

Cultural Caravan



ANNUAL RESULTS REPORT

STORIES 2024

THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

PRIORITY AREA 1

Support national efforts to respond to people's needs by ensuring equitable access to quality social services including education, health, social protection and decent work through effective policies and appropriate financing mechanisms with the participation of all parties



DRIVING CHANGE: EMPOWERING DRIVERS IN HIV PREVENTION THROUGH EDUCATION AND TESTING

HIV prevention programmes are quite effective, but not all population groups can be reached.

The initiative 'Choose the Right Path!' by the Reproductive Health Alliance aimed to get an idea of the category of people who are less covered by prevention programmes.

In December 2024 with UNAIDS and FHI's support a "Choose the Right Path!' campaign was held to raise awareness about HIV transmission risks among drivers devoted to the World AIDS Day.

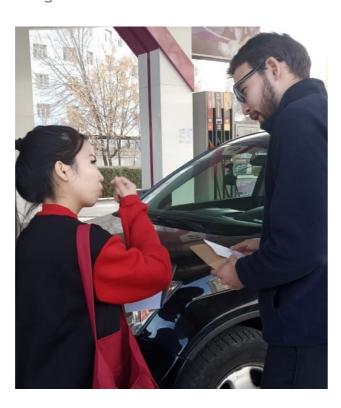
Volunteers of the Reproductive Health Alliance and Public Fund Plus Centre at 8 petrol stations engaged 576 drivers, who were surveyed and provided with information of HIV testing and were given HIV self-tests.

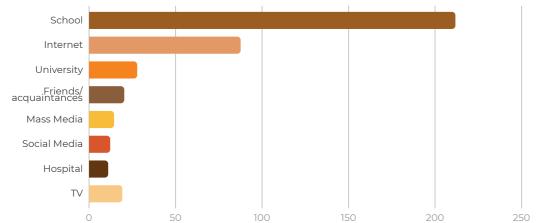
25.7% knew all HIV transmission routes. The respondents received information about HIV from various sources, but the most surprising source of information was a 'school'.

Only 28.9% had recent HIV tests, while 35.7% never tested. HIV is diagnosable with rapid tests that provide same-day results. This greatly facilitates diagnosis and transition to treatment and care. 75.8% of surveyed drivers at petrol stations do not know that there is a possibility for HIV self-testing.

Despite 35.5% engaging in risky behavior, only 20% perceived high infection risk, yet 43.3% were interested in self-testing.

The campaign highlighted the need for tailored HIV prevention programs, emphasizing the crucial role of education, the high demand for self-testing among drivers, and the necessity for targeted interventions for at-risk driver categories like truckers and taxi drivers.







In an effort to bolster the Kyrgyz government's health governance capacity, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been at the forefront of strengthening the national response to tuberculosis (TB) through innovative technology and comprehensive support. With funding from the Global Fund, this project aims to enhance diagnostic accuracy, improve treatment outcomes, and ultimately reduce the prevalence of TB in Kyrgyzstan.

X-rays have long been foundational in diagnosing tuberculosis, but with the integration of artificial intelligence (AI), this process has become significantly more accurate and efficient. Under the UNDP project, a total of nine portable X-ray machines equipped with AI capabilities have been procured. Eight of these machines were distributed to regional TB control centers and the State TB Center in Bishkek, while one was allocated to the Institute of Narcology of the Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic. These advanced devices are designed for the emergency diagnosis of tuberculosis, enabling immediate differentiation of TB from other diseases and assessing the extent of lung lesions.

As Tamara Bayalieva, Chief Physician of the Bishkek TB Hospital, explains: "We really needed this machine. The portable X-ray is very convenient because we did not need to take the patients somewhere else; instead, we visited different places, including remote regions and districts, ourselves. We examined residents, detected suspicions of tuberculosis, and then referred them for further examination." She emphasized that although there is room for improvement, Al significantly enhances the precision of TB detection.

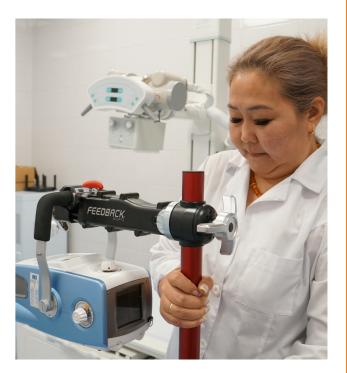
The UNDP also plays a crucial role in training and supporting healthcare workers in Kyrgyzstan to effectively utilize these Al-enhanced X-ray systems. Ongoing online collaboration between Kyrgyz and German specialists ensures that any implementation challenges are swiftly addressed. Through these collaborative efforts, communities are empowered to combat tuberculosis more effectively, contributing to the global effort to eliminate the disease.

These highly sought-after devices not only improve TB case finding in remote communities

but also aid in the timely diagnosis of potential future COVID-19 cases, thus enhancing the overall health of affected populations, including the most vulnerable. "At the UNDP, we are committed to supporting health services for all, including the most vulnerable groups of the population. No one should be left behind in this global effort to effectively cope with COVID-19 and tuberculosis," stated a UNDP representative.

Since 2011, the UNDP has been implementing Global Fund grants, actively supporting Kyrgyzstan's HIV and TB control programs. These initiatives focus on quality prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and care. The UNDP/Global Fund project collaborates closely with national and international partners to adapt its response to the HIV and TB epidemics, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring continued patient treatment, timely diagnosis, and prevention for key population groups despite challenging circumstances.

Acting as the Principal Recipient of Global Fund grants since 2011, the UNDP has successfully implemented five grants, with the current project aimed at accelerating reductions in HIV infections and deaths, significantly increasing the treatment success rate among drug-resistant forms of TB, and strengthening Kyrgyzstan's healthcare system. The project, with a budget of \$146 million, spans from 2011 to 2023 and demonstrates the UNDP's unwavering commitment to enhancing public health infrastructure and outcomes in Kyrgyzstan.





In the Kyrgyz Republic, a young Afghan woman has found hope and a determination to give back to her home country through education.

Since she was a child, Suhaila has always found comfort in numbers. "I don't like vague things," said the 24-year-old Afghan former refugee who now works in financial administration. "Numbers are always certain, stable."

For someone who was forced to flee her home at the age of four, this desire for stability is understandable. In the year 2000, amid rising insecurity and violence in Afghanistan, Suhaila's parents decided that it was no longer a safe place to raise their children, and the family fled to the Kyrgyz Republic.

"At first, it was difficult," Suhaila recalled, adding that it was only after the family enrolled in classes offered by the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, including Russian language classes, that they started to integrate and make friends with other members of the Afghan community in Bishkek, the capital.

As recognized refugees, Suhaila and her family were issued refugee cards and had access to some basic rights, including education. She and her siblings soon settled in at their new school, but Suhaila remembers that it was much more challenging for her mother, who was a homemaker, to adapt to their new life in Bishkek.

"It was at that point I decided that I wanted to be independent," she said, adding that getting an education was the most important step towards realizing that goal.

After graduating from high school, Suhaila wanted to study further. Her parents were supportive, but she knew it was a huge financial undertaking. When she heard about the DAFI scholarship programme, run by UNHCR with support from the German Government and other donors, she decided to apply. A year later, she received a scholarship to pursue a bachelor's degree in business administration, specializing in financial accounting, at the American University of Central Asia.

"When I got the scholarship, I felt like a huge weight was lifted from my shoulders," she said.

