



ASSESSMENT

OF THE NEEDS AND CONSTRAINTS OF THE RURAL POPULATION (PRA) FOR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES



The report has been prepared within the framework of the project:
"Youth Empowerment for Digital Governance", 2024-2026".

With financial support from the:



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

Bishkek 2024



© DWV International Kyrgyzstan 2024

Published by
Institute for International Cooperation
of the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V. (DVV),
the German Adult Education Association (DWV International)

Layout by Nurgazy Osmonkanov

DWV International Regional Office for Central Asia:
Frunze Street 402, 710017
Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
+996 312 323 901
+996 558 858 758
E-mail: info@dvv-international.kg
www.dvv-international-central-asia.org



TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of abbreviations1

Introduction 2

Summary..... 3

Chapter 1 - Situation Analysis: Results of the desk study 5

Chapter 2 - Brief overview of pilot municipalities: main needs and constraints hindering the participation of rural inhabitants, especially youth, in decision-making processes at local and national levels 11

Chapter 3 - Conclusions and Recommendations 24

Increased capacity of local authorities and youth participation in public processes 25

Educational initiatives to enhance digital skills 25

Information initiatives 25

Technical resources 25

ROADMAP 26

LIST OF REFERENCES: 28

LIST OF APPLICATIONS 29

DISCLAIMER

The content of the report does not reflect the position of the European Union, DVV International, Institute for Youth Development.

I. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Aiyl aimak
AO	Ailn District
APR	Administrative and territorial reform
GDP	Gross domestic product
GND	Gross national income
DVW International	Institute for International Cooperation Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V. (DVV), the German Adult Education Association.
FAP	Feldsher-midwifery
FGD	Focus of discussion groups
IKI	Key informant interviews
IYD	Institute for Youth Development
HDI	Human Development Index
CR	Kyrgyz Republic
MSU	Local government
NGOS	Non-governmental organization
	Public Foundation
LGBS	Local government bodies
GS	Public Association
	Training for trainers
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USAID	U.S. Development Agency
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal

II. INTRODUCTION

This report is based on the results of the "Needs and Constraints Assessment of the Rural Population for Active Participation in Decision-Making Processes" for the project "Youth Empowerment for Digital Governance", which is implemented jointly by DVV International and the Institute for Youth Development (IYD) with the support of the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in accordance with the Terms of Reference (*Annex 1 - Terms of Reference*).

The study was conducted from May 24 to October 31, 2024 (*Annex 2 - PRA Methodology and Timeline*) and consisted of three key phases: the *inception phase (May 24 - July 24)*, during which the main approaches of the study were developed in consultation with the DVV International and IYD team, including the detailed methodology that was used with comprehensive data collection tools, a detailed implementation plan, and the design and structure of this report. This phase also included several activities such as literature review and document analysis as well as existing research on the topic, and introductory briefings with the project team. *The second (field) phase (July 29 to September 12)* included data collection during field visits to the project's pilot locations and meetings with staff of the target municipalities and regional governments, local residents including youth and women, representatives of civil society organizations/non-governmental organizations (NGOs), experts, as well as initial data analysis and development of a technical report based on the results of the field phase of the study. The third (final) stage (September 15 - October 31) included preparation and presentation of preliminary results of the study with participation of representatives of governmental bodies, district administrations of the pilot regions of the project, NGOs, national experts, DVV International and IYD staff, as well as preparation of the final report on the results of the study.

The overall aim of the study is to identify the needs and constraints to youth participation in local and national decision-making processes, taking into account the digital and other challenges they face.

The main objectives of the study are:

Understanding Needs: Conduct a survey among the rural population to determine their needs and constraints in participating in local governance.

Identification of obstacles: Identify the main obstacles faced by rural residents in using digital technologies to participate in local decision-making.

Youth Focus: Identify the specific needs and preferences of youth in rural areas in the context of their participation in local government.

Recommendations: Provide recommendations and a roadmap to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of local decision-making mechanisms for rural populations, especially youth.

Preparation of the final report:

- ✓ Conduct a review of the literature and existing research on the topic.
- ✓ Conduct a survey and/or focus groups with village representatives, including youth/women's committees.
- ✓ Analyze data from surveys and focus groups.
- ✓ Conduct interviews with experts in civic participation and digital technologies.
- ✓ Prepare a report analyzing the results of the study and making recommendations.

The main approaches in the research process:

- Mixed quantitative and qualitative methods were used for data collection and analysis. Qualitative methods included document analysis, interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), integrative participatory approaches

such as ranking, Venn diagram, mapping or other participatory methods to identify the needs and requirements of the rural population (Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)).

- Key conclusions are developed and verified by multiple sources using the principle of triangulation.
- Respect for confidentiality facilitated more candid communication with key informants, resulting in more honest and accurate data.

To achieve the objectives, the team utilized a mixed methodology with three components:

- (1) desk study;
- (2) conducting a Participatory Rural Needs, Requirements and Priorities Assessment (PRA) through FGDs and in-depth interviews;
- (3) quantitative surveys through online questionnaires and telephone interviews.

Basic tools in the PRA process:

I. Mapping: mapping the participatory process to illustrate complex details that are particularly important to local people. The main objective of the mapping was to collect relevant information on local perceptions of resources, to identify important places and services most frequently requested by women and youth. The method was used to activate participants in exploring the resource base, gathering information on local perceptions of resources, identifying and articulating problems in service delivery, with a particular focus on digital services. By drawing a map, the villagers were able to look at their village as a whole, a little "from above", to understand its characteristics, structure and resources, and to identify the most problematic areas.

II. The Venn diagram was used to depict key institutions, organizations and individuals providing services to the local population, to study the significance of organizations and institutions, to study the interrelationships between citizens, organizations and institutions, to study the opinion about the role of LSG bodies in the life of citizens and the work of organizations and institutions, as well as their relations with the local community. Thus, the key players in decision-making were shown, and the significance and interrelationship of local groups (interest groups, youth and women's groups, jamaats, NGOs, aksakal (elders) courts, etc.), local institutions (aiyl okmotu, school, FAP, club, sports club, etc.), and external groups and institutions (district subdivisions of government agencies, social services, investors, etc.) were determined.

III. Ranking is a tool for ranking problems, issues, and solutions based on needs or personal preferences. Community members were able to rank different options or criteria based on their preferences or importance, which helped to identify priority areas or preferences for them.

Conducted an online questionnaire among youth regarding their experiences, preferences, and opportunities to participate in local decision-making.

III. SUMMARY

The main conclusions drawn from the results of the study:

Based on the analysis of the results of the study, the main obstacles and challenges faced by the residents of the 29 pilot municipalities, including 27 rural municipalities and 2 urban municipalities, including youth, municipal and regional government staff, and other groups involved in the study were highlighted:

- 1. Weak communication between LSGs and youth:** Local authorities do not sufficiently support and interact with youth. Youth committees and centers do not function properly, and LGBs lack a specialized department to work with youth.
- 2. Lack of knowledge and skills:** Youth face low leadership capacity and lack of education and practical experience, which limits their participation in local governance.
- 3. Lack of training:** There are insufficient life and social skills development programs, which limits young people's ability to interact with authorities and community organizations.

4. **Lack of digital literacy:** Youth have little knowledge of digital tools and services, which hinders active participation in decision-making.
5. **Difficulties with electronic systems:** Low digital literacy prevents people from using platforms such as Tunduk and My Light.
6. **Internet connectivity issues:** remote areas have difficulty accessing the internet, making it difficult to use digital services.
7. **Information gaps:** Lack of information on social media makes communication between residents and authorities difficult.

Based on the analysis of the survey data, the following **recommendations** were developed to strengthen the capacity of local authorities, improve interaction between youth and local authorities, and increase the level of youth involvement in decision-making processes:

1. **Capacity building of local governments:**
 - Organization of trainings for employees of LSG structures on interaction with youth.
 - Holding forums and meetings to discuss the problems of the region.
 - Utilizing digital formats for interaction.
2. **Supporting and motivating young people:**
 - Develop trainings on rights and opportunities for participation in governance.
 - Introduction of leadership and communication skills courses.
 - Organization of motivational events and contests.
3. **Educational Initiatives:**
 - Opening of local digital training centers.
 - Courses in programming and digital content creation.
 - Online conferencing to facilitate access to educational resources.
4. **Information Initiatives:**
 - Conducting workshops on digital opportunities.
 - Launching news pages on social media to improve communication.
 - Creating informative platforms for sharing best practices, knowledge and experience.
5. **Technical Resources:**
 - Providing educational institutions with modern equipment.
 - Creating free Wi-Fi zones in public places.

Based on the developed recommendations, a detailed roadmap was developed, which is a strategic document describing methods and consistent actions to increase youth participation in local self-governance. It emphasizes that youth participation should be active and informed, where young people not only demand benefits and services from the authorities, but also take equal responsibility for achieving common goals. This creates a basis for partnership and trust between the authorities and the community.

Developed on the basis of the study's recommendations, the roadmap aims to create sustainable mechanisms to involve youth in local decisions about their future. Key areas of action include:

1. **Training and support for local authorities:** Special program to increase the capacity and competencies of LSG staff in the field of democratic and digital governance, including effective communication skills for interaction with the population, skills for involvement/participation of citizens in local self-governance, digital literacy, etc.).
2. **Development of leadership skills:** Development and implementation of educational programs and courses for youth aimed at developing legal literacy, leadership, legal and communication skills, raising awareness of decision-making mechanisms and youth participation in local self-governance.
3. **Digitalization and access to information:** Building and testing platforms to introduce new mechanisms for effective engagement and digital literacy among youth
4. **Information campaigns:** Programs to disseminate information on youth participation opportunities and their rights.

5. **Technical support:** Provision of modern equipment to educational institutions in the pilot territories and creation of Internet access at the local level.

IV. CHAPTER 1 - SITUATION ANALYSIS: RESULTS OF THE DESK STUDY

This situation analysis is based on a thorough review of academic and practical materials, as well as an examination of statistical data, reports and studies that provide important information on the current conditions, current issues and challenges facing young people in Kyrgyzstan.

Economically, the Kyrgyz Republic (KR) is a lower-middle-income country and ranks 120th out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI).¹ The country has the lowest Gross National Income (GNI) in Central Asia (US\$8 billion,² and its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita was US\$1,173.6).³ The Gini coefficient in the KR is 27.7,⁴ and the poverty rate was 20 percent.⁵ One third of the country's population (25.3 percent) lives below the national poverty line (1.2 USD per day)⁶ and 42.3 percent live in multidimensional poverty.⁷ Compared to the rest of the country, Aksy, Ala-Buka districts of Jalalabad oblast and Ak-Talin district of Naryn oblast have the highest level of recurrent poverty.⁸ Kyrgyzstan's economy relies heavily on remittances (28.4 percent of GDP)⁹, which have played a fundamental role in reducing poverty in the country.¹⁰

Population. The total population of Kyrgyzstan according to estimates as of November 1, 2023 was 7 million 141.8 thousand people.¹¹ The country has an annual population growth rate of 2.1 percent and a low population density of 32.97 persons per km.¹² According to demographic standards, the population of the Kyrgyz Republic is "young": the share of young people aged 14-35 years is more than a third of the total population. One third of young people (30%) live in urban settlements and two thirds (70%) in rural settlements. Half of the country's residents are under 24 years of age (as of January 1, 2020, the median age was 24.06 years), - preschool children (up to 7 years old) make up 17% of the population, and about 21% are schoolchildren (7-17 years old).¹³

Legal frameworks and youth policy frameworks

In accordance with the legislation of Kyrgyzstan, **youth** (defined by the Law "On Youth"¹⁴ as persons aged 14 to 35 years inclusive) remains one of the most vulnerable groups in the Kyrgyz Republic, making up 35 percent of the total population of the country according to the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (hereinafter referred to as the National Statistical Committee)¹⁵. Young people are an active part of the country's population, which necessitates a more thorough study of them in the conditions of a transforming society, including analysis of their political and economic activity, participation in decision-making processes, especially in the period of digital transformation of Kyrgyzstan.

