



# YOUTH, PEACE & SECURITY

*Youth Activism in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*



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# Intro

A milestone has been reached – youth is now on the international agenda!

Young people have agency and, given the right conditions, are able to have a positive impact on all levels of decision-making. The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 emphasizes the potential impact and importance of youth civic engagement, and its contribution to peace. The idea for the resolution arose from the recommendations put forth in the Amman Youth Declaration. In the summit leading up to this declaration over ten thousand young people were consulted. Although this is a great development, we should view this as the beginning of youth empowerment.

Having a binding international framework, which acknowledges the agency of youth, is the first step. Yet changes that benefit youth will only reach their full potential if they are implemented at national and local levels of governance. It is only when young people are informed about their rights that they can hold decision-makers accountable. This report provides the reader with an overview of this UN resolution, in order to raise awareness about it.

In this age, when we are becoming more interconnected, it is possible to find a Swedish based NGO such as the Central Asia Solidarity Groups\* working in cooperation with grassroots initiatives and civil society organizations in Central Asia.

Young people from around the globe are able to support each other, in spirit, solidarity, and through activism. Cooperation is key to having a positive impact, as are staying informed and being open to diverse or opposite ideas. This publication aims to contribute to good practices in youth engagement by sharing the ideas, methods and experiences from youth activists from three Central Asian republics: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.\*\*

This publication starts by providing a brief outline of the UNSCR 2250. It then offers a comparative overview of the three countries, with a particular focus on the situation of young people. The third, fourth and fifth sections focus on the work of youth organizations in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan respectively.

The stories are based on interviews with activists in these organisations, giving a voice to issues that they have raised with an emphasis on how they engage youth in civil participation.

***"Cooperation is key  
to having a positive impact,  
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diverse or opposite ideas."***



\* Centralasiengrupperna in Swedish

\*\* Within the timeframe of this project, it was only feasible to include these three countries in this publication.



# What is the UNSCR 2250?

The United Nations' Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250, which was unanimously adopted on the 9th of December 2015 following the Amman Youth Declaration in Jordan, is the first thematic resolution that is fully dedicated to the role of young people in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

It broadly defines youth as people aged between 15 - 29 years old. It supports a new narrative that recognizes the agency of youth. It also mentions the threat that violent extremism poses to young people and further acknowledges the role that they play in countering extremism.

It works in mainly two ways. Firstly, it keeps national governments in check. It reminds them of their responsibility not only to protect young people but to also take their needs and perspectives into account. Secondly, it recognizes the contribution of youth, prompting organizations and government agencies to view them as partners and leaders and include them at all levels of decision-making. Importantly, it encourages diversity when engaging with youths as their needs may differ depending on their physical abilities, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, education as well as their environment.

The resolution is built upon the following five pillars of action [1]:

## Participation

Calling on member states to involve youth in conflict prevention and resolution. It also appeals for increased representation of youth in all levels of decision-making.

## Protection

Recalling the obligation to protect civilians in conflict and post-conflict situations with a particular emphasis on protecting young people from all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

## Prevention

Urging key stakeholders to facilitate an environment that enables socio-economic development, improves education and creates a culture of tolerance and peace.

## Partnerships

Advocating an increase in support for youth and highlighting the importance of partnering with young people and the local communities in countering violent extremism.

## Disengagement & re-integration

Supporting the reintegration of those who have been troubled by conflict.

So, how is accountability ensured?

It is ensured through the annual debate on the progress of implementation of the resolution in the Security Council. Furthermore, the resolution requests that the Secretary-General carries out a progress study on the positive contribution of youth to peace processes and conflict resolution. The progress study, titled "The Missing Peace: an independent study on youth and peace and security" was published in 2018. It includes recommendations at local, national, regional and international levels.

How does this connect to youth in Central Asia?

The progress study involved regional focus groups with youth representatives. One of these regional consultations was with Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Thirty-nine youth representatives from nineteen countries and territories including all Central Asian republics gathered in Istanbul on the 23-25th May 2017 to participate in this consultation and to share their perspectives on the implementation of UNSCR 2250. The participants drafted recommendations and an action plan on how to continue their efforts in peacebuilding and social cohesion in their respective communities.

The group outlined their security and peace priorities for this particular region, which are as follows [2]:

To promote peace and security projects that nurture the culture of tolerance in contrast to current initiatives that highlight national, cultural and religious differences and divide social groups.

To speak freely about security matters without fear of reprisals from authority.

To support family-level peacebuilding programs and acknowledge the role families can play in peacebuilding processes in the region.

To emphasize the role of gender and to address gender-related issues in the youth, peace and security agenda.