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Young refugees face huge barriers when it comes to higher education. Besides the high cost of tuition fees, many lack power or connectivity at home. The barriers for young female refugees are even higher, with more refugee boys graduating from secondary school than refugee girls. While progress has been made in increasing the number of refugees enrolled in higher education from 1 per cent in 2019 to 7 per cent in 2023, partly as a result of the DAFI programme, enrolment rates still lag far behind those of non-refugees.

Since the DAFI programme launched in the Kyrgyz Republic in 1997, over 100 young refugees have been able to pursue higher education.

For Suhaila, attending university was life-changing in more ways than one. She found herself surrounded by bright, ambitious young women, many of them from Afghanistan.

"I didn't grow up in conflict, but these girls did. Despite that, they had so much energy and passion to change their lives," she said.

What she learned from her new friends together with the freedom of studying at a liberal arts university inspired her to take a deeper interest in what was happening in Afghanistan and efforts to end the conflict there.

"Since I come from Afghanistan, where there is always conflict, always war, I was curious about peacebuilding organizations, about how they work on such issues," she said. "This work is really valuable, and sometimes dangerous, but it's worth it."

Today, Suhaila works in the administrative and finance office of Search for Common Ground, an international non-governmental organization focused on social cohesion, conflict resolution and conflict prevention. And although she has been away for more than 20 years, Afghanistan and its women are never far from her thoughts.

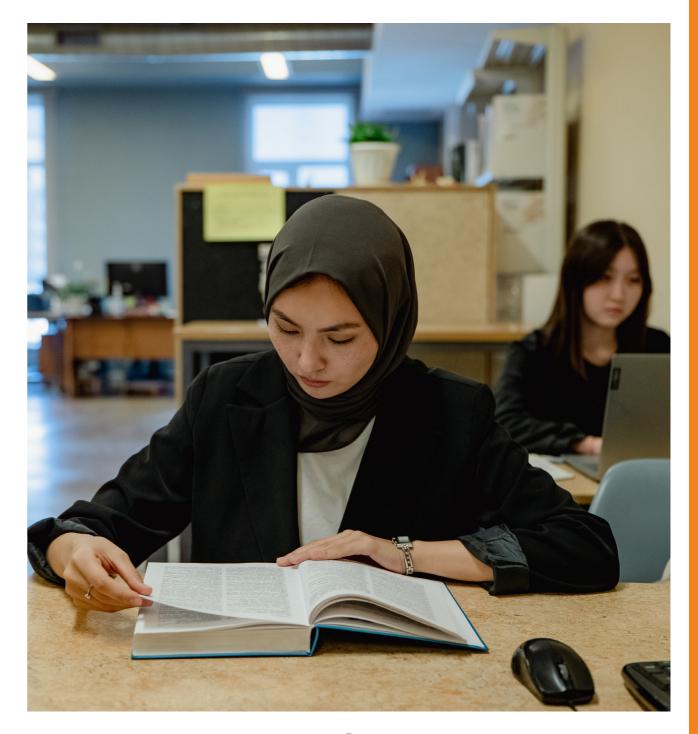
"In the future, if it will be possible security-wise to go back and work in Afghanistan, I really do want to help women there ... I was heartbroken when I heard that the Taliban had banned women from higher education," she said.

Since 2021, women and girls in Afghanistan have been facing systematic discrimination in all areas of public life and are unable to exercise their basic human rights. UNHCR, together with the rest of the UN system, continues to urge the country's de facto authorities to end restrictions for women and girls.

Suhaila moved one step closer to realizing her dream of travelling and working in 2023 when she gained citizenship in the Kyrgyz Republic, with help from UNHCR's legal support and counselling services.

"Even though I had a refugee card, and it is legal for me to work in the Kyrgyz Republic, it was difficult to find work," explained Suhaila, adding that some organizations are wary of the processes involved in hiring refugees.

"It was surreal," she said, recalling the moment she received her citizenship. "Now that I have citizenship, I am in control."





MIRA'S STORY: TRUST IN YOUR HEALTH-CARE PROVIDER CAN GO World Health A LONG WAY IN TRANSFORMING Organization DIABETES CARE

Mira, a tenacious and energetic 67-year-old woman from Alamedin district near Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan, has been living with diabetes since 1985. Her story is one of resilience and community, and conviction that living a healthy life is possible.

As an active member of a local support group, she is a passionate advocate for the effectiveness of these groups in helping people manage their condition.

"We live with diabetes, and I know it can be managed," she says. "But I think that many people are still afraid of the condition, and that's what I think we need to concentrate more on."

Getting rid of the fear of diabetes, Mira says, is about trusting your doctor and taking charge of your own health. Her commitment to a healthy lifestyle and regular medical check-ups mirrors her advocacy for others grappling with diabetes.

"Adopt a healthy lifestyle, go see your doctor, get tested, and don't be afraid."

Trust, Mira says, is key.

"I am in constant contact with my endocrinologist, I call her all the time," she says, emphasizing the bond they share. "We talk, we sit, she explains everything to me."

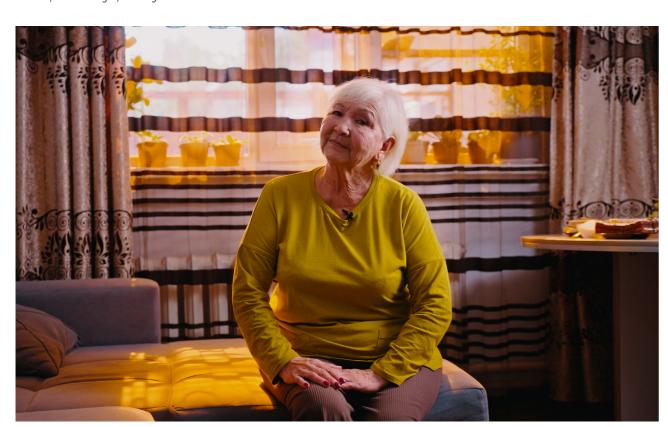
This trust is a cornerstone of her diabetes management – a partnership founded on mutual respect and understanding.

For example, once her blood sugar level dropped, and the doctor advised her to modify the insulin dose.

"So, if the doctor tells me I need to do something, I do it," she recalls.

In the wake of a pandemic that has eroded people's confidence in institutions, including health systems, this trust in health-care providers is essential. WHO/Europe's upcoming Tallinn Health Systems Conference spotlights the critical issues of trust and transformation and examines the effect these have on health care.

The conference will focus on the growing sentiment that health services will not deliver for people when they are needed, and on why health and care workers feel increasingly undervalued by the system. This is echoed in Mira's testimony, and that of the doctors and nurses caring for diabetes patients in Kyrgyzstan.



CHANGE IS NOT ALWAYS EASY, ESPECIALLY WHEN MANAGING HEALTH CONDITIONS

In the WHO European Region alone, at least 64 million adults over the age of 18, and around 300 000 children and adolescents, live with diabetes. By 2045, the International Diabetes Federation estimates that almost 1 in 10 people in the European Region could have diabetes as populations age and obesity rates climb.

Diabetes is generally under-detected, under-treated and under-controlled. Many complications, such as foot problems because of blood supply issues, are avoidable - as are the associated health and social care costs. Simple measures such as frequent foot care can reduce the risk of amoutation.

Kyrgyzstan, where an estimated 256 400 people live with the condition, is grappling with the same challenges: only 60% of people with diabetes are diagnosed.

In 2022, the Ministry of Health, supported by WHO/Europe and the World Diabetes Foundation, began the implementation of a new project in Kyrgyzstan. Essentially, the project is about improving the quality of care for diabetes through, for example, changing who diagnoses the condition and supports the diabetes patients in its management.

