate their path toward employment.
- To recommend to the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Committee on Women and Family of Tajikistan and Committee on Affairs of Youth and Sports under the Government of Tajikistan, with participation of non-State actors, the donor community, to *raise the issues of employment and vocational training of youth and women in the current consultative processes, and organize a dedicated meeting if necessary. Based on the discussion, prepare recommendations and develop roadmap for their implementation to help reduce barriers faced by young people (in particular women) in local labour markets.*

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