POVERTY AND WELFARE TRENDS IN KYRGYZSTAN
OVER THE 1990s

Country Paper

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Poverty and Welfare Trends in the Kyrgyz Republic in the 1990s

In the first ten years of state sovereignty, the republic carried out radical reforms aimed at establishing a democratic state, maintaining and fostering universally shared human values, and promoting economic and social development. In the course of these reforms, society met with serious problems, the most challenging of which were an economic crisis, a decline in living standards, growing poverty, unemployment, and a mounting external debt. Despite all these difficulties, however, the social sphere remains a top priority of government policy in the republic: around 60% of the country's budget expenditures go to meet social needs. Today the development of the social sphere implies an effort to upgrade the state regulation mechanism in market conditions.

Population

The demographic situation in the Kyrgyz Republic in the 1990s underwent substantial changes. The transition to a market economy coupled with socio-economic instability had a crucial effect on the dynamics and pattern of population development. Annual rates of population growth fell significantly, amounting to an average of 1% for 1990-2000. The drop in population growth has been predetermined by a fall in the birth rates and a rise in emigration, with resultant changes in the ethnic and age structure of the population.

The fullest and most comprehensive picture of demographic processes can be obtained from the results of general population censuses. In 1999, the First National Population Census was conducted in Kyrgyzstan, and its main results were as follows: the permanent population makes up 4,823 thousand, one-third of them living in towns and cities and two-thirds in rural areas; 2,380 thousand men (49.4%) and 2,443 thousand women (50.6%). The average age of the population is 26 years. The country is a home for people of more than 90 nationalities, most of them being Kyrgyz (64.9%), Uzbeks (13.8%) and Russians (12.5%). The average population density is 24 persons per square kilometre. There are both sparsely populated areas (in the mountains) and major concentrations (in valleys and urban areas), a pattern which is largely due to different natural and climatic conditions and to the specific features of the country's economy.

During the latest intercensal period (1989-1999), the highest rate of population growth was recorded in the southern regions, where natural growth remained high: in the Dzhalal-Abad Region (an annual average of 1.5%) and the Batken and Osh regions (2-2.3%). An insignificant increase was recorded in the Issyk-Kul and Talass regions (0.2-0.3%), which were the scene of both external and internal migratory outflows; and a similar marginal reduction due to heavy migratory outflows was
registered in the Naryn Region (internal migration) and Chu Region (external migration). At the same time, the population of the capital markedly increased due to large numbers of internal migrants.

The past ten years have also seen a change in the ethnic structure of the population: the numbers of Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and other Central Asian peoples have increased, while those of Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Germans and others have gone down. The 1999 census data show a considerable increase not only in the numbers of Kyrgyz, but also of Dungans, Uzbeks, Tajiks and people of other nationalities. This increase is largely due to a high rate of natural growth, and for Tajiks it is also connected with the arrival of refugees from areas of military operations in Tajikistan. At the same time, emigration is behind the fall in the numbers of Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Jews and others. Particularly drastic was the fall in the number of Jews and Germans owing to their massive outflow in the early 1990s.

A significant effect on the size of Kyrgyzstan's total population has always been exerted by migration, which, in contrast to natural population movements, has less momentum and is more dependent on the socio-economic situation in the country. For a long time, up until the 1970s, migration was one of the factors behind the growth of the population in Kyrgyzstan (alongside natural growth). Starting from the 1970s, migratory flows changed their direction: the positive migratory increase turned negative. The situation sharply worsened in the 1990s following the break up of the Soviet Union. So, migration has always been a key component of population dynamics in Kyrgyzstan.

The development of external migration processes in the 1990s could be divided into three periods: prior to 1994, 1994-1998 and later on. The first period was marked by an annual increase in migratory outflows from the country, which reached their peak in 1993. Subsequently, in 1994-1998, upon the signing of a decree by President Askar Akaev on the regulation of migration processes (1994), the outflows began to slow down. From the second half of 1999 onward, emigration went up once again. One should note that from the standpoint of immigrants Kyrgyzstan is "not very attractive", and since the early 1990s their numbers have been falling annually, possibly because of economic instability in the country. The total number of emigrants in 1990-2000 was 618 thousand, that of immigrants, 218 thousand, and the migration-related decrease in the size of the population, 400 thousand (around 10% of the total population). The most intensive two-way movement is recorded with Russia: around 60% of the total flow of migrants. At the same time, the
The migration balance has remained positive with some countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, for example, with the countries of the Transcaucasia, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan.

The main motive for people to leave the country is an urge to settle in what is known as their historical homeland: over 80% of departing Russians and Tatars went to live in Russia, the same proportion of Uzbeks, to Uzbekistan, and of Kazakhs, to Kazakhstan. Yet another migration trend that came to the fore in the 1990s was emigration to Far Abroad countries. The main host countries for emigrants from Kyrgyzstan are Germany, Israel and the USA, which accept over 90% of the annual number of emigrants leaving the boundaries of the former USSR.

A characteristic feature of present-day migration processes in Kyrgyzstan is an influx of forced migrants. Registration of refugees in the country started in 1993. Most of them came from Tajikistan, Afghanistan and the Chechen Republic. In 1996, Kyrgyzstan accepted some refugees from Azerbaijan and Georgia, but their numbers were insignificant. At the end of 1994, the country had 6.4 thousand registered refugees, i.e. migrants who were obliged to change their permanent place of residence as the result of a rise in ethnic tensions or armed conflicts in the areas where they lived. Later on, the number of refugees rose annually, with forced migration reaching its peak in 1996, when their numbers swelled to 16.7 thousand. In subsequent years, the influx of refugees began to slow down. As the situation in Tajikistan stabilized, some of the forced migrants returned to their earlier place of residence. At the end of 2000, a total of 10.6 thousand refugees were registered at the Migration Service Department; most of them were ethnic Kyrgyz (81.8%), Tajiks (10.1%) and Chechens (7.6%). The age structure of this contingent is marked by a sizeable share of people of working age (48.9% of the total), children and adolescents under 16 years of age (46.9%), and a relatively small share of people of post-working age (4.2%).

As the results of the First National Population Census showed, an overwhelming majority of refugees came from rural areas and were mostly workers in agriculture. In terms of educational standards, they were characterized by a high share of persons with a secondary general (49%) and basic general (26.8%) education and a relatively low share of persons with a higher (5.4%) and specialized secondary (5.2%) education. The most attractive areas for refugees from the standpoint of settlement proved to be the republic's capital and the adjacent Chu Region, which were chosen as a place of residence by over three-quarters of all forced migrants.

Since migration is a social phenomenon, it reflects processes underway in society and in the country's economy, and affects a majority of the population. As emigration processes intensified, internal migration in the 1990s gathered momentum as well. Migration processes occurred against
the background of a decline in production and forced closure of enterprises, with a subsequent rise in the mobility of people living in small towns, urban-type settlements and rural areas. The main stream of internal migrants was directed towards the capital with its wider job opportunities. Thus, during the latest intercensal period, the population of Bishkek increased by 222 thousand newcomers (29% of its total population) from other parts of the country. So, migration is the most important population process leading to greater concentration of rural inhabitants in towns and cities. The maximum internal-migration outflow was recorded from the remote mountainous Naryn Region. A high rate of natural population growth in the region during the past ten years did not compensate the migratory outflow, with a resultant reduction in its total population.

General population censuses provide a unique opportunity for an analysis of the long-term effects of migration. According to the data of the 1999 census, 1,350 thousand people (28% of the country's total population) had changed their place of residence at least once in their lifetime, which means that roughly one inhabitant in four was in effect registered as a migrant. The largest share of people living in a given populated locality not from birth was recorded in the capital (61% of the total number of inhabitants), and the smallest, in two southern regions: Osh and Batken (12-13%). Among the Kyrgyz, one person in four had changed his place of residence (from birth to the time of the 1999 census); among the Kazakhs, Germans, Russians and Tatars the figure was one in two. The Uzbeks were the least mobile with a rate of one in ten, once again confirming the conclusion that people in the southern regions tend to lead a more settled life. But on the whole the country's population is fairly mobile, and the trend towards mobility was particularly pronounced in the past decade.

As it was noted above, the past decade in Kyrgyzstan was marked by a decline in birth rates, which was the main cause of population ageing. Thus, whereas at the time of the 1989 census the share of the population aged 65 years and over was 5.0%, in 1999 it was 5.5%. The share of men of that age rose from 3.3% to 4.2%, while the share of women remained virtually unchanged: 6.6% and 6.7%, respectively. In other words, there was a considerable reduction in the number of women in that age group. The main reason here was that the early 1990s were marked by a rise in mortality in the older age groups, in which women outnumber men; in addition, most of the emigrants of the past decade were women.

