

Youth of Uzbekistan: Challenges and Prospects





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Acknowledgements

UNICEF conducted the national study “The youth of Uzbekistan: challenges and prospects” in the framework of a joint workplan with the Youth Union of Uzbekistan and a partnership agreement with the Nationwide Movement Yuksalish in 2018-2020. The key aim of the national youth study was to provide a comprehensive overview of the state of young people in Uzbekistan, with a focus that includes key spheres of their everyday lives, to inform national youth policy and improve decisions made on matters affecting youth wellbeing.

The study was accomplished thanks to the valuable contributions of the following stakeholders:

- The Nationwide Movement Yuksalish provided support and helped to gain access to the population, reviewed the research instruments and findings of the study;
- The Youth Union of Uzbekistan, as well as the Institute for Studying Youth Problems and Training Perspective Personnel, contributed to identifying the themes of the study, the methodology and reviewed the study report;
- Representatives of the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, Ministry of Public Education, Ministry of Health and mass media provided valuable expert opinions which were used to develop the research instruments and finalize the methodology;
- The research agency “Expert Fikri” collected the primary quantitative and qualitative data;
- UNICEF M&E colleagues, specifically Zokir Nazarov and Komolakhon Rakhmanova, provided significant support to develop the research methodology, monitor the data collection process to ensure quality and adherence to ethical guidelines, and also reviewed the report;
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- Design and data visualization were developed by Mardiyah Alexandra Miller;
- Quantitative data analysis, including factor analysis, was conducted by Rauf Salahodjaev.
- The report authors are UNICEF consultants, Philipp Shroeder and Inna Wolfson.

Executive Summary

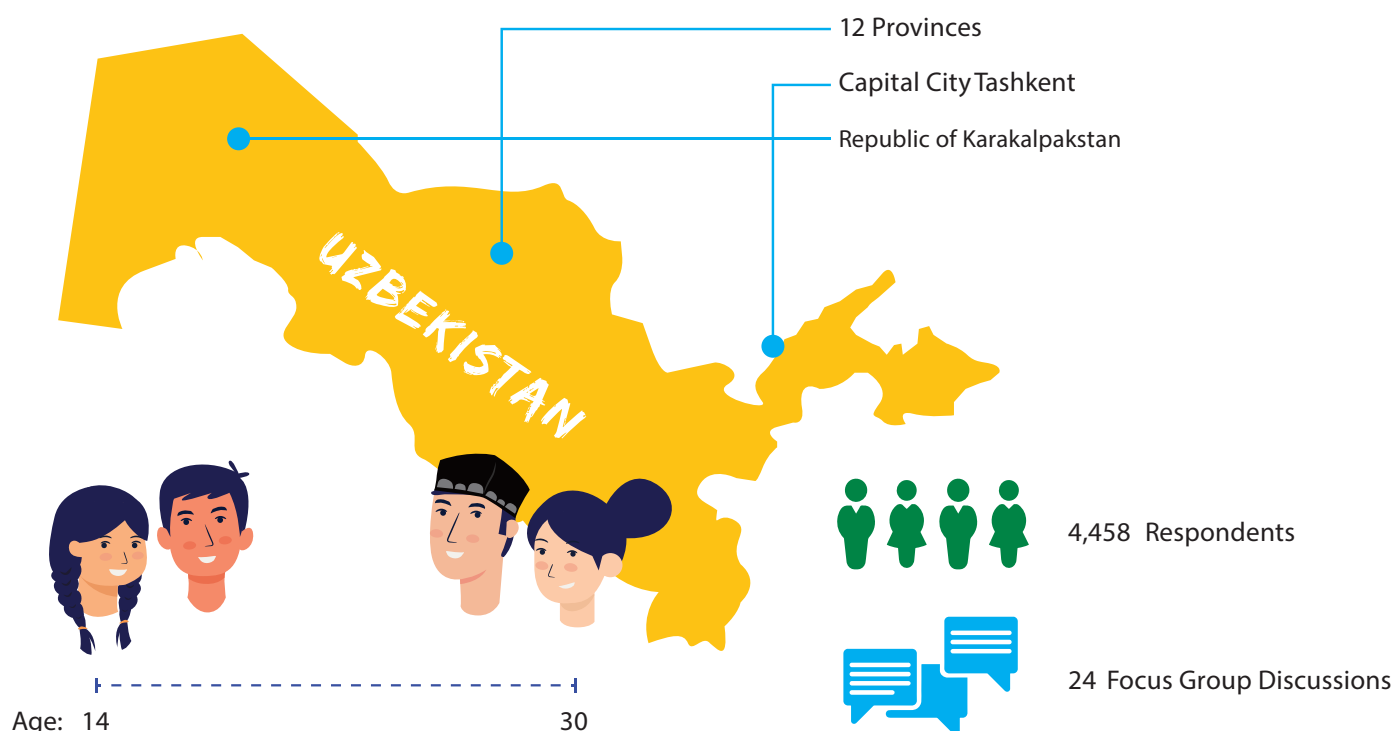
Introduction

In present-day Uzbekistan, children and young people below 30 years of age constitute 60 per cent of the population. In 15-20 years, they will become the largest labour force Uzbekistan has ever had, presenting a unique opportunity to take the country to a new level of socio-economic development. Grasping this opportunity entails the development of a strategic long-term vision on youth development, informed by evidence and the opinions of young people.

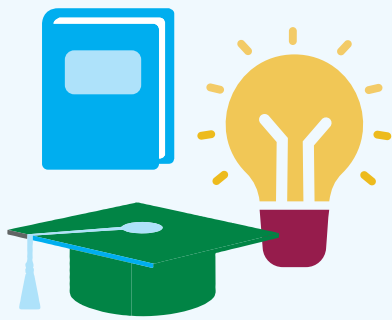
The study 'The Youth of Uzbekistan: Challenges and Prospects' is a joint effort by UNICEF, the Nationwide Movement Yuksalish and the Youth Union of

Uzbekistan that aims to strengthen youth policy development and implementation by providing in-depth findings and actionable recommendations from the perspective of young people and in their own voices.

Conducted between 2018-2020, the study targeted youth between 14 and 30 years of age across Uzbekistan's 12 provinces, the capital city Tashkent and the autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan. It employed a mixed methods-approach composed of a quantitative survey with 4,458 respondents and a qualitative survey with a total of 24 Focus Group Discussions.



Findings



Education & Learning

Across Uzbekistan, students from different educational institutions indicate far-reaching satisfaction with the present educational infrastructure (e.g. built environment, instruction, learning materials). However, they depict the situation to be less favorable in rural areas than in urban centres. As to their learning environments, students express a wish for these to be more positively motivating, more practice-oriented and to provide better-quality education. In particular, students want better training in language skills, to increase their business literacy and to be better prepared for the transition into professional life.

For many students the costs of education cause personal stress and frustration. These include the need to pay for private tutoring, to pay bribes and to pay high tuition fees in order to enroll into institutions of higher education.

Professional Life & Economic Opportunities

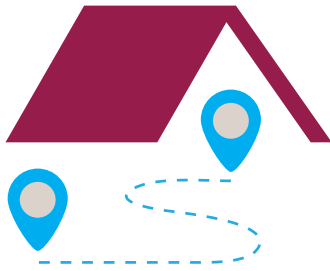
Among 19-30-year-old respondents, the rate of those not transferring to further education, training, or the labour market after secondary education (NEET) is an alarming 54.6 per cent. For young women, the NEET-rate is consistently higher than for young men, reaching 74.0 per cent as compared to 24.8 per cent. When it comes to their future work, it is important for young people in Uzbekistan that their particular professional field is their 'own choice' (and not that of their parents). In addition, working should lead to a 'decent income' and allow the individual to be surrounded by a positive 'collective' of colleagues who are supportive to youth and enable continuous learning.



The factors impeding the ambition of young women to generate own income are household and family-care responsibilities, and lower mobility in regards to being able to relocate towards economic opportunities. As compared to their contemporaries residing in urban centres, youths in rural areas enjoy fewer opportunities for continuing their education or securing employment, and therefore show an interest in pursuing entrepreneurship. More generally, young people critically assess the role of pre-existing networks (and nepotism) and the family's individual economic capability of advancing their social mobility.

Social Embedding

Uzbekistan's youth almost exclusively trusts and relies on their parents. In contrast, many perceive their friendships to be at risk from a lack of support, breaches of secrecy and social stigmatization. In relation to the elder generation, young people point to the expectation that they should be 'obedient', especially within their neighbourhood communities (mahalla). A sense of independence increases among young people once they start to generate their own income or after they get married, but this applies more for males than for females. The present and future of gender relations is assessed by youth along the lines of a continued conservative patriarchy (which was more the male position) versus a change towards equal rights (which was more the female position). When it comes to marriage, the new partner is depicted as a source of moral, practical and financial support. At the same time, married youth acknowledges that the transition to living as a married couple with the extended family (usually the husband's parents) is a difficult one.



Residency & Mobility

Young people in Uzbekistan show an exceptional sense of belonging to their home villages and cities, and their motivation not to migrate is high, both in-country (80.3 per cent) and abroad (77.3 per cent). The comfort of residing in familiar geographical and social environments seems to be inspired by a dislike of change, a fear of the unknown, or negative migration experiences.

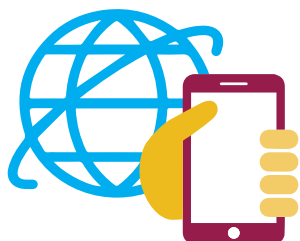
There is widespread agreement among youth that 'a good place to live' can be either a rural or an urban setting, as long as it fulfils the essential condition that one's family can lead a quiet, healthy and peaceful life there.



Societal Impact

The younger generation indicate a strong interest in 'political news' and also feel 'free' to express their opinions publicly. However, only a few young people are active in public or political organizations. Young people widely share the opinion that they are excluded from decision-making and activities at the local (mahalla) level, based on the societal perception that 'adults know better'. They therefore advocate for a change to communication between themselves and the elder generation, and it is essential to them that a serious interest in the life-experience of young people emerges, and a proactive engagement with them.

As far as youth organizations are concerned, in particular the Youth Union, it is generally suggested that these should focus their activities more on skills-development and on improving information flow on topics relevant to educational and professional success.



Digital Life & the Internet

While young people in Uzbekistan express a very strong interest in learning more about computers (86.9 per cent), there still is a significant group (37.8 per cent), composed particularly of females and rural youth, who do not have any computer skills. Furthermore, the gap is noticeable between the large number (53.9 per cent) who 'never' use the Internet (primarily youth in rural areas and females) and the smaller number using it 'daily' (25.4 per cent) (primarily urban residents and males). The Internet itself is equally represented as a 'useful' instrument, for maintaining social contact and for study or work purposes, but also a potentially dangerous place for 'wasting time' or being exposed to 'bad influences' (which is disproportionately a constraint for females, who fear stigmatization).



Concerns, Leisure & the End of Youth

While young people in Uzbekistan generally consider themselves 'happy', there is also a significant number who admit to 'feeling sad or depressed' regularly (26.5 per cent at least once a week). While self-reported health satisfaction is generally high (79.7 per cent at least 'good'), there are critical voices about the public health system that point to inadequate conditions in rural areas and the overall high costs of good-quality treatment or medicine. The major areas that youth identifies for improvement are better-quality education and training, effective measures against youth unemployment and low incomes, as well as addressing the societal issues of early marriage/divorce and the disconnect between the older and younger generations. When it comes leisure time, the potential is lower in rural areas and among females, due to increased farm, household and care-work responsibilities. Finally, the perception of when youth comes to an end is varied, with explanations ranging from specific ages (up to 60), to the status of being married or becoming a parent.

Recommendations

From the analysis of the research data, the study concludes the following recommendations in the following key areas:

1. Reinventing the approaches of youth work towards support and positive motivation, with the focus on the most disadvantaged youth
 - Systematize youth work practice with the aim of supporting and empowering young people, with the focus on the most disadvantaged;
 - Strengthen positive motivation and attitudes towards youth as subjects rather than objects of decisions at family and school levels;
2. Enhancing opportunities for all young people to obtain foundational, life, technical, digital, innovation and entrepreneurial skills is required for a successful school-to-work transition
 - Enhance formal and non-formal education of life, technical, innovation and entrepreneurial skills with the focus on young people at most risk of being among NEET, including young women, young people residing in remote rural areas, youth from low-income families, young people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups;
 - Enhance computer skills education and the functionality of the Internet, particularly in rural areas and for female youth;
3. Creating sustainable platforms for young people to voice their concerns and aspirations, to express their opinions and to engage in decision-making at local and national levels
 - Establish sustainable institutionalized platforms for youth engagement in decision-making on matters affecting their life at local and national levels;
 - Support young people to establish platforms for youth-to-youth communication and to develop youth digital activism;
4. Creating opportunities for young women to actively participate in social and economic life
 - Promote active participation of young women in economic, social and political life;
 - Support the active participation of women in the economic, political and social spheres by providing child-care services and flexibility in working settings;
5. Enhancing the health care system to provide essential services for young people and their families
 - Establish health insurance that covers essential youth health services;
 - Strengthen medical human resources (capacity and quantity), especially in rural areas;
6. Conducting further open research on the state of young people in Uzbekistan for the evidence-based development and implementation of youth policy



Abbreviations and Glossary

FGD(s)

Mahalla

NEET

Tanish-bilish

Focus Group Discussion(s)

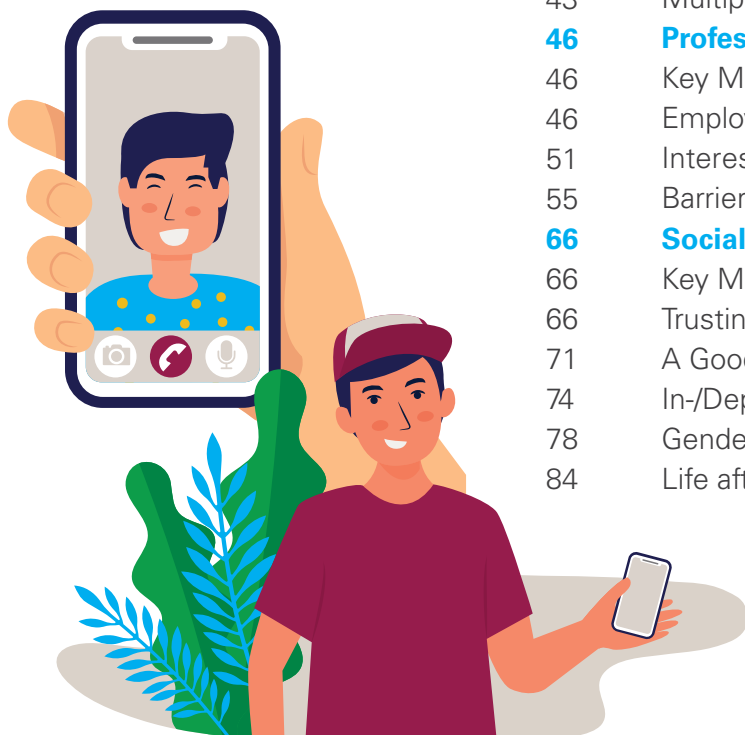
Neighbourhood Community

Not in Employment, Education or Training

Literally: “acquaintance-known”, meaning social ties used to access certain resources informally (as part of nepotistic networks)

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1

Introduction

Uzbekistan has favourable demographic conditions for a growth spurt – the so-called demographic dividend – that could substantially lift real incomes and help to reduce poverty.

Background¹

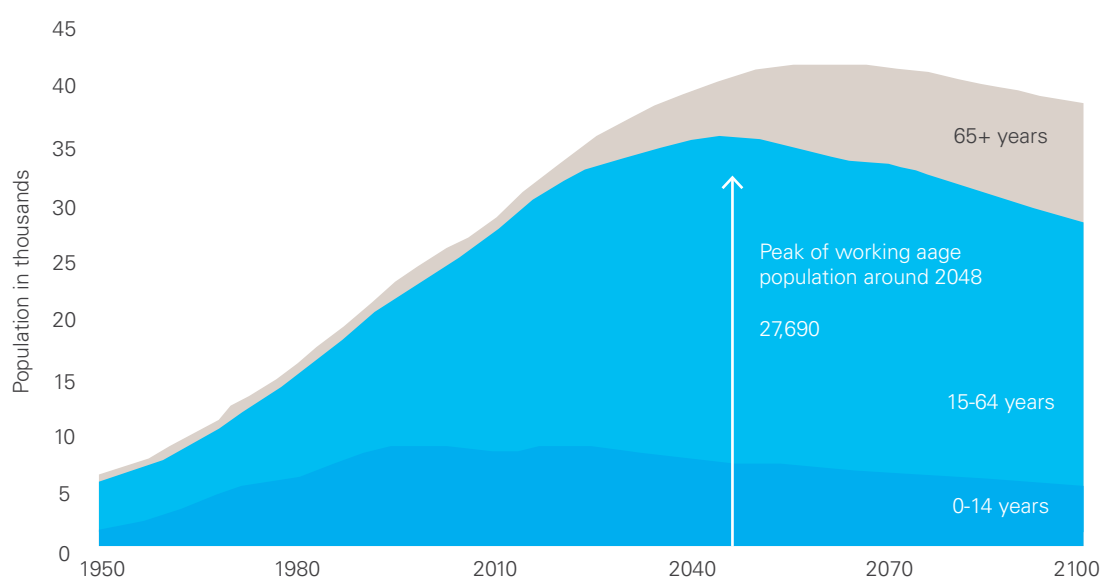
Uzbekistan is at an important demographic juncture. As a result of the steady demographic transition experienced in the country during the last two decades, the share of dependents (children under 15 years of age and people over 65 years of age) in the total population has declined and population growth has stabilized while remaining youthful. Such a demographic situation is classified as an “early demographic dividend” stage.

With the share of the working age population growing and the share of dependents remaining moderate, Uzbekistan has favourable demographic conditions for a growth spurt – the so-called demographic dividend – that could substantially lift real incomes and

help to reduce poverty. However, the demographic dividend is not guaranteed. Attaining the dividend requires long-term vision and making investments now to maximize the potential of citizens who are currently children and young people, who by 2048 will constitute the largest labour force in the history of Uzbekistan.

Alternatively, a failure to adequately invest in the well-being of today’s children and young people may lead to a loss of the precious demographic dividend. This loss would result not only in lost opportunity for economic growth, but also in greater youth unemployment, hopelessness and disenfranchisement which in turn can create a breeding ground for discontent, political and social tension.

FIGURE 1
Total population by broad age groups, 1950-2100



(Data: UNDP,2010-17)

1. UNICEF (2018)

Rationale

The President and the Government of Uzbekistan have always prioritized support for the positive development and self-realization of youth. A youth policy has been in place since the first days of the Republic's independence in 1991. With the political transition in 2016, youth policy has seen a steep increase in importance. In addition to Law #406 on State Youth Policy, which has introduced a rights-based approach to youth policy, and the Presidential Decrees #510 "On measures to improve the effectiveness of state youth policy and support the activities of the Youth Union of Uzbekistan", the government's overall Action Strategy for the period 2017–2021 features youth as one of five priorities for public policy-making.

This increase in importance recognizes how critical it is to make immediate investments in youth development. The most recent Presidential Decree #6017, on radical reform and elevating state youth policy to a new level, speaks of the need for effective solutions to the challenges faced by young people, and establishes the Youth Affairs Agency with the aim of developing a universal youth strategy, monitoring its implementation and protecting the rights and interests of young people. Additionally, youth policy is one of the key areas of collaboration between the Government and the United Nations (UN) in the framework of the Collaboration Roadmap for 2017-2020.



Objective

Despite being a distinct political priority, policymaking and the development of interventions into youth issues continues to suffer from a lack of consistent and reliable data. Decision-making in this domain has therefore remained a process that is largely driven by political opinion and general assumptions instead of relying on evidence about the actual needs of young people. In order to inform the ongoing radical reform of youth policy and strengthen the effectiveness of policy development and implementation, the Youth Union of Uzbekistan, the Nationwide Movement Yuksalish, and UNICEF agreed to pioneer a nation-wide study. The study aims to provide an overview of the challenges and prospects faced by young people in Uzbekistan in key areas of their life from their own perspective and in their own voices. It is envisioned that the findings of the study will be particularly useful for the work of the newly established Youth Affairs Agency which aims to systematically collect data on youth development and

develop a national youth development index. Moreover, the findings will inform decisions on further reforms conducted by the Ministry of Public Education, Ministry of Secondary Specialized and Higher Education, Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, Ministry of Economy and Poverty Reduction, Ministry of Health and other stakeholders.

This chapter introduces the study, discussing the country context, and the rationale and objectives of the study. Chapter 2 of the report discusses the conceptual framework that the research approaches are based on. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the two research components and ethical principles of the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings within the key thematic areas of the study, including education and learning, professional life and economic opportunity, social embedding, residency and mobility, societal impact, digital life and the Internet and leisure. Chapter 5 concludes with recommendations.



2

Conceptual Framework

The main purpose of the national youth study is to explore how youth transitions in Uzbekistan currently occur as viewed through the eyes of young people themselves, and how these changes affect their development in their present and future lives.

“Enhancing the status of young people, empowering them to build on their competencies and capabilities for life. It will enable them to contribute and benefit from a political stable, economically viable, and legally supportive environment, ensuring their full participation as active citizens in their countries.”

Youth policy, youth research and youth work are, individually as well interconnectedly, comparatively young, emerging disciplines, which mature at different speeds and with different priorities across the globe.

One of the key terms and concepts used in the study is youth. According to the UN definition, youth is an age category encompassing people between the ages of 15-24. However, for this study, the definition of youth as stipulated by the Law on State Youth Policy of 2016 is employed, which encompasses all citizens between 14-30 years old.

Another concept used is youth development. While there is no authoritative definition of youth development, for the purpose of the study, the comprehensive definition indicated in the 2016 Youth Development Index Report is used:

“[E]nhancing the status of young people, empowering them to build on their competencies and capabilities for life. It will enable them to contribute and benefit from a political stable, economically viable, and legally supportive environment, ensuring their full participation as active citizens in their countries.”²



2. The Commonwealth (2016)

Youth is generally considered as a phase of transition: graduating from education and transitioning into employment; finding one's own place to live and transitioning into independence; transitioning into one's own family—in the widest sense, transitions from dependence to autonomy. Most of these transitions, research shows, have become increasingly complex and multi-faceted for many young people across the world.

For the study, no assumptions about the exact nature, duration, intensity and impacts of youth transitions in Uzbekistan were made. The main purpose of the national youth study is to explore how youth transitions in Uzbekistan currently occur as viewed through the eyes of young people themselves, and how these changes affect their development in their present and future lives.

It is expected, based on observation of transitions of young people to adulthood in other countries, that young people in Uzbekistan face specific challenges and are subject to specific discrimination and exclusions, and that their rights may not be sufficiently protected. However, for the purpose of this study, no assumptions about the possible violation of the rights of young people are made. The study explores with an open mind which rights young people cherish, which rights they may not be able to access and what the underlying reasons might be.

The study framework and approaches generally build on the concepts underpinning a human-rights-based approach to youth development, specifically on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its categorisation of the rights of children and young people:

1. **Guiding principles, including non-discrimination; adherence to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and the right to participate.** These represent the underlying requirements for any and all rights to be realized.
2. **Survival and development rights:** These are rights to the resources, skills and contributions necessary for the survival and full development of the child. They include rights to adequate food, shelter, clean water, formal education, primary health care, leisure and recreation, cultural activities and information about their rights. These rights require not only the existence of the means to fulfil the rights but also access to them.
3. **Protection rights:** These rights include protection from all forms of child abuse, neglect, exploitation and cruelty, including the right to special protection in times of war and protection from abuse in the criminal justice system.
4. **Participation rights:** Children are entitled to the freedom to express opinions and to have a say in matters affecting their social, economic, religious, cultural and political life. Participation rights include the right to express opinions and be heard, the right to information and freedom of association. Engaging these rights as they mature helps children bring about the realization of all their rights and prepares them for an active role in society.³

3. UNICEF (2014)

Youth Policy Framework

There are presently no national frameworks in Uzbekistan that would measure youth wellbeing and provide a comprehensive overview of youth transitions. The two international frameworks which this study builds on are the International Youth Development Index (YDI) and the Youth Wellbeing Index (YWI).

The YDI is based on publicly available data on 18 indicators in five domains: education, health and wellbeing, employment and opportunity, political participation and civic participation. In 2016, the YDI was calculated to also assess youth development in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan's score was 0.683 out of a maximum 1, placing it 53rd in the world, among 183 countries assessed. Across Central Asia, Uzbekistan outranked its neighbouring countries: Kazakhstan was placed 61st (0.668), Kyrgyzstan 64th (0.664), Tajikistan 98th (0.614), and Turkmenistan 122nd (0.566).⁴ However, Uzbekistan received comparatively low scores in the domain of education (rank 90) and the domain of employment and opportunity (rank 81).

The YWI explores young people's feelings, concerns and aspirations, going beyond statistical data. Such expansion allows for a richer understanding of how young people view and experience life. The YWI is measured across seven domains, including gender equality, economic opportunity, education, health, safety and security, citizen participation and information and communication technology. YWI is calculated for the

30 countries with the highest youth population, collectively representing nearly 70 per cent of the world's youth population. However, the YWI does not cover any country in Central Asia, and among the former Republics of the Soviet Union it only includes Russia.

Building on the approaches and themes suggested by both the YDI and YWI, this study followed an inductive, bottom-up approach to treating empirical data, from which the following thematic categories emerged as most relevant for contemporary youth in Uzbekistan:

- Education and Learning
- Economic opportunity and Professional Life
- Social Embedding
- Residency and Mobility
- Societal Impact
- Digital Life and the Internet
- Concerns, Leisure and the End of Youth

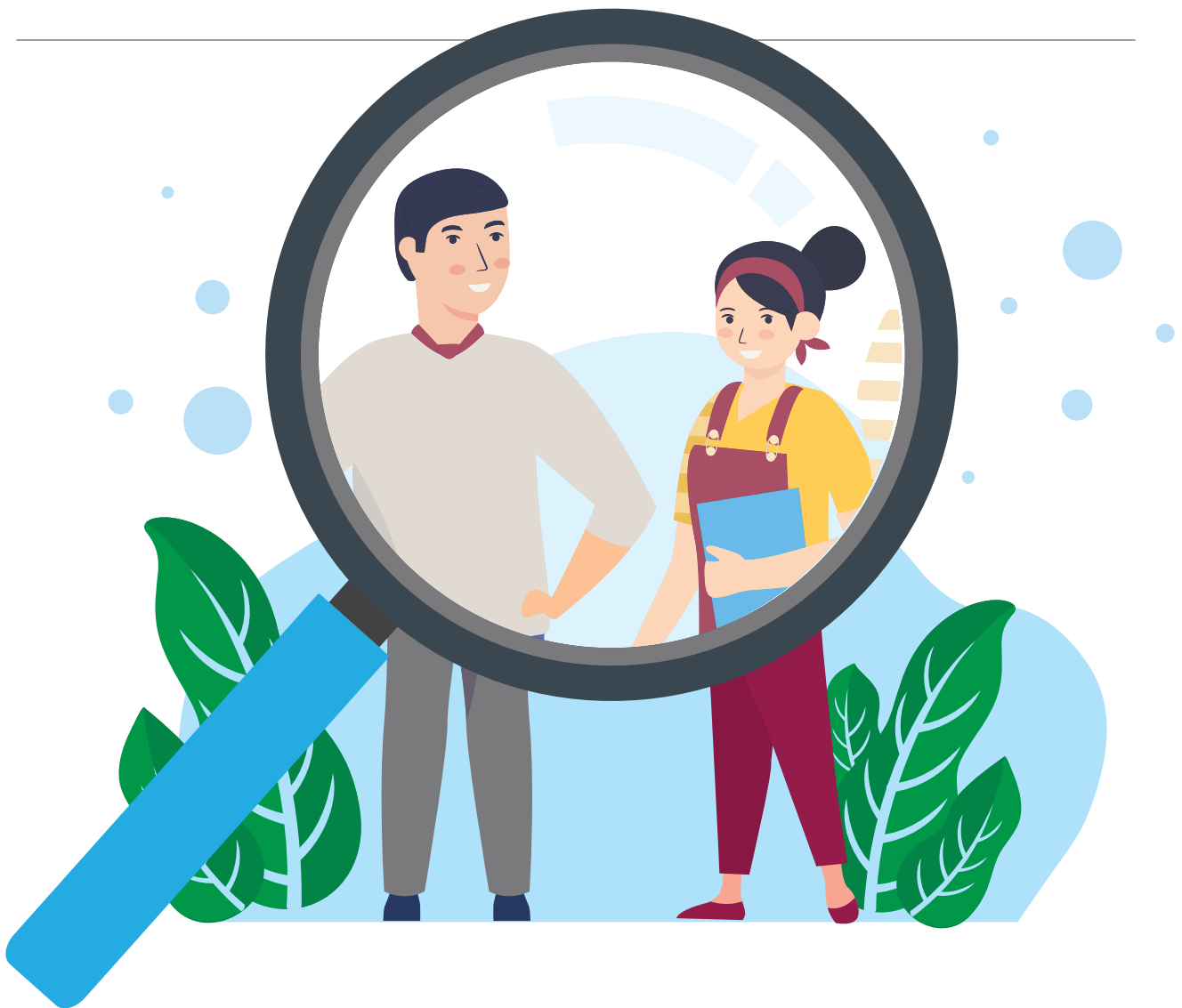


4. The Commonwealth (2016)

3

Methodology and Research Process

Over 4500 young people aged of 14-30 years from 12 regions, Tashkent city and the autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan participated in the study through quantitative and qualitative surveys



Target audience

The target audience of the study are young people residing in Uzbekistan across the country's 12 provinces, as well as the autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan and Tashkent city, aged between 14-30 years. Considering differences in needs and aspirations across this broadly defined age-category, it was decided that the research would be carried out with narrower age-groups: 14-18, 19-24 and 25-30 years of age. The first age-group represents those adolescents and young people typically attending secondary education (14-18 years old). The second age-group represents those young people typically attending tertiary (higher or vocational) education (19-24 years old). The third age-group represents those

young people who typically already have experience in the labour market (25-30 years old).

To reflect the actual diversity of individual biographies, the study respondents were asked to give their age as well as their current educational or employment situation. In that way, for example, a respondent, who is "only" 18 years old, but who already left secondary education, could be included into the student or worker group. Following this logic, the study introduced a fourth strata, irrespective of age, which comprises those young people who are "not in education, employment or training" (NEET).

Data collection methods and instruments

The national youth study employed a sequential, mixed methods-approach that featured two main components: first, a quantitative survey through tablet-assisted personal interviews (TAPI) with tablet-assisted self-interviews (TASI) for sensitive questions; second, it followed a series of focus group discussions (FGDs), which produced qualitative data to illustrate, confirm, clarify and deepen key insights in compliment to the quantitative survey.

Quantitative Survey

Research Sample

The quantitative survey sample was formed as a stratified random sample. It included young people aged between 14 and 30 years. The total sample size consisted of 4,458 respondents, including 1,464 respondents aged 14-18 years old, 1,521 respondents aged 19-24 years old and 1,473 respondents aged 25-30 years old. 57.9 per cent (2,581) of respondents were female, 42.1 per cent (1,877) were male. 48.2 per cent (2,148) of respondents resided in urban areas, 51.8 per cent (2310) resided in rural areas.

Among all survey respondents of 14-30 years of age, 38.4 per cent were students, either at a school or a lyceum, at a (professional) college or a university. In addition, there were respondents belonging to the category of "workers" (24.5 per cent, 1093) and those who indicated that they were not in employment (neither formal, nor informal), education or training (NEET, 37.1 per cent, 1653).

The ethnic profile of the respondents was the following:

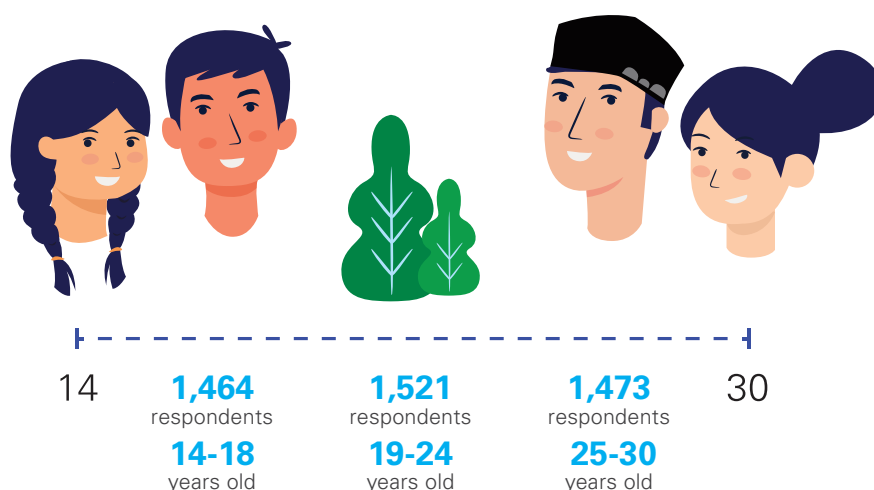
- 90.6 per cent of respondents identified as Uzbek
- In certain locations, there were significant minority groups: 41.5 per cent of respondents in Karakalpakstan identified as Karakalpak. Tajik respondents were registered in Jizzakh (6.1 per cent), Tashkent region (8.2 per cent) and Surkhandarya (11.2 per cent). Kazakh respondents were registered in Tashkent region (9.3 per cent) and Karakalpakstan (10.3 per cent). Kyrgyz respondents were registered in Jizzakh (13.6 per cent).

Sampling Stage 1. Selection of PSUs/ Mahallas

The primary sampling units (PSUs) were small territorial units locally known as 'mahallas' (neighbourhood communities). The list of all mahallas across the country was obtained from the Mahalla Fund (Central Committee of all mahallas). Within each larger settlement, the single mahallas are clearly demarcated and consist of approximately equal numbers of households and overall population size.