¹ United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 'Latest Human Development Index (HDI) Ranking', Human Development Reports (2020), <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/latest-human-development-index-ranking>,

² World Bank, "GNI per capita, Atlas Method," World Bank Open Data (2020), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.ATLS.CD>,

³ World Bank, "GDP per capita (current US\$ exchange rate) - Kyrgyz Republic," World Bank Open Report (2020), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=KG>,

⁴ UNDP, "Kyrgyzstan: Human Development Indicators, Human Development Reports (2020), <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/KGZ>,

⁵ World Bank, "Proportion of Population Living Below the Poverty Line at National Poverty Lines (Percentage of Population) - Kyrgyz Republic," World Bank Open Data (2020), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC?locations=KG>,

⁶ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, "Indicator 1.2.2", Sustainable Development Goals in the Kyrgyz Republic (2020),

⁷ UNDP, "Kyrgyzstan: Human Development Indicators" (2020)

⁸ United Nations World Food Program, "Map of Integrated Context Analysis"

⁹ World Bank, "The World Bank in the Kyrgyz Republic," Kyrgyzstan Review <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kyrgyzrepublic/overview#2>

¹⁰ UN World Food Program, "Food Security Situation - Kyrgyz Republic," World Food Program (2021), <https://www.wfp.org/publications/kyrgyz-republic-food-security-situation-2021>

¹¹ Data of the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic on the Results of Selective Integrated Survey of Household Budgets and Labor Force. Available at

¹² World Bank. World Bank Data: Population Density (persons per square kilometer of land area) - Kyrgyz Republic, 2018, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.DNST?locations=KG>

¹³ Demographic Challenges in the Development of the Kyrgyz Republic, Policy Brief, available at .

¹⁴ <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/4-3394/edition/1270197/ru>

¹⁵ <https://stat.gov.kg/ru/news/mezhdunarodnyj-den-molodez-hi-cifry-i-fakty/>

Youth policy is aimed at supporting and developing young people, creating conditions for their active participation in public life, ensuring access to education, employment and health care, and protecting the rights and interests of the younger generation. Kyrgyzstan's youth policy is based on key legal and regulatory instruments, such as the National Concept of Youth Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic¹⁶ and the Law on Youth. These documents define strategic directions, goals and priorities in the area of youth support and development, as well as establish mechanisms for implementing youth initiatives and programs.

The National Youth Policy Concept for 2020-2030 aims to develop the potential of youth as a strategic resource of the state. The main objectives include building human capital, investing in education, health and culture, as well as creating conditions for active citizenship and equal access to resources. The Concept implies support for educational, cultural and social programs, focusing on the individual needs of different youth groups.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) consider youth policy to be one of the key instruments that form an important resource for the development of society - young people, and clearly define that young people, being in a period of active socialization, need effective support from the state and society in order to realize their potential.¹⁷ At the same time, it should be noted that while in the case of children the State has well-developed mechanisms of influence and guarantees a set of basic services, thus ensuring the development of the child, in the case **of young people** there are not enough **clear mechanisms of interaction**. This results in **problems of access to basic services, loss of faith in the support of the state and, ultimately, a surge of discontent in the form of destructive behavior and social explosions**. While saying that young people are a strategic resource for the country's further development, the state does not attempt to support this particular social group in a targeted manner. Youth, observing such dissonance between word and deed, strengthens in its disappointment and seeks to find its own way, often the way of protest and destruction.

Youth participation and activation

Youth participation is seen as a fundamental principle of youth policy. The key idea behind youth participation is to empower young people to have an influence on all issues that affect their lives. Young people can realize this influence both through participation in decision-making with adults and through their own activities that have an impact on the life around them. The pace of economic development in the city, village and country as a whole depends on the position of young people in social and political life, their confidence in the future and their activity. This participation results not only in youth-friendly decisions, but also in young people's self-esteem and self-respect, the experience of being listened to by adults, and the development of decision-making skills that enable them to make their own decisions on a wide range of issues in a variety of situations. Young people, by participating in solving local problems at the local level and gaining life experience, should become an active creative force tomorrow, passing on their life wisdom to new generations. Therefore, young people, the future adults, are the most valuable assets of every society.

According to the **Youth Situation Analysis** (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2021)¹⁸, the aggregate indicator of **youth participation** in socio-political activities is 18.4%, which means that a significant part of the young population of Kyrgyzstan shows very little interest in political, public, municipal, state activities. The indicator related to youth participation in elections is less than half of young people, overwhelmingly as voters, but not as observers and candidates. The indicator of membership in parties is 1.8%, the indicator of young people working in the civil service and local councils is only 0.2%. Participation in public activities, in particular, in volunteering is 12%. The reasons for such low indicators are: **lack of relevant competencies necessary for political, public, municipal work, as well as low pay or lack thereof**.

¹⁶ <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/157204/edition/978698/ru>

¹⁷ Institute for Youth Development in Kyrgyzstan, 2017, Index of Youth Well-Being and Development in the Kyrgyz Republic, <https://www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/media/1861/file/Youth%20Wellbeing%20and%20Development%20Index%20in%20Russian.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://kyrgyzstan.unfpa.org/ru/publications>

The Youth Well-Being and Development Index (2022)¹⁹ study indicates a decline in civic participation among youth in Kyrgyzstan, which is associated with disillusionment with politics, corruption and lack of civic education. Young people have difficulty navigating the state and political structure, do not understand why it is important to participate in socio-political processes, and how legal and regulatory acts can affect their rights and opportunities. Young people do not know how the system of government in the country is structured and what processes they can participate in and influence in order to promote their interests and solve problems in their community, using their potential, energy and time for positive changes in themselves and society. Another very important feature of youth civic and social political participation is focus and concentration on specific issues. A sense of alienation, apathy and disillusionment with and cynicism about traditional decision-making processes and the political system leads many young citizens to direct their energies towards particular issues or goals that are of primary importance to them. Whereas in the past, issues of concern to young people prompted young people to take action in the form of voting for certain candidates or joining political associations, today they are increasingly inclined to address such issues by organizing and participating in various actions, protests and demonstrations, as well as through social media activism, charity events or community volunteer work.

The young generation has good potential to actively participate in political, social as well as civic change. To realize this potential, it is necessary to stimulate youth civic engagement by teaching young people life skills and preparing them for the labor market. Young people's views and interests are poorly integrated into final decision-making due to their low participation. First decision-making skills are acquired in the family, later in school and in educational institutions. Youth participation in financial and management issues in educational institutions is very low, as is participation in leadership elections. In addition, practice shows that at the level of local self-government, young people participate poorly in village meetings, kurultays and other events. At the national level, the level of youth involvement in the decision-making process also remains extremely low. This passive civic position is alarming and requires the creation of incentives for young people to participate in public activities.

Women's participation. Measures to promote women's leadership in Kyrgyzstan have resulted in mixed dynamics: although the number of women deputies to the Jogorku Kenesh has increased from 15.8% in 2018 to 22% in 2024, this is still below the target 30%. In local authorities, on the contrary, there has been an increase in women's representation: from 19% in 2016 to 38% in ayil keneshes (village councils), exceeding the established quota of 30%. However, the established organizations responsible for gender equality do not have sufficient authority and cannot effectively influence the implementation of women's rights, creating only an illusion of functioning mechanisms.²⁰

Skills and economic opportunities for young people

A study by the University of Central Asia²¹ shows that most available jobs for young people do not require higher education. Rural areas provide temporary (seasonal) jobs in crop and livestock production, food processing and some services. Urban areas provide more jobs with higher wages and more intensive work in services, manufacturing and construction. According to the study, potential products and services for the youth labor market are: for urban areas: construction, clothing, catering (cafes and restaurants), services (beauty salons, car repair and washing), retail trade; and pharmacies, and for rural areas: agricultural production (cotton, grapes, potatoes, milk, meat, apricots). **Youth entrepreneurship** is an important resource in the development of SMEs, as it is believed that young entrepreneurs are characterized by greater receptivity to innovation and a propensity to take risks in business. According to this study, a large proportion of the young population demonstrates **an unwillingness to engage in entrepreneurship**. Among the reasons preventing young people from starting their own business are the lack of appropriate education and the low availability and high cost of credit.

¹⁹ <https://www.undp.org/ru/kyrgyzstan/publications/indeks-blagopoluchiya-i-razvitiya-molodezhi-v-kr-2022>

²⁰ Beijing+30: National Review of the Kyrgyz Republic on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action (2024), <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Kyrgyzstan-Report-ru.pdf>

²¹ University of Central Asia, 2019, Analyzing Youth Market Trends in Kyrgyzstan, <https://www.ucentralasia.org/Content/Downloads/IPPA-WP52-Eng.pdf>

Based on data from the analytical report of the study "Skills of Youth in Kyrgyzstan: Looking to the Future" (2022)²² The high unemployment rate among young people is caused by a number of factors, including low wages, lack of jobs, lack of information about vacancies and lack of necessary professional skills and experience. Young people often experience difficulties in finding employment due to lack of qualifications, problems with team adaptation and poor self-promotion skills. These circumstances point to the need to improve vocational guidance programs and align educational standards with labor market needs.

According to the *analytical analysis "Young Population and High Demographic Growth", UNFPA (2020)*, the change in the total population of the country is significantly influenced by migration. Labor migration plays an important role in Kyrgyzstan's economy and labor market, significantly easing tensions in the country.²³ Many citizens of the country go abroad to work, mainly to Russia and Kazakhstan, which helps to relieve some of the pressure on the domestic labor market. This creates an opportunity for better working conditions for those remaining in the country and also brings remittances that support the economy and the living standards of many families. Migration also leads to the loss of skilled labor, but it also facilitates the exchange of experience and skills that migrants bring back to the country. This interaction contributes to the modernization and development of different sectors of the economy. What migrant workers gain most often is not professional knowledge (since the skills they acquire in migration are in low-skilled sectors such as construction, trade and services), but general cultural attributes: improved communication skills, the ability to communicate and build working and social relationships. These positive but limited experiences are due to the fact that they are engaged in low-skilled jobs that do not require specialized knowledge.²⁴ If the socio-economic situation in the country does not change, remittances will continue to be used for daily poverty alleviation, leaving no opportunity to invest in human capital. If the quality of education is not improved in rural areas, emigrating youth will initially have low chances of getting more skilled jobs in destination countries and fewer opportunities for professional growth.

