



**ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL
AUTHORITIES' ATTITUDES
TOWARDS RETURNED
MIGRANTS AND THEIR
READINESS TO
REINTEGRATE THEM**



Assessment of local authorities' attitudes towards returned migrants and their readiness to reintegrate them

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GLOSSARY

AO – Aiyl okmotu¹

AA – Aiyl aimak²

COVID-19 – Coronavirus Disease 2019

CSO – Civil society organization

FGD – Focus group discussion

FMS – Feldsher-midwife station

IDI – In-depth interview

IOM – International Organization for Migration/The UN Migration Agency

LGB – Local Government Body

LSG – Local Self-Government

NGO – Non-governmental organization

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

VA – Village administration

Migrants – Kyrgyzstani citizens who either were or are currently involved in migration on a permanent or temporary basis.

Migration – the movement of a person or a group of persons within Kyrgyzstan or across its borders.

Note: Given that this study focuses on emigrants and returned migrants, whenever the terms “migrants” and “migration” are mentioned in this document, they should be read as “emigrants” and “emigration”.

International migration – the movement of Kyrgyzstani citizens across Kyrgyzstan's borders for work or other purposes on a permanent or temporary basis.

Internal migration – the movement of Kyrgyzstani citizens within the borders of Kyrgyzstan for work or other purposes on a permanent or temporary basis.

Reintegration – a process which enables individuals to re-establish the economic, social and psychosocial relationships needed to maintain their lives, livelihoods, dignity and inclusion in civic life.

Returned migrants – migrants who came back from abroad to Kyrgyzstan.

Stigma – prejudices, stereotypes and negative judgments about someone, expressed in verbal or facial expressions.

Discrimination – a violation of human rights owing to a limitation of opportunities due to the presence of a particular characteristic (age, gender, nationality, religion, etc.)

¹ Aiyl okmotu (village administration) is an executive and administrative body under an aiyl (rural) or kenesh (settlement), which, within the limits of its authority, manages the affairs of the lives and well-being of the local community <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ky-kg/35209>.

² Aiylny aimak (city) is an administrative-territorial unit within the boundaries of which the local community exercises local self-government. An aiyl aimak may consist of one or more settlements. <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/203102/120?cl=ru-ru>.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive summary

The assessment of local authorities' attitudes towards returned migrants and their readiness to reintegrate them was implemented in the framework of the *“UNDP-IOM Seed Funding to fast-track joint response to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19: Analyzing and improving evidence based social cohesion and returnee inclusion in response to COVID-19”*. The main goal of this activity was to strengthen the evidence-based knowledge of UNDP and IOM/The UN Migration Agency on the attitudes of local authorities, their readiness to reintegrate returning migrants and their capacity building needs for leveraging inclusive approaches towards a sustainable recovery from COVID-19. To achieve this objective, a blended approach was applied using a qualitative study with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as well as individual questionnaires. The geography of the study covered 10 target communities from 4 regions (Osh, Batken, Chui, and Talas) of the Kyrgyz Republic affected by migration. The target audience included representatives of local governments and local keneshes,³ as well as local community leaders who work on or are aware of activities linked with Kyrgyzstani citizens returning from abroad, and migrants as well as their family members left behind.

Overall, the findings of this assessment are expected to inform future joint UNDP-IOM strategic responses to enhance the positive contribution of returnees and reduce impediments for their sustainable reintegration back home.

Socio-economic background in target local communities and assessment of local governance

The results of the joint assessment undertaken by UNDP and IOM highlight the main socio-economic problems faced by residents in 10 target local communities covered by the assessment. All survey participants mentioned the **lack of jobs** and **income generating opportunities** for the population as some of the main challenges being faced at the local

level. In addition, most of the villages surveyed do not have access to basic services, such as **potable water**. Therefore, people have to bring water from other localities or use water from a nearby ditch. This problem is aggravated in the regions of Batken and Osh by the absence of a landfill, which consequently results in water becoming polluted with household waste. A lack of water for agricultural purposes was also mentioned; in Talas oblast, the **shortage of irrigation water** leads to the low productivity of land, and, consequently, makes agriculture unprofitable. The results of the assessment also highlight a **shortage of accessible land** for construction, business, pastures or agriculture due to the transfer of land for other usages (transformations) or privatizations in three oblasts: Osh, Batken and Talas. Participants also identified **insufficient infrastructure**; in the regions of Chui, Batken and Osh, there is often a lack of or poorly maintained transport infrastructure, and in Talas, there is no infrastructure for leisure or entertainment for youth and children. Respondents from Osh Oblast also mentioned a lack of kindergartens, schools and hospitals.

The analysis of the results by regional disaggregation showed that southern regions are less satisfied with the work of local self-governments (LSGs) in addressing socio-economic issues, primarily observed in the region of Osh, followed by Batken Oblast. By contrast, the highest number of participants who were positively disposed towards heads of local governance structures was observed in the region of Chui, while in Talas Oblast, more than half of the respondents said they are rather satisfied with their work.

Effects of the pandemic on the situation in villages and village administrations

The socio-economic situation in villages and village administrations (VAs) deteriorated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The research results demonstrate that local authorities in target commu-

³ Local kenesh is a representative body of local self-government, elected directly by the local community of the corresponding city (city kenesh), ayil aimak (ayil kenesh). https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/ZakonodatelstvoMyyzambar/ZakonyMyyzambar/O_vyborax_deputatov_mestnyx_keneshi/

nities were not prepared for a crisis situation, visible through limited support provided to the local population and returned migrants, as a result of the pandemic and lack of specific knowledge and tools how to properly assist thereof. Because of the pandemic, instead of implementing their development plans approved previously, local authorities had to reallocate funds to counter the spread of coronavirus infection and provide aid to the population. It is important to note that during the pandemic, VAs in the region of Osh worked more actively by providing targeted social aid to people in need.

Among the negative consequences of the pandemic, respondents mentioned a decrease in the quality of education due to online learning, as well as significant difficulties in selling harvested crops because of the lockdown. Despite the negative effects of the pandemic and the difficulties it created in target localities, some positive effects were still mentioned, such as increased social cohesion, mutual help, patriotism, and the reunification of families with the return of migrants. Positive examples of joint problem-solving initiatives can serve as a basis for further interactions between the population, in particular migrants, and LSGs.

Migration in local communities: evidence, reasons and mutual relations

Migration destinations differ depending on the region of residence in Kyrgyzstan. More than 90% of the residents of southern regions chose to travel to the Russian Federation, while a significant part of the residents of northern regions also migrate to Kazakhstan and Turkey, in addition to the Russian Federation. Internal migration is more common among residents of northern regions. Regional variations can also be observed in the dynamics of return migration. According to the respondents, more than half of migrants from northern regions returned during the pandemic, while only a third of migrants returned to their native villages in southern oblasts.

The local kenesh (parliament) and the ayil okmotu (AO - village administration) keep official records of departing and arriving migrants in only two oblasts (Chui and Batken). These are based on population censuses and knowledge of other organizations that are aware of the entry and exit of migrants. During the pandemic, records of arriving migrants were also kept in some rural districts in the regions of Osh and Talas, in order to control the spread of COVID-19.

Among the positive aspects of migration, some respondents mentioned the improved living standards

of emigrants, which also had a positive impact on the village and community in their country of origin. Emigrants procured, renovated, and built new homes for them and their families. They also were able to invest in their children's education and in some cases even opened new businesses back home, when possible. Among other positive aspects, very few respondents also mentioned newly acquired professional skills, knowledge, and experience which they were able to use and apply at home.

However, despite the fact that remittances had a positive impact on the quality of life for migrants and their families, **97% of their incomes acquired abroad were channeled into consumption**. Therefore, investing remittances in businesses, local services or local economic development was not seen as a priority for migrants. Despite several occasional successful examples of initiatives taken by migrants to invest in local economic development or businesses in their countries of origin, there is much more to be done at the institutional and policy levels to make this process effective, inclusive and sustainable.

Among some negative facets of migration, respondents also pointed to health problems from difficult working conditions, the issue of children and elderly being left behind, loss of human capital and inability of migrants to apply their skills in the labour market.

Attitudes towards returned migrants and their reintegration

According to the study, the main reason for migrants' return was the COVID-19 pandemic, as the multiple restriction measures left countless migrants unemployed without any prospect for a future in countries of destination. Furthermore, most of them were also alarmed about their and their families' health. Consequently, an estimated 50,000-200,000 migrants returned home, where they find an already overstretched socio-economic environment.

In general, the attitudes of migrants' relatives and local community members are positive, which is also somewhat the case on the part of local authorities. Many authorities however express indifference to returnees. The **COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to some changes in the attitudes between local authorities, migrants and migrants' relatives**. In order to prevent the spread of the virus, local authorities closely interacted with migrants, and monitored their health and movement in the community (especially if they needed to enter quarantine), which was mostly assessed as a positive measure by a majority of respondents from Osh, Talas and Batken oblasts.

Despite the overall positive attitudes of local residents towards returned migrants, women confessed a **more negative attitude towards female migrants as compared to men** in all focus group discussions (FGDs). Consequently, returned women mentioned stigmatization, criticisms and rumors about the nature of their work undertaken abroad. In some localities in Batken and Talas oblasts, male migrants were also exposed to stigmatization due to established stereotypes, including the condemnation of men if their wives engaged in labor migration.

Residents' **attitude towards returned migrants**, however, significantly **worsened during the pandemic**. Residents became more cautious in their interactions with returned migrants and consequently avoided or limited contact with them due to the fear of contracting COVID-19. Even after migrants had undergone quarantine and spent time in observation facilities, residents remained hostile, especially in southern regions.

Difficulties faced by migrants upon returning and their situation before the pandemic.

Returned migrants face a variety of challenges back home, especially resulting from the unplanned and "forced" nature of their return in the context of COVID-19. Many of these issues are of a financial nature, considering **difficulties in finding employment, paying loans** and subsequently supporting their families. In addition, numerous migrants mentioned social challenges such as a **lack of reintegration services, poor access to public services, and challenges in being accepted in the local community**. In terms of health, respondents highlighted health problems upon return due to poor working conditions, difficulties in accessing local medical services because of the inability to obtain insurance and a shortage of guidance and information. A systemic lack of a reintegration and support mechanisms at the local level mentioned by most of those surveyed reflects the almost non-existent role of local governments in providing support to returnees, especially as a result of COVID-19.

In addition, the majority of migrants mentioned **documentation and paperwork** issues. In particular, the lack of information and support from local authorities were raised regarding this issue. Therefore, migrants are often not informed about the necessary procedures, rules and conditions to be followed in order to obtain documents and various

certificates. Participants in the study from Talas and Osh regions noted the very complicated bureaucratic system forcing them to travel to several localities in order to get a document or certificate for them or their children, which involves significant time, resources and effort.

Insufficient access to accurate and reliable knowledge, information and tools back home is another aspect to be highlighted. Respondents mentioned a lack of available and up-to-date information on their rights in countries of destination and of origin, as well as on the few available services and investment opportunities that exist for them at home.

Even though the main target group of the study was returned migrants, the assessment therefore identified a strong **need to support migrants during the pre-departure stage** with proper information, guidance, and training. While most potential migrants at the local level are young and often plan to migrate immediately after graduating from school, they often base their decision to migrate on rumors from relatives or friends. They consequently lack genuine and updated information regarding immigration rules, employment opportunities, working conditions and the specific skills needed in countries of destination. Therefore, respondents mentioned that they often faced detention, inclusion in black-lists, imprisonment and deportation after migrating abroad.

Access to services for returned migrants

In general, despite difficulties for migrants in accessing public services, authorities and returned migrants interviewed indicated that emigrants formally benefit from equal access to services compared to the rest of the population. Despite that, the majority of those interviewed from Talas, Batken and Osh regions stated that migrants' families faced discrimination in accessing humanitarian aid during COVID-19 and jobs in the community. According to them, local authorities assume that such families are wealthier (even though this was untrue in most cases) and channeled available support to other families. In terms of employment, when hiring a new employee, organizations often give preference to candidates who have never migrated due to the fear that a returned migrant may decide to emigrate again.

According to local government representatives from some local communities, migrants benefit from additional services. These particular authorities surveyed provide them with psychological support and

involve various local organizations in conducting training courses and carrying out awareness campaigns on COVID-19 risks and safety measures. This engagement demonstrates that local authorities are able to reintegrate migrants effectively if they possess the necessary capacity, equipment and support.

The role of returned migrants in local community development

In every target region except for Chui, **returned migrants play a role in improving village infrastructure**, providing material assistance to socially vulnerable groups of the population, and sharing their professional skills and knowledge with other villagers. In the regions of Batken, Osh and Talas, migrants have established informal structures and/or funds to implement local development projects. However, in many cases, such projects are solely driven by migrants, not implemented on a regular basis, not necessarily in line with local strategies or priorities, and ultimately are not being implemented with the participation, engagement and support of local authorities.

VAs do not place priority on including migrants in the implementation of local development initiatives and generally do not involve them in their work. Although migrants mentioned that they do not face any specific obstacles from local governance structures, they usually do not receive any support. Notably, **some returned migrants showed an interest in investing back home but pinpointed the absence of business advisory support** at the local level, vague legal norms, and a bureaucratic legal and institutional framework as barriers in achieving this. Without this required cooperation, migrants have typically not developed trustful relationships towards local governments compared to other actors at the local level (religious, health, educational, local community etc.), which prevents an improved ability for migrants to invest in local development.

Interactions between returned migrants and local authorities

The study revealed **generally neutral and passive relations between local authorities and migrants**, considering the lack of cooperative partnerships. Exceptions were identified in Osh and Batken oblasts, where there have been more positive trends, likely owing to some previous positive experiences of migrant engagement in local development.

Online channels constitute the main instruments

of communication between migrants and local authorities, while offline communication is rarely used, according to government representatives (40%) and migrants (67%). Local authorities and migrants mostly interact on documentation and land issues. The low level of interaction can be explained by the fact that migrants are accustomed to solving their issues on their own or with the help of relatives, without seeking the assistance of local authorities. This practice was formed over the years as a result of negative past experiences, when migrants turned to local authorities for help but did not receive sufficient support. The low level of trust also explains why Kyrgyzstani migrants do not approach local authorities for support upon return nor partner with them for implementing local development initiatives.

Despite this passive relationship, the survey provided some positive curious insights where the **majority of local authorities interviewed expressed their eagerness to work with migrants, support their reintegration back home and engage them in local development, if properly capacitated and guided throughout the process. The same is applicable to migrants (80%) who showed a strong interest to engage in local development by investing at home**, subject to improved transparency, effective communication, partnerships, mutual trust with local governments, and guidance on available investment opportunities at home.

The role and potential of local authorities in reintegrating returned migrants

A majority of local government representatives (70%) assessed their role in working with migrants as important, particularly in the regions of Batken and Osh and less so in Chui and Talas oblasts. Nearly all government representatives noted the need to improve work with returned migrants. As some of the surveyed local authorities pointed out, it would be beneficial to **include migrants when developing and implementing strategic development plans in their localities**. Authorities and migrants must interact more intensively with regard to services delivery and development at the local level.

The analysis by regional disaggregation shows that local authorities engage more intensively with migrants in Osh and Batken oblasts compared to the regions of Talas and Chui. Representatives of local governments in the regions of Osh and Batken interact with returned migrants on issues of documentation, employment, the allocation of land, humanitarian aid, and the implementation of joint local projects. Local authorities in these areas involve

various NGOs and public foundations that jointly implement initiatives with migrants. Moreover, as approximately half of FGD respondents pointed out, in some cases migrants themselves take the initiative and turn to local authorities with their ideas for local community development. However, as these sporadic initiatives are driven by migrants, a more proactive role of local authorities should be encouraged.

Nevertheless, the majority of interviewed local authorities showed a high interest in partnering and working with migrants, supporting their reintegration back home and engaging them in local development, if properly capacitated and guided throughout the process. **Local governments voiced their lack of knowledge on topics such as effective reintegration, investment, documentation, psychosocial needs, legal support** and many other areas, as one of the main obstacles that prevent them from properly supporting migrants back home.

Local authorities consider that **many obstacles they face can be overcome by actively working with development partners, NGOs, international organizations, donors and state structures**, and through targeted capacity building activities and on-the-job training.

Financial challenges can be overcome by designing **innovative programmatic and financial solutions**, engaging in new partnerships, and identifying alternative fundraising opportunities, instruments,

and funding sources to address local challenges. This will necessarily include building local capacities to transform migration from a perceived problem into an opportunity worth seizing, making the most of migrants' knowledge, skills, networks, and remittances for sustainable local development at home. Going beyond encouraging direct financial investments by migrants, which may be more limited as a result of restrictions induced by COVID-19, it is important to consider new ways to approach the issue. Migrants could therefore act as bridges between their local community and potential investors, including from counties of destination. Their networks and newly acquired skills can benefit both sending and receiving communities, if properly managed and coordinated by local authorities.

To achieve this, it is necessary to create **systemic and efficient communications between migrants and local authorities** using all available media tools, followed by a proper institutionalization of existing informal structures and funds established by migrants in their native communities. Even though local authorities participate to a certain extent in the reintegration and engagement of migrants in some regions, their role needs to be strengthened by improving communication and involving migrants from the design stage of local socio-economic development plans, to the funding of joint initiatives, and their implementation. The success of such an approach is directly contingent on the principles of transparency, coordination and mutual trust.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, Kyrgyzstan has witnessed several waves of high migration outflows. Over 1 million citizens of Kyrgyzstan, many of whom are young people and qualified professionals, have engaged in external migration on a temporary or permanent basis, depleting the country of essential human capital and socio-economic development potential and causing significant impacts on the country's economy and development.

Migrant workers outside of the country represent up to 20% of the economically active population, and a significant proportion of them are young people aged 15-29 (60%).⁴ Among them, female migrants account for 40% of total migration flows and are especially vulnerable in their ability to secure decent work opportunities and social protection, largely caused by women accounting for the majority of labor working in the informal sector.

The leading destination country for Kyrgyzstani migrants is the Russian Federation, accounting for 91% of migrants,⁵ followed by Kazakhstan (150,000) and Turkey (30,000). Other notable countries of destination for Kyrgyzstani migrants, which have the most active and developed labor markets include China, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, South Korea, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, among others. The main causes of outward migration are primarily economic and political, and are linked to a wide range of factors including, inter alia, the collapse of the local economy, the inadequate development of employment systems, the limited effectiveness of public policy and governance in the fields of labor and employment, low labor productivity and quality of jobs available, insufficient land in densely populated southern regions, climate change and natural disasters.

Migrants overseas directly impact the well-being of their households in their home country. It is re-

ported that every fourth household in Kyrgyzstan has one or more family members who are migrant workers. Despite the significant remittances that migrants send from abroad to contribute to the national economy, especially at the household level, reducing poverty rates by 6-7% between 2010-2014, they are mostly neglected in the development agenda of their home communities. In other words, remittances are mostly spent on consumption and are less channeled into savings, investment, entrepreneurship, and productive development activities. Kyrgyzstan is among the top five countries globally with the highest share of remittances as a proportion of gross domestic product. Remittance inflows hovered around 30% of the country's GDP in 2012-2019, (around 9 times more than FDI flows), with USD 2.5 billion in remittances in 2019, and over 97% being channeled into consumption. Although the impact on the economy must be assessed and qualified further, remittances drove up demand for the Kyrgyz Som, leading to a currency appreciation (of over 10% according to the IMF),⁶ higher relative labor costs and higher prices, discouraging investment in improving competitiveness and labor from engaging in export-oriented activities.

The positive effects of migration on economic development are therefore still barely observed in rural communities from where most migrants originate, and so rural-urban disparities are continually increasing. The rural population remains the most vulnerable, both socially and economically, because it typically lacks access to better services, education and income generating opportunities compared to those living in urban areas of the country, which tend to be more developed. With such a history of out-migration, the pandemic-induced quarantines and economic downturns have resulted in an estimated 50,000-200,000⁷ migrants returning to their communities back home thus far. The figure could be far higher due to undetected irregular migration. These migration flows have intensified social tensions from the perceived strain on already over-stretched fiscal budgets due to economic recession,

⁴ IOM Kyrgyzstan Mapping.

⁵ Official statistics of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, which collects data on border crossings, show that in 2019, over 959,000 citizens of Kyrgyzstan arrived in the Russian Federation.

⁶ Kyrgyz Republic and the IMF.

⁷ Official statistics from Russian Federation identify almost 1 million Kyrgyzstani labor migrants who crossed the border in 2009. Within these, almost 900,000 are thought to be labor migrants. The data also finds that the Russian Federation lost at least 20% of its labor force.

limiting access to public services and employment opportunities. Returning migrants may consequently face particularly heightened discrimination and hardship upon their return, driven by systemic issues such as the weak social contract between state and society, deficits in the rule of law, and wide inequalities and vulnerabilities that reduce resilience in society, which existed prior to the pandemic.

The impact of migration is mainly felt at the local level, from where the majority of migrants originate and subsequently return to. Given the profound local dimension of return migration, the role of local authorities in providing support that migrants require for their sustainable reintegration is becoming more crucial. Understanding their role in this process and supporting returnees as a result of the pandemic, including from the local development and social cohesion lenses, is a key step for devising concrete reintegration measures in the short-term and long-term, while assuming that some returnees are more likely to consider re-migrating than others.

Considering that a lack of proper data is one of the main challenges for devising proper migration and COVID-19 recovery policies and responses at the local level, to better understand the readiness and perceptions of local authorities to support the reintegration of returning migrants, their opinions and attitudes towards returnees, capacity gaps, and

possible root causes of tensions (with some of them amplified as a result of the pandemic), UNDP and IOM undertook a dedicated assessment in 10 target communities in the regions of Osh, Batken, Chui and Talas affected by migration. The assessment aims to create the basis for designing efforts towards the sustainable reintegration of returning migrants, including support for socio-economic recovery at the national and local levels, the inclusion of migrants into national recovery plans, community social cohesion and the strengthening of ongoing and future joint strategic interventions by UNDP and IOM for the next few years. The findings from this joint assessment outline concrete areas of future joint UNDP-IOM interventions at the local level, aimed at addressing current gaps and harnessing the benefits of migration for obtaining sustainable and inclusive local development, and are fully in line with both agencies' strategies, mandates, and complementary expertise.

Such strategic interventions could include strengthening the role of local authorities in managing migration effectively for the benefit of migrants, their families and local communities; providing sustainable reintegration support for returning migrants, including support for socio-economic recovery at the national and local levels; including migrants into national and local recovery plans; mainstreaming migration in local policymaking; engaging migrants

in local development; and promoting social cohesion at the local level.

Methodology

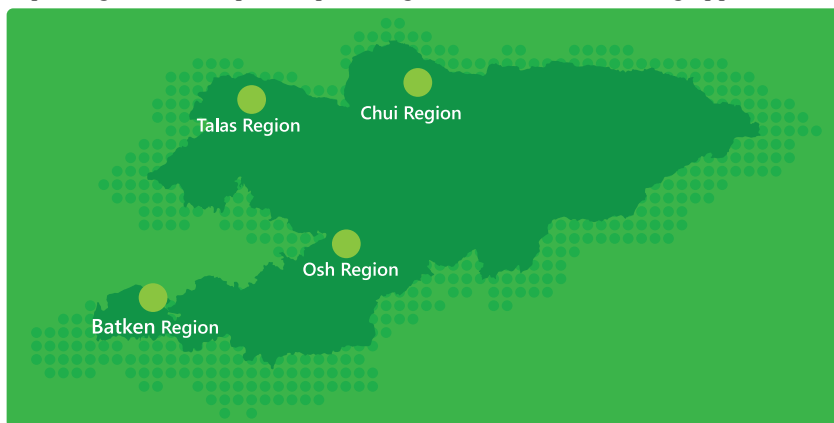
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to assess the attitudes of local authorities and their willingness to reintegrate returned migrants for informing future IOM and UNDP activities. In doing so, this report analyzes local authorities' views on the prospects and motivations regarding local development, as well as the capacity building needs for a sustainable recovery after COVID-19. It will serve as a basis for future strategic responses to enhance the positive impact of returned migrants, remove barriers to their sustainable reintegration and provide effective pre-departure support.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

As part of this project, the study has the following objectives:

- Assessing LGB's understanding of their role in supporting returned migrants,
- Exploring the opinions and attitudes of local authorities towards migrants who have returned as a result of COVID-19,
- Examining the attitudes and perceptions of returned migrants towards LGBs,
- Understanding the attitudes of local communities towards local authorities' measures aimed at interacting with the population (including migrants), promoting the transfer of skills learned abroad, improving local development, providing basic services and creating opportunities for income



generation.