The PSUs/mahallas were selected with the approach of Probability Proportional to Size (PPS). The number of PSUs/mahallas was identified by dividing the total number of sample households by 25, which resulted in 136 mahallas to visit across 12 provinces of Uzbekistan, Tashkent city and the Republic of Karakalpakstan (covering 68 rural mahallas and 68 urban mahallas).

Respondents profile



GENDER

57.9% (2,581) of respondents were female, 42.1% (1,877) were male.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	1877	42.1	42.1	42.1
	Female	2581	57.9	57.9	100.0
	Total	4458	100.0	100.0	

SETTLEMENT TYPE

48.2% (2,148) of respondents resided in urban areas, 51.8% (2310) resided in rural areas.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Urban	2148	48.2	48.2
	Rural	2310	51.8	51.8
	Total	4458	100.0	100.0

OCCUPATION

Among all survey respondents of 14-30 years of age, 38.4% were students, either at a school or a lyceum, at a (professional) college or a university. In addition, there were respondents belonging to the category of "workers" (24.5%, 1093) and those who indicated to be not in employment, education or training (NEET, 37.1%, 1653).

	Frequency	Percent
School, lyceum student	1167	26.2
College student	392	8.8
University student	153	3.4
Worker	1093	24.5
NEET	1653	37.1
Total	4458	100

FIGURE 2

Distribution of PSUs/makhallas by regions

Region	Number of PSUs/Makhallas		
	Total	Urban	Rural
Republic of Karakalpakstan	8	4	4
Andijan region	12	6	6
Bukhara region	8	3	5
Tashkent city	11	11	0
Jizzak region	6	3	3
Kashkadarya region	13	5	8
Navoyi region	4	2	2
Namangan region	11	7	4
Samarqand region	15	5	10
Surhandarya region	10	4	6
Syrdarya region	3	1	2
Tashkent region	14	7	7
Fergana region	13	7	6
Khorezm region	8	3	5
Total	136	68	68

Sampling Stage 2. Selection of Households

In each mahalla a list of households, updated in the beginning of 2019, was obtained. The households in the list were numerated by interviewers in the order from 1 to n (total number of households in each mahalla). Then the selection of each household to be surveyed was carried out by systematic random selection. The starting random number was provided to interviewers by the national research agency coordinator.

Sampling stage 3. Selection of the respondents

Respondents in each household included all members who had resided in this household for at least the last 6 months and were between 14-30 years of age. However, separate questionnaires were

administered among household members according to the different age-groups identified above. The replacement of selected households and respondents was not allowed.

Data collection approach

Surveying youth requires data collectors who are young enough to be able to relate to youth, and vice versa, to whom youth can relate. Therefore, the study mobilized youthful teams (aged 18-35 years old) as interviewers for corresponding age cohorts. Moreover, considering specific cultural norms of Uzbekistan, quantitative data collectors worked, whenever possible, in gender-balanced pairs so that female interviewers interviewed girls and young women, while male interviewers interviewed boys and young men.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The sample for the qualitative research component was designed along relevant typological categories that could be identified from the quantitative research component.

In total, 24 FGDs were conducted in the following six provinces of Uzbekistan, equally covering urban and rural areas: Tashkent, Fergana, Andijan, Samarkand, Kashkadarya and Karakalpakstan. The FGDs lasted between 120 and 180 minutes. They were conducted in homogenous gender and age groups of 7-10 participants (195 participants in total).

This means that in each location there was one group of females between 14 and 18 years of age and one same-aged group of males; equally, in each location there was one group of females between 19 to 24 years of age and one same-aged group of males. Correspondingly, all female FGDs were led by a female moderator, and all male FGDs by a male moderator.

The major intention for the FGDs was to access the complex relatedness of meaning, imagination, reasoning and consequences in regards to the major topics of the national youth study, from

the perspective of its diverse youth participants. Narratives, dialogues, case studies and event descriptions were gathered to illustrate, refine and enhance the findings of the questionnaire. In this way, the FGDs provided complementary qualitative data to enable a more comprehensive understanding of everyday youth life-experience, challenges and prospects they face in present-day Uzbekistan.

FGDs followed a guideline that required open-end, qualitative questions on topics that were identified as relevant by the analysis of the questionnaire data and after pilot trials. To encourage discussions among participants and to enable them to openly express their viewpoints, FGD participants were divided into smaller working groups that prepared visualizations and statements prior to the general discussion of topics in the plenary.

Following the consent of participants, FGDs were audio-recorded. They were conducted in Uzbek, Russian and Karakalpak languages. FGD recordings were then transcribed and translated into Russian. Finally, the qualitative data was coded and systematized with a content analysis approach.

Research Ethics

Both research components of the study followed ethical principles and guidelines that are based on the child protection policies of both the national and international organizations that conduct research with children, as well as the UNICEF Innocenti publication

Ethical Research Involving Children (2013). The principles of protecting respondents throughout the collection of the quantitative and qualitative data were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Informed Consent

Informed consent was an ongoing process throughout the research. Young people were reminded before each interview and FGD that they could withdraw their participation at any point they wished. Adolescent and young people were told they have the following rights:

- To take time to decide whether to help the surveyors;
- To refuse to take part without this affecting them in any way;
- To refuse to answer some questions;
- To withdraw from the project at any time;

Additionally, the participants were told about the following procedures:

- that all the notes and tapes from the focus-group discussions will be saved in lockable place;
- that no names will be used in the report and presentation of the results so that every participant remains anonymous.

For participants of 18 and above, parental consent was not required, but if parents were the first contact, they were informed about the survey so that they were aware that their child might be participating. Informed consent of the young person or their parents was obtained as the very first step of the survey. For under-age participants, obtaining parental consent prior to participation in the survey or focus groups was mandatory and legally required, in addition to obtaining the consent of the young people themselves.

Completed consent forms were collected and archived in the local research agency "Expert Fikri". Information sheets remained with parents/adolescents.

Confidentiality

The identities of respondents are protected. Names of the respondents and their contact information do not appear in the database and report.

For participants in the household-based quantitative survey, confidentiality was explained and ensured from the outset of the survey. No names or other identifying information were collected other than basic demographic information (e.g. age, sex, location, ethnicity).

For participants in the focus groups, confidentiality was explained and ensured before the session started. The facilitator could ask the names of the participants while in the session for easier communication, but the participants were given an option not to reveal their real name but to call themselves any nickname of their choice. All audio taping is properly stored and will be destroyed after a period of 3 years.

Facilitators conducted focus groups in places (e.g. conference rooms in the hotels, designated room in the office of the research agency) where they and the respondents were not in the hearing range of any other person. If an adult (teacher/parent) accompanied a younger adolescent, he/she was not present in the focus group discussion and did not remain near the room such as he/she could overhear the discussions.

Anonymity

To ensure anonymity and the inability to identify a person from the story shared, all direct identifiers (names, addresses, phone numbers) were removed from the database, text variables were generalized and the report was reviewed by UNICEF

M&E colleagues before going public to ensure that it did not include any identifiable information.

Safety

While the primary purpose of research was to generate new evidence, this goal has never taken precedence over the rights of individual participants or placed them in harm's way. The cultural context was considered while developing and conducting the research, including such factors as the composition of a group of interviewers and facilitators of the focus-group discussions, the opportunity for parents to be present or to be nearby during individual interviews of girls and young women so as not to socially discredit them.

All surveyors and interviewers were trained on the peculiarities of youth research and corresponding ethical principles prior to the initiation of both qualitative and quantitative data collection. Additionally, supervisors of the interviewers were in constant contact with UNICEF colleagues for consultations, and field monitoring visits were conducted.

Protection protocols

Regarding the potential for concerns or complaints raised by participants or communities, all participants were given the contact details of the survey supervisor – a representative of the local research agency - in case they had any additional questions, concerns or complaints.

Instrument pre-testing, training of survey teams and field testing

Prior to quantitative and qualitative data collection, the team of interviewers and regional supervisors was thoroughly trained, and all research instruments were pre-tested and piloted in the field. The training of the quantitative data collection consisted of a two-day workshop during which the aims, peculiarities of the study, the ethical approach to data collection and the data entry procedure were presented and discussed with the interviewers and supervisors from all the regions. All questionnaires were read together and each question was discussed. Individual interviews were role-played. Questionnaires were pre-tested with a

group of invited young people of different ages and genders from Tashkent city.

Following the training, the whole process of data collection, including obtaining a list of households in a mahalla, random selection of the households, selection of the respondents in the household and interviewing, was piloted in two PSUs in Tashkent city with young people of different age cohorts, under the supervision of the research agency survey supervisor, UNICEF M&E colleagues and the study coordinator. The pilots were not included in the quantitative survey sample.

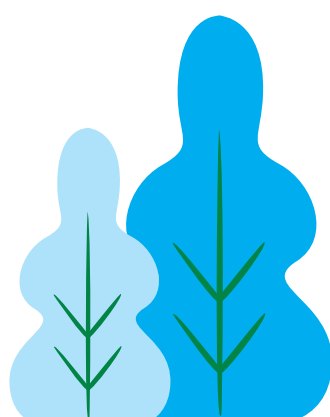
Prior to conducting FGDs, the team of three interviewers (two female and one male) and their assistants were also trained. The aims of the FGDs and the approach was discussed. All questions in the FGD guide were read together and discussed, and appropriate formulation in all languages was agreed. Following the training, FGDs were piloted with an

invited group of boys aged 14-18 from Tashkent city and with young women aged 19-24 from Tashkent region, under the supervision of the international UNICEF consultant, UNICEF study coordinator and research agency survey supervisor. The pilots were not included into the qualitative survey sample.

Supervision of the field work

Supervision was provided consistently. During the first two weeks of field work, intense supervision was conducted by the research agency survey supervisor, UNICEF M&E colleagues and the UNICEF

study coordinator. Monitoring field visits assisted in identifying and addressing any problems, in assuring the quality of the data collected and adhering to ethical procedures from the outset. In addition,



the research agency assigned supervisors in each region who ensured that correct survey procedures are followed. They

were in constant contact with the research agency survey supervisor and the UNICEF study coordinator.

Data management and analysis

Data entry

Quantitative data collected through individual interviews and self-interviews of young people were automatically transferred from tablets connected to the Internet into a database on the cloud. In case of there being no internet connection in the field, the interviewer uploaded all the data collected to the cloud at the end of the working day.

The responses of young people during the FGDs were recorded. The recordings were then transcribed and translated to Russian.

Data monitoring

Interview data uploaded from the tablets to the cloud were monitored continuously by the research agency specialist. In case of systematic or sporadic errors, the

interviewer and the regional supervisor were immediately informed about the problem, so that it was not repeated. For errors that the interviewer could address, they were requested to address these immediately while they were still in the PSU or to return to the PSU to correct the error. To ensure the reliability of data collected, the research agency specialist also continuously monitored the location of the interviewers and the duration of each interview. In the case of very short interviews, the survey supervisor called the respondents and asked them about the interview process and the questions asked. In case of significant protocol violation, interviews were conducted again, and interviewers were replaced.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated for

the whole sample of young people and with disaggregation by age, occupation, gender and residence cohorts. Factor analysis was done using Stata version 15 software. The statistical precision of all estimates was assessed using a 95 per cent confidence interval.

FGD transcripts were imported into a qualitative data analysis software called MAXQDA2020. Summaries of each

transcript were composed, and all FGD transcripts were coded (1) drawing on the sections of the interview guideline and (2) sensitive to responses by research participants. This enabled a theme-based analysis and systematization of contents across all FGD transcripts. In that way, a balance could be achieved between the generalization of research findings and a detailed illustration of the main insights.

Limitations

The study provides the first broad overview of the challenges and prospects faced by young people in Uzbekistan in key areas of their life from the perspective of young people. However, it should be read with consideration of the following limitations:

- By design, the study aimed to provide an overview of the challenges and prospects faced by young people in all major spheres of their everyday life, rather than to focus on predetermined areas of concern. FGDs assisted in eliciting in-depth narratives in those areas which arose as being central to the self-realization of young people in the quantitative survey.
- By design, the study aimed to cover the general population of young people aged 14-30, with no specific focus on vulnerable young people. Therefore, young people were selected randomly, with no efforts made to reach out to vulnerable youth, such as young people with disabilities, HIV positive youth, or labour migrants outside of Uzbekistan.
- The quantitative part of the study was household-based. However, taking into consideration the peculiarities of youth research and the aim of keeping the timing of personal interviews as short as possible, no household data was collected. Thus, the analysis does not contain disaggregation by any household-specific data.
- Throughout the methodology and research process discussed above, concerted efforts were made to avoid a social desirability bias to data. However, after preliminary analysis of the quantitative data, comparison of the results with problems raised publicly by the Government, findings from previous thematic UNICEF research and findings

from the youth consultations conducted in 2018-2019, it was noticed that some responses, including questions that measured satisfaction with existing education and living conditions, appeared to be biased. Building on this fact, the FGDs questions and methods were designed to obtain the deeper, unbiased perspectives of young people. To ensure an adequate measure of the comparability of responses across the FGDs, the study relied on a guideline for questions that was adjusted after pilot trials and the training of moderators. Furthermore, the locations and participants for the total of 24 FGDs were selected to allow for regional

variation within Uzbekistan (conducted in a total six provinces), and to equally include urban and rural settlement types. Participant groups were composed to be gender-homogenous (females and males were separate) and allowed for only small age-differences (14-18-year-olds were separate from 19-24-year-olds) in order to reduce the risk of silencing voices across age- or gender-hierarchies (which are key societal orientations in Uzbekistan). Correspondingly, a male colleague moderated the male FGDs and a female colleague moderated the female FGDs.



4

Findings

Education & Learning

Professional Life and

Economic Opportunities

Social Embedding

Residency and Mobility

Societal Impact **Digital Life**

& the Internet Concerns

Leisure & the End of Youth

4.1 Education & Learning



Key Messages

- Although most young people in Uzbekistan indicated satisfaction with the present educational infrastructure, the situation is less favorable in rural areas than in urban centres.
- Students want their learning environments to be more positively motivating, to be more practice-oriented, and to provide better-quality education (particularly in language skills, business literacy and preparation for professional life).
- Study participants remark that the cost of education is a source of personal stress and frustration, i.e. the necessity for private tutoring, to pay bribes and to pay high tuition fees in order to enter institutions of higher education.

“In the questionnaire, educational infrastructure was assessed to be satisfactory by a strong majority of young people across Uzbekistan. This included the educational building (91.1 per cent satisfied) and its sanitary facilities (72.6 per cent satisfied), the performance of teachers (94.7 per cent satisfied), and the availability of learning materials (95.0 per cent satisfied).”

Sense of Belonging

In regard to young people’s sense of belonging to their educational institutions, the survey revealed that 26.7 per cent of respondents feel no such connection,

while 69.3 per cent do. Urban youth has a slightly stronger sense of belonging to their educational institutions than young people in rural areas.

Material Conditions

The material conditions that are provided at learning institutions were reflected quite heterogeneously among the participants of the study.

In the questionnaire, educational infrastructure was assessed to be satisfactory by a strong majority of young people across Uzbekistan. This included the educational building (91.1 per cent satisfied) and its sanitary facilities (72.6 per cent satisfied), the performance of teachers (94.7 per cent satisfied), and the availability of learning materials (95.0 per cent satisfied).

Most dissatisfaction was expressed with the access to computer resources and the Internet, 30.4 per cent of young people in rural areas and 21.3 per cent in urban

areas indicated no access to the Internet at school at all (see further section “Digital Life and the Internet”).

In regard to material conditions, FGDs revealed that these were generally assessed to be less favorable in rural areas than in urban centres.

A 16-year-old schoolboy from rural Kashkadarya region summarized this vividly: “Bad schools are mostly those we currently have in the villages. We have no heating, it is cold during the winter. In the classrooms, there are not enough desks, the toilets are in bad condition. We have computers, but they are mostly not working.”

Quality of Teaching and Necessary Skills

According to the views of the FGD participants, the quality of teaching could be identified as a multifaceted issue and a general concern among young people.

Some respondents expressed the opinion that educational success would depend on individual efforts exclusively. This attitude is well captured in this quote of a 19-year-old, male college student from the Fergana region: "Everything depends on the person him-/herself. The teachers have provided us with all the knowledge, being interested depends on us, ourselves."

In contrast, many other young people wished for their teachers to be more motivating. Frustrations among study

participants originated particularly from disinterested and poorly performing teaching personnel, who sometimes would openly discourage them from further pursuing higher educational or professional ambitions; or, who would not go beyond repeating empty platitudes to them, such as "you should study well".

This speaker revealed that students found it essential for learning environments to maintain a balance between educational quality and social order. In fact, many study participants expressed appreciation for punctuality, communicative etiquette and also for enforcing regulations on regular attendance or appearance (such as through proper school uniforms).

"This speaker revealed that students found it essential for learning environments to maintain a balance between educational quality and social order."



At the same time, FGD participants were openly critical about those teachers, who would either disproportionately turn to measures of discipline and punishment instead of focusing on knowledge transfer; and those, who would intrusively encroach into their private lives (e.g., suggestions on whether girls should or should not pluck their eyebrows or paint their fingernails).

Young people overwhelmingly agreed on which knowledge and skills they would need for their personal advancement, but were not currently sufficiently provided with.

Respondents to the questionnaire reflected that their educational institution would not adequately prepare them for their future in two particular areas: to “adapt and be flexible in different situations” (10.9 per cent) and to develop “leadership skills” (16.9 per cent).

Despite near-universal enrolments in secondary education, most students currently perform below expected curricular standards in their ability to “apply” their knowledge and use it for reasoning.⁵ Employers are not satisfied with the skills of their employees, especially non-cognitive skills such as “taking responsibility for one’s own actions”; “self-motivation” and “creativity”.⁶

The lack of leadership skills was given more prominence by the older age-groups (19-24 = 19.2 per cent; 25-30 = 21.6 per cent) than the youngest age-group (14-18 = 9.8 per cent).

“A good school - this is good teaching, social upbringing, discipline, order, knowledge and...mutual respect.”

— 18-Year-old college student from Fergana



5. UNICEF (2019)
6. Ajwad et al. (2014)



“Although they [young teachers of Russian language] did not graduate from the faculty of Russian language, they were assigned [to teach] this subject...And they teach it to schoolchildren of the 6th or 7th grade, who already know the grammar of Russian language. My niece told me that [in her school] the geography teacher teaches Russian language, although she knows it badly.

18-Year-old college student from Fergana

As far as language proficiency is concerned, the FGD participants mentioned that they lack abilities in English, but even more so in Russian. In particular, the latter was depicted as decisive both for securing better employment locally and in cases when regional labour migration to Russia was considered an option or a necessity.

A lack of competent Russian language instructors was thus a widespread and impactful concern among the study participants. Another ambition

reflected by the participants of the FGDs was to improve their business literacy. As reasonably many young people in Uzbekistan appeared skeptical of their income earning opportunities in the public sector or as private employees, they showed an interest in gaining more knowledge about aspects of (small-scale) entrepreneurship, such as the practicalities of taking out a loan or of establishing a client base (see section “Professional Life and Economic Opportunities”).

FGD participants also remarked that teaching approaches would often be rather theoretical and not very practice-oriented. While this critique covered many domains of education or training, including the medical and engineering professions, it was mostly mentioned in reference to computer skills. Particularly in rural areas, a lack of functioning computers was reported to lead to classes being divided into a theoretical

session for half of the students and a practical component for the other half.

Furthermore, the voices of the study participants reflected a significant divide between the high level of interest among young people to increase their digital literacy and the low numbers of the current teaching body who were reported as sufficiently qualified to do this.

“Particularly in the region, programming lessons are not taught in the way necessary. We did not know how to use basic programmes, such as Excel, Word...”

— In the words of a 22-year-old male from Kashkadarya



Young people participating in the FGDs generally agreed that local educational institutions would not prepare them for how to behave in a work environment and handle the stresses of professional life. Associated with this, a number of participants mentioned that “being nimble” (shustryi) would be a decisive soft skill to advance in Uzbekistan’s present labour market. Such personal qualities of being agile, quick-thinking and self-confident were understood by the FGD participants to be more widespread among urban residents than among those with a village background.

A 16-year-old male from Fergana shared the story of a relative, who he depicted as an excellent student, but with a shy personality: “He found work as an accountant. But because of his shyness, he could not do everything flexibly and could not show his full abilities. Therefore, after two months, they told him at work that he was fired and that they needed a more nimble person. Now he is still out of work.”



“Young people participating in the FGDs generally agreed that local educational institutions would not prepare them for how to behave in a work environment and handle the stresses of professional life”

Multiple Sources of Learning

The study revealed that young people are interested and involved in multiple, alternative sources of learning and acquiring knowledge.

During the FGDs, it became apparent that many participants utilized the services of private tutors to compensate for the inadequate quality of teaching in state institutions and to increase their chances of enrolling in universities. The selection of tutors was generally directed towards the study programme or profession a young person aspired to, e.g. biology and chemistry for medical purposes or mathematics for engineering.

One 19-year-old man from Fergana summarized this clearly: "At school, now there are teachers who do not know their subject very well. Because of them, schoolchildren receive little knowledge, and parents are forced to spend money on additional education [i.e. tutoring]."

Privately paid tutors were considered by the study participants to perform better than teachers on state salaries (even though some teachers appeared to work as part-time tutors). Also, tutors in urban centres enjoyed the reputation of being better qualified than those in rural areas.

The stories from FGD participants indicated that significant efforts were made by families to enable "visits" to private tutors for their children. Traveling times of more than 1 hour on public transport were mentioned, and expenses sometimes exceeded \$30 per month per subject.

A 16-year-old female from a rural part of the Andijan region reflected on this in the following way: "In order for us to reach a tutor for one subject, we need three cars [i.e. changing three times in semi-public transport]. Aside from this, we pay 100,000 Sum [approx. \$10] for the tutor [per month], in one year this is 1.5 million Sum [approx. \$150]. If after this you do not [manage to] enroll to study, this means all these expenses have been in vain."

In light of this, many participants of the FGDs expressed the wish that affordable, extra-curricular learning "clubs" (*kruzhki*) would be offered close-by (see section "Societal Impact").

At the level of continued education, participants of the FGDs debated the bribes necessary for entering and studying in different institutions. One female FGD participant claimed that \$3,000 were necessary to enroll in a university in the Fergana region. Another female participant assured the group that in Samarkand such a bribe for entering university would amount to \$5,000.

The situation at one college in Samarkand was vividly described by this 18-year-old male: "In order to get a 4 [second highest grade], you need to pay a certain amount; a 5 [highest grade] is even more expensive. There are those who do not come to college at all, and they need to pay to receive a 3 [third highest grade]. Some work and cannot come to the lessons. They pay around \$100, and then can [afford] not to attend classes for a whole year."

"After I could not enroll into university, my spirits fell. This condition then affects work. When you fail and do not enroll in university, this destroys you. The thought 'I could not enroll' circles around your head permanently. And you are cracking psychologically, you fall into depression. This condition decreases your working ability. A person becomes sluggish, passive. He loses his opportunity to increase his education, because the thought comes up that next year he will not be able to enroll again. A person loses belief in his strength."

— In the voice of one 23-year-old male from Karakalpakstan



In institutions of higher education, regular tuition fees are significant. One 22-year-old male from Andijan, for example, remarked that at a university in his region tuition fees would be 14 million Sum [approx. \$1,400]. Even more financial capability was reported to be necessary in order to pay for a "super-contract," which enables students who did not meet the academic requirements to still enroll into higher education institutions by paying tuition fees of up to 10 times above the regular ones.

Taken together, private tutoring, bribes and tuition fees that are barely affordable for the majority are manifestations of the monetized system of knowledge transfer. This reality intricately entangles a young

person's future opportunities with his or her family's present economic capability and thus puts barriers in the way of their aspirations and social mobility.

For young people, the monetization of education and the degree to which educational and work opportunities are subject to "being well-connected" have the potential to cause personal stress and frustration.

During the FGDs, participants reported the actual and imagined disappointment for themselves and in front of their families, if they are unable to enroll into higher education.

In 2019 the tertiary education enrolment rate in Uzbekistan was 20% per cent.⁷

There are significant equity issues in access:

- people living in urban areas are twice as likely to complete tertiary education as people living in rural areas (22% compared to 9%).⁸
- only 3% of young people in the lower income quintile aged 25-30 have completed higher education, compared to 23% in the wealthiest quintile.⁹
- only 37% of students enrolled in Uzbek universities are women.¹⁰

However, during the FGD quite a few cases speak about the solidarity of parents with their children. Continued parental support during multiple attempts to overcome the difficult barrier of continuing education (see section “Social Embedding”) was registered as well.

Aside from the knowledge necessary for developing a professional career, the participants of the study related a desire to receive support in the domain of life counseling and psychology. This was associated with the larger concern shared by many young people that their voices would not be heard by the elder generation and that there was a far-reaching ignorance of their life-experiences and indifference towards their interests (see section “Concerns, Leisure and the End of Youth”).



“Now parents set the conditions for their daughters that if she can enroll into university, then she will study further and work afterwards. But if not, then they give her away for marriage right after school [graduation].”

— For young women, one possible consequence was that they would be given for marriage soon after such “failure”. In the words of one 14-year-old female schoolchild from Fergana

7. UzA (2019)

8. Government of Uzbekistan (2018)

9. UNICEF (2018)

10. World Bank (2018)

4.2

Professional Life and Economic Opportunities

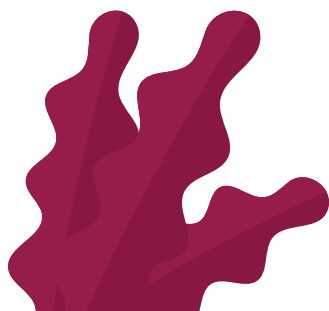
Key Messages

- Among 19-30-year-old respondents, the rate of those young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) is an alarming 54.6 per cent. With regard to gender differences, the NEET-rate reaches as high as 74.0 per cent for women, while it remains as low as 24.8 per cent for men.
- Young people in Uzbekistan wish for their profession to be their 'own choice' (and not that of their parents), but also that working should lead to a 'decent income' and that in their working lives they would be surrounded by a positive 'collective' of colleagues.
- The factors impeding the ambition of young women to generate their own income are household and family-care responsibilities, as well as their lower mobility in regards to being able to relocate towards economic opportunities.
- Youth in rural areas is marginalized in terms of educational and employment opportunities, and so is interested in pursuing self-employment/ entrepreneurship.
- Study participants critically reflect on the role of pre-existing networks (of nepotism) and their family's individual economic capability when it comes to advancing their social mobility.

Employment and NEET-profile

In the questionnaire, 24.5 per cent of respondents identified themselves as being formally or informally employed, while 37.1 per cent of all questionnaire respondents aged 14-30 years old could be assigned to the NEET-group. Looking

at the gender disaggregation we find that 18 per cent of male respondents report themselves to be NEET, as compared to a staggering 51 per cent of female respondents.

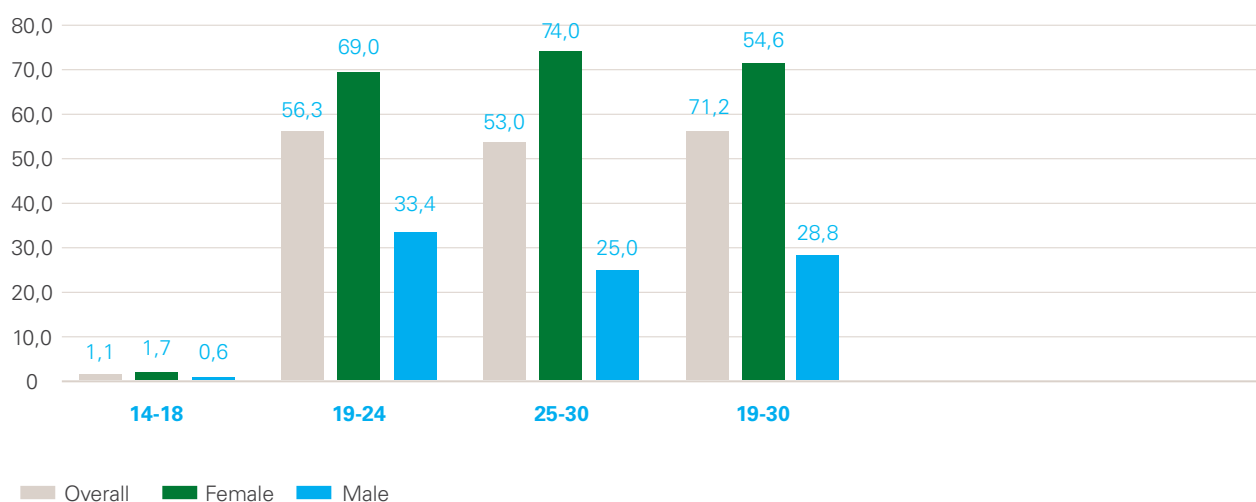


According to data from the national survey Listening to Citizens of Uzbekistan, the NEET rate among youth aged 14-30 years old is also nearly 37 per cent of youth (3.2 million people). The NEET rate among young women is 53 per cent and among young men of the same age group is 18 per cent.¹¹ Among young people aged 15-29 years, 42 per cent (3.6 million) are not in employment, education or training.¹² In this age category, the female NEET rate is 66 per cent, compared to 34 per cent for young males.

When examining different age-groups, it was noticeable that the NEET-rate significantly increases for respondents older than 18 years of age - the phase in life corresponding to the completion of compulsory secondary education. **Among 19-30-year-old respondents, the NEET-rate is 54.6 per cent.**



FIGURE 4
NEET rates by age group



11. World Bank and UNICEF (2018)

12. UNICEF (2020)

When examining gender differences within the age-groups 19-24 and 25-30 years old, the data revealed that the NEET-rate for women increases rapidly once they are above 18 years of age (from 1.7 per cent to 69.0 per cent) and reaches

74.0 per cent for the cohort of 25-30-year-olds. However, for men it remains generally lower (a maximum of 33.5 per cent) and decreases with age (to 24.8 per cent).

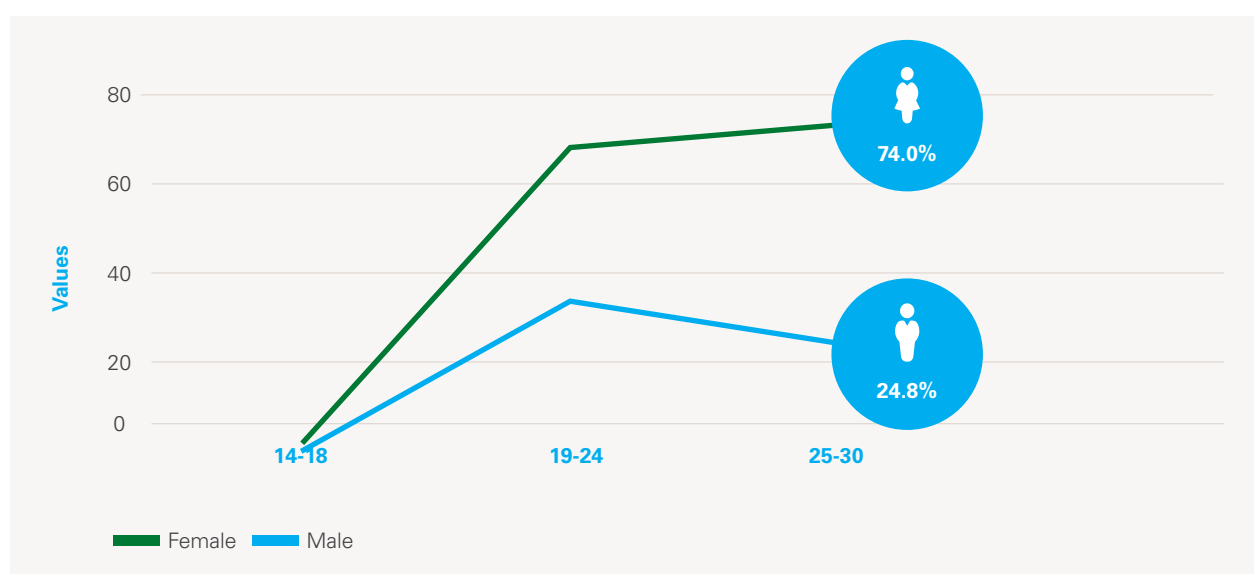
FIGURE 5

What is your major occupation? – student, employed, or not in education or employment? Age groups and gender cross tabulation

		Age groups			Total
		14-18	19-24	25-30	
Male	Student	97.9%	17.6%	3.2%	42.8%
	Not in education, employed formally or informally	1.6%	49.0%	72%	38.9%
	Not in education or employment neither formally nor informally	0.6%	33.5%	24.8%	18.2%
Female	Student	97.5%	14.6%	2.9%	35.2%
	Not in education, employed formally or informally	0.8%	16.4%	23.2%	14.0%
	Not in education or employment neither formally nor informally	1.7%	69.0%	74.0%	50.8%

FIGURE 6

NEET, disaggregated by age-groups and gender



Among respondents in the NEET-group, 18.0 per cent obtained no education further than secondary school, and 80.4

per cent obtained no education further than a college or lyceum degree. Only 1.3 per cent have higher education.

FIGURE 7

What is your major occupation? student, employed, or not in education or employment? What is your highest level of education attainment? Crosstabulation

	School	College or academic lyceum	Higher education (bachelor's degree)	Higher education (master's degree)	No completed education	No education	No answer	Total
Student	91.5%	5.4%	2.5%			0.2%	0.4%	100%
Not in education, employed formally or informally	13.7%	74.7%	10.7%	0.8%				100%
Not in education or employment neither formally nor informally	18%	80.4%	1.0%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%		100%
Total	45.2%	50.2%	4.0%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	100%

Probability analysis of potential determinants of NEET status supports the observations and demonstrates that **female respondents are more likely to be NEET and that gender alone explains nearly 11 per cent of the variation in NEET. Moreover, marriage even further increases the likelihood of women to be NEET, while for men this factor is an insignificant predictor. In addition, the analysis demonstrated that possession of tertiary education, irrespective of parents' level of education, and satisfaction with this education, as well as possession of IT skills and usage of Internet, decreases the probability of becoming NEET.** ¹³

Among employed young people, the two most frequent sectors are the public sector (35.2 per cent) and the private business sector (35.7 per cent), with the private sector being a more frequent choice for young people in urban areas. Smaller proportions of young people are employed in the "start-up" (17.5 per cent) sector, which included "entrepreneurs" and "(co-) founders of new businesses". However, the "start-up" sector was selected by rural youth more frequently. 2.9 per cent registered that they were active in the non-governmental sector, which was defined to include "NGOs, trade unions, youth organizations, women's organizations, etc."

