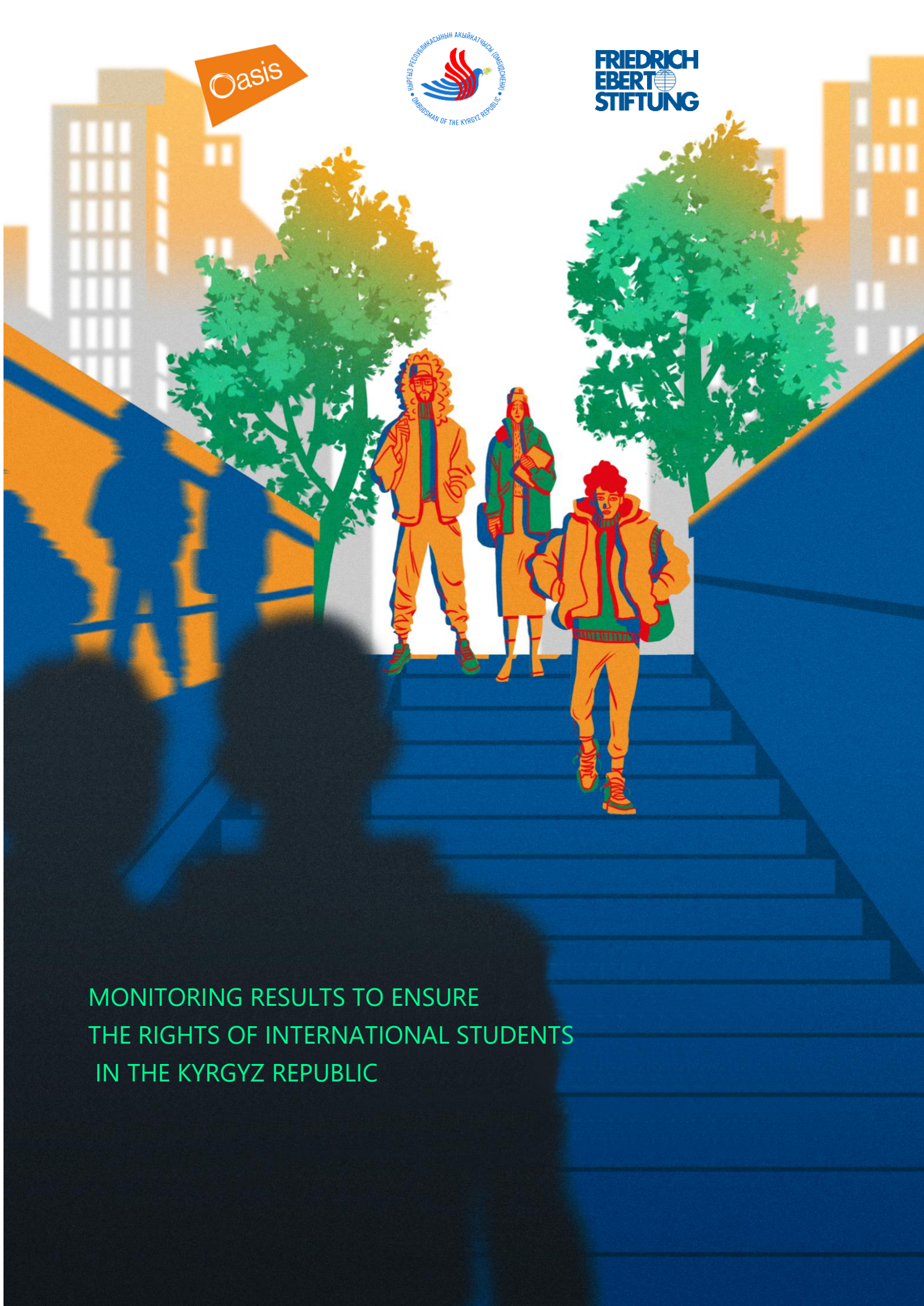

MONITORING RESULTS TO ENSURE THE RIGHTS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

MONITORING RESULTS TO ENSURE THE RIGHTS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

This research was conducted by the Ombudsman Institute of the Kyrgyz Republic in collaboration with the Center for Safer Solutions and the Oasis Foundation, which are co-authors of the research. This research was supported by the Representative Office of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in the Kyrgyz Republic. The aim of this research is to develop recommendations for protecting the rights of international students from South Asia in accessing inclusive and safe public spaces and infrastructure in urban areas.

Research Team: Meerim Osmonalieva - Lead Researcher; Chyngyz Dooronbekov, Akbar Amanov, and Zhibek Baktybekova – Researchers.