"Patients used to be managed by endocrinologists only, and their diabetes care was never entrusted to family doctors and nurses," explains Dr Guldana Jolchieva, endocrinologist at the National Centre for Endocrinology in Bishkek. "This led to a series of problems, one of them being, for example, long waiting times since endocrinologists simply couldn't cope with so many patients."

By enabling patients to go directly to primary care centres and be seen by their family doctors or nurses, the project is transforming the way diabetes is being managed in the country. Patients have been trusted to take an active role in the design of these care pathways - and in evaluating how well they work.

"First of all, patients now have more confidence in their family doctors and nurses; and second, they don't need to travel long distances, so they can get the care they need at their local primary care centre," explains Dr Nataliya Dobrynina, the lead endocrinologist at the National Centre for Endocrinology.

TRUST AS THE ENABLER **OF CHANGE**

The transformation has seen enhanced and more widespread training of primary care doctors and nurses - in detecting diabetes cases, managing the condition and preventing complications, especially with patients' eyes, feet and cardiovascular systems.

Alita, a feldsher nurse in Alamedin district, explains how the trainings have revolutionized the way she cares for the diabetes patients in

"Before, we used to refer patients to a polyclinic far from here to get their blood sugar levels checked, and for some of the older patients this was impractical," she says. "Now we do our own blood-sugar testing, run our own laboratory tests, and offer our own counselling, talking to them about their diet, weight loss and lifestyle in general."

This, Alita says, has also changed the way she feels about her work. She is happy that her newly acquired skills are helping patients in her district better manage their conditions.

"I think they trust me now, and come here more often," she says.

LIBRARIES ARE TRANSFORMING unicef INTO HUBS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (FROM ARR)

Transforming Libraries into Early Learning Centers: A New Era for Childhood Development in Kyrgyzstan

Three-year-old Altynai giggles and runs around as she arrives with her parents at a place that was once just a library. Today, it's much more.

Altynai is one of 26 children attending a new child development center in her village of Stavropolovka, Chuy Region. Housed in the local library, the center opened in late 2024 to help young children like Altynai build essential skills before starting school.

Early childhood education is critical, yet in 2018, only 24% of children aged 3-5 have access to preschool programs. To close this gap, the Ministry of Education and Science, together with the Ministry of Culture, launched an initiative transform libraries into child development centers.

With support from UNICEF, librarians and early childhood educators have been trained to create engaging learning environments for young children. Parents also play a key role—Altynai's mother, Jyldyz, says the center has given her

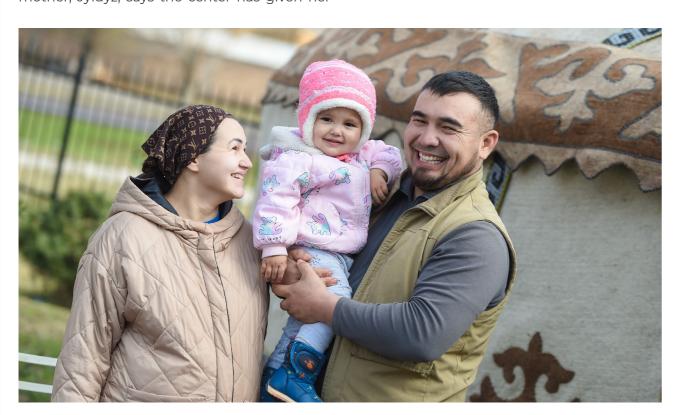
family new ways to encourage learning at

"Before, we didn't know how to teach her at this age," Jyldyz shares. "Now, we read together, play counting games, and even practice drawing. She's learning so much."

These centers are more than just places for education—they foster social skills, creativity, and confidence. Asylbek, Altynai's father, believes the program is preparing his daughter for school: "She's learning colors, numbers, letters, and how to communicate with other children. This is the foundation she needs for a bright

A 2023 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey showed significant progress in expanding early childhood education, with access rising to 39%. Today, 300 child development centers operate across Kyrgyzstan, all within public libraries. These centers serve over 7,000 children aged 1 to 6, providing play-based learning, emotional development, and parental support.

Education Minister Dogdurgul Kendirbaeva emphasizes that expanding early childhood education is a key pillar of the Altyn Kazyk education reform. By integrating libraries into the early learning system, Kyrgyzstan is ensuring that more children have the tools they need to succeed—starting from the very first years of life.





MEERIM SURANBAY KYZY: "EVERY WOMAN IN LABOR IS LIKE MY OWN SISTER AND I UNDERSTAND THAT THE ONLY THING SHE WANTS IS TO SAFELY **CUDDLE HER NEWBORN"**

With 14 years of experience as a midwife, she has learned that warmth and care build trust. She not only offers kind words but also brings tea and water to make women feel at home.

As a child, she wanted to learn English, but on her sister's advice, she entered medical college. After an internship at Osh Regional Clinical Hospital, she realized she had made the right choice. Her knowledge of English helped her learn medical programs and use a computer.

Previously, labor records were filled out by hand, often requiring extra hours. Now, with the introduction of electronic patient records, admissions, diagnoses, and treatments can be digitally recorded. Initially, the transition was difficult, but now she and her colleagues can enter data even from their phones. By simply entering a patient's PIN, they can access her entire medical history instantly.

The time saved from paperwork is now spent supporting women in labor. Expectant mothers often feel anxious and do not want to be alone, but with her presence, they feel calmer, making labor easier. She deeply values their trust and the joy of childbirth.

While digitalization makes work more efficient, she believes the most important aspect is mutual respect and teamwork among colleagues. Despite advancements in technology, she is convinced that no robot can replace a midwife's warmth and care.

Private clinics have offered her and her colleagues jobs, but they chose to remain at Osh Regional Hospital. This workplace shaped her into who she is today. When women recognize her on the street and express gratitude, it is priceless. Her husband is proud that while she is a wife and mother of three at home, she is also a "second mother" to many newborns in Kyrgyzstan.

She and her colleagues participated in training sessions on using electronic patient records as part of the UN South-South Cooperation project, supported by the Ministry of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic and UNFPA. In April-May 2024, the implementation process is taking place in five obstetric institutions across the country.



PRIORITY AREA 2

Support national efforts to promote prosperity and resilience for all citizens through inclusive green socio economic development



NEW ELECTRONIC QUEUE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM TO REMOVE DELAYS AT KYRGYZ BORDERS (FROM ARR)

Bishkek, 29 November 2024 — The State Customs Service of Kyrgyzstan, in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy and Commerce, is launching a pilot Electronic Queue Management System (eQMS) at the Kyzyl-Kiya Road border crossing with Uzbekistan. The eQMS will streamline border-crossing procedures for truck drivers, optimize logistics, and support Kyrgyzstan's economic and regional trade integration goals.

The eQMS pilot leverages digital solutions to improve traffic flow and border efficiency. Beginning 30 November 2024, truck drivers can reserve a time slot via the eQMS website (kezek. gpti.kg) and enter a designated waiting zone at the appointed time.

This initiative funded by the European Union (EU) is implemented with technical support from the International Trade Centre (ITC), a United Nations special agency, as part of its Ready4Trade Central Asia: Fostering Prosperity Through the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor project.

"The launch of the eQMS is a transformative step toward more efficient and transparent border operations," said Almaz Saliev, Deputy Chairman, State Customs Service of the Kyrgyz Republic. This system is not only an operational improvement but also a commitment to a modern, user-cantered approach to border management."