13. Detailed regression analysis can be observed in the annex

FIGURE 8

Which sector do you work at?

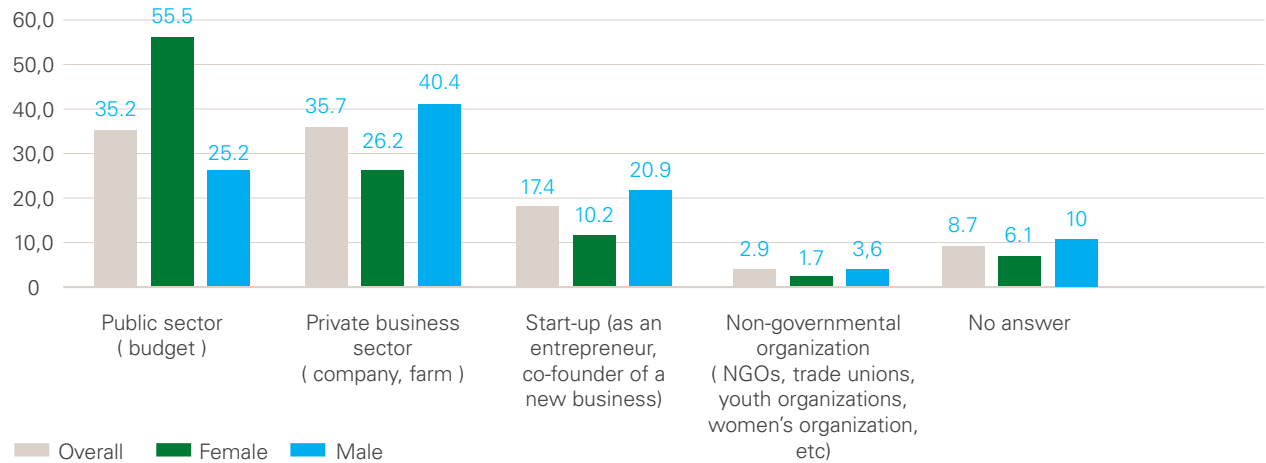
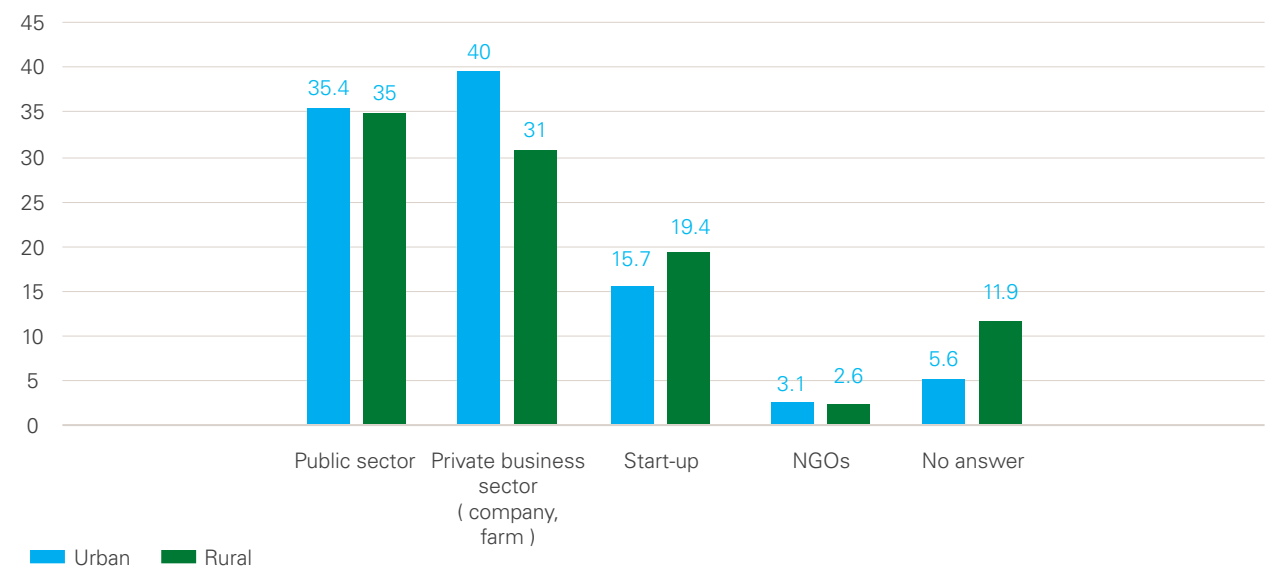


FIGURE 9

Which sector do you work at?

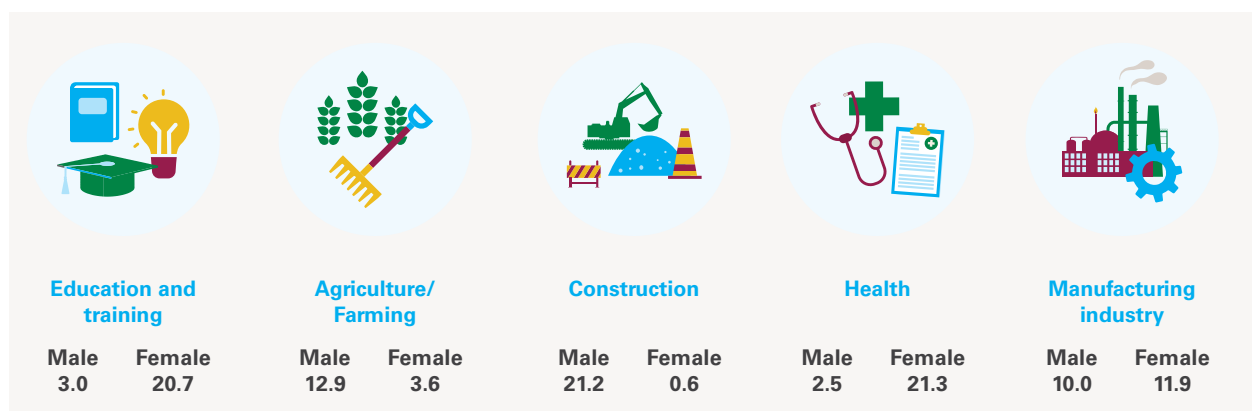


In regard to gender, the questionnaire data showed that except for a balanced ratio in the public sector, the private business sector and the other sectors are male-dominated. Industries with a

considerable representation of females were health, education and training and the manufacturing industry. For men, it was construction, agriculture and the manufacturing industry.

FIGURE 10

Which industry are you employed at? most popular industries by gender. %



Interesting Work

Respondents to the questionnaire indicated that to have “interesting work” was their primary reason for choosing one employment sector over another. This was mentioned by 63.4 per cent of

respondents, and was equally distributed across the regions, different gender and age-groups, as well as between urban and rural settlements.

FIGURE 11

Why do you want to work in this sector?

	Total	Urban	Rural	Male	Female
Interesting job	63.4%	62.7	64.1	62.1	63.9
Convenient working hours	22.8%	21.9	23.4	17.3	25
Good salary	19.8%	20.5	19	26.2	17.2
Creative job	11.0%	10.9	11.2	8.3	12.1
Convenient location	8.1%	7.1	9	7.7	8.2
Allows trying myself in different roles	5.7%	5.4	6.1	5.8	5.7
Comes with authority	3.7%	4.1	3.3	5.6	3

During the FGDs, we could reveal that for the study participants a job or profession was considered interesting primarily if it was their “own choice”.

This was contrasted with the undesirable situation in which lines of study or work were chosen for youth by their parents, or when young people needed to take up a particular employment out of financial necessity.

The following story, shared by a 24-year old married father from Andijan, points to the real-life complexities of this decision-making. During the FGD, this young man indicated that he worked in a car-manufacturing site and that he liked this work, because it corresponded with his college education. Yet then he revealed that “life had forced” him into taking up this profession, and actually he wanted to become a medical doctor.

“I think that youth who are forced by their parents end up having a non-interesting work. For example, someone wants to become a military man, but the father says ‘You shouldn’t, you have to become a medical doctor’. This becomes a non-interesting work. Or, someone wants to become an actor, but the father says ‘No, you have to become a lawyer!’”

— This aspect was well-captured in the voice of this 20-year-old university student from Tashkent city

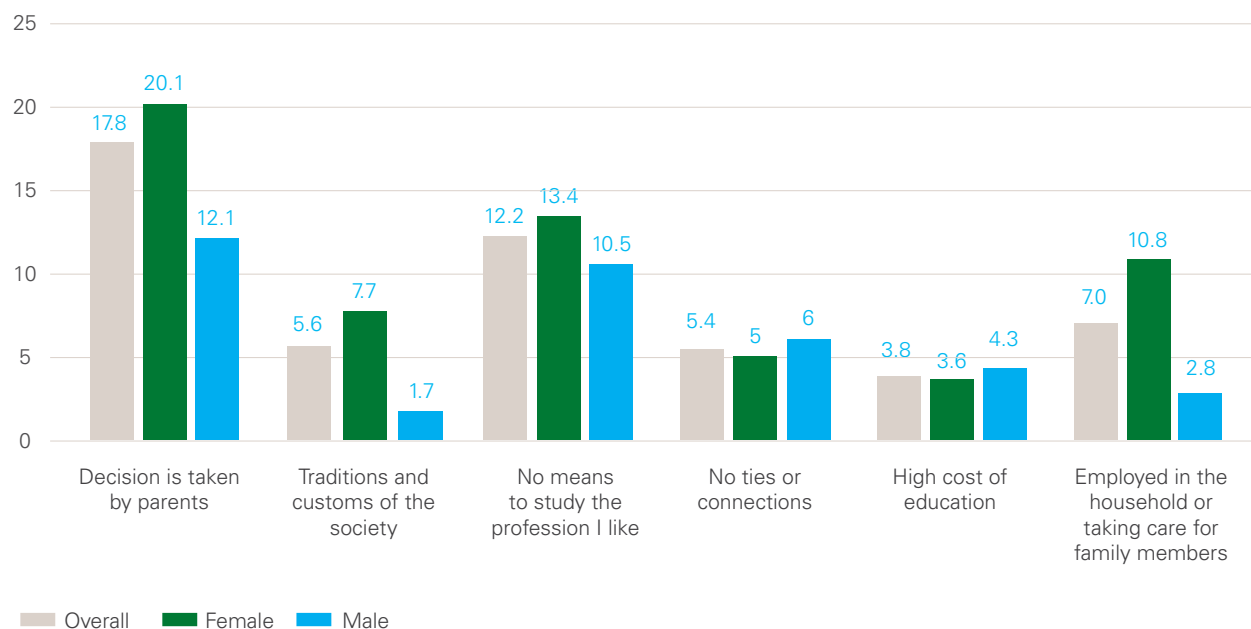
“I work, because I have a good salary [above \$300 per month]. But actually, I do not want to work in this profession. Two years in a row, I submitted my documents to a medical college, but I could not enroll. I could not enroll despite the fact that I have the knowledge but not the [bribe-] money. At work, I have no difficulties, I like the work. However, I have no wish to do this [work]...I would like to be a surgeon.”

The questionnaire data confirmed the observation that there is considerable influence from parents in regards to whether or not a young person continues his or her educational career. Across the regions of Uzbekistan, parents were mentioned by 17.8 per cent of the respondents as the main obstacle to their continued education. Whether respondents resided in a rural or an urban area was irrelevant for this question. However, a gender gap was noticeable: 20.8 per cent of female respondents mentioned parental decisions as an obstacle, as compared to only 12.1 per cent of male respondents.



FIGURE 12

What do you think could stop you from continuing your education up to the desired level? The key reasons



Furthermore, the study participants defined an interesting job by the joy it would bring to them; that an interesting job would thus be characterized by self-motivation (e.g. would be done “from the soul”); and that it would allow for self-development. An uninteresting job, on the other hand, was commonly associated with monotonous and physically strenuous labour.

The following story was shared by a 15-year-old schoolboy from rural Andijan: “An un-interesting job, this is boring, monotonous work. For example, my brother works in a can workshop. The whole day, he works in humid conditions, constantly one and the same. This work is not creative. It is furthermore physically tough. But my brother is forced to work there. He dreamt about becoming a teacher, but he could not enroll into an institute. So, he has to help our parents.”

Or in the words of a 15-year-old schoolboy from Kashkadarya: “For example, if you did not enroll into an institute [of higher education]...because you could not receive the qualification for [what you consider] to be an interesting job, you will be forced to work in the fields...or graze cattle.”

The questionnaire data revealed a clear gap between which industries the respondents found most appealing (education/training 28.7 per cent, science/research 26.3 per cent, health/medical sector 22.9 per cent, business/management 21.7 per cent) and in which industries they were actually employed (Construction 14.4 per cent, Manufacturing industry 10.6 per cent, Agriculture/Farming 9.8 per cent).

Young people also remarked that an interesting job should lead towards a decent income. 19.8 per cent of participants mentioned “good salary” as an important criterion for their professional choices. The importance of a good salary varied between gender groups, with 26.3 per cent of male respondents considering it important as opposed to 17.3 per cent of female respondents, for whom convenient working hours is a more important factor.

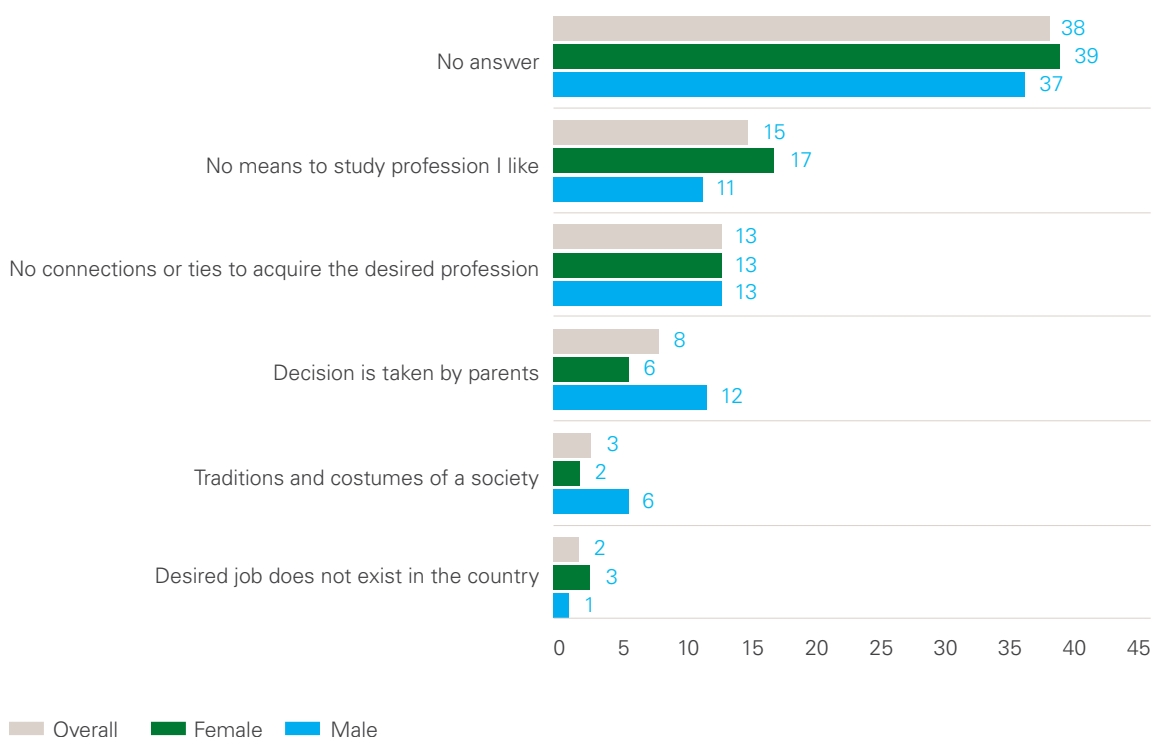
The amounts that were discussed as minimal or adequate monthly incomes differed, depending on the study participants’ rural or urban origin, on their gender, and on the region in Uzbekistan. The lowest expectations in this regard were found among young women in rural

areas. Generally, an absolute minimum of 1 million Sum [approx. \$100] was discussed among FGD participants. UZS 3-5 million [approx. \$300-500] was often considered a solid salary. However, participants of the FGD also reflected on salaries that were too low.

In the voice of a 24-year-old married mother from Samarkand: “Presently, the salary in sewing enterprises amounts to only USZ 500-600,000 [below \$60; per month]. But with this money you cannot do anything. It is therefore better not to work and instead sit at home. Because if you work for such a salary, then you spend more money than you earn. Because you also have to pay for transport to work and back, and you spend money for lunch.”

FIGURE 13

What barriers did you face when seeking employment, even if you’re employed now?, %



Relationships with colleagues and integration into an existing work “collective” were an important aspect during the discussions among study participants. The stories shared with us detailed positive experiences of learning and support for young professionals. Yet they also allowed for the insight that power hierarchies in work collectives might not necessarily be merit-based but can be governed by seniority. Young people reported that they faced situations in which they had to strictly mind the rules of workplace etiquette and also to fend off exploitation by elder co-workers.

This was vividly expressed by one 24-year-old married father from Samarkand: “Some also find it difficult to establish relations with the [work] collective. If he is young and does not know anyone, maybe, the elder ones will load him with extra work. For example, my brother went to work for one company. They hired him as a helper. He knows a lot about computers.

And they forced him to work during weekends and until late. Because senior colleagues load him with their work. He cannot refuse them, he is afraid to lose this work.”

When comparing younger and older participants of the FGDs, it was noticeable that over time an enthusiastic view, which outlined a broad wealth of future professional potentials, gave way to a more pragmatic and narrower spectrum of actual opportunities for attaining income. Again, this process could be observed more strongly among women than among men.

Study participants were aware that the challenge of securing attractive employment was exacerbated by the fact that there was always a high number of young professionals who competed in local labour markets (see also section “Concerns, Leisure and the End of Youth”).

Barriers to Pursuing a Career

The top three barriers to finding an employment indicated by young people are ‘lack of means to study for profession I like’, ‘no connections or ties to obtain the desired profession’ and ‘decision is taken by parents’. While young women and men indicated that having no connections and ties is a factor that equally hinders their employment, a lack of means to study is a higher barrier for men, and parental decisions affects young women’s employment opportunities twice as frequently as men.

There is a clear gender divide for the first of these reasons: 61.9 per cent of female respondents indicated household duties as the reason for not studying, as compared to only 14.0 per cent of male respondents. Household chores are also a more frequent reason of not continuing education in rural areas rather than urban.

I

n consequence, the number of young women leaving the labour market upon marriage is significant. The questionnaire data revealed that among married respondents belonging to the NEET group, 88.1 per cent were female as compared to 11.9 per cent male.

The FGDs of the study revealed in detail the constraints that young people encounter when trying to pursue their personal educational or professional ambitions. **Local opportunities to advance were depicted to differ significantly depending on gender, regional origin, social connectedness and economic ability.**

Young women in the study reported encountering two main constraints if they wished to continue their education or find work after marriage – unwillingness of their family, including parents, husbands and mothers-in-law, and limited mobility. As the primary reason for unemployment among young women, FGD participants constantly indicated **unwillingness of their family members, especially their husbands and mothers-in-law.** Young women frequently explained the unwillingness among husbands that their wives participated in public work-life and interacted with male colleagues as being caused by jealousy or fear of the consequences of their wives' independence if they generated their own income.

FIGURE 14

Why aren't you studying, or continuing your education? 4 = I'm busy in the HH taking care of HH members

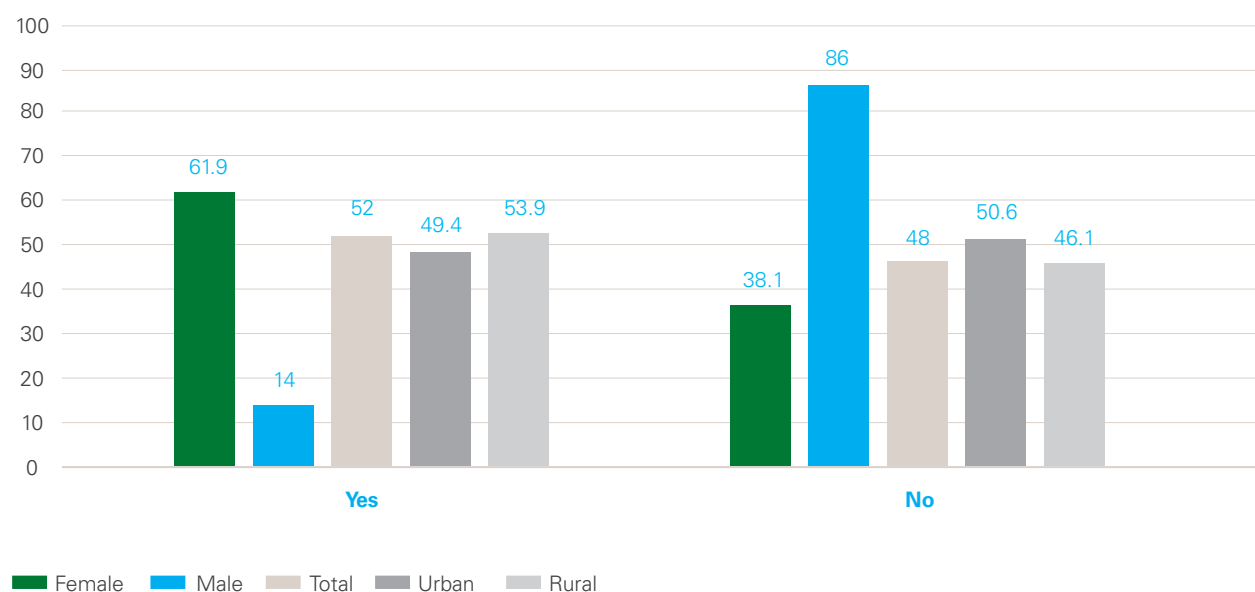
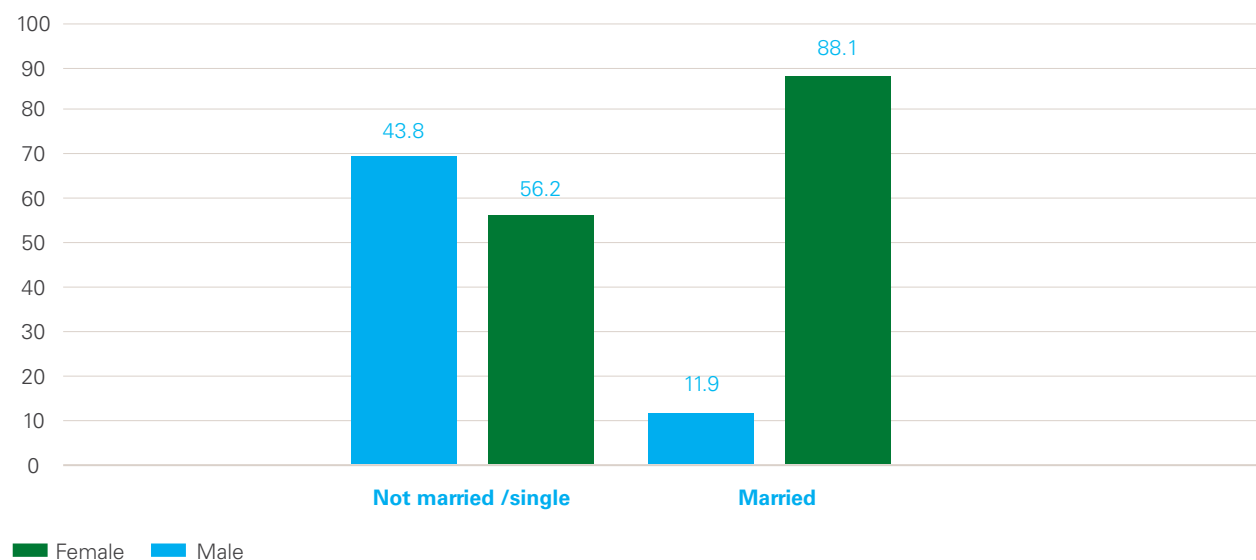


FIGURE 15

NEET, disaggregated by not married/single vs. married



"I'm busy in the household taking care of household members" (52.0 per cent); "My family cannot afford to pay for my studies" (17.9 per cent); and: "I couldn't get in" (17.1 per cent).

— In the words of a 21-year-old married woman and mother from Kashkadarya, who was a housewife, but was looking for employment

"Currently it is difficult to find work. In our village, there is no choice of workplaces. [There is] one school, one medical point, and one village laboratory for farmers. The staff in all these three organizations is small. A lack of interest among youth is also a problem...[But] pensioners do not leave into pension, they occupy workplaces. Corruption and injustice, this is what makes youth lose interest for work and education."

— In the words of one 19-year-old woman from Karakalpakstan



However, consider the exchange of these rather un-mainstream opinions, between male participants, 19-24 years old, in an FGD conducted in Karakalpakstan:

This depends on the kind of work. If the work is quiet, calm, then a woman can work. Because if a person is constantly sitting at home, he feels oppressed...Of course there is enough work at home: washing, cooking, doing dishes. But this can all be done after work...

— Participant 1

For example, a woman can work as a medical doctor, teacher, educator.

— Participant2



In the words of a 21-year-old married woman and mother from Kashkadarya, who was a housewife, but was looking for employment: “But sometimes the problem is that my family says that I should devote time to the family, and not to work. My husband says that he is earning himself. But I do not just want to sit at home...I want to find work that I can combine with the family. I would very much like to work so that I also have some money for myself.”

A 22-year-old woman from Andijan shared this prediction during an FGD: “When I marry, then my husband might not let me work...Because in Andijan, there are many such boys claiming that girls who work in [hairdressing] salons are bad [in terms of moral integrity]. Therefore, I could lose this work.”



Mothers-in-law were depicted by the study participants as preferring to keep the wives of their sons at home, because it would relieve themselves from the most arduous household chores. **This was also because it was necessary in order to preserve their cultural reputation within the local community (based on the idealized notion that a good mother-in-law would keep her daughter-in-law under close control).** Some female

study participants expressed that they felt that throughout their lives everything would be decided for them, first by parents then by husbands and their mothers.

This situation was summarized by a 21-year-old university student from Samarkand: "A girl will never be independent. Until marriage she depends on her parents, and after marriage she depends on her husband."

Those young women in the study who were continuing their education or worked did so in professional domains that “traditionally” are considered female in Uzbekistan, such as medicine, education or as home-based seamstresses, hairdressers, or bakers.

The questionnaire data revealed that the picture of what respondents registered as their “most desired professions” is highly diverse. Predominantly mentioned were classic professions, which furthermore were distributed according to gender differences:

- **businessman:** 8.1 per cent males vs. 1.7 per cent females
- **military:** 14.5 per cent males vs. 1.0 per cent females
- **doctor:** 4.6 per cent males vs. 18.0 per cent females
- **nurse:** 0.0 per cent males vs. 7.4 per cent females
- **teacher:** 7.2 per cent males vs. 24.4 per cent females
- **seamstress:** 0.2 per cent males vs. 8.8 per cent females

Furthermore, young women must be regarded as being less mobile than their male counterparts when it comes to relocating towards localities with better professional opportunities, both within Uzbekistan and within transnational labour migration (such as to Russia).

This was well-expressed by one 21-year-old female university student from Samarkand: “But boys still find a way out of this situation [of finding employment]. They leave to earn in South Korea. But our girls cannot do this, because our culture does not allow them to.” To the follow-up question of the FGD moderator as to whether girls would be allowed to leave for Russia [for labour migration], all female participants of this FGD responded simultaneously with “No!”

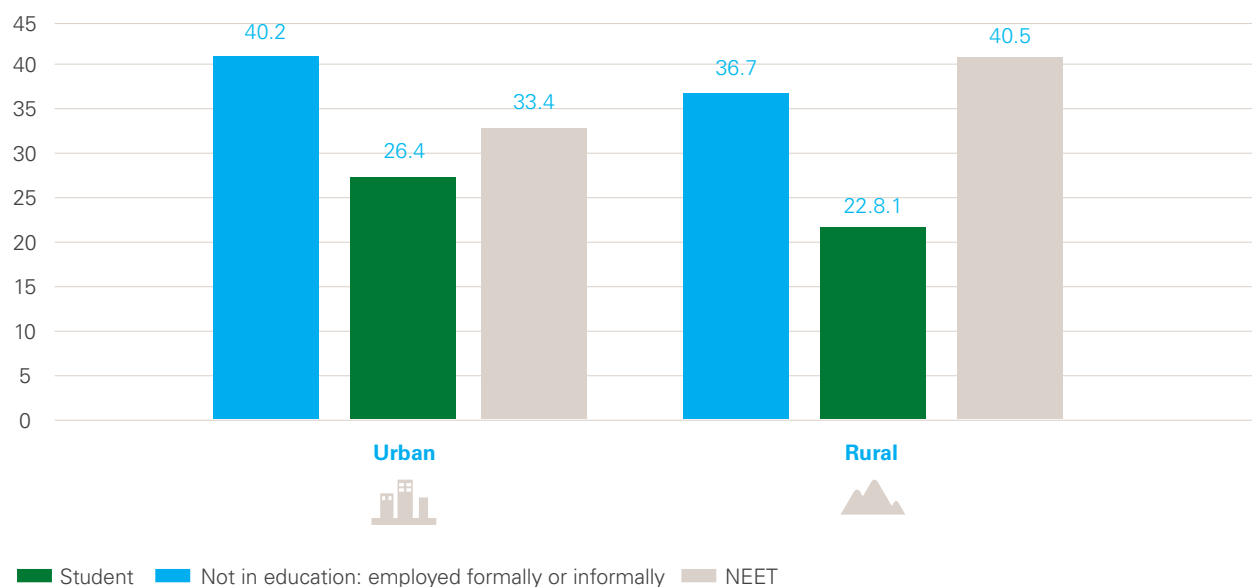
The study identified the ways in which young residents of rural areas are marginalized.

The questionnaire data revealed that when contrasting settlement types, there are less students from rural areas (36.7 per cent) than from urban areas (40.2 per cent); that rural youth is employed at a lower rate (22.8 per cent) than urban youth (26.4 per cent); and that the NEET-rate is higher in rural areas (40.5 per cent) than in urban ones (33.4 per cent).



FIGURE 16

What is your major occupation? - student, employed, or not in education or employment?



Among young people who live in rural areas, it was noticeable that what they defined as “interesting work” is usually located elsewhere, i.e. in urban centres. In contrast, their rural income opportunities were marked by a strong dependency on animals, land, and hard physical labour.

Consequently, young people living in villages were particularly alarmed about the growing divide between the demographic increase of young professionals and the rather stagnant labour market situation. Some study participants highlighted that this development would get even more severe if the older generation continue to remain in their jobs beyond pension age instead of freeing up income opportunities for younger citizens.

Consider the following comment from a 22-year-old male, married university student, who reflected on the reasons for youth unemployment in his region of Andijan: “In Andijan, there are five

institutes. And from each institute on average 1000 people graduate each year, in total 5000 graduates. But there is no work for these youths who have higher education. I also studied at an institute... now I receive a salary of 1.2 million Sum [approx. \$120 per month]. For a husband and wife, 1.2 million is not enough. This money is not enough for transport, lunch and clothes. I quit my job and now I am looking for work...Some youths are forced to travel abroad in order to earn [i.e. become labour migrants].”

In the words of one 19-year-old woman from Karakalpakstan: “Currently it is difficult to find work. In our village, there is no choice of workplaces. [There is] one school, one medical point, and one village laboratory for farmers. The staff in all these three organizations is small. A lack of interest among youth is also a problem...[But] pensioners do not retire, they occupy all the workplaces. Corruption and injustice, this is what makes youth lose interest in working and education.”

Facing such a disconnect from attractive salaried work, young rural people revealed an openness to experimenting with self-employment and small-scale entrepreneurship.



The questionnaire data supported this indication. Asked about which sector individuals would like to work in, there were few differences between study participants from rural or urban areas. However, when the option of wanting to work in the “start-up” sector, as an entrepreneur or (co-) founder of a new business venture, this appeared attractive to 59.7 per cent of rural respondents compared to only 40.3 per cent of urban respondents.

A 22-year-old married male from Karakalpakstan commented: “In a rural place, youth cannot find work after college. And some want to start their own enterprises, for example breeding poultry. They know how to breed poultry, because they all have animals at home. But on how to conduct a business, they do not have knowledge. Therefore, it would be good, if at school there was a subject like business studies...”

One insight into the lack of rural employment opportunities, especially for young women, was provided by one 21-year-old mother and married woman from Kashkadarya: “There are of course beauty salons in the city, kindergartens,

FIGURE 17

Which sector would you like to work at? Settlement type crosstabulation

		Settlement type		Total
		Urban 	Rural 	
Public sector	Count	857	896	1753
	% within 44. which sector would you like to work at?	48.9%	51.1%	100.0%
Private business sector (company, farm)	Count	232	190	422
	% within 44. which sector would you like to work at?	55%	45.0%	100%
Start-up (en entrepreneur, co-founder of a new business)	Count	199	295	494
	% within 44. which sector would you like to work at?	40.3%	59.7%	100%
Non-governmental organization (NGOs, trade unions, youth/women organizations, etc.)	Count	24	21	45
	% within 44. which sector would you like to work at?	53.3%	46.7%	100%
Any sector	Count	184	273	457
	% within 44. which sector would you like to work at?	40.3%	59.7%	100%

schools, where many woman [work]. But working in the city is not allowed [for us]. I think that here it is extremely difficult to find interesting work. Therefore, if women work, then it is only where possible. And this is picking cotton or fruits. But is this really interesting? No.”

The voices of the study participants clearly reflected the relevance of networks and economic ability when it came to advancing social mobility.

Respondents to the questionnaire widely agreed, although more in urban areas than in rural ones, that “finding a job depends too much on good personal connections and networks”. Young people without higher education indicated the necessity of having personal connections and networks to find a job more than young people with higher education did.