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Research title: Monitoring results to ensure the rights of international students in the Kyrgyz Republic

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Introduction

Today, Bishkek city is the central hub of the economic and social life for the citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic. Advancing policies and initiatives that foster inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements is essential for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11[1]. Creating safe and inclusive public infrastructure and spaces for everyone—regardless of gender, age, cultural background, religion, ethnicity, or socio-economic status—is essential for the advancement of cities and countries (Zhou, 2019, p. 7). This commitment to inclusivity fosters considerable economic and social progress, as it encourages both investors and individuals to participate in various sectors of the economy.

International organizations estimate that the average annual rate of urbanization in Kyrgyzstan will double by 2030[2]. Over the past nine years, the number of new settlements (named novostoiki) in Bishkek and its surrounding areas has surged from 13 to 47, clearly demonstrating the rapid development driven by internal migration[3]. The influx of migrants is primarily directed to Bishkek and the Chui region, with Bishkek city accounting for more than 64% of the overall positive migration growth[4]. According to the IOM analysis, 71% of internal migrants move to the north of the country, mainly to the Chui region and the city of Bishkek[5]. Osh and Jalal-Abad regions are the main donors of internal migrants. The Oasis Foundation's analyses also show that 91% of young people from all over the Kyrgyz Republic also migrate to urban areas in search of decent earnings and quality education.

The educational services market in Bishkek is drawing not only young people from various regions of the Kyrgyz Republic but also an increasing number of foreign students in recent years. We are witnessing a rise in international students and migrant workers from South Asian countries. Over the past seven years, the number of students from India and Pakistan has surged nearly 5.5 times, growing from 4,330 in 2015 to 23,713 individuals today. People travel to the Kyrgyz Republic to receive high-quality medical education at attractive prices and favorable conditions. Citizens have noticed that the city's population has become more diverse, with an increasing number of residents from South Asia. This diversity is a positive indicator of economic growth and an improved investment climate. However, there are also concerns about the safety of foreign citizens and the readiness of society and the system to accommodate a significant influx of people who may not speak the local languages and who have distinct cultural differences.

This research focuses on identifying the key challenges that international students from South Asia encounter in Bishkek, especially in relation to accessing safe public spaces and infrastructure. Additionally, it highlights the existing services available to safeguard the rights of these students. The research team collected valuable insights from 355 international students through online surveys and interviews. Based on our findings, we propose constructive recommendations and initiatives aimed at improving the safety and security of foreign students in the Kyrgyz Republic.

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[1] SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities. Link https://www.globalgoals.org/goals/11-sustainable-cities-and-communities/

[2] The annual urbanization rate in Kyrgyzstan increases from 0.59 in 2015-2020 to 1.18 in 2025-2030. Link: https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/2018-revision-of-world-urbanizationprospects.html

[3] Akipress 2016. Number of new buildings in Bishkek. Link:https://kg.akipress.org/news:630084

[4] Bishkek City Council 2022. Link:https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/530700/edition/1166327/ru

[5] IOM 2022. Internal Migration in the Kyrgyz Republic

CHAPTER 1. METHODOLOGY

Research goal and objectives

The main goal of this study is to develop recommendations for improving the implementation of the rights of international students from South Asia to access inclusive and safe public spaces and infrastructure in urban areas. To do this, the project pursued three main objectives:

1) To evaluate the current situation regarding the implementation of international students' rights from South Asia to access inclusive and safe public spaces and infrastructure in Bishkek.
2) To assess the measures taken by state and local governments, educational institutions, and other stakeholders in creating a safe and inclusive environment for international students.
3) To develop recommendations for stakeholders aimed at improving the implementation of international students' rights to access safe and inclusive public spaces and infrastructure in urban areas. This will also involve creating recommendations for the effective protection of the rights and freedoms of international students in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Data collection method

This study employed mixed methods, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches for data collection and analysis. Quantitative methods were used to gather extensive data on the experiences and consequences of safety and infrastructure access issues faced by international students in Bishkek city. Qualitative methods were implemented to gain a deeper understanding of safety perceptions through semi-structured interviews with international students from South Asia and government officials. The main objective was to gather evidence to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by international students regarding access to inclusive and safe public spaces and infrastructure in urban environments. This includes examining the types of safety threats they encounter. The research aimed to inform future recommendations and policies. The methods employed in this study consisted of a literature and media review, interviews with international students, discussions with other key stakeholders, and an online survey targeting international students.