To strengthen peace journalism and provide young people with safe spaces in mainstream media and on online platforms so that they are able to show the potential roles they can have in peacebuilding and preventing violence.

# Introduction to Central Asia

This factual section provides an overview of the current socio-economic, political and cultural situation of the three Central Asian republics discussed in this publication. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have transitioned from being centralized Soviet republics to independent states. Additional information on each country will be provided in the country overviews in the following sections.

## Demography

One common denominator for the three Central Asian republics of this study is the large youth population. The median ages for 2017 in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are 30.6, 26.6 and 24.5 years respectively. [3] It is predicted that this large youth population will not change since fertility rates are still relatively high. [4] However, despite making up a large proportion of the population, young people have a limited role at every level of decision-making.

## Economics

Inter-Central Asian trade turnover is low. Despite the obvious need, economically, the region is considered to be one of the least integrated in the world. [5] There have been some regional endeavors to remedy this – all three countries are members of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which works towards facilitating the free movement of goods, capital, services and people. [6] The EEU is, however, often seen as a controversial geo-political project of Russia, with few economic benefits. [7]

Central Asian states struggle with providing employment opportunities for their young people. Although only 3% of oil and gas-rich Kazakhstan's population live below the poverty line, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have high levels of poverty with 25% of the population in Kyrgyzstan (2016) and 31% of the population in Tajikistan (2015) living below the national poverty lines. [8]



## Education

The economic challenges, mentioned above, are a contributing factor to the current state of the region's educational system, where the quality of education and school facilities suffer greatly. The lack of adequate funding for education has resulted in underpaid and unmotivated teaching staff. [9] Qualifications have been devalued, as corruption in the education sector remains high.

For example, in Kyrgyzstan, the majority of students in primary and secondary education have demonstrated knowledge and skills below the established standards. [10] In Tajikistan, where more than 50% of the population are youth, school dropout numbers remain high. The Tajik government, has recognized the issue, and placed education reform as a priority in its strategy, while welcoming partnerships with international agencies. [11] Although Kazakhstan performs better economically, the challenges there can be linked to the urban-rural divide. Rural schools usually have staff shortages and poorer infrastructure which often translate into lower quality of education. [12]

## Migration

Two-thirds of the youth in Central Asia say they want to leave their country, and a growing number do migrate mostly to Russia and Kazakhstan, where there are more job opportunities. A significant number of people enter these countries illegally thus the official figures for migration are much lower than the reality. This pattern of migration make Central Asian migrants easy targets for crime such as human trafficking, drug-smuggling, prostitution, slavery, harassment, and kidnapping. [13] As neighboring Russia's population declines, its workforce will increasingly be sourced from Central Asian countries. This can currently be seen through the large amount of money being sent back from Russia. In 2016, the total volume of remittances sent by migrants from Russia to Tajikistan was USD 1.9 billion and to Kyrgyzstan, it was USD 1.7 billion. [14] In both countries, the percentage of remittances is equal to more than a quarter of their GDP putting them on top of the list of the world's most remittance-dependent economies. [15]

In addition, it is worth noting the gender trends in migration. Among persons above 18 years old migrating to Russia from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2016, 38% and 16% respectively constitute women. [16]

## Social and Gender Issues

These three countries are generally categorized as top down societies in which citizens and civil society have limited influence on the political system. Age, as well as gender, plays an important role in societal hierarchies in this region, whereby young people, especially girls have little say in their future. Young people are often perceived as lacking experience or irresponsible, therefore, ageism is one of many challenges which youth activists in Central Asia are faced with. [17] Central Asian societies are also characterized by further structural obstacles such as ethnic belonging, class and social status playing a determining role on people's ability to decide over their own lives. [18]

When it comes to the issue of migration, as discussed above, there are differences in the number of women versus the number of men who migrate for work. These differences can be explained by the concept of social legitimacy which is ultimately a set of norms connected to what is perceived as feminine and masculine in societies. These norms dictate what is acceptable behavior, based on one's gender. [19]

Central Asian countries are built on patriarchal values and thus there are, socially more limitations for women. Although there are fewer social restrictions in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in comparison to Tajikistan, the problems linked to inequality as well as gender-based violence persist in all three countries.