Geography of the study

10 target communities from 4 regions (Osh, Batken, Chui, and Talas) of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Target audience

- Representatives of local governments and local keneshes⁸, as well as local community leaders who work on or are aware of activities linked with Kyrgyzstani citizens returning from abroad,

⁸ Local kenesh is a representative body of local self-government, elected directly by the local community of the corresponding city (city kenesh), ayil aimak (ayil kenesh). https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/ZakonodatelstvoMyyzambar/ZakonyMyyzambar/O_vyborax_deputatov_mestnyx_keneshei/

- The local community, represented by migrants returning from overseas due to COVID-19, migrants overseas, and members of families with at least one family member abroad.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLING

Due to the epidemiological situation, many people from Kyrgyzstan who were working abroad were “forced” to return home, since the crisis and restrictions affected almost every country in the world and caused a significant reduction in labor market demand. Local governments can play an important role in reintegrating these returnees.

Before this assessment, there was no data on the level of support and interests of LGBs on this issue nor on authorities' attitudes towards returned migrants. Therefore, before devising concrete socio-economic reintegration policies and measures at the local level, it is necessary to understand how local authorities perceive their role in this process, their attitudes towards returned migrants and their openness to engage and support returned migrants, especially through the lenses of local development and social cohesion. This required extensive research and the collection of reliable, relevant and accurate data. In order to achieve the project's objectives, the company's experts suggested using a qualitative study approach, which consisted of **1) in-depth interviews (IDIs) with representatives of LGBs and local leaders, and 2) focus group discussions (FGDs) with migrants** who have returned to their area of residence due to the pandemic, migrants abroad, and members of families with at least one migrant.

In addition, at the end of the IDIs and FGDs, participants were requested to fill short questionnaires that allowed the collection of additional quantitative data on their specific profile, migration plans and level of trust towards local authorities, compared to other local actors in the community.

For each of the outlined instruments, a research toolkit was developed by the company's specialists in close coordination with UNDP and IOM representatives.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

In order to obtain robust data on the attitudes of local authorities towards returned migrants and their willingness to work on reintegrating them, increasing social cohesion, and developing a plan for post-pandemic sustainable development, qualitative research was conducted through in-depth interviews among local government officials (in the city hall, AO and local kenesh) and other local leaders.

The interviewer worked according to a guide, which provided a special conversation script that set the topics for discussion, without limiting the interviewees' interpretations. Overall, 20 IDIs were conducted within the project, two per target local community. The duration of IDIs did not exceed 1.5 hours and involved open discussions based on the developed questionnaires.

SAMPLING

The sample settlements were carefully selected by UNDP and IOM based on having high rates of external migration in Kyrgyzstan. The study covered 10 target communities in 4 regions, identified by UNDP representatives. The research sample covered between 1 and 3 districts in the target regions, and between 2 and 4 target communities were selected in each district. 2 IDIs in each target community were conducted (1 IDI with a representative of the city hall or AO, and 1 IDI with a representative of the local kenesh or local leader), to provide a more extensive understanding of LGBs' perception of returned

migrants and readiness to work on their reintegration.

The research sample, which UNDP agreed on, is presented in the table below:

■ **Qualitative research sample (IDI):**

Region	District	AO/Village	TA	Amount of IDI
Batken	Kadamjay district	Kotormo village	1 Representative of LGB 1 Local leader	2
		Orozbekovo village	1 Representative of LGB 1 Local leader	2
		Ak-Turpak AA	1 Representative of LGB 1 Local leader	2
Talas	Kara-Buura district	Kara-Buura AA	1 Representative of LGB 1 Local leader	2
		Amanbaevo village	1 Representative of LGB 1 Local leader	2
Chui	Panfilov district	Voznesenovka AA	1 Representative of LGB 1 Local leader	2
Osh	Nookat district	Nookat city	1 Representative of LGB 1 Local leader	2
		Toolos AA	1 Representative of LGB 1 Local leader	2
	Uzgen district	Bolshevik village(Ak-Jar)	1 Representative of LGB 1 Local leader	2
	Kara-Suu district	Jany-Aryk AA	1 Representative of LGB 1 Local leader	2
Total				20

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

As part of the project, FGDs were organized with local community members who returned from migration in order to obtain comprehensive and multidimensional data. The discussions helped to identify the needs of returned Kyrgyzstani migrants and determine priorities for their reintegration into communities.

The FGDs lasted **approximately 90-120 minutes**.

SAMPLING

20 FGDs were conducted, covering target communities in Osh, Batken, Chui and Talas regions. Two FGDs were conducted in each AA (1 with women and 1 with men), in order to provide more comprehensive data on the specific attitudes and needs of men and women returnees, which can significantly differ.

Since the project was focused on analyzing the opinions of returned Kyrgyzstani migrants regarding the activities of LGBs that aimed to support migrants, it was important to objectively select participants for the FGDs.

In order to conduct the assessment, different groups of returned migrants, including men and women, and

younger and older generations, were selected. Accordingly, each group included migrants in the 24-55 age range. This sampling ensured the opportunity to hear the voices of citizens representing certain social positions and, at the same time, allow participants to freely express their opinions.

■ Recommended distribution of FGDs

Region	District	Village/AA	Amount of FGDs	Group composition
Batken	Kadamjay district	Kotormo village	2	Mixed age groups: one with men and one with women, aged 24-55 years old
		Orozbekovo village	2	
		Ak-Turpak village	2	
Talas	Kara-Buura district	Kara-Buura village	2	
		Amanbaevo village	2	
Chui	Panfilov district	Erkin-Sai village	2	
Osh	Nookat district	Nookat city	2	
		Toolos AA	2	
	Uzgen district	Bolshevik village (Ak-Jar)	2	
	Kara-Suu district	Jany-Aryk AA	2	
Total			20	

1. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Socio-demographic profile of study participants

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF IDI PARTICIPANTS

Over the course of the study, 20 IDIs were conducted with representatives of LGBs, local leaders, and representatives of the local kenesh. A more detailed distribution of the sample can be seen below (Table 1.1).

■ **Table 1.1 IDI sample distribution**

Target group	Nº
LGBs	10
Local keneshes	6
Local leaders	4
Total	20

The survey covered four regions in the Kyrgyz Republic: Batken, Talas, Chui, and Osh. The IDI participants' age ranged from 24 to 64 years. The majority of the participants were men (65%), and 35% were women.

■ **Table 1.2. Regional distribution of IDI respondents**

Region	AO/Village	TA	Amount of IDI
Batken	Kotormo village	1 Representative of LGB, 1 Local kenesh	2
	Orozbekovo village	1 Representative of LGB, 1 Local kenesh	2
	Ak- Turpak AA	1 Representative of LGB, 1 Local kenesh	2
Talas	Kara-Buura AA	1 Representative of LGB, 1 Local kenesh	2
	Amanbaevo village	1 Representative of LGB, 1 Local kenesh	2
Chui	Voznesenovka AA	1 Representative of LGB, 1 Local kenesh	2
Osh	Nookat city	1 Representative of LGB, 1 Local leader	2
	Toolos AA	1 Representative of LGB, 1 Local leader	2
	Bolshevik village (Ak-Jar)	1 Representative of LGB, 1 Local leader	2
	Jany-Aryk AA	1 Representative of LGB, 1 Local leader	2
Total			20

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF FGD PARTICIPANTS

The study included 20 FGDs with people who had returned from overseas due to the coronavirus pandemic. A total of 158 respondents were interviewed. Of these, 78 were women and 80 were men.

■ **Table 1.3. Regional, age, and gender distribution of FGD respondents**

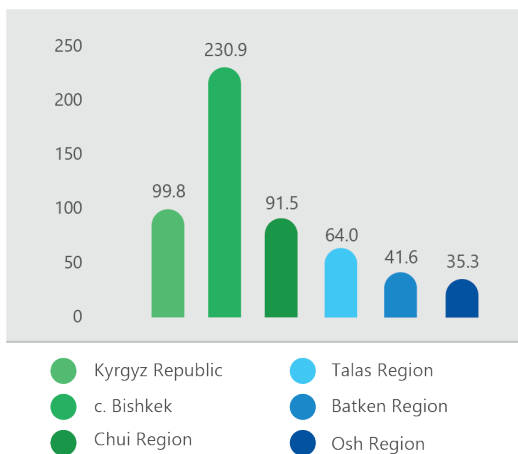
Village/AA	Gender	Group composition	Nº
Kotormo village	male	22-45	7
	female	30-55	8
Orozbekovo village	male	24-55	8
	female	27-55	8
Ak-Turpak village	male	24-50	8
	female	22-46	8
Kyzyl Adyr village	male	25-57	8
	female	24-46	7
Amanbaevo village	male	24-56	8
	female	26-59	8
Erkin-Sai village	male	24-35	8
	female	26-55	8
Nookat city	male	20-55	8
	female	27-50	8
Toolos AA	male	24-52	8
	female	26-54	8
Bolshevik village (Ak-Jar)	male	29-55	8
	female	25-42	8
Jany-Aryk AA	male	24-53	8
	female	26-43	8
	20		158

2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT IN TARGET LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Socio-economic environment in target local communities

Different regions of the Kyrgyz Republic present wide disparities in terms of socio-economic development indicators such as poverty⁹ levels, gross regional product (GRP), and dependence on migrant remittances. A particularly significant gap in the levels of development can be observed between the capital and other regions, between northern and southern regions, and between urban and rural areas. Thus, the GRP of the capital, Bishkek, for 2019 was 6.5 times higher than in Osh Region, which had the lowest indicator among all regions of the country.

■ **Diagram 1. Gross regional product per capita, thousand soms (2019)**



These gaps in socio-economic development levels across different regions explain the outflow of migration from southern regions of Kyrgyzstan to

the north of the country and abroad.¹⁰ As a result, household dependency on migrant remittances also considerably differs by region. The impact of remittances on poverty reduction is most significant in southern regions of the country (Batken and Osh regions),¹¹ which consequently makes them the most vulnerable to the economic consequences of the ongoing pandemic.

According to a 2019 study undertaken by IOM¹², only the improvement of the socio-economic situation in Kyrgyzstan and the creation of income generating opportunities in local communities could encourage young migrants who are abroad to return home. However, the COVID-19 pandemic pressured many Kyrgyzstani citizens to return home in 2020 and, as a result, returned migrants faced the same unfavorable socio-economic environments in their villages, which had caused outward labor migration in the first place.

2.1 Socio-economic environment in local communities and assessment of local governance

General socio-economic environment in villages Rural districts of Kyrgyzstan typically experience difficult socio-economic contexts. This chapter analyzes common problems observed in selected regions by participants in the study, and illustrates challenges faced by local populations from target local communities. A number of common problems outlined by the participants from this assessment were analyzed and grouped as follows:

⁹ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic. Access: <http://www.stat.kg/ru/opendata/category/120/>

¹⁰ UNDP, Asian Development Bank. 2020. COVID-19 in the Kyrgyz Republic: Impact assessment on the socio-economic situation and vulnerability and policy responses. Access: https://kyrgyzstan.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/UNDP-ADB%2520SEIA_11%2520August%25202020%2520Rus.pdf

¹¹ Asian Development Bank. 2019. Kyrgyz Republic: enhancing growth potential. Access: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/648501/kyrgyz-republic-growth-potential-ru.pdf>

¹² International Organization for Migration (IOM). 2019. External youth migration in Central Asia: risk analysis and minimization of negative impacts. Access: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/external_youth_migration_ru.pdf

Economic problems



high unemployment rate



lack of funding for development at the regional level

Social problems



lack of access to water for drinking, household needs and irrigation



poor social infrastructure in health care, education and leisure



difficulties in obtaining land



poor transport infrastructure

Both migrants and representatives of local governments who participated in the survey noted that unemployment is one of the main socio-economic problems in their places of residence. Most survey participants mentioned the lack of jobs and income generating opportunities for the population, and the shortage of local industries (workshops, factories, plants, enterprises) as important challenges. The local population has been forced to stay at home without the opportunity to earn money to support themselves and their families. This situation explains the high household dependency on migration and remittances, over 97% of which are channeled into consumption.

Another vital problem raised by most interviewees concerns the lack of access to water for personal, household, and agricultural purposes. This problem was mentioned in 80% of the surveyed villages, except for Toolos village and Nookat town in Osh Region.

The lack of access to basic services such as drinking water is one of the greatest concerns for all parties, namely migrants, their families and representatives of local governments. However, without investments and financial resources allocated for that purpose, this issue is likely to remain unresolved. Water supply networks were built in Soviet times in most of the country's villages and are now outdated. The interviewees mentioned constant disturbances in their water supply due to old pipes. These circumstances force villagers to look for water in neighboring communities or to use water from ditches.

This situation is exacerbated by the lack of a proper waste management system in Batken¹³ and Osh regions.¹⁴ According to the respondents, the absence of a landfill in these areas leads to the pollution of irrigation ditches. Many residents expressed their concerns that this will affect the population's, and especially children's, health.

Thus, drinking water is neither safe nor physically available, which is considered a violation of one of the fundamental human rights, the right to water. Everyone has the right to have access to water that is safe, of good quality, affordable in price, and physically accessible.¹⁵ The report of the Akyikatchy (Ombudsman) of the Kyrgyz Republic states that, despite the fact that all levels of government are making various attempts to resolve issues with the provision of safe drinking water for the population, such as the adoption of the "Strategy for the development of drinking water supplies and water discharge in populated areas of the Kyrgyz Republic by 2026," the Government of Kyrgyzstan does not allocate sufficient funds to address the issues linked with the supply of safe drinking water to the population.¹⁶

Citizens reported problems related to the accessibility and lack of water resources to use for personal, household and agricultural purposes



This problem exists in 80% of assessed villages, except localities such as Toolos and Nookat in Osh Region



Waste problems were noted in two regions: Batken and Osh



¹³ Orozbekovo village.

¹⁴ Dzhany Aryk and Bolshevik villages.

¹⁵ Official site of the United Nations. Access: <https://www.un.org/ru/sections/issues-depth/water/index.html>

¹⁶ Ombudsman (Akyikatchy) of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2018. Special report «The Right of citizens to access to clean drinking water and sanitation». Access: <https://ombudsman.kg/>

Another related problem is the lack of financial resources in the country to address and solve existing socio-economic challenges. Leaders of local communities and heads of VAs emphasized the fact that the funds allocated by the state are not sufficient to address the social needs of the local population and ensure their access to basic local services. It should be noted that, according to the Joint Framework Document¹⁷ prepared by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Coordination Council of Development Partners, regional development does not solely depend on public funding. It also relies on the support and initiative of the private sector. However, for expanding private sector involvement, it also needs government support for eliminating challenges in the business industry. Therefore, there is a strong need to devise a proper institutional set-up and sustainable financing mechanisms at the local level, aimed at harnessing a stronger partnership between local authorities, local populations, CSOs, the private sector, and in particular, migrants, as potential investors and contributors to local development.

Another problem mentioned in 40% of FGDs was a lack of educational institutions in villages, namely kindergartens and schools. In addition, there is a strong need to renovate and improve the conditions in existing schools. A similar situation is present with healthcare facilities, which lack the proper infrastructure and have poor equipment. Participants also mentioned the insufficient number of hospitals or their obsolescence. This fact, once again, indicates that there is insufficient government funding in these regions and the need for private investment.

The study results also highlight the difficulties caused by land scarcity in three regions: Osh, Batken and Talas.¹⁸ Many residents in the surveyed VAs cannot obtain land for building houses, commercial purposes, or breeding. Local governments cannot allocate land to the population for the construction of houses because many land plots are still in the process of being transferred from categories of agricultural lands, forest, water funds and reserve properties to other unrelated land categories or land types.¹⁹ Due to the shortage of land plots, local authorities in VAs are unable to fulfill their duties, especially in allocating land to poor and young families.

We, the government, are obliged to allocate a land plot to every citizen born. But these lands have not been sufficiently allocated.

Local Council, Amanbaevo village, Talas Oblast. In-depth interview

Local authorities' timely resolution of this problem would allow migrants to contribute not only to improving the situation of their own households, but also to the overall development of villages.

Participants also identified problems with the transport infrastructure in Chui, Batken and Osh regions, but were not mentioned by interviewees of Talas Oblast. Study participants affirmed that roads in their villages had not been renovated in a long time, which limits mobility and in turn can affect many aspects of life. For example, this may lead to difficulties for rural residents in accessing transport, engaging in economic activities for rural residents (export of goods, taxi services), and obtaining educational and healthcare services since some schools and hospitals are located in neighboring localities.



¹⁷ Joint framework document. 2019. Access: <http://www.municipalitet.kg/ru/article/full/2140.html>

¹⁸ Bolshevik village and Nookat town in Osh Oblast, Orozbekovo and Kotormo villages in Batken Oblast and Amanbaevo village in Talas Oblast.

¹⁹ Law of the Kyrgyz Republic «On the transfer (transformation) of land plots» dated 15 July 2013. Access: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/203953>

Chui Oblast

Problems linked to the lack of access to water were noted in all of the oblasts assessed except Chui. The specificity of this issue in Chui Region is seasonal; although there is access to drinking and irrigation water, there is a shortage of irrigation water in the summer, and villages are deprived of water in the winter since sources freeze and pipes become obsolete and prone to breaking.

I think that the main problem is water, because there is not enough irrigation water in summer, even though we are located at the beginning of the source. And in winter, we cannot do our laundry, because the water freezes for two or three months.

Erkin Sai village, Chui Oblast. FGD women

Talas Oblast

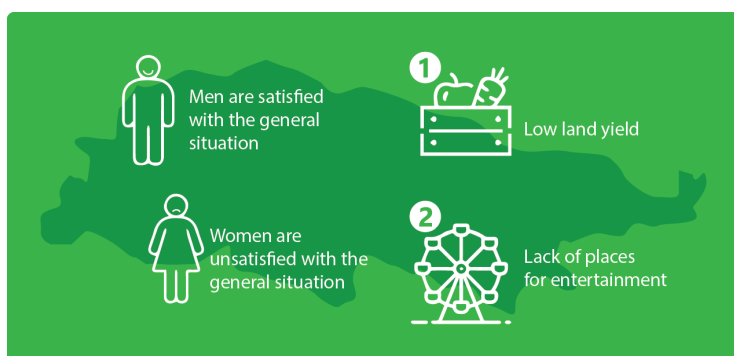
Residents in Talas Oblast, in addition to the main problems mentioned, noted several other difficulties in their villages.

Firstly, land productivity is low due to insufficient irrigation water. Many participants expressed a desire to engage in agricultural activities but said that it would be unprofitable due to the lack of water. For this reason, many residents are “forced” to migrate in order to receive higher wages.

First of all, we need to resolve the issue with water. Since the earth has dried up, there is no water. There is no point in working on this land in the future.

Head of the VA, Amanbaevo village, Talas Oblast. In-depth interview

A lack of access to drinking water was also highlighted in the village of Amanbaevo. Many residents have health problems due to the fact that they have had to use drainage water as drinking water.



Interviewees of Talas Oblast also mentioned a lack of well-developed infrastructure for leisure and entertainment, especially for youth and children. Respondents reported that there are no entertainment parks for recreation in their villages.

Interestingly, male participants of the study expressed satisfaction with the general socio-economic situation in Talas Oblast, as opposed to the women surveyed who were more concerned about recreational places for their children, since they bear the primary responsibility for raising children. The lack of water is an important factor for the entire population, regardless of gender.

Batken Oblast

Two important issues were also identified in Batken Oblast, linked with the specific characteristics of the region: natural emergencies (mudflows) and border issues near Uzbekistan. According to the respondents, houses and roads in their villages²⁰ are often washed away by mudflows. The regular renovations of residential neighborhoods constitute a burden for local residents.

²⁰ Orozbekovo and Ak Turpak villages.

Focus group participants were concerned that the lack of land plots for residents in Batken Oblast is due to the fact that some territories were given to Uzbekistan to resolve issues regarding disputed areas.²¹ This problem has potentially been exacerbated by the land transformation process.

Osh Oblast

In Osh Oblast, attention was drawn to a number of difficulties, such as:

1. land scarcity,
2. low quality of medical and educational services,
3. high costs of celebration events.



1. The main problem faced by residents of all target villages in this Oblast is the scarcity of land for building houses, breeding and/or for farming. In three of the four target communities, respondents stated that they lack land plots to build their villages, which may be caused by the process of legal transformation. A shortage of grazing land for breeding livestock was also reported in half of the villages. According to the FGDs, land scarcity can be attributed to the privatization of pastures and previous purchases by other village residents who fenced off territory and later registered it as private territory. Furthermore, in two villages, there is not enough irrigated land for agricultural activities. In another village, study participants pointed out a shortage of land for the construction of enterprises that could potentially create additional jobs for villagers. Overall, the residents of the villages of Bolshevik and Dzhan-Aryk experience the greatest shortage of land available for construction, grazing and irrigation. Nevertheless, in the town of Nookat, there is generally enough accessible land and residents only need land plots for building houses.

2. In three local communities, the quality of medical services is low due to the lack of quality medicines, hospitals and nurses, among others. Therefore, residents have to seek services in other settlements, at the expense of their health, which is especially difficult for women in labor. It is also important to consider the problems with transport infrastructure,

which makes it challenging to receive timely medical services. With regards to education, problems were noted in all target communities; however, the decline in the quality of educational services was associated exclusively with the pandemic. Only some villages in the region are in need of books or school renovation.

3. In one FGD, participants noted that many community members spend significant financial resources on holding festive events ("tois"²²) in Osh Oblast. Due to excessive spending on single events, the hosts may experience financial problems in the future. This information can be confirmed by the "Life in Kyrgyzstan" study, which found that a quarter of the remittances received from migrants abroad are spent on weddings and funerals, exceeding family members' expenses on health care and education.²³ Only a small share of savings is invested in personal businesses. Therefore, instead of making use of migrant remittances to launch income generating opportunities, which also contribute to the development of the local economy, funds are mostly spent on day-to-day consumption.

The problems identified in the target oblasts are also reflected in the results of the quantitative study: slightly more than half (52%) of FGD participants were satisfied with the work of local governments to varying degrees, while 41% were not satisfied.

²¹ Kotormo village.

²² A "tol" is a blessed celebration, an event such as a wedding, or the birth of a child.

²³ Kyrgyzstan – Extended Migration Profile. 2016. Access: https://kyrgyzstan.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Migration-Profile-Extended-Kyrgyzstan-Eng-2010-2015_0.pdf

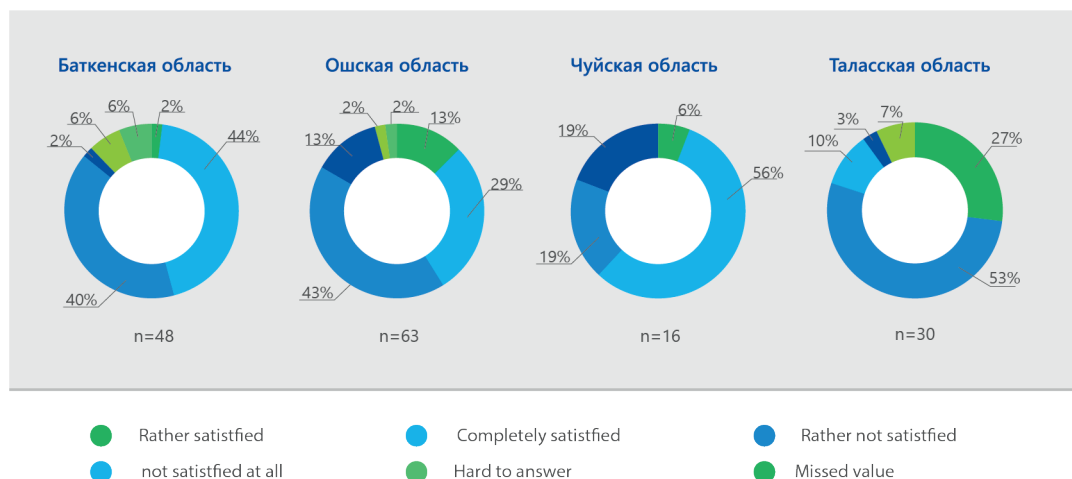
■ **Diagram 2. Participants' satisfaction levels with the work of local governments.**
FGD participants, n = 158



What role do you / your organization / institution play in supporting returned migrants?