Target groups for data collection

№	Main topics	Target group	Methodology
1.	Access to inclusive and safe public space and infrastructure in urban areas	International students from South Asia	Surveys collect information from international students about their opinions, behavior, or knowledge.
2.	Implementation of international students' rights from South Asia to access inclusive and safe public spaces and infrastructure in Bishkek	Representatives of responsible government agencies and local authorities.	Written requests according to the developed questionnaire

Geography

Bishkek City is chosen as the location due to the concentration of educational institutions in the area.

Survey of international students

A total of 355 students from South Asia and select other countries participated in the survey. The breakdown of respondents by country is as follows: Pakistan - 284 students, Bangladesh - 35 students, India - 10 students, Afghanistan - 5 students, and 21 students from other countries. Initially, the research group intended to interview only students from South Asia. However, during meetings with students, some individuals from Africa and other distant countries expressed their desire to participate, as they also faced various challenges. To gather data effectively, the research team collaborated with community leaders from South Asian countries to ensure better polling and representativeness. Before conducting the surveys, the research group and interested community leaders organized information campaigns focused on safety measures and crisis protection methods.

To study the perception of safety and accessibility to public infrastructure and spaces among international students from South Asia, an online survey was conducted with 355 respondents. The 69-question questionnaire addressed various aspects, including access to housing, public transportation, and employment. Additionally, there was a section for respondents to share details about incidents that threatened their safety. The questions were developed by the researchers and underwent pre-pilot testing. The questionnaire was then distributed through student organizations and social networks using the snowball sampling method. The collected data were processed, encoded, and analyzed. Semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis.

The survey was conducted in English because over 90% of the participants are proficient in the language. Only 34.5% of the respondents have a decent understanding of the local official languages: 23.3% speak Russian, while only 3.1% understand Kyrgyz. Many students later expressed that language barriers were their primary vulnerability, impacting not only their adaptation but also their ability to protect their rights during incidents of attacks or violations within the Kyrgyz Republic.

Students from over 11 educational institutions participated in the survey, with the following distribution: International University of Kyrgyzstan - 312 students; International Higher School of Medicine - 17 students; International Medical University - 8 students; Asian Medical Institute - 4 students; Royal Metropolitan University - 3 students; Kyrgyz State Medical Academy - 2 students; Avicenna International Medical University - 3 students; American University in Central Asia - 2 students; and one student each from KRSU, Kyrgyz Turkish University ‘Manas’, Kyrgyz National University, and OSCE Academy in Bishkek. The majority of students, 98%, are enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine, while the remaining students attend other faculties. Looking at their education levels, over 67.1% (239 students) are pursuing a bachelor's degree, 31.2% (111 students) are studying for a doctorate, and 1.7% (6 students) are working towards a master's degree.

Interviews and focus groups with students

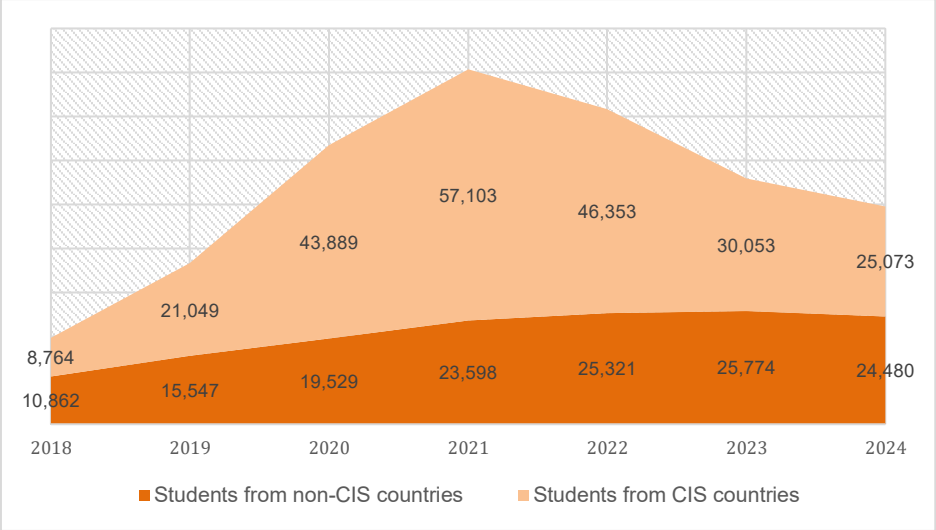
For in-depth analysis, semi-structured qualitative interviews with 20 students and 4 focus groups were conducted to understand the different views and dynamics of the groups, including expectations and perceptions of being in Bishkek, their experiences of violence or abuse, including cases when they witnessed or were victims of attacks. The survey respondents were engaged using the snowball sampling method. The initial sample was gathered with the help of student associations and educational institutions. The research team reached out to these student associations and academic institutions to ask them to inform their students about the research. Interested students were invited to contact members of the research team or research assistants via phone or email if they wished to participate in the research

project. Once the interested students reached out, they received more information about the research and the interview process verbally. Additionally, a detailed written description of the research and the interview process, along with a consent form, was sent to the potential participant via email or their preferred messaging platform. If the student agreed to participate, the representative from the research group and the student determined a suitable time and place, or platform, for the interview. Participants signed a voluntary consent form prior to the start of the interview and were informed about the objectives of the study.