The results of the latest census showed a further improvement in the ratio between males and females: in 1989, there were 953 men per 1,000 women, and in 1999, 975 men. This gender imbalance first appears at the age of 34, and in the older age groups the number of women is
considerably bigger than that of men. The effects of the war and the shorter lifespan of men are behind this disparity. Among women there are more persons of older age, so that their average age at the time of the census was 27 years compared with 25 years for men. Such an age structure reflects the past trends of natural population movement, especially high birth rates. In demographic terms, the country's population is a young one: in 2000, 37% were children and adolescents, 54%, people of working age, and 9%, people of post-working age. In view of that, the burden on the working-age population is high: the dependency ratio (the number of persons of non-working ages per 1,000 persons of working age) was 837 (647 in urban areas and 958 in rural areas).

Over the past few years, the number of women of fertile age in the country has increased, nevertheless, the number of births among them has tended to decline for economic reasons. Thus, the fertility rate went down from 2.8 children per woman in 1989 to 2.6 in 1999. Despite the decline, such a fertility rate points to a process of expanded reproduction in the country (i.e., the present fertility rate ensures a numerical replacement of the generation of parents by their children).

The number of births differs markedly among urban and rural women, and also among different nationalities and regions. Rural women bear more children than urban ones (1.9 per woman in urban areas, 3.2 in rural areas). The birth rate for women of different nationalities living in the republic differs as well. Thus, according to the results of the 1999 census, the fertility rate was 3.0 children for Uzbek and Tajik women, 2.9 for Kyrgyz and Turkish women, 2.8 for Dungan women, 2.1 for Ukrainian and Tatar women, 1.8 for German women, and 1.7 for Russian and Korean women. In view of that, the highest fertility rate was recorded in the Naryn Region (3.6 children born per woman), in all the southern areas and the Talass Region (3.1-3.2), and in the Issyk-Kul Region (2.9), where a process of expanded reproduction is underway. In the Chu Region, replacement of parents by their children is barely ensured (2.3 children per woman), whereas in the capital reproduction is on a decreasing scale (1.5 children per woman).

Fertility levels differ markedly depending on the woman's marital status: the birth rate among women in registered marriages is twice as high as that among those in unregistered marriages or divorced (3.5 and 1.6-1.8 children, respectively). The educational level of women is inversely proportional to fertility: the higher the educational level, the fewer children per family, and this trend is recorded among women of different nationalities. Thus, the rate per woman with a higher education is 2.3 children, whereas women without a primary education have an average of 5.1 children, devoting themselves to their family.
Against the background of a decline in fertility rates, the problem of abortions remains urgent on the agenda despite a steady downtrend in abortions recorded in the past decade (in that period, their number fell by more than two-thirds). A number of regulatory enactments adopted in recent years have provided for a set of measures aimed at improving the health of children and their potential parents, which has also served to improve the situation in this field. Since 1995, there has been a steady decline in the number of abortions among girls aged 15-17 years: from 4.3 per 1,000 girls of that age in 1995 to 1.8 in 2000.

The fertility situation is complicated by the worsening marriage situation. During the past decade, a total of 30-40 thousand marriages were concluded in Kyrgyzstan every year. Socio-economic instability and growing difficulties in creating normal conditions for family life intensified the negative trends in the development of marital and family relations. Compared with 1990, the total marriage rate (the average annual number of marriages per 1,000 population) was halved: from 9.9 in 1990 to 4.9 in 2000. In order to study that phenomenon, a question concerning unregistered marriages was included for the first time in the 1999 census programme. According to the census data, 5% of men and 5% of women over 15 years of age have an unregistered marriage relationship. The share of such marriages is highest in the 20 to 30 age bracket, when young people marry for the first time. That is partly due to the recent proliferation of Moslem-tradition marriages (without registration at civil registry offices).

Nevertheless, most people aged 15 years and over are married: 62.5% of men and 59% of women. Celibacy is not a widespread phenomenon: only 0.1% of men and 0.2% of women aged over 50 years have never been married. On the whole, the trend in family formation in the country is a favourable one. It is based on long-standing traditional standards of marital and family behaviour among the population. Divorces and extramarital fertility are the main reasons for the emergence of one-parent families. Young couples increasingly prefer to do without official registration of marital relations, with a resultant spread of premarital cohabitation and unregistered marriages. In 2000, one baby in three was born out of wedlock (32% against 13% in 1990). The very rapid increase in the number of extramarital births testifies to weakening of the social duty to be married in order to have children. One should note, however, the occurrence of marriages performed only in accordance with Moslem traditions of late (when registration at civil registry offices is not performed at all or is performed only following a certain event: the birth of a child, etc.). This means that some of the children born outside a de jure marriage in actual fact have both parents: two-thirds of them are registered on the basis of the joint application of both parents, and only one-third on the application solely of their mothers, so that probably these children alone will be raised in a one-parent family,
that is without a father. The highest extramarital birth rate was recorded in the capital, and also in the Dzhalal-Abad and Chu regions (36-38%). The age of mothers in extramarital births has two peak values: under 20 years and 30-35 years. The first of these two peaks reflects the lowering of the age at which young people first enter into sexual relations and an increase in premarital pregnancies, and the second one, mostly deliberate motherhood without registration of marital relations, both on the part of men and women. Over the past few years, there has been a substantial increase in the number of children born by women of premarital age (15-17 years). Thus, the average number of children born in 1990 per 1,000 women of that age was 4.4, and in 2000 the figure was 6.3. Around 60% of the children born by such young mothers are registered on the joint application of both parents, and around 40%, on the application of the mother alone, which once again confirms the unplanned nature of such births.

In recent years, the annual number of dissolved marriages was 5-9 thousand (1-2 per 1,000 population), with the result that 5-7 thousand children were left without one of their parents every year. The 1999 census recorded 184 thousand divorced and separated men and women. The highest share of such people was in the capital (6.8% of men and 12.4% of women over 15 years of age), and the lowest, among men in the Batken and Osh regions (2.1%) and among women in the Naryn Region (4.9%), where the fertility rate is highest. So, in Kyrgyzstan, as in many other countries, the incidence of divorces is highest among town dwellers, especially those living in big cities. The largest number of divorced and separated people, both men and women, was in the 30-54 age bracket, with the number of women of such marital status twice exceeding the number of men. A half of all divorced women were those of active reproductive age (25-39 years), who account for 50% of all annual births. During the past ten years, their share in the total number of women rose from 7.8% to 9.1%, and the increase in the number of unmarried women of fertile age is one of the reasons behind the recent trend towards a drop in a birth rate.

So, Kyrgyzstan's regional demographic peculiarities are manifested in high marriage and fertility rates. One consequence of the country's high birth rate is a significant proportion of children in the total population. Another regional peculiarity of reproduction is that the large proportion of children, especially girls, creates favourable conditions for sustained fertility in the future, since children are potential parents.

Marriage as an institution in the country remains intact. Despite all the hardships of the reform period and the decline in the living standards of a majority of the population, the trend in family formation is a favourable one. It is based on steady traditional standards of marital and family
behaviour prevalent among the population. A sizeable percentage of adults are married, and celibacy is not spread. Most children are born of officially married couples. In the current decade, there has been a decline in the fertility rate due to family reluctance to have many children in the conditions of an economic crisis.

**Income and Employment**

The labour market situation in the Kyrgyz Republic during the past decade was determined, on the one hand, by the changes underway in the republic's economic, social and political life and, on the other, by significant demographic processes. In the period from 1990 to 2000, the population of working age kept growing by an average of 42 thousand a year (1.9%). The rapid increase in labour resources in the 1990s took place against the background of a decline in demand for workforce and a reduction in the number of jobs, so that the employment rate for the people of working age went down from 76.7% in 1990 to 63.8% in 2000. The working population in 2000 totalled 1,768.4 thousand, or only 1.2% more than in 1990. An analysis of employment dynamics over the past ten years shows that starting from 1993 there was a reduction in the number of the employed, which trend lasted until 1995. From 1996 onward, employment began to grow, mostly as the result of an increase in self-employment. The processes of denationalisation and privatisation that were at work in the 1990s and the continued slump in production have led to mass redundancies among the working people, who subsequently found employment in the sphere of individual enterprise or in peasant (private) farming.

Self-employment is particularly widespread in the agrarian sector of the economy, where a process of restructuring agricultural enterprises and subsequent formation of individual peasant (private) farms started in 1991. The privatisation process in the countryside was quite intensive, and in the period from 1991 to 2000 the number of people engaged in peasant (private) farming increased from 15.8 thousand to 676.7 thousand, while their share in the total population employed in agriculture rose from 2.6% to 72.2%.