"Through the eQMS, we are creating a transparent, reliable, and convenient process for crossing the border, ultimately benefiting Kyrgyzstan's economic development and strengthening ties with regional partners," stated Iskender Asylkulov, Deputy Minister of Economy and Commerce of the Kyrgyz Republic.

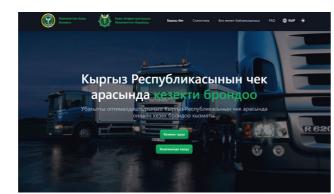
"The European Union is proud to support Kyrgyzstan's efforts to modernize its border management through the eQMS pilot initiative,"

said Marilyn Josefson, Ambassador of the European Union to the Kyrgyz Republic. "Improving soft connectivity and facilitation of trade and border procedures is a crucial step in advancing the operational efficiency of the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor and supporting the internationalization of Central Asian businesses, ultimately fostering sustainable economic development and stronger regional integration."

"Implementing the eQMS at Kyzyl-Kiya is a key part of our mission to make cross-border trade more accessible and efficient for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises in Central Asia," said Adelina Harunjen, Trade Facilitation Expert, International Trade Centre. "This system not only simplifies border crossing processes but also fosters a transparent and predictable trade environment, empowering smaller businesses to compete more effectively in global markets and contributing to sustainable economic growth in the region."

A series of training sessions for key stakeholders were organized to ensure a smooth implementation of the eQMS. An initial event took place in Bishkek on 12 November 2024, where transport companies, logistics operators, and trade associations were introduced to the system's benefits and received step-by-step booking instructions. A practical seminar for drivers was held at the Kyzyl-Kiya border on 28 November 2024, with a focus on hands-on training and demonstrations.

For more information on the eQMS and booking procedures, visit **kezek.gpti.kg.**





The establishment of Regional Investment Councils (RICs) in Batken, Osh, and Jalal-Abad oblasts of Kyrgyzstan contributes to strengthening public-private partnerships and fits a multiple purpose such as the building trusted relations between the Government and businesses, Development Financing, Climate Action, Creativity and Innovation, digital transformation, regional development, youth and women entrepreneurship. These councils, supported by UNDP, have become as multi-faceted, multi-stakeholder platforms for development, enabling stakeholders from government, business, civil society and young entrepreneurs to collaboratively shape the regional development agendas and addressing systemic challenges.

Since their inception, the RICs have contributed to improving the business environment by identifying key barriers to investment and entrepreneurship and implementing targeted solutions. Through a series of consultations and meetings, the councils have facilitated regulatory improvements, enhanced tax policies, and optimized processes in key sectors such as tourism and insurance. These efforts have resulted in tangible benefits, such as reducing administrative burdens for businesses and creating a more conducive climate for investment.

The RICs engage youth and persons with disabilities, support women entrepreneurship, and create employment and self-employment

opportunities. The councils have been attracting both public and international financing for large scale Public-Private Infrastructure projects in Batken, and the development of business initiatives that contribute to local economic growth while addressing social inequalities. Additionally, efforts to digitalize municipal services have improved accessibility and efficiency, empowering local businesses to thrive in an increasingly trusted Government-Citizen relationships, accountable governance and digital economy.

Public-private dialogues have emerged as an innovative tool for enhancing social cohesion, firmly grounded in the principles of area-based integrated development. This approach focuses on addressing geographic-specific challenges within a particular geographic context. This collaborative approach has enabled the formulation of strategic investment plans that align with national development priorities and reflect the unique needs of each region. The councils have facilitated the co-creation of recommendations and policy measures that enhance investment attractiveness and promote sustainable development solutions. The most recent outcome was achieved in Batken, where the Council played a central role in mobilizing \$2.2 billion in public-private and foreign investments, accelerating the regional sustainable development.

Moving forward, the RICs will be established in other four oblasts. By leveraging the collective expertise and resources of diverse stakeholders, these councils are paving the way for a more inclusive, dynamic, and sustainable future for Kyrgyzstan.





EMPOWERING LOCAL FARMERS AND SCHOOLS: A SUCCESS STORY World Food Programme FROM THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

The Kyrgyz Republic greatly relies on food imports, the country faces persistent obstacles in delivering fresh and nutritious food to all segments of society. Coupled with challenges related to climate shocks, high food prices and inadequate infrastructure, food accessibility poses a significant problem for communities in remote areas. The lack of logistical and storage facilities has often forced local farmers to either lose a substantial proportion of their harvest or sell their produce at lower prices.

To address these issues, WFP supported an agricultural cooperative in establishing a logistics centre and linking schools with local producers through a public-private partnership. The logistics centre ensures a steady supply of fresh produce to schools and helps local farmers earn a more stable income.

Ysmanaly Parpiev, head of the logistics center, supplies 56 schools and 40 kindergartens in

Kadamjai district with local vegetables, offering products at a 10 percent lower cost than its competitors.

"Previously, farmers struggled to sell their products due to a lack of access to stable markets and difficulties in reaching consumers directly. Now, with schools serving as a reliable market, farmers have a steady outlet for their produce, while schools receive fresh, high-quality, locally sourced ingredients for children's meals," says Ysmanalv.

The centre includes a vegetable storehouse, a processing unit, and a mobile laboratory for quality testing. It can store up to 220 tons of fruits and vegetables for 10 months, ensuring a consistent supply of fresh ingredients.

By converting schools into markets for local farmers, the project successfully bridged the gap between producers and consumers, thereby addressing the issues of accessibility. While children receive locally produced, organic fruits and vegetables, contributing to a healthy learning environment, preventing loss of concentration and improving academic performance.





Osh - In honour of International Migrants Day, IOM in close cooperation with Osh State University and Asia Creative Women Fund organized premiere screening of the documentary film "Osh, I Love You". This special event took place on 18 December 2024, at 16:00, in the Grand Assembly Hall of Osh State University.

"Osh, I Love You" offered an intimate glimpse into the lives of Aftab and Safiullah, two Pakistani migrants who have embraced Osh as their second home. Through their stories, the documentary highlighted their challenges, triumphs, and the deep affection they developed for Kyrgyzstan, resonating with the experiences of many migrants around the world.

"Perhaps, after watching this film, someone may experienced a profound shift in perspective. They might have discovered an inner harmony that transcended borders and languages, realizing that the essence of belonging is not tied to where you live or the language you speak," reflected Asel Zhuraeva, the film's director.

The screening was followed by a panel discussion with the film's director and the protagonists, providing a unique opportunity to delve deeper into the themes of the film and explore the broader context of migration and integra-

Kyrayzstan has been home to more than 28,000 international students, with approximately 10,000 of them pursuing their studies at Osh State University. These students not only brought a rich diversity of cultures and perspectives to the country's academic environment but also contributed significantly to its economy. Their presence supported local businesses, from housing and food services to retail and transport, thereby fostering economic growth and creating jobs.

This event was made possible with the support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Norwegian agency for development cooperation (NORAD).





EMPOWERING SUSTAINABLE LIVING: THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF IOM ON HOUSING AND RENOVATION IN KYRGYZSTAN

Bishkek and Osh– Housing insecurity is a pressing global issue, and Kyrgyzstan is no exception. In Bishkek and Osh, the country's two largest cities, rapid population growth has outpaced the government's capacity to provide essential services such as housing, water, sanitation, healthcare, and education. Approximately 35% of the city's population consists of internal migrants who reside on the outskirts of the capital.