An analysis of these results by region demonstrates that southern regions are less satisfied with the work of local governments than northern regions. The highest percentage of respondents dissatisfied with the work of local governments was observed in Osh Oblast, followed by Batken Oblast. The largest number of people favorable to heads of local governance structures was observed in Chui Oblast, while in the region of Talas, more than half of respondents reported being rather satisfied with their work.

■ **Diagram 3. Participants' satisfaction level with the work of local governments by oblasts.**
FGD participants, n = 158



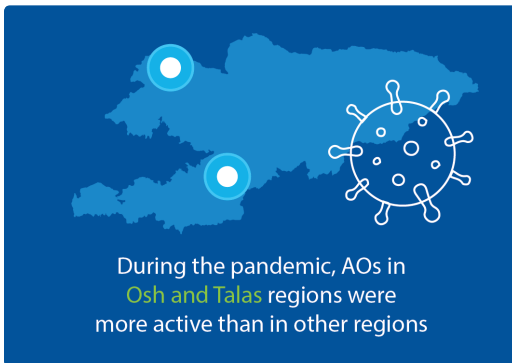
C3_1 How satisfied are you with the work of the following persons / organizations? 1. Head of local self-government

The impact of the pandemic on the situation in villages and VAs

This socio-economic situation in the surveyed communities has been aggravated by the impact of COVID-19. The study's results demonstrated that local authorities were not prepared for a crisis situation. The pandemic caused an unprecedented and severe shortage of funds in local budgets, especially without sufficient tax revenues. Due to the pandemic, instead of implementing their pre-existing and approved development plans, local authorities were forced to reallocate funds for limiting the spread of COVID-19 and for providing emergency assistance to the population. However, local authorities were still not able to provide medical services, drugs, hospital beds, food, sanitary items and disinfectants on time.

According to the results of IDIs with representatives of local governments in Osh and Talas oblasts, many families could not make ends meet due to the lockdown and the subsequent wave of unemployment. This was true for migrants who had returned from overseas and all other village residents alike. Participants expressed their frustration caused by the fact that humanitarian aid was also provided to wealthy residents who were left without a source of income. Remittances from migrants decreased, and migrants themselves required financial support from relatives back home while abroad in some cases.

Information obtained as a result of FGDs reveals that during the pandemic, VAs were most active in Osh²⁴ Oblast. The participants stated that local authorities had provided targeted social assistance to vulnerable groups of the population in the form of food (flour, vegetable oil) and medicines, opened day care facilities for people who were diagnosed with COVID-19, and installed roadblocks. In some villages, in response to traveling restrictions, local authorities imported food that was then sold at market price.



However, it is important to note that in particular villages²⁵ there were doubts about the transparency of humanitarian aid distribution and accountability in general, which undermined the public's trust in local government.

Local government representatives in the region of Batken²⁶ most critically assessed the work of VAs. Representatives denounced VAs' low level of interest in the population's problems, their lack of dialogue with the population and insufficient campaigning activities. Representatives of VAs also recognized their inability to properly support the population. As a result, they highlighted the important role of *ashar* (mutual assistance), which resolved many issues experienced in the locality during the pandemic.

Management by the local government during the pandemic was very low. The reason for this is the absence of a dedicated budget. The Village Administration did not provide residents with any means during the pandemic, did not visit sick families nor assist them, and did not send patients on treatment.

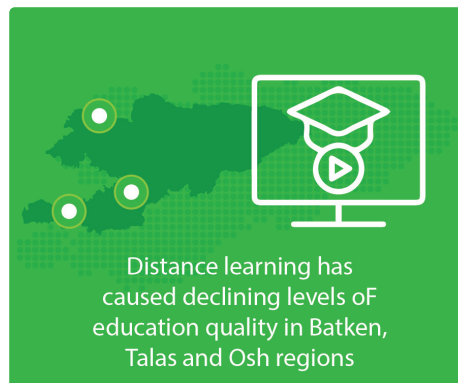
Women's council, Bolshevik village, Osh Oblast. In-depth interview

Given the fact that villages assessed in Batken and Talas oblasts border other countries, the closure of borders has had a strong impact. For example, many residents of villages²⁷ were unable to export their goods to neighboring countries. Most farmers suffered losses since they were unable to sell their harvest because of the lockdown. This was mainly mentioned by male participants in focus groups, who are more involved in agriculture.

For example, people could not sell last year's apple harvest. Our residents usually keep apples until March in order to sell them at double the price. But then, in March, the pandemic began and apples rotted, everything was gone, people's annual income just burned out.

Kotormo village, Batken Oblast. FGD with men

Female participants from villages in Batken,²⁸ Talas and Osh oblasts noted a decrease in the quality of education due to online learning, since children either did not understand the lessons, or did not listen to the teachers. Moreover, students were not always able to attend classes due to the lack of technical equipment (cell phones/laptops), money to top up their mobile phone credit, and access to the internet or mobile networks.



²⁴ Dzhany Aryk village, Nookat town, Toolos village and Bolshevik village in Osh oblast.

²⁵ For example, Bolshevik village.

²⁶ Ak Turpak village, Orozbekovo village and Kotormo village.

²⁷ Kotormo and Ak Turpak villages in Batken Oblast, Kyzyl Adyr village in Talas Oblast.

²⁸ Ak Turpak village.

The education level has decreased. There are families who don't have any T.V.s or cell telephones. For example, one young woman has three schoolchildren in her family and only one cellphone. The school doesn't provide antiseptic sprays, but we cannot buy them ourselves.

Kyzyl Adyr village, Talas Oblast. FGD with women

Kyzyl Adyr village, Talas Oblast. FGD with women
Despite the negative consequences of the pandemic and the difficulties faced by members of target communities, some focus group participants and government officials pointed out positive effects of the pandemic, including increased social cohesion, mutual assistance, patriotism, and the reunification of families. The demonstrated ability to solve the populations' problems through joint efforts can serve as a basis and example for the further development of relations and dialogue between the population, especially migrants, and local governments.

2.2 Migration in local communities: statistics and the causes of migratory patterns

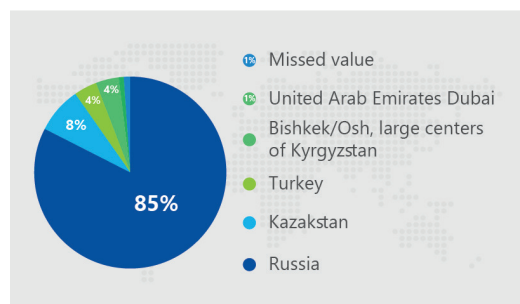
The main reasons for labor migration

Socio-economic factors are among the dominant drivers of both internal and external migration. In this regard, migration is perceived as the main way to solve economic problems and promote advancements in well-being. All of the respondents unanimously recognized that the main reasons for labor migration are unemployment and the lack of funds in Kyrgyzstan. This information is confirmed by a 2019 IOM study,²⁹ which suggests that the main motives for migration include systemic poverty, material crises in the family, low wages, lack of jobs, unsatisfactory living conditions, and the poor quality of medical services and education. Respondents from one FGD pointed out that young professionals cannot always find work in villages, since teacher and medical worker positions are already occupied by older generations. Choices of profession and employment opportunities are therefore very limited in villages. Interviewees added that another motivating factor for migrating is the desire of youth to gain independence and economic freedom from their parents.

Main countries of destination for migrants

Local authorities indicated the following as the main destinations for labor migrants from Kyrgyzstan: the Russian Federation (St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kazan, etc.), Kazakhstan, the United States of America, and Korea. Data from the survey of FGD participants also confirms that the majority of respondents left to work in the Russian Federation (85%), as well as in Kazakhstan (8%).

■ Diagram 4. Main countries of destination. FGD participants, n = 158



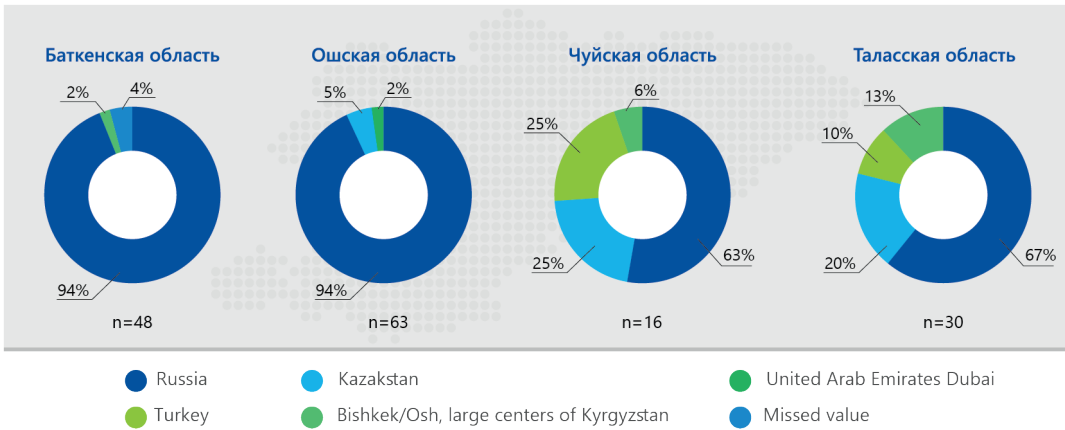
B4 Indicate the last place of your migration, internal or external

Some differences can be noted depending on the territorial affiliation of the participants, in particular between participants from northern and southern regions. An overwhelming majority (over 90%) of migrants from southern regions leave for the Russian Federation to work. In northern regions, the destinations of emigrants are more differentiated. Even though the Russian Federation was the most chosen country of destination for the surveyed migrants, a significant number of migrants also travelled to Kazakhstan and Turkey to earn a living. The diversity of migration patterns in northern regions can be explained by the geographical proximity of the capital, Bishkek, to Kazakhstan, where levels of income are higher. In addition, internal migration flows were most raised by participants in the north, in contrast with southern regions. The residents of Talas and Chui oblasts are more likely to take up work in large urban areas in Kyrgyzstan.

Another factor influencing migrants' choice of destination may be the existing information channels and networks among migrant workers, which result in greater awareness of migration opportunities. For example, in the village of Orozbekovo, there is a significant external migration outflow to the United States of America. According to the head of the local VA, many young people from this village managed to obtain American citizenship because residents shared information about their successful migration experiences.

²⁹ IOM. External youth migration in Central Asia: risk analysis and minimization of negative consequences.

Diagram 5. Main countries of destination, depending on regional affiliation. FGD participants, n = 158



B4 Indicate the last location of migration, internal or external:

General statistics of migrants by age and gender

Migration outflows in target communities were found to be significant. Representatives of VAs and FGD participants unanimously stated that currently most migrants are young people. Many recent graduates of 9th or 11th grades have been unable to find jobs locally due to the lack of vacancies, and are thus “forced” to migrate. This trend has been observed continuously over the past 10-15 years. According to an IOM report in 2018, 60.46%³⁰ of the total number of migrants from Kyrgyzstan are youth aged 15 to 29 years old.

Undoubtedly, youth make up the majority of migrants, approximately 70%.

Vice Mayor, Nookat town, Osh Oblast. In-depth interview

Despite the fact that most migrant workers are men, there are some villages³¹ in southern regions where the number of female migrant workers exceeds the number of male migrant workers, as confirmed by both FGD participants and representatives of local authorities.

The majority of migrants are young people



Young people often migrate immediately after 9th-11th grades



In Batken Region, more women than men migrate



In Osh and Talas oblasts,³² the migration flow is gender balanced. Information obtained during this research project indicates a recent increase in the share of women among migrant workers, and so migration overall from Kyrgyzstan could become gender balanced in the future.

When examining other demographic characteristics, the following accounts were noted in isolated cases: the leader of the local community in the town of Nookat reported that young men of Uzbek ethnicity account for most migrant workers in the area, while among ethnic Kyrgyz youth, more girls tend to migrate than boys. Interestingly, in southern regions,³³ the study found that many migrants leave with their families and children, especially newlyweds.

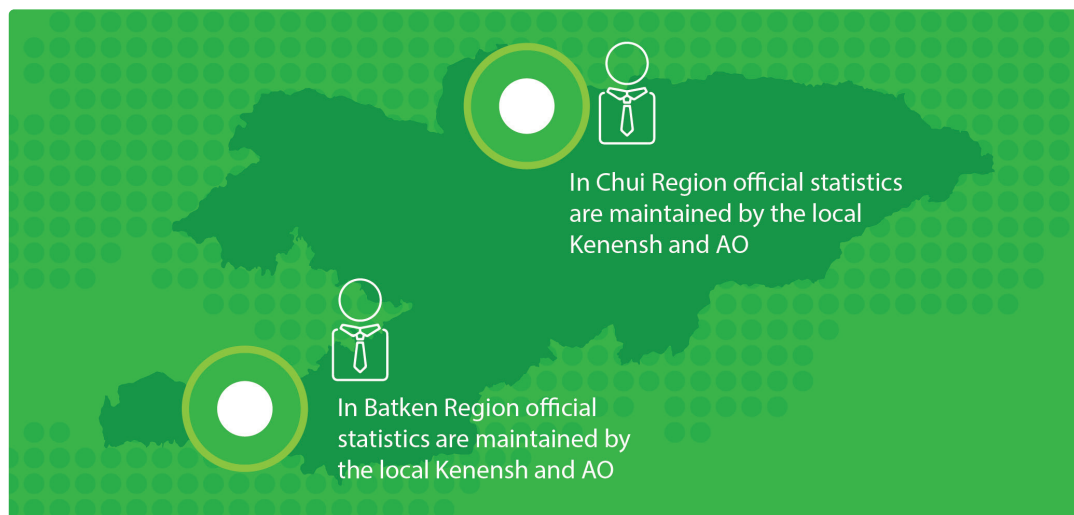
³⁰ Official site of the International Organization for Migration. Access: <https://kyrgyzstan.iom.int/news/current-migration-situation-and-trends-kyrgyzstan>.

³¹ Nookat town in Osh Oblast and Orobekovo village in Batken Oblast.

³² Bolshevik and Toolos villages in Osh Oblast and Amanbaevo village in Talas Oblast.

³³ Toolos village in Osh Oblast and Kotormo village in Batken Oblast.

Evidence on migration kept by local authorities



In the regions of Chui and Batken, official statistics are maintained by local councils and VAs through population censuses. In VAs, a social worker gathers gender and age statistics, including information on migrants leaving the country and returning from abroad. The censuses also register data on the number of children left behind by migrant parents. These statistics are also obtained through data collected from various organizations which have information on the entry and exit of migrants, such as employees of schools, airports and sanitary-epidemiological inspection services. For example, in Batken Oblast, representatives of VAs interact with border and customs authorities as well as with employees of registry offices in order to register migrants.

In Osh Oblast, statistics on migrants are kept only in the village of Toolos and the city of Nookat. In this Region,³⁴ local authorities receive relevant information from influential local communities and leaders. None of the target communities in Talas Oblast nor other villages of Osh Oblast³⁵ keep official records of migrants. A local authority representative interviewed explained that maintaining such records is difficult since migrant workers do not notify VAs upon arrival in their villages. However, they are aware of the possibility of obtaining data from airport services, which record the number of arrivals. In addition, some respondents noted that maintaining official statistics was not included among the necessary tasks of VAs. The representatives of local authorities within villages in Osh³⁶ and Talas oblasts expressed their belief that such records were not

necessary. Local authorities' reluctance to maintain records can be explained by the sizable and dynamic nature of migratory flows. Nevertheless, the experiences of other oblasts show that keeping records of migration is viable, and only requires minimal interest and commitment from representatives of VAs.

Records of migrants during the pandemic

According to the study, some additional records on migration were kept during the pandemic. Records of returned migrants were kept in Chui and Batken oblasts, as well as in specific villages in Osh³⁷ and Talas oblasts,³⁸ in order to identify migrants potentially carrying COVID-19. The records helped local authorities to control the number of new arrivals and the spread of COVID-19. In these communities, such data was most recently updated in January 2021.

Interviewees in the villages of Osh and Talas oblasts noted that although local authorities kept records of migrant workers and distributed humanitarian aid, this interest towards returned migrants did not last long. As the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic decreased, local authorities did not view supporting migrants as a priority.

During the coronavirus pandemic, they came to the homes of returned migrants to register them and warned them not to leave their homes. The Village Administration received lists from the district that a certain plane had flown in, and then they clarified the identity and number of migrants in the village.

Toolos village, Osh Oblast. FGD with women

³⁴ Toolos village.

³⁵ Bolshevik and Dzhany Aryk village.

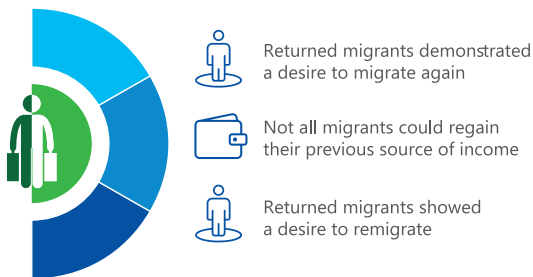
³⁶ Dzhany Aryk village.

³⁷ Toolos village.

³⁸ Amanbaevo village.

Overall, dynamics in migrants' return were uneven depending on the geographic region, whereby the smallest proportion of migrants who returned was registered in southern regions. In Batken and Osh oblasts, the heads of VAs indicated that only a third of migrants had returned home during the pandemic while, in northern regions and in large cities, the assessment found that at least half of migrants returned to their native villages.

Migrants want to remigrate



It is important to note that half of returned migrants (54%) expressed their intention to resume their labor activity overseas. However, they were not able to return to their usual country of destination.

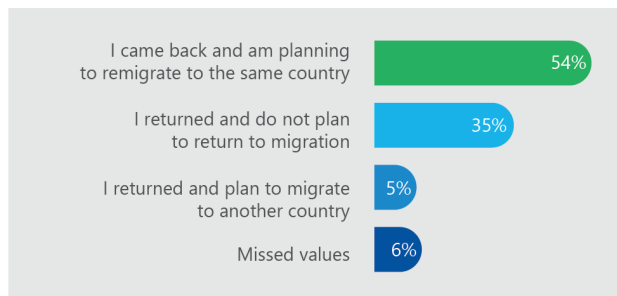
This happened because of ongoing lockdowns and border closures, and the significantly increased cost of tickets, posing issues of affordability for migrants. The high travelling costs to destination countries, especially the Russian Federation, were noted by an overwhelming majority of those interviewed. In addition, migrants must show negative COVID-19 test results to board planes, which creates additional financial and logistical difficulties. Some consequently take loans, or sell land or cattle to buy the tickets, as they view migration as the only solution to their financial challenges.

They suffer, they cannot buy a ticket back. They can solve these problems by borrowing money from someone. Or they take a loan. Yesterday Zhenish, for example, bought a ticket for 47,000 soms. He sold his bulls for 100-something thousand.

*Deputy VA, Dzhany Aryk village, Osh Oblast.
In-depth interview*

According to the results of the quantitative survey, more than half of the respondents plan to return to the same country of destination to work.

■ Diagram 6. Migrant intentions. FGD participants, n = 158



B7 Indicate your future migration plans

It should be noted that focus group participants in Batken Oblast³⁹ mentioned that there is a shortage of labor in the Russian Federation, since many migrants returned to their countries of origin after the implementation of lockdown measures. According to the participants, there were even cases when some companies in the Russian Federation expressed their willingness to pay for migrants' tickets to return, and increase the wages of migrant workers who had remained in the Russian Federation in order to dissuade them from returning home. This reflects a per-

sisting demand for migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan in the main destination country for migrants, the Russian Federation. In light of this, returned migrants often asked for help to be able to leave again. Local authorities suggested the provision of state loans to migrants so that they could purchase tickets, which migrants would later repay after reaching their country of destination. The study participants believe that this would be better than staying in Kyrgyzstan without any work or money.

³⁹ Amanbaevo and Kotormo villages.

If migrants cannot go back, then the state could provide funding and conclude contracts with migrants, and include this in the budget ... If a person is in need, and does not have enough money for a ticket, then help them buy a ticket from these funds, that they will repay later.

*Local council, Kotormo village, Batken Oblast.
In-depth interview*

Positive effects of labor migration

Given the significant volume of migration outflows from Kyrgyzstan, it is evident that they have significant impacts on the population, especially on the socio-economic situation.

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF MIGRATION



According to the study, one of the main positive aspects of migration has been the improvement of the living conditions in each household with a migrant overseas, and in the village as a whole, because of remittances sent from abroad. Participants of focus groups and IDIs unanimously agreed that migrants are able to improve incomes and local development. For example, many villagers were able to build new houses, fix their courtyards and acquire livestock.

In addition, many migrants acquired new professional skills, which they could then utilize to start their own businesses when returning, thereby creating jobs for the villagers. Key skills acquired include road, house and facility construction, building renovations, and pastry skills.

■ **Table 1. Basic skills acquired by survey participants. FGD participants, n = 158**

Building	20%
Cooking	20%
Sales/Selling	8%
Loading/Gardening/manual work	8%
Foreign languages	6%
Maid/Cleaning	4%
Agriculture/Farming	3%

Negative effects of migration

During the study, respondents highlighted the negative impacts of migration on families, children, education and health.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF MIGRATION



Education of migrants



Health of migrants



Unfavorable situations within migrants families

Most focus groups (80%) firstly noted the negative effects of migration on migrants' families, and especially on their children. Many children of migrants grow up without parental education, care and supervision, since, at best, children remain in the care of close relatives and grandparents. Most of the government representatives interviewed consider this to be one of the main problems not only for the families themselves, but also for villages as a whole. In addition, the absence of one or both parents puts children in a vulnerable position by being exposed to physical and mental health risks. Study participants mentioned that children are often depressed and stressed, and noted an increase in cases of violence against migrants' children. With a whole generation who represent the future of the country growing up in these unfavorable conditions, these challenges must be confronted.

For example, we often hear about abuse of young children.

*Women's council, Bolshevik village, Osh Oblast.
In-depth interview*

In addition, FGD participants who raised the issue of children being left behind as a result of migration, also provided remarks on the impact on elderly parents of migrants. Consequently, elderly people are often left responsible for raising their grandchildren and running the household alone.

Furthermore, participants of the IDIs and FGDs from all oblasts noted an increase in the number of divorces among migrants. They mentioned that migrants often initiate a second family in their country of destination, or even completely abandon their family back home. Because migrants often spend long periods of time overseas, many find it difficult to maintain relationships, which can lead to the break-up of families.

Some families break up; the number of divorces may increase, and children may experience certain difficulties here.

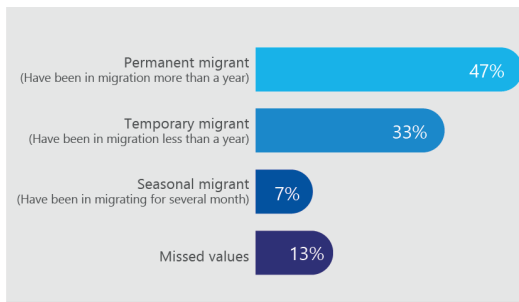
Head of VA, Amanbaevo village, Talas Oblast. In-depth interview

After completing their general education, they immediately leave for labor migration without receiving any specialized education. As soon as they turn 18, young people immediately go abroad, mainly to the Russian Federation, to Moscow.

Head of the VA, Voznesenovka Village District, Chui Oblast. In-depth interview

According to the quantitative study, 47% of the respondents have engaged in migration for more than 1 year.

■ Diagram 7. Duration of migration. FGD participants, n = 158



B6. Indicate the duration of your last stay in migration



Focus group participants in Batken and Osh oblasts⁴⁰ also cited the deterioration of health as one of the negative effects of migration, as many migrants compromise their health by the age of 30 since work overseas can require excessive physical labor. Many migrants work 12 hours per day to increase their earnings, or work in hazardous industries such as chemical plants.

In addition, the consequences of long separation also impact the well-being of migrant workers themselves. Many interviewees indicated that long-term migration causes them stress, psychological depression and loneliness.

Study participants also stated that young people who leave to work in another country do not receive a proper education, as many young migrants leave as soon as they graduate from school. Thus, an entire generation is not obtaining the professional education necessary for their future development. A better education in their native country can also improve chances for better employment opportunities abroad, which would benefit both sending and receiving communities. Respondents also noted a “brain drain” in villages, in which educated and smart youth leave their native communities and go abroad to build their future, leaving villages without much-needed human capital.