Persons engaged in what is known as individual labour activity constitute another sizeable group of the self-employed population. Whereas in 1990 their number was around 3 thousand, in 2000 it reached 237 thousand (13.4% of the total number of employed). Individual labour activity is widely practiced in trade, repair of cars and household appliances, in transport, construction, provision of private services, and manufacture of clothes and foodstuffs. About half of the people engaged in individual labour activity live in Bishkek. In the years of reform, Bishkek has become a wholesale trade centre for neighbouring countries of Central Asia and Russia. Internal migrants from other
parts of the country attracted to Bishkek by real opportunities for self-employment in the capital have also found a niche in the sphere of individual enterprise, forming a group of street and market traders. The highest share of persons engaged in individual labour activity is among the urban youth: whereas in the total working population of towns and cities the share of such persons is 23.4%, the figure for young people aged 15-19 years is 41.2%.

At the same time, one should note that the past decade brought a considerable reduction in the number of hired (wage) workers, especially in the production sphere. In the period from 1990 to 2000, the number of employees of enterprises and institutions in all sectors of the economy fell more than 2.1 times, including 2.4 times in industry, 2.2 times in transport, and 4.3 times in construction.

In the years of economic reform, privatisation in the production sphere was in the main completed. In the period from 1990 to 2000, the share of the population employed at state enterprises, institutions and organizations diminished from 73.9% to 21.8%. In 2000, more than three-quarters of them were employed in the social sphere and administrative bodies, in public security and defence agencies. The most drastic decline was observed in the number of those employed at state-owned enterprises in the production sphere. In 2000, their share in industry was 12%, in construction, 11%, and in transport, 8% of the total number of employed in these sectors.

During the past decade, substantial changes took place in the sectoral distribution of the employed population, caused by the crisis in production and by the reforms in the agrarian sector and social infrastructure. As production activity at many enterprises came to a halt or was markedly reduced, the number of those employed in industry and construction fell more than 2.5 times. At the same time, employment in agriculture and forestry increased in that period 1.6 times, which was largely due to the formation of peasant (private) farms. As a rule, virtually all able-bodied members of the family household take part in the work of such farms.

The distribution of the working population belonging to various age groups by type of activity differs markedly from one group to another. Young people entering the labour market upon the completion of educational establishments face considerable difficulties in finding jobs, since they lack the necessary skills and experience. Employment opportunities for them are limited. According to the data of the First National Population Census, the main type of activity for nearly a half of all urban young people aged 15-19 years is trade, repair of cars and household appliances, employment in hotels and restaurants, while the share of those employed in industry, construction, transport and communications in this age bracket is much smaller than among older people. The crisis in
production entailed mass redundancies among workers, and young people were usually the first to be dismissed.

In rural areas, young people are faced with even more limited job opportunities. Around 92% of young people aged 15-19 years are engaged in farming, whereas for adults aged 30-49 this share is under 70%. Owing to an acute shortage of jobs in the countryside, employment in peasant (private) or personal subsidiary farming is the only possible field of activity for most young people. Those who see no prospect to find job in the countryside migrate to towns and cities. The most attractive destinations for them in this respect are the capital and regional centres, where they most often find jobs in the small business sector. Rural young people graduating from higher and secondary educational establishments in the towns are in no hurry to return home, since the chances to get employment in their specialty in rural areas are limited, with the exception of jobs for specialists in the field of school education and healthcare.

Employment of children under 16 years of age is prohibited by law in the Kyrgyz Republic. Some exemptions are made for children reaching the age of 15, who may be employed with the permission of their parents. However, child labour is practiced both in rural and urban communities. According to the data of the First National Population Census, 2.7 thousand adolescents aged 12-15 years (0.6% of their total number) were obliged to work, and more than 35% of them worked instead of attending school. In rural areas, adolescents are mostly busy at family-run enterprises, i.e., on peasant (private) or personal subsidiary farms, and in urban areas they are mostly engaged in individual labour activity, especially trade. Village boys and girls start working at an earlier age than those in towns. In rural areas, 0.8% of all adolescents aged 12-15 years had some kind of an occupation, while in urban areas the figure was 0.3%. One may assume that in actual fact the number of working adolescents in rural areas is much larger, since most enterprises in the countryside are a sort of family concerns, and children usually take an active part in agricultural work.

In 1991-1994, consumer prices rose much faster than nominal wages, which led to a sharp drop of its real level. From 1995 onward, the trend has somewhat reversed: nominal wages began to grow faster than consumer prices, which meant that real wage levels were going up. In 1999, there was a fall by 8.1% as the result of a sharp spurt in consumer prices against the background of the financial and economic crisis that broke out in late 1998. In 2000, the decline in real wages slowed down to 1.5%.
In 2000, the average monthly nominal wage of employees of enterprises, organizations and institutions was 5.3 times higher than in 1994, reaching 1,227 soms, while its real amount increased during that period by 26.3%. Despite an annual growth of nominal wages, during the past seven years their amount fell short of the so-called minimum consumer budget of the able-bodied population. Between 1994 and 2000, wages were closest to the minimum consumer level in 1998: 89.4%. In 2000, the figure was 85.6%.

From 1995 onward, wages ceased to be the main source of money income for the population. In the period from 1995 to 2000, their share fell from 42.1% to 23.3%, since for most families individual labour activity has become the main source of cash income. Some other sources of income (like sale of goods to the population by natural persons, provision of services, and money transfers from other countries) have also appeared.

Wage differentiation between sectors has increased. In 2000, the difference in wages between sectors with the highest and lowest average monthly wage was 7.2 times against 3.2 times in 1991. Sectoral wage differentiation in 2000 was marked by higher wage levels in credit and insurance organizations (4,218 soms) and in communications (2,764 soms). In the social sphere, wages were below the average for the republic and constituted 611 soms in healthcare, physical culture and social security, 714 soms in education, 797 soms in culture and the arts, and 1,199 soms in science and scientific services. This is connected, first and foremost, with the labour cost standards initially taken as the basis for calculating wage rates and salaries in the production and nonproduction spheres. Moreover, wages in the nonproduction sphere are tied to the statutory minimum wage (100 soms), which has not been revised in the republic since 1998. The unbalanced state budget does not allow the authorities to raise the wages of employees of public sector (budget-funded) enterprises, organizations and institutions in order to keep pace with prices, whereas enterprises in the real and financial sectors of the economy are enabled to establish their own wage rates and salaries depending on disposable income.

There are certain gender disparities in remuneration, which are primarily affected by the sectoral distribution of male and female employment due to differences in physiology and long-standing traditions. The remuneration system that existed at the time of the planned economy had a strong impact on gender distribution by sector. The relatively low level of wages in the budget sector did not attract men to this sector, and female employment was prevalent there. So, one could say that the wage inequalities between men and women are rooted in the past. In the second half of the 1990s, the gap in male and female remuneration levels widened: whereas in 1996 the average wage
of women stood at 73% of the male wage, in 2000 the figure was 67.6%. In 2000, the average male wage was 1.5 times higher than the female wage, constituting 1,427.5 against 964.6 soms.

The problems of the transition period have affected the interests of the entire population, with a particularly negative impact on pensioners and persons receiving survivor benefits, whose total number in 2000 was over 610 thousand. In tracing the changes in the number of old age pensioners, one will find that it kept growing until 1995; later on the trend was reversed, which may be explained by a rise in mortality among the older age groups and by migration. As a rule, migrants of the first wave (recorded in the early 1990s), having settled in a new place, would subsequently bring their parents to live with them. A special cause for concern is the steadily increasing number of disabled children, which tripled during the period under review. Though state allocations for pensions are growing, pensions still fall far short of the minimum consumer budget. Thus, the average old age pension in 2000 was 488.7 soms, or less than half of the pensioner's minimum consumer budget (1,014.4 soms). The situation is even worse with disabled persons, especially disabled children, whose average pension was only 167 soms in 2000.

**Unemployment.** Given annual growth in the size of the able-bodied population and a reduction in the number of jobs, the number of the unemployed began to grow in the republic from the beginning of the 1990s. Prior to 1991, the unemployment indicator was not used in the republic's statistical practice, since officially unemployment as a phenomenon did not exist there. In 1991, a national employment service was established in the country, and the first steps were taken to assess the scale of unemployment in Kyrgyzstan. In the period from 1991 to 1996, registered unemployment moved in one direction: upward. Having reached its highest level at the end of 1996 (77.2 thousand), registered unemployment began to decline. The highest rate of unemployment was also recorded in 1996 (4.3%) went down to 3% in 1997, remaining practically the same (with ups and downs of 0.1 percentage points) in all the subsequent years.