FIGURE 18

Do you agree that “finding a job depends too much on good personal connections and networks”?

	All	Urban	Rural	Has higher education	No higher education
Completely disagree	19.2	15.6	22.6	21.5	19.1
Somewhat disagree	11.7	12.7	10.8	11.3	11.7
Somewhat agree	35.2	37.1	33.4	42.9	34.7
Absolutely agree	31.1	31.9	30.4	23.7	31.5
Don't want to answer	2.8	2.7	2.8	0.5	2.9

Participants in the FGDs showed that the local concept of “being acquainted and knowing someone” (tanish-bilish) might override any objectively acquired skills or professional qualities.

Examples provided during the FGD include the views of one 19-year-old male college student from the Fergana region: “I had an acquaintance. He received a diploma in engineering, and graduated in Tashkent. He wanted to find work here in Fergana, but he couldn't find it here. One should speak the truth: here you need connections and contacts to secure work. He had to leave for Tashkent and he found work there... He did not want to leave, because his parents are here. Now he has to come here twice per month in order to visit his relatives.”

However, the study participants also shared stories about exceptions from this common practice of being acquainted and knowing someone” (tanish-bilish), from which the potential for systemic change could be identified.

The evidence also demonstrates that Uzbek workers with a tertiary education on average earn a 55 per cent higher wage than similar workers with a secondary education.¹⁴

14. Ajwad et al. (2014)

In addition, young people widely agreed that education and obtaining learning certificates increased their chances of securing attractive employment. When comparing the different groups represented in the study, it was noticeable that rural residents and women were more skeptical about their professional futures than urban residents and males. Younger participants in the study were more hopeful that individual effort and merit would lead to life-success.

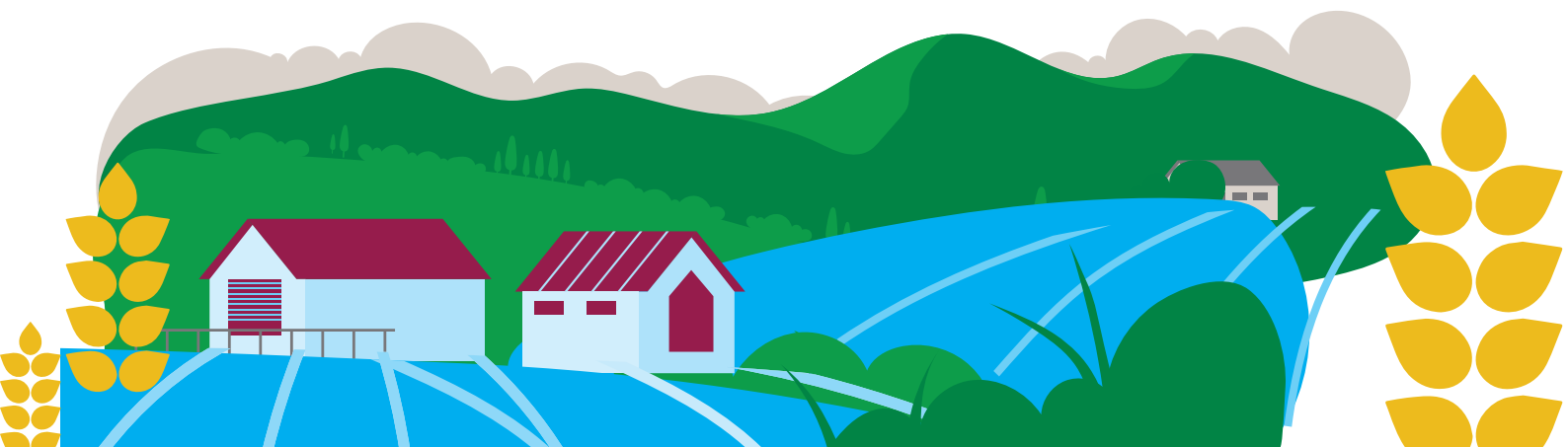
Many of the study participants were skeptical as to whether they would be able to find employment in their original profession.

This concern related to the combination of strong competition in local labour markets, with the informal practice of distributing income opportunities. The study found

that among young people the rate of lateral recruits, i.e. someone working in a job without having received professional training for it, is significant.

In the questionnaire, among the participants that were currently employed, 26.9 per cent expressed that they were “not at all satisfied” in regards to how their current job corresponds with their educational background. In contrast, 59.1 per cent of study participants registered that they were satisfied with the correspondence of their education and current employment. It was noteworthy that women reported significantly stronger satisfaction than men: 44.2 per cent vs. 28.7 per cent. Young people with higher education expressed stronger satisfaction than young people with secondary and secondary specialized education: 60.9 per cent vs. 30.6 per cent.

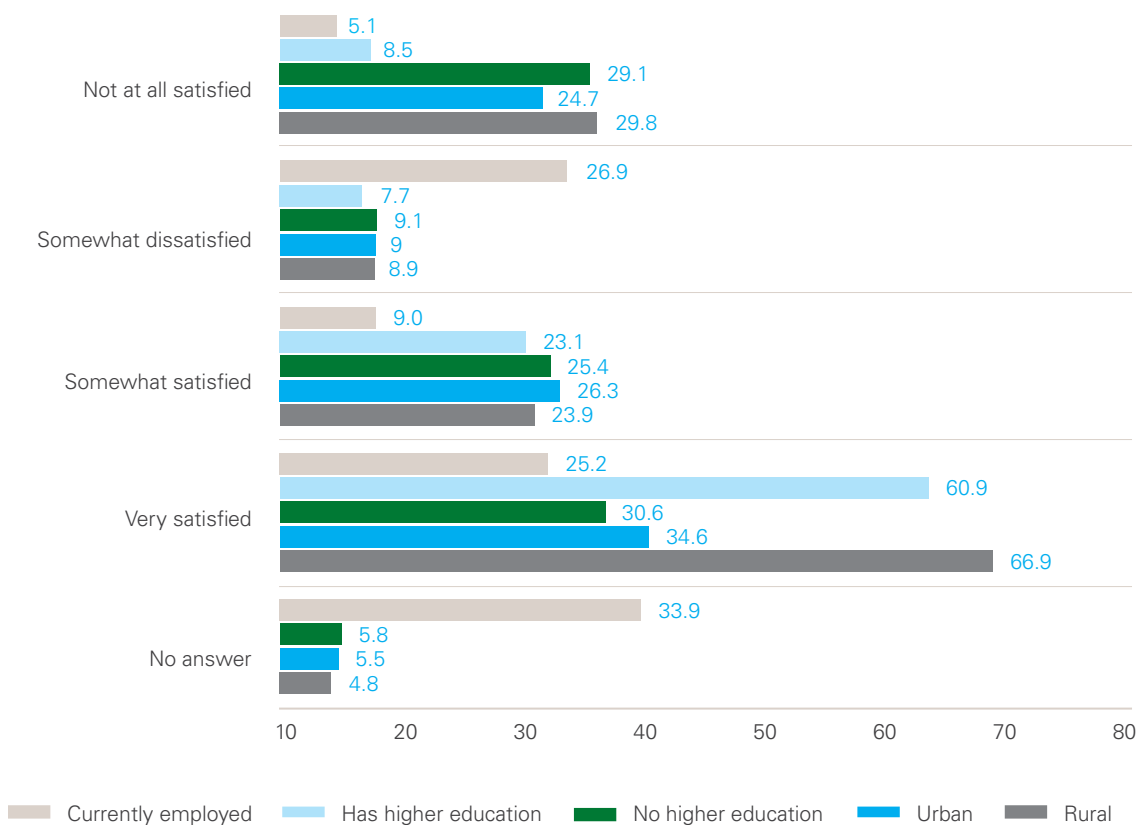
“Many of the study participants were skeptical as to whether they would be able to find employment in their original profession.”



“Young people widely engage in friendship relationships, and only few participants in the study claimed not to have any friends. Good friends were described as standing up for one another, lending each other money in times of crisis, providing mutual help with daily tasks, and honestly giving their opinion about daily-life matters (ranging from pointing out a friend’s personal shortcomings to assessments of potential future spouses).”

FIGURE 19

To what extent are you satisfied with how your job corresponds to your educational background?, %



4.3 Social Embedding

Key Messages

- Young people in Uzbekistan almost exclusively trust and rely on their parents, while many perceive their existing friendships to be endangered by a lack of support, breach of secrecy and social stigmatization.
- Study participants reflect that the general expectation of them is to be 'obedient', especially within their neighbourhood communities. A sense of independence increases once young people generate their own income or after marriage, but more among male than female youth.
- Married study participants depict their partner as a new source of moral, practical and financial support, while acknowledging that the transition to living as a married couple with the extended family (usually the husband's parents) is a difficult one.
- Young people assessed the present and future of gender relations in their country along the lines of a continued conservative patriarchy (which was more the male position) versus a change towards equal rights (which was more the female position).

Trusting

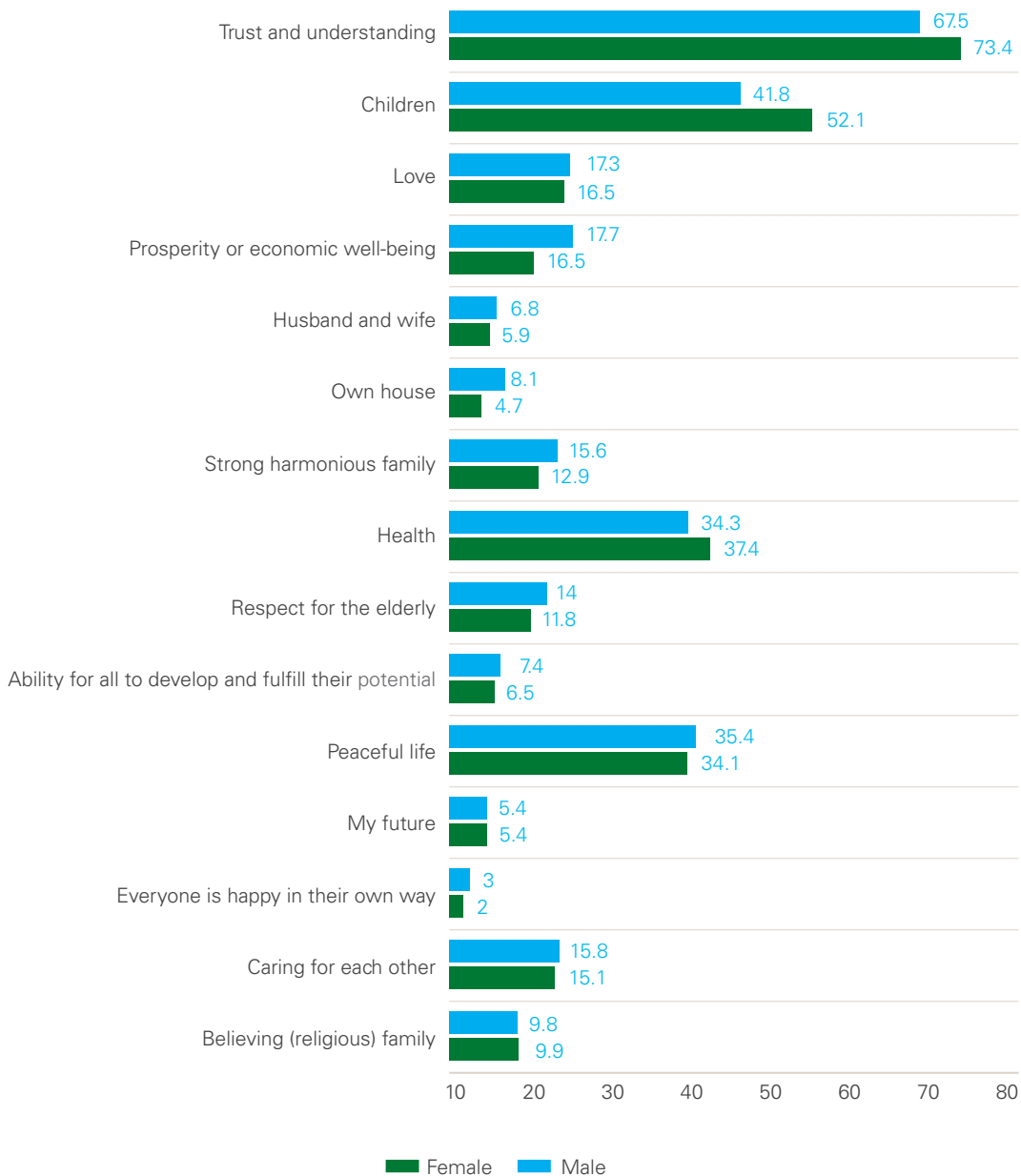
When it comes to family relations, the questionnaire data highlighted the importance of "trust and understanding" for young people – 70.9 per cent of study participants associated the notion of a "happy family" with "trust and understanding". This appeared slightly more

important for women (73.4 per cent) than for men (67.4 per cent) with no significant difference in rural and urban areas. It is noteworthy that men associate 'love' and 'economic well-being' with a happy family more frequently than women.



FIGURE 20

What do you think when you hear a phrase “happy family”?



Young people widely agreed that they could above all trust their parents.

Parental support was depicted as all-encompassing, including financial contributions and moral support. This was especially appreciated in regards to education, where parents enabled young people to take lessons with private tutors or provided the motivation for continuing to study hard. Some young women participating in the FGDs also named their mothers as friends and the keepers of their secrets.

Whereas the participants of the study reflected that parents could be counted on at all times, good and bad, they expressed that the same would not apply for other relatives, friends or spouses.

These other social ties, it was commonly agreed, could become more important than ties to parents only during rare, short-term situations when young

people might be in conflict with their parents about a particular matter.

This is well captured in the words of this 14-year-old schoolboy from Fergana: "Parents are holy! We owe them our life and we always trust them. They feed us, teach us, even if they have not enough for themselves."

These words of a 23-year-old married male from Samarkand compare parents and friends in regards to trust: "A friend might leave you at any moment. Probably, there are good friends, but they appear only in movies. In life, I have not yet seen a good one among my friends. Your parents are your friends. And most importantly, your mother. Your mother is always the first to find out if something has happened. She asks right away what problems I have or if I need money, which she gives immediately."

Or consider this exchange between male participants of an FGD in Tashkent city, all aged 19-24:

There is no one closer than parents.

— Participant 1

This is not even about a friend, not even a wife will love you like your parents do.

— Participant 2

Well, this is for sure!

— Participant 3



Young people widely engage in friendship relationships, and only few participants in the study claimed not to have any friends. Good friends were described as standing up for one another, lending each other money in times of crisis, providing mutual help with daily tasks, and honestly giving their opinion about daily-life matters (ranging from pointing out a friend's personal shortcomings to assessments of potential future spouses).

Among the participants of the questionnaire, there was confidence "that your friends will do their best to support you in difficult life situations".

In general, women and older participants were more skeptical about this statement.

FIGURE 21

To what extent do you agree that you're confident that your friends will do their best to support you in difficult life situation? Gender crosstabulation




	Gender		Total
	Male 	Female 	
Completely disagree	2.8	8.4	6
Somewhat disagree	3.2	5.1	4.3
Somewhat agree	31.2	38	35.1
Absolutely agree	61.9	47.2	53.4
No answer	0.9	1.4	1.2
Total	100	100	100

FIGURE 22

To what extent do you agree that you're confident that your friends will do their best to support you in difficult life situations? Age Groups Crosstabulation

	Age groups			Total
	14-18	19-24	25-30	73.4
Completely disagree	1.8	8.3	7.8	6
Somewhat disagree	3.3	4.3	5.3	4.3
Somewhat agree	32.1	36.2	36.9	35.1
Absolutely agree	62.4	49.8	48.2	53.4
No answer	0.4	1.3	1.8	1.2
Total	100	100	100	100



These aspects are well illustrated by an exchange between female participants of an FGD in rural Andijan, all 14-18 years old

"Parents will always be close, on good and bad days."

— Participant 1

"For example, you trust your friend. But someone, just in order to slander you, tells her something bad about you. She might believe that and then end your friendship. But parents never believe in words from strangers about you..."

— Participant 2

"I had an instance like that in my life. Something like this happened to me with my class-mate. And this affected me psychologically."

— Participant 3



At the same time, there was a shared understanding among study participants about the short-term nature of friendship and its limited reliability. Experiences shared during the FGDs illustrated that ties to friends can end abruptly and may lead to lasting negative emotions. Feelings of betrayal and disappointment were often associated with former friends, who

had made personal secrets public and so subjected the other to public shaming and collective ridicule. As a consequence, the participants of the study were cautious about opening up to non-family members. Some study participants reported that they selected friends from among their relatives (which is a possible adjustment to this dilemma).

For young women in Uzbekistan the transition into marriage could be identified as marking an end to friendship relations, because as a young wife and daughter-in-law any control over her social activity was reported to largely rest with her husband and his mother.



A Good Person

To capture the ideals and realities of day-to-day morality in Uzbekistan, the study asked its participants what constitutes a “good person”.

There was widespread agreement that a good person should find a balance between caring deeply for others while not transgressing certain boundaries. More particularly, a good person was

considered to be generous and supportive (materially), and in general “useful for society”.

At the same time, he or she should obey the law and not be corrupt, maintain “neutrality” during disputes, avoid arrogance despite personal wealth, and respect the privacy of others (including the keeping of secrets). Some participants of

the study remarked that a good person also should be spiritual, which still others said he or she needed to be a firm believer (in Islam).

Questionnaire data also confirmed that religion plays an important role in youths' lives: a combined 70.6 per cent of respondents either somewhat or absolutely agreed with this observation (regardless of differences in age, gender, settlement type or regional belonging).

Furthermore, the exercise of defining a good person allowed for insights into what young people considered troubling trends in present-day society. This entailed reflections on abandonment, indifference, a lack of trustworthiness and of unkept promises, all issues that study participants raised from among their recent experiences of social exchange with the older generation (see also section "Concerns, Leisure and the End of Youth").

In the words of a 15-year-old school girl from Tashkent city: "I think that a good person is someone who is not entirely indifferent, but also not someone who is too fixated on the problems of others."

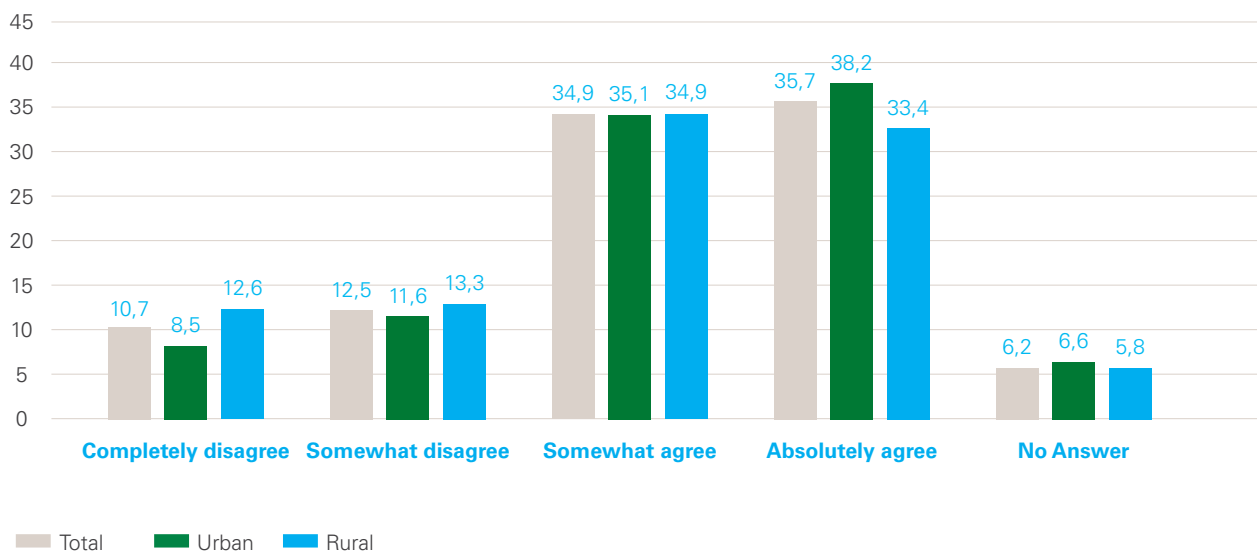
Or in the words of a 17-year-old school girl from Kashkadarya: "I also want to say that if a person believes in Allah, then he surely will be a good person. Because this person then had a clean soul, does not betray other people and does not steal."

Asked about how someone may become a good person, young people agreed that this would strongly depend on their personal social environment, in particular on the family.

Study participants described a favorable "atmosphere" for this as being characterized by parents who establish a communicative pattern with their children that is directed at facilitating personal growth, exchanging constructive criticism and widening worldviews.

FIGURE 23

To what extent do you agree that religion plays an important role in your life?



“You should try to choose [the right] people to surround you. Of course, you cannot always distinguish between friend and foe, but...you should try to communicate with sensible people. And it’s better to communicate with people who are older and smarter than you, who have a wider horizon. That kind of people motivate you towards [personal] growth.”

— In the words of this 19-year-old male from Fergana



Among the challenges to achieving such an enabling environment, study participants mentioned disharmony and “scandals” within families, the absence of fathers (e.g. during labour migration to Russia), and the fact that children might not receive enough attention because parents were occupied with securing the family’s livelihood.

Otherwise, study participants did not think that whether someone had grown up in a rural or urban setting had any bearing on their ability to become a good person. As part of a few life-stories, teachers were mentioned as an influence towards someone becoming a good person.

These aspects are also reflected in this exchange between two female participants of a FGD conducted in Fergana, both aged between 14 and 18, on why they will always agree with their parents' decisions:

Because my parents never force me to do anything. They take my feelings into account. If I told them that I would marry this one boy and not the other one, and they did not agree with it, this would mean that their disagreement was justified. Otherwise they would not be against [my preference]."

— Participant 1

Because as they say here: 'the agreement of parents is the agreement of God'. And if one does everything with the agreement of one's parents, then all will be well.

— Participant 2



In-Dependence

As part of their embedding in different communities, young people carefully navigate their social dependence and independence. For the participants of the study it was apparent that at a young age, they were generally supposed to be “obedient”.

Towards their parents, this was understood as an integral part of their “filial piety”. Feelings of dependence

on their parents among young people extended from the material domain (shelter, food, education) to their emotional needs, as part of which they reported strongly desire the affection and appreciation of their fathers and mothers.

Accordingly, FGD participants noted that key choices in their life would depend on the “blessing” of their parents, which may include their future profession and

spouse. A dependency of that magnitude was reflected on critically by some, while others pragmatically registered it as just a regular part of their lives.

Consider this answer from a 19-year-old male from Fergana on why it would be essential to agree with your parents about whom to marry: "Imagine how the life of a young family will be, if the parents opposed. This would be daily scandals and it could go as far as a divorce... Our neighbour fell in love with one girl. His mother did not like this girl. But for love he went against the opinion of the parents. At home, there were permanent scandals between his mother and his wife. In the end, the wife, pregnant with the first child, left the house of her husband. The committee of the neighbourhood community (mahalla) reconciled them, but still they could not live together. See, such a sad result can happen, if you do not listen to your parents."

The study results showed that neighbourhood communities must be regarded as the key (semi-) public audience before which the social face of a family and its members is constantly negotiated. Participants in the study who live in rural areas particularly admitted to feeling very dependent on the dynamics of neighbourhood opinion-making. Public shaming and the spread of rumours were identified as powerful ways to exercise social control and ensure conformity with collective norms (of culture and custom). As a consequence, young people reported a constant awareness of informal surveillance and being judged. Moreover, many study participants reported adjusting their style of dress, behaviour and communication to the local mainstream in order to avoid the consequence of social ostracization.

In one FGD in Kashkadarya, the male participants, all aged between 14 and 18, collectively agreed with the following reflection: "We Uzbeks listen very much to the opinion of our nearest and dearest. We are afraid to bring shame on the family. How could you afterwards [and otherwise] walk with your head held high among your neighbours?"

One 22-year-old male from Kashkadarya spoke about the negative side of dependence on collective decisions taken within circles of relatives:

"If someone in this gathering of relatives (maslahat oshi) says that it is not worth moving to Bukhara, because salaries there are small, this will be enough for a young person to stop and not move further [i.e. pursue this ambition] ... [Therefore,] we are afraid to take a certain step if someone might oppose. These are the traditions that we were brought up with. But on the other hand, if there is too much freedom for young people, then they might go in the wrong direction. There should always be the [right] measure... We depend very much on the society in which we live. In the village, everyone knows each other. You take one step and everyone knows about it right away. We are afraid to make a mistake in case neighbours and relatives then blame us for our wrong behavior."

In the FGDs, young people expressed that their lives would become more independent, not after they had reached a particular age, but rather once they had started to earn their own income or were married. Young men in particular shared that becoming the "head of their own family" would mean independence, but also that this created the pressure to provide for these new dependents without the support of one's parents.

For young women, in contrast, marriage was considered rather as a switch into a different constellation of dependence, from their own parents to their husband and new in-laws (especially if they share a household).

In the words of this 23-year-old married father from Andijan: "My wife and I live separately from my parents. I am already independent. I am the head of the family and am now not running to my parents for help. I decide everything myself."

In the words of this 24-year-old married mother from Samarkand: "Those girls who are married and have children have to obey

their husband...Because he is already our companion in life. He is the person who understands us, feeds us. Now the responsibility for us and for the children rests with him."

While the study participants expressed various opinions about the general advantages or disadvantages of their social embedding and dependence, they gave insights into the relevance that micro-acts of independence play within their daily lives. Young people referred to being out in public, to buying their own things, to cooking a dish they selected, or to working and achieving something "on their own" as liberating experiences.

Consider this exchange between female participants, aged 19-24, during one FGD conducted in Andijan about when they feel independent:

When we can go to the bazaar and buy the goods that we like.

— Participant 1

I work. And the money I earn, I can spend on buying the things that I like.

— Participant 2



In the words of this 18-year-old male college student from Karakalpakstan: "When I go out into the streets from home, then I feel like a man and my own opinion is taken account of. And when I return home, then I do everything, consult with my parents and my older brothers. But with my friends I behave independently and I am the master of my opinion."

As part of the questionnaire, we asked respondents to what extent their life would depend on their own decisions

or on those made by other people for them. Along a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 reflecting that decisions would be made solely by others and 10 solely by the participant, the most popular answers were 5 (21.0 per cent) and 10 (21.1 per cent), followed by "no answer" (11.6 per cent).

Otherwise, no significant variation could be detected between gender, settlement type, education background or age-groups.

FIGURE 24

Some people believe that their life depends solely on their decisions, while others believe that life depends on decisions made by other people. Please assess on a scale from 1 to 10, to what extent your life depends on decisions (10) or on decisions made by other people (1)

	Male	Female	Has higher education	No higher education	Total
10	21.95	20.5	22.03	21.07	21.1
5	21.79	20.46	18.64	21.12	21
No answer	12.36	11.08	7.91	11.77	11.6
7	10.34	9.41	12.43	9.69	9.8
6	8.26	9.22	13.56	8.62	8.8
8	7.51	8.68	10.73	8.08	8.2
1	4.69	7.13	2.82	6.24	6.1
9	5.17	4.07	8.47	4.37	4.5
4	3.94	4.3	2.82	4.2	4.1
3	2.56	3.02	0.56	2.92	2.8
2	1.44	2.13		1.92	1.8

Gender Relations

Young people assessed the present and future of gender relations in their country along the lines of a continued conservative patriarchy versus a change towards equal rights.

In the questionnaire, we asked respondents to agree or disagree with the statement that “women must have the same rights as men”. Generally, a widespread agreement can be noted among young males and females. Educational background does not make a significant impact on youth views. Among the different age-groups represented in the questionnaire, younger respondents supported the statement more than those in the 25-30 age category.

During the FGDs, participants who sided with the conservative model highlighted that men should/would remain as “the heads of families”. They advocated for gendered labour-sharing with men as breadwinners and women being responsible for household matters and child-rearing. Such a view of gender relations was legitimized in reference to an “Asian upbringing”, to Uzbek national traditions, to being prescribed by Islam, and more generally that it would be “respectful” towards women.

In the words of one 19-year-old school boy from Kashkadarya: “It is not accepted here that a married girl works. Her main task is to provide comfort at home, so that the husband and children are well cared for. She has too much to do at home for her to also go to work. Milk the cows, bake bread...”

And consider the voice of this 20-year-old university student from Tashkent city: “This [matter of gender relations] depends on social upbringing. I have an oriental upbringing. In my family, the man is the head of the family. The woman maintains the hearth and home.”

This aspect is also reflected in the words of this 15-year-old school girl from Tashkent city: “For example, if the man earns less than his wife, she will already have a feeling that this man is a nobody.”

In the questionnaire, we identified widespread agreement among male respondents in regards to the statement that “it’s better for everyone if a man earns money and a woman takes care of the home and children”. Although the majority of female respondents also agree with this statement, the rate is considerably lower in comparison with men. It is also noteworthy that young people with tertiary education are more critical of this statement.

The questionnaire also registered a conviction among young people that “women, just like men, can manage a business”, with significantly stronger support for this statement among women than men (56.6 per cent vs 35.3 per cent) and slightly stronger support among young people with higher education that without a university degree.

FIGURE 25

To what extent do you agree with the statement that women must have the same rights as men?
Respondent gender and university degree crosstabulation

		Gender		University degree		Total
		Male	Female	Has university degree	No university degree	
Completely disagree	Count	279	195	16	458	474
	% within respondent gender and university degree	14.9%	7.6%	9%	10.7	10.6%
Somewhat disagree	Count	167	167	22	312	334
	% within respondent gender and university degree	8.9%	6.5%	12.4%	7.35	7.5%
Somewhat agree	Count	730	891	64	1557	1621
	% within respondent gender and university degree	38.9%	34.5%	36.2%	36.4%	36.4%
Absolutely agree	Count	665	1282	74	1873	1947
	% within respondent gender and university degree	35.4%	49.7%	41.8%	43.8%	43.7%
No answer	Count	36	46	1	81	82
	% within respondent gender and university degree	1.9%	1.8%	0.6%	1.9%	1.8%

FIGURE 26

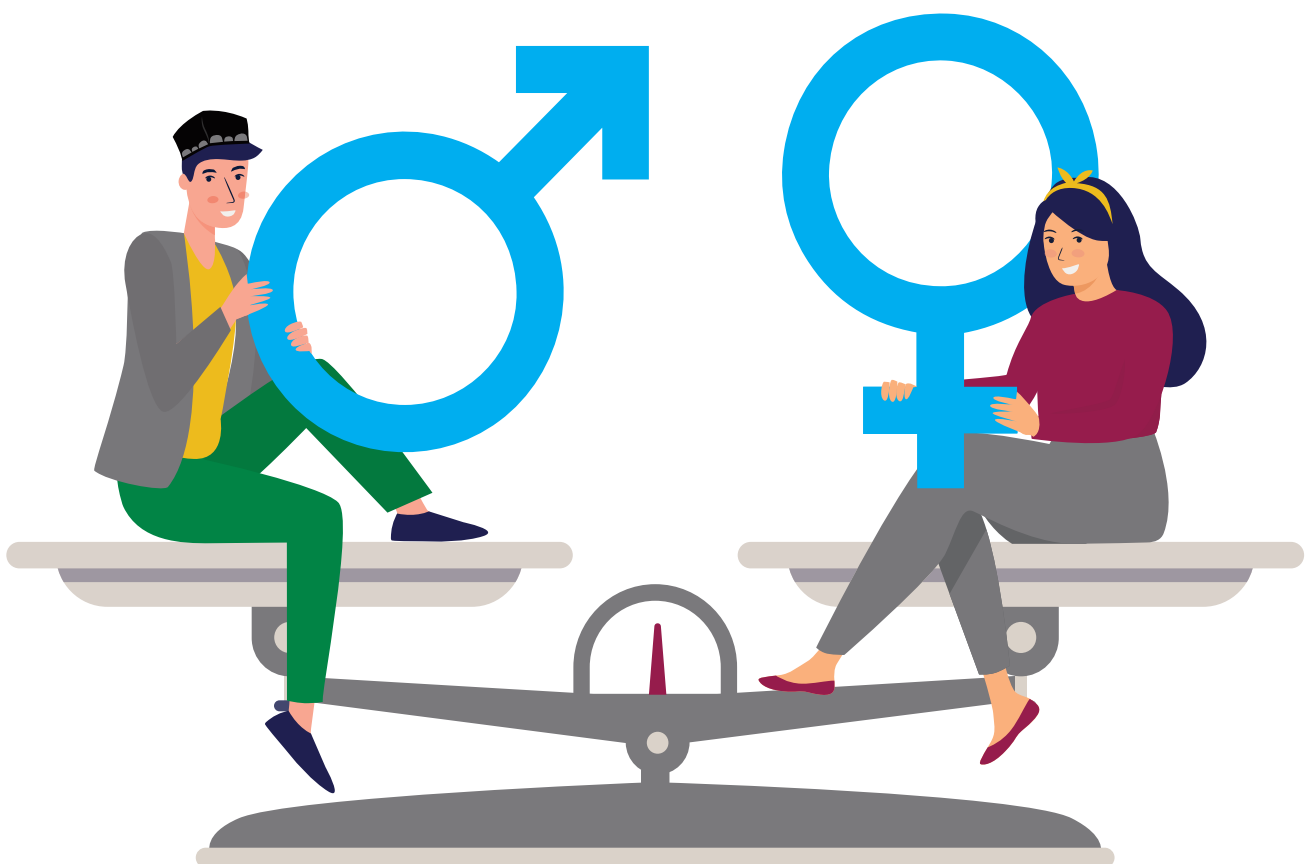
To what extent do you agree with the statement that it's better for everyone if a man earns money and a woman takes care of home and children? Respondent gender and university degree
Crosstabulation

		Gender		University degree		Total
		Male	Female	Has university degree	No university degree	
Completely disagree	Count	111	347	28	430	458
	% within respondent gender and university degree	5.9%	13.4%	15.8%	10.0%	10.3%
Somewhat disagree	Count	107	310	41	376	417
	% within respondent gender and university degree	5.7%	12%	23.2%	8.8%	9.4%
Somewhat agree	Count	441	771	47	1165	1212
	% within respondent gender and university degree	23.5%	29.9%	26.6%	27.2%	27.2%
Absolutely agree	Count	1202	1132	61	2273	2334
	% within respondent gender and university degree	64%	43.9%	34.5%	53.1%	52.4%
No answer	Count	16	21		37	37
	% within respondent gender and university degree	0.9%	0.8%	0.0%	0.9%	0.8%
Total	Count	1877	2581	177	4281	4458
	% within respondent gender and university degree	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

In the FGDs, a number of male participants voiced their concerns about challenges to this conservative model be challenged. Their worries included young women's changing perspectives on proper gender relations as a result of them being "spoiled" by "Western" TV shows (e.g. from Turkey), or because they had grown up abroad (e.g. in Russia). This suggested a direct link between influences from outside the country and the rising number of divorces among young couples inside Uzbekistan. Eventually, the proponents of a conservative viewpoint concluded a new need to enhance the status of men in families and their ability to keep women "under control".