The issue is further compounded by Bishkek's severe air pollution, which ranked among the worst globally on the World Air Quality Index from 2021 to 2023. The widespread reliance on coal for indoor heating in low-income households has led to dangerously high levels of fine particulate matter (PM2.5), posing significant public health risks. The urgency to address these environmental and housing challenges is more pressing than ever.

Safe, sustainable, and affordable housing has been a topic of concern for many families living in homes that are far from being energy-efficient and climate-resilient, thus increasing vulnerability to health and environmental risks. By 2050, it is projected that around 200,000 people in Kyrgyzstan will migrate internally due to the impact of climate change, further straining urban infrastructure and exacerbating risks to migrants' well-being.

In the face of an urgent need for sustainable and innovative solutions, the International Organization for Migration (IOM Kyrgyzstan) launched a project in 2023 to develop standardized, pre-approved, cost-efficient, environ-

mentally sustainable, and climate-resilient construction plans. These green renovation designs have been developed to improve the quality of housing and to enhance energy efficiency and combat air pollution. Standardized, pre-approved, cost-efficient, and climate-resilient construction plans play a crucial role in sustainability. These designs maximize natural opportunities, such as sunlight, to reduce energy consumption. Effective insulation is particularly important for improving energy efficiency by maintaining indoor temperatures and reducing reliance on external heating sources.

Bermet Moldobaeva, Head of Office at the International Organization for Migration (IOM Kyrgyzstan) explained the significance of this ground-breaking project. "Unfortunately, not everyone builds energy-efficient houses, nor can everyone afford to hire an expensive architectural firm to design a house for them. The project's ambition is to assist households in achieving energy-efficient homes and improving environmental standards in our towns and cities."

The project began in 2023 with a working group meeting that brought together national partners from various ministries and city authorities to enhance communication and foster the inclusion of internal migrants in the environmental problem-solving process.

IOM Kyrgyzstan, together with the Union of Architects and the Non-Governmental Organization Unison Group, invited architects to create climate-resilient and earthquake-resistant home designs. Out of 16 submissions, a jury of experts selected the top three based on the design's energy efficiency, sustainability and affordability.

IOM Kyrgyzstan, with support from the IOM Development Fund completed the process of renovating 12 of the most vulnerable households, led by women in Bishkek and Osh. These green renovation pilot schemes aimed to empower the women as role models within their communities.

"Living in this house with my three children has been a struggle. We did not have the resources to insulate it, and the winter is harsh here. The wind cuts through our bones, and my children suffer from constant illnesses. This land is all I have inherited from my mother, but we could never afford to build a better house. When I

learned about the joint IOM Kyrgyzstan and Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration's initiative, I felt a surge of hope. I applied immediately, hoping that they would consider my situation as a woman-led household. And they did!" explains Nazira, one of the project's beneficiaries in Bishkek.

Moving forward, the project trained more 155 representatives of Gosstroy's regional offices on energy-efficient heating, safe water supply, and ventilation. Additionally, IOM Kyrgyzstan is working on awareness campaigns to promote sustainable practices.





PRIORITY AREA 3

Support national efforts to promote inclusive approaches to climate action, disaster risk management, and environmental protection to conserve natural resources and leverage ecosystem benefits for sustainable human development.



UN SUPPORTS KYRGYZSTAN IN RAISING AWARENESS UNEP ON AIR QUALITY

Air quality is one of the most pressing challenges for Kyrgyzstan, particularly in urban centers like Bishkek, where pollution severely impacts citizen well-being. Despite extensive scientific studies on air pollution, their conclusions often fail to reach those most affected – local communities and marginalized groups in coal-heated residential areas around Bishkek. Recognizing this gap, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology, and Technical Supervision (MNRETS) sought the support of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO) and the Asian Development Bank to launch a nationwide awareness campaign in 2024. Partnering with MoveGreen, a leading NGO on air quality, this campaign aimed to bridge the communication gap with accessible, actionable messages for the public.

A Comprehensive Campaign on Air Quality

The awareness campaign leveraged findings from the Development Partners Coordination Council's (DPCC) joint policy brief on air pollution. A working group, including representatives from UNEP, MNRETS, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the rest of the UN System in Kyrgyzstan represented by the UNRCO, was established to craft the campaign's strategy. Through collaborative discussions, the team decided to create six concise, 30-second videos addressing key air pollution issues: waste incineration, grass burning, transportation emissions, the importance of green spaces, industrial filtration, and the harm caused by coal combustion. Each video, developed in Kyrayz and Russian. highlighted the health impacts of air pollution while offering practical solutions.

These videos premiered on February 21, 2024, via MNRETS' official Facebook page and were broadcasted multiple times daily on the State Television and Radio Company "EITR" during the heating season when air pollution peaks.

With a daily audience of 1.187 million viewers, the campaign reached a vast segment of Kyrgyzstan's population. In autumn, the videos were also broadcast via information screens in Bishkek's public transport.

Building Capacity for Sustainable Communication

To strengthen MNRETS' communication capabilities, and at its request, UNEP and MoveGreen organized a training session in September 2024 for 25 communications specialists from MNRETS, regional departments, mayor's offices, and the Presidential Administration. This training covered modern communication tools with a focus on social media and included technical insights into air pollution causes, monitoring, and mitigation strategies. The training has since transformed MNRETS' digital presence, significantly increasing the frequency and quality of content on their website and social media channels.

Engaging Citizens Through "Dem Al" Festival

On September 14, 2024, the "Dem Al" (Clean Breath) festival in Bishkek marked the International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies. Co-organized by MNRETS, MoveGreen, UNEP, and Bishkek City Hall, the festival creatively blended art, environmental education, and public interaction to highlight the importance of clean air. Activities included the "Taza Dem Al" breathing flashmob, symbolizing health and self-care, and the "Dance of Nature." which celebrated harmony between humans and the environment.

Workshops taught participants practical skills such as waste sorting, creating eco-bags from recycled materials, and crafting with reused materials. Respiratory health workshops and discussions on volunteerism further enriched the event. Over 130 citizens attended, while media coverage and social media posts reached over 200,000 people. Festival participants shared heartfelt messages, such as, "Let's create more green zones in the city so every generation can enjoy nature and clean air."

Sustaining Momentum

The campaign's success has laid the groundwork for expanding national efforts to raise awareness and communicate government actions on air quality. UNEP continues to support MNRETS in

its mission to ensure cleaner air for all citizens, fostering collaboration between government, civil society, and local communities. Together, they aim to create a future where every breath taken is truly a "clean breath."





GREENING BISHKEK: HOW UNEP TRANSFORMS URBAN PLANNING THROUGH UNEP NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Air pollution is one of the most pressing challenges faced by Bishkek, with dust pollution from degraded lands, urban territories, and roads severely impacting public health. Yet, beneath this challenge lies an opportunity: the potential of nature-based solutions (NbS) to transform Bishkek into a greener, healthier, and more climate-resilient city. Recognizing this, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Urban Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) partnered with the Bishkek Mayor's Office to embed NbS into urban planning, fostering a sustainable vision for the city's future.

Building Awareness and Capacity

In collaboration with Ornithologiya and other local partners, UNEP organized a comprehensive training workshop in September 2024. This multi-stakeholder event brought together 32 participants from the Mayor's Office, Bishkek Architecture Office, Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision of Kyrgyzstan, and various environmental organizations to explore the application of NbS in urban environments. For many attendees, this was their first exposure to NbS, opening their eyes to the tangible benefits such approaches could bring.