Families, as well as the societies are based on gender hierarchies where women have a limited sphere of influence. This is manifested in harsh gender norms saturating and structuring everyday life as well as widespread violence against women. In Tajikistan, 58.2% of women have reported that they have experienced some form of gender-based violence. [20] In Kyrgyzstan, the equivalent is nearly 30% and in Kazakhstan almost 20%. [21]

Although the actual figures are expected to be higher since there is limited data and many instances of gender-based violence are underreported. A regional brief by the UNFPA explains this could be due to the belief that: "Victims and survivors are blamed when they report violence". [22]





## Politics

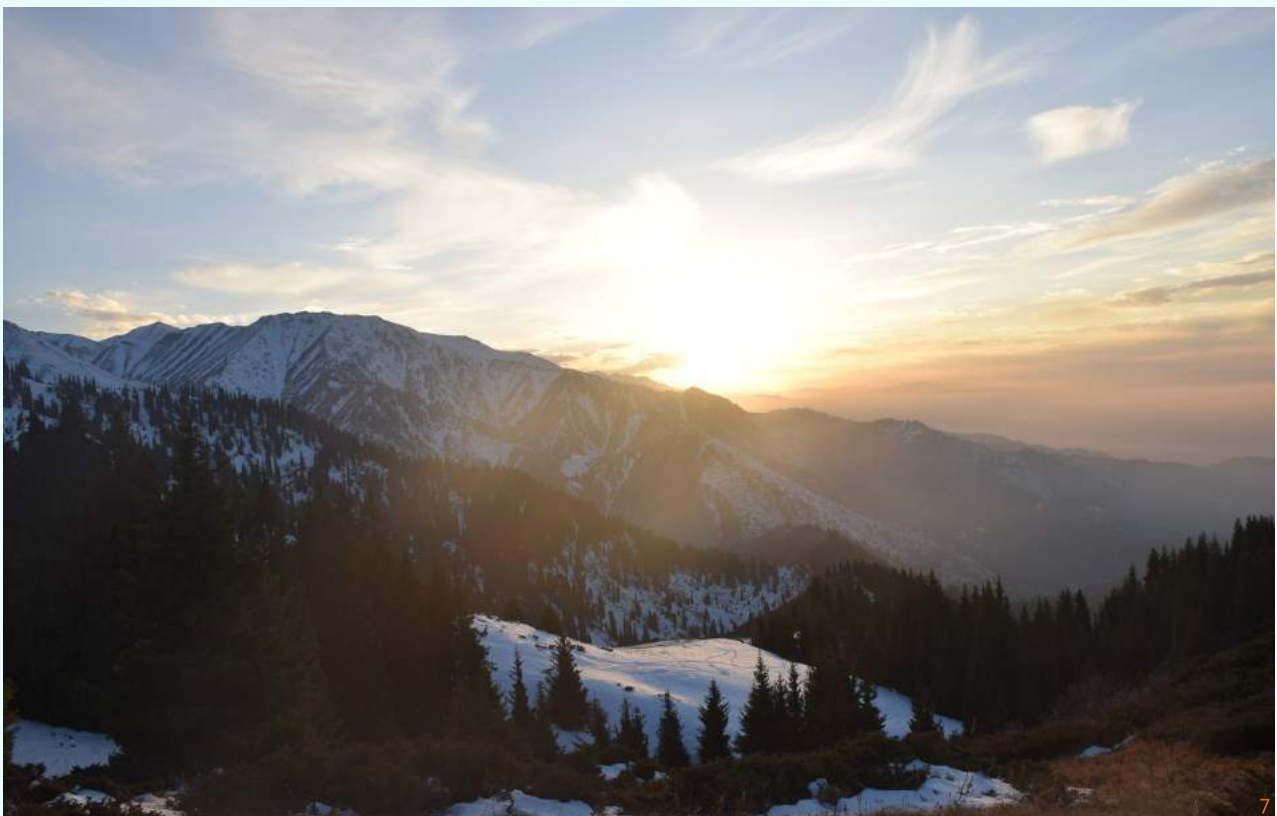
All three countries are considered to be consolidated authoritarian states by Nations in Transit reports from 2018. [23] Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev has been the leader of the country since it gained independence in 1991 and Emomali Rakhmon, the Tajik president has been in power since 1992, placing the two presidents high up on the global list of the longest serving leaders. [24] Kyrgyzstan on the other hand has experienced two revolutionary overthrows of government in 2005 and 2010, and has thus been viewed the most liberal in the region. The political landscapes have, since independence been formed around the threats of terrorism and recently got recognition for this on the international level following the involvement of Central Asians in global extremist groups.

The threat of extremism has and is being used by regimes to maintain their power.

In Tajikistan, for example, the use of extremist tendencies enabled Rakhmon to ban the country's second-largest party and label them a "terrorist organization", imprisoning its members with sentences up to 28 years. [25]

Kazakhstan, had long been portrayed as the most stable state in Central Asia. However, this changed suddenly with the attacks in Aktobe and Almaty in 2016. The country was awoken by the sound of gunshots, assumed to be from radicalized locals. Although, neither of the attacks had direct connections to global extremist groups, in contradiction to the narrative produced by the Kazakh authorities.