The FGDs also revealed that influence in family decision-making was widely understood to be closely related to income. Some male participants thus remarked that wives who earned their own income would become more outspoken and would aim to increase their leverage.

Consider this opinion of a 23-year-old married man from Kashkadarya: "Now a lot of young girls leave with their mothers to earn in Russia or Kazakhstan. They get spoiled there... They think that once they earn, they can raise their voice against the husband. Because of this, divorces occur. Now there are a lot of cases when women feel themselves superior to men."





During the FGDs female voices speaking in favour of this conservative-patriarchal gender model were also encountered. Among the participants, there were young women who argued that it would be difficult for mothers-in-law to deal with young wives who were too progressive; that a phenomenon such as “househusbands” would “not be normal”; or that it was appropriate behavior for young girls to step aside whenever men would pass them on the street.

In the words of one 24-year-old married woman from Andijan: “The problem of equality worries my husband. And when he speaks about it, then his mother pities him and sympathizes with him.”

In contrast to the conservative model, other study participants, both females and males, expressed the view that within the next ten years the number of women who would accept the current predominant gender hierarchy to “simply obey” their husbands will decrease.

Multiple indications towards a more “open” culture of communication between the sexes and towards more public participation of women were mentioned. However, study participants agreed that this change would be incremental rather than revolutionary. Examples mentioned during the FGDs included: that women had recently become “important farmers” in certain rural areas; that women had been elected as heads of neighbourhood communities or were promoted to key government positions; that during the latest election for national parliament in December 2019, there had been more female candidates than before; that girls would not be given for marriage as early as before; that young wives would be handled less strictly by mothers-in-law and husbands; that more village girls were allowed to study in urban centres; that now women could also be observed to do classic male sports (soccer) and tasks (house renovations).

In the voice of one 19-year-old woman from Kashkadarya: “Men will always be the strong gender and women have to obey them...But it could be that they stop giving girls for marriage early. And that husbands and mothers-in-law will not abuse young daughters-in-law. Girls will be older and then they can defend their opinions.”

It was interesting to note that younger participants in the study tended to reflect rather conservative positions. This suggests that this model is an integral element of early socialization. Also, study participants gave the impression that changes in gender relations would be initiated in urban centres and then would more slowly spread towards rural areas.

Consider this exchange between two young male university students, 19 and 23 years of age, from Samarkand

Now women are aware of their rights. The government has created the conditions for this. Now, and for 10 or 20 years, everything will remain the same: the head of the family will be a man, and a woman will help him in the family. But at the same time, they [women] can work and have equal rights as men...

— Participant 1

They began appointing women to high positions. By doing so, the government is showing an example to everyone that women have equal rights as men. We have a female representative for the neighbourhood committee. She leads the neighbourhood even better than some of the men. But at the same time, in the family she respects her husband and is not arrogant.

— Participant 2



Life after Marriage

The study also asked how young people experienced “life after marriage.” **Many study participants shared positive experiences about how a new partner or “other half” improved their well-being and was a reliable source of moral, practical and financial support.** Furthermore, both male and female FGD participants depicted marriage as a step towards more independence from their own parents.

Consider this comment from a 23-year-old married man from Karakalpakstan: “For me, starting a family had a positive effect. Someone appeared near me with whom I could share everything that is in my soul. A wife is like your other half. Apart from this, everything I need is done in time: the food is ready on time and I always have clean clothes.”

At the same time, young people reflected that the transition to married life entailed a process of adjustment, which was primarily related to the patrilocal custom (that young couples tend to move in with the husband’s natal family). For young women, leaving the parental home and relocating to the husband’s family was depicted as a major challenge, primarily because of her new dependence on her spouse and her mother-in-law. Female study participants revealed that change for them was less about the actual tasks they performed, which traditionally remained as cooking, cleaning and helping the female head of the household. Rather it related to having a new audience of in-laws, which entailed more cultural obligation to behave respectfully, commonly associated with the role of a new daughter-in-law (*kelin*).

The experiences of this 24-year-old married woman and mother from Andijan reflected this: “When you start a new a family, a new life begins. And getting accustomed to a new family might be difficult. Girls enter into a completely different world. While they were still unmarried girls, they felt free. But now they have to consider what the mother-in-law and the husband say, and they might suffer from this.”

Having their own children was widely depicted as contributing happiness to the lives of young mothers. More generally, “children” were associated with the notion of a happy family by 47.8 per cent of respondents in the questionnaire (second after “trust and understanding, 70.9 per cent). This answer also appeared to be more important for women (52.1 per cent) than for men (41.8 per cent).

However, they also reflected on how the role of being a mother would introduce new and serious responsibilities into their daily lives. As discussed before, marriage and motherhood presented significant barriers to those young women who aspired to begin or continue their educational or professional careers.

For young males who remained in their natal household, the challenge was depicted as learning how to establish harmonious relationships between their wives and mothers. Furthermore, the male participants of the FGDs highlighted that marriage would impose new financial responsibilities upon them, which would force them to “grow up” and motivate them to make their new family a priority.

“The study also asked how young people experienced “life after marriage”. Many study participants shared positive experiences about how a new partner or “other half” improved their well-being and was a reliable source of moral, practical and financial support.”

In the words of a 24-year-old male from Karakalpakstan: “With the appearance of children in the family, responsibility dramatically increases. Even when the children are still small, you start to think that you need to provide them with education, that you need to marry them off and provide them with a place to live. And thus, you start to feel an enormous responsibility.”

In the questionnaire, almost 65 per cent of male respondents expressed the opinion that men should marry between 23 and 25 years of age. 25.7 per cent of female study participants thought that the best marriage age for women would be 20.

During the FGDs, the concern that early marriage might lead to early divorce was widely brought up. Many young people questioned whether girls below 20 years of age would be prepared and ready for marriage. Female study participants rather considered an age above 22 as appropriate for a woman to be able to handle the physical and emotional challenges that being a wife, daughter-in-law and mother in Uzbekistan entail. It was noticeable during the FGDS that the blame for early pregnancy and divorce at a young age commonly was assigned to women and not men.

In the voice of a 19-year-old female university student from Andijan: “If they [young girls] are not prepared morally, then this leads to depression and divorces. The majority of parents do not prepare their daughters for family life. Some mothers-in-law are unable to cook lunch, do the dishes or keep order in the house. However, they demand that the daughter-in-law should be able to do all of this.”

Or consider this opinion of a 19-year-old woman from Kashkadarya: “For us it is highly shameful when the husband leaves the house or throws you out of the house. And if the woman allows this to happen, it means that she is to blame that her husband abandoned her...”

4.4 Residency and Mobility



Key Messages

- Young people in Uzbekistan show an exceptional sense of belonging to their home villages and cities, and their motivation not to migrate is high, whether this be in-country (80.3 per cent) or abroad (77.3 per cent).
- The comfort among study participants of living in familiar geographical and social environments seems to be inspired by a dislike for change, a fear of the unknown, or negative migration experiences.
- Uzbekistan's youth widely agrees that 'a good place to live' can be a rural or an urban setting, as long as it fulfils the essential condition that one's family can lead a quiet, healthy and peaceful life there.

“Respondents of the questionnaire ranked the following three features of their “ideal place of residence” as the most important: “proximity to family and relatives” (61.9 per cent), “good quality drinking water” (46.1 per cent) and “uninterrupted power supply/gas supply” (44.9 per cent). ”

The “Ideal Place” and Belonging to Home

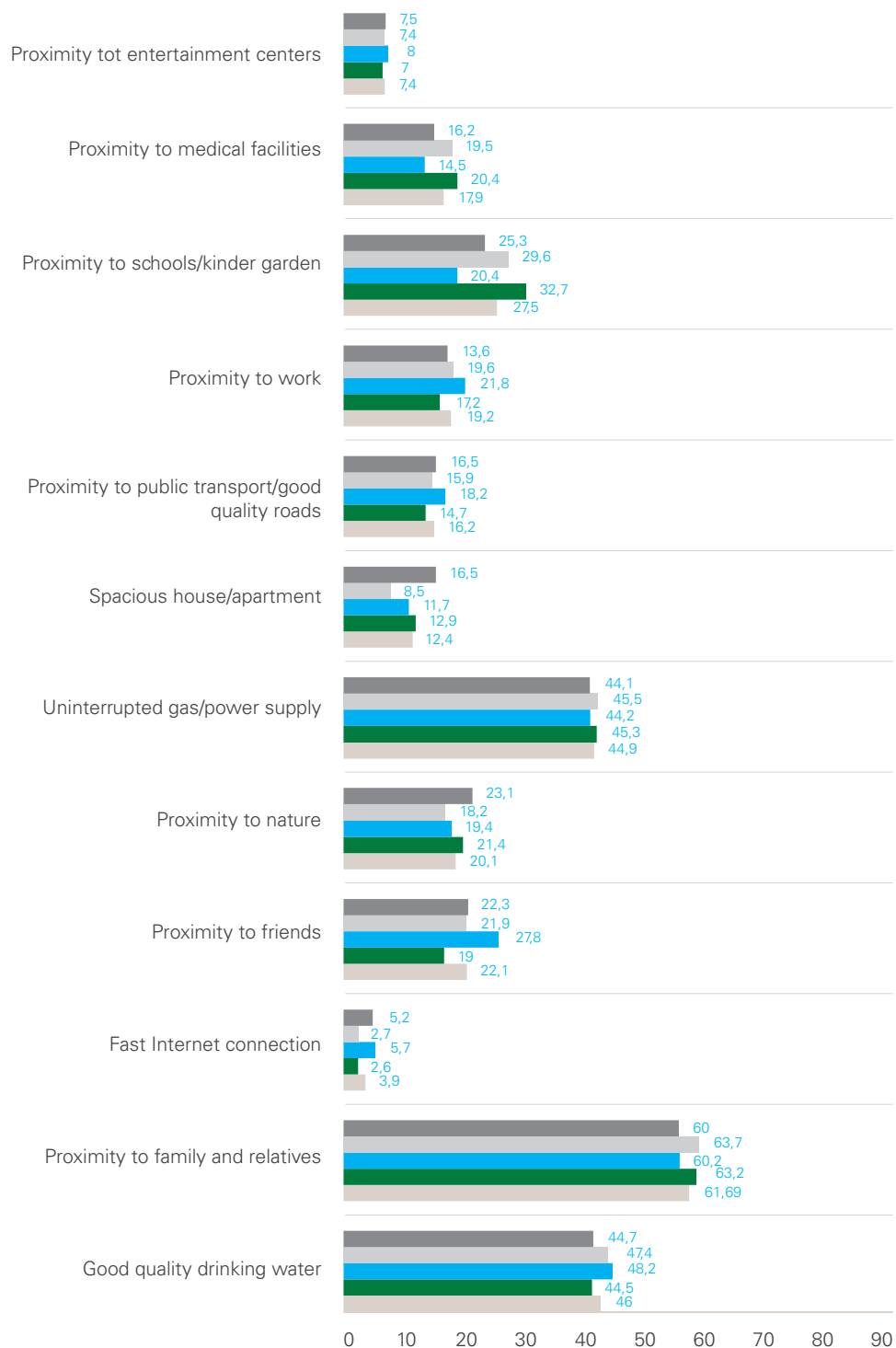
Respondents of the questionnaire ranked the following three features of their “ideal place of residence” as the most important: “proximity to family and relatives” (61.9 per cent), “good quality drinking water” (46.1 per cent) and “uninterrupted power supply/gas supply” (44.9 per cent). All these factors are particularly important for women and youth residing in rural areas. Two other

particularly important factors for them are the proximity of schools/kindergartens and medical facilities. Factors which are more important for men are proximity to friends, proximity to work, good public transport and the quality of roads. Such factors as “a spacious house, apartment” is more important to young people residing in urban areas than in rural areas (16.5 per cent vs 8.5 per cent).



FIGURE 27

Most important things for ideal place of residence, %



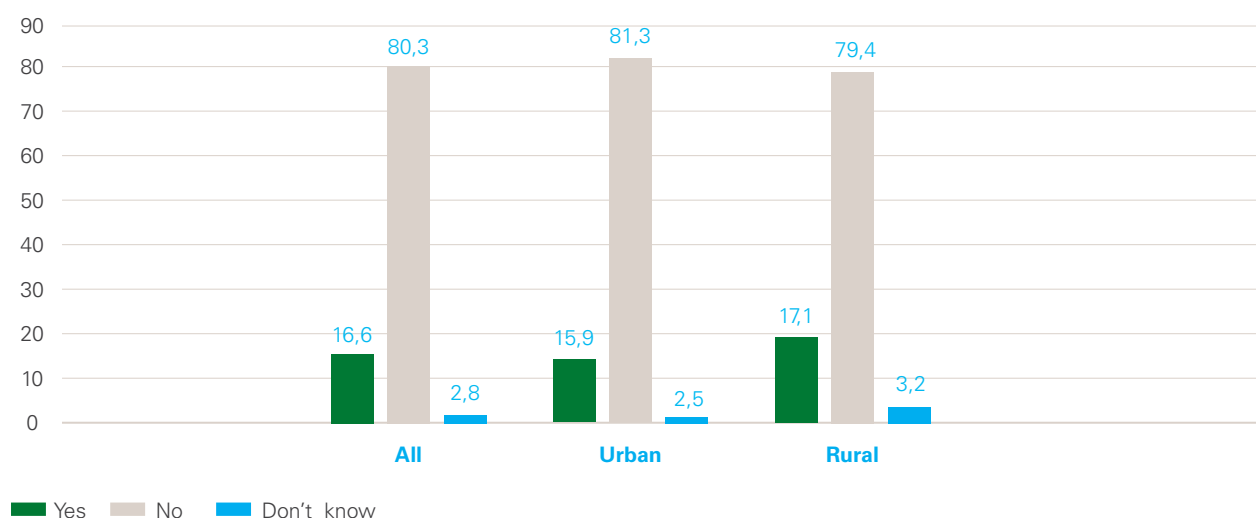
Urban Rural Male Female Total

The young people who participated in the study revealed an exceptional sense of belonging to their home villages and cities. The majority of respondents (80.3 per

cent), more in urban than in rural areas, indicated that they would not want to move to another place within Uzbekistan.

FIGURE 28

Would you like to move to another city/village within our country?

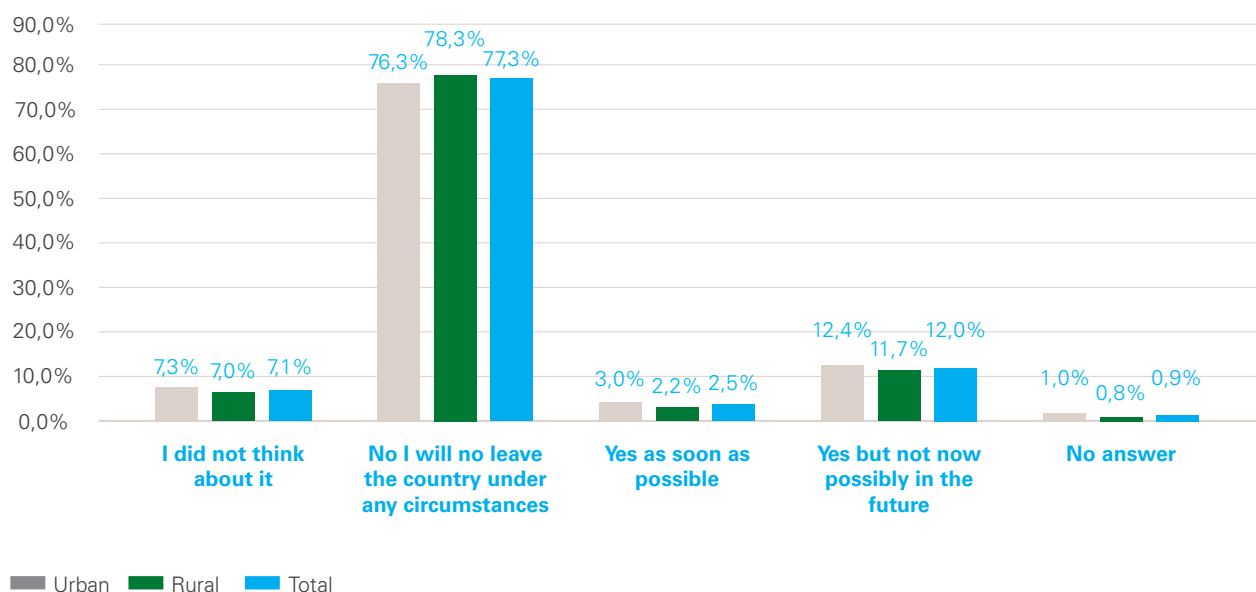


The openness among questionnaire respondents towards leaving Uzbekistan for another country is also very low - 77.3 per cent of respondents answered that

they would not leave the country "under any circumstances". It is noteworthy that young people from rural areas are even less willing to migrate than urban youth.

FIGURE 29

Thinking of leaving Uzbekistan for another country, in %



This aspect is also reflected in this exchange among female participants aged between 19 and 24 during an FGD conducted in Fergana



Young people said they took comfort in residing in an environment where everything was familiar to them, geographically but even more so socially. Many understood this native environment to be a part of their personal make up, and existential for their personal selves.

In the words of one 18-year-old male college student from Fergana: "There is a saying: 'Better be a beggar in your country than a sheikh in a foreign one.'"

Those young people, who considered migration within Uzbekistan, indicated the following primary reasons - "Improved

standard of living" (54.9 per cent); "Better/ more diverse employment opportunities" (50.0 per cent); and "Better quality of water, electricity and gas supply, as well as transportation and roads" (43.5 per cent).

The four main reasons that were indicated for (considering) migration abroad were "to receive education" (a more frequent reason among young people in urban areas), "to improve standard of living", "to improve quality of life" and "for employment and career reasons".



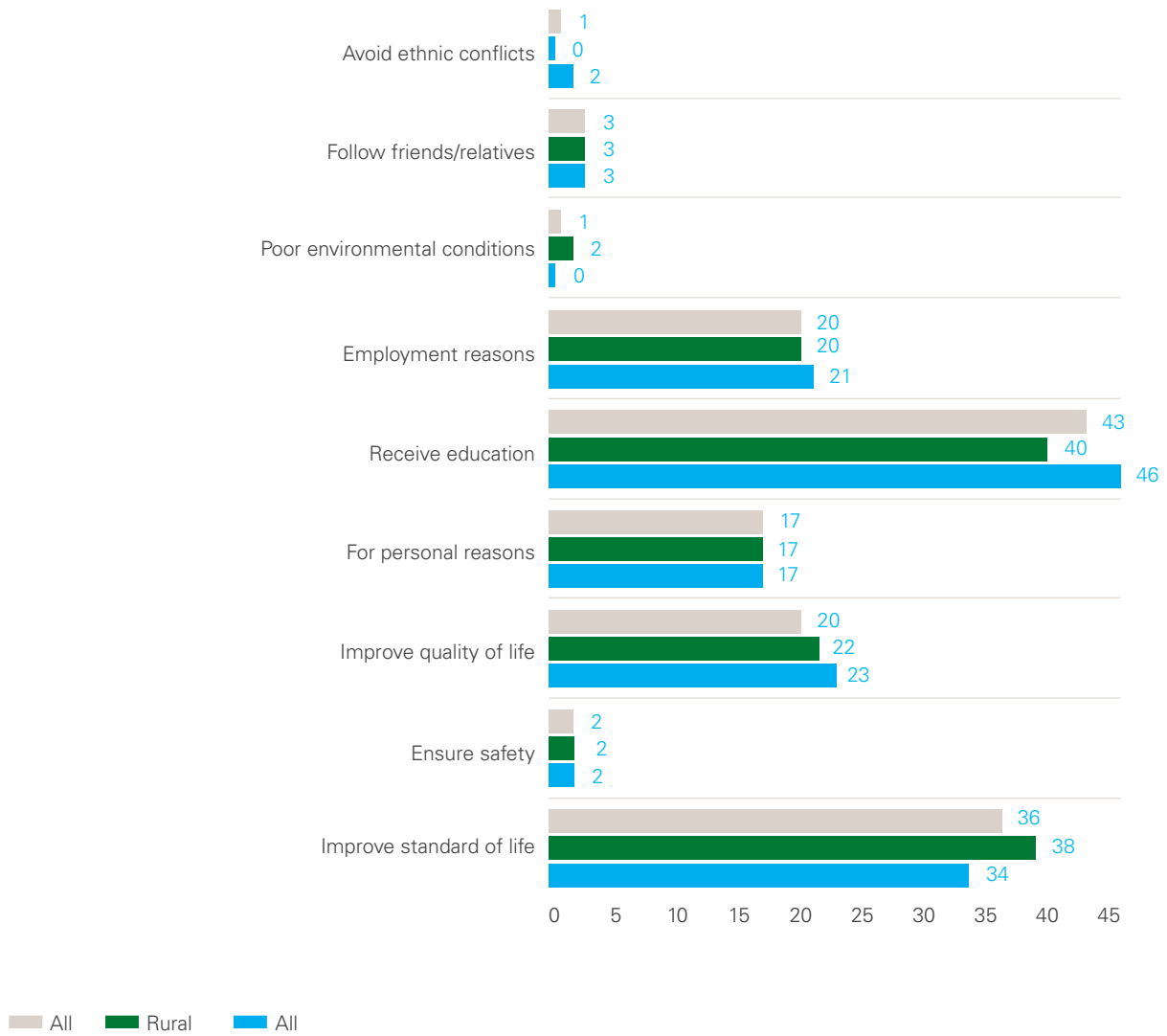
The FGDs further revealed that this strong attachment to home was often accompanied by a dislike of change and a fear of the unknown. Many participants of the study remarked that “foreign places” would have their own social “laws” which they would not be aware of, and that it thus would be almost impossible for them to grasp who could be trusted there and who not. Furthermore, many contributions during the FGDs highlighted that away from home, social relations could never be as warm and supportive.

Consider this opinion of a 22-year-old male from Andijan: “I do not want to be there [in an unknown place] like an orphan. I do not want to live far from my parents and brothers. I do not wish to live at a distance from my relatives. If all the members of my family leave, then I will also leave.”

Or this, from a 24-year-old married woman and mother from Fergana: “I was born here, and I dedicate myself to the development of my village. I do not want to move to another place and start everything anew.”

FIGURE 30

Reason to migrate, %



The voice of one 16-year-old school girl from Fergana reflected this aspect as well: “Yes, this disturbs a lot [not knowing people in a new place]. Because even from talking to them, you do not know whether they are good or bad. This is something you will not understand right away. You need time in order to understand this.”

And the voice of this 18-year-old male college student from Karakalpakstan: “But there [in a new place] everything will be different. Because there you will have strangers around you...In another country you will not have relationships with neighbours like you have here. Here, there is always a mutual exchange of everything

necessary with neighbours. And there it won't be like this.”

The study participants also mentioned possible constraints on their mobility that are tied to customary expectations. For young women, this could be the parental wish that unmarried daughters remain close to the family home in order to control the narrative of their chastity. For young men, this could be the tradition that the youngest son of a family should care for the parents as they grow old. Yet neither of these scenarios was given as much importance during the FGDs as was the personal wish to stay in familiar surroundings.

Rural and Urban Places

Young people widely agreed that a good place to live can be a rural or an urban setting. Most importantly, this place was characterized as being quiet or peaceful, and where one's family could lead a healthy and peaceful life.

As was mentioned above, respondents to the questionnaire reflected that their understanding of a “happy family” would crucially be associated with “health” (36.1 per cent) and a “peaceful life” (34.7 per cent; next to “trust and understanding”, 70.9 per cent, and “children”, 47.8 per cent).

In the words of this 18-year-old male from Fergana: “It is not important whether it's a village or a city, a good place can be anywhere. Most importantly, it is quiet and peaceful there...”

Also consider the comment of this 24-year-old woman from Samarkand: “You have to be able to live happily there, and that there is peace and calmness. And that there are all [the necessary] living conditions for you family there.”

The participants also used the FGDs to assess the differences between urban and rural living environments.

Young people agreed that as part of life in the village, a resident's first concern would often be more about the neighbourhood community than about individual aspirations. The intimate relations emerging from the neighbourhood allowed them to easily mobilize support when needed, but also carried the risk of quickly spreading gossip about inadequate public behavior. A “typical” rural resident

was characterized as having a “good soul,” which sometimes would lead them to be too trusting and almost naïve during social transactions.

In contrast, urban relations were depicted as rather anonymous, indifferent and competitive, but also as more independent and thus enabling them to pursue alternative life-styles. Urban residents accordingly were rather presented to be versed in pursuing individual benefits and to be “nimble” (shustro) than their rural counterparts.

This is reflected in the words of this 18-year-old woman from Fergana: “We have a different culture of communication [between urbanites and rurals]. It may be that the soul of our rural residents is cleaner, compared to that of urban residents...And [in our group discussion] we remarked that teachers in rural schools can express their thoughts and emotions straightforwardly, and not control their way of expressing. Therefore, children too are accustomed to expressing everything just as they like, just like their parents.”

Or consider this comment from a 20-year-old woman from urban Andijan: “Urban girls are more independent, they know how things work. Among rural girls, there are many who are simple and trusting.”

In regard to rural and urban places as material environments, cities were understood to be “civilized” and “comfortable” in terms of the availability and proximity of key facilities for everyday life. This included hospitals, schools, learning centres, shops, playgrounds and

the Internet. In contrast, study participants living in rural areas shared stories not only about the poorer quality or absence of such facilities, but also about their limited or interrupted access to such basic necessities as electricity, drinking water or gas. On the other hand, the study also registered voices that pointed to the recent improvements in rural infrastructure and connectivity.

Consider this exchange between female FGD participants in Karakalpakstan, all aged between 14 and 18

Participant 1

In the city you can sit in a café and talk to your friend...

Moderator

What else do you not have [in your home village]?

Participant 2

No education centres.

Participant 3

No kindergartens.

Participant 4

No sewing workshop for girls...

Participant 5

There is no asphalt. Walking in the rain is impossible. Your shoes get dirty. And from the dirt they wear out quickly.

Or the voice of this 15-year-old school girl from Andijan: “The electricity is turned off at 9am, and turned back on at 1pm. Electricity is especially often turned off during the winter...The water supply also stops at 9am, and late in the evening it appears again...”

At the same time, many young people from rural areas took pride in making their lesser material living conditions a secondary concern, or something they to be successfully overcome. Instead, they highlighted a number of common positive associations with villages, such as offering a more spacious, cleaner, cheaper and healthier living environment.

A 22-year-old male from Samarkand contributed this observation: "It is not right to say that everything is bad in villages. Houses are built, also playgrounds, kindergartens...Life in villages is improving, many [government] decrees have been issued."

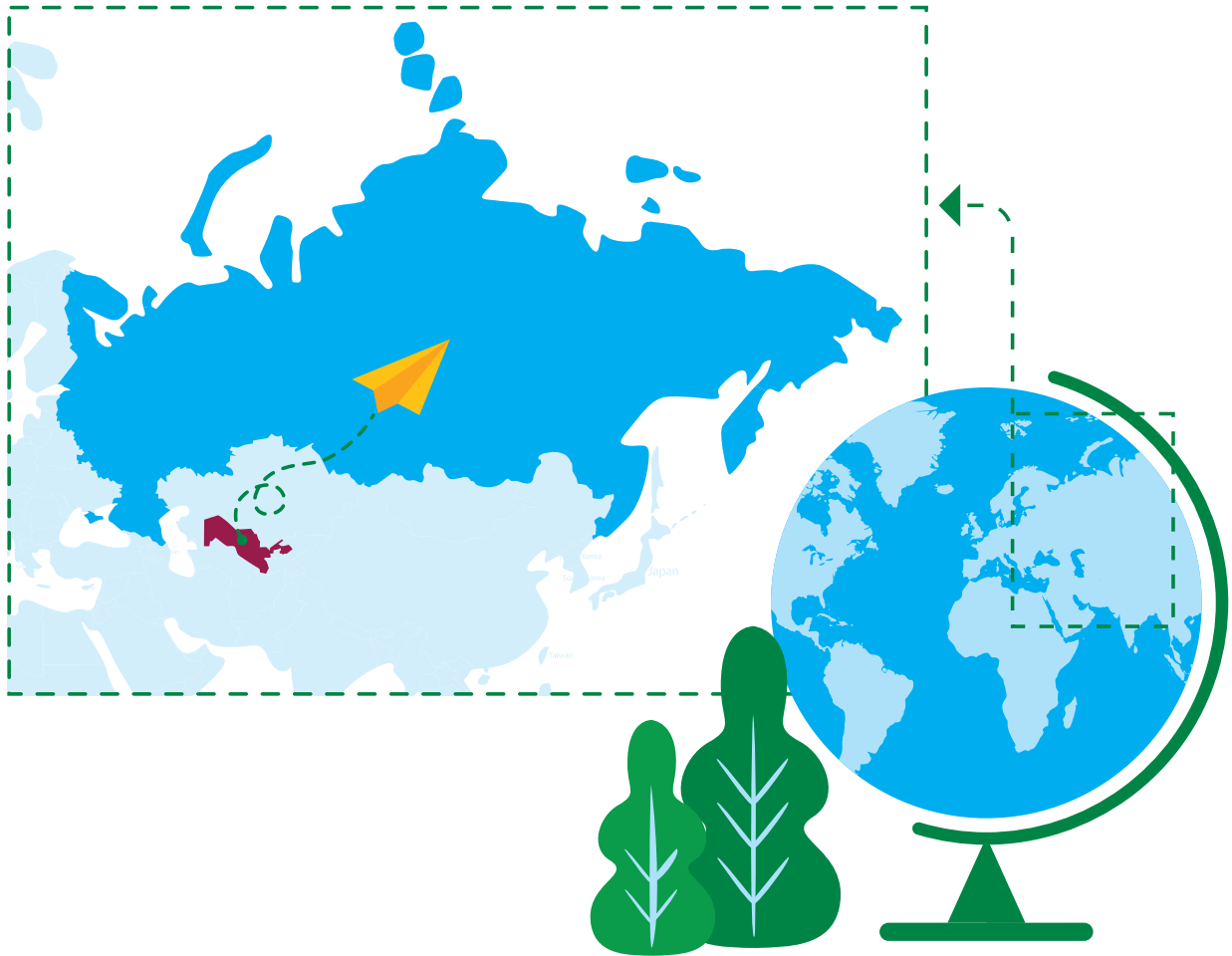
And this 19-year-old male from rural Andijan remarked: "There is no need to say that life in villages is bad. Our homeland is there, we grew up there. Yes, we do not have these [urban] conditions, we are facing difficulties. But we cope with this, because our relatives are close. In the city there are all these [comfortable] conditions, therefore life there is easier."

The study registered the key role that shared experiences and imagination about "foreign places" played for young people whenever they contemplated these as potential destinations.

Outside of Uzbekistan, Russia was at the centre of the discussions among the study participants. As the long-established primary destination for migration, it was considered attractive mainly due to its better education system and income

opportunities. The study participants reflected that achieving higher salaries in Russia would be important for being able to send money back to families and relatives in Uzbekistan, or to accumulate investment capital for starting a new career or business after having returned home.

The desire for economic success aside, the participants of the study agreed that the actual process of integrating and working for an Uzbek citizen in Russia would be demanding and might even present severe risks for one's physical and emotional integrity. Young people mentioned language barriers for those not well versed in Russian, the colder climate, social isolation, xenophobic aggression against "non-Russians", and harassment by public officials (e.g. police). For some citizens of Uzbekistan, it appears that their previous experiences in Russia would prevent them from considering labour migration again regardless of the good money earned there.



In the words of this 24-year-old male from Andijan: "Because [Russia] is a foreign land. I, for example, went last year to earn money in Russia. I wish no one to experience what I experienced there. First, not knowing the language. We do not know Russian language sufficiently. Second, not knowing their laws. There, any policeman can stop and arrest you. The employers do not respect us and we work in tough conditions. We lived with as many as 20 people in one barrack. I could stay there only three months, so I could only earn as much as my expenses for traveling there."

Or this 23-year-old male from Samarkand: "I went to work—it was very tough. I was in St. Petersburg. But if someone told me now that there was a high salary to earn, I would not go. If someone said to travel there, that in St. Petersburg there are many museums, I would go. But not for work. I put an end to this."

“Living in Tashkent is good, but it will take 5-10 years before you get used to this place and its [social] surroundings. For example, when I went into a shop, they asked me where I came from. I said that I was from Andijan, and residents of Tashkent said that they had understood right away from my dialect.”

However, also within Uzbekistan, and beyond basic urban-rural divides, the participants of the study identified the particular “mentalities” of different regions as factors complicating the integration of non-locals. During the FGDs, participants discussed social exclusion due to differing “dialects,” speech patterns or ways of pronouncing Uzbek language, such as between Andijan, Tashkent or Karakalpakstan. Others mentioned difficulties in adjusting to a particular mainstream lifestyle that in one region (e.g. Fergana) would be more “Europeanized” than in another (e.g. Andijan) in regards to tolerating females working, dressing more openly, smoking in public or driving cars.

In the voice of this 17-year-old male college student from Andijan: “Living in Tashkent is good, but it will take 5-10 years before you get used to this place and its [social] surroundings. For example, when I went into a shop, they asked me where I came from. I said that I was from Andijan, and residents of Tashkent said that they had understood right away from my dialect.”