CHAPTER 2. DESK ANALYSIS

2.1. General information on international students in the Kyrgyz Republic

As of 2024, the total number of international students in the Kyrgyz Republic is 49,553, with 24,480 students coming from non-CIS countries[6]. It is important to note that the number of international students has decreased by 31% compared to 2022. If the 2021-2022 academic year the total number of foreign students was 71,674 students, then in 2023-2024 the number of foreign students has already decreased by a third. Most of the foreign students studied in the major cities of the Kyrgyz Republic: Bishkek and Osh. If from 2018 to 2021 the number of students increased by an average of 32% each year, then in recent years we can observe a significant decrease in the number of international students.



Pic 1. International students in the Kyrgyz Republic

Over the past two years, there has been a notable decline in the number of international students from Uzbekistan. Their numbers have dropped by 53% since 2022, resulting in only 18,937 students in 2024. Additionally, there has been a gradual decrease in students from India, with a nearly 13% reduction in the past two years. While there was a significant increase in international students from 2018 to 2021, recent years have seen a sharp decline in their numbers.

The gradual decline in the number of students from India pursuing medical education abroad may be attributed to the opening of new medical institutions within India. For instance, in 2024, the Government of India established 60 new medical colleges to address the growing demand for healthcare professionals. Looking ahead, India plans to continue expanding its educational facilities to train highly qualified personnel in the medical field. This initiative is also expected to attract students from across South Asia who are seeking quality education in English and wish to obtain international certification.

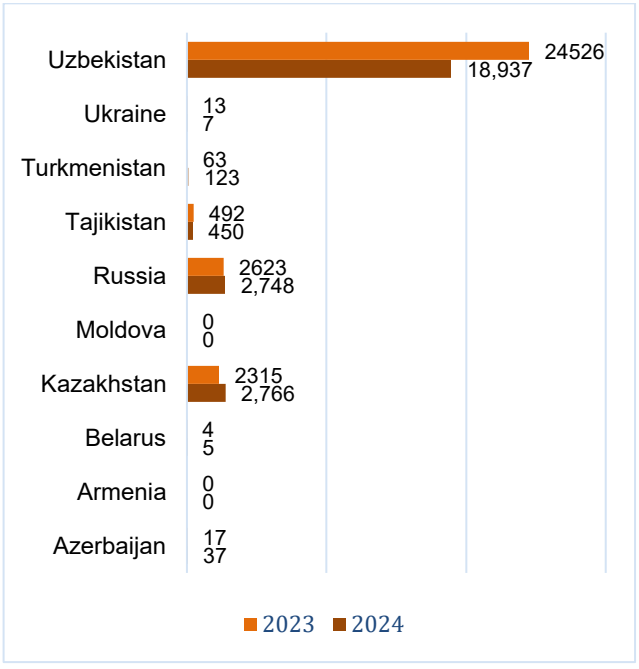
In the past two years, there has been a significant outflow of international students, particularly from Uzbekistan. The number of Uzbek students has decreased by almost 40%, with a total decline of 15,756 individuals. Additionally, there has been a slight decrease in the number of students from India, which has dropped by nearly 6%, totaling 882 students. From 2018 to 2021, there was a notable increase in the

[6] National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic

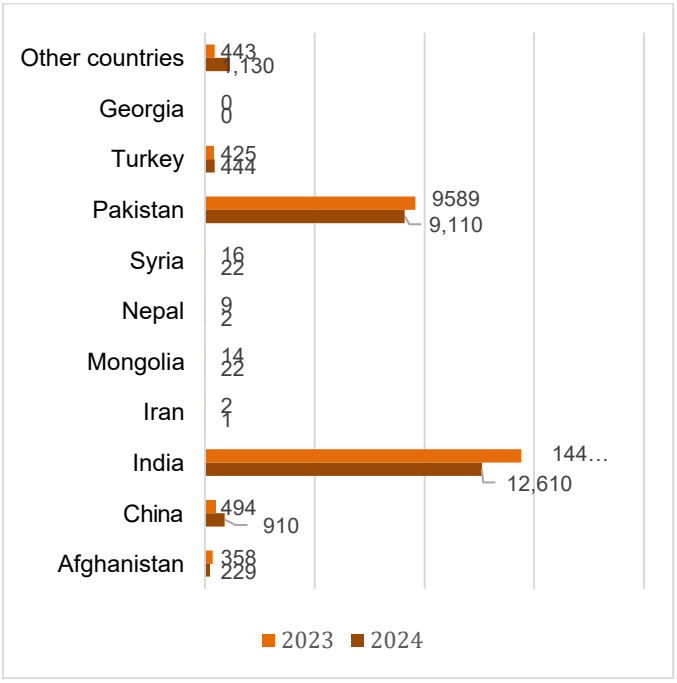
number of international students. However, after 2021, the numbers began to decline sharply. One possible reason for the decrease in students from Uzbekistan could be the growth of universities within their own country, particularly those that cater to the needs of students from the Ferghana Valley[7]. This means that the investment climate in vocational education has become more attractive in the neighboring country.