In the aftermath of the attacks, the security services, who already had comprehensive surveillance powers lobbied for strengthened internal migration laws. The new laws require citizens to register in every new city where they spend more than 30 days. [26] While Kyrgyzstan is sentencing hundreds of people for owning videos, pamphlets, and books that are illegal under a very broad and vague definition of extremism. Those prosecuted mainly belong to the ethnic minority of Uzbeks. [27]



## Radicalization

In the UNSCR 2250, an emphasis has been placed on countering violent extremism and terrorism among young people. In order to comprehend these issues, one has to talk about their root causes and the process of radicalization. In the work that has been done on this topic, in relation to Central Asia, a focus has been placed, and a correlation has been identified between the lack of opportunities for youth, migration and radicalization. [28]

An issue that the UN listed as a challenge for youth in Central Asia was the lack of employment opportunities. As mentioned in the previous section, this has resulted in large scale migration. The percentage of total migrants aged between 18-29, who migrated from Tajikistan to Russia in 2014 amounted to 46%. The equivalent percentage for Kyrgyzstan was 37%. [29] Not only are young people more likely to migrate but they are also at a higher risk of being recruited by radicalized groups.\*

Noah Tucker argues that migration plays a key role in radicalization. In his research he found that the majority of people with Central Asian origins were not radicalized in Central Asia, but in Russia.

This is further supported by The Institute for Security and Development Policy, which states that the "overwhelming majority of Central Asian recruits to the Syrian civil war – over 85 percent were radicalized while labor migrants in Russia, not in their home countries". \*\* [31] [32]

It is therefore necessary to mention the "myth of radicalization", a concept by which the authoritarian regimes in Central Asia are using radicalization to empower themselves by suppressing opposition and also shrinking the democratic space for civil society. [33]

Moreover, it is not the mere act of migrating that renders these young people victims for recruitment. It is due to the marginalization, exclusion, and alienation that labor migrants living in Russia experience because of administrative, legal, financial, and social challenges. These individuals are further at risk since they are likely to lack "sources of resilience" such as community and social support, i.e the guidance provided by family elders. Consequently, more time is spent on social media, where they are more prone to be exposed to violent-extremist content that is targeted specifically at them. [34]



\* A study suggests four groups are more vulnerable to violent extremism; youth, illegal migrants, uneducated migrants, and lonely individuals.

\*\* A percentage of the total recruits include families, mainly wives and children, who moved to war areas on their husband's request.



# KAZAKHSTAN

## Institute for equal rights and equal opportunities

The Public Foundation Institute of equal rights and equal opportunities was founded by Margarita, who is a child psychologist by training. Since the foundation's inception in 2010 she has used her skills to help many youth and children through her organization. Young people play a major role in this organisation.

What makes this foundation special is that it combines academic and activist methods in its work. In order to map and understand social issues in their communities, project workers conduct research first using questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. For example, their latest publication named "The situation of girls and women in the context of the religious situation in Kazakhstan" examined mechanisms used to recruit girls and women into religious associations and the role of religion on their political views and civil activism. The conclusions from their research have allowed them to form an agenda to tackle the problem.

The Foundation focuses a lot on advocacy and believes in the importance of using mass media to raise awareness of issues and inform people about their projects. They are very active online, commenting on events and offering their perspectives through writing posts and articles. Margarita said, "Many women who contact our Foundation learn about us on the Internet, hence it's very essential for us to keep an active online presence".



### Kazakhstan at a glance

**Area:** 2,724,900 km<sup>2</sup>  
**Population:** 18,744 million (2018)  
**GDP per capita:** 26,300 (2017, USD)  
**Nations in Transit:** 6.7/7  
(consolidated authoritarian regime)  
**Fragile States index:** 63.4  
**Gender Inequality index:** 0.197  
ranking 43 out of 160 countries  
**Expected years of schooling:** 15.1  
**Human Development Index:** 0.800  
positioning it at 58 out of 189 countries and territories

Another way they reach out to young girls is by directly contacting schools and Universities and holding training sessions and discussions in their premises.

They have signed multiple memorandums of understanding and have partnered on projects with youth groups and centers such as the Eurasian Congress of Youth.

One of their projects involving young girls of ages 15-19 was "Rights of girls to life", where they had training sessions about sexual harassment, domestic violence, early marriages, paedophilia and suicide. During these discussions, Margarita is able to meet motivated girls who may then join as volunteers and remain socially active in their communities.



## Y-PEER

Y-PEER is a global youth peer education network. In Almaty, volunteers engage youth through non-formal education, by holding training sessions in schools, colleges, universities and orphanages. In order to increase their network and foster civic engagement, they also hold training of trainers (ToT) sessions for interested individuals, providing them with the skills to further engage with youth.