Or the opinion of this 19-year-old female university student from Andijan: “For example, if you move from Andijan to Fergana, then the Fergana mentality differs a bit from ours. Those from Fergana are more Europeanized than we are. And, also their speech differs a bit.”

4.5 Societal Impact



Key Messages

- Young people indicate a strong interest in 'political news' and 'feel free' to express their opinion publicly, but in fact only few of them are active in public or political organizations.
- Study participants widely agree that they are excluded from decision-making and activities at the local (*mahalla*) level based on the societal perception that 'adults know better'.
- Young people advocate for a change in communicative practice between themselves and the older generation, and they consider it essential that a serious interest in youth life-experience and a proactive engagement with youth emerges.
- There is a widespread opinion that existing youth movements, in particular the Youth Union, should focus their activities more on skills-development and on improving information flow on topics relevant to educational and professional success.

Political Interest, Freedom and Activism

The questionnaire data revealed that there is a widespread interest in “political news” among young people. 45.0 per cent of respondents claimed to be “very interested”, another 30.5 per cent to be “somewhat interested”.

Respondents across rural and urban areas were both in wide agreement with the statement that “you can freely express your opinion in public”. In total, 53.2 per cent of participants “absolutely” agreed with this statement and 34.0 per cent “somewhat” agreed. However, the number of girls and young women who strongly share this opinion is considerably

lower than that of boys and young men (48.1 per cent vs 60.1 per cent).

At the same time, an 83.9 per cent majority of questionnaire respondents above 18 years of age indicated that they were not active in a public or political organization or movement.

When examining civic participation more closely, “volunteer and charity activities” stand out as the only field in which a majority of questionnaire respondents report regular involvement.

FIGURE 31

To what extent do you agree that you can freely express your opinion in public?

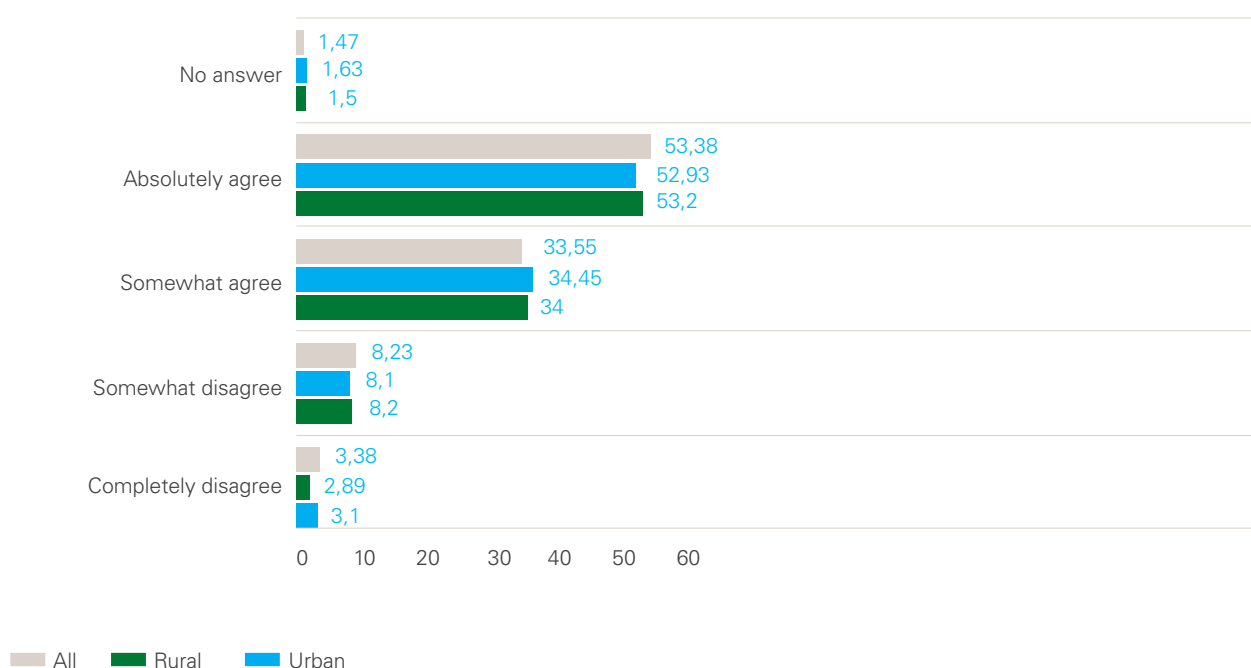


FIGURE 34

To what extent do you agree that you can freely express your opinion in public?

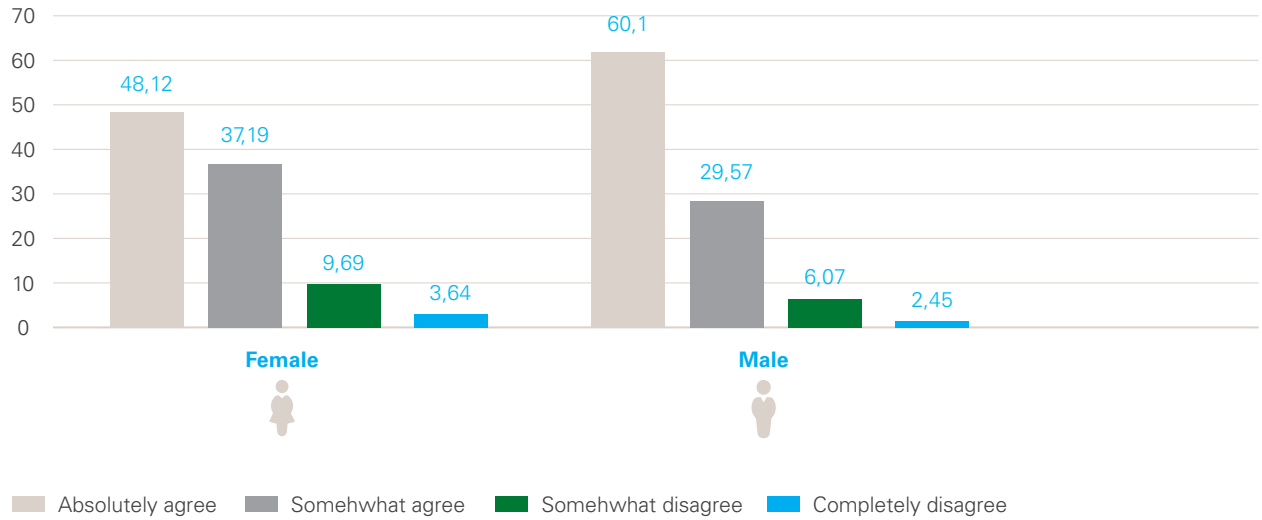


FIGURE 35

Are you involved in the activities of a public or political organization or movement?

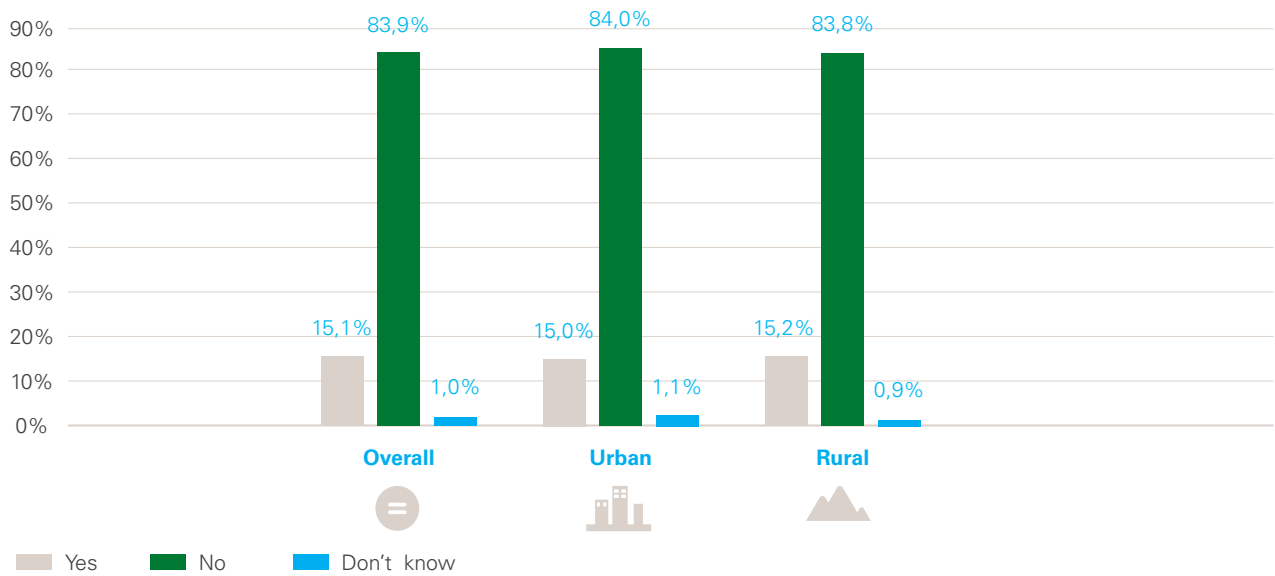
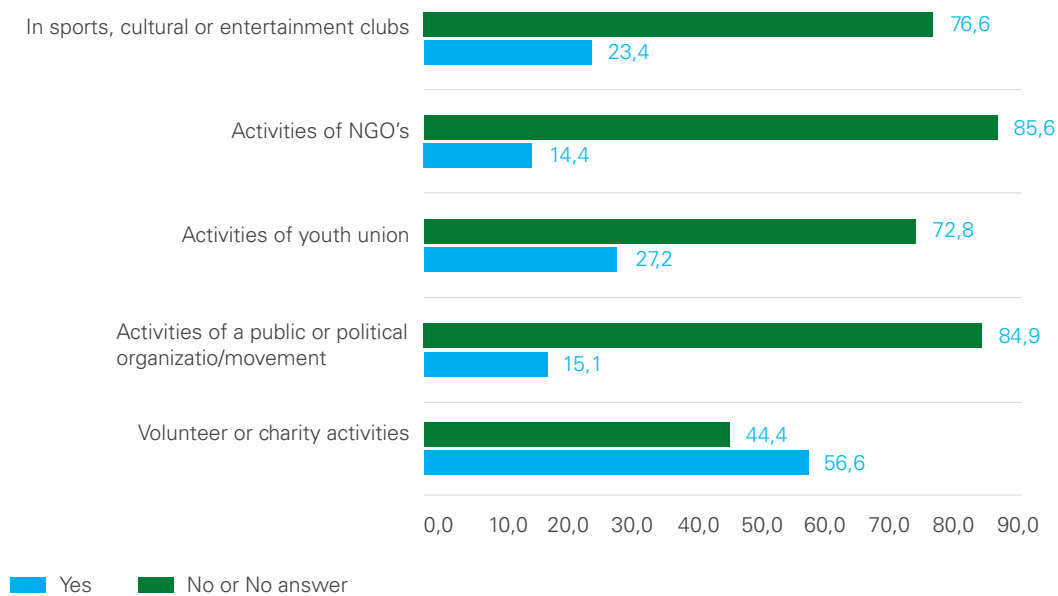


FIGURE 36

Young people are involved in the following social activities





Influence on Political and Societal Decisions

The study asked how young people view their opportunities to influence political and societal decisions. The respondents to the questionnaire reflected a reasonably strong belief in their potential to impact on change. 52.3 per cent of them indicated that there would be “many ways to influence”.

During the FGDs, it was mostly younger participants below 18 years of age who widely agreed that they have no influence on political matters. They highlighted that they were still (considered to be) “small” and that the expectation towards them would be to study well.

Consider this exchange among female participants, all aged between 14 and 18 years, during an FGD conducted in Tashkent city.

Moderator: How could you influence... societal life?

Many participants simultaneously: No, we are not influencing it...

Participant 1: [Because] we are still small!”

With the elections for a new Parliament of Uzbekistan ongoing at the time of the FGDs, this political event was prominently discussed among young participants. The opinion of many young people who had reached voting age was that generally these elections would give them a voice.

Beyond that, the study documented a picture of rather heterogenous viewpoints. Some study participants provided insights into their informed selection process of candidates and expressed confidence that this might induce positive change within their constituency. Other study participants had voted, but were skeptical about the actual impact this might have. This included voices that doubted a fair election process and speculated that candidates had already been pre-selected to pass or not by the governing authorities beforehand. It also included those that believed that candidates would be either passive or ineffective within the current political system of a presidential constitutional republic.

Still other study participants, mostly young females, remarked that they had not participated in this election. Among the reasons given for this were a lack of interest or information, that their husbands had not allowed them to vote, or that one older member had gone and voted collectively for the whole family.

Consider the opinion of this 24-year-old married woman and mother from Andijan: "I think that these elections have no meaning. I think that also in these elections they choose the deputies according to who knows who [expressing that the election results might be pre-arranged]."

In the voice of this 18-year-old female university student from Samarkand: "A medical doctor of [one local] hospital put up his candidacy. We voted for him... [Moderator: Who is 'we'?] My mother voted for him...we had heard only good things about him. Therefore, I also voted for him."

This is also reflected in the following exchange between female participants of an FGD, all between the ages of 19 and 24, conducted in Samarkand:

Participant 1: I did not participate [in the elections].

Moderator: Why?

Participant 1: Because I just got married...

Participant 2: I didn't either. Because I did not want to participate...

Participant 3: I didn't participate either. Because I am not interested. Because there is no benefit from them [the elections]. In the past, they prepared some kind of [election] programmes... But still there were no results [meaning changes] at all. And they [deputies] do not fulfill their promises, and there is nothing good coming from them...

Participant 4: [Also did not participate in the elections.] Because my husband did not let me go there...

Young people widely agreed that they had no direct influence on the local matters of their neighbourhood communities (mahalla). The role of mahalla committees in facilitating or constraining social change and impact opinion-making remained unchallenged by the study participants.

The questionnaire data revealed that 96.7 per cent of respondents across gender groups and rural and urban areas considered themselves to be part of their neighbourhood community.

FIGURE 37

To what extent do you agree that you consider yourself a part of mahalla which is your small homeland? Crosstabulation by gender and residence

		Gender		University degree		Total
		Male	Female	Has university degree	No university degree	
Completely disagree	Count	24	39	40	23	63
	% within respondent gender and university degree	1.3%	1.5%	1.9%	1.0%	1.4%
Somewhat disagree	Count	15	36	30	21	51
	% within respondent gender and university degree	0.8%	1.4%	1.4%	0.9%	1.1%
Somewhat agree	Count	453	640	602	491	1093
	% within respondent gender and university degree	24.1%	24.8%	28%	21.3%	24.5%
Absolutely agree	Count	1372	1848	1461	1759	3220
	% within respondent gender and university degree	73.1%	71.6%	68%	76.1%	72.2%
No answer	Count	13	18	15	16	31
	% within respondent gender and university degree	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%
Total	Count	1877	2581	2148	2310	4458
	% within respondent gender and university degree	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

“Young people widely agreed that they had no direct influence on the local matters of their neighbourhood communities (mahalla). The role of mahalla committees in facilitating or constraining social change and impact opinion-making remained unchallenged by the study participants. ”

During the FGDs, participants presented the mahalla as an institution that would be dominated by elders who were largely unreceptive of young peoples' viewpoints and rather aspired to silence their voices instead of integrating them into this local decision-making. The only way that some young people could imagine impacting matters in their immediate neighbourhoods was through their parents, although this was also not reported to be a channel widely used or considered effective.

Consider this collective response by several male members of an FGD, conducted in Samarkand, all between the ages of 19 and 24:

Moderator: For example, could you raise issues in your mahalla and you would be listened to?

Several participants simultaneously: No, we are not listened to. All questions are decided by the elders in a family.”

Or in the words of this 20-year-old female university student from Samarkand: “If something happens in our mahalla, then usually they [representatives] turn to our parents. But no one addresses us.”

Taking Youth Life-experience Seriously

It was particularly in this part of the study that youth expressed that they wished for their viewpoints to be taken more seriously. Participants in the FGDs advocated for a change in communicative practice between the younger and older generations in regards to matters of contemporary Uzbekistan society. They considered it essential that parents, political leaders and other authority figures would show interest in young life-experience and proactively engage with them. The participants of the study showed their receptiveness and desire to be guided by older members of their society once these had developed a better awareness of the issues relevant to young people.

In the questionnaires, 27.7 per cent of participants identified “No understanding of what we want to do in our lives” as being among the “biggest problems” that youth in Uzbekistan face today. The “inability to find a decent job” along with “a failure to acquire necessary life skills” ranked highest among the “biggest problems” as well. It is noteworthy that there was no significant difference in the responses of young people across urban and rural settlements.

Consider this exchange among female participants, all aged between 14 and 18, during an FGD conducted in Fergana. Responding to the moderator asking what participants considered necessary if they were to become members of youth organizations:

Participant 1: Paying attention to youth... We just spoke about how we do not [yet] bring any benefit to society. But this is because no one pays attention to this. It is necessary that more attention to youth is paid...

Participant 2: Our opinions need to be heard.

This aspect is also reflected in the following exchange among male participants of an FGD, aged between 14 and 18, conducted in Samarkand.

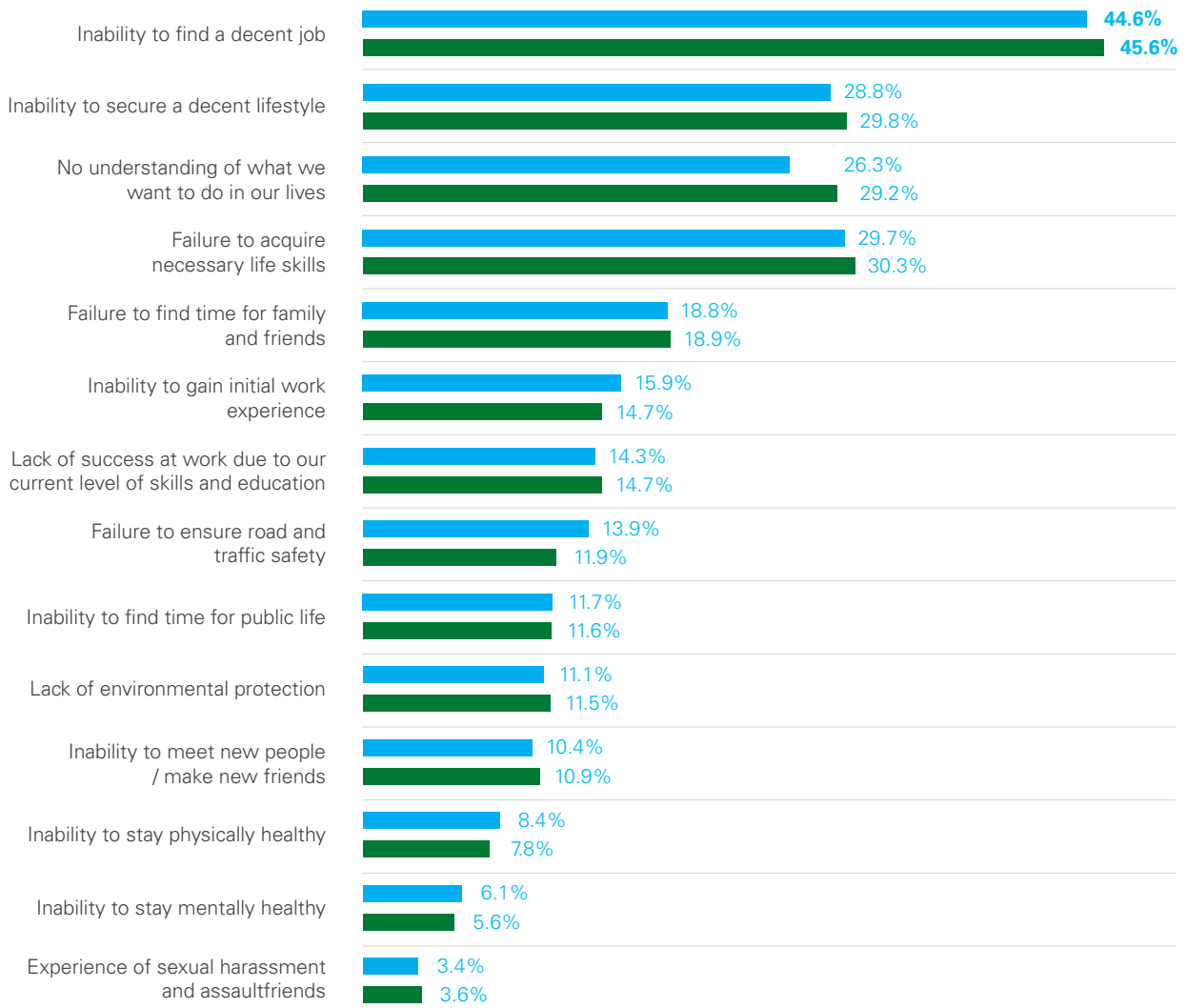
Participant 1: We can express our opinion, but we can hardly influence [anything]. We can ask questions to the people who are responsible and make certain suggestions... In matters of the neighbourhood community [mahalla] only adults intervene, we are usually not asked.

Moderator: And if you have certain suggestions?

Participant 2: We can [promote this] through our parents.

FIGURE 38

What are the three biggest problems that most young people like you face today?



■ Rural ■ Urban



“It is necessary to conduct all sorts of conversations with youth. So that you [referring to society in general] know what youth [actually] is about.”

— In the words of a 20-year-old male university student from Tashkent

The Ideal Youth Movement

During the FGDs the participants were asked which issues an ideal youth movement in present-day Uzbekistan should address. These discussions revealed that knowledge about the existing Youth Union of Uzbekistan (Ozbekiston Yoshlar Ittifoqi) and its work was limited. Study participants reported that representatives of the Union would be elected by all learning institutions in the country.

In the questionnaire, 72.1 per cent of respondents reported that they were not involved in the work of the Youth Union.

Generally, men reported being more involved than women, 30.0 per cent vs. 25.1 per cent. Moreover, the youngest respondents to the questionnaire – schoolchildren aged 14-18 years – said that they were more involved (57.2 per cent) than the older two age-groups (19-24: 14.9 per cent; 25-30: 10.1 per cent).

FIGURE 39

Are you involved in the activities of the Youth Union? Gender Crosstabulation p.80

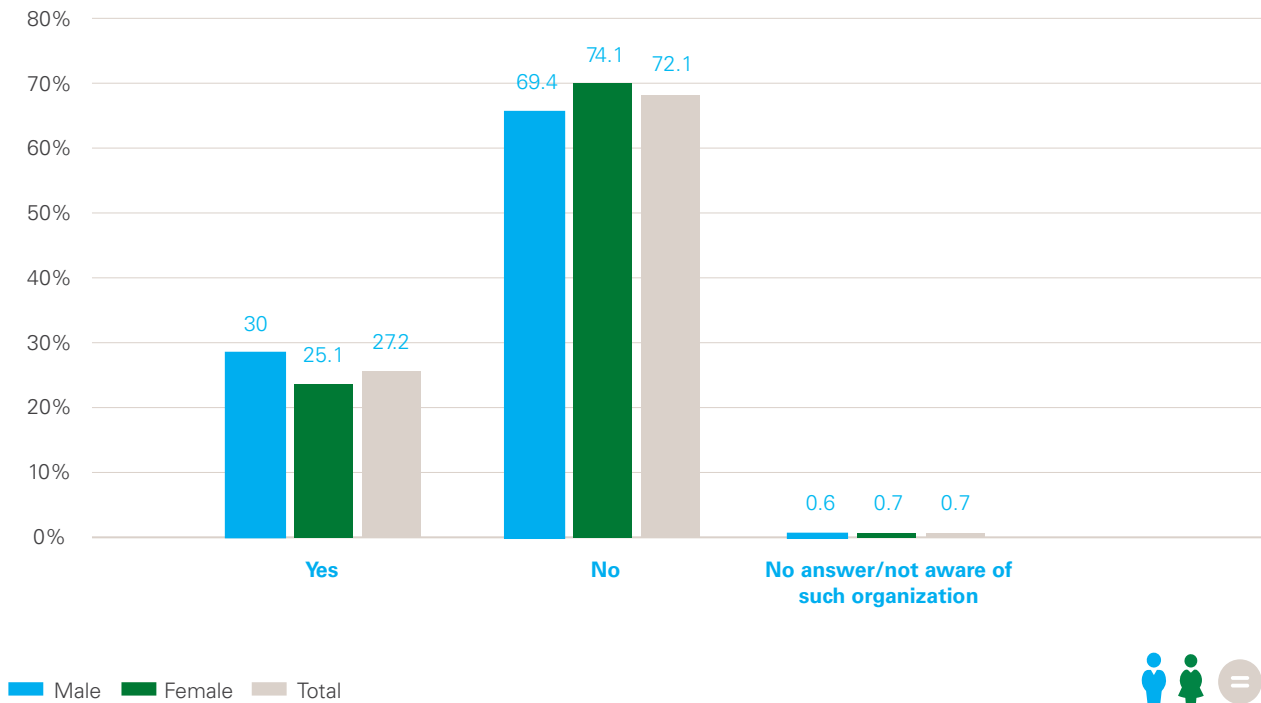
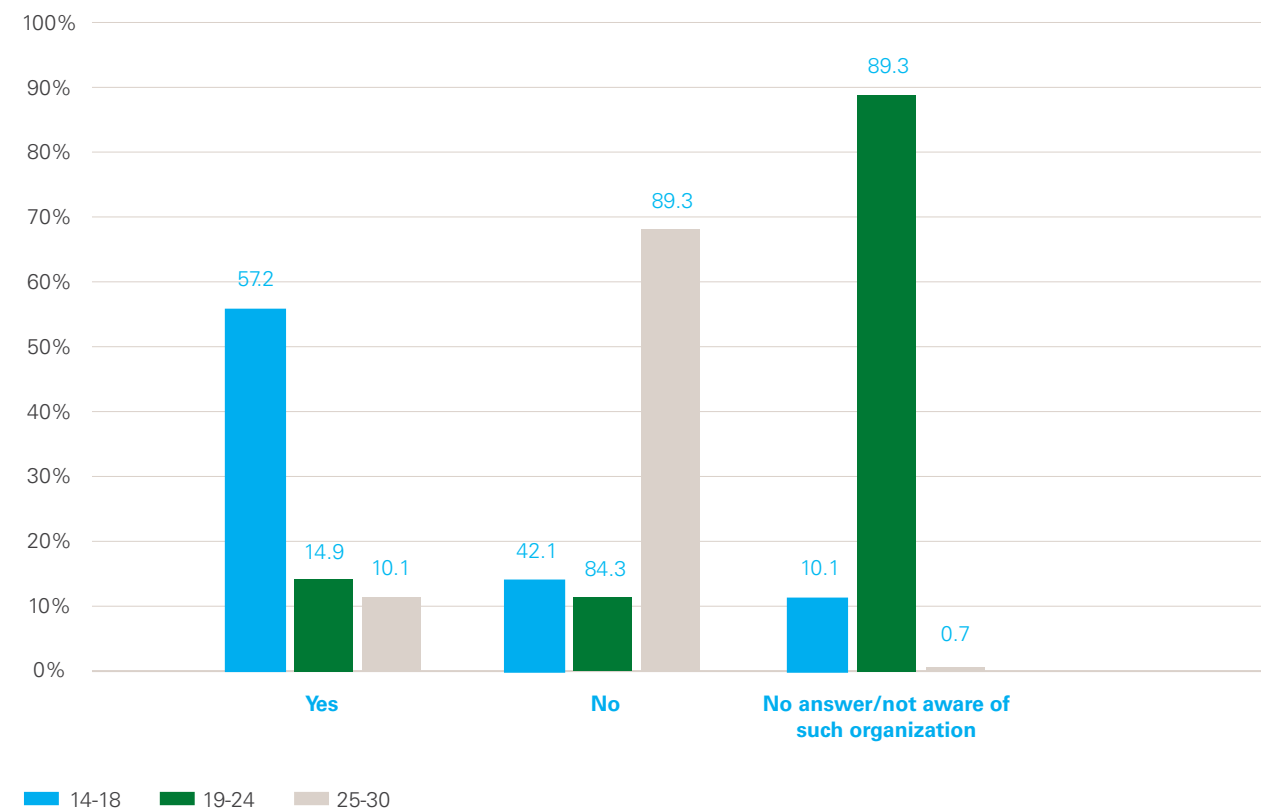


FIGURE 40

Are you involved in the activities of the Youth Union? Age Groups crosstabulation



Similarly, during the FGDs only a few participants identified themselves as being active members of the Youth Union. Those who were active members reported particularly appreciating the financial support that the Union would provide towards covering their tuition fees (which in cases of learning success apparently reached up to 35 per cent).

Among those FGD participants who claimed to be aware of the Youth Union's work, quite a number advocated for a change in approach.

They remarked that the Youth Union's activities should focus less on charity work or on hosting entertainment events, such as concerts or prize competitions. Instead, they suggested that the Youth Union should support young people to address what they regarded as their most pressing challenges and to develop the specific skill-sets which they identified as most necessary.

In particular, they wanted the Youth Union (or other youth movements) to contribute to a better flow of information on topics such as university enrolment, job market developments and loan requirements.

From the point of view of the FGD participants, a youth movement should actively contribute to decreasing the rates of youth unemployment, especially among young women and in rural areas. To achieve this, young people suggested measures against corrupt practices (*tanish-bilish*) and to offer learning clubs

(*krushki*), free of charge or at affordable prices, on biology, algebra, languages (especially Russian), business literacy and sewing. Furthermore, study participants reported that such clubs should address youth interests aside from career-development, such as different kinds of sports, sessions on "society and behavior", on psychological topics, or on advice for young, mothers-to-be.

Consider this exchange between the participants of an FGD conducted in Tashkent city, all young males between 19 and 24 years of age.

Participant 1: [Youth organizations] should provide more knowledge and practice, and someone should share their life-experiences.

Participant 2: More actions, less words.

Participant 3: There are various organizations, they gather [youth], conduct [meetings], teach... But what does it amount to? Tomorrow I will have forgotten everything, if there are no definite actions, and if these do not correspond with the words."

In the words of this 16-year-old school girl from Tashkent on the topic of learning clubs: “[Youth organizations should be] About education, that is, for clubs to be more accessible.” ... Even if they are not for free, the price should be affordable. [Moderator asks which clubs they would wish for.] Language clubs...Russian, Algebra.”

This 18-year-old male college student from Kashkadarya shared the following opinion: “At schools, clubs for children should be organized to teach them about crafts. Boys [should be taught] about what will be useful for their work in the future. For example, sewing for girls. And of course, these clubs should be free.”

From an FGD among 19 to 24-year-old females in Andijan the following comments are insightful

In Andijan, for example, it is necessary to organize a club called ‘Mother and Child’, and ‘Preparation of pregnant women for motherhood’...

— Participant 1

For young people who want to open their own company, it is now necessary to draw up a business-plan. And I would [like to] to be taught which are the necessary documents for this, and where to apply to with them.”

— Participant 2



4.5 Digital Life and the Internet



Key Messages

- While youth in Uzbekistan expresses a very strong interest to learn more about computers, there is still a significant group (37.8 per cent), composed particularly of females and rural youth, without any computer skills.
- The study identified a gap between a larger group of respondents (53.9 per cent) who 'never' use the Internet, primarily youth in rural areas and females, and a smaller group using it 'daily' (25.4 per cent), primarily urban residents and males.
- For young people in Uzbekistan, the Internet is equally a 'useful' instrument, to maintain social contacts and for study or work purposes, but also a potentially dangerous place for 'wasting time' or being exposed to 'bad influences' (which is disproportionately a constraint for females who fear stigmatization).

Computer Skills and Internet Access

The questionnaire data registered a significant group of respondents who stated that they did not know “at all” how to use a computer (37.8 per cent). Computer skills appear to be slightly more widespread in urban than in rural settlements. More females (43.5 per cent) than males (30.0 per cent) responded that they had no computer skills “at all”.

There is a strong desire among young people in Uzbekistan to “find out more” about computers, 86.9 per cent in total. Younger respondents (aged 14-18) in particular were more eager to gain further knowledge in this domain (92.9 per cent) than respondents from older age-groups (83.3 per cent among 25-30-year-olds).



FIGURE 41

Would you like to learn how to use a computer or to find out more about it? Age groups crosstabulation

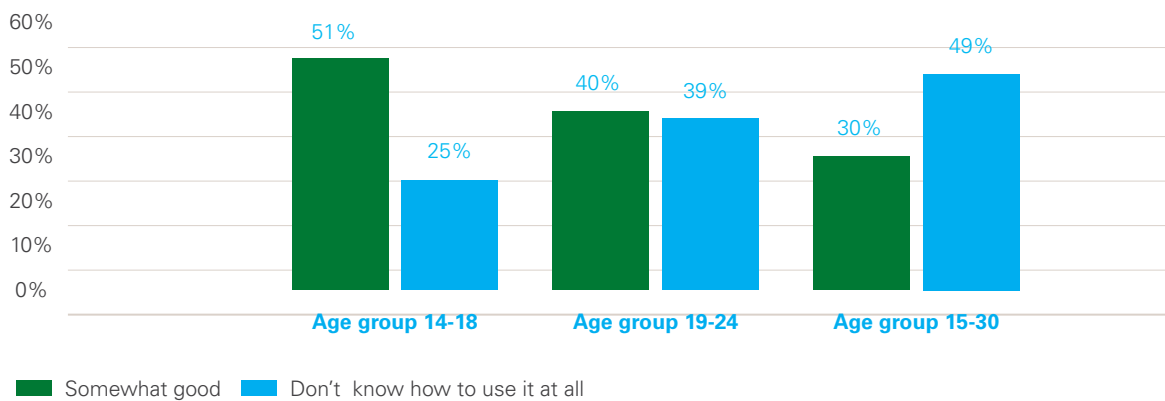
	14-18	19-24	25-30	Total
Yes	92.9%	84.5%	83.3%	86.9%
No	6.5%	13.1%	15.3%	11.7%
Don't know	0.6%	2%	1%	1.2%
No answer		0.3%	0.5%	0.3%

The questionnaire registered a significant gap in computer knowledge between age-groups: only 24.9 per cent of those aged 14-18 claim to have no computer skills “at all”, as compared to 39.2 per cent of those aged 19-24, and 49.2 per cent of those

aged 25-30. Correspondingly, “somewhat good” skills were found to be more widespread among the 14-18 age-group (50.8 per cent) and least among the age-group 25-30 (30.3).