The gradual decline in the number of students from India pursuing education in Kyrgyzstan may be attributed to the increasing availability of medical professional educational institutions within the country. For instance, in 2024, the Government of India opened 60 new medical colleges to address the market's demands and the shortage of qualified healthcare professionals[8]. In the future, India plans to open new educational institutions dedicated to preparing highly qualified medical specialists. This initiative will create opportunities for students from across South Asia who are seeking quality education in English and want to obtain international certification.

In the 2022-2023 academic year, the largest number of international students from CIS countries came from neighboring Uzbekistan, accounting for approximately 44% of the total international student population. Among students from countries outside the CIS, India has the highest representation, comprising 26% of all international students. Following India, students from Pakistan make up 17% of the total. Notably, the number of students from Pakistan has seen significant growth. While the number was much lower than that of Indian students at the beginning of 2018, it has surged from 830 to 9,589 students over the past six years, representing an increase of nearly 12 times. In comparison, the number of students from India rose approximately 1.5 times during the same period, reaching around 14,424 students in 2023.



Pic 2. Number of students from CIS Countries[9]



Pic 3. Number of students from non-CIS Countries[10]

[7] Kun.Uz 2024. Article "What new universities have opened in Uzbekistan this year?", link https://kun.uz/ru/news/2022/06/06/kakiye-novyye-vuzy-otkrylis-v-uzbekistane-v-etom-godu

[8] Article about medical education in India published in India Today, link: https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/60-new-medical-colleges-in-2024-mbbs-seats-increase-63-percent-2604981-2024-09-23

[9] National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic

[10] National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic

Official statistics do not provide a comprehensive overview of the international student population from Bangladesh, which has seen a notable increase in recent years. According to the Ministry of Labor, Social Security, and Migration, the estimated number of Bangladeshi students studying abroad has reached approximately 950 in this timeframe.[11]

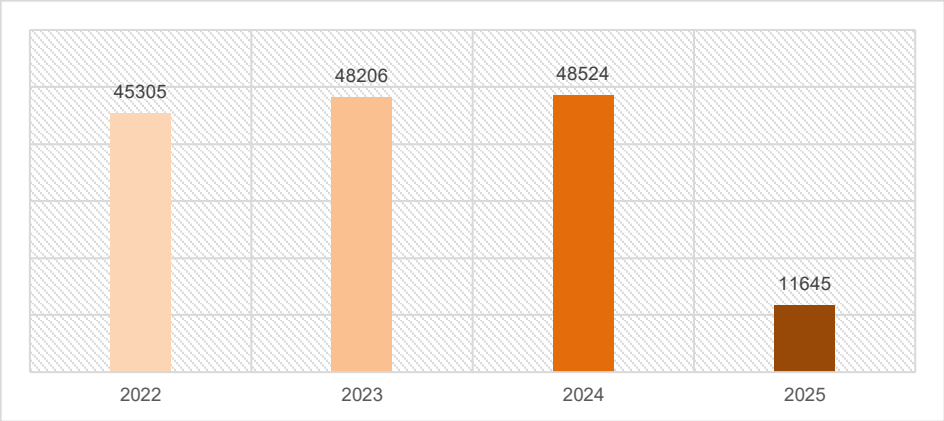
Issued study visas from 2022 to 2025

According to data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, the number of international students from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh receiving student visas (Type "S") in the Kyrgyz Republic is projected to decrease from 48,524 to 11,645 by 2025 (see Table 1). This represents a significant decline in the number of international students pursuing vocational education in the Kyrgyz Republic. Overall, the total number of students receiving student visas has dropped by more than fourfold, resulting in a difference of 36,876 students.