Our guys are engaged in any work, including work in a chemical plant or in freezing weather. Due to this burden, young guys waste their health by the age of thirty. 80% of migrants return sick. Many work in chemical plants because they are attracted by good wages.

Nookat town, Osh Oblast. FGD men

In addition, an answer from a focus group participant in Chui Oblast should be noted, who claimed that migration can trigger the loss of the nation's identity, as the number of interethnic marriages rises.

⁴⁰ Kotormo village in Batken Oblast and Bolshevik village and Nookat town in Osh Oblast.

3. RETURNED MIGRANTS: POTENTIAL FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

RETURNED MIGRANTS: POTENTIAL FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

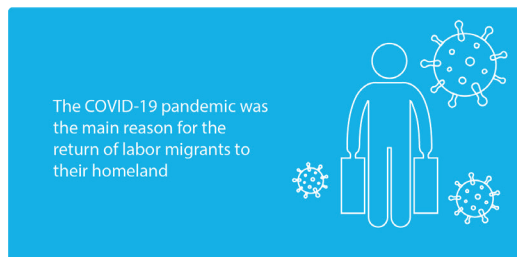
This chapter examines the main reasons why migrants returned to Kyrgyzstan during the period of the pandemic in 2020, as well as citizens' overall perceptions of returned migrants. The study reveals the main reasons for returning, returned migrants' impact on community development, perceptions of returned migrants, and the difficulties they face at home.

The research data includes qualitative results from IDIs and FGDs on the topic of the availability of basic services for returned migrants. This section will also examine migrants' level of participation in development initiatives and projects in villages and local communities.

3.1 Attitudes towards returned migrants and their reintegration.

Main reasons why migrants returned during the pandemic

During the pandemic, the return of Kyrgyzstani migrants to their homeland was not only due to ordinary factors such as the termination of labor contracts, planned returns, illnesses of relative, "tois" (celebrations), etc., but also due to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.



According to the results of the FGDs, the quick spread of COVID-19 and the consequences of lockdown measures strongly affected migrant workers' decision to unexpectedly leave their countries of destination.

Respondents of FGDs said that strong lockdowns were imposed in many cities of the Russian Federation. The use of metros was restricted, and many businesses closed down or cut their production volume. Even when migrants did not lose their jobs, their wages significantly decreased during the pandemic. Restrictions in movement made it impossible for migrants to leave their houses and work as usual. Many migrants had difficulties in reaching their workplaces, even when they were able to keep their job. Due to self-isolation, unemployment or

salary decreases, migrants could not cover their basic living expenses and did not receive any support from the government in their host country.

We were forbidden to go out, we couldn't use the metro, and even if we did have a job, we couldn't reach it. We had jobs, but they didn't let us take the metro, the police checked all documents.

Kyzyl-Adyr village, Talas Region. FGD with men

We sewed hats in a sewing factory that they exported to other countries. All of the roads were closed and we started having less work. We started earning only 200-300 Russian Rubles per day, when we would usually earn 2000-2500 Russian Rubles, so we went back home.

Ak-Turpak village, Batken Region. FGD with women

A second important reason for the unexpected return of migrants was their concern for their own health and the health of their relatives. All returned migrants who participated in the FGDs indicated that they were afraid to contract COVID-19 in a foreign country, since migrant workers did not have access to medical services in their host country. A resident from the village of Dzhjany Aryk stated that migrants were scared of dying in another country, as they generally did not know what would happen to their body and if their remains would be brought to Kyrgyzstan.

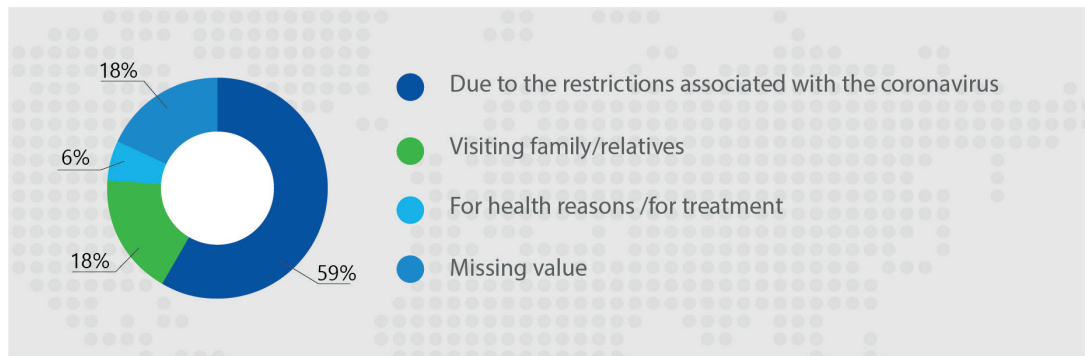
If there's no work, come back, otherwise you'll get infected yourself, and nobody looks after Kyrgyzstani people there.

Dzhjany-Aryk village, Osh Region. FGD with women

Every returned migrant participating in the focus groups also revealed that they wanted to be in Kyrgyzstan to be close to their loved ones during such a difficult period. They were scared for their relatives, given the fact that migrants' parents and children usually remain at home, and that elderly people are the most vulnerable group to COVID-19 infection.

The survey of FGD participants revealed that 59% of migrants returned home because of restrictions associated with the pandemic and the subsequent inability to continue their work abroad, 18% returned to visit relatives (because they were concerned about their health) and only 6% because they were facing health problems.

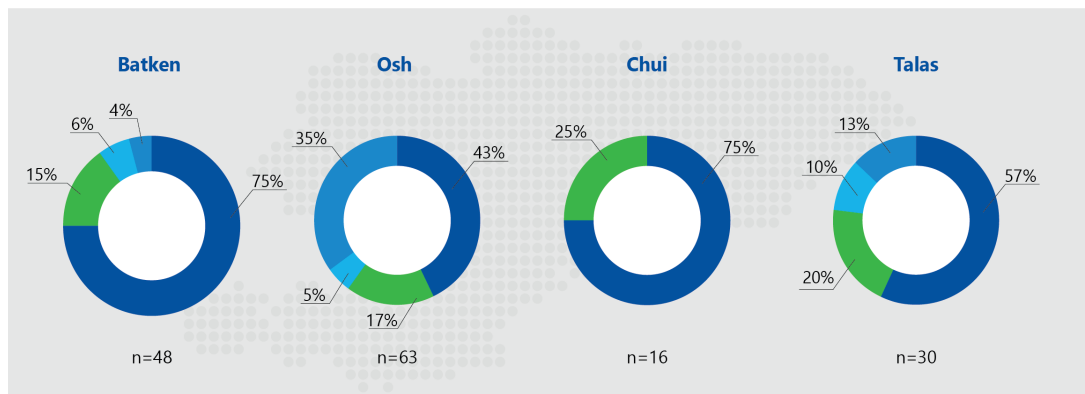
■ **Diagram 6. Main reasons for returning from migration. Participants of FGDs, n=158**



B3 If you are returned migrant ,please tell us why you returned to your home village/town?

It is important to note that the proportion of migrants who returned due to the pandemic was greater in the regions of Batken (75%) and Chui (75%), compared to 57% in the region of Talas and 35% in Osh Region. These lower proportions in the regions of Osh and Talas can be explained by the higher incidence of seasonal migration.

■ **Diagram 7. Main reasons for returning from abroad by region. Participants of FGDs, n=158**




- Due to the restrictions associated with the coronavirus
- For health reasons /for treatment
- Visiting family/relatives
- Missing value

B3 If you are returned migrant ,please tell us why you returned to your home village/town?

3.2 General attitudes towards returned migrants

More than **60%** of the participants in in-depth interviews expressed the opinion that local authorities have a very positive attitude towards returning migrants

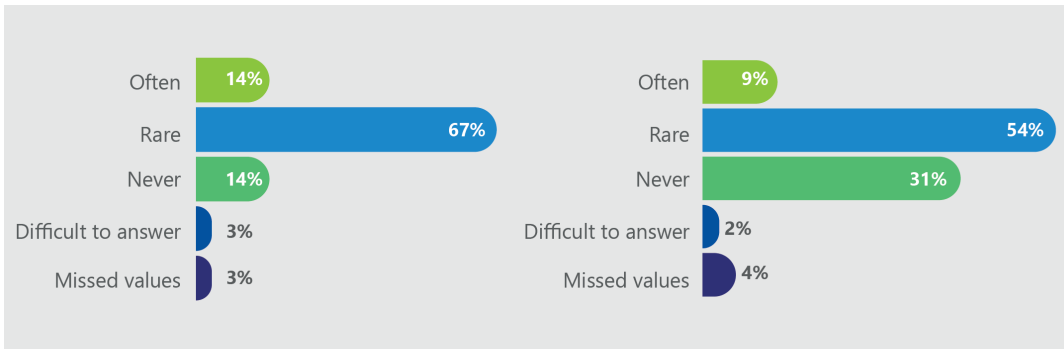


Participants of all FGDs noted that when migrants return, their family members and relatives express a very positive attitude towards them. Since they often lived outside of their locality for long periods of time, migrants did not have the opportunity to see their relatives, and sometimes even their children and parents. Because of this, families were delighted to reunite with migrant family members, especially between children and their migrant parents. They were also satisfied to see that their migrant family members returned safely. Moreover, the study indicates that community members also generally have positive or neutral attitudes towards returnees. 60%

of representatives of local governments and community leaders indicated that residents have a positive attitude towards returned migrants, with the highest share of such responses reported in Batken Oblast (67%). Despite some suspicions towards migrants due to the COVID-19 pandemic, around half of migrants and their relatives also shared this opinion. This phenomenon can be explained by the presence of migrants in many families and the existing close ties between villagers.

In addition, many participants in the study also expressed that local authorities hold positive attitudes towards returned migrants. Around 60% of the participants of IDIs indicated that local authorities display a certain degree positivity towards migrants. This opinion is more predominant in Osh Region (75%), likely owing to the relatively active interactions between authorities and migrants in the region. Government representatives understand that returned migrants may have learned beneficial skills and have the financial resources that can be used to implement local development initiatives. These pre-existing relationships helped to shape more positive attitudes towards returned migrant workers in their places of residence.

■ **Diagram 8. Attitudes towards returned migrants. Participants of IDIs, n=158**



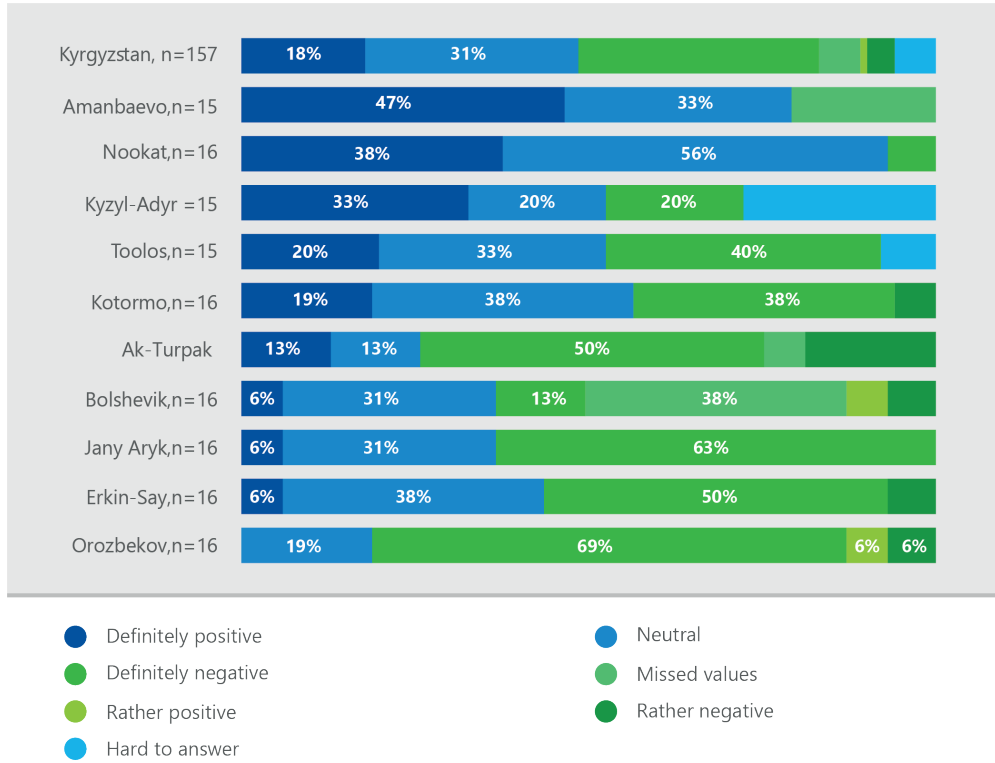
C1_1 How are returned migrants treated?

Nevertheless, according to the assessment, local authorities generally have a neutral attitude towards returned migrants. Participants in more than half of FGDs noted that local authorities demonstrated no particular interest in residents who have migrated or returned. Quantitative indicators confirm these results: a relatively high share (35%) of respondents indicated that local authorities have a neutral attitude towards them, with the highest proportions of such responses being in Orozbekov (69%) and Ak-Turpak (50%) in Batken Oblast, Zhany Aryk (63%) in Osh Oblast and Erkin-Sai (50%) in Chui

Oblast. Migrants therefore usually only turn to local authorities in exceptional cases when they cannot resolve the issue independently, or through relatives and friends.

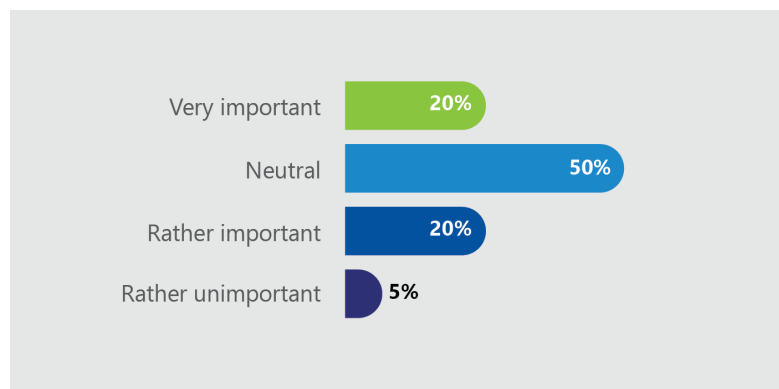
A significantly lower share of local authorities in IDIs indicated having a neutral or indifferent attitude towards returned migrants (25%), with the largest proportion of such responses being in Chui Oblast (100%). This could be explained by the local authorities' limited awareness and lack of communication with arriving migrants.

■ **Diagram 10. Attitudes of local authorities towards returned migrants. FGD participants, n = 157**



C1_1 How often do you interact with the following persons/organizations?
1. Local authorities

■ **Diagram 11. Attitudes of local authorities towards returned migrants. In-depth interview participants, n = 20**



C1_1 Treatment of returned migrants_Local authorities

If I or another person leaves for migration, we will not come to the Village Administration and will not say that we are leaving, we will simply leave in silence. And if I return, the Village Administration will not come to my house, will not ask how I got there. It doesn't care about us at all.

Kotormo village, Batken Oblast. FGD with men

Despite this overall positive and neutral perceptions of migrants, negative attitudes still exist in the communities studied.



When asked about the existence of discrimination against returned migrants, the opinion of men and women who have migrated or have a migrant family member differed. In nearly all of the FGDs with male participants, except for an FGD in the region of Osh and one in the region of Talas,⁴¹ respondents noted the absence of differences in the perceptions of male and female returned migrants. However, in every FGD with female participants, respondents, on the contrary, denounced the stigmatization against women who had returned home. Such an attitude most often takes the form of judgments against women migrants who leave their children and families to earn money, and suspicions about the integrity of women migrants' sources of income. Women migrants declared that local residents often gossip about the possible lack of integrity of returned female migrants, their honor, and their behavior, highlighting possible debauchery and dubious ways of earning money. Many residents do not want to marry girls who previously migrated. Interestingly, local authorities shared this opinion only in the region of Osh,⁴² who mentioned that local residents have always had questions and doubts concerning women and young girls' sources of income. However, it is important to note that there has been a positive shift in attitudes towards women migrants in certain VAs. Representatives of local governments in the region of Batken⁴³ indicated that levels of disapproval towards migrant women are currently decreasing, due to the important contributions of migrant youth from the region. Currently, many households have family members engaged in work overseas, and residents increasingly understand that young girls must work in other countries because of the limited employment opportunities and low wages in Kyrgyzstan.

If someone wants to get married to a certain girl, they say – she was in the Russian Federation, you can't marry her.

Women's council, city of Nookat, Osh Region. In-depth interview.

Women are not the only ones exposed to stigmatization. There are also isolated cases of local residents disapproving of men whose wives migrated from the regions of Talas and Batken.⁴⁴ Community members in these regions criticize these men for not being able to provide for their families themselves, and for sending their wives to earn money outside the country while they, themselves, stay in Kyrgyzstan. These attitudes are likely caused by traditional patriarchal social beliefs of families in the country, where men are perceived to play the dominant role.

Men mock us like this: "You sent your wife to the Russian Federation, while you're the man but you're staying home and playing her role in the family". And they also say: "A man's duty is to earn money, and a woman's duty is to stay home".

Orozbekovo village, Batken Region. FGD with men

Representatives of local government structures in Osh Oblast identified migrants' higher level of well-being as another factor that may cause discrimination or stigmatization, as other residents of the locality sometimes feel envious. Because of labor migration, migrants' families may have improved living standards or have been able to invest their funds in income generating activities (for instance, the purchase of cattle), unlike other local residents who do not have such opportunities. However, this factor was not noted as a reason for discrimination by migrants or their relatives.

In addition to the stigmatization of migrants, isolated cases of migrants stigmatizing local residents were mentioned. For instance, a representative of the local kenesh in the village of Erkin Say, Chui Region, identified migrants' intolerant or disdainful attitudes towards local residents, in particular, against people of other nationalities. This attitude could have been caused by the fact that migrants are often the victims of negative attitudes or discrimination in foreign countries. Upon returning home, they may attempt to transfer their resentment or anger to people of other nationalities.

⁴¹ Villages of Ak Turpak and Amanaevo.

⁴² Village of Bolshevik and the city of Nookat.

⁴³ Villages of Orozbekovo and Kotormo.

⁴⁴ Villages of Kyzyl Adyr and Orosbekovo.

There are also cases of nationalism. This happens because migrants in the Russian Federation are exposed to humiliation and violence from the Russian-speaking residents, who call them names. And perhaps all of this accumulates in the hearts of our migrants. When they come back, they start to show hatred towards this category of residents.

*Local Kenesh, village of Erkin-Say, Chui Region.
In-depth interview*

Dynamics of attitudes towards returned migrants resulting from the spread of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic did not only cause migrants to return to home, but also changed people's attitude towards them. Although men who had migrated from some VAs of Batken, Osh and Talas oblasts⁴⁵ said that there had been no changes, participants in all other FGDs indicated changes in people's attitude towards them. Some migrants noticed that relatives and village residents often expressed a colder and more cautious attitude towards them when they returned to their homeland. They isolated returned migrants and limited or stopped communication with them completely. Some village residents also avoided public places where returned migrants frequently visited and even criticized their decision to return home. For instance, in some villages within Batken Region, residents negatively treated returned migrants who tested positive for COVID-19, because of their fear for their own health and the health of family members. The quick spread of the infection and its severity caused panic among inhabitants of the country, as the first cases of COVID-19 were brought into the country by people travelling from abroad.

Even though returned migrants were tested for COVID-19 and held under quarantine and self-isolation, unfriendliness persisted afterwards. However, this was the case only in southern regions, and interviewees in northern regions did not mention this negative attitude.

Representatives of local keneshes in the regions of Batken and Osh⁴⁶ also agreed that attitudes towards returned migrants had changed because of the pandemic, due to the population's fear for their health.

One migrant came home and was later diagnosed with the virus, so the whole street was entirely closed and all of the residents were put in quarantine. Residents negatively perceived this migrant, asking why he came back if he knew that he was sick.

*Local kenesh, Orozbekovo village, Batken Region.
In-depth interview*

Before the pandemic, neighbors and relatives used to warmly welcome migrants, but now they look at them suspiciously, as if they were infectious. But they tried not to show it.

Dzhany Aryk village, Osh Region. FGD with women



The COVID-19 pandemic forced local authorities to reconsider their attitude towards returned migrants, as they could risk infecting other local residents

However, the rest of the participants in IDIs did not notice any changes in local residents' attitudes towards returned migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic. Heads and deputy heads of VAs affirmed that the situation had not in any way affected the way people felt about returned migrants. This can largely be explained by the well-coordinated work of local authorities to control the spread of COVID-19 upon the arrival of migrants. Local authorities sent returned migrants to observation facilities and held them under strict quarantine for 14 days, even if they had shown negative test results. Returned migrants were allowed home only after completing the required quarantine and obtaining negative test results. Thus, local authorities were sure that the migrants were healthy and local residents did not hold negative attitudes owing to fears for their health. Authorities also observed an increased level of responsibility among returned migrants, as they did not go outside, refrained from meeting up with their relatives or friends, and respected quarantine measures.

Difficulties faced by migrants upon returning before the pandemic

The study revealed that returned migrants face a variety of challenges in Kyrgyzstan. Unemployment and financial issues were reported as the most substantial problems faced by migrants, and were mentioned by nearly all of the migrant participants

⁴⁵ Village of Ak Turpak, city of Nookat and village of Kyzyr Aydr.

⁴⁶ Villages of Orozbekov and Kotormo in Batken Oblast, city of Nookat and village of Dzany Aryk in Osh Oblast, and, village of Kara Buura in Talas Oblast.

and their relatives in FGDs. Interviewees expressed that there are generally no significant employment opportunities in the country and that salaries are low, particularly in remote localities. The limited number of enterprises and large organizations leads to a low number of vacancies in the labor market. Because of this work shortage, returned migrants are limited in their ways of earning money. Consequently, they experience difficulties in providing for their families, and in repaying or withdrawing loans. As one of the government representatives from the region of Batken confirmed,⁴⁷ returned migrants often face difficulties in obtaining loans since they do not have an official job in Kyrgyzstan nor proof of income. They must therefore involve relatives in the process, which is not always an effective method to solve this issue. Financial difficulties sometimes even keep migrants from buying a ticket to go back to their country of destination and continue working and earning a living.

The majority of migrants mentioned documentation and paperwork issues, as well as the lack of any information and support from local authorities regarding these matters. Therefore, migrants are not sufficiently aware of the necessary procedures, rules and conditions to be followed in order to obtain documents and various certificates. Study participants from Talas and Osh regions criticized the complicated bureaucratic system forcing them to travel to several localities in order to obtain a document or certificate for them or their children.

When they return, migrants often need to update or recover documents which have expired or were lost. For instance, in the region of Osh, there were cases where a labor migrant lost their identity documents. They also need to obtain various certificates (birth, death, name changing confirming certain civil facts etc.). For these instances, returnees need to turn to the institutions responsible for the issuance of the respective documents. However, many do not know where to start in obtaining them and where they should appeal. Low awareness around this issue and the absence of an information center for migrants means that they are not able to resolve these issues quickly and easily, and so many cases are left unresolved.

These challenges also arise because relevant authorities are located in different places. Thus, participants of FGDs in Talas and Osh oblasts noted difficulties

in acquiring all the necessary documents and seals in order to recover documents or obtain new ones. Returned migrants must travel to the district center and to other settlements, since state structures are dispersed. This requires significant effort, resources and time. As a consequence, this often negatively affects migrants' emotional states. In one of the FGDs, migrants even said that it is easier to pay a third person to obtain documents rather than navigate state institutions alone.

In the regions of Osh⁴⁸, Talas and Chui, respondents also cited paperwork problems due to their citizenship status. Migrants who are in foreign countries often try to obtain the citizenship of the respective country, since it gives them the opportunity to find better jobs, acquire higher salaries, avoid problems with paperwork (registration) and gain access to state services in their country of destination. However, this creates problems when returning to Kyrgyzstan, as foreign citizens holding dual citizenship need to periodically register for paperwork and face difficulties in accessing state services, among other problems. Migrants do not always know how to overcome them, and therefore, require the help of local authorities.



Migrants also face problems with their children's documentation. Some female migrants from the region of Osh stated that when they migrate with their children or give birth to children abroad, their children become citizens of another country. When these migrants return, however, they have to prepare a number of documents in order to register their children in kindergartens, schools or universities. Additionally, a government representative from the region of Batken⁴⁹ mentioned that, due to frequent divorces and unstable situations in families, children's documents sometimes get lost. Migrants cannot easily solve these issues on their own and need the support of local authorities.