FIGURE 35

How good or poor are your computer skills? “Somewhat good” vs “Don’t know” how to use it at all”, disaggregated by age-groups



With regards to Internet usage, the questionnaire identified a significant gap between a larger group of respondents who said they “never” used it (53.9 per cent) and smaller groups who stated they used it “weekly” (11.3 per cent) or even “daily” (25.4 per cent). It is noteworthy

that employed young people most often use the Internet daily, while the largest share of youth who never use the Internet is among NEET young people (66.1 per cent). Over half (55.7 per cent) of young people in education indicated that they never use the Internet.

FIGURE 42

How frequently do you use Internet? Disaggregated settlement type, age 14-30 y.o.

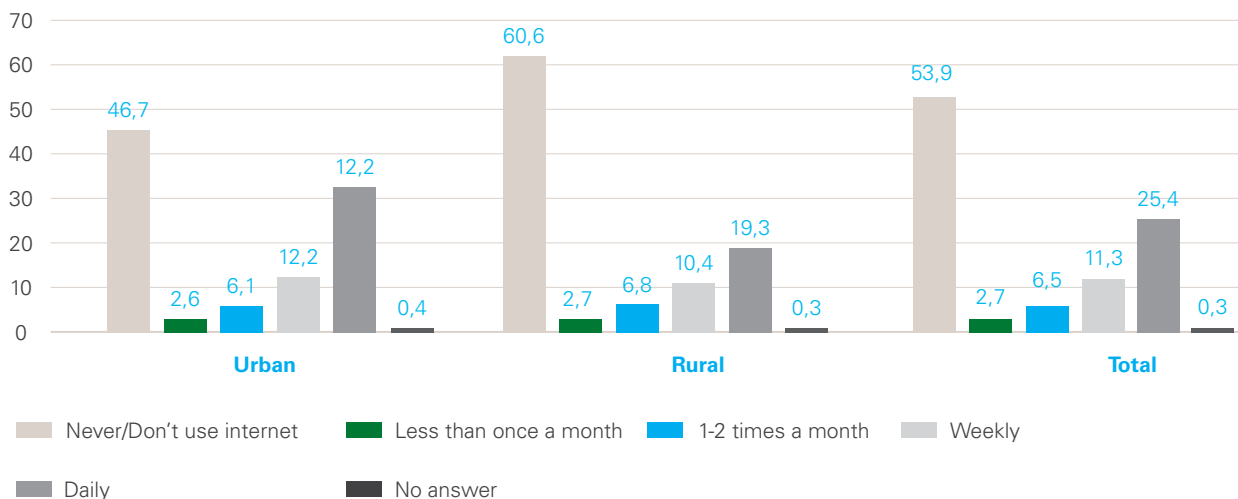


FIGURE 43

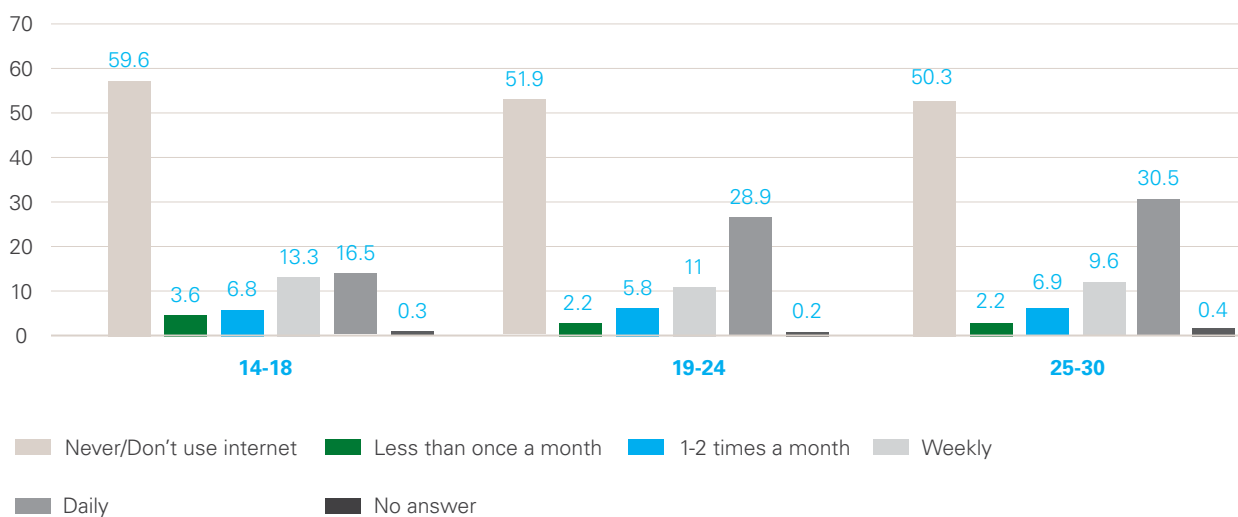
How frequently do you use Internet? Disaggregated by occupation

		NEET	Employed	Student	Total
1-2 times a month	Count	89	82	118	289
	% within respondent occupation	5.4%	7.5%	6.9%	6.5%
Daily	Count	297	485	349	1131
	% within respondent occupation	18%	44.4%	20.4%	25.4%
Less than once a month	Count	39	21	59	119
	% within respondent occupation	2.4%	1.9%	3.4%	2.7%
Never/Don't use the Internet	Count	1092	357	953	2402
	% within respondent occupation	66.1%	32.7%	55.7%	53.9%
No answer	Count	6	2	6	16
	% within respondent occupation	0.4%	0.2%	0.4%	0.3%
Weekly	Count	130	146	227	503
	% within respondent occupation	7.9%	13.4%	13.3%	11.3%
Total	Count	1653	1093	1712	4458
	% within respondent occupation	100%	100%	100%	100%

When examining age-groups, it was noticeable that the rate of respondents "never" using the internet decreases with age, while the rate of those using it "daily" increases with age.

FIGURE 44

How frequently do you use Internet? Age groups crosstabulation



The Internet as a Useful and Dangerous Place

Youth in Uzbekistan reflected on the Internet as both a useful and a dangerous place. The participants of the study identified multiple functionalities of the Internet for their everyday lives. The Internet was portrayed as a key resource for obtaining educational information that youth otherwise found challenging to access. This included exam templates and scientific literature, especially in Uzbek, Russian and English.

In the individual interviews, 60.7 per cent of respondents chose the option “search data/information on the Internet for your tests, courses, diploma papers, studies” less often than “twice a month.” 38.5 per cent registered that they do so at least every week. However, another 31.5 per cent of respondents registered that they “never” do so.

Consider this comment from a 15-year-old female schoolchild from Tashkent city: “But the Internet is at 50 per cent bad, and 50 per cent good.”

Or this one from a 24-year-old married man from Samarkand: “If we take students, then now they often use the Internet during their studies because there are digital books. In most cases, libraries do not give out books [for borrowing]. In digital books, there are test modules from which you can take information. The Internet has many useful sides.”

Socially, the Internet was depicted by many study participants as a comfortable instrument with which to keep in touch with “nearest and dearest”, particularly with those who were currently abroad, for example as labour migrants in Russia.

From the questionnaire, a diverse picture emerged about online chatting. 33.1 per cent of the respondents indicated that they “rarely” or “never” chat online. The questionnaire also documented that younger respondents (14-18) claim to “never” chat online (26.6 per cent) compared to older respondents aged 19-24 and 25-30 (17.0 per cent and 17.5 per cent respectively).

With regards to participating “in discussions” on social networks, it is noteworthy that 72.1 per cent of the respondents reported to “never” do so or “rarely” do so (51.0 per cent and 21.1 per cent respectively). However, 15.5 per cent do so “every other day” or “every day” (7.2 per cent and 8.3 per cent respectively).

At the same time, young people were cautious of the Internet. Many study participants identified it as a potential source of “bad influence”, mentioning terrorist recruitment or the recent case of an online game (called “Blue Whale”) that had lured some youth across the former Soviet space into self-harm and even suicide. Also, study participants expressed the opinion that the Internet could become a considerable “waste of time” time and make people “lazy”.

In the words of one 15-year-old school girl from Karakalpakstan: “Now everyone at school has a private mobile phone. And sometimes guys from our class watch indecent video-clips, and share them amongst each other. Or they go onto the Internet and play games, which do not give them anything [i.e. are a waste of time].”

"I have brothers, born in 1994 and 1996. Since 2011, my older brother has often gone to Russia [on labour migration]. The Internet and social media help us to always be in touch. I can talk to them, see them, even if they are far away."

— In the words of a 19-year-old male college student from Fergana





Rural and Urban Differences in Digital Life

The study found significant differences between Internet use in the villages and cities of present-day Uzbekistan.

During the FGDs, young people living in rural areas shared stories of disconnectedness, citing slow Internet speed and said that gaining access would be comparatively expensive. The latter remark referred not only to the general situation of cash-shortages in many village settings, but also that reaching the next urban centre with acceptable Internet access was associated with transportation expenses. At the other hand, some rural study participants mentioned that even in these circumstances downloading a book from the Internet would be cheaper than buying a paper-copy of the same publication.

The questionnaire found that the rate of those claiming to “never use” the Internet differs between urban (46.7 per cent) and rural settlements (60.6 per cent). Similarly, the daily use rate was registered to be higher in urban settlements (31.9 per cent) and lower in rural settlements (19.3 per cent).

Furthermore, the questionnaire data showed that distinctions between the chatting behavior of rural and urban respondents became most apparent in regards to their “daily” use, which was marked at 35.5 per cent for urban dwellers vs. 27.5 per cent for rural dwellers.

These insights reveal that when access to the Internet is restricted, for technical or economic reasons, the functionality of available computers and mobile phones, which is the primary instrument to access the Internet for young people, is significantly reduced.

In the words of a 24-year-old married woman and mother from Kashkadarya: “We [among FGD participants] think that in the present conditions in our area, the Internet is not very important. There are libraries in schools so that children can study. Many parents do not allow their children to use the Internet, because it can spoil their social upbringing. We rarely use the Internet. Maybe someone who is working might be in need of it.”

“These insights reveal that when access to the Internet is restricted, for technical or economic reasons, the functionality of available computers and mobile phones, which is the primary instrument to access the Internet for young people, is significantly reduced. ”

Or in the voice of this 16-year-old school boy from Kashkadarya: “The Internet would now help me a lot during preparations for university enrolment. I drive to the city to a tutor. He gives me a print-out of the [learning] materials, which he gets from the Internet. If the speed in my area would allow it, I could do that while sitting at home, not driving to the city for it.”

And consider this exchange between the male participants of an FGD, all aged between 14 and 18 years, conducted in Karakalpakstan:

Participant 1: One of my friends is working in Moscow. So, he worked out...that for 14.000 Sum [approx. \$1.5] he can receive unlimited mobile Internet access [there]. But I pay 40.000 Sum [approx. \$4.0] per month for 5 Megabytes. And this traffic is only enough for me for 10 days.

Participant 2: [In Uzbekistan] We also have unlimited Internet for 169.000 Sum [approx. \$17].

In contrast, young people residing in urban areas spoke not only about better digital infrastructure, but also about the wider spread of the Internet into different life domains. This included the labour market and stories of how study participants found employment through websites or agencies. It also included trade and the buying and selling of certain goods via online platforms.

Or the reflection of this 16-year-old school girl from rural Andijan: “No, finding work through the Internet is difficult in the village. However, sometimes employment advertisements are posted in private messages via Telegram. These advertisements we notice... One example: you find work through the Internet, but it is not in your village but in a different region. Then you could drive there, have a look, get acquainted [with the conditions and employer] and only after that take up this work.”



In the words of this 22-year-old female university student from Tashkent city about her side-job: "Yes, I found it [the job] through the Internet. I worked as a cashier at a cinema. They took me without any work experience, they trained me. But maybe two years ago it would have been difficult to find work [via the Internet]."

— 22-year-old female university student from Tashkent city about her side-job

"No, finding work through the Internet is difficult in the village. However, sometimes employment advertisements are posted in private messages via Telegram. These advertisements we notice... One example: you find work through the Internet, but it is not in your village but in a different region. Then you could drive there, have a look, get acquainted [with the conditions and employer] and only after that take up this work."

— Reflection of this 16-year-old school girl from rural Andijan



Gender and the Internet

Young people revealed that Internet use is gendered and tied to cultural notions. Female participants of the study said that they receive information online about recipes, fashion styles, child-rearing and sewing. Male participants mentioned that they were interested mainly in car models or sports.

The study also registered a gender divide in regards to Internet accessibility.

Whereas young men did not indicate any constraints, quite many young women reported that their use of the Internet and communication technology was limited.

The questionnaire registered a significantly lower rate of never using the Internet for males than for females. Correspondingly, the “daily” use rate is lower among females (16.1 per cent) than among males (38.1 per cent). Furthermore, 27.0 per cent of the female respondents reported that they “never” chat online, as compared to 15.2 per cent of males.

“The study also registered a gender divide in regards to Internet accessibility. Whereas young men did not indicate any constraints, quite many young women reported that their use of the Internet and communication technology was limited.”

While marriage could be found to generally increase the rate of respondents never using the Internet, this difference in this increase is significantly gendered. The number of female respondents who never

use the Internet is significantly higher than that of males and increases even more with marriage.

FIGURE 45

How frequently do you use Internet? Disaggregated by gender, age 14-30 y.o.

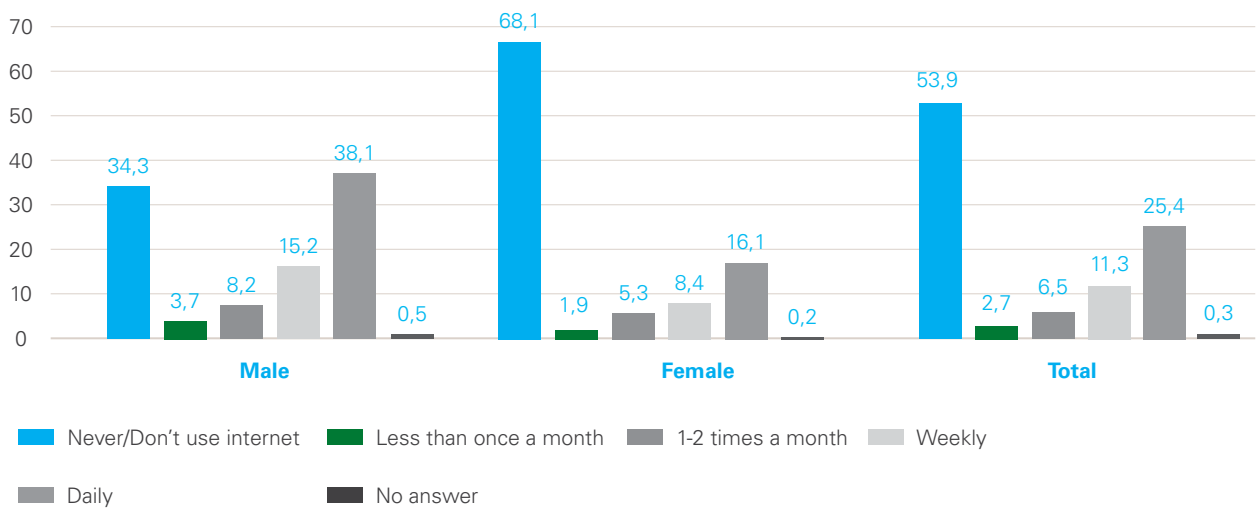
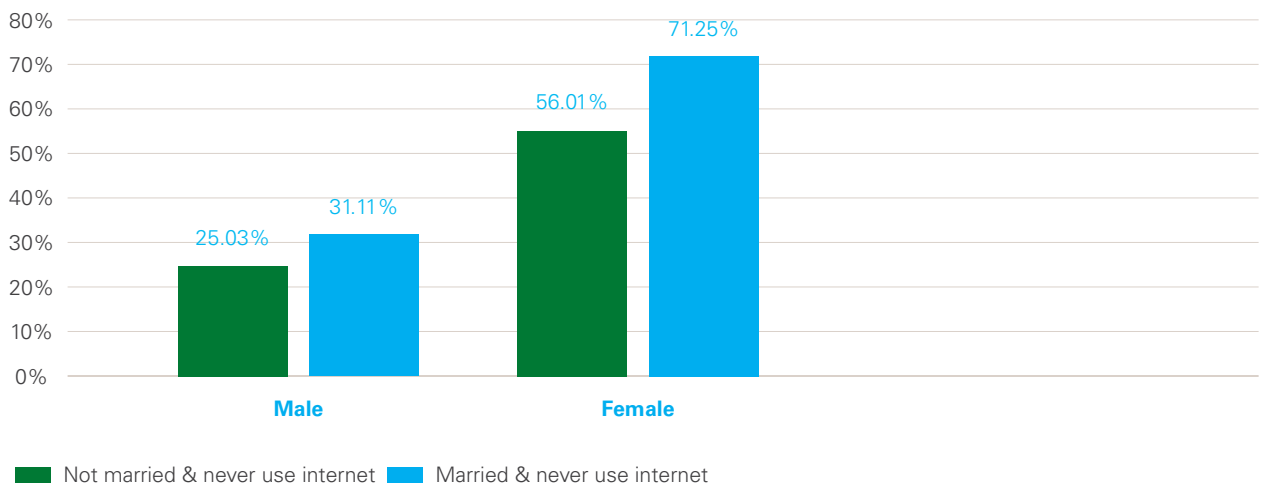


FIGURE41

Never using the internet: Unmarried vs married males & females



Life Without the Internet

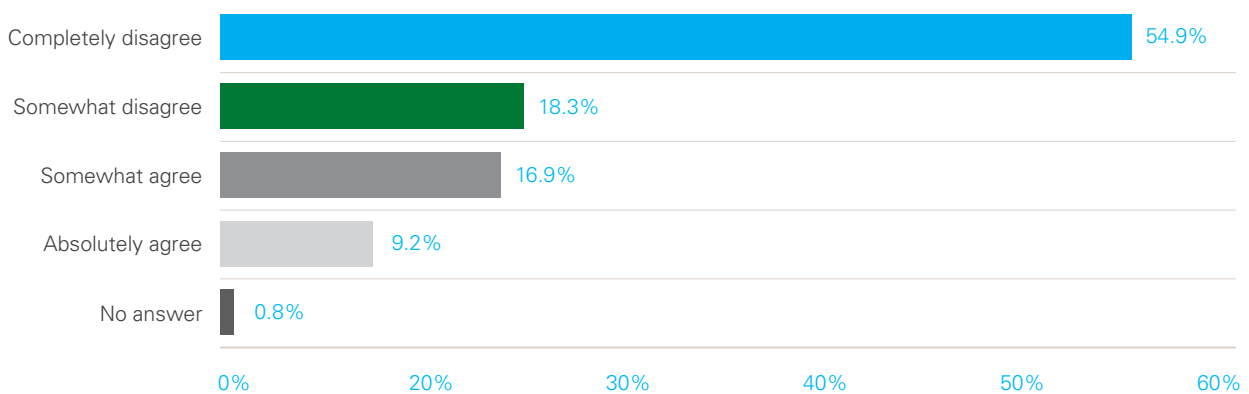
Many participants of the study claimed that they could easily live without the Internet.

When asked “to what extent would you agree that you cannot imagine

your life without the Internet?”, only a combined 26.1 per cent of questionnaire respondents agreed. In contrast, 54.9 per cent disagreed “completely”.

FIGURE 46

To what extent would you agree that you cannot imagine your life without the Internet?



During the FGDs, participants were quick to think about adjustments to that scenario, such as using libraries instead of downloading books and writing letters or using landline phones instead of sending their messages via the popular Telegram application.

For those study participants residing in rural areas, this might be explained by the fact that the Internet generally is less functional for them than for their urban counterparts. For young women in rural areas, cultural constraints must be added to technical and economic reasons. However, quite a large number of urban young people pointed out the beneficial potential that life without (or with less) Internet use could have bring people closer again.

In the voice of this 22-year-old woman from Tashkent city on life without the Internet: “We would spend more time in the fresh air. We would go for a walk more often. We would devote more time to the our nearest and dearest. That is what happens when the Internet is off, because the money [on the prepaid SIM-card] has run out or there is no electricity.”

Or this insight offered by a 19-year-old male from rural Fergana: “Many use the Internet for bad purposes. The Internet is not such a necessary thing that people could not live without it. I, for example, have not gone on the Internet for four months. I learn about the news during meetings in the neighbourhood community. This is more like real life.”

4.7

Concerns, Leisure and the End of Youth



Key Messages

- While young people in Uzbekistan generally consider themselves 'happy', there is also a significant number who admit to 'feeling sad or depressed' regularly (26.5 per cent at least once a week).
- Study participants reported high levels of health satisfaction (79.7 per cent at least 'good'), but critical comments about the health system point to inadequate conditions in rural areas and the overall high costs of good-quality treatment or medicine.
- The major areas for improvement identified by Uzbekistan's youth are better-quality education and training, effective measures against youth unemployment and low incomes, as well as addressing societal issues of early marriage/divorce and a disconnect between older and younger generations.
- The potential to enjoy leisure time is lower in rural areas and among females due to increased responsibilities with farm, household and care-work.
- Young people in Uzbekistan revealed an extremely varied perception of when their youth would come to an end, with explanations ranging from specific ages (up to 60), to the status of being married or becoming a parent.

Happiness and Health

The questionnaire data registered that young people generally considered themselves “very happy” (67.0 per cent) or “somewhat happy” (30.2 per cent). Gender, settlement type or age seemed not to significantly change this overall state of happiness.

At the same time, the questionnaire identified a significant number of young people across urban and rural areas who admitted to “feeling sad or depressed” regularly. A combined 26.5 per cent of participants expressed to feel this at least once a week (“about once a week” - 7.5 per cent, “two or three times a week” - 7.6 per cent, “almost every day” - 7.2 per cent, “every day” - 4.2 per cent).

According to the World Happiness Report (2020), Uzbekistan took 38th place among 153 happiest countries in the world in 2017-2019. Uzbekistan’s indicator is the best in the CIS, where Kazakhstan took the 50th place, Moldova - 70, Tajikistan - 71, Russia - 73, Kyrgyzstan - 74, Belarus - 75, Azerbaijan - 89, Turkmenistan - 95 and Armenia - 116.

FIGURE 47

Thinking about your life, do you consider yourself a happy or unhappy person? (%)

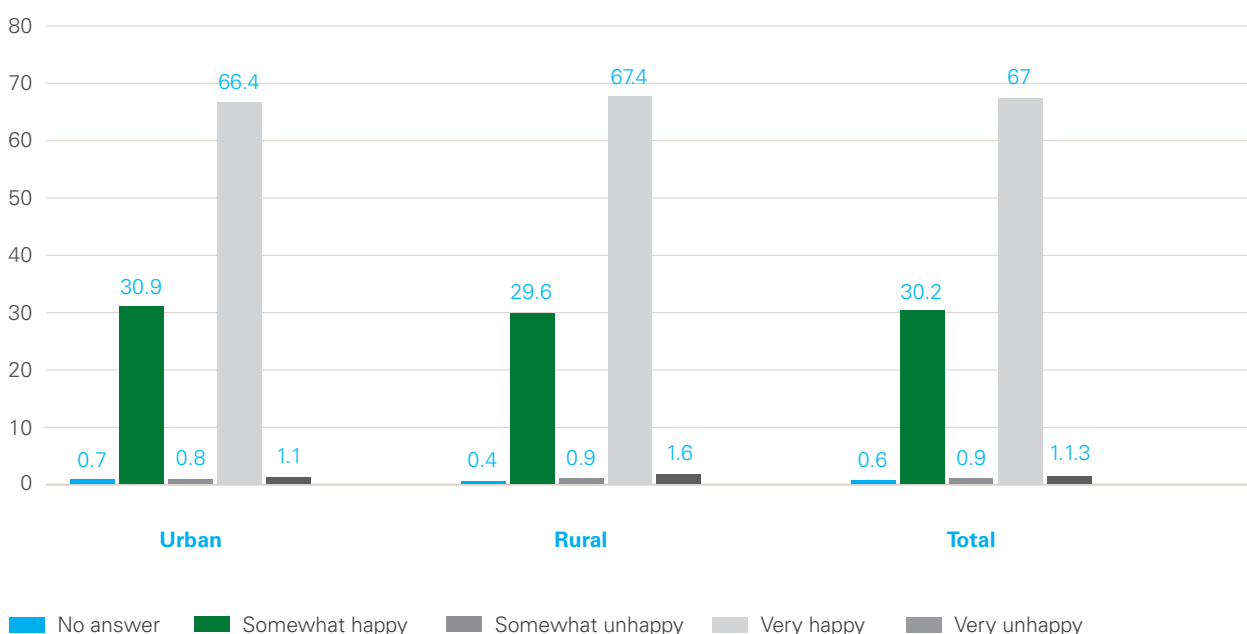
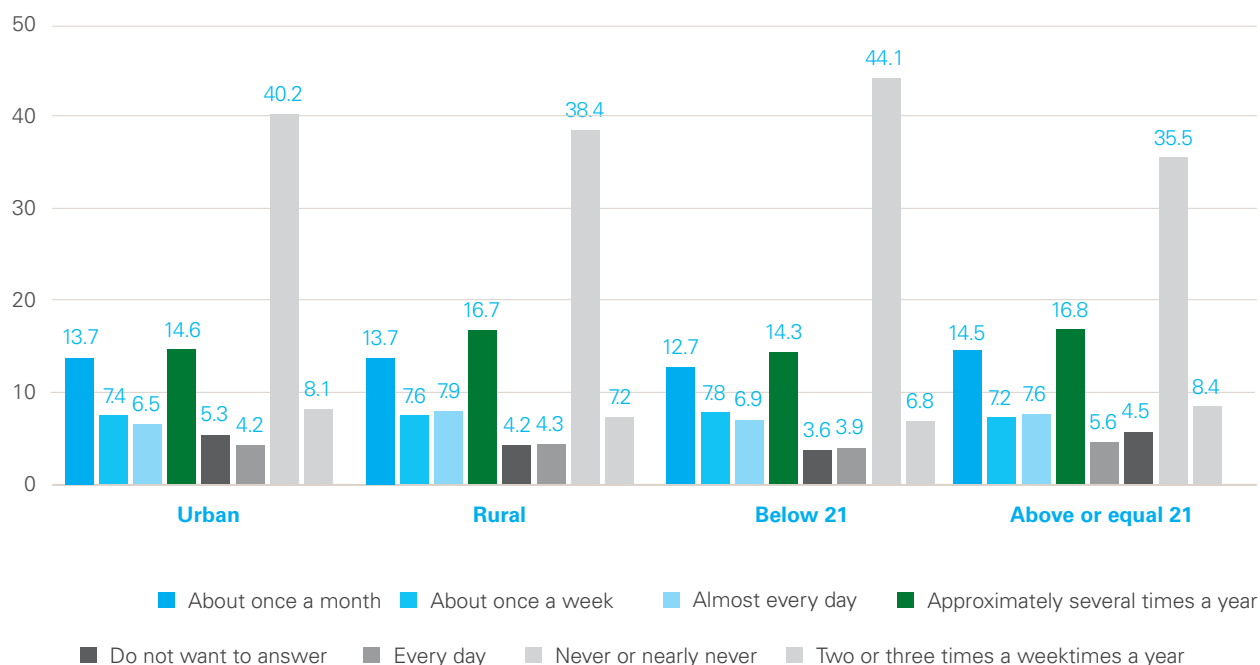


FIGURE 48

How often do you feel sad or depressed? (%) By gender and age



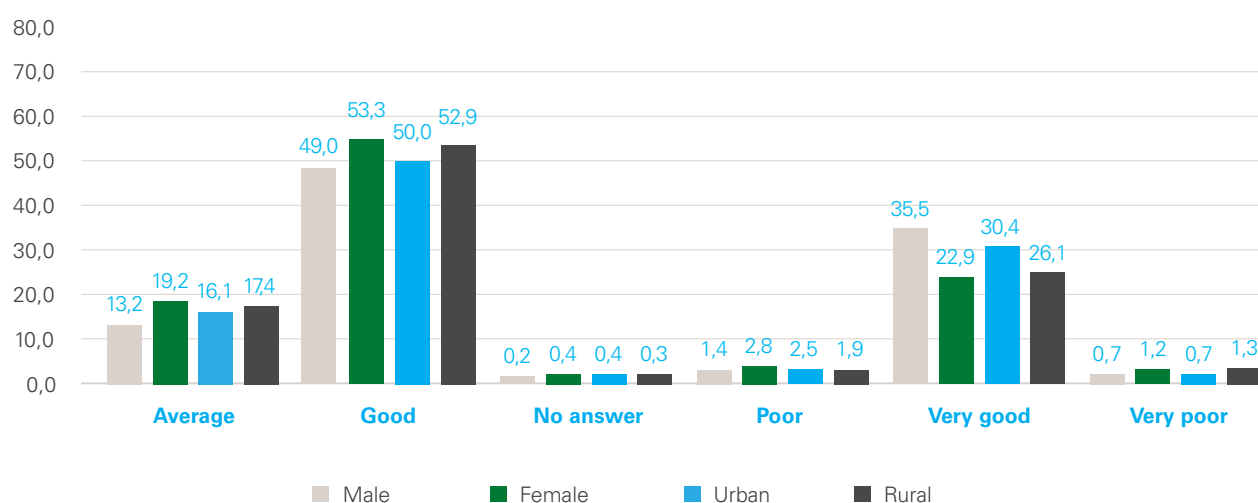
More male respondents than female ones claimed to “never or hardly ever” feel sad or depressed (46.9 per cent vs. 33.7 per cent). Similarly, the youngest participants (aged 14-18) were more likely to respond that they “never or hardly ever” feel sad or depressed compared to older ones: 46.2 per cent (14-18) vs. 38.1 per cent (19-24) vs. 33.7 per cent (25-30).

Evidence demonstrates a high and raising suicide and self-injury rate among adolescents aged 10-19 years, indicating a significant prevalence of mental health problems among young people. In 2016 the suicide and self-injury mortality rates were 19.6 per 100,000 population for children aged 10-19 years. This has increased consistently from year to year and has almost doubled since 2008.¹⁵

The questionnaire respondents indicated a high level of self-reported health satisfaction. Only 3.2 per cent of respondents considered their health status to be below “average”. Comparing the age-groups represented in the questionnaire, it is noteworthy that the self-declared status of “very good” health decreased from 37.0 per cent among those aged 14-18 to 21.4 per cent among those in the age-range 25-30. Moreover, more male respondents and respondents residing in urban areas identified their health as very good in comparison with young women and respondents from rural areas.

15. TransMonEE Database (2018)

FIGURE 49
Self-reported health



During the FGDs, participants shared more openly critical experiences of the current health system in Uzbekistan.

Residents in rural areas reported on inadequate conditions in local, state hospitals in regards to outdated equipment and the lower qualifications of medical personnel. Their stories indicated that in order to receive higher-quality treatment, rural residents would usually need to turn to private medical facilities in urban centres, which was often equated with travelling to Tashkent city.

A second concern for many FGD participants referred to the high expenses incurred in the purchase of medical drugs and to receive treatment compared to regular household incomes. Participants reflected that in situations of serious illness they could only rely on the help from family members or close relatives to raise the large amounts of money necessary. Aside from deficiencies in its performance, participants indicated their discontent with the corrupt commercialization of the public health care system and the lack of state support for medical matters more generally.

“We are worried about the health of our relatives and nearest and dearest. Because being sick is very expensive, all the medicine must be paid for. In the village there is no adequate hospital. In case something happens to someone, we need to drive to Tashkent for treatment. Local hospitals do not have modern equipment like in Tashkent.”

— 18-year-old male college student from Kashkadarya



Consider this exchange among female participants, aged 14-18, during an FGD conducted in Andijan:

Participant 1: During their medical examination, the height and weight of 1st and 2nd grade schoolchildren are measured, and a blood sample is taken for analysis. In the village medical centre, this medical examination is for free but they take money anyway. And they do not measure height and weight, or take a blood sample for analysis. They only fill in some papers...

Participant 2: But you [the schoolchildren] are getting together the money anyway in order not to go through this medical examination!

Participant 1: No, we are not getting together the money! The medical doctors are demanding money from us.

Participant 3: This is corruption. It is [really] necessary to stop corruption in the sphere of health care.

This was the story shared by an 18-year-old male from Fergana: "I was seriously ill myself. I received help only from my family and those nearest me. I was lying in the hospital. My parents spent a lot of money on my treatment. They were also supported by our relatives. Now all my treatment is paid for. You need to pay for everything. Medical drugs are expensive, too. We had it hard, back then. Support came only from close relatives. No one else cares what happens to you."

Major Concerns: Education/Training, Employment/Income, Trust/Guidance

Some of the aspects contained in this section have already been touched on before. However, the fact that the study participants mentioned them explicitly among their major concerns speaks to their particular relevance.