The main issue that they work with, is sexual and reproductive health and rights. This is a topic which is considered taboo in Kazakhstan, making it tricky to work with. Volunteers, through a method of peer-to-peer education, are able to break this silence on this topic and engage young people in these issues. It is considered to be an efficient method, which engages the young people on a level by which, the topic becomes comprehensible.

In Almaty, Y-PEER functions as an initiative group. This is a common feature of civic engagement in Kazakhstan, as formal requirements for starting civil society organisations are tough and time-consuming.

There are also further limitations, imposed by the government, which limit the activities and ability for establishing civic participation. It is therefore, easier and safer for young people to be engaged through initiative groups.

Moreover, the more established NGOs, which are run by adults, as well as the ones that predominantly apply for and receive grants. They may use youth as part of their labor force, where they often work hard to gain experience, but unfortunately, with limited to no remuneration. This is a reason why you will find few young people working in mainstream NGOs.

Among the challenges that Y-PEER face, are engaging youth from the rural areas, due to language barriers and the conservative traditions which the communities follow. Although this is something they want to improve. A strength of Y-PEER is its focus on teamwork, which has contributed to a tight-knit team of result-oriented and ambitious young people. Eugene is one such engaged young person in the organization who is also involved in multiple projects through AIESEC and the Accountability Initiative for Reform. He advocates for regional cooperation since many of the challenges that youth are facing in Kazakhstan are similar to those in other Central Asian countries. Eugene himself has, participated in regional forums and sees the benefits that they can have. Y-PEER have, through support from the UN, been able to implement interesting projects such as organizing a Youth Forum in Turkestan, which brought together 400 participants. They have also been able to hold events on International Youth Day, International Volunteer Day and World Population Day.





## AIESEC Almaty

AIESEC Almaty is the local branch of AIESEC, one of the largest youth-run international non-profit UN-affiliated NGOs. They work with youth between the ages of 18 and 29 years old, providing them with leadership skills and cross-cultural experiences through three different types of exchange programs: volunteer, professional and entrepreneurship. On top of that, they organize city-wide events for children and youth, and promote cross-cultural exchanges. All activities are linked to one of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In Almaty, they mainly work with goal four - quality education.

The organization is run by young people, predominantly students, who are engaged on a voluntary basis. Offering the possibility for volunteers to gain professional skills, the organization gives members different areas of responsibility. Having an appointed marketing specialist who engages their target group is an example of this. Social media platforms have proven to be instrumental for reaching out to and engaging with young people. The main channels that are being used are Facebook, Telegram and V Kontakte.

Javdet is currently the Proxy President of AIESEC in Almaty and Director of Business Development. Holding two positions is tough and time-consuming, especially taking into consideration that he is also a full-time student. He explains that the strength of the organization lies within the individuals, further elaborating that "the volunteers are incredibly talented and smart". The diversity of those involved is an additional strength of the organization as many participants come from various regions of Kazakhstan and thus have different backgrounds and life experiences.

Javdet advises other civil society organizations in Central Asia to be creative and persistent when seeking funding and to look at how international goals such as the SDGs can be implemented locally taking into consideration the local culture and context.



# KYRGYZSTAN

## Novi Ritm Osh

Novi Ritm is a youth-led organization that has grown to become one of the main civil society actors in southern Kyrgyzstan since its establishment in 2014. The group started with a few young community leaders in the southern, more conservative part of Kyrgyzstan, wanting to promote social reconciliation in a post-conflict society.\*

The main goal was to relieve tension between ethnic groups through joint activities where youth from all backgrounds can exchange ideas and learn together. The simple idea of creating a safe space for young people for intercultural dialogue and peer-to-peer learning has transformed Novi Ritm into a strong organization working with youth in other surrounding regions and small villages.

Novi Ritm believes in the importance of involving youth from the countryside because the organization is convinced that there is keen interest in social engagement and activism among rural youth, but a lack of opportunities. The team of Novi Ritm creates these opportunities through organizing activities like camps, open dialogues, initiative clubs, and campaigns on gender norms, tolerance, ecology, and human rights. The methods used to stress the importance of these issues are informal talks, quiz games, cartoon drawing, acting, and debating.

To better understand the context in the regions they organize regional exchange programs, where activists from Novi Ritm visit local organizations to learn more about their experiences, and then volunteers from those organizations come to Novi Ritm for a week to exchange knowledge and methods of activism.