Table 1. The number of foreign citizens who received student visas [12]

Year	Pakistan	India	Bangladesh	Total
2022	15461	21861	775	45305
2023	18088	23603	951	48206
2024	16945	20991	1223	48524
2025	4200	4689	333	11645

In 2025, there was a significant decrease in the number of students applying for student visas. The number of applicants from Pakistan fell by 75%, while applications from Bangladesh decreased by 58%. Additionally, the number of Indian students receiving student visas dropped by nearly 80% compared to the previous academic year. In 2025, the number of students from India was 4,689, and from Pakistan, it was 4,200, making their numbers almost equal. It's worth noting that during the 2022–2023 academic year, Indian students significantly outnumbered those from Pakistan. This trend indicates that students from both countries share similar concerns about their safety in the Kyrgyz Republic.



Pic.4. Issued study visas (type "S") for 2022-2025

[11] Kaktus Media 2024. Information from the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Migration about labour migrants. Link: https://kaktus.media/doc/501549_ministr_tryda_rasskazala_ob_inostrannyh_trydovyh_migrantah_rabotaushih_v_bishkeke.html

[12] Data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2025, provided to the Akyykatchy Institute

2.2. International experience in providing education to international students

Exporting educational services in developed countries generates billions in tuition fees, accommodation, and living expenses, creates new jobs, and increases government revenue[13]. The most attractive countries for international students seeking vocational education include the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, and Australia. In Asia, South Korea and China are prominent choices, largely because many educational programs are taught in English. Additionally, these countries have made significant advancements in scientific and technological development, surpassing many others worldwide.[14] In 2016, China ranked as the third-largest host country for international students, with a total of 442,773 students. By 2018, this number had increased to 492,185.[15]

A study by the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA) illustrates the economic advantages of increasing international student enrollment in U.S. higher education[16]. According to their analysis, one million international students at U.S. colleges and universities contributed more than $40 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2022-2023 academic year, an increase of nearly $6.3 billion (almost 19%) over the previous academic year and supported more than 368,000 jobs[17]. International students bring not only jobs but also financial benefits to the economy. According to NAFSA, the development of higher education exports also significantly impacts the rapid development of innovation and technology.

Table 2. Top 10 countries by international student enrollment in 2024 [18]

	Countries	2023	2024	Changes	Main sending countries
1	USA	1057188	1126690	+6.57%	China, India, South Korea
2	Canada	660230	842760	+27.65%	India, China, France
3	UK	718085	758855	+5.68%	China, India, Nigeria
4	France	392630	505617	+28.78%	Morocco, Algeria, China
5	Australia	361247	437485	+21.10%	China, India, Nepal
6	Germany	349438	367578	+5.19%	China, India, Syria
7	Russia	282922	321845	+13.76%	Kazakhstan, China, Uzbekistan
8	South Korea		208962		Thailand, Pakistan
9	China	210903	200892	−4.75%	Thailand, Pakistan
10	Spain	135478	149279	+10.19%	China, Vietnam, Nepal

Research by London Economics shows the total economic benefit of such students, which was last calculated to be £41.9 billion for the UK in 2021-22[19]. There are 679,970 international students studying

[13] Nurbek Zhenish 2012. Research: Export of higher educational services. Published by the University of Central Asia, link https://ucentralasia.org/media/ xe3etact/uca-ippa-wp-7-education-eng.pdf

[14] Institute for International Education 2024.

[15] UNESCO Institute for Statistics. "Inbound internationally mobile students by continent of origin". Archived from the original on 2 January 2018. Retrieved 15 October 2018.

[16] NAFSA 2023 https://www.nafsa.org/about/about-nafsa/new-nafsa-data-reveal-international-student-economic-contributions-continue

[17] NAFSA 2023 https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2

[18] Institute for International Education 2024.

[19] The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) 2023. Ссылка онлайн: https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2023/05/16/international-students-boost-uk-economy-by-41-9-billion/

at higher education institutions in the UK, representing 24% of the total higher education student population[20]. On average, each of the UK's 650 parliamentary constituencies generates £58 million in revenue from international students, which is approximately £560 per citizen. To enhance its attractiveness for investment and improve educational quality, South Korea aims to attract over 300,000 international students by 2027. To support this goal, South Korea has implemented the "Study Korea 300k Plan" to boost the global competitiveness of its universities [21]. To this end, they have already developed a number of incentive mechanisms, such as facilitating the Korean language proficiency test, teaching most programs in English, and various scholarship programs. For students who earn advanced degrees, these allow them to pursue careers in technical fields and the most in-demand professions on the labor market.