⁴⁷ Village of Orozbekovo and representatives of the VA.

⁴⁸ City of Nookat and village of Toolos.

⁴⁹ Local authorities from Orozbekovo village

Those who obtained citizenship in their country of migration face difficulties when returning, such as registering a marriage, or registering a child who was born in that country.

*Vice mayor, city of Nookat, Osh Oblast.
In-depth interview*

It is difficult for migrants to adapt into their native villages



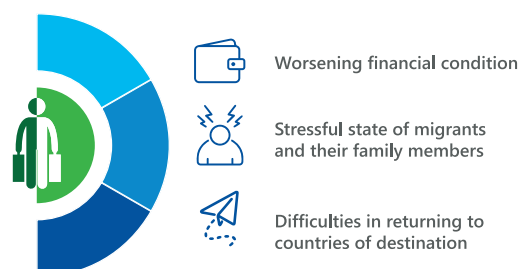
Numerous returnees also mentioned social challenges such as a lack of reintegration services, and difficulties in accessing services and being accepted by the local community. Government representatives from every target region indicated that migrants have a hard time in adapting to their native villages. They claim that migrants' perceptions of life changes while outside the country and, as a result, face additional difficulties in settling into their native villages. Migrant workers most often relocate to more developed countries and work in cities with well-developed infrastructure. When they return, they see striking differences between their locality and former host country and, as a result, face difficulty in adjusting to local life. That is why, upon return, numerous migrants prefer settling in cities, due to the lack of services available in their native places of residence in rural areas. In terms of health, respondents also highlighted health problems upon return due to poor working conditions, difficulties in accessing local medical services because of lack of insurance and a shortage of guidance and information on this issue. A systemic lack of a reintegration and support mechanism at the local level is mirrored in the almost non-existent role of local governments in providing comprehensive support to returnees, especially as a result of COVID-19.

Even though the main target group of the study was returned migrants, the assessment also identifies a strong need to support migrants during the pre-departure stage with the proper information, guidance, and training. While many potential migrants at the local level are young people planning to migrate immediately after they graduate from school, they often base their decision to migrate on rumors

from relatives or friends. Therefore, they lack genuine and up-to-date information about immigration rules, employment opportunities, working conditions and the specific skills needed in countries of destination. Respondents mentioned that their migration path often ends with their detention, inclusion in blacklists, imprisonment and deportation. Obtaining inaccurate, incomplete and unofficial information increases migrants' risk of facing these problems and forces them to take risks.

Participants of FGDs in some villages⁵⁰ noted that some people cannot successfully migrate due to previous legal issues such as violating rules of stay and exit. In order to guarantee the security of migrants, representatives of local governance structures suggested opening information centers for migrant workers. In addition, migrants and their relatives from the region of Osh proposed that local authorities could cooperate with private companies and obtain labor contracts for migrants in order to protect them from violations from employers and inform them on rules of stay.

Difficulties faced by migrants after returning during the pandemic



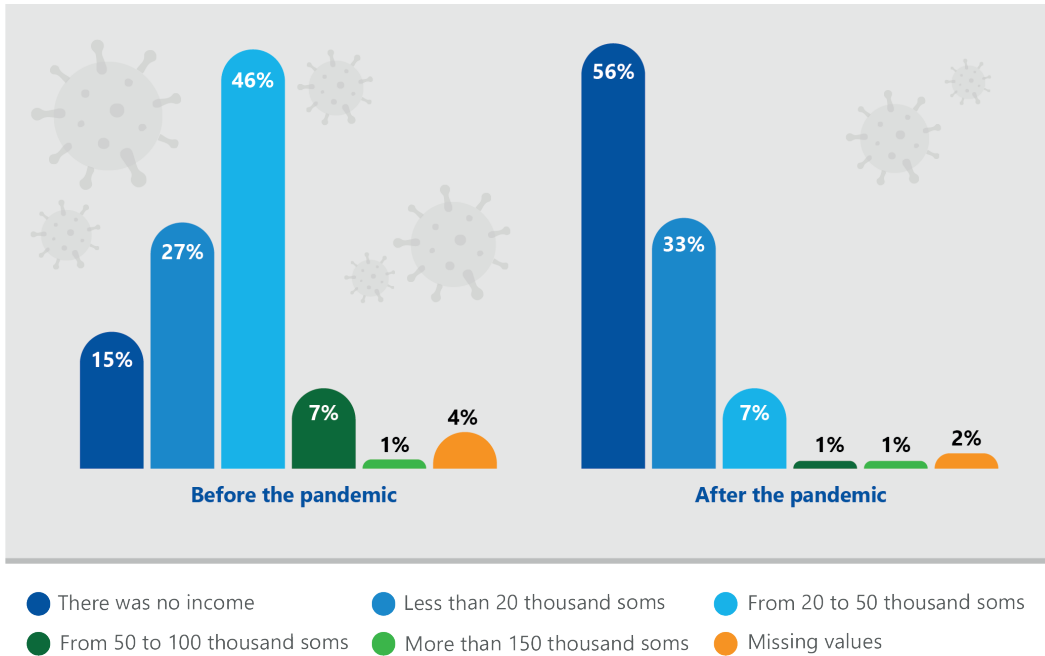
Returnees faced additional problems during the pandemic, including worsened financial conditions, difficulties with returning to the country of destination, and stress.

The pandemic and the lockdown measures strongly affected the financial well-being of the population in Kyrgyzstan, including families with migrants.

The FGHs with migrants revealed that the overall level of household incomes significantly decreased. Prior to the pandemic, around half of the respondents had an average monthly income of 20-50 thousand soms, but this share dropped to 7% after the pandemic. The share of households with no source of income increased by more than three times and reached 56% during the lockdown.

⁵⁰ Village of Kyzyl Adyr in Talas Oblast; village of Orozbekovo in Batken Oblast, and Chui and Osh oblasts.

■ **Diagram 9. Level of income before / after the pandemic. Participants of FGD, n=158**



B10 What is your average monthly income before/after coronavirus pandemic?

All of the survey participants mentioned that their financial situations had worsened. Migrants said that they had to use the money saved from previous work abroad to cover daily basic needs instead of on improving their living conditions, such as repairing or building a house, or investing in income generating activities. The sudden increase of the prices of essential goods also led to greater expenses on food and healthcare. As a result, migrants also had to provide assistance to their relatives who were out of work during the lockdown.

Deteriorations in the financial well-being of migrants' families were aggravated by migrants' delays in their return home. Not all migrants were able to immediately return home after the lockdown was announced, as some got stuck in border zones, where they were "forced" to spend their earned money on living expenses and food, and many simply ran out of means for living.

It was hard, we didn't have any money. We had a hard time getting back. We wasted all of our money on the trip and on food.

Nookat city, Osh Oblast. FGD with men

After the initial delight felt when migrants returned, their relatives gradually started showing concern for the family's well-being. Returned migrants and their relatives thus often reconsidered whether they should have returned or remained in their country of destination to continue working after the lockdown ended. The inability of migrants to find jobs, remigrate and solve their financial difficulties due to the COVID-19 context, is therefore deteriorating the emotional state of migrants and their relatives.

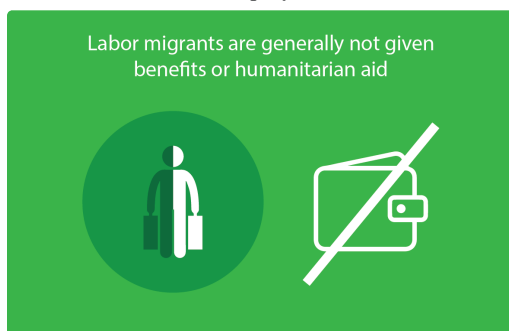
Back then we sent money and we ourselves had money. But now, yes, we feel worried, because everything has slowed down.

Kyzyl Adyr village, Talas Oblast. FGD with men

Access to services for returned migrants

Local authorities' work on reintegrating migrants can be assessed by the range of services available. According to the research results, all of the government representatives surveyed assured that there is formally equal access to services for the entire population, including for migrants. Many returned mi-

grants and their relatives also noted that community members and migrant workers have equal access to all existing services provided by local authorities, and that there is no discrimination in this regard. However, some of the study participants still mentioned instances of discrimination against migrants in their access to benefits and employment.



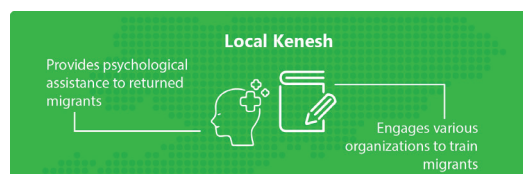
In nearly half of the localities assessed,⁵¹ returned migrants said that VAs do not always provide equal access to benefits and humanitarian aid to migrants and their families. They suppose that local authorities do not perceive such families as vulnerable, assuming that having a labor migrant in the family means that the family enjoys better financial and living conditions. Thus, even if they have low incomes and several children to support, families of migrants are often denied the necessary assistance. For instance, in the village of Bolshevik in Osh Region, a family with five children was receiving benefits for two years, but when the parents migrated to the Russian Federation for work, they stopped receiving aid. The family had purchased a small car (Matiz) and built a fence, so authorities decided to stop supporting them. Migrants were outraged by receiving such explanations for the denial of benefits. In order to obtain support from the local authorities, some migrants have been forced to undertake deception, claiming that their husbands are simply shepherds. This attitude of local authorities towards migrants may cause tense interactions, distrust and hostility towards VAs. As a result, migrants often do not want to turn to local authorities to solve their problems.

When we ask for benefits, they refuse to give them to us, saying that our children or our husbands are in migration. My brother wasn't able to get benefits for two children because his oldest son had migrated to the Russian Federation.

Ak Turpak village, Batken Oblast. FGD with women

Migrants from Chui Region also mentioned discrimination in employment. Women believe that it is easier for men to find jobs, whereas conversely, men indicated that it is easier for women to get hired. This difference in opinion may be explained by the fact that participants discussed their own personal experiences and believed that it is easier for the opposite sex.

One local government representative also mentioned instances of discrimination against migrants in employment. According to the head of a VA in Osh Oblast,⁵² when hiring, preference is given to people who have never migrated, since employers fear that a former migrant may, at any time, decide to remigrate. Since local authorities often do not possess the skills or tools to properly guide and council migrants on potential available income generating opportunities back home, migrants often take the decision to remigrate. It is therefore vital to further capacitate local authorities and improve their role in providing effective reintegration services for migrants back home, including through their proper referral to available services, employment, and investment options in the country of origin.



Only the government representatives in the region of Batken⁵³ indicated that complementary services are provided to returned migrants. The local kenesh provides psychosocial support to returned migrants, and involves various organizations in their education. This assistance is mainly provided by organizations such as the Red Cross, the Rosa Otunbayeva Foundation and the “Grace” Foundation, which have already conducted consultations and trainings on important topics such as migrants’ rights. Local authorities’ active participation, support and reintegration of migrants are particularly noticeable in this region. Representatives of local governments from the region of Batken⁵⁴ have also already undertaken consultations with returned migrants, mainly on COVID-19. However, not a single participant from the other regions assessed indicated the existence of special services for migrants.

⁵¹ Villages of Ak Turpak and Kotormo in Batken oblast, villages of Toolos and Bolshevik in Osh Oblast, and village of Kyzyl Adyr in Talas Oblast.

⁵² Village of Bolshevik.

⁵³ Village of Ak Turpak.

⁵⁴ Villages of Kotormo and Orozbekovo.

Many organize training courses specifically for migrants. These trainings are organized by foreign organizations like the Red Cross, the "Grace" foundation, and also by projects of Rosa Otunbaeva.

*Local kenesh, Ak Turpak AA, Batken Oblast.
In-depth interview*

A representative of a VA in Talas Oblast⁵⁵ stated that he does not consider the provision of special services for migrants to be necessary. In his opinion, all citizens of Kyrgyzstan should have equal access to all services. This highlights a lack of awareness on the specific problems faced by migrants, as well as their potential for advancing local development if properly assisted and reintegrated back home.

Among the services requested by migrants, they identified the need for improved access to information from reliable sources, mainly on legal and administrative issues (registration, visas and documents), available investment and funding opportunities at home, immigration policies in countries of

destination and skills in high demand abroad.

Since the majority of migrants lack information to

An official information channel where migrants can get answers to any of their questions of interest must be developed and implemented



address their particular needs, there is a strong necessity to work on improving access to reliable and accurate information in local communities, such as by launching an official information channel from which migrants can get answers to their questions of interest. As migrants and government representatives pointed out, it would also be useful to open information centers or designate and train specific employees of VAs to support migrants.

3.2 The Role of Returned Migrants in Community Development

Returned migrants' initiatives and their impact on village development



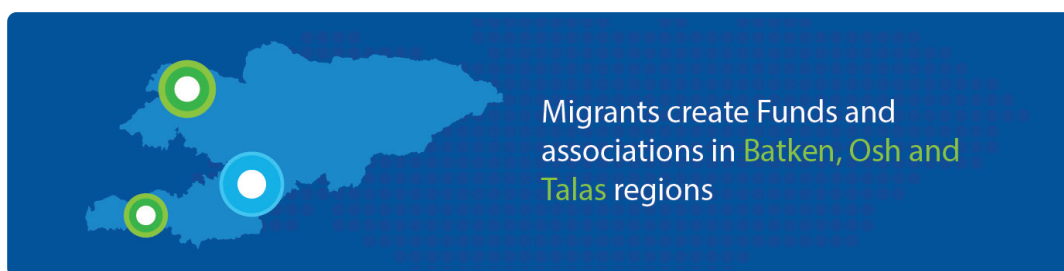
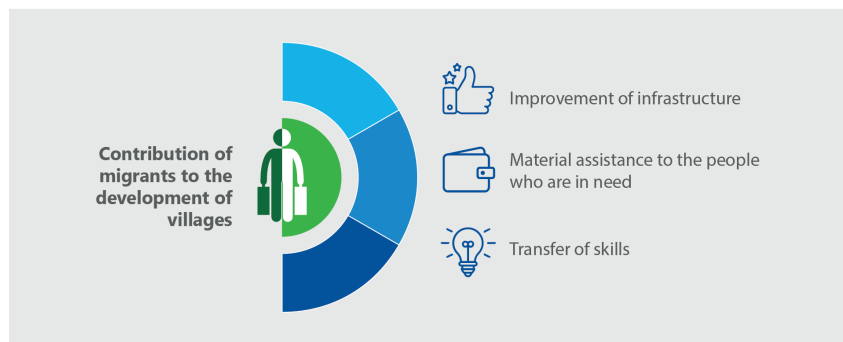
In Chui Region and partly in Talas Region, migrants **only support the basic necessities of their families** because they do not possess enough earnings to undertake other investments

The study revealed that migrants play a significant role in the development of villages in southern regions, while in the region of Chui and partially in Talas Region, migrants only provide assistance to their own families, since they do not possess sufficient financial resources to undertake other investments. Study participants explained that external migration began in northern regions later, so migrants have not yet been able to contribute to local development in these areas. It can be assumed that in the regions of Osh and Batken, there is more than one generation of migrants, and they have already been able to increase their families' living standards

which, consequently, results in greater capacities to invest in local development initiatives.

Migrants, therefore, are most active in contributing to local development in villages within the regions of Osh and Batken. According to the participants of FGDs in these target communities, migrant workers greatly contribute to the improvement of rural infrastructure, particularly by improving roads, water supply systems and outdoor lighting, building bridges, roads, and houses, and establishing adequate conditions in kindergartens, schools, and hospitals.

⁵⁵ Village of Kyzyl Adyr.



These improvements are implemented through remittances from migrant workers that are transferred to foundations. In Batken and Osh regions and partly in Talas Region, migrants create funds and associations. In the village of Orozbekovo alone in Batken Region, there are seven migrant associations, and there are two funds in Talas Region.

People are organizing and installing lighting at the expense of migrants. Young people opened a fund for the village.

*Orozbekovo village, Batken Oblast.
FGD with women*

It is important to note that migrants usually develop initiatives for rural development themselves, and implement them through their own motivation, although some do involve the local AO.

With the help of migrants, the ayil okmotu, we were able to solve the issue of drinking water in our village, as well as solve the issue of street lighting. The migrants are the ones who took this initiative.

*Deputy AO, Orozbekovo village, Batken Region.
In-depth interview*

In Chui Region, no joint projects between migrants and local authorities were mentioned. Although young people may develop ideas, they cannot find proper support for their implementation. Respondents from villages where initiatives have been implemented without the participation of the local AO said that migrants themselves perform the functions of the AO.

In addition to improving village infrastructure, migrants have provided material assistance to those with low incomes, families in need and other socially vulnerable groups (such as people with disabilities, widows, unemployed people), usually by distributing groceries (flour, oil, rice, etc.).



Migrants are transferring skills to residents in southern regions

In southern regions,⁵⁶ returned migrants actively train young people through sharing their experiences and teaching them their skills acquired from overseas. For instance, skills in construction have been utilized by residents in the construction and reparation of buildings and houses in their native villages. Women have also trained fellow villagers to sew, which can help young girls find jobs in the future.

⁵⁶ Ak Turpak and Orozbekovo villages in Batken Region and c. Nookat in Osh Region.

This woman herself asked for help, motivated by the fact that she will be training other women in her profession. At the moment, there are about 30 girls being trained there.

City of Nookat, Osh Region. FGD with men.

According to all of the participants of FGDs, patriotism and love for the village are the main incentives for supporting the development of villages. However, respondents in southern regions noted that local

authorities should actively encourage migrants and express signs of gratitude in order to show that the migrants' accomplished work does not remain unnoticed.

We need to attract people, and by doing so, awaken patriotic feelings in them, and with this we will achieve development.

*Vice-Mayor, Nookat city, Osh Region.
In-depth interview*



When examining this issue through a gender lens, women in Talas and Osh regions⁵⁷ highlighted that gender partially influences migrants' interest in participating in rural development, as they stated that more men than women take initiatives to contribute to the development of local communities. However, in many cases, investments made by women are not made public, and husbands or other male family members may take credit for the assistance provided by women.

But the role of men is more important. They never say, after all, that a woman gave something. They only talk about men. Perhaps this money that is given for aid comes from a woman's salary, as you said, but nobody mentions the name of this woman, they give the name of the man (praise only the man).

Bolshevik village, Osh Region. FGD with women

Bolshevik village, Osh Region. FGD with women
IDIs with local authorities also revealed migrants' positive impact on rural development, even in villages without migrants providing direct assistance to development due to their efforts in improving their families' living standards. Local authorities said that migrants' contributions to supporting their children's education, building houses and improving

private properties can also be considered as a general contribution to the development of the village. In addition, they mentioned that, when they return, migrants often engage in agriculture, cattle breeding, and setting up their own businesses. In general, local authorities suggested that returned migrants are proactive, and possess different ideas and values. The survey results showed that, during the pandemic, migrants took on more initiatives in every village where the study was conducted. Migrants actively assisted residents of their native villages by distributing drugs, personal protective equipment, ventilators, and hospital beds. They also provided additional financial support to poor families in need during the crisis.

Obstacles for migrants' participation in rural development

Almost all participants in the study claimed that migrants generally do not face any active obstacles in improving local development. Residents of Chui Oblast were the only ones who were not able to answer the question since they did not have any prior experience in supporting rural development.

In the regions of Osh and Batken, FGD participants also praised the support of the AO, which helps with organizational issues.

⁵⁷ Bolshevik village in Osh Region and Kyzyl Adyr village in Talas Region.



All focus groups, as well as representatives of local authorities in all areas, noted that there are no obstacles for migrants in promoting the development of AOs



In Osh and Batken regions, FGD participants noted not only the absence of obstacles, but also support from the AOs



Difficulties arise when return migrants want to start their own businesses, as noted from participants in Batken and Talas regions

However, returned migrants face considerable difficulties when they want to set up their own businesses. Participants from Batken and Talas regions reported that after opening their own businesses (for example, food service), they face problems such as frequent tax inspections, visits by the financial police, state environmental inspections and checks by other state services. In Batken Region, they also described bureaucracy and paperwork-related issues as difficulties. FGDs from southern regions also pointed out challenges in obtaining land for opening enterprises.

Despite this lack of coordination, around 80% of interviewed migrants understand the need to work together with local authorities and have shown a strong interest to engage in local development by investing at home. However, despite this interest, some migrants surveyed criticized the lack of business advisory support at the local level, vague legal norms, and a challenging bureaucratic, legal and institutional framework, as issues that could be addressed for facilitating their increased involvement in local development.

4. INTERACTIONS BETWEEN RETURNED MIGRANTS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Interactions between returned migrants and Local authorities

In order to assess the role of local governments in the reintegration of returned migrants, the interactions between the two parties needs to be examined. This section analyzes the main trends in the interactions between returned migrants and local authorities. It includes an analysis of the role of local authorities in supporting the reintegration of returned migrants (functions, responsibilities, services, and the effectiveness of requests), and provides observations on local authorities' efforts and recommendations on involving returned migrants in local community development.

4.1 Interaction trends between returned migrants and local authorities

While local authorities generally have neutral attitudes towards returnees, as discussed, establishing communication channels between arriving migrants and local authorities to intensify interactions could help improve the situation by building more positive attitudes.

Generally, relationships between migrants and authorities have been passive, with few instances of interactions between them. However, interactions have increased with the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced local authorities to reconsider their attitude towards returned migrants, who could put other residents at risk of infection, and manage their return to their local communities safely during the ongoing pandemic. Female migrants from Osh, Talas and Batken noted the increased control of returning migrants, whereby local authorities began to track those who arrived and monitor their health in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Although women perceived these measures as positive, a man from Batken Oblast criticized this approach. Other male participants did not notice any obvious changes in the attitudes of local authorities in the context of the pandemic. Almost none of the study participants experienced isolation or discrimination from local authorities after returning from overseas due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The vast majority of respondents who indicated that there is some kind of interaction between local authorities, community leaders and migrants also mentioned that social networks and messengers are the main channels used to communicate with both returnees and migrants overseas. There also are special groups on social media where migrants can share information or receive information from other citizens abroad.

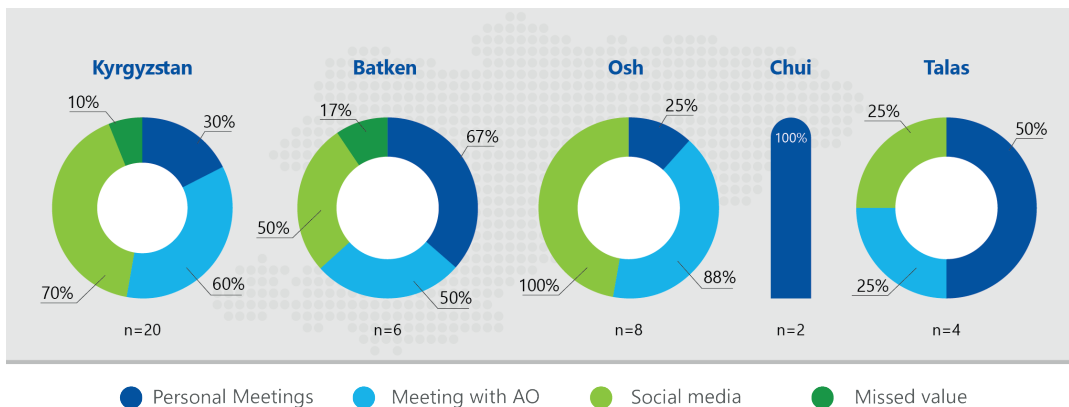
Yes, we keep in touch. We have a close relationship with youth in Moscow. There are older women and men overseas who are constantly asking what kind of help they can provide.

*Head of the VA, Amanbaevo village, Talas Oblast.
In-depth interview*

However, in-person meetings with migrants are held less frequently than online interactions, and often take place in informal settings, where authorities act like fellow villagers. The latter form of communication often does not result in the implementation of initiatives but instead raises socially significant issues that require support and assistance. Generally, this type of communication is focused on the experiences of migration or domestic issues.