Youth participation at the local level: challenges and prospects

The data obtained in the framework of the *"Assessment of the level of youth participation in local self-governance"* of the Kyrgyz Republic²⁵ based on the results of the project "Strengthening youth participation in decision-making at the local level", the youth of Kyrgyzstan have a good potential to participate in political, social, as well as civic changes. To realize this potential, it is necessary to stimulate youth to civic engagement by teaching young people life skills and preparing them for the labor market. Young people's views and interests are poorly integrated into final decision-making due to their low participation. First decision-making skills are acquired in the family, later in school and in educational institutions. Youth participation in financial and management issues in educational institutions is very low, as is participation in leadership elections. In addition, practice shows that at the level of local self-governance, young people participate poorly in village meetings, kurultays and other events. At the national level, the level of youth involvement in decision-making also remains extremely low. This passive civic position is alarming and requires the creation of incentives for young people to participate in public activities.

The coronavirus pandemic had a negative impact on the income and employment of young people. Among the negative impacts of the pandemic was a decrease in remittances from abroad, which included both payments for goods and transfers from migrant workers. Remittances not only account for about 30% of the country's GDP, but are also the main source of income for many households. The financial component of the quality of youth employment remains low. Population growth requires ensuring demand for labor force. Otherwise, it will lead to negative consequences: rising unemployment, increasing poverty, inequality, lower consumption, social tension,

²² <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bischkek/20238.pdf>

²³ UNFPA, 2020, Young Population and High Demographic Growth, kyrgyzstan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Policy_brief_Youth_May-22.pdf

²⁴ International Organization for Migration, 2019, External Youth Migration in CA Countries, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/external_youth_migration_ru.pdf

²⁵ <https://dpi.kg/ru/library/full/45.html>

etc. Economic and social factors are among the key barriers to youth participation in decision-making processes and active involvement.

It is necessary to work at the local level, which is closest to the community - the level of LSG bodies. However, the limited powers of LSG bodies and the low level of income security of local budgets do not always allow LSG bodies to organize effective work with youth. This encourages young people to direct destructive energy and discontent toward the central government and provokes young people to participate in unrest and gives them the opportunity to be involved in various extremist movements and actions. These events have exposed two very unpleasant facts: a) *the inability of governance bodies*, including at the local level (local self-governments), to *involve young people in addressing issues of local importance and train them to participate in the political process*, and b) *the inability and inability of young people to participate peacefully and constructively in political processes*.

The weakness of the youth in this context is generated by the following circumstances:

- ✓ Low level of political awareness and education of young people.
- ✓ Lack of practical skills to participate in the political process through existing democratic institutions or own initiatives.
- ✓ Low level of youth understanding of the role and functions of state and local self-government bodies.
- ✓ Lack of targeted youth policies and programs at the local level.
- ✓ Low level of work of public youth organizations and lack of continuity of experience.
- ✓ Low level of access to information at various levels.
- ✓ Unemployment of young people in small towns and rural areas, as a result of which young people easily succumb to the provocations of third forces, such as religious extremists, nationalists and others. This establishes a stereotype of relations between the state and young people, according to which young people do not see their role in the development of the country and the area where they live.

The issues highlighted are indeed key to understanding youth engagement with local government. Low levels of political awareness and education among young people, as well as a lack of practical skills for political participation and a lack of local youth policies, limit young people's ability to actively influence their communities. It is important to develop programs aimed at engaging youth in the political process, increase access to information and create conditions for active citizenship in order to overcome existing stereotypes and empower youth to participate in the development of their localities.

This situation will persist until young people learn to be a full-fledged participant in socially significant processes at the national level and acquire skills to participate in decision-making. But before young people try to take part in political processes at the national level, they need to gain experience of participation in decision-making at the local level, in solving issues of local importance. At present, it is extremely necessary to strengthen motivation and develop a sense of patriotism among young people and to involve the younger generation in solving issues of local importance. It is necessary to show young people the importance and possibility of improving life at the regional level, thereby improving life in the country through work with local self-government bodies (local council, city hall, aiyl okmotu). There are many issues of local importance, including beautification, care for the poor and elderly, participation in child rearing, self-organization and self-employment, in which young people could find use for their energy and initiative. However, in practice young people, even if they have the desire and ideas to do something useful, do not know where to turn and how to organize the implementation of their initiative. Meanwhile, local self-government bodies are in great need of citizens' participation, involvement of their energy and initiative for successful resolution of local issues.

Youth participation in an era of digitalization

According to the study *"Youth and Media: the Impact of Information Technologies on Political Worldview"* (2024)²⁶, in today's world information technologies play a crucial role for young people, influencing their behavior, beliefs and attitudes. Traditional forms of youth participation are increasingly at odds with the new realities of the information society. Young people are mobile, they quickly learn new information technologies and use them in their lives. Young people spend more and more of their time on the Internet. Virtual communication of young people becomes even more intensive than communication in real life. Social platforms are a potentially effective tool for managing the consciousness of young people. The structures of power and public organizations engaged in work with youth have not yet given an adequate response to these changes. The Internet resources they create do not compare in terms of the number of visits with chat rooms and forums popular among young people. At the same time, the timeliness and relevance of these resources is extremely low. As a result, the most important channel of interaction with the youth audience is not used. The problem concerns not only the authorities, but also youth organizations, youth centers and other structures designed to ensure the development of youth participation. The lack of channels for direct information interaction with young people drastically reduces the opportunities for their inclusion in various forms of social activity. Young people objectively need more opportunities to participate in various spheres of life at the local and regional levels. This concerns such issues as access to information, participation in decision-making, finding support for the realization of their own projects and initiatives, access to the services of youth NGOs, social services and other structures. Solving the problem of renewing the channels of youth participation will be an important step forward in the formation of an active generation of citizens of Kyrgyzstan.

International and best practices

The UNICEF experience: strengthening youth participation and digital tools

Since 2021, UNICEF together with the Ministry of Culture, Information, Sports and Youth Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic launched the U-Report program in Kyrgyzstan. U-Report is a global initiative of UNICEF, represented by a messaging platform used by 17 million young people in 89 countries. Kyrgyzstan became the 89th country participating in the global U-Report platform and the 2nd country in the Central Asia region to launch this initiative.²⁷ It was developed and is being used to give young people a chance to share their opinions on issues that are important to them in their communities and that inspire communities to take action for sustainable development. According to the platform²⁸, 16,167 youth reporters across the country are currently participating.

Experience of "Youth of Osh": signs and trends of digital society development, factors and mechanisms of formation of youth political activism

The [#SanaripAymdar](#) ("Digital Ladies") project was implemented by Youth of Osh PF during 2022-2023 and covered Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken oblasts. The main objective of the project is to increase economic opportunities and empowerment of women by improving their IT and digital, leadership and communication skills. Training in IT and digital courses of their choice has been provided to 180 women aged 15 to 34 years and 98 digital women are currently working. As a result, in addition to IT and digital courses, 180 women from 3 regions were able to upgrade their skills through specialized leadership and communication trainings. Today, 50% of the 180 women who participated in the project are employed.

The Ukuk Bulagi Project, supported by USAID²⁹, helps increase access to justice for citizens, increase transparency in the work of justice institutions, promote gender-sensitive justice, and reduce corruption. The project is based on a "people-centered justice" approach. This approach uses data to better understand a person's legal needs and find solutions to meet those needs. This approach uses data to better understand people's legal needs and

²⁶ <https://journal.pravo.by/articles/natsionalnaya-bezopasnost/vliyanie-informatsionnykh-tehnologiy-na-molodezh-sotsialno-politicheskiy-aspekt-problema-radikalizm/>

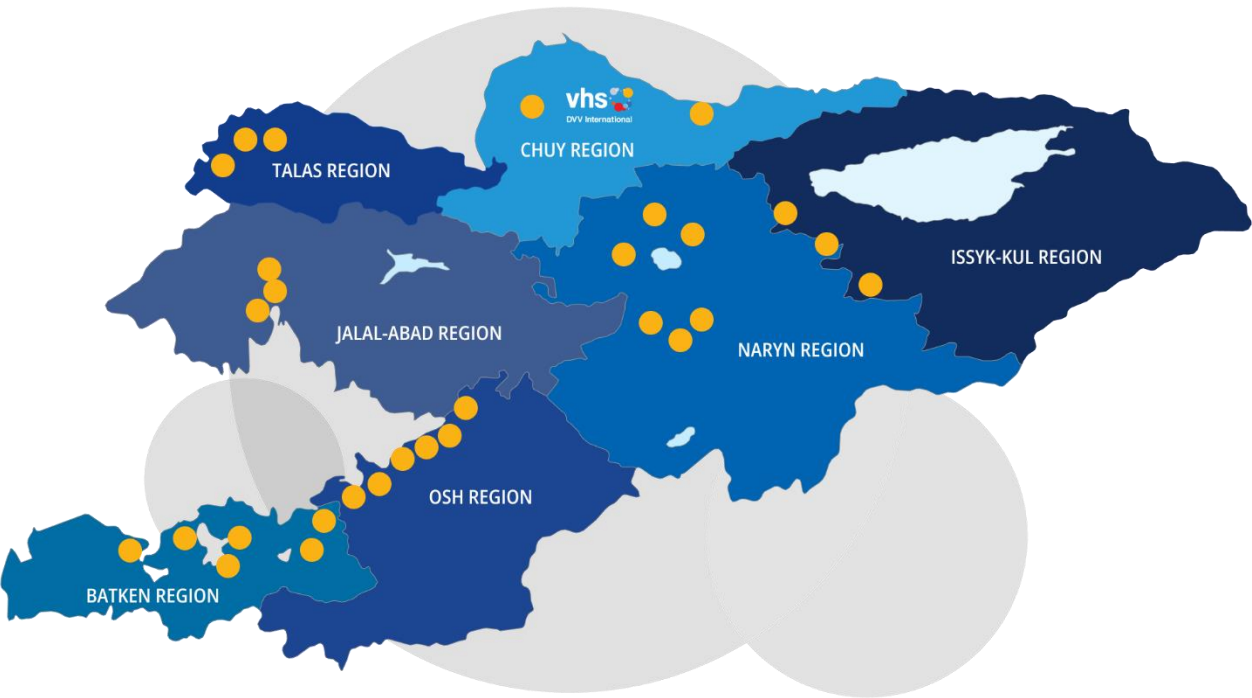
²⁷ <https://kyrgyzstan.ureport.in/story/845/>

²⁸ <https://kyrgyzstan.ureport.in/engagement/>

²⁹ <https://www-2021.usaid.gov/ru/kyrgyz-republic/fact-sheets/usaid-ukuk-bulagy-project>

find solutions to meet those needs. It aims to improve citizens' legal literacy and address systemic legal problems, and to promote open and accountable delivery of public services. ³⁰The "Ukuk Bulagy" project supports the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic in the implementation of the National Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2018-2040³¹, National Anti-Corruption Strategy³², National Target Plan for the Development of the Judicial System (Development of the Justice System of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2023-2026)³³, National Action Plan for the implementation of the "Open Government Partnership" initiative³⁴, Strategic Plan for Information Technology for the Judicial System of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2023-2026³⁵, National Strat.