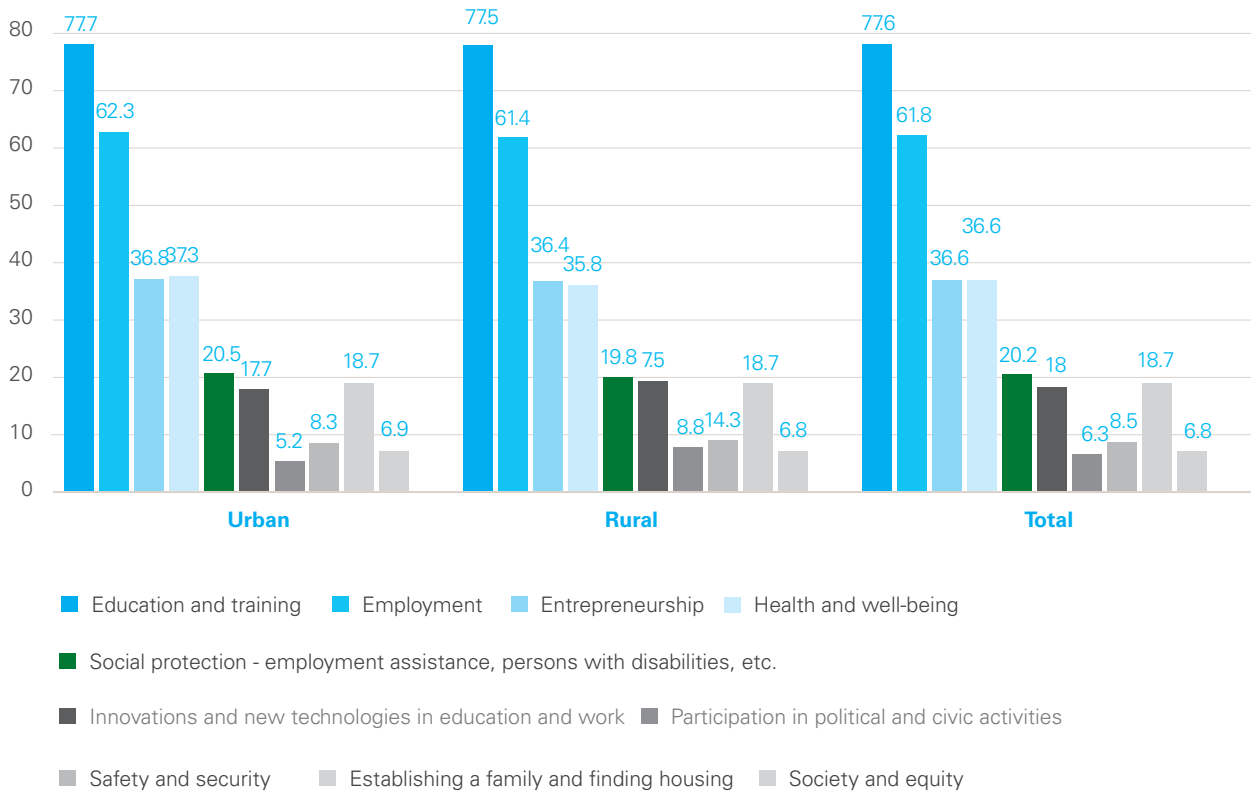
Generally, only very few FGD participants said that they had no concerns at all and claimed that everything would be great throughout their lives. However, on the other hand, few respondents said that they were worried about their basic livelihood and survival, or who voiced an all-encompassing critique about everything.

The clear majority of young people, across rural and urban settlements, were very specific in regards to which issues they most wished to be addressed in order to increase their future life-opportunities.

Among the questionnaire respondents, 77.6 per cent indicated that "education and training" would be among the main areas that needed improvement in contemporary Uzbekistan. In particular, the FGD participants demanded improvements to the quality and contents of teaching (see section "Education and Learning"). Furthermore, they mentioned the obstacle of entering further

FIGURE 50

What are the three most important areas for young people that need improvement today?



educational institutions. This obstacle was portrayed as multi-layered and included: the fact that a high number of young people currently compete for relatively few places to study; that corruption and “being connected” (tanish-bilish) is pervasive; that educational advancement requires significant monetary resources, not only for bribes, but also to pay for private tutoring lessons during the school years and being able to afford tuition fees in higher educational institutions.

Young people depicted failure to enroll into certain educational institutions as a severe concern in their lives, personally and because of the loss of social face and reputation vis-à-vis their parents and peers.

In the words of an 18-year-old female college student from Fergana: “Now we are worried about our future enrolment into university... There will be a simultaneous graduation of school schoolchildren and students of professional colleges. And we are worried that all of us are going to take the entry exams for university...”

Or the opinion of this 14-year-old school boy from Fergana: “in particular, we are worried about the problem of enrolling into university. Because if you have money, then you can work with a tutor or you can study at prestigious private schools. But if there is no spare money in the family, then the child will study at a regular school. I think that education in private schools is better, and that more knowledge is

offered there. Already there is a feeling of stratification of the population into those who are better off and those who are not. Now everything is expensive, but people's salaries are low."

And consider the words of this 16-year-old female college student from Tashkent city: "Personally, among my peers, this [main concern] now is enrolment. You could say that this affects everyone. And if you do not [manage to] enroll, people in the neighbourhood community [mahalla] will speak badly about you."

Another major concern for the participants of the study was youth unemployment

and the uncertainty that would be associated with low incomes.

Among questionnaire respondents, 61.8 per cent identified "employment" among the main areas for improvement.

Correspondingly, facilitating "entrepreneurship" was marked as another area for improvement by 36.6 per cent of all respondents.

Furthermore, the "inability to secure a decent lifestyle" was mentioned by 29.3 per cent of respondents as being among "the biggest problems" faced by youth today.

"What worries us the most? We are sitting at home. But our children are growing up, and now we need to earn more in order to provide them with everything. And we are worried about the problem of finding [opportunities] for additional income. The income of one person is not enough for the expenses of a family."

— 23-year-old married woman and mother from Andijan



During the FGDs, participants also debated a growing disparity between rising living costs and stagnant income potential. Many reflected that one salary would hardly be sufficient to provide for a family.

In the words of this 14-year-old school girl from Fergana: "Nowadays, a person without an education is a nobody. For example, a cleaning lady receives a salary of 3-400.000 Sum [approx. \$30-40, per month]. And while she receives this amount for a whole month of work, the prices for everything increase even more. Currently, 1 kilogram of meat at the bazaar is 60.000 Sum [approx. \$6]."

During the FGDs a multitude of social challenges were addressed. Study participants expressed their frustrations about a lack of trust within society and indicated their desire for positive motivation as well as for life-guidance and psychological support.

In family matters, young women were particularly concerned about early marriages and rising divorce rates, whereas their male counterparts found it challenging to find a "proper" partner, i.e. a young female they would not consider to have been spoiled (see above).

Furthermore, study participants across the country criticized the distance between children and parents, and more generally the disconnect between the younger and older generations in society. Young people did not want to challenge the authority of elders and the customary expectation to respect them. However, they remarked critically that the existing social institutions of (status-based) seniority would privilege key decisions to a collective of elders and thus silence the

voices of young people. In consequence, youth's ability to participate in civic life and to develop into more self-reliant members of society would be constrained.

From Tashkent city, one aged 20 and one aged 21 years old:

Participant 1: Parents have to understand children, children have to understand parents. During all disputes you have to be able to agree and coordinate your choice with your parents.

Participant 2: Parents have to communicate more with children, as much as possible, and vice versa. And [you need to] share your worries.

Consider the opinion of a 24-year-old male from Kashkadarya: "Our Uzbek mentality is very peculiar...Relatives get together to take a decision. And if out of 8 relatives 7 will be for it and 1 against it, then the person who wanted to start or do something will not be able to do it. Therefore, independent thinking is not developed among our youth. They are afraid of loneliness [i.e. ostracization] and prefer to be close to their parents... [So in order to have a future elsewhere] it is necessary to be brave enough to separate yourself from your parents."

And consider this exchange between two female participants, 19 and 24 years old, of an FGD conducted in Kashkadarya:

Participant 1: Now there is a problem with divorces. Many families are getting divorced one or two years after



The Right Amount of Leisure

In regard to leisure, the FGD participants agreed that young people residing in rural areas would generally have less free time than their urban counterparts. The main reason given was that rural households with farmland and animals demanded the constant and full participation of all members.

Furthermore, the potential for enjoying free time is gendered, because women generally reported being assigned the more time-consuming responsibilities in the household, including child-rearing if they were mothers. Young female participants of the study therefore mentioned that they relaxed most whenever they found the time to be by

themselves, without their regular tasks. In contrast, young men said they would rather go out and socialize publicly.

Aside from time, study participants also remarked that rural areas had less opportunities for leisure, such as cafés, restaurants, Internet clubs etc. In villages, “having a good time” appeared rather to focus on specific community events, in particular the celebration of weddings, birthdays or national holidays (such as Navruz). Accordingly, the rural participants of the study, and among these especially young women, remarked that they would predominantly spend their leisure time around family members and relatives. Urban study participants, on the other

hand, also mentioned getting together with friends whenever they were free from study, work or family obligations.

Young people widely agreed that having free time and fun should be enjoyed only in limited measure. Many study participants revealed an understanding that idleness could lead to negative consequences, such as gossiping, wasting time on the Internet or playing video games. They reflected that in order to avoid becoming a “loafer” (bezdelnik), and then potentially slide further into joblessness or delinquency, young people might need close supervision by their parents and neighbourhood communities.

This was reflected in the following comment from a 23-year-old male from Kashkadarya: “I agree that having fun is mostly for those without anything to do, who do not think about the next day. Urban people relax more than we [rural dwellers], because they have no land and animals [to work with]. They have different life conditions...”

Also consider this exchange among female participants, aged 19-24, during an FGD conducted in Tashkent:

Moderator: When can you relax?

Participant 1: I relax when there is no one around!

Participant 2: When I am alone by myself.

Participant 3: Yes. I eat, lie down, watch a TV show.

Or the voice of this 18-year-old male college student from Karakalpakstan: “This [relaxing] occurs during [certain] holidays. Not long ago it was the birthday of one of my good friends and he celebrated it well... See, this is what is called ‘games and fun’. However, but what is counted as games and fun depends on perception of each person. And if you dedicate a lot of time to games and fun with your friends, then this could end badly. Because after all, life is not only made of games and fun.”



An exchange among female participants, aged between 19-24 years old, during an FGD conducted in rural Fergana also offered important insights:

Participant 1: There should always be a measure in everything. You should not have too much fun either.

Participant 2: Because that leads to negative consequences. For example, if a young girl is only having fun, then she cannot complete

her household tasks. Therefore, she might be scolded.

Participant 3: Rumours will go around about such a girl, no one will take her for marriage...

Moderator: So, what is having fun and relaxing for you?

Participant 4: Taking part in family events, holidays and birthdays.

Participant 3: When you gather as a family.

The End of Youth

Finally, young people revealed a very mixed perception of when their youth would come to an end.

Some FGD participants remarked that this would be a personal choice or depend on the condition of someone's "soul". Others provided a specific age, but the range varied widely between 25 and 60.

Still other voices mentioned that specific life-events would mark the end of youth, such as choosing one's profession, taking over the responsibilities of your own family after marriage, or becoming parents. And still others foregrounded physical or social aging, associating the end of youth with emerging health problems or after someone's own parents had passed away.

In the words of this 16-year-old male schoolchild from Kashkadarya: "Youth ends when you have to feed your own family, when you have children. I would not say that youth disappears entirely, but there will be no such carefree life as now."

Or in the words of this 20-year-old male university student from Tashkent city: "Many understand youth as a concept of age. But after all, youth is a condition of your soul."

"Youth ends when you have to feed your own family, when you have children. I would not say that youth disappears entirely, but there will be no such carefree life as now."

— In the words of this 16-year-old male schoolchild from Kashkadarya



"Many understand youth as a concept of age. But after all, youth is a condition of your soul."

— 20-year-old male university student from Tashkent city:



5

Recommendations

Building on youth responses and the voices documented, the following recommendations to enhance Uzbekistan youth policy development and implementation can be concluded.

Reinventing the approaches of youth work towards support and positive motivation, with the focus on the most disadvantaged youth

1. Systematize youth work practice with the aim of supporting and empowering young people, with the focus on the most disadvantaged

The findings of the study reveal that young people lack affordable access to knowledge and training, safe spaces for meaningful leisure, support in setting their goals and identifying the available opportunities to achieve them. In this context, it is recommended to enhance and systematize youth work practice at local level, so that every young person, including the most disadvantaged, feels supported and a strong sense of belonging to their community. Specifically, using the basis of the existing youth organizations, it is recommended to establish multi-functional youth support centres for adolescents and youth and to enhance the capacity of the existing employees to provide the following services:

- Psychosocial support for young people and their parents during challenging situations, with a focus on the most disadvantaged young people
- Meaningful education and leisure activities that are responsive to the needs and interests of young people and which enhance their life skills, creativity, preparedness for continuing education, confidence and enthusiasm, trust and cohesion among each other
- Education and career counseling to increase the flow of reliable and actionable information to youth on post-secondary education opportunities, current and emerging labour market trends and skills requirements for income generation
- Other services, based on specific interests and needs of young people in their living area

Establishment of these multi-functional support centres should be accompanied by a strong communication campaign targeted at parents and local communities, to ensure that young people, especially young girls are given the opportunity to visit these centres.



2. Strengthen positive motivation and attitudes towards youth as subjects rather than objects of decisions at family and school levels

Throughout the study, young people showed an appreciation for social order and a readiness to follow collective norms and the leadership of elder generations. However, they advocated that this relationship should not be overly burdened by excessive discipline and by the expectation that young people should simply function within the social roles assigned to them (daughter, son, schoolchild etc.).

Young people's readiness to perform filial piety (respecting parents) should thus be rewarded by parental piety, which refers to the responsibility of parents to attend to, understand, protect and act on the needs of youth in their own terms. It is recommended awareness is raised and positive parenting practice promoted among parents. Practically, this means promoting the advantages of positive motivation for youth development (instead of fear and humiliation). Communication for development campaigns should centre on the importance of discussing and communicating key life decisions, for example in regard to educational aspirations or professional career planning.

In educational institutions, teaching personnel and school administrators should be trained how to create an encouraging learning environment. Most importantly, this includes motivating students to express and pursue their individual ambitions and to employ a teaching approach that is

more student-centred and practice-oriented rather than teacher-centred and theory based.

Enhancing opportunities for all young people to obtain foundational, life, technical, digital, innovation and entrepreneurial skills is required for a successful school-to-work transition

3. Enhance formal and non-formal education of life, technical, innovation and entrepreneurial skills with the focus on young people at most risk to be among NEET, including young women, young people residing in remote rural areas, youth from low-income families, young people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups

The findings of the study demonstrate an alarming NEET rate among youth after completion of compulsory secondary education (54.6 per cent). Young people lack access to tertiary education. They consider self-employment and entrepreneurship as an option for further employment but indicate limited opportunities to obtain relevant knowledge and skills through formal education.

In this context, and building on the President's initiative to develop an entrepreneurial ecosystem with associated skills and mindsets among the Uzbek population as a strategy for poverty reduction, it is recommended to enhance the formal and non-formal education of life, technical, innovation and entrepreneurial skills among young people to enhance their opportunities in the labour market.

Additionally, non-formal trainings should be provided in language learning to ensure access to more educational opportunities and to assist the labour mobility of young people, especially in rural areas.

Modules on life and entrepreneurial skills can be integrated into the formal education curriculum as well as taught through non-formal education platforms, including the existing local Youth centres. Such education programmes can be linked to the existing opportunities provided by the Government and Start Up programmes. In practice, the module should include stronger employer integration for curriculum design or “school-based career counseling programmes”.¹⁶

It is essential that such education-/training-modules are accessible for all young people, including the most vulnerable, through the provision of relevant resources and communication with parents, especially those of girls, and by orientating them to current regional market demands (e.g. emerging tourism or certain manufacturing industries). Modules should achieve a balance between theoretical content and the practical application of knowledge and should be integrated into the respective professional sector via certified internships or apprenticeship programmes for “young professionals”. If these conditions are met, the labour market can integrate the country’s young human resources as an investment that contributes to (longer-term) economic success and reaping the “demographic dividend”.¹⁷

4. Enhance computer skills education and the functionality of the Internet, particularly in rural areas and for female youth

Based on the findings, 37.8 per cent of respondents do not know how to use a computer at all and over half of young people never use the Internet, especially those in rural areas and young women. At the same time, probability analysis demonstrates that possession of IT skills has a positive effect on reducing the likelihood of young people becoming among those not in education employment or training.

Therefore, it is recommended to increase the functionality of the Internet including both, technical accessibility (connectivity, speed, devices) and financial affordability, and to enhance the education of IT skills through formal and non-formal education. Specifically, the connectivity of schools and youth centres, especially in rural areas, should be ensured. One of the potential solutions to achieving universal school connectivity is the participation of Uzbekistan in the global initiative of ITU and UNICEF - GIGA.¹⁸

It is recommended to accompany this enhancement of the IT curriculum and the capacity of the ICT schoolteachers by developing online IT-skills development courses in Uzbek and Karakalpak languages. An option of youth-led peer-to-peer IT education courses taught in the local Youth Centers would also be viable.

16. World Bank (2018)

17. More detailed information on GIGA is available at <https://gigaconnect.org/>

18. The address of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, on the meeting with youth on 27 December 2019

Particularly for young women, the functionality of the Internet also hinges on cultural notions of improper conduct. Targeting parents, husbands and mothers-in-law as key cultural gatekeepers who control Internet access should be considered, in order to reduce the risk of stigmatization of female youth who go online. The Internet should be recognized as a tool for expanding educational opportunities and labour market potential in rural, remote areas. Specifically, access to the Internet and computer skills could stimulate more active economic participation among young women and generate income using the home-based entrepreneurial potential of young females.

Creating sustainable platforms for young people to voice their concerns and aspirations, to express their opinions and to engage in decision-making at local and national levels

5. Establish sustainable institutionalized platforms for youth engagement in decision-making on matters affecting their life at local and national levels

The findings of the study demonstrate that young people in Uzbekistan are open to being guided and receiving advice from the generation of their parents (which includes teachers and other professionals). However, the common desire of youth is that their voices, interests and concerns are heard and considered by 'adults'. Young people would like to actively participate in decisions affecting their lives and contribute to actions that improve the wellbeing of their community (mahalla), in which currently they feel

particularly silenced and powerless.

In this context, and building on the President's call¹⁹ for constant dialogue between the Government and young people, it is recommended to establish sustainable institutionalized platforms for youth engagement into decision making at local and national levels.

Specifically, it is advised to systematize and enhance the effectiveness of the existing platform "Khokim va Yoshlar" (Local governor and Youth) to engage young people, including NEET youth, into regular youth consultations at local level. Such consultations and a strong follow up mechanism will ensure that young people are heard and that decisions are responsive to the needs and interests of young people. Consequently, young people will have a strengthened sense of belonging to their communities and trust in the Government.

Additionally, it is recommended to scale up and institutionalize the existing digital youth engagement platform, U-Report. The platform engages already over 100,000 young people across the country into decision-making at national level through weekly opinion polls. Additionally, U-Report creates an opportunity for the Government to disseminate reliable socially significant information among the youth. Being available via different messaging channels, including Telegram, Facebook and SMS, U-Report is accessible even to disadvantaged youth in the most remote areas and who may not have access to smartphones and the Internet.

Development of the platforms should be accompanied by building the capacity of decision-makers on the meaningful engagement of young people and building the capacity of young people as young leaders and advocates for youth rights. This includes relevant knowledge and development of leadership, public speaking, communication skills, legal and political literacy.

6. Support young people to establish platforms for youth-to-youth communication and to develop youth digital activism

In regard to social issues, young people indicated a need to talk particularly about trust in society, gender relations and early marriage/divorce issues. At the same time, many young people fear breaches of secrecy and social stigmatization when sharing their opinions and emotions about such delicate subjects.

In this context, it is recommended to promote youth social activism and to establish platforms where youth can feel safe to express their concerns without fear for their personal integrity. This can take the form of peer-to-peer exchanges among youth, youth bloggers, podcasts or moderated discussions. Such approaches guarantee that participants can remain anonymous, but also allows them to connect to youth in other regions of Uzbekistan.

Additionally, it is advisable to establish platforms for professional consultations where young people can seek advice from trained specialists via telephone or online helplines. It is essential that this professional help follows the approach of support and positive motivation.

Creating opportunities for young women to actively participate in social and economic life

7. Promote active participation of young women in economic, social and political life

The findings of the study demonstrate that young women are disproportionately more represented among NEET youth. They have lower labour mobility and lower access to the Internet. With marriage, young women experience even stronger disenfranchisement.

Though young people do not want any radical changes to gender social norms, they admit to a current inequality in the fulfilment of rights among males and females and raise the issue of the difficulty in sustaining a family on the salary of only young family member.

In this context, it is recommended to conduct C4D campaigns that promote women's stronger participation in economic, political and public spheres. The campaigns should be targeted specifically at parents/ parents-in-law and husbands and promote not marrying off girls before they can obtain an education and/or not raising opposition to women continuing their education or having a career after marriage.

Additionally, it is recommended to include the promotion of 'fatherhood' into C4D campaigns to promote the participation of fathers in bringing up children and raising awareness about its importance for children's development, to change the perception of bringing up children as exclusively a female responsibility.

The C4D campaigns should be supported by a mix of normative arguments (e.g. based on equal rights-discourse), pragmatic persuasion (e.g. an increase of household budgets), and graspable success stories (e.g. about families being better off with working women). In order for other youth to consider these success stories achievable for them as well, these stories should be localized (e.g. “a family not far from here”), should focus on a realistic next step (e.g. “getting a good internship”) and should reflect the approval of youth’s relevant others (peers, husbands, parents, in-laws).

8. Support the active participation of women in the economic, political and social spheres by providing child-care services and flexibility in working settings

Besides social, gender and cultural norms, family care and household chores impede women from taking opportunities to continue their education and/or employment. It is therefore recommended to provide child-rearing services, including by increasing the number of state kindergartens and by promoting the establishment of private home-based kindergartens, and mutual self-help practice kindergartens in which mothers can rotate caring for their own and the children of some neighbours during the week, thereby freeing up time for each other.

In addition, it is recommended to consider diversifying employment arrangements for both parents, entailing flexible working hours, working from home arrangements and the introduction of paternity leaves as a common practice.

Enhancing the health care system to provide essential services for young people and their families

9. Establish health insurance that covers essential youth health services

The study findings demonstrate that one of the health-related concerns of young people is the high direct and indirect expense associated with medical treatment and the inability to rely on an any social support for receiving treatment in case of serious illness.

Thus, it is recommended to establish a health insurance system and ensure that essential youth health services are covered by this insurance.

10. Strengthen medical human resources (capacity and quantity), especially in rural areas

In addition, young people raised the issue of the lack of availability and low qualification of medical personnel, especially in rural areas. Thus, it is recommended to strengthen human resources for health, particularly in rural areas. This should include a preferential policy to encourage health providers working in rural areas and improving continuing education for health providers. Specifically, building on the Government initiative of providing fiber-optic communication to all regional and district centres, it is proposed to develop telemedicine and distance learning opportunities. Provision of consultation services and online peer discussions through telemedicine and distance learning equipment will provide new opportunities for on-the-job training of medical personnel in rural areas.

Conducting further open research on the state of young people in Uzbekistan for the evidence-based development and implementation of youth policy

11. Acquire further evidence on key matters that affect life of young people

It is recommended to establish a national youth development index, which would monitor and evaluate the impact of ongoing reforms on youth well-being.

As a follow-up to this study, it is recommended to conduct further research on

- a sizeable group of NEET youth in Uzbekistan. Decisive knowledge gaps remain in the following aspects - NEET group's contours (e.g. objective and subjective opportunity structures or the impact of gender and regionality), patterned ways in and out of employment or training (fluctuations), and the economic and social consequences of being NEET, especially with gender and geographical disaggregation.
- the origin and consequences of the widespread preference among young people not leave their home villages or cities. In light of much evidence that ties geographic mobility with social mobility, it is essential for the context of Uzbekistan to better understand in what ways this phenomenon of non-mobility is tied to a social upbringing that dismisses social change through relocation and propagates a fear of the unknown.
- It is recommended to collect empirical data to better understand the role of mothers-in-law for those many young couples who co-reside with the husband's parents (patrilocality). The mother-in-law could be identified as an authority with whom young families have to negotiate key decisions and who has considerable potential to negatively impact their married lives. The opportunities for further education or employment of young married women could be increased if mothers-in-law adopted a less conservative/containing approach. However, the risk of doing harm when trying to induce behaviour change in relation to such a highly relevant socio-cultural group without sufficient scientific insights is significant.

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Annex

Determinants of NEET among youth of Uzbekistan

In order to investigate potential determinants of NEET, conventional studies on labour market outcomes were followed and the following regression model was estimated:

$$NEET_i = \alpha + \beta X_i + \gamma H_i + \delta S_i + \lambda I_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where NEET is a binary variable whether respondent is NEET group, X is a set of personal characteristics (gender, age, marital status, type of settlement, health), H is a set of controls related to human capital, S is a set of controls linked to soft skills, I a vector capturing hard (IT) skills

and ε is a stochastic error term. Taking into account the binary nature of the dependent variable, Eq. (1) is estimated using logistic regression model in Stata 15 with robust standard errors.

The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. As it can be observed, in the sample nearly 37 per cent of respondents fall in NEET group. Female respondents comprise 58 per cent of the sample, while average age in the sample is 21 years. Nearly 55 per cent of respondents are married and 48 per cent live in urban settlements. It is noteworthy that we find that there is 6 percentage points of education gap between respondents' parents' highest obtained education.

TABLE 1.
Descriptive statistics

Variable	Description	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Neet	= 1 if respondent is in NEET, 0 otherwise	0.37	0.48	0	1
Female	= 1 if respondent is female, 0 otherwise	0.58	0.49	0	1
Age	Respondent's age	21.64	4.82	14	30
Married	=1 if respondent is married/living together as married, 0 otherwise	0.55	0.50	0	1
Urban	=1 if respondent lives in urban area, 0 if respondent is living in rural area	0.48	0.50	0	1
Health	Self-reported health scale (0 very poor – 4 very good)	3.29	0.58	1	4
Mothereduc	=1 if respondent's mother has higher education, 0 otherwise	0.12	0.32	0	1
Fathereduc	=1 if respondent's father has higher education, 0 otherwise	0.18	0.39	0	1
Unive	=-1 if respondent has higher education, 0 otherwise =1 if Respondent has the following skills or abilities	0.04	0.20	0	1
Adapt	To adapt to and be flexible in different situations	0.82	0.39	0	1
Resolve	To resolve and prevent conflicts / disputes	0.84	0.36	0	1
creative	creative thinking skills, for example how to solve problems and think out of the box	0.84	0.36	0	1
critical	critical thinking skills	0.84	0.37	0	1
decision	decision making skills	0.86	0.34	0	1

Variable	Description	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
time	to work under time constraints and complete tasks on time	0.87	0.34	0	1
leadership	leadership skills	0.76	0.43	0	1
goals	to set goals and achieve them	0.90	0.30	0	1
team	to work in teams	0.90	0.31	0	1
timemanage	time-management skills	0.90	0.30	0	1
pcskills	Respondent's skills to use personal computer, (1 – Don't know; 5 – very good)	2.78	1.52	1	5
internet	Respondent's frequency to use internet, (1 – Never; 5 –Daily)	2.51	1.76	1	5

In Table 2 the personal characteristics as potential determinants of NEET are investigated. In column 1, bivariate regression model between gender and NEET is presented. As expected, the estimate for female respondents is positive and significant (at 1 per cent level) suggesting that female respondents are more likely to be NEET. Moreover, the R-squared from bivariate OLS regression (not reported here) suggests that gender alone explains nearly 11 per cent of variation in NEET.

In column 2, age and its squared term to assess the non-monotonic link between age and labour market outcomes are added. Probability to fall into NEET rises with age until respondents reach the age of 24. Once this threshold is achieved, age has negative impact on NEET.

In column 3, the link between marriage and NEET is assessed. It is found that marriage increases likelihood of a person to be in NEET. This variable is positive and significant at 1 per cent level. Finally, in columns 4 and 5, urban settlement and

TABLE 2.
NEET determinants: individual characteristics

	I	II	III	IV	V
Female	1.533 (21.41)***	1.866 (20.83)***	1.671 (18.72)***	1.699 (18.92)***	1.679 (16.77)***
Age	2.956 (24.07)***	1.976 (12.57)***	1.970 (12.46)***	1.950 (10.84)***	
Age-sq	-0.059 (22.46)***	-0.041 (12.40)***	-0.040 (12.29)***	-0.040 (10.68)***	
Married	0.827 (8.63)***	0.787 (8.17)***	0.754 (6.95)***		
Urban	-0.407 (5.00)***	-0.395 (4.32)***			
Health	-0.318 (3.93)***				
Constant	-1.501 (25.11)***	-37.295 (26.30)***	-24.971 (13.44)***	-24.720 (13.21)***	-23.420 (11.01)***
N	4,458	4,458	3,274	3,274	2,652
R2 (OLS)	0.11				0.26

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

self-reported health status are introduced as predictors. Both variables are negative and significant at the 1 per cent level. Overall, personal characteristics explain nearly 26 per cent of variation in NEET.

In Table 3, the results are disaggregated by gender. The results are nearly identical to the ones reported in Table 9, however, marriage seems to be insignificant predictor of NEET status for male respondents.

In Table 4, the role of human capital accumulation on the probably of being NEET is assessed. In column 1, we

control for father's and mother's highest education. It is found that when the highest attained degree of parents is higher education, the likelihood of NEET decreases. However, once the respondent's highest education degree is controlled, the parents' education has no influence on NEET. This implies, that respondent's education mediates the effect of parent's education on labour market outcomes. Finally, in column 3, a binary variable if respondent is/was satisfied with his/her education institution is added. It is observed that satisfaction with education decreases probability of NEET.

TABLE 3.
NEET determinants by gender

	Female	Male
Age	1.837 (7.29)***	1.565 (6.01)***
Age-sq	-0.037 (7.08)***	-0.032 (5.71)***
Married	1.435 (10.48)***	-0.255 (1.36)
Urban	-0.384 (3.08)***	-0.523 (3.62)***
Health	-0.367 (3.31)***	-0.241 (2.00)**
Constant	-20.806 (7.14)***	-18.581 (6.16)***
N	1,532	1,120

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

TABLE 4.
NEET determinants: human capital accumulation

	I	II	III
Female	1.660 (16.17)***	1.665 (15.59)***	1.667 (15.36)***
Age	1.995 (10.96)***	2.150 (11.37)***	2.290 (12.75)***
Age-sq	-0.041 (10.79)***	-0.044 (11.11)***	-0.047 (12.40)***
Married	0.746	0.784	0.761

In Table 5, we assess the role of soft skills in predicting NEET status. Therefore, we include the following skills separately in each column: (1) ability to adapt to and be flexible in different situations, (2) ability to resolve and prevent conflicts / disputes, (3) creative thinking skills, (4) critical thinking skills, (5) decision making skills, (6) ability to work under time constraints and complete tasks on time, (7) leadership skills, (8) skills to set goals and achieve them, (9) teamwork and (10) time-management skills. Of these variables only skills to set goals, teamwork and time-management skills have negative effect on likelihood to be NEET.

In Table 6, the role of hard (IT) skills in predicting NEET is assessed. In column 1, a binary variable if respondent has computer usage skills is included into the model. As anticipated this variable is negative and significant. In column 2, a dummy variable if respondent uses Internet is added. It is observed that both of these skills are instrumental in decreasing NEET among youth of Uzbekistan.

TABLE 5.
Determinants of NEET soft skill

	I	II	III	IV	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI
Female	1.677 (15.39)***	1.678 (15.45)***	1.669 (15.40)***	1.675 (15.39)***	1.671 (15.40)***	1.669 (15.43)***	1.669 (15.37)***	1.678 (15.48)***	1.676 (15.46)***	1.696 (15.59)***
Age	2.288 (12.73)***	2.283 (12.74)***	2.285 (12.76)***	2.300 (12.79)***	2.287 (12.73)***	2.278 (12.76)***	2.289 (12.76)***	2.289 (12.78)***	2.286 (12.80)***	2.302 (12.77)***
Age2	-0.046 (12.38)***	-0.046 (12.40)***	-0.046 (12.40)***	-0.047 (12.46)***	-0.046 (12.39)***	-0.046 (12.41)***	-0.047 (12.43)***	-0.047 (12.45)***	-0.046 (12.43)***	-0.047 (12.46)***
Married	0.766 (6.67)***	0.763 (6.63)***	0.755 (6.58)***	0.752 (6.52)***	0.755 (6.57)***	0.749 (6.53)***	0.758 (6.59)***	0.748 (6.52)***	0.757 (6.60)***	0.750 (6.55)***
Urban	-0.250 (2.56)**	-0.252 (2.59)**	-0.266 (2.53)**	-0.272 (2.59)**	-0.269 (2.55)**	-0.268 (2.55)**	-0.271 (2.58)**	-0.268 (2.56)**	-0.272 (2.50)**	-0.283 (2.51)**
Health	-0.338 (3.85)***	-0.339 (3.86)***	-0.333 (3.81)***	-0.341 (3.89)***	-0.338 (3.85)***	-0.336 (3.86)***	-0.330 (3.76)***	-0.336 (3.83)***	-0.345 (3.93)***	-0.340 (3.87)***
M.educ	-0.089 (0.52)	-0.071 (0.42)	-0.059 (0.35)	-0.078 (0.46)	-0.064 (0.38)	-0.068 (0.40)	-0.074 (0.43)	-0.052 (0.31)	-0.053 (0.31)	-0.064 (0.37)
Feduc	-0.129 (0.96)	-0.117 (0.87)	-0.113 (0.84)	-0.112 (0.84)	-0.113 (0.85)	-0.118 (0.88)	-0.101 (0.75)	-0.121 (0.91)	-0.112 (0.84)	-0.115 (0.86)
R.educ	-2.938 (9.14)***	-2.955 (9.19)***	-2.939 (9.15)***	-2.936 (9.15)***	-2.938 (9.14)***	-2.946 (9.18)***	-2.934 (9.11)***	-2.939 (9.13)***	-2.935 (9.09)***	-2.951 (9.12)***
Adapt	-0.130 (1.00)									

TABLE 6
NEET determinants: the role of hard (IT) skills

	I	II
Female	1.610 (14.99)***	1.447 (12.94)***
Age	2.158 (11.37)***	2.260 (11.69)***
Age2	-0.044 (11.18)***	-0.046 (11.48)***
Married	0.760 (6.60)***	0.687 (5.94)***
Urban	-0.230 (2.37)**	-0.184 (1.87)*
Health	-0.310 (3.58)***	-0.290 (3.30)***
Mother's edu.	0.013 (0.08)	0.097 (0.57)
Father's edu	-0.079 (0.59)	-0.071 (0.53)
Respondent's edu	-2.674 (8.13)***	-2.610 (7.82)***
Has computers skills	-0.198 (5.97)***	-0.123 (3.41)***
Can use internet		-0.180 (5.78)***