Personal meetings often take place in an informal setting

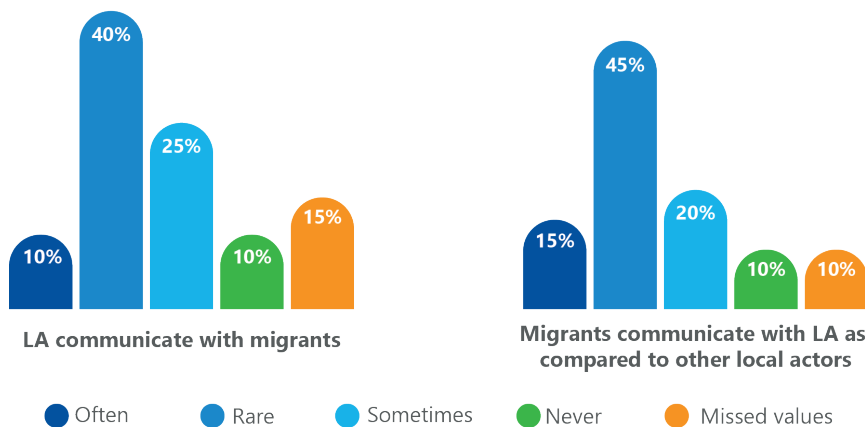




B2 what channels do you use to interact with migrants, if any?

This can be confirmed by the results of the survey among local authorities, whereby more than 40% of local authority representatives indicated that they rarely interact with migrants through offline channels, and a quarter said that interactions take place from time to time.

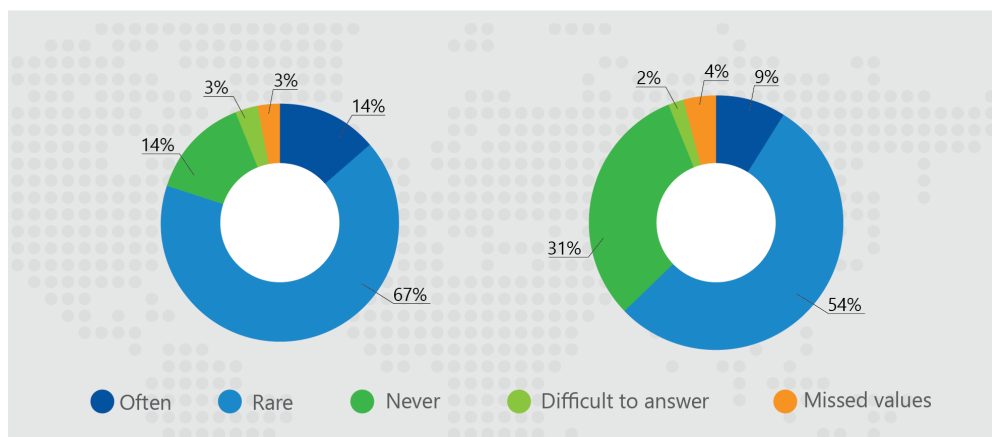
■ **Diagram 6. Frequency of interactions with migrants. In-depth interview participants, n = 20**



B1_2 How often do you interact / contact through offline channels with migrants?

In addition, 67% of FGD respondents (Diagram 7) noted that interactions with representatives of VAs are rare. 14% had never communicated with the local authorities. In Chui oblast, this response was chosen by a quarter of the respondents. The share of those who had personal interactions with the head of the VA or the mayor is even lower. Communication also usually occurs at a lower level with employees of local governments. Heads of local governments seem to get involved only in exceptional cases.

■ **Diagram 7. Frequency of interactions with local authorities. FGD participants, n = 158**



C1_1 How often do you interact with the following persons / organizations?
1. Local authorities, 2. Head of AO / Mayor



The main questions for which migrants turn to local authorities concern paperwork and obtaining certificates, which was confirmed by local authorities. There are isolated cases of conversations about cooperating with local authorities regarding the use of public funds and the provision of social assistance. Returned migrants are accustomed to solving emerging issues on their own, with the help of acquaintances (friends and relatives), which explains the low level of dialogue. Many respondents believe that there is no point in involving authorities in issues other than administrative ones, due to the currently low levels of interaction and communication that is not conducive to open dialogue to jointly solve problems and implement community development initiatives. It is probable that switching communication topics to economic and social issues would foster more open and productive dialogue between migrants and local authorities.



Trust is important in understanding interaction levels between local authorities and migrants. One third of the focus group participants had an attitude of distrust towards local governments and their rep-

resentatives. This is a consequence of negative personal experiences when they previously appealed to the VA but did not receive sufficient assistance. This attitude of distrust has developed gradually over the years, when migrants themselves, or their acquaintances, did not receive sufficient assistance after approaching the local government, considerably damaging their credibility. This results in migrants' indifference or even negative attitudes towards local authorities, as well as a lack of communication and the subsequent joint implementation of initiatives that could positively contribute to local development.

Because there is no trust. Even when you turn to them, they cannot give you an appropriate answer. And the Village Administration does not have the ability to address the issue.

*Women's council, Bolshevik village, Osh Oblast.
In-depth interview*

Levels of trust were ranked in a quantitative assessment of the relations between migrants, local authorities and community leaders, based on a calculated coefficient of the levels of trust towards each individual or organization.

During the FGDs, migrants expressed the highest level of trust in relation to other returnees and migrants abroad. There are no significant differences in the results according to each oblast. Conversely, local government and their heads are the least trusted by those surveyed. Other institutions such as religious structures, medical institutions and educational institutions are also trusted more than local government representatives.

Migrants' trust in authorities is slightly higher in the region of Talas, where heads of VAs are ranked 6th. This relatively high indicator can be explained by the fact that migrants have already implemented a few projects jointly with VAs in this region. In almost all of the FGDs in Osh, participants highlighted local authorities' openness to provide a variety of support and cooperation with returned migrants. Positive experiences of interaction with local governments led to further interactions with VAs on various issues of interest, and subsequently migrants' overall positive attitude towards VAs.



90% of the interviewed migrants and their relatives indicated the need to develop active and open interaction

Nevertheless, about 90% of the surveyed migrants and their relatives indicated the need to develop active and open interactions with local authorities and local community leaders, firstly, in order to maintain statistics on migration flows in each locality and, secondly, to provide assistance to migrants. They expressed that authorities could provide support to recently returned migrants who are disabled, or address administrative issues, in particular for assisting migrants in obtaining a passport when lost. While migrants in many settlements indicated that they are already helping their localities through direct interactions with the respective VA or through funds as discussed, migrants also indicated the need to interact more effectively with local authorities in providing financial or social assistance to their communities.

Government representatives also noted their readiness to assist in issues related to documentation

and registration. VAs expressed that they are ready to provide comprehensive assistance for migrants within their capacities. Authorities declared that issues such as unemployment cannot be resolved at the local level, but they expressed their readiness to assist with other problems. However, local authorities do not always possess a complete understanding of migrant affairs due to passive interactions. For instance, VAs were ready to provide assistance to a schoolgirl child of parent migrants, who was found to have been abused by her brother, but only after a teacher approached them. The majority of respondents indicated that migrants should therefore openly involve and inform local authorities about their difficulties and needs.

Not a single migrant had turned to the VA for assistance before. This girl, who is studying in the seventh grade, has migrant parents. She was staying with her grandmother and sister, and her brother systematically beat her. She could not tell this to anyone, but one day she decided to tell her teacher. Today, the headmaster of the school contacted me with this issue. She asked me to examine this case.

*Head of the VA, Bolshevik village, Osh Oblast.
In-depth interview*

Moreover, as discussed previously, many migrants and local authorities expressed their readiness to partner and implement mutually beneficial projects that contribute to both the local community and migrants' families in Kyrgyzstan. Local authorities therefore need to involve returned migrants in implementing development projects and provide any possible assistance within their capacities to build trust. However, returned migrants should also take the initiative to contact the local government themselves. Positive changes may then be observed in their relations and interactions.

■ **Table 2. Migrants' level of trust in individuals and representatives of various organizations. FGD participants, n = 158**

Individuals / Organizations	Kyrgyzstan				
	Do not trust	Average level of trust	Trust	Coefficient	Rank
7. Migrant	14%	44%	41%	47%	1
8. Returned migrants	18%	40%	42%	25%	2
9. Law Enforcement Agencies (Police)	22%	34%	44%	22%	3
3. NGO	26%	34%	40%	14%	4
10. Residents of your village / city	32%	24%	45%	13%	5
2. Religious structures (mosque /church)	31%	29%	40%	9%	6
6. Local entrepreneurs	21%	53%	26%	5%	7
5. Medical institutions	29%	39%	32%	3%	8
4. Educational institutions (school/ kindergarten)	40%	26%	35%	-5%	9
1. Head of local self-government	33%	41%	26%	-8%	10

■ **Table 3. Migrants' level of trust in representatives of various individuals and organizations by oblast. FGD participants, n = 158**

Individuals / Organizations	Batken region				
	Do not trust	Average level of trust	Trust	Coefficient	Rank
7. Migrant	2%	55%	43%	40%	4
8. Returned migrants	2%	52%	45%	43%	3
9. Law Enforcement Agencies (Police)	37%	44%	20%	-17%	10
3. NGO	23%	63%	15%	-8%	8
10. Residents of your village / city	2%	29%	69%	67%	1
2. Religious structures (mosque /church)	14%	33%	52%	38%	5
6. Local entrepreneurs	2%	67%	31%	29%	7
5. Medical institutions	5%	52%	43%	38%	6
4. Educational institutions (school/ kindergarten)	7%	30%	63%	56%	2
1. Head of local self-government	26%	56%	18%	-8%	9

Individuals / Organizations	Osh region				
	Do not trust	Average level of trust	Trust	Coefficient	Rank
7. Migrant	27%	44%	29%	2%	3
8. Returned migrants	36%	34%	30%	-7%	4
9. Law Enforcement Agencies (Police)	10%	25%	65%	56%	2
3. NGO	10%	18%	73%	63%	1
10. Residents of your village / city	64%	18%	18%	-45%	8
2. Religious structures (mosque /church)	57%	24%	19%	-39%	7
6. Local entrepreneurs	20%	56%	16%	-13%	5
5. Medical institutions	55%	37%	8%	-47%	9
4. Educational institutions (school/ kindergarten)	76%	21%	3%	-73%	10
1. Head of local self-government	42%	29%	29%	-13%	6

Individuals / Organizations	Chui region				
	Do not trust	Average level of trust	Trust	Coefficient	Rank
7. Migrant	13%	31%	56%	44%	1
8. Returned migrants	13%	38%	50%	38%	3
9. Law Enforcement Agencies (Police)	25%	63%	13%	-13%	9
3. NGO	63%	38%	0%	-63%	10
10. Residents of your village / city	13%	38%	50%	38%	4
2. Religious structures (mosque /church)	13%	31%	56%	44%	2
6. Local entrepreneurs	13%	50%	38%	25%	6
5. Medical institutions	13%	44%	44%	31%	5
4. Educational institutions (school/ kindergarten)	13%	50%	38%	25%	7
1. Head of local self-government	19%	63%	19%	0%	8

Individuals / Organizations	Talas region				
	Do not trust	Average level of trust	Trust	Coefficient	Rank
7. Мигранты	4%	37%	59%	56%	2
8. Вернувшиеся мигранты	4%	33%	63%	59%	1
9. Правоохранительные органы (Милиция)	26%	22%	52%	26%	7
3. НПО	55%	25%	20%	-35%	10
10. Жители Вашего села/города	15%	22%	63%	48%	4
2. Религиозные структуры (мечеть/церковь)	7%	33%	59%	52%	3
6. Местные предприниматели	37%	26%	37%	0%	8
5. Медицинские учреждения	15%	22%	63%	48%	5
4. Образовательные учреждения (школы/детсады)	22%	15%	63%	41%	6
1. Глава ОМСУ	33%	33%	33%	0%	9

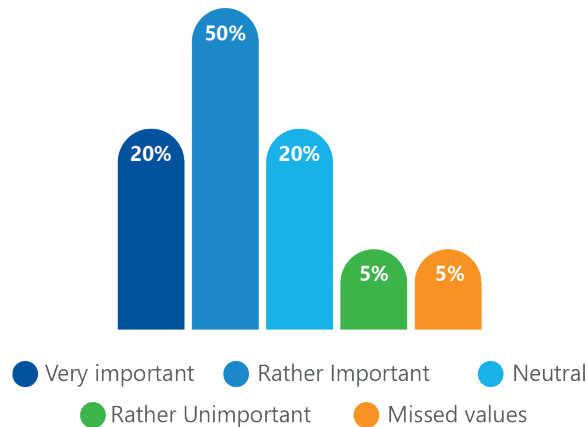
4.2 Role and potential of local authorities in the reintegration of returned migrants

Local authorities and community leaders have a key role to play in the reintegration of returned migrants. Migrants face certain difficulties when returning home, which joint efforts between migrants, local authorities and community leaders can help to alleviate. This chapter analyzes local authorities' role in providing support to migrants, and assesses current government activities aimed specifically at reintegrating migrants into local communities. Suggestions from target audiences to improve interactions between migrants and local authorities are also presented.

Role of local authorities in the reintegration of returned migrants

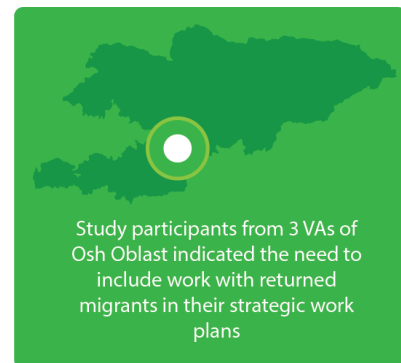
According to the survey of local government representatives and community leaders, local authorities play an important role in the lives of returned migrants, as mentioned by 70% of the respondents, with the highest share of local authorities perceiving their role as important in the regions of Batken (83%) and Osh (63%). Representatives of women's councils in the city of Nookat, the villages of Dzhanly Aryk and Bolshevik in Osh Oblast, and the head of the VA in the village of Amanbaevo in Talas Oblast, however, indicated low levels of support for returned migrants in their respective areas.

■ **Diagram 9. Significance of the role of local authorities in village development.**
In-depth interview participants, n = 20



B5 What role do you / your organization / institution play in supporting returned migrants?

As discussed, local authorities' role in reintegrating migrants is generally low, as confirmed by the results of the survey. The interactions between migrants and local authorities are mainly limited to issues relating to assistance in obtaining documents or certificates, and rarely involve advice or support in implementing local development initiatives. This assistance provided by local authorities has also been shown to not be sufficient for the full reintegration of returned migrants into local communities. However, the majority of representatives of local governments highlighted the importance of working on improving the reintegration of returned migrants.

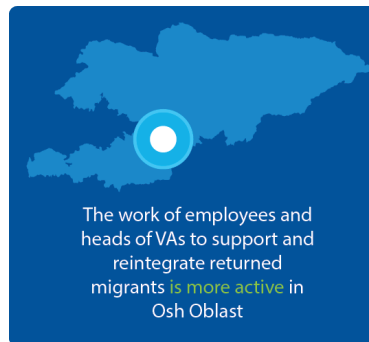


Study participants from 3 VAs in Osh Oblast⁵⁸ indicated the need to involve returned migrants in their strategic work plans to help build closer relations with migrants and reintegrate them into their communities. According to many local authorities, local development strategies do not consider the impact of migration. Only the local authorities in Batken and Osh oblasts⁵⁹ take migration processes into account when designing development plans, but they are not always implemented in practice.

Furthermore, local authorities identified the following issues that need to be addressed to facilitate work with migrants:

- Issues with paperwork, since this is one of the direct responsibilities of VA representatives. More than half of survey participants indicated the need to support migrants with documentation and other administrative problems, including: obtaining a passport, renewing registration, and obtaining documents for their children (for example, to register them in school or kindergarten), or for real estate.
- Employment opportunities. Representatives of Chui, Batken and Osh oblasts⁶⁰ stated that more jobs must be created for residents, including for returned migrants. It is important to support the expansion of businesses and opening of factories and plants in order to increase the number of available workplaces. About half of the migrants have good education, on top of new skills that they acquired abroad. Their employment would have positive impacts on businesses and the development of their respective localities.
- Assistance with opening businesses, or engaging in entrepreneurship or agricultural activities. According to local government representatives, authorities should provide assistance by allocating land for rent and providing loans with low interest rates in order to stimulate farming. Only about half of respondents of IDIs reported that local authorities currently assist migrants in business matters.
- Provision of psychological, social, and business advisory assistance to facilitate the reintegration of migrants into the local community and support their families. In addition, representatives of women's councils noted that they should focus on supporting migrants' children and helping families with migrants when family conflicts and disagreements with neighbors escalate.

Only in a few cases⁶¹ did local authorities not entirely understand the essence of how to reintegrate returned migrants, by linking this with actions that require significant financial investments only. **Overall, almost all of the representatives of local governments and community leaders highlighted the need to assist migrants in their reintegration. However, they said that they cannot entirely fulfil their duties on reintegrating returned migrants due to their limited budgets.**



Role of the authorities in reintegrating returned migrants in Osh Oblast

The work of employees and heads of VAs in Osh Oblast in supporting and reintegrating returned migrants is more thorough in comparison with other target regions. According to local government representatives, the range of the services they provide to migrants include the following: paperwork issues, advice on investing in the local community, land plots, assistance in finding jobs, the allocation of land, assistance to low-income families at the request of migrants to improve their living standards, and the distribution of humanitarian aid. Examples of assistance with paperwork include passport issuance, documents to enroll children in schools, various certificates and the renewal of registration.

Another key area of work with returned migrants has been joint efforts to improve local infrastructure, utilizing their newly acquired skills and knowledge. Migrant workers obtained new skills and knowledge in construction, business management and other areas that can be applied upon their return to develop local communities. In more than half of FGDs, some migrants and their relatives explained that they turn to local authorities to advance their own ideas for the improvement of local infrastructure and community development, such as for improving infrastructure, such as installing lighting and build-

⁵⁸ Bolshevik village, Toolos village and Dzhany Aryk village.

⁵⁹ Villages of Orozbekovo, Ak Turpak, Kotormo, Dzhany Aryk and Toolos, and Nookat town.

⁶⁰ Erkin-Sai village, Kotormo village and Nookat town.

⁶¹ Orozbekovo village in Batken Oblast.

ing sports stadiums. In some cases, VAs cover half of the expenses for the construction or reconstruction of roads, playgrounds, lighting and other social facilities in the settlement, demonstrating their positive perception of returnees. For instance, in the village of Dzhany Aryk, local authorities successfully implemented a project together with migrants on drinking water supply systems, and have built a kindergarten. According to migrants, the project was implemented with the help of the local VA and funds from returned migrants. The vice-mayor of the town of Nookat also said that authorities provide active assistance for migrants in preparing documents and obtaining land permits for business projects.

The majority of local authorities expressed satisfaction with migrants' assistance and endeavor to create favorable conditions for the implementation of local development initiatives. Study participants from the village of Dzhany Aryk also mentioned that if local authorities also initiated projects for local development (construction of hospitals, stadium) and contacted them, migrants would be open to assisting in their implementation. According to the results of the study, in some VAs, migrants were involved in installations and plumbing work in the creation of new hospitals, and a woman who returned from abroad opened courses to train other women in her village.

Migrants come themselves to the Village Administration and suggest their ideas, offer their help in installing lighting, drinking water supply systems and building kindergartens. Half of the expenses are covered by the migrants and the other half by the Village Administration.

Dzhany Aryk village, Osh Oblast. FGD with women

Dzhany Aryk village, Osh Oblast. FGD with women
A quarter of FGD participants in several villages⁶² of Osh Oblast also said that they interact positive-

ly with other organizations and local communities. For instance, residents of the village of Bolshevik turn to the "court of elders" for family issues, and to the "ayaldar keneshi" (women's council) for cases of violence. They also mentioned positive interactions with institutions such as UNDP, ADB and ARIS.



Migrants do not often turn to local authorities

However, the current levels of interaction and the role of local authorities in reintegrating migrants remain insufficient and can be improved. Almost all of the representatives of local governments and community leaders in Osh Oblast noted that they are not sufficiently informed about migrants' needs because migrants often do not turn to them for assistance or to resolve other issues. Returned migrants admitted that they need to take the first step in establishing interactions with local authorities but lack trust in local authorities, resulting in passive interactions, as discussed. Nevertheless, local authorities claimed that they can provide assistance to overcome migrants' main problems if supported further.

Role of the authorities in reintegrating returned migrants in Batken Oblast

Representatives of local authorities evaluated their role in supporting returned migrants as quite high. Local authorities suggested that they interact with migrants and try to help them in every possible way. Local authorities reported being mostly involved in addressing issues related to passports, children's documents and real estate documents, and may also provide other administrative advice. In addition, local authorities assist in creating favorable conditions for the implementation of development initiatives by helping migrants obtain permits, resolving administrative issues, providing land for construction, advising returned migrants and attracting external investors for the successful implementation of small businesses and development projects.

there are sometimes problems with Funding projects

This problem

is addressed through the active work of local authorities. They attract external investors, represented by funds created by migrants, local residents, as well as various donor organizations and NGOs

⁶² Villages of Bolshevik and Toolos.

According to the study participants in Batken Oblast, there are sometimes challenges related to funding local development initiatives. Local authorities actively work in addressing such difficulties by attracting external investors, including through funds created by migrants, local residents, various donor organizations and NGOs. Thus, they are able to create deeper cooperation to implement projects for the development of local communities.

One successful example that was mentioned was the implementation of a project on water supply systems by local authorities and returned migrants.⁶³ This project was initiated and designed by migrants, which representatives of the respective VA then communicated to higher authorities to receive funds for its implementation. Local authorities, with the active assistance of returned migrants, also installed lighting in the villages, constructed roads and made a significant contribution to the village's development. Additional work involving returned migrants and funding from NGOs is planned in Batken Oblast in the near future. For instance, there are plans to allocate land to migrants so that they can engage in agricultural activities. The COVID-19 pandemic has not produced any changes in the services provided by the local government.

We chose a certain place, we will give them seedlings for them to grow, and we will buy their harvest. Also, we created 25 storage units with the help of one NGO so that those who wish can make a contribution to agriculture.

Local council, Orozbekovo village, Batken Oblast. In-depth interview

However, almost all participants of the FGDs indicated that local authorities ineffectively involve migrants in community development and that they do not take the necessary initiative to engage with them. According to one of the groups, NGOs are significantly more likely than local authorities to support development projects. This may be the case because local authorities are limited in their financial resources and cannot co-finance all of the initiatives put forward by returned migrants. The participants in FGDs with migrants in the villages of Ak Turpak and Orozbekovo highlighted the possibility for the local government to provide further assistance if returned migrants approached local authorities themselves.

Role of local authorities in reintegrating returned migrants in Talas and Chui oblasts



Migrants indicated they receive assistance from local authorities with paperwork and obtaining land when they, themselves, turn to the VA

Target audiences in Talas and Chui oblasts indicated that local authorities do not often interact with returned migrants or provide sufficient assistance. About half of the FGDs with migrants revealed that they sometimes receive assistance from local authorities with paperwork, obtaining land or other administrative issues. The pandemic has had little impact on the level of services provided by local authorities, except regarding the distribution of humanitarian aid to local residents. However, it is difficult to examine the provision of assistance to returned migrants, since, according to the study participants, this aid was primarily provided to those within the personal networks of VA representatives, significantly eroding trust in local authorities.

When considering joint initiatives, neither local authorities nor migrants were consequently able to single out concrete assistance provided to migrants. The authorities are not working to involve returned migrants in local community development or make use of their skills and knowledge. Local authorities attributed this issue to a lack of funding, as local budgets are mostly dedicated to self-maintenance and the maintenance of infrastructure (such as schools and hospitals) in the village. However, assistance from local authorities does not always depend on significant financial resources, since funding can come from migrants themselves or from external sources. Local authorities can play a greater role in reintegration by providing assistance in administrative issues or other advice. They could improve their interactions with migrants and more actively involve them in local community development projects, or at least encourage them to do so. Such cooperation would help in developing relations based on mutual trust and create better conditions for the reintegration of returned migrants.

Obstacles faced by local authorities in improving the reintegration of returned migrants, and ways to overcome them

⁶³ Kotormo village.

The work of local authorities in reintegrating returned migrants is impeded by certain factors that require close attention. Despite the fact that half of the representatives⁶⁴ of local governments and community leaders indicated that they face no obstacles in providing effective services for the reintegration of returned migrants, others still mentioned several challenges.



According to the study's results, a key obstacle in improving the role of local authorities in reintegrating returnees is their lack of knowledge and competencies in the fields of legal advice and migration issues. Representatives of local authorities in some target settlements in the regions of Batken and Osh⁶⁵ indicated that it would be important for them to obtain knowledge in these areas. Currently, the fact that specialists of local governance structures cannot provide proper legal advice due to insufficient knowledge and experience, and the absence of state information centers, constitutes a significant problem.