V. CHAPTER 2 - BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PILOT MUNICIPALITIES: main needs and constraints hindering the participation of rural inhabitants, especially youth, in decision-making processes at local and national levels



Project geography: pilot municipalities on the map of Kyrgyzstan

³⁰ <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/159472/edition/1189691/ru>

³¹ <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/5-9084/edition/1095562/ru>

³² <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/430235/edition/1042429/ru>

³³ <https://constsof.kg/ru/news/2023-2026-zhyldarga-kyrgyz-respublikasynyn-sot-adiletligi-sistemasyn-%D3%A9n%D2%AFkt%D2%AFr%D2%AF%D2%AF-mamleketтик-maksattuu-programmasy-bekitildi/>

³⁴ <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/216401/edition/933980/ru>

³⁵ <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/434916/edition/1234928/ru>

Table 1 - List of pilot municipalities

No	Area	Pilot municipalities	Number of locations
1	Chui Oblast	r. Tokmak and Kara-Balta city	2
2	Naryn region	<i>Zhumgal district</i> : Kuiruchuk-Kyzart JSC, Baizak JSC, Chaek JSC <i>Ak-Talinsky district</i> : Baetov JSC, Kara-Burgon JSC, Ala-Buga JSC	6
3	Issyk-Kul region	Ton district: Ulakhol AO, Kun Chygysh AO, Ak-Terek AO	3
4	Talas region	<i>Aitmatovsky district</i> : Cholponbai AO, Sheker AO, Kara-Buura AO	3
5	Osh region	<i>Uzgen district</i> : Myrzake AO, Kurshab AO, Kizil Oktyabr AO <i>Aravan district</i> : Kerme-Too AO, Yusupov AO, Dobo-Korgon AO	6
6	Jalal-Abad oblast	<i>Aksy district</i> : Kerben City Hall, Kara-Kamysh AO, Sary-Chelek AO	3
7	Batken oblast	<i>Batken district</i> : Kara-Bulak AO, Samarkandek AO, Kyshtut AO <i>Kadamjai district</i> : Birlik AO, Masaliev AO, Moldo-Niyaz AO	6
<i>Total number of pilot municipalities</i>			29

For a brief analysis, a profile was developed with different indicators of the municipalities (*Annex 3 - Main Characteristics of Municipalities*), which provide a basic characterization of the municipalities. The profiles included the following indicators that define the current state of the municipality:

- Number of villages
- Demographic indicators (gender, ethnicity, working age population)
- Availability of common resources
- Social infrastructure
- Distance from the center and altitude

Thus, based on the analysis of PRA data, the pilot municipalities combine more than **204 villages**. The study found that many municipalities have undergone administrative territorial reform (ATR)³⁶, resulting in consolidation and amalgamation of villages, as well as personnel changes. On average, a municipality now includes between 2 and 5 villages, with 9 out of 29 municipalities combining between 11 and 19 villages.

The total population of the pilot locations is **575,162** residents (51% male and 49% female). According to local residents, in a number of AOs, residents are not well acquainted with local government staff due to enlargement and recent personnel changes, which limits interaction and partnerships, as well as participation of the population in local self-governance.

³⁶ On administrative-territorial reform in the Kyrgyz Republic <https://mineconom.gov.kg/ru/post/10216>

Chart 1 - Total number of villages

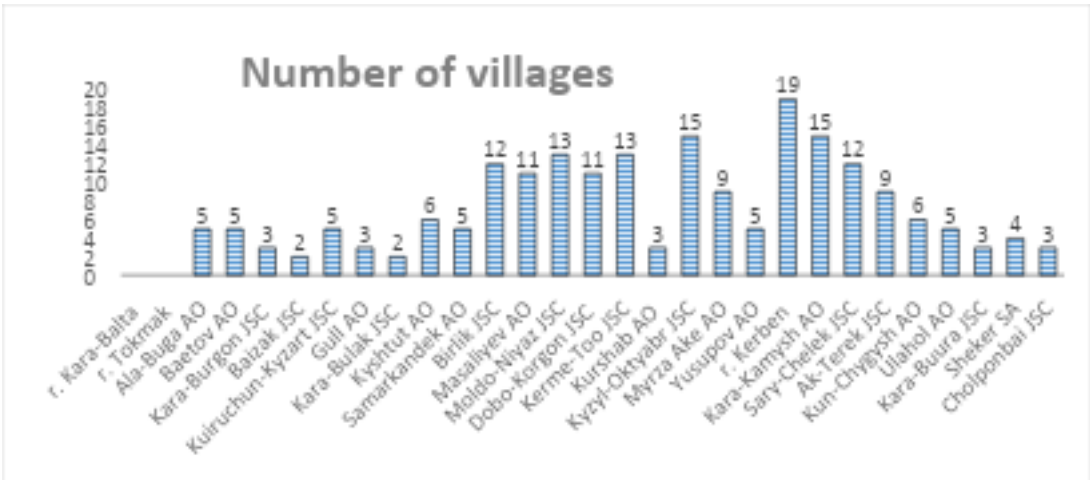
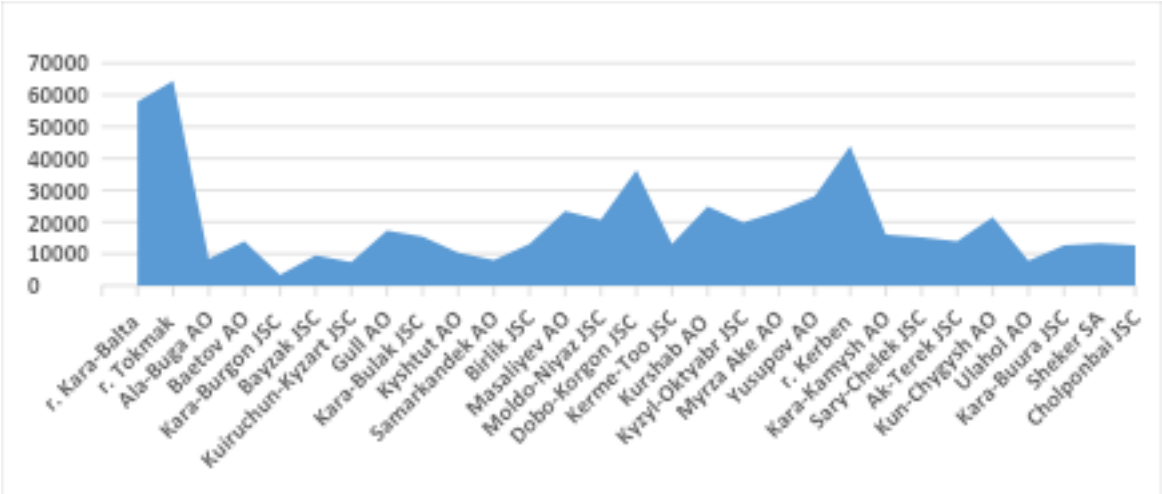


Figure 2 - Total population by municipality



Many villages are located in remote and high altitude areas (between 800 and 5,000 meters above sea level), which creates difficulties with internet access in many locations.

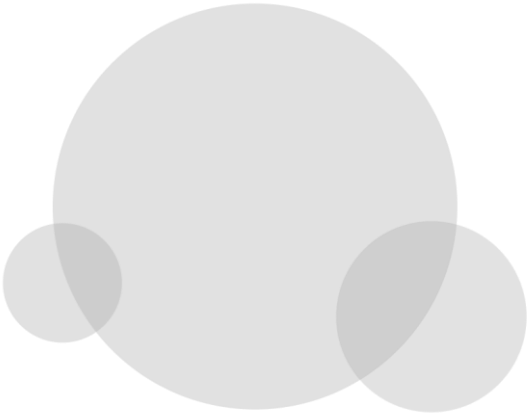
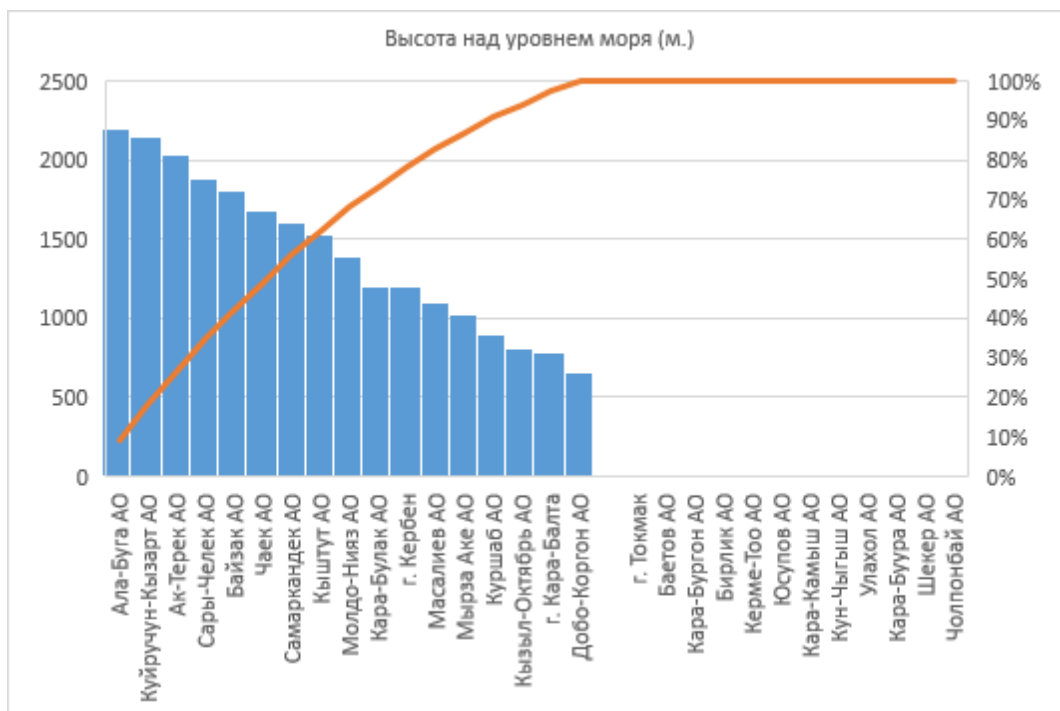


Figure 3 - Elevation of municipalities above sea level



During the field mission from July 29 to August 26, 2024, **29 FGDs and 25 in-depth interviews/interviews with key informants** were conducted with the participation of local residents, LSG staff, representatives of community organizations/NGOs, local activists including youth and women based on the Participatory Rural Needs, Requirements and Priorities Assessment (PRA) (*Annex 4 - Details of pilot locations based on PRA results*).

Overall, the study included **532 participants** (*Appendix 5 - PRA Participant List*), of which **67% were female** and **33% were male**. The majority of participants (**61%**) were *young people between the ages of 14 and 35*, while **39%** of participants were *between the ages of 36 and 65*.