Key sessions highlighted NbS as cost-effective measures addressing air pollution, urban heat, and flood risks while enhancing urban biodiversity and public health. From urban forests to green corridors, participants learned how integrating ecological principles into city planning could yield multi-faceted benefits. Discussions emphasized that sustainable urban development should harmonize infrastructure, social, health, and environmental goals.

Advancing the Dialogue

Building on the momentum, UNEP supported a panel discussion in October 2024, titled "Green Urbanisation: Sustainable Development and Transformation of the Urban Environment." Experts from diverse fields—climate science, urban planning, and community engagement—showcased real-world examples of NbS, such as participatory green space projects and the transformation of industrial zones. These discussions underscored the critical role of citizens, youth groups, and decision-makers in implementing sustainable urban practices.

During the Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference, UNEP further elevated the conversation by co-hosting a panel titled "Sustainable and Healthy Urban Living in Bishkek: The Power of Nature-Based Solutions to Improve Air Quality and Wellbeing." This session highlighted innovative NbS strategies, such as extensive greening, green facades, and the use of bioindicators, to combat urban air pollution. The event drew policymakers, experts, and donors, reinforcing UNEP's role in fostering collaboration and advancing urban resilience in Bishkek.

The event also delved into integrating NbS into Bishkek's new city masterplan (2025-2050). With the Bishkek Architecture Office leading the charge, NbS will play a pivotal role in shaping the city's future, addressing issues such as air quality, water management, and climate resilience.

Knowledge for Action

UNEP further solidified its impact by publishing, together with its partners Ornithologiya and Central Asian Regional Environmental Centre, a detailed compendium and desk review on NbS for Bishkek. These documents highlighted innovative strategies, from tree planting and green corridors to vertical gardens, that could mitigate air pollution and promote biodiversity. They provided actionable recommendations for integrating NbS into policy and practice, aligning with global commitments like the Sustainable Development

One notable success is the Mayor's Office's renewed interest in greening initiatives. Thanks to UNEP's and UN-Habitat's advocacy, the city has committed to creating two vertical green facades by 2025, demonstrating the tangible benefits of NbS in improving air quality and urban well-being.

Transforming Perceptions, **Transforming Cities**

These interventions have fundamentally changed how the Bishkek Mayor's Office views green initiatives. Once seen as secondary, these are now recognized as essential tools for combating air pollution, fostering climate adaptation, and enhancing urban life. UNEP's support By fostering partnerships, disseminating has not only strengthened institutional capacity but also catalyzed a city-wide shift towards environmental sustainability.

knowledge, and showcasing the benefits of NbS, UNEP and UN-Habitat has laid the groundwork for a greener Bishkek—one where nature thrives alongside urban development, improving lives and safeguarding the environment for generations to come.





EVERY DROP COUNTS: FAO SUPPORT FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN ELECTRONIC IRRIGATION WATER MONITORING SYSTEM IN KYRGYZSTAN

Climate change impacts agriculture

Kyrgyzstan's economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, the productivity of which largely depends on water availability. Much of that water is meltwater from the mountains, where climate change is having a serious negative effect on the environment. Glaciers are melting and snowfall is becoming inadequate to replenish the shortfall in the volume of water available to agriculture. Water has become an important issue for Kyrgyzstan and its farming communities.

For many years the people of Ak-Bashat used water from mountain streams to irrigate their

fields and apple orchards. As a result of climate change, many streams have dried up and instead of blossoming gardens there are now sun-scorched hills.

"Water is life, especially for agriculture," said farmer Talgat Zanzaliev, who due to water scarcity, has decided to rear cattle rather than tend crops. "Water depletion leads to disputes even between friends. If we do not use natural resources wisely, we may soon lose the green forest and water."

Water is scarce not only in Ak-Bashat, but also in many other villages in the region. As a high-altitude country, Kyrgyzstan has been experiencing the effects of climate change earlier and more acutely than its neighbours. Changes in temperatures are leading to changes in precipitation patterns and more frequent peaks in temperature, leading to aridity and drought.



The use of innovative technology

Due to water scarcity, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Government of Kyrgyzstan and scientists from the Irrigation Institute have joined forces to address the issue of field water accounting.

Ultrasonic sensors for measuring channel water levels have been installed at hydrological posts in several pilot areas of the country. Such digital technologies have not only helped in the rational distribution of water but also eliminated conflicts among farmers over this vital resource. The sensors emit ultrasonic pulses reflected on the water surface. Specialized equipment records

crucial information, which is then transmitted to a computer. The system provides real-time data on the water level in channels.

The sensors were installed in pilot areas of the Naryn and Batken regions as part of the FAO project "Integrated natural resources management in drought-prone and salt-affected agricultural production landscapes in Central Asia and Turkey (CACILM-2)" and with financial support from the Global Environment Facility.

"Thanks to the automated water metering system, we know exactly where, when, and how much water is being used. In addition, you can see the total water consumption during a month or a quarter," said Vitaly Shablovsky, who invented the system. "Previously, such data was collected manually at special gauging stations. But what happened between the checks was unknown. Water could be underdelivered, cut off and so on."

The physical principles used by the Kyrgyz scientists are well-known, but their device turned out to be several times cheaper than imported equivalents. According to Vitaly Shablovsky, the application of this system in the context of water scarcity will ensure objective accounting of water use and development of the users' water-sustainable attitude to this diminishing resource.

"The farmer doesn't really care how much water there is in a river or a canal, but he does care how much water he gets to irrigate his field," said Vitaly Shablovsky. "But to calculate the water balance, all hydro posts must be equipped with sensors. Only a systematic approach will achieve the expected result."



The experience gained from the use of this device in the pilot districts is being scaled up across the country. It is important that this initiative is actively supported by the state. Now an inventory of the main water canals and hydraulic structures, where water level gauges should be installed, is being developed.

Looking to the future

FAO is supporting several projects in Kyrgyzstan that address water scarcity and help villagers use water judiciously. For example, in the south of the country it introduced modern approaches, including the construction of artificial glaciers, to manage pasture resources sustainably and adapt to climate change.

The communal construction of an artificial glacier in Kashka-Suu village exemplifies local ingenuity. The resulting ice towers, accumulating in winter and melting in summer, yield a sustainable water source for irrigation and domestic use, benefiting numerous households and enabling extensive livestock grazing.

This technology offers long-term benefits, reducing the impact of climate hazards and generating income throughout the year. Local authorities, recognizing its efficacy, installed additional artificial glaciers through local funding sources.

For many rural people, water is often the primary production factor that needs to be secured. The integration of local experiences with innovative agricultural initiatives enriches strategies for climate change adaptation and enhances rural livelihood resilience in Kyrgyzstan.





Kyrgyzstan is home to more than two thousand high-mountain lakes, with 368 of these categorized as breakthrough-prone. To protect the population from natural disasters, timely forecasting of such phenomena is essential. With support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Kyrgyzstan has engaged artificial intelligence to address this challenge. Anton Uspensky of the UN News Service spoke with UNDP colleagues in Kyrgyzstan and government representatives about these projects.

Alexandra Solovieva, UNDP Resident Representative in the Kyrgyz Republic, discussed two new programs based on the latest AI technologies. "Our project with the Ministry of Emergency Situations helps implement a unified information system for monitoring glacial lake outbursts," she said. "Artificial intelligence can help manage disaster risks by using machine learning and algorithms to monitor and predict glacial lake outbursts and landslides. The system also informs authorities and citizens about potential dangers."