In 1995-2000, the number of persons provided with jobs kept rising, except in 1999 when it fell by 7.6% compared with the preceding year. In 2000, the job placement figure was over 27 thousand. According to the Employment Department of the Kyrgyz Republic, at the end of 2000 a total of 78.4 thousand job seekers were registered with state employment agencies; 58.3 thousand of them had the status of the unemployed, and the unemployment rate made up 3%. Out of the total number of the registered unemployed, 52.9% had left their jobs of their own accord and 16.7% had lost their jobs in view of redundancy, staff reduction or liquidation of enterprises. Apart from that, there is a demand for jobs on the part of graduates of general education schools, higher educational
institutions, secondary specialized and vocational training schools. In 2000, they made up 16.8% (9.5 thousand) of the total number of the registered unemployed. The share of women in the total number of unemployed was highest in the first few years after the establishment of the employment service. Since then, that share has steadily declined. Whereas in 1991-1993 the share of women in the total number of the unemployed was around 70%, by the end of 2000 it was down to 53.6%. The age structure of the unemployed is relatively young: 57.5% of them are under 34 years of age while their educational level is rather high: 9.9% of them have a higher education, 20.6%, a secondary specialized, 59.4%, a secondary general, and only slightly over 10%, an incomplete secondary education.

The dynamics of occupational injuries in 1991-2000 was determined by the economic situation in that period (closure or conversion of enterprises, substantial drop in the number of people employed in production). As a result, the total number of occupational injuries fell 9 times, or 4.6 times per 10,000 working persons. In 2000, a total of 309 occupational injuries were recorded in the country, including 40 fatal ones. The number of deaths as a result of accidents at work per 10,000 workers fell by 30% during the period under review. Two-thirds of all occupational accidents occur at enterprises and organizations in industry, agriculture and transport. In 1991-2000, the amount of compensation paid for harm caused by job-related injuries per person varied widely: from 80 to 900 thousand soms, primarily depending on the gravity of the injuries received.

Poverty and the Transition Period

In order to identify the republic's poor strata, use is being made of an indicator known as the absolute poverty line, which includes the cost of a basket of basic foodstuffs required to attain a certain recommended calorie intake (2,100 kCal per day) and the cost of essential non-food goods and services. The country's poverty rate is defined as the share of the population with consumption cost below the general poverty line. In order to determine the most vulnerable strata of the population, the poorest among the poor, the country's statisticians use an indicator known as the extreme poverty line, which is taken to mean the cost of the food part of the general poverty line basket. The period of Kyrgyzstan's transition along the way of economic reform has been accompanied with steadily growing social and property inequality. Whereas in 1993 the total money incomes of the richest 20% of the population were 5.8 times higher than those of the poorest 20%, over the past few years the gap has widened to nearly 10 times.

Although there are considerable problems in obtaining data for previous years and ensuring their comparability, one may say that from 1990 onward the poverty rate in Kyrgyzstan rose sharply. The
most rapid increase in the poverty rate was recorded in 1998. Whereas in 1996 the share of all households living in poverty was 43.5% (compared with 30.0% in 1993), in 1998 the figure jumped to more than half of the country's population: 54.9%. A certain measure of economic stabilization in subsequent years had a positive effect on reducing the number of poor households: the poverty rate in 2000 went down by 3% compared with 1998 to make 52%.

For several years now, poverty has been a largely rural phenomenon: 80% of the country's poor live in rural areas. If one considers recent changes in dynamics of rural poverty with due regard for an increase in real consumption, one will find that during the 1996-2000 period the number of poor people in rural areas changed but little, whereas urban poverty in recent years has tended to grow. In 1998, the urban poverty rate doubled compared with the preceding year and has stayed at around that level ever since, whereas in rural areas there is a slight trend towards reduction in the number of poor households (by 5% in 2000).

The adoption of the Law on State Benefits in the Kyrgyz Republic laid the groundwork for a targeted approach in awarding benefits and allowances to low-income families and individual citizens. The methods being used to assess the need for such benefits are based on a differentiated approach in assessing real income. An arrangement known as "social passports" now being introduced in the country makes it possible to do away with virtually all unwarranted benefits and privileges. Thus, whereas in 1995 benefits were being paid to over 409 thousand households, in 2000 the figure was down to 156 thousand. In 1995, the average size of benefits per family was 97 soms, and in 2000 it was 155 soms. Although such benefits help to avoid acute privation, they cannot, as a rule, enable their recipients to escape from poverty altogether.

Although the economic difficulties that arose in the transition period primarily affected the "traditional" socially-vulnerable strata of the population (large families, families with disabled members, and old people receiving minimum pensions), the most rapid increase in poverty rate has also been recorded in recent years among a new group of the population: young people in search of work, the unemployed who have lost their jobs as a result of closure of enterprises, growing numbers of "the working poor" (and their dependants), and refugees. In contrast to the widespread belief that old people are the main victims of the transition period, there are various other data confirming that poverty has had a greater effect on children, the unemployed and the "working poor" than on pensioners. In 1996, poverty rate among children under 15 years of age stood at 49%, whereas for adults aged 31-60 years the rate was 38%, and for pensioners, 35%. A family's risk to fall within the category of poor families is directly dependent on its composition. According to the
data of the First National Population Census of 1999, Kyrgyzstan has a total of 976.5 thousand families (households), including 793.1 thousand (81%) with children under 18 years of age. Nearly all children and adolescents (2,013 thousand, or 98% of the total number under 18 years of age) live in families (two-parent or one-parent), including 148 thousand (7% of the total number of children and adolescents living in families) in one-parent families.

The rise in poverty rate among children is largely due to a degradation of the system of child benefits and other changes in child-related incomes. Evidently, low-income families have had to face serious difficulties in view of long delays in the adjustment of child benefits for inflation. In 2000, the rate of poverty among children in Kyrgyzstan (61.2%) was higher than the poverty rate for adults and old people, respectively, by 8.0% and 10.0%, mostly in view of a significant rise in unemployment among breadwinners of families in the middle age bracket, employed, for the most part, in low-paid jobs. Pensioners, with only a few exceptions, have proved to be more protected against inflation than all other groups finding themselves below the poverty line. Besides, "working pensioners" may count on a double source of income; apart from that they also have enough time to cultivate their personal plots of land, and are often recipients of funds as a result of interfamily income distribution.

Healthcare

The main results of the short- and medium-term strategy of reform in the healthcare sector (1996-2000) include structural transformations, formulation of a government policy on medicine supply, introduction of compulsory health insurance, testing and introduction of new funding methods with the use of information technologies, preparation for a final division of the healthcare sector into "customers" and "suppliers" of medical services based on market principles, and involvement in the reform process both of the medical community as a whole and of the public at large.

A major line of reform in healthcare was a drive to restructure the system for providing medical aid, to transform ineffectively operating small in-patient units into more effective primary-level institutions, to amalgamate specialized institutions, and to set up general hospitals. An active reform to ensure rational use of resources led to a reduction in the number of hospital beds from 54,123 in 1991 to 36,552 in 2000. In the process, the utilization rate for hospital beds went up from 89.1% in 1991 to 92.8% in 2000, while the average length of hospital stay was reduced from 15 to 14 days. New forms of providing in-patient and general medical care have developed over the past few years. These are outpatient surgery centres, nursing units, day care wards and home care units. Thus, the number of institutions with day wards went up from 13 with 394 beds in 1991 to 78 with 1,236 beds
in 2000. Despite a shortage of funds, many new medical institutions were put into service during the past ten years: hospitals with over 3 thousand hospital beds and polyclinic-type institutions designed for 4.3 thousand visits per shift, including over 2 thousand beds and around 2.5 thousand visits per shift in rural areas. Alongside state-run therapy and preventive institutions, medical care is provided by 88 nonstate medical institutions and 205 private practitioners.

In 1991, medical and sanitary care in the country was provided by 16,363 doctors (36.3 per 10,000 population) and 47,269 nurses and paramedical personnel (105.0 per 10,000 population). In the period from 1992 to 1994, there was a substantial outflow of people from the republic, including specialists from the healthcare system. From 1996 onward, there is a trend towards stabilization of medical staff and migration of doctors and nurses remained within the natural limits of migration, mostly within the boundaries of the republic. In 2000, a total of 14,297 doctors and 37,034 nurses and paramedical personnel (29.1 and 75.5 per 10,000 population, respectively), were employed in the health care system.