Chart 4 - Total number of PRA participants by region

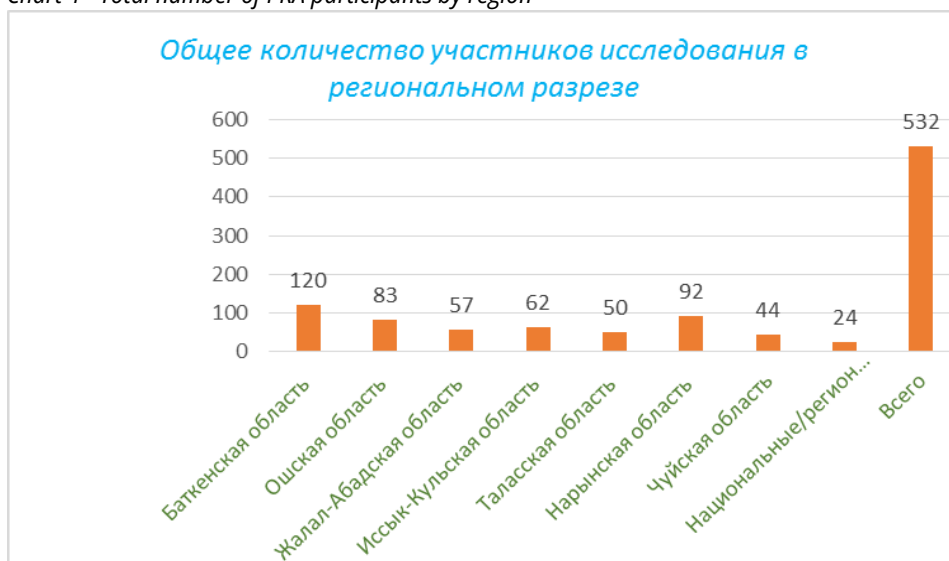
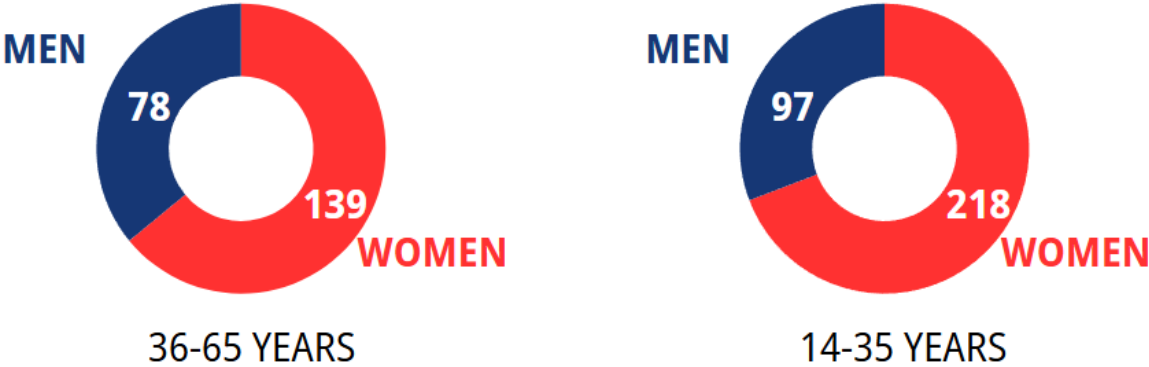


Chart 5 - Composition of PRA participants by gender and age



As it was noted during the meetings, the main forms of participation of residents in local self-government are:

1. **Village assemblies and meetings** at which residents together with LSG bodies discuss important issues and have the opportunity to express their opinions and proposals.
2. **Public hearings** where projects and initiatives in the location/municipality are discussed, as well as **budget hearings** where residents are informed about planned revenues and expenditures of the local budget and can express their priorities and needs.
3. **Work in local councils** through the participation of residents in the activities of local councils, where decisions on the development of districts are made.
4. **Feedback via social media:** Using social media to interact with local authorities and express opinions (whatsapp, telegram, facebook, instagram).
5. **Active participation** in various local initiatives (social, sports, environmental, etc.) aimed at improving life in the community.

As noted by the staff of the pilot AOs during the field meetings: "In many locations conditions have been created for involvement of local residents in decision-making processes, including participation in meetings of the village councils, village assemblies, inquiries and appeals to the AO through various communication channels (email, personal meetings, official websites and profiles in social media (Facebook, Instagram, Telegram)) to inform citizens about news, promote activities and initiatives. Information about the work of LGBs is also available through various WhatsApp groups, which helps residents to get up-to-date data and share opinions. However, the problem with the overload of municipal employees makes it difficult to directly interact with citizens, dialog with the population and involve citizens in the life of the municipality".

In turn, residents during the meetings noted the fact that local authorities do not have the necessary knowledge and skills for systematic work with local residents, effective interaction with non-governmental organizations and activists, which limits their ability to involve citizens in decision-making processes and reduces the overall level of participation and involvement of the population. They also noted that much of the weak participation in local self-governance is due to a lack of knowledge and skills among local residents, activists and leaders in civic participation, cooperation, communication and teamwork. Problems with access to the Internet, financial and educational services also create barriers to the development of local self-governance and make it difficult for the population of the pilot municipalities to actively participate in decision-making processes using digital technologies and limit opportunities for improving life in the community.

The research identified a number of **key barriers** to the use of digital technologies for participation in local decision-making that were noted by residents of the pilot locations during the field meetings (including the regional transect). In order to prioritize the issues, the research team conducted an analysis of determining the importance of each requirement relative to others, and grouped into high, medium and low priority categories

using the ranking method. The structuring and prioritization also took into account resource constraints (time and budget availability) and stakeholder views on which solutions would be most important.

Thus, **2 levels of prioritization** can be distinguished:

- **Strategic or national**, when the proposed solutions to key problems require more time and resources and it is necessary to link it to the long-term development program of the country or region within the framework of digital transformation;
- **Tactical or community-based**, where individual tasks or projects can be accomplished within a short period of time and with current financial and human resources.

Strategic or national priorities (in descending order):

1. Insufficient funding to create and maintain an ayil location website, which limits access to information and reduces the transparency of local authorities;
2. Lack of digital literacy and lack of skills with digital tools limits local people's ability to make informed decisions.
3. Many residents do not know how to participate in local government and what mechanisms are available for participation;
4. There are no online courses or digital education programs available;
5. There are no centers for training and courses for digital and language skills

Tactical priorities or community issues (in descending order):

1. **Lack of skills of interaction of LSG** structures with local population, public organizations and initiative groups.
2. **Competence deficit of local leaders**: Local leaders and activists are not sufficiently prepared to participate in self-governance.
3. **Low motivation**: Limited interest of local people in decision-making.
4. **Lack of training**: No courses for youth to strengthen leadership capacity and communication skills.
5. **Limited competencies**: Lack of digital literacy among local residents.
6. **Lack of platforms and courses**: No digital platforms and online courses to develop digital skills, especially in remote areas. Limited digital resources in educational institutions (e.g. digital whiteboards, e-books).
7. **Information gaps**: Lack of information on projects and programs for youth and women.

To systematize the obstacles by priority on the basis of evidence based on the percentage based on the determination of the significance of each obstacle for the effective interaction of local self-government (LSG) with the population and program performance. For this purpose, the research team analyzed each of the obstacles in terms of their impact on the processes and needs of the target groups. In doing so, they used the following approach - they assigned priorities on a scale from 1 to 7 (where 1 is the highest priority and 7 is the lowest).

- **Lack of skills of interaction of LSG structures with the local population, public organizations, initiative groups** - 20%. This obstacle is the most important, as it affects the basis for the functioning of local self-governance and interaction with citizens.
- **Competence deficit: local leaders and activists are not sufficiently prepared to participate in self-governance** - 18%. Insufficient training of leaders and activists slows down decision-making processes and initiatives, which makes this obstacle important, but not as much as problems with interaction.
- **Low motivation: limited interest of local residents in decision-making** - 15%. This obstacle is important, because without motivation of citizens to participate in decision-making processes, interaction with them may be ineffective. However, it still affects the very infrastructure of self-government to a lesser extent.

- **Information gaps: lack of information about projects and programs for youth and women** - 15%. This obstacle reduces the level of awareness, which can affect the activity and participation of target groups in programs and projects. However, it is not as critical as problems related to skills and motivation.
- **Lack of training: there are no courses for youth to strengthen leadership potential and communication skills** - 12%. This obstacle is related to the insufficient preparation of young people to participate in self-governance and increase their involvement in the processes. This is an important factor for long-term changes.
- **Limited competencies: lack of digital literacy among local people** - 10%. Digital literacy is important, but compared to other issues, its deficit may have less impact on direct interaction with local people.
- **Lack of platforms and courses: There are no digital platforms and online courses for digital skills development, especially in remote areas** - 10%. This obstacle primarily hinders the availability of information and resources for digital skills development in remote areas. While important, its impact is limited by territorial specificity.

The main obstacles in the use of digital technologies for participation in local decision-making that were noted by residents of the pilot locations during the field meetings (regionalized):

Chui Oblast:

- Lack of digital platform and online courses to strengthen digital skills;
- Deficit of competencies of local leaders and activists to participate in local self-governance;
- Ineffective interaction with local self-government bodies;
- Low motivation of local residents, activists to participate in decision-making;
- Lack of digital resources in educational institutions (e.g. digital whiteboards, e-books);
- Lack of development courses and summer camps to improve digital skills and leadership capacity for local youth/school children;

There is a lack of training on how to work with neural networks.

Naryn oblast:

- Limited digital competencies of young people;
- Lack of information on projects and programs to improve the digital skills of youth and women;
- There are no centers for training and courses for digital and language skills;
- Low internet speeds and poor ISPs;

Limited access to information and consequent lack of outreach through available communication channels (e.g. WhatsApp).

Issyk-Kul region:

- Learning gap: Limited digital skills training for youth, especially girls, which constrains their participation in public life;
- Insufficient funding to create and maintain a local website, which limits access to information and reduces transparency of local authorities;
- Low youth participation: Limited participation of youth, especially girls, in public life and decision-making;

- Information gaps: There is a lack of information on social networks in Aiylaimak, which makes communication between residents and authorities difficult;
- Lack of laptops and internet access for youth teams, which limits their participation in projects;
- There are no online courses or digital education programs available;
- The need to digitize visual projects to improve transparency and monitoring of AO performance;
- Lack of a marketing platform to promote goods and services at the local level;
- Some neighborhoods are having trouble accessing reliable internet;

Lack of digital literacy and lack of skills with digital tools limits local people's ability to make informed decisions.

Talas region:

- Most local leaders do not have the necessary knowledge and education to systematize youth work;
- Local leaders and authorities do not have the skills to interact with NGOs and do not know how to organize the work of a youth center;
- Many residents do not know how to participate in local government and what mechanisms are available for participation;

Low level of interest and involvement among local residents, resulting in a lack of engagement in local governance issues.

Osh Oblast:

- Limited digital competencies of local residents;
- Lack of information on projects and programs for youth and women;
- Lack of centers for training and courses for digital and language skills;
- Weak internet infrastructure: Low internet speeds and poor ISPs;

Limited access to information: Lack of outreach through available communication channels (e.g. WhatsApp).

Batken oblast:

- Limited internet access - insufficient communication infrastructure;
- Low level of digital literacy, lack of skills of local residents to use modern technologies;
- The lack of information is a lack of knowledge about the opportunities for participation through digital platforms;
- Technical faults with devices and software;

Complex processes and lack of transparency in local decision-making.

Jalal-Abad oblast:

- Lack of digital literacy, lack of skills in working with digital tools limits the participation of local residents in local self-governance;
- Lack of knowledge and skills reduces young people's willingness and ability to participate in decision-making processes;
- Limited and unreliable internet access in some areas;

There are no training programs and workshops for local people to improve digital skills on the use of mobile applications

Specific needs and preferences of young people in the pilot municipalities to strengthen their participation in local self-governance:

As part of the study, one of the objectives was to identify the level and extent of youth participation in decision-making processes and to consider mechanisms for local governments to empower young people to influence vital issues in their communities. Young participants indicated that they can realize their participation in decision-making through their own activism and activities that have an impact on their surroundings. For example, many high school graduates in the target communities, including those in labor migration, have established community foundations and mobilized resources to improve local infrastructure, repair roads and schools, engage in philanthropic activities, and actively consider addressing environmental issues such as garbage, recycling and sorting. There are small business and job creation initiatives. One of the opportunities for youth participation in decision-making is through the elected bodies of local self-government - councils.