## Kyrgyzstan at a glance

Area: 199 900 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 6.202 million (2017)

GDP per capita: 1 219.82 (2017, USD)

Nations in Transit: 6.7/7

(consolidated authoritarian regime)

Fragile States index: 78.6

Gender Inequality index: 0.392,  
ranking 91 out of 160 countries

Expected years of schooling: 13.4

Human Development Index: 0.672  
positioning it at 122 out of 189  
countries and territories



At the end of these exchanges, youth organizations establish partnerships and lay the groundwork for future collaborations.

***"the methods used ... are  
informal talks, quiz games,  
cartoon drawing,  
acting & debating"***

\* Following the ethnic clashes in the June events 2010 in the south of Kyrgyzstan.



## Novi Ritm Osh continued

The activists we interviewed said they try to keep in regular contact with their fellow youth in the regions through messaging, calls and involving them in campaigns within Novi Ritm. They communicate in the language the rural youth are most comfortable with, be it Kyrgyz, Uzbek or Russian. The activists also acknowledged the difficulty in expanding their work to regions, due to the little to no online presence of rural youth organizations. It is therefore necessary for individuals from Novi Ritm to travel to rural areas in order to establish contact with the local organizations.

They also participate in big events in the capital, Bishkek, where youth from all over the country gather. For others wishing to work with young people in the countryside, Novi Ritm suggests enabling young people to connect with other young people since they may feel more comfortable sharing their concerns and needs with their peers. This naturally leads to a more informal atmosphere where fruitful discussions are likely to happen following interactive activities.



## Nazik Kyz Bishkek

Nazik Kyz is an activist group of young women with disabilities who fight against discrimination and inaccessibility in Kyrgyzstan. Ukei, one of its members tells us their unique story.

"Some of us joined the group in our early twenties when we were still nazik", says Ukei. "Nazik" in Kyrgyz means "gentle", "delicate" and is usually used to describe younger girls. Ten years later after all the battles fought against stigma and exclusion, the veteran members do not feel nazik any longer. They now continue to help other young women with disabilities to become as strong and resilient. Ukei explained that they work with girls with disabilities because they are particularly vulnerable to violence and tend to participate less in their communities. To address some of the problems these girls face, they have set up shelters for those who have been exposed to assault.

They also have annual summer programs on reproductive health, where they teach their participants self-esteem and self-care. Moreover, they offer mental and emotional support to girls. When there are legal and other issues beyond the group's capacity, they partner with other local organizations such as Equality and Central Asia Network of Women with Disabilities that offer help in those circumstances.

Nazik Kyz is part of a bigger movement called Zhanyryk involving 35 organizations working for the equal rights of people with disabilities, and the rights of children. Through this association, they are able to lobby the government directly. For instance, they convinced the government to pay a monthly allowance to the parents of kids with disabilities and to allow those monthly payments to count towards the parents' pension fund. The group also pressured the government, to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It is expected to be ratified in 2019.

Sometimes Nazik Kyz uses social platforms to bring issues to the attention of people in their communities. At other times, the initiatives originate from a small group of people within the organization.



For example, five girls decided to divide Bishkek's neighbourhoods into areas with each girl taking responsibility for a few. They started to report addresses and take pictures of the areas with inadequate access for people with disabilities. They want to add their findings into the taxi app "Giz2" so it can use this information to provide a better service for anyone with physical disabilities.

Ukei emphasizes how important education is for the group and those around them. They regularly conduct study circles on politics, feminism, reproductive rights as well as encouraging young women to participate in other educational activities. She says you have to take responsibility if you want to be successful, to be able to solve challenges and to fully and actively participate in society.





## Search for Common Ground

Search for Common Ground (SFCG), is an international non-profit organization, which has operated in Kyrgyzstan since 2013.

Nuriia, one of the workers who has been in the organization since its early expansion into Bishkek, spoke to us about their work. She stressed that despite the common mission guiding all their activities, which is "to transform the way how people deal with conflict", their local projects and initiatives originate from brainstorming and discussions of local challenges by resident staff.

She shared her thoughts on some of the current issues facing organizations. For example, some people are suspicious of international organizations particularly in remote areas where SFCG operates at a grass root level. Hence, in their current project "Youth as agents of peace and stability in Kyrgyzstan", despite its mission to mitigate causes that lead to radicalization, the term "extremism" is not used by project workers given its sensitive associations. However, other goals within this project that are in line with UNSCR 2250 are addressed through various methods of alternative narratives approach.

They focus on three of the pillars within the resolution: partnership, participation and prevention.

Participants admitted to this project come from 27 conflict-prone communities in 6 oblasts\* of Kyrgyzstan. SFCG collaborated with local youth centers and other NGOs with similar agendas.

\* An oblast is a regional district, the term was used in the Soviet Union and is still used in many Central Asian countries.