Legal knowledge means knowledge in the migration field. That is to say, what are the rules for going on migration, what labor contracts should be made with employers? There is a need for such specialists.

*Deputy head of the VA, Toolos village, Osh Oblast.
In-depth interview*

According to local authorities in some of the communities in Talas and Osh oblasts,⁶⁶ insufficient workforce in VAs is another important obstacle. A specifically trained employee who can provide consulting services and refer migrants to the proper institutions to solve their problems is necessary. Increasing the number of employees in VAs would facilitate faster responses that address the needs of returnees and improve the services provided to them.

Local government representatives in the village of Orozbekovo indicated another obstacle: the lack of skills in the field of psychology. Migrants who have lived abroad often experience psychological stress, which can be aggravated by the social and financial

difficulties they face when returning. It is important for representatives of local authorities and community leaders to be aware of the available services and refer migrants and their family members to professional psychological assistance. According to the authorities, this would positively contribute to the reintegration of migrants.

Assistance on improving authorities' skills and knowledge in the legal and psychological spheres and on the specificities of working with migrants could thus have a positive impact on the effectiveness of the services they provide. According to the study's results, only a few representatives of local governments⁶⁷ have participated in trainings or meetings since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, only one of these events, which was attended by representatives of the women's council from the village of Toolos in Osh Oblast, had migration issues on the agenda, namely the role of women migrants as a source of development ("Woman in migration - the basis for development"). The rest of the events were meetings to share experiences and trainings on precautions when holding parliamentary elections during the current pandemic.

Nearly all of the local government representatives interviewed expressed a deep interest in attending training events on migration issues. These trainings or courses should provide knowledge on issues related to migration and be conducted by knowledgeable experts, organizations, and possibly specialized NGOs or international organizations. Authorities need to receive detailed explanations on laws governing interactions with migrants, since they are not always aware of them. Even though the majority of the study's respondents were favorable to the idea of changing the legal framework in order to improve the reintegration of migrants, some local government representatives expressed the opposite opinion. They claimed that giving preferential conditions to migrants would be inappropriate, since migrants are members of the community, and therefore, should not be entitled to different services than other community members.⁶⁸ This proves the need to educate local authorities on the particularities of migrants' needs.

Local authorities are interested in learning how other local governments work to reintegrate migrants. They expressed a desire to learn how to effectively engage with returned migrants and apply positive examples into their own activities. Some local gov-

⁶⁴ Ak-Turpak and Kotormo villages in Batken Oblast, Toolos and Dzhany Aryk in Osh Oblast and Kyzyl Adyr of Talas Oblast.

⁶⁵ Villages of Ak Turpak, Kotormo, Bolshevik and Toolos, and Nookat town.

⁶⁶ Amanbaevo village, Kyzyl Adyr village and Nookat town.

⁶⁷ Orozbekovo village in Batken Oblast, and Dzhany Aryk and Toolos villages in Osh Oblast

⁶⁸ Orozbekovo village in Batken Oblast, and Bolshevik village in Osh Oblast.

ernment representatives also showed interest in obtaining psychosocial skills. It would therefore be useful for local authorities to participate in projects concerning issues of migration and their solutions.

I cooperated with USAID for 5 years, including 1 year as a member, and 4 years as a trainer. At that time, the regions of Chui, Dzhahal-Abad, and Osh participated on interesting migration issues. I need to participate in such events. This project lasted 5 years, and now there are no such long-term projects. It would be good if there were similar projects more often.

*Women's council, Toolos village, Osh Oblast.
In-depth interview*

According to returnees, the limited budgets of VAs is the only significant obstacle for local authorities to provide the necessary support



According to migrants, the limited budget of VAs is the only significant obstacle for local authorities in providing the necessary support to returned migrants, as highlighted by participants from Osh and Chui oblasts.⁶⁹ of the reintegration process only through direct financial support. However, local authorities can also help to reintegrate migrants into the community by providing assistance with employment, addressing administrative issues, involving migrants in the implementation of various initiatives, providing support in the event of conflict situations, and giving advice on and attracting external investments. Considering the overwhelming opinion that interactions between local authorities and returned migrants are limited due to a lack of interest from both parties, more efforts are therefore required. Inclusive relationships need to be established so that migrants will feel welcome to report their problems to local authorities. Communication can be improved by increasing the number of social workers and arranging meetings with migrants.

Representatives of Osh⁷⁰ and Chui oblasts indicated that such meetings could help identify migrants' emerging difficulties and find solutions for addressing them. Regular communication and in-person meetings would thus help to improve interactions between migrants and local government structures, and therefore facilitate the reintegration of migrants. According to the participants of the FGDs in Osh Oblast,⁷¹ the easiest way to solve limited budget constraints would be to increase the local budget at the expense of central government funds. The experience of other VAs, which have attracted external investments from funds created by migrants, NGOs, or international and donor organizations, can also serve as examples of potential options.

Participants in FGDs in Batken Oblast⁷² also mentioned the need for local authorities to provide additional medical services and assistance for returned migrants, since their health is often compromised overseas and in transit. Migrants and their relatives, therefore, mentioned the need to create a plan at the national level for the provision of better health services for returnees' reintegration.

Comprehensive work should be organized to improve the reintegration of returned migrants, including acquiring assistance from various local private and state structures, NGOs and international organizations. According to an overwhelming majority of local government representatives, there are currently no organizations involved in the reintegration of returned migrants. However, there have been some experiences of interactions between local associations, various NGOs, international and donor organizations, and local authorities in some southern regions⁷³ and examples of active interactions between women's councils and elders' councils, and the UN, USAID, ARIS, the World Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, the Blagodat Social Fund, etc. These structures and organizations conduct training courses, finance project implementation, participate in development projects and support the creation of businesses. Participants of the FGDs expressed their desire for local authorities to interact further with NGOs, and international and donor organizations.

⁶⁹ Toolos village, Dzhany Aryk village, Nookat town, and Erkin Sai village.

⁷⁰ Toolos village.

⁷¹ Dzhany Aryk village and Nookat town.

⁷² Kyzyl Adyr village.

⁷³ Toolos village and Nookat town in Osh Oblast and Orozbekovo and Ak Turpak villages in Batken Oblast.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations of the study

Recruiting

During the recruitment process, a difficulty arose with a respondent from Kara Buura Ayil Aimak in the village of Kyzyl Adyr. The head of the AO in the village of Kyzyl Adyr initially could not make time for the interview. The scheduled meetings were disrupted or ignored by the respondent. However, after long conversations, the recruiter managed to make an appointment and successfully conduct the interview.

Fieldwork

There were no difficulties during the fieldwork process.

Although the study adopted an inclusive approach

to involving participants, since the questionnaires were only filled out by the participants of FGDs, it cannot be confirmed that the results of the questionnaire survey reflect the opinions of the entire general population.

During the qualitative research stage, all respondents were given mini questionnaires to fill out on their own. The questionnaires were filled out at the end of each interview and FGDs anonymously, so that respondents would feel free to answer the questions as desired. The moderator observed the process and was available to help if necessary.

Since the questionnaires were self-filled, there were cases in which respondents did not answer a question, skipped some questions, or marked them incorrectly. Therefore, when collecting quantitative data, some questionnaires contained missing values.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Main findings and recommendations

It can be concluded that returned migrants require complex reintegration support and need further assistance from local authorities, considering that they are also interested in and ready to invest in businesses, and social development projects if there are favorable conditions such as partnership, transparency, coordination and mutual trust. The following is a list of the main conclusions and recommendations, which were formulated as a result of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, as suggested by migrants, their families and / or representatives of local authorities.

FINDINGS:

Returned migrants are facing numerous challenges upon their return.

Migrant workers outlined a list of challenges that they are facing upon their return because of COVID-19, such as: **financial** issues (difficulties in repaying loans and supporting their families); **social** challenges (the lack of reintegration services, difficulties in integrating into local communities in Kyrgyzstan, and the inability to access services and be accepted in the local community); **legal** difficulties (the lack of information on their rights in the country of destination and upon return); **health** matters (poor working conditions and difficulties in accessing local medical services because of the lack of insurance); an absence of information on investment opportunities (as many returning migrants want to invest in local communities but criticize the lack of any business advisory support at the local level, and the presence of vague legal norms and bureaucratic legal and institutional frameworks); and documentation issues (numerous returnees raised issues of documentation upon return and the unavailability of support from local authorities to support them).

A systemic lack of a reintegration and support mechanism at the local level and the almost non-existent role of local governments in providing support to returnees, especially as a result of COVID-19.

Regardless of the long list of challenges and needs faced upon return, most migrants do not benefit from any kind of support upon return. Even though local authorities understand the need to properly support returned migrants and they have a high

desire to support returnees, local authorities usually fail to do so due to the lack of knowledge, information and tools.

Most returned migrants also lack sufficient knowledge and information on the existing services, opportunities or their benefits and do not know where to get such information.

No mechanism to engage migrants effectively for encouraging investments in local development.

While the assessment unpacked some positive examples of migrants supporting their local communities, these are mostly occurring sporadically, driven by migrants rather than being in line with local plans, and are not accompanied with sufficient support from local authorities. Existing institutional frameworks are not sustainable and do not ensure transparency nor the inclusive engagement of actors. The existing relationship between local authorities and migrants is rather passive, with migrants generally adopting a more proactive role. Many heads of AOs only communicate with migrants such as fellow villagers rather than as officials. There is no common, established channel of communication that could help improve interaction between returned migrants and local authorities on local development issues. Migrants do not know who and where to turn to when they face problems, so they often feel powerless and helpless. In many cases, migrants subsequently turn to their relatives to solve their issues or look for information themselves. Migrants are also informed by other former or current migrants through established communication channels, in which local authorities are not included, and this information is not always reliable and useful.

The lowest level of migrants' trust is towards local governments when compared to other actors at the local level (religious, health, educational, local community members, etc.).

Considering that trust is one of the main prerequisites for migrants' engagement in local development, this explains why Kyrgyzstani migrants do generally not approach local authorities for support upon their return nor partner with them for improving local development. This is also likely why the instances of development initiatives at the local level are driven by migrants without sufficient support from local authorities. As mentioned by respondents, lack of trust can be addressed through continuous two-way communication between migrants and local authorities, jointly implemented and co-funded initiatives, better framing of their partnership and creating a framework that would enable migrants engagement in local development and business creation, in a systemic and transparent manner.

Strong interest by migrants in supporting their native communities' development and by local authorities in engaging with them.

Despite this somewhat passive relationship between both interviewed groups, the assessment provided some positive insights, with the majority of interviewed local authorities expressing their eagerness

to work with migrants, support their reintegration back home and engage them in local development, if properly capacitated and guided throughout the process. The same is applicable for migrants (80%), who showed a strong interest to engage in local development by investing at home, subject to transparency, effective communication, strong partnerships, mutual trust with local governments, and the provision of proper guidance on available investment opportunities.

Need to support migrants during all stages of migration, including the pre-departure stage.

Finally, even though the main target group was returned migrants, the assessment also identified a strong need to support migrants, including those intending to return during the pre-departure stage. While most potential migrants at the local level are young people who plan to migrate immediately after graduating from school, they often base their decision to migrate on rumors of relatives or friends. Consequently, they lack information about employment opportunities, working conditions, the skills in high demand abroad and immigration rules in countries of destination. Comprehensive pre-departure assistance and information can be essential in supporting legal and informed migration in line with the rules and needs of destination labor markets, which is a prerequisite to grow a future constructive force for development.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. A **whole-of-government approach** on migration and development at the national and local levels needs to be designed. Providing an effective framework for harnessing the development dividends of migration will create the required favorable premises to work on designing concrete measures at the institutional, legal and policy levels to address existing challenges and engage the appropriate national and local actors. Such a set-up can involve the creation of **national and local migration focal points**, instructions on the nature of their work, and the suitable framing of local authorities' mandates and roles in the context of migration and in the reintegration chain. This could also concretely outline the capacity building needs and other possible areas of support.
2. Strengthen **data** on migration and the impact of migration at the community level, as well as on the potential of migration for development.
3. Create the necessary **facilities to properly mainstream migration** in institutions and policy, including designation of local migration focal points, integrate migration related functions in the existent job descriptions, consult migrants on local priorities and mainstream migration in local policies (or strategies)
4. Devise a **reintegration and referral system** at the national, regional and local levels, which outlines the clear role of local authorities in this process in line with their mandate and resources. This will allow for the proper diagnoses of migrants' problems, the identification of possible solutions, and their referral to available instruments to support their reintegration. This will also entail the optimization and simplification of bureaucratic procedures by building on existing institutional structures at the local level.
5. Design and implement targeted **pilot reintegration and support schemes** that will allow for the sustainable socio-economic reintegration for returnees, considering the specific needs of different groups. This will be done through a tridimensional approach comprised of social, economic and psychological reintegration. Examples of tailored reintegration assistance mentioned by respondents include matching grant schemes for local development, matching funds for incentivizing the investment of remittances into the national and local economy, recognizing skills and qualifications upon migrants' return, job matching schemes, incentives for employers, cash-for-work programmes and state-based national and local reintegration and referral programmes.
6. Design innovative **investment schemes and packages** for migrants and their families based on existing best practices in countries with

similar migration patterns. Banking and government structures could consider the option of creating favorable conditions for migrant workers to obtain loans. It is worth considering the possibility of allowing returned migrants to obtain loans with proof of money earned overseas.

7. Design and develop **communications platforms** to ensure smooth, continuous and effective interactions and consultations between local authorities and migrants at every stage of local planning and development.
8. Harness migrant engagement in local development through establishing and building the capacity of **local migrants' organizations** in their native communities with clear mandates, roles and objectives (e.g. through TORs) on leveraging migrants' potential, resources and skills for contributing to local development.
9. Design a comprehensive and adaptable set of **capacity building measures for local authorities** to properly understand and manage migration, and equip them with the necessary skills, tools and instruments to transform perceptions of migration from a problem into an opportunity for rural areas in Kyrgyzstan.
10. Explore new partnerships, funding opportunities and instruments aimed at bringing together migrants, their families and local authorities.

To conclude, the data analyzed shows that migrants face a long list of challenges upon return, especially as a result of COVID-19. However, they do not receive sufficient reintegration support, information, or advice after their return to Kyrgyzstan. As local authorities stand on the frontline when it comes to dealing with these challenges, while fully acknowledging the need to have a more proactive role in this process and expressing a strong interest in doing so, they lack the proper knowledge, skills, and tools to fulfil these responsibilities. Migrants also do not tend to approach local authorities for support due to their lack of trust towards them.

Migrants are mostly willing to partner with local authorities and support the development of their native communities, subject to transparency and the creation of proper partnerships with local authorities. Ultimately, returning migrants are not the only ones facing challenges. The results show that potential migrants also lack the required support and guidance during the pre-departure stage, which is another area where local authorities could have a more proactive role, including by supporting other local actors.

The assessment provides concrete evidence for future joint UNDP-IOM interventions in areas such as strengthening the role of local authorities in effectively managing migrants, their families and

local communities; sustainable reintegration of returning migrants, including support for socio-economic recovery at the national and local levels; the inclusion of migrants into national and local recovery plans; mainstreaming migration in local policy-making; engaging migrants in local development; and promoting social cohesion at the local level. The findings from this UNDP-IOM joint assessment therefore provide an important platform for advancing cooperation on migration and development in Kyrgyzstan, in line with both agencies' strategies, mandates, and complementary expertise.

ANNEXES

Annexes

GUIDE - INSTRUCTION (FGD GUIDE)

For FGDs with the participation of representatives of the local communities:

1. With migrants who returned as a result of the COVID-19 crisis;
2. Relatives of current and returning migrants.

Hello, my name is _____.

I represent an independent research company "M-Vector", which, together with UNDP and the International Organization for Migration, conducts a survey among representatives of State and municipal authorities, as well as representatives of local leaders, about the general situation of your settlement, the interaction of local self-government bodies with the population, as well as the role of migration in the development of the community.

In total, the interview will take about 2 hours. For further analysis, our conversation will be recorded on a voice recorder. The information obtained during the survey will be completely confidential; your responses will be processed and presented only in a generalized form. We ask you to give the most detailed answers to the questions. What may seem self-evident to you may become the most important argument for us. Based on your answers, decisions will be made on the implementation of measures for the development of your locality, building peace and prosperity.

1. Name and age of FGD participants _____
2. Gender of the participants _____
3. Education and marital status of FGD participants _____
4. Current employment and occupation of FGD participants _____
5. Date of last migration and country / area of migration of FGD participants _____

Notions used

For the purpose of this discussion, several notions will be used and are explained below:

Migrants – Kyrgyz citizens who either were or are currently involved migration, within Kyrgyzstan or across its international borders, on a permanent or temporary basis.

Migration – The movement of a person or a group of persons, within Kyrgyzstan or across its international borders.

International migration - the movement of Kyrgyz citizens outside the borders of Kyrgyzstan, for work or other purposes on a permanent or temporary basis (international migrants)

Internal migration - the movement of Kyrgyz citizens within the borders of Kyrgyzstan, for work or other purposes on a permanent or temporary basis (international migrants)

Reintegration – a process ensuring the support, protection and well-being of Kyrgyz citizens returning to their native communities, after being involved in internal or international migration.

Involved in migration - current migrants, as well as migrants who returned from migration.

Block A. General socio-economic situation in the local community

Let's talk about your native local community and its people.

1. How satisfied are you with the current socio-economic situation in your village / city?
2. In your opinion, what are the most important challenges and problems your local community is facing?
3. How did COVID-19 affect the current situation in your community?
4. What is the role of local authorities in ensuring an effective local governance (e.g. social stability; prevention of conflicts; infrastructure development, health care, education, employment; labor market, economic development, attraction of resources)?
5. It is well known that Kyrgyzstan is a country with very high out-migration flow. Tell me, what is the estimated proportion of the population of your community involved in migration? How many percent of them are women? And the youth? How has this proportion changed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic?
6. How does migration affect your local community? How does migration affect your family?
7. In your opinion, what is the impact of migration on the development of your community?
 - 7.1. Positive or negative? Please explain why you think so.
8. In your opinion, what are the main factors that people leave their native village / city and migrate to another country / region of Kyrgyzstan?
9. Do you or your compatriots (involved in migration) maintain any connection with the inhabitants of your locality while abroad?
 - 9.1. What is the role of the family in this process?
 - 9.2. What kind of people / organizations do you / they keep in touch with?
 - 9.3. How often? In what ways?
 - 9.4. What topics?

Block B. Migrants' role in local community development

10. In your opinion, what is the role migrants can play in the development of their native local community?
 - 10.1. Should it be proactive or passive?
 - 10.2. Can they bring benefits? In what areas and how?
 - 10.3 Do they have a positive / negative impact on the development of their community? In what areas / sectors? Provide examples.
 - 1.4 How do their relocation to another area / country affect the local community?
11. What is the local context enabling or impeding migrants' engagement in local development?
 - 11.1. What difficulties / obstacles do you or your co-nationals involved in migration face while engaging in local development?
 - 11.2. Does the migrant belonging to certain groups (gender, age, nationality, financial and marital status) influence their ability and capacity to participate in local development?
 - 11.3. What could encourage/enable them to be more involved into local development while being abroad?
12. What needs to be done, in your opinion, in order to motivate returned migrants to participate in local initiatives and apply the knowledge/skills gained during migration in local communities?
 - 12.1. In your opinion, what is the role of local authorities in facilitating your and other compatriots' abroad engagement in the community development?
 - 12.2. What is the role of the local community?
 - 12.3. What is the role of other institutions/organizations?

Block C. Returning migrants

Let's now talk about your returning experience, especially as a result of COVID-19 pandemic.

13. What are the main reasons for return migration?
 - 13.1. How did COVID-19 influence the decision of people to return?
 - 13.2. How did the pandemic affect returning migrants and their capacity to support their family back home?

14. In your opinion, what is the overall perception of migrants' families towards returning migrants in the context of COVID-19?
 - 14.1. How do they react?
 - 14.2. Is it positive or negative? Please explain.
 - 14.3. How different is this perception from the pre-COVID-19 period?

15. In your opinion, what is the overall perception of the local population towards returning migrants in the context of COVID-19?
 - 15.1. Explain why?
 - 15.2. How did it change as a result of COVID-19?
 - 15.3. Is there any difference in how women and men returning migrants are perceived? If, yes how and why?
 - 15.4. How about other characteristics of the migrants such as age, ethnicity, financial and marital status, did they influence the perceptions of the local population?
 - 15.5. Are there any examples of negative attitudes towards returned migrants, both men and women? If, yes, why did this attitude arise?
 - 15.6. Who has a more positive / negative attitude towards returning migrants, men or women? Explain why?

16. What difficulties do migrants face upon returning, as a result of COVID-19, and how they are solved?
 - 16.1. Do they have equal access to services available to the local population?
 - 16.2. How does gender affect access to services? Who is more likely to be isolated, stigmatized or discriminated against - men or women? Explain why.

Stigma - prejudices, stereotypes, negative judgments about someone, expressed in words or facial expressions.

Discrimination is a violation of human rights and limitation of his opportunities due to the presence of some characteristic (age, gender, nationality, religion, etc.).

17. What public services and support do migrants need upon returning to their home village / city?
 - 17.1. Please list these needs / services (examples: social, legal, medical and material support, assistance with documentation)? Are these services available to them? Are there any difficulties with the documentation for obtaining these services?
 - 17.2. Are they applying for these services? If not, explain why.
 - 17.3. Are socio-economic opportunities available for migrants? Can they apply for social services? Why not?

18. What services are available for migrants upon return for their effective reintegration?
 - 18.1. To whom did they address to receive these services. What is level of satisfaction?
 - 18.2. What are the difficulties in accessing the services? What can be improved?
 - 18.3. Who/what institutions are providing them.
 - 18.4. What other institutions should be involved (both at national and local level)

Block D. Role and attitude of local government

- 19. What is the relation between returning migrants and local authorities?**
- 19.1. How do migrants and local governments interact, upon return? On what issues?
 - 19.2. If they do not interact, do they think it is necessary to start and why?
 - 19.3. Do local governments work with returnees? On what issues?
 - 19.4. How can this relationship be described? Is it based on mutual trust and cooperation? Are there any divergences? Please reflect.
- 20. What is the attitude of local self-government representatives towards returning migrants observed in the local community?**
- 20.1. It is positive or negative? How did it change as a result of COVID-19?
 - 20.2. Do returned migrants feel socially isolated, stigmatized, or discriminated in any way by local authorities? Why do they feel this way?
 - 20.3. From the gender perspective: Who are more likely to be isolated, stigmatized, or discriminated by local authorities, in any way, men or women? Explain why.
 - 20.4. To what extent are local government authorities open and accessible in providing assistance to returned migrants?
- 21. Could you please tell us about the current role of the local authorities in supporting the reintegration of returned migrants?**
- 21.1. What are the main functions of local authorities with regards to returning migrants?
 - 21.2. Do you think that local governments are effectively working to support the returned migrants? Why do you think so?
 - 21.3. What services are providing local governments to returned migrants? Are these services provided based on returnees' needs or are they just basic services available?
 - 21.4. How did the spectrum of such services change as a result of COVID-19?
 - 21.5. What was the support provided by local authorities to returned migrants as a result of COVID-19?
 - 21.6. How open and transparent are local governments in providing such support?
 - 21.7. How often do returned migrants address local governments for support and services? Explain why it is so.
 - 21.8. What are the most common issues returned migrants address local authorities for? Are they different in case of men and women?
 - 21.9. What needs to be improved in order to effectively support returned migrants, as a result of COVID-19?
 - 21.10. Is the level and quality of the support provided influenced by such aspects as: gender, age, ethnicity, financial and material status? Which groups are most often supported? Which groups have the least support?
- 22. In your opinion, how effectively do the local authorities involve returned migrants on local development issues?**
- 22.1. Do local authorities encourage the participation of returned migrants in local planning processes? How?
 - 22.2. Do local authorities provide support to returned migrants in implementing projects that can contribute to local development? What kind of support do they provide?
 - 22.3. How are local authorities promoting the use of skills gained in migration for the development of the community?
 - 22.4. Are local authorities creating opportunities for returned migrants to successfully implement initiatives?
 - 22.5. What can be done to encourage returned migrants' engagement in local development? What organizations should be involved?
- 23. What needs to be done, in your opinion, in order to facilitate the application of knowledge/skills gained by returned migrants abroad, in their native communities?**
- 23.1. Please provide any positive examples of returned migrants using the skills gained abroad at home. Why was it positive? What factors were conducive?
 - 23.2. What impact did this have on local development?