During the study it was revealed that many targeted aiyl okmotu have undergone administrative-territorial reform (ATR), which resulted in enlargement and unification of villages, as well as personnel changes. The reduction of "age" staff and those in pre-retirement age has led to changes not only in the territorial structure, but also in staffing. Young people noted that this initiative has become one of the barriers to active participation in the life of the community, as the newly annexed villages are located much further from the administrative center and not all young people are familiar with the new LSG staff and do not have information about the new staff and do not know how they can interact with them. It takes time to establish new contacts and cooperation. LGB staff noted that the initiative of young people is the basis for many things in the village and they are the key drivers of socially important and political processes.

It should be noted that young people consider themselves to be the key labor resource of the community and note that economic development of the village and the country as a whole depends on their involvement in socio-political life and activity. At the same time, young people, while participating in solving local problems at the local level, have little involvement in decision-making processes at the local level. Young people noted that LGBs do not have the skills to involve young people in addressing issues of local importance (this means the local budget and initiatives at the expense of the local budget) and participation in the political process, as well as young people do not have a platform for constructive discussion and participation in political processes. Despite the establishment of youth committees in the pilot locations, many of them do not actually function. Unfortunately, local self-governments lack a specialized department for youth work and paid staff and resources from the local budget to support youth committees.

We would like to pay special attention to the participation of young women in all of the above processes. Unfortunately, almost everywhere the staff of LSG administration and local councils consists of men. Nevertheless, at the meetings and during the research, most of the participants were women and girls. Funds of migrants or graduates also consist of men and are managed by men, funds for community development are also distributed by men.

Summarizing all the statements and opinions of young people, *several key aspects* can be highlighted:

- The effects of the APR have had a great impact on the active participation of youth in decision-making processes and the realization of youth rights.
- Youth from isolated communities (cross-border and border communities) are excluded from participation in general and face difficulties related to physical isolation, insufficient infrastructure, limited access to information and educational programs. These factors create barriers to inclusion in civic and political processes, resulting in their lower participation in decisions regarding their rights and

interests. The isolation of these groups can also reinforce social inequalities and limit their opportunities for self-actualization.

- Limited institutions or platforms for youth that promote their active participation in local development.
- Low level of youth understanding of the role, function of state and local government bodies and engagement mechanisms.
- Limited number of public youth organizations in the regions, really working with the issues of youth participation and activation.
- Complete absence of gender policy and LSG programs to strengthen the role of women in the family and society, to realize the right to vote of girls and young women.

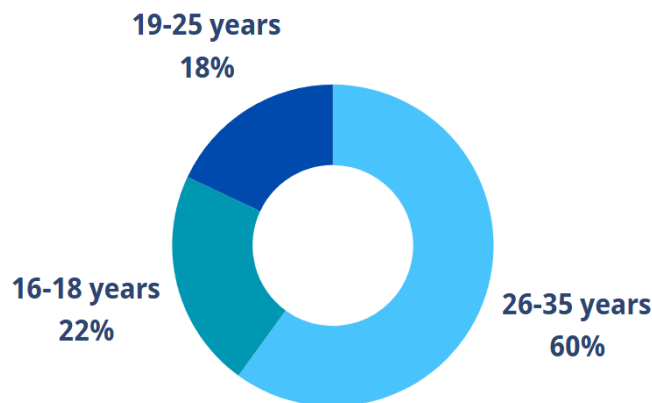
These aspects emphasize the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing youth engagement issues.

Results of the online survey among young people in the pilot municipalities

The online survey was conducted from September 15 to 22, 2024 among 262 young people from the pilot locations. The link to the questionnaire was sent to their numbers via WhatsApp and SMS in two languages - Kyrgyz and Russian - for easy completion, using the Google Forms application (*Annex 6 - Results of the online survey*). The survey was aimed at young people aged 16 to 35 years old, which allowed to focus on current opinions and perceptions of the younger generation on participation in decision-making processes, digitalization and other aspects of development at the local level. Out of 262 respondents, 67 people aged between 16 and 35 years responded:

Geographic coverage: Survey participants represented all regions of Kyrgyzstan, including Batken, Osh, Talas, Naryn, Issyk-Kul and Chui oblasts (Kara-Balta and Tokmok cities). This allowed us to compare the opinions of young people from different locations, which is particularly useful for identifying regional differences.

*Diagram 6 –
Age composition of respondents*



*Diagram 7 -
Gender composition of respondents*

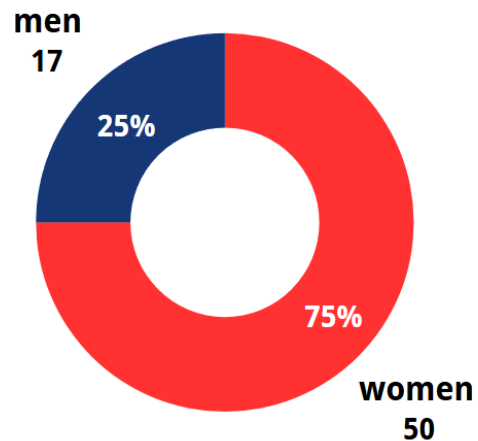
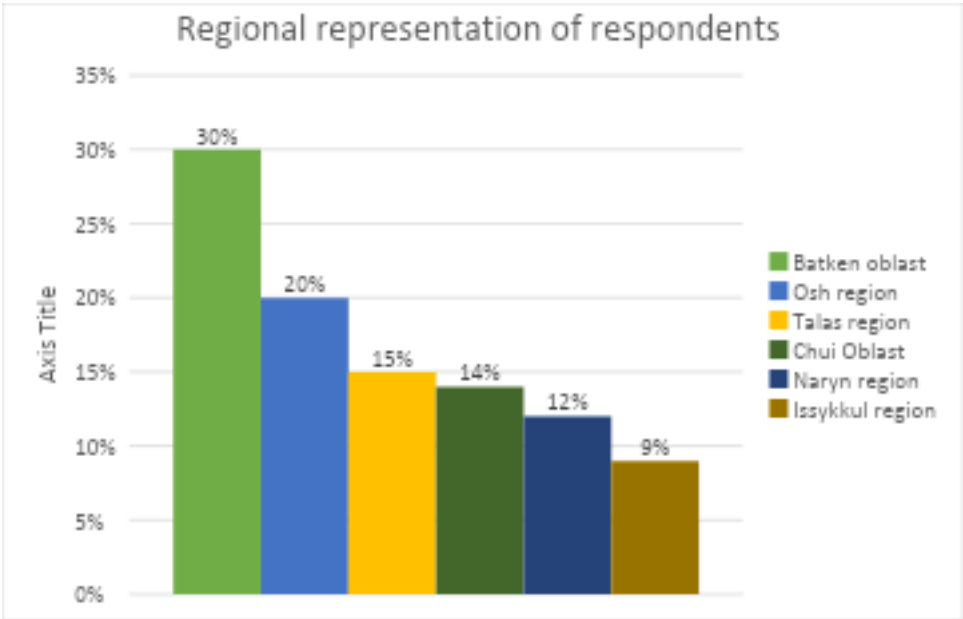


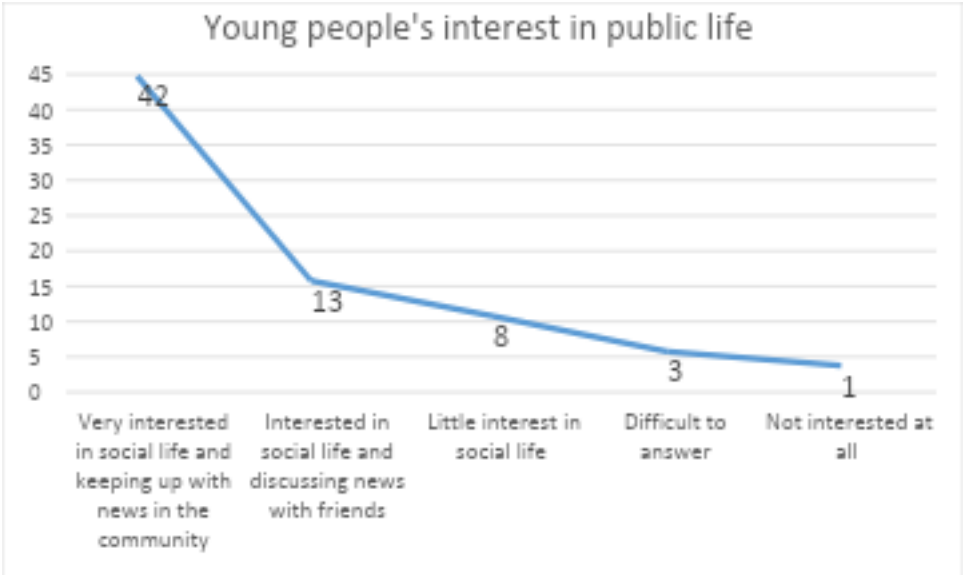
Chart 8 - Regional representation



Key findings from the survey

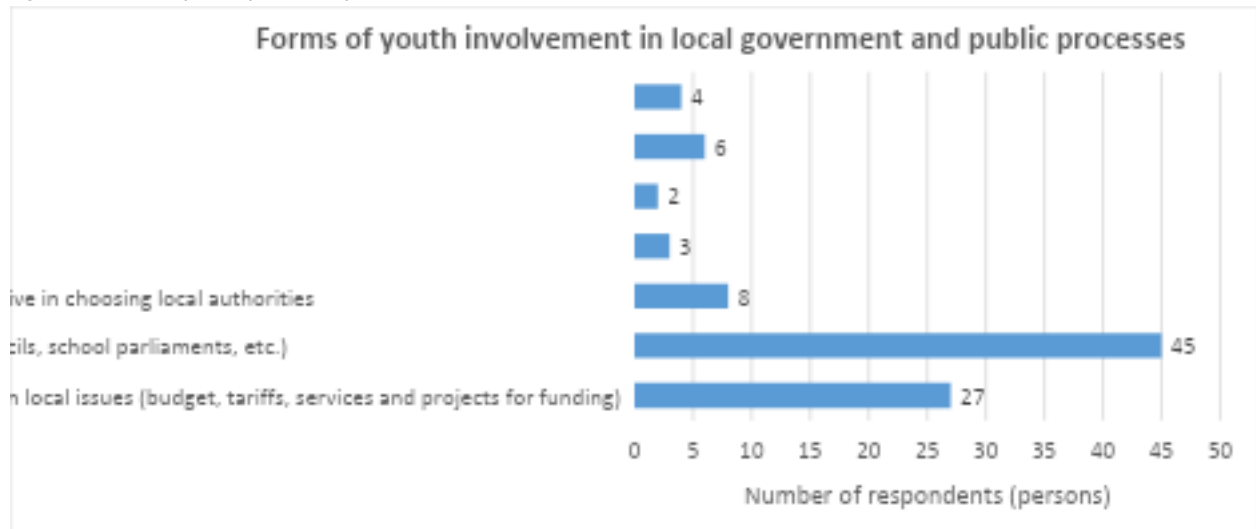
In general, among young people who participated in the online survey there is a high interest in public issues - 42 respondents (63%) are actively interested in the public life of the village, country, and community, which indicates a high level of involvement in the community

Diagram 9 - Interest of young people in public life



The share of youth actively participating in public events and discussions is quite high - 40% or 27 respondents participated in public hearings, as well as actively participated in discussions on local issues, including budget, tariffs, services and projects for funding, 67% (45 respondents) participated in advisory bodies, such as youth councils, women's councils, school parliaments and other similar organizations, 12% of respondents took part in local elections, which indicates that the participation of young people in local elections is very high. At the same time, 9% of respondents found it difficult to answer, which may indicate uncertainty or lack of involvement of young people in the pilot municipalities in local public processes.