This project engaged young people outside of the "coffee break" youth circle, which consists of the same group of youths that attend these types of conferences and training sessions. Therefore, one of the criteria for selection was "no-prior engagement in projects of this kind". As a result, some group participants worked in the market, for example helping to choose the right livestock, which resulted in a diverse portfolio of projects by the end of the program. Not only was there professional diversity and gender balance in the project, but various ethnicities such as Dungans, Uzbeks and Kurds were also represented, which prompted intercultural dialogue and understanding.

The project involved four types of activities: Leadership Development Training (LDT), youth conflict mapping, mini-grants and a TV series. These activities were important because they created a sense of belonging in the young people involved so that they were not so inclined to contest their identity and consequently are less vulnerable to extremist recruitment.

LDT allowed young people to interact closely with local governments. Nuriia says that at the end, "they were communicating over WhatsApp about their projects" and views the establishment of this level of trust as a positive outcome of these opportunities. She highlights the possibility of implementing UNSCR 2250 at all levels, at no cost and says it is crucial to instill the idea of volunteering into the young people of Kyrgyzstan.



## Jivye Goroda

Jivye Goroda\* is a youth-led organization working on issues linked to urban culture, unemployment, and civic participation.

Activists within the organization use different types of methods in order to engage other youth. Examples of some of their more creative methods include simulation games, flash mobs and different types of performances. Additionally, they use more conventional methods such as holding training sessions and organizing seminars and debates. Using a wide range of methods enables them to reach out to a broad group of young people.

Currently, Jivye Goroda is active in Bishkek and the Chui oblast, some of the country's most developed regions when it comes to civic youth participation. They are looking for ways to expand to other regions as well as exploring how to increase their online presence and engage with youth on social media.

One of organization's greatest achievements was the adoption of their recommendations to improve the state policy on youth employment by the national State Agency for Youth Affairs. The recommendations were incorporated and have been implemented in the state agency's information system. Despite having experience working with government agencies, Jivye Goroda includes the difficulty of cooperation with government bodies as one of the challenges they face.

Additional challenges which they identify for youth include age and gender-based discrimination, low levels of education, and the state's lack of consideration for the interests and needs of young people.



Familiar with UNSCR 2250, they can, both directly and indirectly, relate their activities to the scope of the resolution. In particular linking them to the pillars of participation and partnership, as they advocate for increased opportunities for youth in decision-making processes.

Furthermore, they are instrumental in the development of a youth employment policy and they have experience working with the Millennium Development Goals linked to the areas of gender equality and climate change.

Jivye Goroda believes in the advantages of cooperation and is a member of the recently established Association of Youth Organizations of Kyrgyzstan which brings together different youth-led organizations, combining their efforts and, through a shared voice, advocating for youth. Also, as members of the Association of Lawyers of Kyrgyzstan, they are able to be involved in the development of the concept for a Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan 2020-2030. Furthermore, they are members of the Education Coalition in Kyrgyzstan, whereby they are part of an initiative that actively promotes the concept of lifelong learning.



\* Translates to living cities in English

# TAJIKISTAN

## Y-PEER

Y-PEER in Tajikistan is currently involved in two projects, one focusing on new technologies and one, that is run with support from the UNFPA, and which focuses on sexual and reproductive health. Mekhrubon, who has been a volunteer since 2013, is now a project coordinator for Y-PEER in Tajikistan. She has multiple years of experience as a programme facilitator and a coordinator of several projects. Mekhrubon has also been engaged in another organisation called Hamsol ba Hamsol and in AIESEC and can attest to the tight-knit community of youth activists in Dushanbe, as well as on a broader national level.

In Y-PEERs experience, working with a peer to peer approach is the best method since youth are more open to people they can relate to in some way. When engaging a younger audience, they recommend using different game formats. An example of this being storytelling, where participants are asked to reconstruct narratives to discuss issues that may be of a sensitive nature. This is important in order to be able to view something from a different angle or to introduce a new topic. Storytelling is an efficient method for discussing gender issues, as participants can talk about gender stereotypes depicted in traditional fairy tales.

An initiative that Mekhrubon has participated in, with a strong link to peace and security is the conference on 'Youth against violent extremism and peacebuilding among the Central Asian states' hosted by the organization Search for Common Ground. Mekhrubon's participation in the conference led to the realization of a project called "We are for peace and Unity" ("Мы за мир и единство"). The project was implemented in 2016 and consisted of two parts.