The healthcare system is financed from various sources: the state budget, compulsory health insurance, revenue from extrabudgetary activities, introduction of the co-payment mechanism (with patients paying a part of the fee), and foreign investment. In 1990, outlays on public health stood at 4.3% of the GDP; in the following two years, health expenditures fell substantially, but in 1995 they were back to the 1991 level (4.3%). From 1997 onward, state budget expenditures were supplemented with contributions to compulsory health insurance, paid by employers at a rate of 2% of the payroll fund (income). In addition, the country's Social Fund has made its own contributions to compulsory health insurance of pensioners and officially registered unemployed from the Pension Fund and the Employment Fund, respectively. Since 2000, the republican budget has been allocating funds for compulsory health insurance of children under 16 years of age and persons receiving social security benefits.

At the same time, the second half of the 1990s, once again brought a steady decline in the share of health expenditures in the GDP, so that in 2000 the figure was only 2.2%. In view of inflation and underfunding, the actual situation in this area is even worse, with the result that the main burden of medical expenses is borne by the patients themselves. Considering that about 200 thousand people in the country are entitled to healthcare benefits, which requires annual outlays of nearly 450.0 million soms, the mechanism for awarding healthcare benefits to the population needs to be revised and brought into conformity with the level of funding.
All women in the republic are guaranteed free prenatal medical care. During pregnancy, each woman makes over 13 visits to assigned doctors, and during each visit she is provided with all the necessary medical services. In case of necessity, women are referred to maternity hospitals. All children are born in maternity hospitals or in-patient units. When labour is normal, the child is delivered by a midwife, whereas in cases of abnormal pregnancy, women in childbirth must be attended by a doctor, or else such patients must be directed to large maternity centres. However, economic problems prevent the prenatal and postnatal care system from running smoothly, because not all women, especially those from remote rural communities in mountain areas, have enough money for transport expenses and for buying specialized drugs not entered on the statutory list. The rate of congenital fetus anomalies is high: in 2000, the number of children born with congenital anomalies made up 988 babies (1%), and 96 of these anomalies (9.6% of the total) were incompatible with life. Over the past decade, the number of low-weight newborn babies (under 1,000 g) varied from 1.2 to 2.1 per 1,000 live births; the number of those weighing 1,000-1,500 g also varied insignificantly: 2.5 in 2000 against 3.3 in 1991. The share of children whose weight at birth was 1,500-2,500 g increased in the past decade from 46.6 per 1,000 live births in 1991 to 53.5 in 2000.

The slump in the economy and mounting socio-economic difficulties in the Kyrgyz Republic have had an adverse effect on public health.

Iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) present a serious medicosocial problem, because they largely determine the state of public health and the intellectual level of society as a whole. Elimination of IDD is now a priority line in the activity of the Ministry of Public Health of the Kyrgyz Republic and international organizations. Sample surveys have shown a growing incidence of goiter among children and adolescents, an increase in the number of patients with congenital hypothyrosis, and the emergence of cases of endemic cretinism. The results of biological monitoring to assess the severity of IDD in various regions of the republic testify to iodine deficiency virtually all over the territory the country, but especially in its southern regions. The degree of iodine deficiency in Kyrgyzstan has been assessed, according to WHO criteria, as medium to severe. An adverse role in the spread of IDD has been played by factors such as the absence of a national salt industry, loss of the state monopoly in the import and sale of iodised salt, disruption of supplies of marine products to the regions, and high prices putting these products beyond the reach of the bulk of the population. Urgent measures have been taken in some of the republic's southern areas to prevent IDD among children by dispensing a pharmaceutical preparation called lipiodol (iodised oil).
Among the problems causing special concern is the high incidence of anaemia both among the entire population and among its least protected groups: women and children. It has been established that today around 60% of women suffer from anaemia during pregnancy, which is twice as high as in the early 1990s. The number of children suffering from anaemia has also roughly doubled over the past ten years: in 2000, the rate was 14.8 cases per 1,000 children aged 0-14 years. Low living standards, an inadequate and monotonous diet short of all essential nutrients lead to that disease. The prevalence rate for anaemia is highest in the Osh, Talass and Naryn regions.

The problem of combating infectious diseases has always been high on the agenda, sometimes becoming a matter of top priority for the republic's authorities. Kyrgyzstan's rise to sovereignty gave rise to new problems connected with economic difficulties, which led to epidemics in a number of infectious diseases.

In the past decade, tuberculosis remained the worst health problem in the country. The prevalence rate for tuberculosis went up from 56.4 cases per 100,000 population in 1991 to 150.9 cases in 2000, with men suffering from tuberculosis 1.6 times more often than women. The high prevalence rate can be explained, on the one hand, by more effective detection of primary TB and, on the other, by the critical epidemiological situation in tuberculosis. A special cause for concern is the continued high incidence of TB among children and adolescents: during the past ten years, it multiplied more than 2.2 times. In order to ensure timely detection and treatment of patients and to reduce mortality from that disease, a National Tuberculosis Programme was adopted in 1995. Alongside traditional anti-TB measures (vaccination of newborn babies and revaccination of children with BCG vaccine, tuberculindiagnostics, mass fluorographic examinations), new highly effective methods of diagnostics and treatment of TB patients (DOTS strategy) are being introduced throughout the country.

The overall prevalence rate for mental disorders fell during the decade 3.4 times to 52.7 cases per 100,000 population, whereas among adolescents aged 15-17 years the rate has only halved to be 85.4 cases per 100,000 persons of this age (15-17 years).

Drug addiction poses a new threat to the republic. The drug traffic from Afghanistan running across the republic's territory is one of the main factors potentially aggravating the situation. Drug addicts are "getting younger": whereas in 1970-1980 drug addiction was more frequent among teenagers in the 16 to 18 age group, now there are facts of using drugs among children aged 10 to 12. But considering the high latency of the disease, one may be sure that only an insignificant part of drug addicts, including children, are registered with medical institutions. Projects such as Revival (to
prevent chemical dependence), Parents Against Drugs, Young People Against Drugs, and others are primarily aimed to minimize the adverse effect of the "transition period" on children.

Over the past few years, there has been a huge increase in the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases (STD). From 1991 to 2000, the incidence of syphilis multiplied 44 times (from 2.0 cases per 100,000 population in 1991 to 87.9 cases in 2000). What is particularly worrying is the spread of syphilis among children and adolescents, with 132 new cases registered in 2000 (compared with 5 cases in 1991); 44% of these were cases of congenital syphilis. Over the past five years, the prevalence rate for syphilis among men and women in the republic has been virtually the same.

In the second half of the 1990s, the first cases of HIV infection were recorded in the republic; in 2000, the number of detected cases rose to 16 (12 CIS nationals and 4 nationals of Kyrgyzstan). However, considering the rapid spread of STD and drug addiction, the situation could take a turn for the worse at any moment and should be closely monitored.

The state of public health and mortality rates among the population are adequately reflected in life expectancy at birth. High infant and child mortality rates have a negative effect on this indicator. Moreover, from the early 1990s onward there was an increase in overall mortality, mostly in view of higher mortality among older people. It is only in the past few years that mortality among the population has somewhat declined. As a result, life expectancy at birth kept falling annually until the mid-1990s (from 68.5 years in 1990 to 66 years in 1995), and it was only in 1996 that the decline gave way to a slight upturn, so that by the end of the century this indicator had reached the level of the early 1990s (68.5 years in 2000). Still, life expectancy in Kyrgyzstan remains 6-7 years lower than in the economically developed countries.

In view of wide discrepancies in mortality rates (1.5-1.7 times), the difference in life expectancy between men and women makes up 8 years (in 2000, life expectancy for men was 64.9 years, and for women, 72.4 years). However, compared with average figures for the CIS countries, life expectancy for men in Kyrgyzstan is somewhat higher, and for women, on the contrary, it is markedly lower. Such a trend is characteristic of most Central Asian countries. So, although women in Kyrgyzstan on average live longer than men, the difference is relatively less pronounced.

A long period of stagnation was recorded in infant mortality. In 1990-1995, the infant mortality rate fluctuated around 28-32 deaths in the first year of life per 1,000 live births, and in 2000 it fell down to 23 deaths. Despite a general downward trend, the infant mortality rate in Kyrgyzstan remains twice as high as the European average. Besides, one should bear in mind that national criteria of a
live birth and, consequently, of infant and child mortality differ from international criteria, which
leads to a considerable understatement of the national rate. Consequently, the mortality rate for
children in Kyrgyzstan, as in all other countries with a high birth rate, remains on a high level. In the
period from 1990 to 2000, infant mortality fell by nearly a quarter. That was largely due to a
reduction in the number of infants dying from respiratory diseases (by more than 40%).
Nevertheless, these diseases are still the main cause of death among infants in the first year of life
(35% of all infant deaths in 2000), followed by diseases and conditions originating in the perinatal
period (33% in 2000).