Figure 10 - Youth participation in public events and discussions



Participation in youth structures (youth structures, women's councils, etc.) is quite high (67%), which indicates the desire of young people to influence local problems. Only 12% of respondents participated in elections, which shows the need for support for the development of this form of youth participation. The central issues of local governance and influence require further promotion and involvement of youth through educational and informational programs. The low number of youth using social media and actively signing petitions and appeals indicates the need to develop these forms of participation. The overall findings emphasize the potential for youth engagement in public life, but also point to areas for improvement and engagement.

Based on the survey data, several **main reasons for the low participation of young people in the public life of the community** can be identified:

- Weak awareness: 38% of respondents noted that they did not know about the opportunity to participate in public life. This emphasizes the importance of informing young people about existing initiatives and activities.
- Lack of time and opportunity: 12% of respondents indicated a lack of time and opportunity to participate.
- Lack of trust in the process: 6% of respondents expressed a lack of trust that young people's opinions are actually taken into account. This suggests the need for greater transparency in decision-making processes and the need to increase young people's trust in them.
- Feeling of meaninglessness of participation: 4% of respondents believe that their opinion will not change anything. This may be due to pessimistic perception of social changes or lack of examples of successful youth influence on the situation in location or village.
- Uncertainty and other reasons: 40% of respondents found it difficult to answer and chose the option "other". This may mean that there are still many uncertain factors influencing the motivation of young people

The main factors that motivate youth to become more involved in decision-making processes are the following:

- Youth need to be aware of available opportunities for community involvement. This can include information about competitions, meetings, volunteering initiatives and other activities. It may be worth developing platforms where such information can be easily found.
- Interesting and understandable participation formats - the formats of events should be interactive, interesting and understandable for young people. These can be games, hackathons, quizzes, contests, round tables or creative workshops where young people can express their ideas and get feedback.

- Influence of friends and acquaintances - social connections play an important role, so a motivated group of friends can encourage a young person to participate in activities. It may be worth organizing group activities or supporting existing groups to better engage young people.
- Material and moral incentives - prizes and material rewards can serve as an additional incentive for participation. These can be symbolic awards or more serious prizes that will be of interest to young people, such as tickets to events, gift certificates, etc.

It is important for youth from the pilot locations to have *convenient and effective formats for participation in decision-making*:

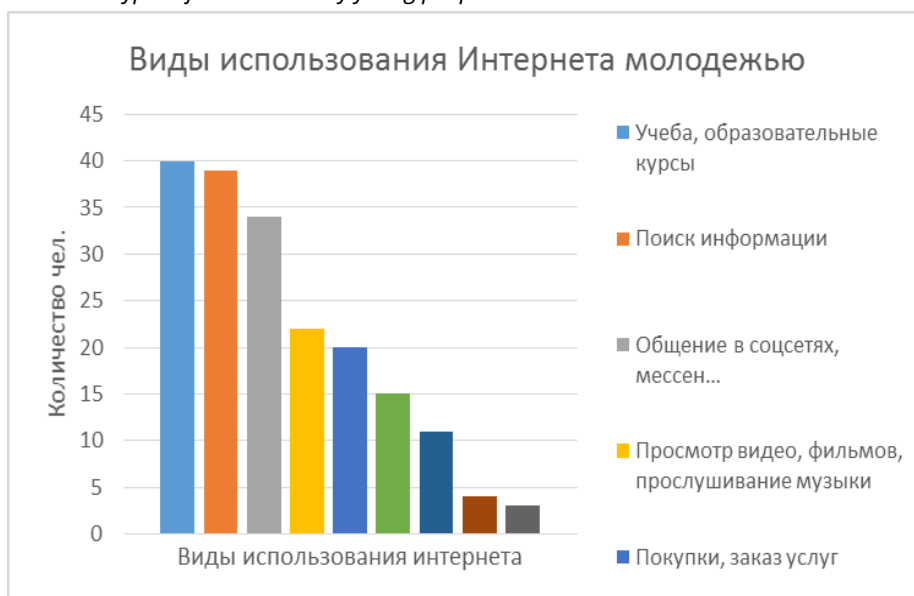
- *Offline (face-to-face) meetings* - this format allows young people to communicate directly with the authorities and each other. Face-to-face meetings create a more trusting atmosphere, promote active discussion and exchange of opinions. They can be organized in the form of discussions, round tables and forums.
- *Public hearings* - allow young people to express their opinions and suggestions on various issues affecting their lives. Public hearings provide an opportunity to hear different points of view and deepen understanding of the problems faced by young people.
- *Opinion-gathering mobile apps* - this tool allows young people to easily and quickly leave their opinions and suggestions. Apps can include surveys, initiatives and other features that help engage young people in decision-making.
- *Youth community councils and parliaments* - these structures provide a platform for young people to participate in governance in a more formalized way. Participation in such councils and parliaments allows young people to influence decision-making at the local government level and represent the interests of their group.

The combination of these formats can ensure the most effective involvement of youth in the decision-making process, taking into account both traditional and modern methods of communication. These factors can significantly increase the level of youth involvement in public processes, contributing to the formation of active and responsible citizenship.

Improving youth participation requires a comprehensive approach, including information campaigns, creating opportunities for engagement, and measures to build confidence in decision-making processes.

According to the data of the online survey, the *main reasons for the use of the Internet* by respondents were distributed as follows:

Chart 11 - Types of Internet use by young people



These data show that the Internet is largely used by young people in the pilot locations for educational purposes, which emphasizes its role as an important tool in the learning process. There is also a high interest in searching

for information, indicating that young people want to keep up to date with current events and acquire new knowledge. Communicating in social networks and messengers remains an important aspect, while viewing entertainment content, despite the number of respondents, ranks fourth. This distribution of Internet use can help further better understand the needs and interests of the youth audience, as well as form target strategies for educational programs and platforms within the project.

VI. CHAPTER 3 - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main conclusions drawn from the results of the study:

The following priorities/problems faced by residents of the pilot locations, including youth, municipal and regional government officials, and other groups involved in the study, were noted during the meetings:

- **Weak communication between local self-governments (LSG) and youth:** In general, there is a lack of support, interest and skills in working with young people on the part of local authorities. There is insufficient support for youth and women at the local level. LSGs do not pay much attention to youth, cooperation is formal, LSG activities are more focused on infrastructure. Despite the existence of youth committees or youth councils³⁷ and youth centers³⁸ in the pilot municipalities, they are not actually functioning. Unfortunately, most local self-governments lack a specialized department for youth work and paid staff to support youth committees.
- **Lack of knowledge and skills:** This one of the main barriers to the active participation of youth in decision-making processes at the local level. Youth have low leadership potential to participate in local self-governance. Youth in the pilot municipalities are generally interested and proactive, but without proper education, training support and practical experience, their capacity to influence important decisions is significantly limited.
- **Lack of training for youth:** Pilot municipalities lack special programs for youth on life and social skills, leadership and communication skills, employment, self-employment, which severely limits their ability to interact and partner with local and state authorities, as well as with community organizations and local initiative groups.
- **Lack of digital literacy:** Low digital literacy and lack of skills in working with digital tools limits local people's ability to make informed decisions due to a lack of real information about the current state of affairs and a lack of information on how and through which existing mechanisms to participate in the decision-making process. Young people also have limited knowledge of the possibilities of digitalization of services, which hinders their active use.
- **Difficulties with electronic systems due to "unfriendly" format of work of platforms and**

³⁷ According to article 13 of the Youth Law, Youth Councils or Youth Councils under local government bodies are established to develop recommendations on the implementation of State youth policy in the Kyrgyz Republic and to ensure constructive and coordinated work between State bodies, local government bodies, youth organizations and youth wings of political parties. The councils are consultative and advisory bodies whose purpose is to encourage the development and implementation of youth policy and the participation of young people in decision-making and in the public life of the State. The councils' activities at the local level are coordinated by local self-government bodies. In the pilot municipalities of the project, Youth Councils have been established, which have consultative status in the implementation of the concept of youth development at the city level (Tokmak and Kara-Balta). At the level of pilot rural locations, Youth Committees have been established, which, for the most part, exist formally and are not active. At the same time, in some locations there are well-working youth committees that implement the concept of youth policy at the local level. Among them is the youth committee in Baetov AO of Naryn oblast, where a separate youth specialist has been allocated and a special budget of 2 million soms from the local budget has been allocated for festivals, sports competitions and other events for youth. In Kun-Chygysh AO of Issyk-Kul oblast, resources in the amount of 800,000 soms from the local budget have also been allocated for youth activities.

³⁸ Youth centers established and equipped with office equipment with the assistance of international organizations and projects under aiyi okmotu. In some pilot locations, youth centers operate on the basis of local Houses of Culture (Naryn oblast - Ak-Taalin district, Kara-Burgon AO; Zhumgal district, Chaek AO; Issyk-Kul oblast - Ton district, Kun-Chygysh AO).

complicated technical interface: residents face problems when using platforms such as "Tunduk", "My Light" and "Registration of children to schools and kindergartens", which is due to low digital literacy of the local population and the need for basic digital skills to work with online platforms.

- **Internet connectivity problems:** in mountainous and remote areas, there are significant difficulties with internet access, making it difficult to use digital services and interfering with interaction with government agencies. Underdeveloped infrastructure negatively affects the lives of residents, including educational and medical facilities.
- **Information gaps:** Lack of information on social networks of all locations, which hampers communication between residents and authorities.

Based on the analysis of the study data, the following **recommendations** can be identified to strengthen the capacity of local governments and increase youth participation in local self-governance:

Increased capacity of local authorities and youth participation in public processes

- Organize trainings (online and offline) for local government officials on how to strengthen engagement with youth and increase their participation.
- Holding regular forums and meetings to discuss topical issues of the region, providing support for activation of youth committees/centers (e.g. organizing interactive events (Zharatman Forum at district level, holding special meetings and "open doors" at AO level)).
- Use of digital formats for interaction between youth and authorities (development and implementation of convenient electronic platforms for interaction between citizens and authorities, including youth initiatives).

Support and motivation

- Develop and conduct trainings for youth on rights and opportunities to participate in local governance.
- Introduction of courses to develop leadership and communication skills of youth.
- Development of reward and incentive programs for youth activation (contests for the best proposal for community improvement, etc.), motivational meetings with influencers at the local level, organization of exchange/study tours at the regional level to share experiences and best practices of youth participation in local self-governance through digital skills.

Educational initiatives to enhance digital skills

- *Opening of courses:* Establishment of local training centers for digital training.
- *Programming courses:* Development of educational programs and courses on programming and digital skills, Training for Trainers (ToT), building a team of local trainers.
- *Variety of topics:* Organizing courses in content creation, graphic design and digital marketing.
- *Online Conferences:* Facilitating access to educational resources through online platforms.