Daurbek Sakiyev, Director of the Monitoring and Forecasting Department of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Kyrgyzstan, explained in an interview with the UN News Service that their work focuses on three main areas: developing a national disaster action plan, strengthening the capacity to manage risks from glacial lake outbursts, and modernizing the population protection system at the local level, including upgrading and enhancing debris drainage channels.

"There are more than 2,000 high-mountain lakes on our territory, of which 368 are categorized as breakthrough-prone," Sakiyev emphasized. "Depending on high-water years and intensive glacier melting, lakes form and fill up. If these lakes burst due to overflow, catastrophic mudslides can occur. There have been many such cases in Kyrgyzstan. Recent climate change, global temperature rise, and glacier degradation have increased this threat. New lakes are forming, posing a risk to infrastructure, settlements, and our citizens."

Experts and scientists forecast that natural disasters will become more frequent in the next 50 years. "We expect an increase in the number of natural disasters, particularly those related to the cryosphere and glaciology. That is why we are working on this task with UNDP," Sakiyev added.

He noted that artificial intelligence predicts rising water levels based on satellite imagery and alerts the Ministry of Emergency Situations when the situation becomes alarming.

"This program, this module, allows us to automatically receive data on lakes in our republic using space images and global climate models," Sakiyev explained. "We can assess their filling using special cartographic tools: this involves evaluating the lake's surface area and conducting retrospective analyses by comparing archival images from past years. The system performs specific calculations and alerts the operator, who then informs our response services and local authorities. This enables us to prepare and issue forecasts for potential lake outbusrts."

This approach is being applied in Kyrgyzstan for the first time. Previously, collecting information on glacial lakes required either field studies, which involved trekking to the lake under difficult conditions, or helicopter overflights, which were expensive. Now, the system automatically identifies these lakes, compares them with previous data, and provides a preliminary analysis. Specialists then conduct deeper analyses to verify the data, either by sending a ground team or conducting helicopter surveys. This work was part of a UNDP project funded by the Government of Japan.

Kyrgyzstan believes the experience gained from this new system will be useful to other countries. Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Indonesia, and Nepal have already expressed interest in this unique solution, according to Sakiyev. Alexandra Solovieva, head of the UNDP office in Kyrgyzstan, shares this view. "Knowledge sharing is vital in our projects because UNDP is a global network where expertise can be exchanged and applied locally, and local expertise can be shared globally," she said.

The use of new technical solutions with AI is not limited to these two examples in Kyrgyzstan. According to Solovieva, the level of digitalization in the country is constantly growing. "If we look at digital transformation and the digital economy in Kyrgyzstan, we see that the government has developed quite advanced systems of public service delivery," she said. "We are talking about a national-level digital ecosystem."

UNDP works closely with the Ministry of Digital Development and other ministries. "Digitalization affects various sectors," Solovieva explained. "A systemic approach is needed to strengthen the digital system, ensuring that Al and other digital solutions can bridge the digital divide and promote inclusiveness."



PRIORITY AREA 4

Support national efforts to promote just, accountable, and inclusive institutions and a civil society that fosters peace, cohesion, and human rights for all



SUCCESS STORY: EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES AGAINST FAMILY VIOLENCE (FROM ARR)

In the tranquil village of Sadovoe, the establishment of the Local Committee for Protection and Prevention from Family Violence, spearheaded by Sadovoe local self-government (LSG), has emerged as a beacon of success in addressing the pervasive issue of family and gender violence. While the government resolution laid the foundation for these committees, the true impact came to fruition through the dedicated efforts of LSG Sadovoe and their strategic collaboration with UNODC and NGO "Women's Support Center".

Initially faced with a committee whose purpose and functions were unclear to most of the community, LSG Sadovoe embarked on a transformative journey. Through a profound partnership with UNODC and the Women's Support Center, the committee underwent a process of institutionalization, clarifying its role and empowering its members with a shared vision and purpose.

Under the guidance of the mentor and local employees, the head of the local self-government (LSG) issued a comprehensive order outlining the creation of the Committee on Prevention of Domestic Violence, thoroughly selecting and approving committee members. A collaborative effort ensued, resulting in the development and refinement of regulations that delineated the committee's functions and tasks, officially approved by the LSG. This marked a significant turning point, transforming the local committee into a specialized body dedicated to the protection and prevention of domestic violence.

The committee's plan for the prevention and intervention of family and gender violence became the compass guiding their actions. Through systematic mentorship, the committee evolved into a cohesive and collegial entity, adhering to the "peer to peer" principle.

The plan, encompassing 12 key points, assigned responsible executors from members and local

police, social protection and medical entities, fostering seamless collaboration and heightened levels of interaction. With the advocacy efforts of the committee, the Crisis Center for provision of coordinated services to women and children victims of violence was opened in the village. The MOU between the committee and Ministry of Justice on free legal aid was signed.

Following the institutionalization of the Local Committee's activities, a noteworthy achievement is the increasing number of women, children, and elderly individuals who have directly reached out for support, indicating the growing trust placed in the committee by both the community and the state.

"I appreciate the support from the Committee members. During tough times for me and my children, they provided us with a place to stay. The psychologist offered crucial guidance, and now I feel prepared to work with the lawyer to file for a divorce from my husband, whom I no longer trust. I want my children to witness their mother free from the fear of being hurt every time their father is angry," shared Ms. Isakova Gulumkan (name changed), a 38-year-old woman who has been living in the village since

Today, Sadovoe village stands as a testament to success, not only in its structural integrity but also in its impact on the community. Through professional awareness campaigns, the committee has effectively communicated its mission, resulting in increased trust from victims of family and gender violence. Women, girls, children, elderly individuals, and people with disabilities have found a reliable ally in Sadovoe committee.

Professionally equipped, the committee now adeptly responds to cases of violence, providing victims with comprehensive assistance. The team has honed the skills to document requests efficiently, redirect cases appropriately, and consistently adhere to the principles and standards for assisting victims of violence as developed by UNODC.

Sadovoe committee has not only become tives, showcasing the power of collaboration, a guardian against family violence but also a model for effective community-based initia-

dedication, and institutionalization in creating lasting positive change.





In its ongoing efforts to build an inclusive society, UNDP has made significant strides in taking practical steps in improving accessibility, expanding inclusive employment, and strengthening the integration of disability perspectives into national policies. Through a series of targeted interventions, UNDP is not only raising awareness but also driving changes that contribute to the fulfilment of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Championing Universal Design and Accessibility

UNDP organized a learning exercise on universal design, accessibility, and reasonable accommodations facilitated by international expert Janina Arsenieva from the International Disability Alliance. Representatives from government agencies, civil society, and organizations of persons with disabilities engaged in in-depth discussions on accessibility within the broader social approach to disability and obtained the knowledge and tools to implement accessibility as guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

As a result, UNDP developed methodological recommendations for conducting accessible and inclusive events. These guidelines will serve as a critical resource in ensuring that persons with disabilities can fully participate in all spheres of life.

Inclusive Employment: Empowering Persons with Disabilities

The Government of Kyrgyzstan conducted the Inclusive Employment Forum. The event, supported by UNDP and partners, showcased successful practices in employing persons with disabilities and introduced the comprehensive Guidelines on Disability-Inclusive Employment developed by UNDP.

These guidelines offer practical recommendations for recruitment, job retention, and professional development while emphasizing universal design and reasonable accommodations in the workplace.