The later cause is closely connected with the health of mothers, whose mortality also remains high.
During the 1990s, maternal mortality declined (from 63 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in
1990 to 46 in 2000). Despite such positive dynamics, the maternal mortality rate is 2.5 times as high
as the European average. In 2000, out of a total of 44 registered maternal deaths, 4 were young
mothers aged 15-19 years (46 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births for mothers of that age).

According to a report on the causes of death among the population in 2000, 30% of all maternal
deaths are connected with diseases during pregnancy, labour and the perinatal period, 18%, with
complications of labour and delivery, 18%, with complications in the perinatal period, 14%, with
consequences of previous abortions, and 20%, with other obstetric conditions. The pattern of
maternal mortality causes has not changed: toxicosis (25%) and hemorrhage (11%) are still the main
causes of maternal deaths.

During the 1990s, there was also a decline in child (0-4 years) mortality: from 41.3 per thousand in
1990 to 33.2 in 2000. Among the main causes of death for children under 5 years of age are
respiratory diseases (around 40% of all deaths in that age group), and for children aged 1-4 years
(i.e., without newborn infants) these also include accidents, poisonings and injuries (24% of deaths
in 2000). In other words, the accidental death rate for 1-4 year olds is much higher than for newborn
infants. At that age children begin to walk on their own, but are often left unattended by adult
members of the family: out of the total number of children in that age group who died from
unnatural causes in 2000, over 40% were victims of accidental falls and just as many drowned. So,
the high rate of child deaths from accidents indicates an acceleration of negative trends in society
leading to child neglect. This problem can only be solved with an interdepartmental approach, an
upgrading of the socio-economic status of families with children, and an improvement in
government social policy with respect to children.
Mortality among young people aged 15-19 years remains quite high as well. At the end of 2000, the number was 516 thousand (11% of the country's total population), including 259 thousand males and 257 thousand females. Compared with 1990, this age group increased by 90 thousand, or by 21% (an average of 2% a year). In 2000, 360 young people died at the age of 15-19 years, or 0.7 per 1,000 persons of the given age (0.9 in 1990). The main causes of death among teenagers, just as ten years ago, are accidents, poisonings and injuries (45% of all deaths in this age group in 2000); circulatory and respiratory diseases and tumours each account for 7-8% of all deaths at this age.

Out of the total number of young people who died from unnatural causes in 2000, 27% committed suicide, 18% died as a result of car accidents, 12% were killed, 12% died from bodily injury inflicted with indefinite intent, 9% drowned, 7% died from electric shock, 6%, from accidental poisoning, and 9%, as a result of other accidents. In other words, suicides are the main cause of unnatural death among the young. Joblessness and low living standards verging on poverty are among the possible causes of juvenile suicide.

Within the overall mortality structure, circulatory diseases account for roughly one-half of all deaths (45% in 2000). They are followed by respiratory diseases (13%), injuries, poisonings and effects of some other external causes (10%), tumours (9%), digestive diseases (6%), and infectious and parasitic diseases (5%). Among the latter, the main cause of death is tuberculosis. The share of deaths from tuberculosis in 2000 was 61% of all deaths from infectious and parasitic diseases and 3% of deaths from all the causes. In the ten-year period, mortality from tuberculosis rose from 6.7 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in 1990 to 20.7 in 2000 (3.1 times), which is due to a worsening of social and everyday living conditions.

One should note that an analysis of the dynamics of age-specific mortality rates shows a rejuvenation of mortality from circulatory diseases. The most significant increase in mortality is recorded in the 20-49 age groups: from 54.2 per 100,000 inhabitants of that age in 1990 to 81.4 in 2000 (1.5 times), which is largely due to stresses.

Young people's health is also markedly affected by negative changes in their way of life. Thus, a poll taken in late 2000 among students of higher educational institutions, vocational school students and school-leavers in the capital showed that an average of 13% of young people are regular smokers and 23% smoke from time to time. Among 16-17 year olds, the share of those who smoke periodically was already as high as 21-22%, and in the 18-25 age group one-third of young men and 7% of young women said they were regular smokers. Drinking is also widespread among the young. Only 23% of all respondents had never tried alcohol, one-half of those polled (irrespective of
gender) took alcohol on festive occasions, and over 2% took alcohol more often than 3-4 times a month. At the same time, physical culture is not very widespread among young people. Only 22% of all respondents attended sports sections on a regular basis, 24% did so periodically, 42% attended physical education lessons as part of the curriculum, and 17% were released from such lessons.

Education

In the period from 1991 to 2000, the education sector in Kyrgyzstan was substantially reformed. The Bilim National Programme adopted in 1996 charted the development of the education sector until 2000. Its main purpose was to ensure access to high-quality basic education for all citizens of the republic. Some other national programmes were also adopted to address the problems of access to education: Cadres for the 21st Century (1995), Access to Education (1999), as well as national programmes to combat poverty such as Araket (1998), Madaniat (1996), and others. A significant achievement of that period was the formation of a legal framework for the protection of children and for the development of younger children. One of the latest programmes with a detailed plan of action is called Access to Education (Zhetkinchek) (1999), which provides for the development of a government strategy mobilizing society for:

* recognition of the need to regard children and their education as a priority;

* higher social sensitivity to problems connected with children's rights to education;

* higher responsibility of parents, state agencies and organs of local self-government in matters of preschool upbringing and education, especially as regards orphans, disabled children and children from disadvantaged family backgrounds.

The results of the First National Population Census of 1999 show that the educational standards of the population are quite high. Out of the total population aged 15 years and over, 10.5% had a higher education, 10.8%, a secondary specialized, 50%, a complete secondary general, and 18.3%, a basic general education (eight or nine years). Only 6.3% of all adults had a primary education, while the illiteracy rate was around 1.3%. Compared with the 1989 census, the share of people with a higher education rose insignificantly (from 9.4% to 10.5%), that of people with a secondary specialized education markedly declined (from 15.7% to 10.8%), and that of people with a secondary general education went up (from 39.1% to 50%).
The highest percentage of people with a higher education is in the 50 to 55 age groups, of which men make up 21.2% and women 20.5%. In the younger age groups, one may note a steady decline in the percentage of people with a higher education: from 19.2% at the age of 45-49 years to 10.6% at the age of 26-29 years (when education in the formal education system is usually completed). In this event, the share of men with a higher and secondary specialized education decreases towards the younger ages at a faster rate than that of women. The share of people with a higher education in the 25-29 age group in urban areas is three times as high as that for rural areas, irrespective of gender.

There is evidence of a decline in the educational standards of the younger generation compared with the 1989 census. At that time, 15.2% of young adults in the 25-29 age group had a higher or incomplete higher education, whereas in 1999 the figure was 12.4%. The share of persons with a secondary specialized education fell by nearly a half (from 22.9% in 1989 to 12.4% in 1999). For women this indicator dropped 1.5 times, whereas for men it fell 3 times. If one compares the qualification gained by persons aged 30-34 years and 20-24 years, one will get a fairly accurate picture of changes in the prestige attached to some specialties in the past ten years. Thus, the share of trained architects, engineers and specialists in related professions went down from 24% (35-39 age group) to 18% (20-24 age group), that of specialists in education, from 35% to 31%, respectively, and in healthcare, from 10% to 4%. At the same time, the share of specialists in the field of social and related sciences went up from 12% to 21%, in law and business, from 4% to 7%, and in computer technologies, from 0.5% to 2%.

Despite the state's sufficiently serious concern for education, during the period under review one will find a trend towards a reduction in educational expenditures as a share of GDP, especially in the last two years.
State Budget Expenditures on Education as a Share of GDP

(Percent)

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A point to note here is that the pace of the reduction was uneven, differing from one segment of the education system to another. The worst-affected area was preschool education, because with the disintegration of the Soviet system most of the organizations which had preschool institutions on their balance sheet were no longer able to finance them. During the period under review, the network of kindergartens and the number of children attending them shrank by more than two-thirds: in 2000, there were only 416 preschool child-care institutions attended by 45.8 thousand children, or 8.7% of the respective age group. The curtailment in the network and in enrolment was particularly drastic in rural areas, where the number of children attending such institutions fell in the past decade 4.5 times.

Although the government of the Kyrgyz Republic took a series of measures to maintain the infrastructure of preschool institutions and settle their financial problems, it proved to be impossible in the past decade to stabilize the process of reducing their number and, consequently, the number of the children enrolled.