Information initiatives

- *Dissemination of information:* Organization of workshops and information days on digital opportunities.
- *Information pages:* Launching newsletters and social media pages with up-to-date information, activating AO's social media by creating interesting content and improving interaction with the audience.
- *Informative platforms:* Creating online and offline spaces for sharing experiences and initiatives.
- *Information campaigns* to disseminate knowledge about digital platforms (Tunduk, My Light, etc.) to raise awareness of local residents (preparation of information materials - infographics, text instructions, videos, podcasts) together with government structures (ministries, agencies and LSGs).

Technical resources

- *Classroom equipment:* Providing educational institutions with modern equipment for demonstrating and processing information in digital format (e.g. interactive whiteboards, 3D printers and scanners, etc.).
- *Digital empowerment:* Establishment of free Wi-Fi zones in public places and schools.

ROADMAP

The Roadmap reflects certain methods and step-by-step actions of LGBs, youth, as well as the project team (DWW International and IYD) to increase the participation of youth in the pilot municipalities in local self-governance. It is important to note that the Roadmap implies not passive, but active participation of youth in this process. Youth participation in solving vital issues at the local level consists not only in the ability to demand certain benefits and services from local authorities, but also to be equally responsible with the authorities for achieving the set goals and desired results. This increases the level of partnership and trust between the authorities and the community. This Roadmap is based on the recommendations of the study and aims to create sustainable mechanisms for youth involvement in local decision-making processes.

Roadmap for the period December 2024 through January 2026.

No	Actions, activities	Implementation timeframe	Expected results	Responsible	Resources
1	Capacity building of LGB employees in the field of democratic and digital governance (Organization of trainings for local government employees)	December 2024- March 2025	Capacity building programs for LGB staff for 29 AOs are developed, trained staff have knowledge and skills in democratic and digital governance. Guidelines on the basic principles of democratic and digital governance (incl. effective communication skills for community engagement, skills for citizen involvement/participation in local governance, digital literacy, etc.) were developed.	Pilot LGBs	Experts, funds for training (transportation costs of training participants, training materials, meals for participants, rent of conference hall for training, equipment rent, etc.).
2	Holding regional forums with the participation of youth and LSGs to discuss youth problems, develop strategies and actions	December 2024- December 2025	Activation of youth initiatives / Creation of a platform for discussion and joint search for solutions	Youth, LGBs, Organizing Committee	Facilities, food, facilitators
3	Developing and conducting educational programs on decision-making mechanisms, participation and rights	December 2024 - December 2025	Increased awareness and engagement of youth. A Guide to Raising Youth Awareness and Involvement in Local Government	Youth, project team	Training materials, experts

4	Conducting trainings for youth on rights and opportunities for participation in local governance	December-September 2025	Increased awareness and engagement of youth. A team of local coaches.	Project team, experts	Trainers, materials
5	Introduction of leadership and communication skills development courses	December 2024-December 2025	Training of active leaders among youth. Youth Initiative Groups have been established	Trainers	Program Materials
6	Creation of motivational programs for youth activation (contests, meetings with local influencers, etc.).	January-November 2025	Increasing youth involvement in initiatives	Project team, trainers	Financing partners
7	Opening of local digital training centers	January-December 2025	Increasing digital literacy among young people	Local Authorities	Equipment, teachers
8	Organization of online conferences to disseminate knowledge	January-December 2025	Access to information and resources for young people	Municipalities	Webinar platforms
9	Organization of information days on opportunities for participation in local governance	January-December 2025	Increased awareness of engagement opportunities	Municipalities	Materials, location
10	Creating informational pages and launching newsletters	January-December 2025	Increased awareness among youth . Increased interaction and trust between youth and authorities.	PR department and specialists responsible for public relations /experts	Social Media, Content
11	Creation of Wi-Fi zones in public places	January-December 2025	Accessibility of digital resources for young people	Municipalities	Equipment budget
12	Conduct exchange/learning tours for youth, AO staff to share best practices (open digital platforms, local youth initiatives to improve participation in decision-making processes, etc.) at regional and national levels.	May-November 2025	Improving the competencies of exchange tour participants. Strengthening regional interaction and partnership networking among tour participants.	Project team, pilot municipalities	Facilitators, transportation costs, food costs for participants

VII. LIST OF REFERENCES:

1. Analytical Notes "Assessment of the Level of Youth Participation in Local Self-Governance in the Kyrgyz Republic", Institute for Development Policy (IDP) available at <https://dpi.kg/ru/library/full/45.html>.
2. Analyzing Youth Market Trends in Kyrgyzstan, University of Central Asia (2019), available at <https://www.ucentralasia.org/Content/Downloads/IPPA-WP52-Eng.pdf>.
3. World Bank, "The World Bank in the Kyrgyz Republic," Kyrgyzstan Review <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kyrgyzrepublic/overview#2>
4. UN World Food Program, "Food Security Situation - Kyrgyz Republic," World Food Program (2021), <https://www.wfp.org/publications/kyrgyz-republic-food-security-situation-2021>
5. World Bank, World Bank Data: Population Density (persons per square kilometer of land area) - Kyrgyz Republic, (2018), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.DNST?locations=KG>
6. World Bank, "GDP per capita (current US\$ exchange rate) - Kyrgyz Republic," World Bank Open Report (2020) available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=KG>.
7. World Bank, "GNI per capita, Atlas Method," World Bank Open Data (2020), available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.ATLS.CD>.
8. Youth Act, available at <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/4-3394/edition/1270197/ru>
9. Data of the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic on the Results of the Sample Integrated Survey of Household Budgets and Labor Force, available at <https://stat.gov.kg/ru/publications/zanyatost-i-bezrobotica-itogi-integrirovannogo-vyborochnogo-obsledovaniya-byudzhetrov-domashnih-hozyajstv-i-rabochej-sily-v-2013g/>.
10. Demographic Challenges in the Development of the Kyrgyz Republic, Policy Brief, available at <https://kyrgyzstan.unfpa.org>.
11. Proportion of the population living below the national poverty line (as a percentage of the population) - Kyrgyz Republic, World Bank Open Data (2020), available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC?locations=KG>.
12. Index of Youth Well-Being and Development in the Kyrgyz Republic (2022), available at <https://kyrgyzstan.unfpa.org/ru/publications/>
13. International Organization for Migration, External Youth Migration in Central Asian Countries (2019), available at https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/external_youth_migration_ru.pdf.
14. International Youth Day: Figures and Facts - National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, available at <https://stat.gov.kg/ru/news/mezhdunarodnyj-den-molodezh-hi-cifry-i-fakty/>
15. Youth and Media: The Impact of Information Technology on Political Worldviews, (2024), available at <https://journal.pravo.by/articles/natsionalnaya-bezopasnost/vliyanie-informatsionnykh-tehnologiy-na-molodezh-sotsialno-politicheskiy-aspekt-problema-radikalizm/>
16. Young Population and High Demographic Growth, UNFPA (2020), available at kyrgyzstan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Policy_brief_Youth_May-22.pdf
17. National Concept of Youth Policy for 2020-2030, available at <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/157204/edition/978698/ru>
18. National Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2018-2040 <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/5-9084/edition/1095562/ru>
19. National Anti-Corruption Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic, available at <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/430235/edition/1042429/ru>

20. National Action Plan for the implementation of the Open Government Partnership Initiative, available at <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/216401/edition/933980/ru>
21. National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, "Indicator 1.2.2", Sustainable Development Goals in the Kyrgyz Republic (2020), available at <https://sustainabledevelopment-kyrgyzstan.github.io/1-2-2/>.
22. National Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic on Achieving Gender Equality until 2030, available at <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/159472/edition/1189691/ru>.
23. Kyrgyz Youth Skills: Looking to the Future (2022), available at <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bischkek/20238.pdf>
24. "Integrated Context Analysis Map", United Nations World Food Program (2020)
25. Kyrgyzstan: Human Development Indicators, Human Development Reports, UNDP (2020), available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/KGZ>.
26. Kyrgyzstan: Human Development Indicators, UNDP (2020)
27. Youth Situation Analysis, United Nations Population Fund
28. Information Technology Strategic Plan for the Judiciary of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2023-2026, available at <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/434916/edition/1234928/ru>.
29. Beijing+30: National Review of the Kyrgyz Republic on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action (2024), available at <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Kyrgyzstan-Report-ru.pdf>.
30. Latest Human Development Index (HDI) ranking, Human Development Reports, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2020), available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/latest-human-development-index-ranking>.
31. KR Justice System Development 2023-2026/National Target Plan for the Development of the Judicial System, available at <https://constot.kg/ru/news/2023-2026-zhyldarga-kyrgyz-respublikasynyn-sot-adilettigi-sistemasyn-%D3%A9n%D2%AFkt%D2%AFr%D2%AF%D2%AF-mamleketik-maksattuu-programmasy-bekitildi/>.

LIST OF APPLICATIONS

Annex 1 - Terms of Reference

Appendix 2 - Methodology and timeline for the PRA study

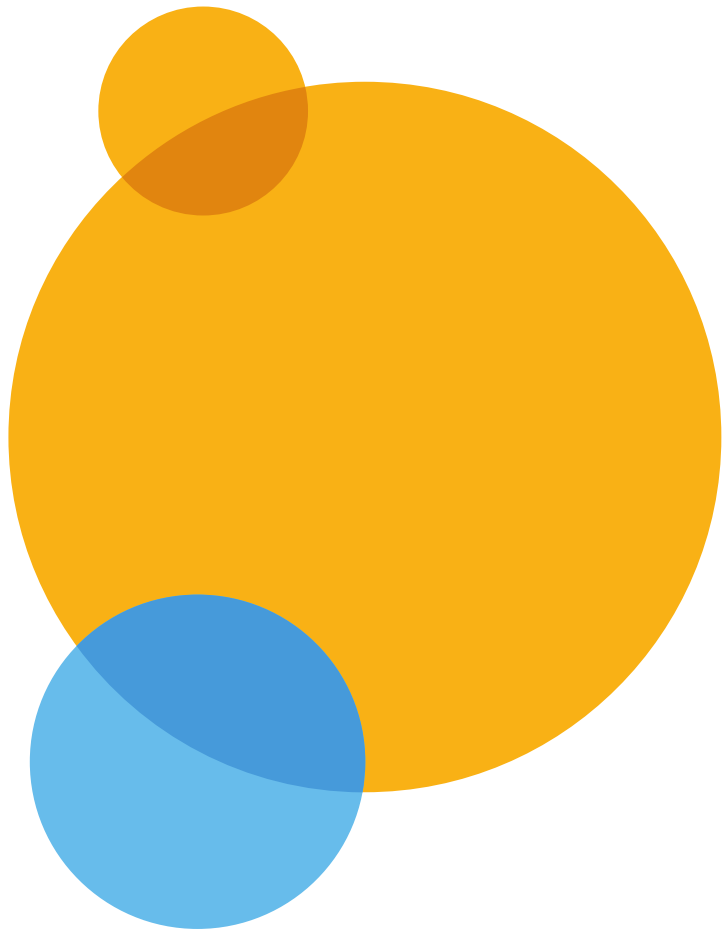
Annex 3 - Main characteristics of pilot municipalities

Annex 4 - Detailed information on pilot municipalities

Annex 5 - List of PRA participants

Appendix 6 - Results of the online survey

Annex 7 - Materials during the PRA (photos and group work (drawings, diagrams, etc.).



+996 312 32 35 89

+996 312 32 39 01

E-mail: info@dvv-international.kg

www.dvv-international-central-asia.org