### Tajikistan at a glance

**Area:** 144,100 km<sup>2</sup>  
**Population:** 8.604 million (2018)  
**GDP per capita:** 3,200 (2017, USD)  
**Nations in Transit:** 6,79/7  
(consolidated authoritarian regime)  
**Fragile States index:** 79,5  
**Gender Inequality index:** 0,317,  
ranking 69 out of 160 countries  
**Expected years of schooling:** 11.2  
**Human Development Index:** 0,650  
positioning it at 127 out of 189  
countries and territories

First, an educational session for youth in the 10th and 11th grades was carried out in a school in Qurghonteppa, whereby a sense of belonging was instilled as a method of preventing extremism.

Second, a round-table discussion was held between members of governmental agencies, the private sector and youth activists. The purpose of the round-table was to create a platform for discussions between representatives of state agencies and youth activists to find common solutions to youth problems and their vulnerabilities to the proliferation of violent extremism.



# The Aga Khan Humanities Project

## Dushanbe

The Aga Khan Humanities Project (AKHP) with its headquarters in Dushanbe at the University of Central Asia (UCA) carries out initiatives at the different campuses throughout Central Asia. AKHP works with promoting the pluralism of ideas and the diversity of cultures. In addition, it supports the development of innovative ways of tackling contemporary challenges while taking the cultural context of Central Asia into consideration. This is mainly done through a Cross Debate Format (CDF), a style of debate and a philosophy that has been created by Professor Pulat Shozimov, who is also head of AKHP.

Building on the rational tradition within the Muslim culture that existed in Central Asia between the eighth and twelfth century, CDF provides a way to engage young people through a three-dimensional debate format. This format includes the cultural, economic and political aspects of a topic as well as encompasses the values of rational thinking while linking topics to real-life scenarios.

There is a team of young people who are developing this format further and who conduct training sessions and act as judges at tournaments and international competitions. Nilufar started as a participant in the debate class and was enthralled by the concept and now works on promoting it. She believes that the concept is going to become global, and mentioned that there are already initiatives to bring CDF to the United States and the United Kingdom.

Nilufar explains how her involvement in AKHP, as well as in other initiatives, have provided her with new perspectives, enriched her knowledge and diversified her social circles. She highlights the importance of these platforms in contributing to a well-informed and engaged generation of young people. Her involvement entails travelling to different regions as well as to other Central Asian countries to hold workshops and be a judge at debating competitions.

She is also an advocate of reaching out to youth in all the regions and to create events in which people from different areas can meet.

There are other initiatives, which work with engaging young people in the more remote areas, through a rotational structure, which means changing the location of their events. This has shown to be an efficient way to reach out to young people, outside of the capital, and to keep them engaged.

Whereas, CDF offers a format that may be better suited to those who attend university, since it provides an interactive space and a means for students to apply the knowledge they have learnt through their studies on cases and practical examples. Moreover, despite being a method that has been created in Dushanbe, CDF is conducted in English and there are currently no training sessions happening in the local languages. This entails limitations due to the language barrier and thus, difficulty in applying it to those who lack English-skills.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

We would like to endorse the recommendations that were put forth at the regional consultation in Istanbul with Eastern Europe and Central Asia on UNSCR 2250 and to add the following recommendations. We encourage:

International donors to provide funding to youth-led initiatives and projects involving youth.

Government action in fostering the implementation of UNSCR 2250 and in increasing youth representation at all levels of decision-making.

Organizations and initiatives to enhance the development of cross-regional networks and forums to promote the sharing of best practices and innovative ideas.

All of you who read this and feel inspired, to get involved in civic engagement and to speak about UNSCR 2250 among your peers as well as to your government to foster dialogue on issues of peace and security.

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## INFORMATION TABLE MEASUREMENTS

Nations in Transit: Nations in Transit 2018 measures progress and setbacks in democratization in 29 countries from Central Europe to Central Asia. The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest and 7 the lowest level of democratic progress.

Fragile States Index: The goal of the FSI is to measure trends in pressures within each individual state. By identifying the most salient pressures within a country, it creates the opportunity for deeper analysis and planning by policymakers and practitioners alike to strengthen each state's resiliency.

GII: A composite measure reflecting inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market

Human Development Index: A composite index of life expectancy, education and per capita income indicators, which are used to rank countries into four tiers of human development. A country gets a high score and a higher HDI when the lifespan is high, the education level is high and the GNI per capita is high.

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Human Development Index: Ibid

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Central Asia Solidarity Groups is a politically and religiously independent non-profit organization. Our mission is to promote a democratic Central Asia, with a strong, active, and inclusive civil society that ensures human rights are protected, exclusion is minimized and social justice is achieved.

We do this through long term solidarity work, trainings, exchanges and advocacy in the thematic areas of

1. Democratic Youth Organizing
2. Gender
3. Conflict Transformation and
4. Culture

Our geographical focus is on Central Asia, meaning the five post-soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In addition to our work in Central Asia, we run several projects in Sweden and Russia.