In Canada, educational services exports contributed $37.3 billion to the economy in 2022. This figure is calculated after accounting for Canadian scholarships and tuition fees, as well as the total annual costs of international students, including their families and visiting friends [22]. Students from India, especially those at the college level, have played a significant role in the increase in the number of long-term international students. The provision of educational services to these students has a direct impact on the economic growth of regions and cities. For instance, Ontario, which has the highest number of international students, contributed the most to the GDP, totaling $16.9 billion, which represents 54.6% of the overall contribution of $30.9 billion. British Columbia followed with an 18.4% contribution, while Quebec accounted for 12.4%.

It's important to consider that the revenue generated from international students is based on several expenses, including:

- Tuition fees (tuition contract)
- Other mandatory payments (such as visa fees)
- Books and research materials needed for education
- Accommodation and food
- Transportation costs
- General living expenses

Many countries are also seeking to generate revenue by opening campuses and representative offices in other countries. For example, many US and UK universities are opening branches in the UAE, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. Thus, capitalizing on franchises, expertise, and the reputation of universities also generates significant revenue for individual Western higher education institutions. Research and consulting services for leading global companies focused on various economic sectors are also sources of funding.

[20] UK Universities 2023. Article “International students boost UK economy by £ 41.9 billion. Ссылка онлайн: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/latest/news/international-students-boost-uk-economy

[21] Data of the Ministry of Education of South Korea
Link: https://english.moe.go.kr/boardCnts/viewRenewal.do?boardID=265&boardSeq=96185&lev=0&searchType=null&statusYN=W&page=1&s=english&m=0201&opType=N

[22] The results of a study by Rosli Kunin and Associates (RKA) for Global Affairs Canada on the economic impact of exporting educational services to international students. Published by the Government of Canada. Link: https://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2022/index.aspx?lang=eng

2.3. Role of international students from South Asia in the development of educational sector in the Kyrgyz Republic

In the Kyrgyz Republic, students not only fulfill their basic contract requirements but also incur additional expenses for accommodation, health insurance, visa fees, and other intermediate costs. In 2022, Almazbek Beishenaliev, head of the Ministry of Education and Science, stated that "International students studying in medical faculties contribute approximately $250 million to the state budget."[23] Acting Minister of Health, Zharkynbek Kasymbekov, added, "Each student contributes at least $7,000 to $8,000 to the Kyrgyz economy per year, with some contributing more than $10,000. If you multiply these figures, that represents a substantial amount of money circulating in this sector."[24]

Funds received from international students play a crucial role in helping educational institutions improve their infrastructure and technical resources, acquire new literature, and maintain a highly qualified teaching staff. According to Indira Kudaibergenova, the Rector of Kyrgyz State Medical Academy, 20% of the institution's budget is supported by the state, while the remaining 80% is derived from the educational services provided to international students[25]. Additionally, the president of the International University of Kyrgyzstan noted that 90% of their student population consists of international students from South Asia. Most universities with medical faculties generate substantial revenue by providing educational services to students from the South Asia.

International students not only receive basic educational services but also support small businesses around educational institutions, which include small shops, kiosks, and catering facilities.

The rising demand for medical education among international students from South Asia has led to the establishment of numerous new private universities, as well as the introduction of medical faculties in existing public institutions. Since 2019, many universities, particularly in large cities that previously lacked medical faculties, have actively begun to develop programs for international students. By 2020, there were 21 educational institutions in the Kyrgyz Republic offering professional medical education specifically for international learners[26]. This trend was primarily driven by the need to enhance financial stability and improve university infrastructure. However, over time, these institutions have faced significant criticism due to the poor quality of education and an insufficient clinical base that fails to meet international standards.[27] As of 2022, only three universities—the Kyrgyz State Medical Academy, Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University, and Osh State University—were deemed to have adequate clinical facilities.[28]

According to Nuripa Mukanova, the head of the Anti-Corruption Business Council under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, inadequate management, a shortage of qualified teachers, and subpar infrastructure, along with a lack of sufficient clinical facilities, are factors that negatively impact the quality of educational services.

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[23] Bakyt Basarbek 2022. Article "Head of the Ministry of Education: foreign students bring 250 million dollars", published in the Evening Bishkek https://www.vb.kg/doc/420477_glava_minobrazovaniia:_inostrannye_stydenty_prinosiat_250_mln_dollarov.html

[24] Sputnik 2022. An interview with the representative of the Ministry of Health https://ru.sputnik.kg/20220816/kyrgyzstan-medicinskoe-obrazovanie-usluga-ehksport-dohod-1066825732.html

[25] Azattyk 2024. Article “International students contribute to education, economy, and development of the country”