Integrating Disability Perspectives into Climate Action

Recognizing the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable populations UNDP worked to incorporate disability-inclusive approaches into national climate adaptation planning. A comprehensive policy brief was developed, offering key recommendations to integrate disability perspectives into the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) across priority sectors such as disaster risk management, health, and agriculture.

To ensure inclusivity, online consultations were conducted with organizations of persons with disabilities, including women-led organizations, in various regions of Kyrgyzstan. These consultations gathered valuable insights that were incorporated into the policy brief and presented to national working groups for integration into policy frameworks.

Through these strategic interventions, the initiative continues to break barriers and create an environment where persons with disabilities can enjoy equal opportunities and contribute meaningfully to society. UNDP stands as a testament to Kyrgyzstan's commitment to upholding the principles of the UN CRPD and fostering a more inclusive and accessible future for all.





The story of Danagul Oroskulova, or Dana, in Kyrgyzstan highlights the societal pressures women face when deviating from traditional roles. By their mid-20s, many women are judged for remaining unmarried, and by their late 30s, the pressure intensifies. Dana, a single woman nearing 40, has defied these expectations, dedicating herself to her community and driving change. As a deputy in the Aiyl Kenesh (village council) of multi-ethnic cross-border village of Kushtun, the area affected by conflict in September 2022, she advocates for gender equality and social cohesion, inspiring others.

Despite her accomplishments, Dana has faced dismissive attitudes from male colleagues and family members who question her priorities and ambition. Instead of being deterred, she has turned these challenges into opportunities to push boundaries. Through participation in UN Women organized psychosocial training, Dana developed tools to confront stereotypes head-on. "I realized I am not defined by others' expectations," she reflects. "I have the right to lead, to create, and to inspire change." Born in a remote village in Batken province, Dana was the youngest of six siblings. Her father, a revered orator, instilled in her the importance of service and courage, while her mother fostered empathy and compassion.

Dana's journey was far from linear. When her father fell ill, she became his primary caregiver for six years, placing her aspirations on hold. After his passing away, she struggled with grief and self-doubt. Her turning point came in 2023 when her village became part of a UN Women programme focusing on peacebuilding and empowerment. Through psychosocial training and art therapy, Dana rediscovered her voice and envisioned a future where she could lead and create meaningful change. Equipped with new skills and confidence, and given an opportunity to influence her community development, Dana initiated projects to support most vulnerable women and other members of community, including psychosocial support. "Access to mental health support is equally crucial as other basic needs as mental well-being could rebuild lives and stronger social bonds" she asserts. As a result, she gained trust of the majority of her community and was elected as a member to local council to address most pressing issues faced in her village: access to social services, education and mental health recovery following the violent conflict.

At 39, Dana is beginning to rewrite the narrative for women in her community. Her ambition now extends to joining Kyrgyzstan's Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament), where she hopes to challenge systemic barriers, advance gender equality, and demonstrate that leadership has no gender. Dana's story highlights her ability to identify the issues that others overlooked, demonstrating women leadership rooted in empathy, adaptability and resilience.





THE STORY OF SHABAS VELIBEKOV: LEZGIN LIFE IN KYRGYZSTAN

Shabas Velibekov is 77 years old. He lives in the village of Zapadnoe, in the municipality of Jany Pakhta, Sokuluk district, located 39 kilometers from Bishkek. Shabas is a native Lezgin, born and raised in Kyrgyzstan.

"In 1936 our parents were expelled, that is, they were repressed. When we came here, there was nothing here: desert, snakes, turtles and gophers. And in winter, wolves would come. Now it is very good to live in Kyrgyzstan, it is peaceful. The people are friendly. That's how we live, we became Kyrgyz too," he recalled.

Shabas and his wife are now retired. However, their youth was marked by hardship.

"The children were small. Everyone worked in the field, on beets. We worked 5-6 hectares each, it was very hard. But the children had to be raised on their feet. And now we do small household chores," says Shabas's wife.

Shabas recalls how his labor path was formed: "I finished 7 classes, then from the state farm

I was sent to Tokmak. And I became a mechanizer of a wide profile. I have been working for more than 40 years.

About 100 families live in Zapadnoye village. 70 percent are Lezgins and the rest are ethnic Kyrgyz who came from Tajikistan.

"We have no differences with the Kyrgyz. We live peacefully, amicably. We go to visit each other. Everyone has two holidays: Orozo Bayram and Kurban Bayram. We go to each other's houses, congratulate each other. We sit together, eat, read the Koran, make dua," Shabas said.

Shabas Velibekov's story is a vivid example of how people, despite difficulties and trials, can adapt to new conditions, preserve their culture and traditions, and at the same time become part of the friendly and hospitable society of Kyrgyzstan.

This material was prepared as part of joint project UNESCO -UNDP funded by the UN Peace-building Fund and implemented by the Association of Community Media.

https://youtu.be/hV-5VdmJY8E?si=_MWi1M-CenbqARtOb





In the early hours of a cold winter morning in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, Aitunuk Zhoomart kyzy began her daily swimming training, undeterred by the weather or her visual impairment. Zhoomart kyzy is a Paralympic champion in triathlon and swimming, overcoming numerous barriers to actively engage in social activities.

A turning point came when Zhoomart kyzy attended the Human Rights and Advocacy School for Young Persons with Disabilities, founded by the UN Human Rights' Regional Office for Central Asia in 2021. The School's curriculum, supported by UN Human Rights staff and external experts, caters to students with hearing, visual, and physical impairments.

There, she learned about international human rights standards and advocacy tools, igniting her passion for promoting inclusion and accessibility in Kyrgyzstan.

Her advocacy journey began when she discovered a loan error at her bank during a training session. Determined to address this oversight, Zhoomart kyzy began engaging with the bank, gradually realizing the broader challenges faced by people with disabilities in accessing banking services. Through collaboration, the bank became the first in Kyrgyzstan to offer contracts in Braille and install payment terminals with Braille touchpads and voice assistance. She also trained bank staff to improve their interaction with clients with disabilities.

Zhoomart kyzy's advocacy highlights the wider societal challenges that individuals with disabilities face. With over 217,000 people living with disabilities, her work has sparked wider change, inspiring individuals and institutions to champion inclusion and accessibility.

"The idea of creating an inclusive school was born from the need to strengthen the capacity of young people with disabilities to recognise and claim their rights, and to become active participants in processes that can change the situation of people with disabilities for the better," said Matilda Bogner, the Regional Representative of the UN Human Rights for Central Asia. "The schools' results exceeded all our expectations, as the graduates believed in themselves as agents of change and initiated many different activities in the field of accessibility,

access to education, awareness raising, access to decision-making processes and others. We are proud of our graduates!".

Zhakshylyk Kadyrov, a local activist and graduate of the same training program, conscious of the critical role young people with disabilities can play in shaping decision-making processes, took a stand to protect his constitutional right to vote.

Kadyrov submitted the petition to the Constitutional Court in Braile, regarding Article 61 of the Constitutional Law on Elections, requiring presidential and parliamentary candidates to deposit an electoral fee of 100,000 KGS (1,152 USD). Consequently, the Constitutional Court of the Kyrgyz Republic issued a decision to eliminate financial barriers for persons with disabilities to participate in political life and to amend the current legislation.

To implement the decision of the Constitutional Court, the Presidential Administration developed and submitted a corresponding draft law to the Jogorku Kenesh, which was adopted in three readings in January 2025 and signed by President Sadyr Japarov on 19 February.

Appealing discriminatory legal provisions through the efforts of young advocates like Kadyrov demonstrates the power of inclusive change.