24. What could be improved in the work of local authorities in dealing with returned migrants?

24.1. In your opinion, what should be the role of local authorities in addressing challenges faced by migrants upon return (mentioned earlier). How should it be different in context of COVID-19?

24.2. Are there obstacles for local authorities to provide the necessary support to migrants?

If so, which ones?

24.3. What can migrants do to work better with local authorities?

25. What other organizations should be involved in provision of support reintegration to returned migrants as a result of COVID-19 (at national and/or local level)?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND INFORMATION!

Questions from the respondent:

ANNEX – CONSENT FORM FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS AND FGDS

Appendix to the GUIDE for In-Depth Interviews and FGDS.

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP ON THE PROJECT'S BASELINE STUDY: «ASSESSMENT OF LSGA INTERACTIONS WITH THE LOCAL POPULATION»

This is a form of consent to participate in an interview/focus group as part of an assessment of LSGA interactions with the local population, the assessment is based on obtaining information through qualitative data collection methods. The assessment will consist of the collection of personal opinions, including focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews with various target groups. The survey will be conducted by the research company M-Vector. This informed consent form has two parts:

1. Information sheet (to provide information to the participant);
2. Statement of consent (which has to be signed if you decide to participate in the study).

The respondent must be given a copy of the completed informed consent form.

PART I. INFORMATION SHEET (INTERVIEWER/MODERATOR - READ OUT)

I, _____, work for a research company called M-Vector. I am going to provide you with information about the study and invite you to participate in the survey. It is possible that this consent form contains words that you may not understand. In this case, ask what is meant and we will explain. Your answers will be analyzed and the results of the analysis will be included in the research report.

The purpose of the study is to conduct an assessment of LSGA interactions with the local population and their readiness for the reintegration of returning migrants, as well as capacity-building needs for sustainable recovery after COVID-19 in 10 UNDP target communities from Batken, Osh, Chui and Talas regions.

The target groups to be interviewed in the study include representatives of the following organizations/partners/persons/residents:

1. Representatives of local self-government bodies, local kenesh, and local community leaders with a focus on persons who can work/be aware of activities aimed at returning Kyrgyzstanis from migration;
2. The local community represented by migrants who have returned because of the COVID-19 crisis and their family members.

Since you represent one of the above groups, we invite you to participate in this study and provide answers that will help the Project.

Voluntary Participation. Your participation in the survey is completely voluntary. You may opt out of the survey entirely at any time. Even if you agree to participate, you may choose not to answer questions that you find unacceptable and still answer other interview questions that are acceptable to you. The results of the discussion will be included in the survey report without any names or addresses.

Duration. The discussion will take about one hour for in-depth interviews and an hour and a half for FGDS. Please make yourself comfortable during the discussion. If you agree to participate, we will ask you questions and take your answers into account. Your answers will be recorded for further processing.

Privacy. We will not share any information about you or any other information that you have given to anyone outside the research team. The information we receive as a result of this research project will not be disclosed. All information about you will be coded and will not include your name. Only researchers will know the code assigned to you, all information will be kept under the password. It will not be shared with anyone except the organizer of the research.

Risks. You may accidentally share some personal information or feel uncomfortable talking about certain topics. You should not answer any question on the questionnaire if you think it is too personal or if you feel uncomfortable talking about it.

Cost-recovery. You will be paid a small fee for your time and participation. You will receive it regardless of the answers to the questions.

Further information. If you need more information about the study, you can contact Margarita Dmitrieva by phone: +996 (312) 97 92 93, or by email: margarita.dmitrieva@m-vector.com

PART II. STATEMENT OF CONSENT (CONSENT FORM)

I, _____, was invited to participate in the study.

I have read the information above. I voluntarily consent to become a participant in this interview/
focus group.

Participant's first and last name in block letters: _____

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

(IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE)

For in-depth interviews with representatives:

1. Local Self-government authorities (LSGA), local council.
2. Local community leaders with a focus on individuals who can work/be aware of activities aimed at returning migrants.

Hello, my name is _____.

I represent an independent research company "M-Vector", which, together with UNDP and the International Organization for Migration, conducts a survey among representatives of State and municipal authorities, as well as representatives of local leaders, about the general situation of your AO (Aiyl okmotu), interaction with the population, as well as the role of migration in the development of the community.

In total, the interview will take about 1.5 hours. For further analysis, our conversation will be recorded on an audio recorder. The information obtained during the survey will be completely confidential; your responses will be processed and presented only in a generalized form. We ask you to give the most detailed answers to the questions. What may seem evident to you may become the most important argument for us. Based on your answers, decisions will be made on the implementation of measures for the development of your locality, building peace and prosperity.

1. Respondent's name and age _____
2. Respondents gender _____
3. Name of the organization you work in _____
4. Specifics of activity of the organization/institution/project _____
5. Your occupation, position _____
6. Area of residence _____

Notions used

For the purpose of this discussion, several notions will be used and are explained below:

Migrants – Kyrgyz citizens who either were or are currently involved migration, on a permanent or temporary basis.

Migration – The movement of a person or a group of persons, within Kyrgyzstan or across its international borders.

External migration - the movement of Kyrgyz citizens outside the borders of Kyrgyzstan, for work or other purposes on a permanent or temporary basis

Internal migration - the movement of Kyrgyz citizens within the borders of Kyrgyzstan, for work or other purposes on a permanent or temporary basis

Reintegration – a process ensuring the support, protection and well-being of Kyrgyz citizens returning to their native communities, after being involved in internal or international migration.

Involved in migration - current migrants, as well as migrants who returned from migration.

Block A. The general socio-economic situation in AO

Let's talk about your community and the people living in it.

1. Could you please assess the overall socio-economic situation in your community, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses?
2. What are the most important challenges and problems the AO is facing? Name them.
3. How did COVID-19 affect the current situation in your community and considerations around effective local governance you just outlined?

4. What is the role of local government bodies in ensuring effective local governance (e.g. social stability; preventing conflicts; infrastructure development, health, education, employment; labor market, economic development, resources mobilization)?

4.1. Do you think citizens also have a role to play?

5. It is well known that Kyrgyzstan is a country with very high out-migration flow. How does migration affect your community? Does the local development strategy take into account the impact of migration on the development of your AO? Does the local development strategy take into account the views and needs of migrants?

6. Tell us what the estimated proportion of the population of your AO is involved in migration? What is the share of women? Share of youth? How this proportion has changed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic?

7. Do you keep any evidence/statistics of people who left your community (in the country or abroad)?

7.1. If yes, is it disaggregated by age, gender? What are the tendencies?

7.2. How do your or other Institutions, organizations collect and store information on migrants?

7.3. Where do people of your village go for migration: to another region / village / city in Kyrgyzstan or to another country?

7.4. What are the main destination countries, known to you?

7.5. **If not**, why not? Have statistics been kept before? What are the obstacles? Are you planning to introduce **statistics**?

8. What are the main factors for people to leave their village and migrate to another country/region?

9. Do you maintain any links with the people who left your community, overseas or to another region within Kyrgyzstan?

9.1. How often? Through what means?

9.2. On what topics? Do you discuss with them the priorities and needs of your AO?

10. In your opinion, how can migrants generate impact on the development of local community?

10.1. Please provide examples supporting the answer.

10.2. Do they contribute to local development projects? Please provide examples when migrants supported their community, if any?

10.3. What is the role of local authorities in facilitating migrants' engagement in the community development?

10.4. In your opinion, is it necessary to involve migrants in the development of the community?

Block B. Returning migrants

Let's now talk about the returning migrants, especially as a result of COVID-19 pandemic.

11. How many migrants (internal / external) have returned during 2020 (since the inception of COVID-19 up to present)?

11.1. What do you think are the main reasons for their return?

11.2. Do you keep a record of returned migrants in that particular period? What is the level of disaggregation (men, women, youth, children who stayed at home etc)? What is the rate of women and youth?

11.3. If yes, when was the record established and/or last updated?

12. What is the overall perception of the local population towards returning migrants?

12.1. Explain why?

12.2. How did it change as a result of COVID-19?

12.3. Is there any difference in how women and men returning migrants are perceived? If, yes how and why?

12.4. How about other characteristics of the migrants such as age, ethnicity, financial and marital status, did this influence the perceptions of the local population?

12.5. Are there any examples of negative attitudes towards returned migrants, both men and women? If, yes why did this attitude arise?

13. What difficulties do migrants face upon returning, and how are they solved?

- 13.1. Do they have equal access to services available to the local population? Is there a shortage / lack of access to services? Are there differences in access to services for women and men migrants? Have you seen any significant changes in their access to services in recent months as the pandemic continues and longer-term approaches are discussed to address its impact?
- 13.2. Do they feel socially isolated, stigmatized, or discriminated in any way? Why do they feel this way?

Stigma - prejudices, stereotypes, negative judgments about someone, expressed in words or facial expressions.

Discrimination is a violation of human rights and limitation of his opportunities due to the presence of some characteristic (age, gender, nationality, religion, etc.).

14. What services are available for migrants upon returning for their effective reintegration?

- 14.1. Can you list them? What is the quality of these services?
- 14.2. What needs to be improved? How?
- 14.3. Are socio-economic opportunities available to them to assist with reintegration? Can they apply for social services? Why not?
- 14.4. Are there any new public and/or private services launched as a result of COVID-19 specifically dedicated for returning migrants?

15. What is the impact of returned migrants on the socio-economic development of the local community?

- 15.1. If positive, please explain: what positive contribution to the development of their settlement / community do returned migrant workers make? What is this contribution / development (political, economic, social)?
- 15.2. If negative, please explain.
- 15.3. Do men or women make more contributions? And are there any differences in what women and men contribute?
- 15.4. What is their role in the labour market, men and women? Have they been able to find work (formal / informal) after returning and are they concentrated in certain sectors / professions? What is their position in the labor market relative to the local population (employment rate, sector / profession)? Are there differences among men, women and youth?
- 15.5. What opportunities or resources do the returning migrants bring back home?

16. How are returned migrants involved in local community development initiatives?

- 16.1. What are the obstacles to the participation of returned migrants in local initiatives, if any? Are there differences between barriers for women and men?
- 16.2. What are some examples of existing initiatives by returned migrants?
- 16.3. How successful are they? How have these initiatives contributed to the development of the community?
- 16.4. Who are more likely to be involved: please reflect via gender (men, women) and age dimensions (youth)
- 16.5. What needs to be done to encourage them to participate in the initiatives? Are any organizations involved in these initiatives?
- 16.6. What is the role of local authorities in creating a conducive environment for migrants to contribute to local development? What are these "conductive factors"?

Block C. Role of Local Authorities in Supporting Returned Migrants

Let's now talk about the role local authorities play in local development and supporting returned migrants in your community in particular.

17. What is your relationship with returned migrants, as a result of COVID-19?

- 17.1. How do you interact with them, upon return?
- 17.2. Does your organization/institution/you personally work with returnees? On what kind of issues?
- 17.3. How would you describe your relationship with the returned migrants? Is this relationship based on mutual trust and cooperation? Are there disagreements? Describe.
- 17.4. How would you like this relationship to develop in the near future? What are the key opportunities and challenges you foresee?

18. You mentioned difficulties faced by migrants upon return, as a result of COVID-19. What do you think should be the role of local authorities in supporting returned migrants reintegrate back home?

- 18.1. Do you think local authorities should provide support to returning migrants? What issues do you think returning migrants need your support in, and how should their needs be taken into account when developing long-term recovery plans?
- 18.2. How do you think local authorities can help them effectively reintegrate, upon return, as a result of COVID-19?

19. Could you please tell us what the current role of the local authority is in supporting support returned migrants?

- 19.1. Do local authorities carry out work to reintegrate them?
- 19.2. What services are the local authority providing to returned migrants.
- 19.3. How did the spectrum of such services change as a result of COVID-19?
- 19.4. How often returned migrants address your institution/organization/you personally for support and services.
- 19.5. Explain why is it so (often/not often)?
- 19.6. What are the most common issues returned migrants address your institution for?
- 19.7. Are you able to provide such support? Explain your answer.
- 19.8. What do you think needs to be improved to effectively support returned migrants, as a result of COVID-19? Describe what needs to be improved, both on the part of returned migrants and on the part of local authorities.

20. What specific skills and knowledge gaps in your organization / institution hinder the provision of effective reintegration services to returned migrants? Is there a need for skills / knowledge / services specifically related to the coronavirus situation?

- 20.1. What type of specific training support do you need? And who should provide it to you?
- 20.2. Have you received any training, since COVID-19 started, to improve your services for effective reintegration?
- 20.3. Is there any need for reviewing policy or regulatory frameworks to help you improve your capacity to reintegrate the returned migrants?
- 20.4. What other type of support do you think you need to do this work more effectively?

21. What other organizations are at the community/AO level that provide support to returned migrants, as a result of COVID-19?

- 21.1. Can you list them (public institutions, NGO/CSOs, other stakeholders – please specify).
- 21.2. How do you cooperate with these organizations?
- 21.3. What other organizations should be involved in the provision of support and reintegration to returned migrants as a result of COVID-19 (at national and/or local level)? What additional contributions can they make?
- 21.4. To your knowledge, what are the specific skills and knowledge gaps impeding these organizations to provide effective reintegration services to returned migrants, including in context COVID-19 situation?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND INFORMATION!

Questions from the respondent:

**“The attitude of local self-government authorities towards return migration”
Post-discussion questionnaire for FGD participants:**

1. Migrants who returned as a result of the COVID-19 crisis;
2. Relatives of current and returning migrants.

Socio - demographic block

A1. Gender

1. Male
2. Female

A2. Specify the age range:

1. 18 - 24
2. 25 - 34
3. 35 - 44
4. 45 - 54
5. 55 - 64
6. 65+

A3. Area of residence:

1. Batken region
2. Osh region
3. Chui region
4. Talas region

A4. Name of the settlement

1. _____

A5. To what ethnic group do you belong?

1. Kyrgyz
2. Uzbek
3. Russian
4. Dungan
5. Uyghur
6. Tajik
7. Turk
8. Kazakh
9. Tatar
10. Ukrainian
11. Others: _____

A6. What languages do you speak? Please list in order of priority: most used to least used.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

A7. What skills do you possess? (Examples: farming, sales, cooking, foreign languages, accounting, etc.) _____

A8. What skills did you acquire abroad? _____

Migration experience

B1. Which group do you belong to?

1. Returned migrant
2. Family member with at least one migrant /**PLEASE ANSWER THE OTHER QUESTIONS IN THIS BLOCK B ON BEHALF OF MIGRANT OF YOUR FAMILY/**
3. Current migrant

B2. If you are a returned migrant, please indicate to which group of migrants do you classify yourself?

1. International migrant
2. Internal migrant

B2.1. If you are a returned migrant, tell me why you returned to your native village / city?

1. Permanent migrant (abroad more than 1 year)
2. Temporary migrant (went abroad for less than 1 year)
3. Seasonal migrant (circular migration every several months for season)

B3. If you are a returned migrant, please tell us what the reason is for your return home?

1. Visiting family/relatives
2. Due to restrictions associated with COVID-19.
3. For health reasons / for treatment
4. Other (specify) _____

B4. Indicate the last place of your migration, internal or international;(multiple choices allowed):

1. The Russian Federation
2. Kazakhstan
3. Turkey
4. Uzbekistan
5. United Arab Emirates (Dubai)
6. Bishkek / Osh, major center of Kyrgyzstan
7. Other (specify) _____

B5. What is the length of your last stay in migration? (If you are currently in migration, please indicate the length of your stay until today)

1. Less than a month
2. 1 - 6 months
3. 6 -12 months
4. 1-3 years
5. 3-5 years
6. 5 years <

B6. Please indicate the reason of your last migration:

1. Job
2. Study
3. Family reunification
4. Unfavorable climate/environment
5. Other _____

B7. Future plans:

1. Returned and do not plan to go back in migration
2. Returned and plan to go back in migration to the same country
3. Returned and plan migrate to another country (please specify) _____

B8. What are the main sources of income for local residents before the coronavirus pandemic? Arrange in order of priority from 1 to 4 (from the most basic in descending order).

1. Remittances
2. Local salaries
3. Social allowances (pensions, invalidity allowance, children allowance etc.)
4. Small local business
5. Others: _____

B9. What was your average monthly income while migrating before the coronavirus pandemic?

1. There was no income
2. Less than 20 thousand soms
3. From 20 to 50 thousand soms
4. From 50 to 100 thousand soms
5. From 100 to 150 thousand soms
6. More than 150 thousand soms

B10. What is your average monthly income after the coronavirus pandemic?

1. There was no income
2. Less than 20 thousand soms
3. From 20 to 50 thousand soms
4. From 50 to 100 thousand soms
5. From 100 to 150 thousand soms
6. More than 150 thousand soms

B11. What is the distribution of remittances spent by you / your family as a percentage of (the total amount should be 100%):

1. Current consumption (food, clothes, payment of utilities etc..)
2. Special consumption (education, health etc..)
3. Payment of debts.
4. Investment in the house (renovation)
5. Procurement of car
6. Family events (weddings, baptizing etc.)
7. Bank deposit
8. Donation for local community projects
9. Invest in business.
10. Others: _____

Interaction with others

C1. How often do you interact with the following persons/institutions?

	1. Often	2. Rarely	3. Never	4. Hard to say
1. Local authorities	1	2	3	4
2. The Mayor	1	2	3	4
3. NGOs	1	2	3	4
4. Schools	1	2	3	4
5. Kindergartens	1	2	3	4
6. Medical institutions / Hospitals	1	2	3	4
7. Religious organizations (mosque / church)	1	2	3	4
8. Local entrepreneurs	1	2	3	4
9. Current Migrants	1	2	3	4
10. Returned migrants	1	2	3	4
11. Your families left behind (if you are a migrant)	1	2	3	4
12. Residents of your village / city	1	2	3	4
13. Law Enforcement Agencies (Police)	1	2	3	4
14. Others (please specify) _____	1	2	3	4

C2. How much do you trust the following organisations/institutions? Please put in order of priority from 1 to 10 (from most to least) the institutions you trust the most in your local community?

	1-10
1. Head of LSG	
2. Religious organizations (mosque / church)	
3. NGOs	
4. Educational institutions (schools/kindergartens)	
5. Medical institutions	
6. Local entrepreneurs	
7. Migrants	
8. Returned migrants	
9. Law Enforcement Agencies (Police)	
10. Residents of your village / city	
11. Others (if the case) _____	

C3. How satisfied are you with the work of the following organizations/institutions?

	1. Very satisfied	2. Satisfied	3. Rather not satisfied	4. Not satisfied at all	5. Hard to say
1. Head of LSG	1	2	3	4	5
2. NGOs	1	2	3	4	5
3. Schools	1	2	3	4	5
4. Kindergartens	1	2	3	4	5
5. Medical institutions/hospitals	1	2	3	4	5
6. Religious organizations (mosque / church)	1	2	3	4	5
7. Law Enforcement Agencies (Police)	1	2	3	4	5
8. Others (please specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5

C4. What is the attitude of the following organizations/institutions towards returned migrants?

	1. Very positive	2. Positive	3. Neutral	4. Rather negative	5. Definitely negative	6. Hard to say
1. Head of LSG	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. NGOs	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Schools	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Kindergartens	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Medical institutions/hospitals	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Religious organization (mosque / church)	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Local entrepreneurs	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Law Enforcement Agencies (Police)	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Residents of your village / city	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Others (please specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

Thank you for your participation!

**“The attitude of local self-government authorities towards return migration”
Post-interview questionnaire for IDIs participants:**

1. Local Self-government authorities (LSGA), local council;
2. Local community leaders with a focus on individuals who can work/be aware of activities aimed at returning migrants

Notions used

For the purpose of this discussion, several notions will be used and are explained below:

Migrants – Kyrgyz citizens who either were or are currently involved migration, on a permanent or temporary basis.

Migration – The movement of a person or a group of persons, within Kyrgyzstan or across its international borders.

International migration - the movement of Kyrgyz citizens outside the borders of Kyrgyzstan, for work or other purposes on a permanent or temporary basis

Internal migration - the movement of Kyrgyz citizens within the borders of Kyrgyzstan, for work or other purposes on a permanent or temporary basis.

Reintegration – a process ensuring the support, protection and well-being of Kyrgyz citizens returning to their native communities, after being involved in internal or international migration.

Involved in migration - current migrants, as well as migrants who returned from migration.

Socio-demographic block

A1. Gender

1. Male
2. Female

A2 Specify the age range:

1. 18 - 24
2. 25 - 34
3. 35 - 44
4. 45 - 54
5. 55 - 64
6. 65+

A3. Area of residence:

1. Batken region
2. Osh region
3. Chui area
4. Talas region

A4. What is the ethnic distribution of the population of your AO? (Please indicate percentages)?

Kyrgyz
Uzbek
Russian
Dungan
Uyghur
Tajik
Turk
Kazakh
Tatar

Ukrainian

Others: _____

A5. Name of the settlement

1. _____

A6. Which group do you belong to?

1. LSG
2. Local council
3. Local community

Migration experience

B1. How often do you interact / contact migrants through offline channels (meetings, face-to-face meetings, etc.)?

	1. Often	2. Rarely	3. Sometimes	4. Never
Internal migrants				
International migrants				
Returned migrants				

B2. If you interact with migrants, tell us through what channels? (multiple choices available)/

1. Meetings of AO
2. Personal meetings
3. Social networks / messengers
4. Other (specify) _____

B3. How often do you interact / contact with migrants through online channels (social networks, mail, calls, online meetings, etc.)?

1. Hotline
2. Whatsapp groups,
3. Facebook groups
4. Other _____

B4. In your opinion, what impact do returned migrants have on the development of your AO?

1. Definitely positive
2. Rather positive
3. Rather negative
4. Definitely negative
5. Neutral

B4. What role do you / your organization play in supporting returned migrants?

1. Very important
2. Rather Important
3. Neutral
4. Rather unimportant
5. Not at all important
6. I don't know.

B5. Do you think migrants need your support?

1. Definitely need
2. Need
3. Neutral
4. Do not need
5. Definitely do not need

Interaction with others

C1. What attitude do the following individuals/organizations have towards returned migrants?

	1. Very positive	2. Positive	3. Neutral	4. Negative	5. Definitely negative	6. I don't know
1. Local authorities						
2. The Mayor						
3. NGOs						
4. Schools						
5. Kindergartens						
6. Medical Institutions / Hospitals						
7. Religious organizations (mosque / church)						
8. Local entrepreneurs						
9. Law Enforcement Agencies (Police)						
10. Residents of your AO						
11. Others (please specify)						

C2. What role play the following organizations in supporting returned migrants?

	1. Very important	2. Important	3. Neutral	4. Rather unimportant	5. Unimportant	6. I don't know
1. Local authorities						
2. The Mayor						
3. NGOs						
4. Schools						
5. Kindergartens						
6. Medical Institutions / Hospitals						
7. Religious organizations (mosque / church)						
8. Local entrepreneurs						
9. Law Enforcement Agencies (Police)						
10. Residents of your AO						
11. Others (please specify)						

Thank you for your participation!

The assessment of local authorities' attitudes towards returned migrants and their readiness to reintegrate them was implemented in the framework of the "UNDP-IOM Seed Funding to fast-track joint response to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19: Analyzing and improving evidence-based social cohesion and returnee inclusion in response to COVID-19", implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the Kyrgyz Republic and International Organization for Migration (IOM) Mission in the Kyrgyz Republic.

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Authors:**M-Vector**

Alekseeva Tatiana, Head of Sociological Research Department

Olga Studenko, Project Manager

Batyralieva Ayzura, Senior Analyst

Abisheva Symbat, Analyst

Alekseeva Tatiana, Head of the Sociological Department

Olga Studenko, Project Manager

Batyralieva Ayzura, Senior Analyst

Abisheva Symbat, Analyst

Contributors:**UNDP in the Kyrgyz Republic:**

Umar Shavurov, COVID-19 Economic Recovery Advisor

Oxana Maciucă, Expert on migration and socio-economic development

Christopher Howells, Consultant

IOM Mission in the Kyrgyz Republic:

Moldobaeva Bermet, Head of Office IOM Kyrgyzstan

Nazgul Chubarova, Senior Programme Assistant