The decline in real outlays on education created immense difficulties for general education schools as well. These had to be overcome, on the one hand, by children, parents and teachers, and on the other, by policy-making agencies whose duty was to ensure equal access to high-quality education. The problem of access took a particularly sharp turn in 1993-1996. At the start of the 1996/1997 school year, 8,588 children failed to turn up at school. Among the main reasons for that were growing education-related expenses of households, a decline in the prestige of education among a part of the adult population, an increase in "social" orphanage, an unwillingness to learn among some adolescents, and closure of boarding schools. For people used to free education, the need to pay for certain educational services came as something of a shock. In that situation, the authorities took a number of steps to maintain access to education: children of needy families were registered, measures were taken to provide them with clothes, footwear and study materials, and in some towns
and cities of the republic children were also provided with meals and free bussing to school. As a result of these measures, the number of children failing to attend school has fallen 2.5 times (since 1997 to date).

Today the republic has about 10 types of schools offering various kinds of education. These include mass schools, gymnasiums, lyceums, profile (specialized) schools, schools based on diverse teaching methods invented by individual authors, experimental schools, school complexes, and specialized schools for children with developmental problems. This range of schools took shape precisely in the 1990-1999 period. By 2000, the network of gymnasiums in the republic had more than tripled, reaching a total of 369 (attended by 50.5 thousand pupils); lyceum numbers and enrolments had also roughly tripled, to 60 and 18.7 thousand, respectively. Innovation schools are usually attended by children with a good pre-basic and basic grounding and high academic results.

The 1999 census data also confirm the main trends in educational enrolment: a fairly high rate (97-98%), irrespective of gender, on the level of incomplete secondary school. At the age of 16, the share of students is already down to 82% (80% of boys and 84% of girls).

At that age, one will already find a distinction between boys and girls in the choice of educational institutions: 72% of boys attend general education schools and 6% join vocational training schools and secondary specialized educational establishments, which are oriented towards early entry on the labour market. The share of girls who continue to attend schools is higher (79%), while that of girls who want to learn a trade as soon as possible at vocational and secondary specialized schools is half as high as the share of boys.

At the age of 17-18 years, the educational enrolment rate is down to 41% for boys and around 50% for girls. By that time, most of them have already decided on their future occupation. In that age group, 18% of boys and 23% of girls are students of higher educational institutions, 8% of boys and 11% of girls attend vocational and secondary specialized schools, and the rest continue their education at school or attend study courses.

In the 20-24 age group, when education at diverse educational institutions is in the main completed, the share of students of both genders evens out and comes to 16%.

In the various regions of the republic, educational enrolment trends are similar both for separate age groups and in terms of gender: a fairly high enrolment rate (97-98%), irrespective of gender, on the level of incomplete secondary school. Starting from 15-16 years of age, there is a gradual decline in educational enrolment, with boys leaving the education system faster than girls. Girls complete
secondary school more frequently than boys, some of whom leave after nine years of schooling and join secondary specialized educational establishments and vocational schools in order to learn a trade and enter the labour market. Bishkek stands somewhat apart from other regions in terms of a higher enrolment rate for age groups beyond the framework of incomplete secondary school. This is due to the wider range of educational services offered in the capital, starting from prestigious vocational schools to institutions of higher education (IHE), which gives young people a better chance to find a job in the future. Those who study in the capital are not only local inhabitants, but come from all over the country.

The implementation of a package of measures to increase access to education ensures a fairly high rate of children finishing school. The repeater rate (the share of pupils enrolled in the same class for a second time to repeat the year) went down from 0.09 in 1991 to 0.02 in 2000 for primary school, and from 0.08 to 0.03 for incomplete secondary school (grades 5-9). In grades 10-11 this rate is lowest: 0.02 in 1991 and 0.001 in 2000.

As regards children leaving school before finishing their studies, the picture here is somewhat different. The lowest and most stable drop-out rate will be found in primary school: 0.05-0.06 throughout the entire period under review; somewhat higher rate is recorded in grades 5-9, where it fell in the ten-year period by nearly one-half (from 0.09 to 0.05); and the highest rate is in grades 10-11, even though it fell in that period from 0.18 to 0.11. The high dropout rate in the first half of the 1990s was largely due to high rates of external migration.

The reform of the national economy calls for an adequate restructuring of the personnel training system with due regard for the requirements of the labour market. For young people who were unable to get a basic education at the school-going age, there are special programs within the system of specialized vocational education. This system provides an opportunity for education on the basis of nine years or eleven years of schooling. All students are entitled to minimum guarantees: free meals, student grants and hostels. Most of the students within the system are teenagers from low-income families or orphans. During the past decade, the vocational education system also experienced certain difficulties: although the network of vocational schools shrunk insignificantly, enrolment at these schools was nearly halved. In 2000, the republic had 113 vocational schools with 26.5 thousand students, including 35.9% of girls. Every year, over 11 thousand vocational school students, apart from learning a trade, receive a certificate of complete secondary education.

The network of higher educational institutions has developed most dynamically: in 2000, there were 45 IHE in all regions of the republic, including 15 nonstate institutions (in 1991, Kyrgyzstan had
only 9 state IHE). At the start of the 2000/2001 academic year, 34% of young women and 33% of young men in the 18-23 age group were students of higher educational institutions in the republic. As a result of the educational reform, the number of IHE students per 10,000 population rose to 385 in 2000, which is three times more than in 1991. Out of the total number of students enrolled at higher educational institutions, young women constituted 50.7%, and at secondary specialized educational establishments, 65.3%.

Although a poll of 600 graduation-class pupils and students taken in Bishkek in 2000 showed that a professional career and an interesting job were last on their list of vital values, three-quarters of all graduation-class pupils in Bishkek (85% of girls and 68% of boys) were planning to join a higher educational institution, only 3% of the respondents, irrespective of gender, were planning to work at a production enterprise, and 14% were still undecided (9% of girls and 20% of boys). In order to obtain a hierarchy of professions enjoying the greatest popularity among young people, respondents were asked to select three of what they thought to be the most prestigious professions from a list of seventeen. The profession of a lawyer proved to be by far the most attractive one: it was chosen by 58% of all the respondents. In the event, a high rating was given to that profession in all the age groups: both among 16-17 year olds (60%) and among 18-25 year olds (54%), with a rate of 59% among females and 56% among males. Such high prestige attached to the profession of a lawyer is due not only to its necessity and social significance in this period of socio-economic transformations, but also to the relatively high and stable income received by members of that profession. The second most prestigious profession was that of a translator (named by 46% of all respondents, including 55% of females and 34% of males). The third on the list was the profession of a businessman or private entrepreneur (44.5%), which was named as desirable more frequently by males than by females (54% and 38%, respectively). These were followed by the professions of a programmer (32.8%), economist (32.3%), doctor (22.5%) and professional athlete (15.2%). Age and gender differences in rating these professions were insignificant, except when it came to doctors (27% of females against 15% of males) and professional athletes (8% of females against 25% of males).

A very small percentage of young people gave preference to once-popular professions such as military serviceman (8.7%), scientist (7.3%), teacher (5.7%), engineer (4%), actor (2.8%) and shop assistant (1.5%), and also to occupations in the service sector (2.2%). In the view of young people irrespective of gender, a good profession means a line of activity which gives an opportunity to travel (35%) and to earn a lot of money (23.2%), followed by "interesting" work (19.7%).
Postgraduate study for a master's degree and subsequent research for a doctor's degree complete the system of higher education. In 2000, 1,688 persons in the country were studying for a master's degree and 65 for a doctorate. During the years of independence, the number of the former increased 2.7 times, and of the latter, 2.8 times. The share of women among persons studying for a master's was 51% in 1991 and 62% in 2000 (the share of men was 48% and 38%, respectively. The share of women working for a doctorate in 2000 was 45% (that of men, respectively, 55%).

**At-Risk Children**

The rights of orphans and children left without parental care are regulated by the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Marriage and Family Code, and the Law on Protecting and Safeguarding the Rights of Minors. Under the Marriage and Family Code, in cases where a child's life or health is in jeopardy the republic's guardianship agencies are entitled to make a decision on terminating their parental rights of their parents (Article 138) and on the adoption of minors (Chapter 14). A government decision of September 15, 1994, lays down the procedure for the adoption of minors left without parental care.

During the 1990s, the number of orphans and abandoned children tended to increase. The worsening socio-economic situation and the substantial increase in "social" orphanage called for an urgent reform in the childhood protection system. Today this work is mostly aimed at "rescuing" children as soon as possible by placing them in state-run children's institutions, a move which cannot always provide a radical solution to the problem. One of the main causes of the increase in the number of orphaned children is alcohol abuse by their parents and, as a result, cruelty to children (child abuse) in such families, neglect of their needs and interests. The number of children whose parents were deprived of parental rights remains invariably high. At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of adoptions of babies and small children. Guardianship of 9-15 year olds is also on the increase, with roughly 80% of all guardians being relatives of the ward. Although adoption and guardianship remain the priority arrangements for children left without parental care, one should note that would-be parents and guardians have to go through complicated bureaucratic procedures aimed at verifying their financial status and screening the child's health.

In 2000, the republic's government jointly with UNICEF carried out a national survey in the field of childhood protection as part of an effort to develop its New Generation program. The main purpose of the survey was to study the position of abandoned children, to assess and analyse the legal framework, to look for ways of reforming and strengthening the family support system, to enlist
parents and the public at large in the effort to resolve childhood problems, and to step up the work being done by guardianship and tutelage agencies to prevent social orphanage.

Children in need of special protection are in the charge of several government structures: the Ministry of Public Health (children of 0-4 years of age), the Ministry of Education and Culture (orphans and abandoned children, and also those with minor mental or physical handicaps) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (disabled children). Juvenile delinquents and children from disadvantaged family backgrounds are monitored by the Interior Ministry's Inspectorate for the Affairs of Minors, whose main duty is to arrange work designed to prevent child neglect and juvenile delinquency.

At the end of 2000, the republic had 5 children's homes with 563 children, 4 infant homes with 264 babies (including 181 orphans), 6,267 wards under guardianship arrangements, and 8,638 adopted children and adolescents. Alternative forms of guardianship and tutelage, such as family-type children's homes and foster families, are being introduced on an ever wider scale. But the number of such institutions is still insignificant: the republic has a total of 11 family-type children's homes raising 76 children. In order to coordinate the work in arranging alternative custody, a standing commission has been set up under the Ministry of Education and Culture to select candidates for adoptive and foster parents, to study their social and everyday living conditions, and to give them psychological and educational assistance in raising and teaching children.

From 1996 onward, the Children's Fund of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Meerim International Charitable Foundation implemented a project in support of orphans, under which the republic's first children's village for orphans was built with the assistance and financial support of SOS Kinderdorf International; a rehabilitation centre for homeless children was established under the mayor's office with UNDP support.

Adoption and guardianship remain the priority arrangements for children left without parental care. The number of children placed with families for adoption constitutes (together with those referred for guardianship) 75-80% of the total number of identified children left without care. At the same time, placement of children with families is often obstructed at the local level. Guardianship and tutelage agencies tend to complicate or drag out the procedures in awarding custody of children to guardians. Guardianship allowances are virtually everywhere paid out with delays and rarely in the full amount. In this context, disabled children (many of whom are left without guardianship) are a special cause for concern. In 2000, there were 14,839 disabled children in the republic, including
those suffering from cerebral palsy. The number of disabled children rose from 6 per 1,000 children in 1991 to 8 in 2000.

Most of the problems faced by parents of disabled children have not been solved over the past ten years. These include:

- shortage of specialized shops (selling wheelchairs, hearing aids, etc.) and enterprises for the manufacture of such equipment;

- lack of educational programs for healthy children to teach them tolerance and goodwill towards disabled children;

- insufficient educational standards and isolation of disabled children from society;

- shortage of teachers and teaching programs for disabled children.

The network of preschool institutions for orphans and physically or mentally handicapped children has undergone a change. Nine specialized schools have been closed down because of financial difficulties over the past ten years. Only a small proportion of children with special needs have an opportunity to attend or stay at specialized institutions and to receive proper care there. Moreover, these institutions are strapped for cash and are often housed in ill-adapted buildings, not in frequently lacking the most essential facilities for the normal development of disabled children. A majority of disabled children, especially from poor families or remote regions, have virtually no access to modern treatment, care and rehabilitation facilities. Children with developmental problems constitute a sizeable segment of school-age children who do not attend school: their number rose from 1,975 in 1997 to 2,336 in 2000. So, the problem of reforming the education system and looking for new ways and mechanisms to ensure access to education for at-risk children is now high on the list of priorities. This issue lies at the basis of the Access to Education (Zhetkinchek) program being put into effect by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Alongside traditional forms and methods of maintenance, education and training of at-risk children, efforts are being made to develop new alternative forms helping to draw such children into the orbit of social education. The main emphasis here is on the establishment of correction classes at mass schools, which makes it possible to teach problem children in the conditions of a conventional school without separating them from their families (today such classes are attended by 504 children).
During the past decade, a number of nonstate social rehabilitation centres were set up in the republic for the purpose of teaching so-called "unteachable" children. One example is the Home for the Development of Mothers and Children Through Their Initiatives, a social rehabilitation centre for disabled children set up by the Meerim International Charitable Foundation which seeks to create conditions for identifying and developing the potential abilities of children with special needs earlier deprived of access to education. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Kyrgyz Republic runs three state-funded mental boarding schools for children of 4 to 18 years of age, with a total of more than 4,000 inmates. A great deal has been done in this area by the republican Association of Parents of Disabled Children, the Umut charitable rehabilitation centre, and regional rehabilitation centres. Today 54% of institutions of this kind are financed from the republic's budget.

In addition, for a radical improvement in the status of orphans, children left without parental care and disabled children it is necessary to carry out a package of measures, in particular:

- to draft a special legislative act (law) aimed at protecting the rights and social guarantees of orphaned, abandoned and disabled children;

- to develop and implement institutional measures in order to overcome the departmental disunity in dealing with abandoned children;

- to upgrade the hardware and software support of the data bank on children available for adoption, and to ensure public access to information on children in need of a family;

- to introduce alternative forms of family arrangements for abandoned children, including adoptive and foster families;

- to develop programs and methodological recommendations on the psychological, educational, medical and social support of abandoned children;

- to ensure early detection of impairments in children's development for the purpose of timely correction, adaptation and rehabilitation;

- to arrange the activities of intersectoral medicopsychological commissions under the administrations of regions, cities and districts on a permanent basis;

- to develop modern criteria of selecting disabled children for resident institutions and enrolment procedures for other resident children's institutions.
In the period of social changes, young people are in a greater danger of coming into conflict with law. Since the ongoing processes and prevailing trends in the area of juvenile crime will largely determine the criminal situation in the immediate future, the state of affairs in this area gives serious cause for concern.

During the past decade, the number of minors committing crimes fluctuated, reaching its peak in 1992: 2,064 persons. That was followed by a six-year stretch of marginal decline. Nevertheless it proved to be impossible to improve the situation in any radical way, so that in 2000 the number of juvenile offenders was virtually back to the 1991 level, totalling 1,713 persons. The number of crimes committed by them in 2000 per 10,000 adolescents (14-17 years) was 29 compared with 43 in 1991. Poverty, a disadvantaged social background and persistent unemployment induce young people to commit illegal acts. In the opinion of 600 Bishkek students and school-leavers polled in 2000, the causes of juvenile crime include unemployment and low income of households (54%), insufficient government assistance to poor families (25%), inadequate role of society in implementing social programs (18%), and low responsibility of parents (15%). In the event, there was no sharp distinction between the views of young men and women. At the same time, the results of the poll revealed a low level of social activity among the young, who showed little interest in matters of world politics and political life in the country, with greater indifference among young women. Thus, only 45% of youths and 41% of girls took an interest in relations with other countries, 46% and 40%, respectively, were interested in political life in the country, 27% and 17%, in the work of the country's parliament, and 19% and 11%, in the activities of political parties.

Aggravation of social and everyday problems, for its part, tends to create a distorted idea of the principles of social justice among the teenagers, leading to a spread of the consumer mentality in their midst. No wonder crimes committed from mercenary motives and violent crimes predominate in the overall structure of juvenile crime. The number of minors committing thefts (60-70% of the total number of juvenile offenders), robberies (8-12%) and drug-related crimes (4-6%) remained stably high throughout the period under review. The growing number of gang offences committed by juveniles together with adults is particularly worrying. Whereas the number of crimes committed by all-juvenile gangs kept falling steadily throughout the period under review, the number of gang offences with the participation of adults nearly tripled in the first half of the 1990s to reach a maximum of 801 crimes. From 1996 onward, their number began to fall, but only very slowly, so that in 2000 the level of gang offences committed by juveniles together with adults was still 22% above the 1991 figure. Cruelty among the young is also on the increase: in 2000, the number of
minors convicted of murder was 10 persons (compared with 11 persons in 1991), and of intentional infliction of grave bodily injury, 14 and 3 persons, respectively.