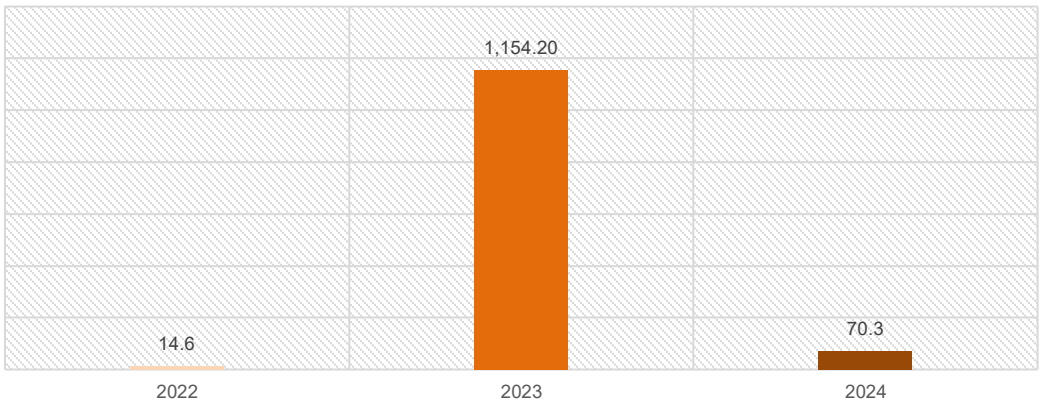
[26] Article "25 thousand foreigners study in medical schools in Kyrgyzstan", published by Akipress in 2021 https://rus.azattyk.org/a/ads-prezident-postavil-zadachu-sdelat-kyrgyzstan-habom-dlya-eksporta-znaniy/31447501.html

[27] Kubanychbek Zholdoshev 2023. The article "Having become a business, has medical education in Kyrgyzstan lost its quality?" was published in Azattyk in 2023.

[28] Article "The head of the Ministry of Health reported that 12 medical universities had their form No. 6 revoked. What it means", published in Kaktus Media in 2022.

2.4. Investment in education sector

According to information from the National Investment Agency under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, there are currently no specialized programs in place to attract investment in education that focus on improving learning conditions for international students. From 2022 to 2024, the inflow of foreign direct investment into the education sector in the Kyrgyz Republic remains relatively low compared to other sectors of the economy. However, in 2023, there was a notable inflow of investments into the education sector amounting to 1,154.2 thousand US dollars, which then decreased significantly in 2024 (pic.5).



Pic.5. Investment in the education sector (in thousands of US dollars)

The regulatory framework of the Kyrgyz Republic creates favorable conditions for the export of educational services. Article 13 of the Law on Education states that the relevant government body must "promote the export of educational services and attract investment in the field of education." Additionally, Article 8, paragraph 4[29], of the same law outlines key principles of state policy in education, which include developing the export of educational services, ensuring high-quality education that meets the best international standards, and focusing on advancements in both national and global science as well as international best practices.

The "Program for the Development of Education in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2021-2040" emphasizes the importance of internationalization as a key indicator of success in higher education. This includes increasing the proportion of foreign students and teachers, offering educational programs in English, and providing more internship opportunities at foreign universities for teaching staff[30]. These initiatives highlight the Kyrgyz Republic's commitment to attracting investments in vocational education.

Today we have an important legislative framework and the will to increase the export of educational services. Therefore, it is important for the Kyrgyz Republic to develop a National Concept for the Development of Education Exports, which will also take into account all aspects of improving the quality of educational services and the safety of foreign students. Providing high-quality, affordable education and ensuring student safety are key factors in attracting international students.

[29] The Law on Education 2023. Link https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/4-3419/edition/1273902/ru

[30] Abdylda Musaev 2025. Article "Export of education in the context of strategic development of higher professional education in the Kyrgyz Republic" published by Akipress. Link: https://mnenie.akipress.org/unews/un_post:42930

When calculating the average expenses of one international student studying in the Kyrgyz Republic, it is estimated that the total investment from all international students from South Asia in the Kyrgyz economy is around $200 million. This figure accounts for approximately 80% of the total income generated from international students in medical faculties. For instance, the following factors influence the growth of international students from South Asia in medical faculties in the Kyrgyz Republic:

1) High demand for health workers in South Asian countries. World Bank data shows that the number of surgical specialists in South Asia is 6 per 100,000 people, compared to 71 per 100,000 in high-income countries[31].
2) In India, there is a government program to support medical students studying at medical faculties, as the country lacks over 500,000 medical workers. Students can obtain educational loans for a duration of up to 15 years[32].
3) Affordable prices for education are available, with annual training costs ranging from $1,650 to $4,500. This pricing is comparable to many universities in India and Pakistan.
4) The minimal admission requirements make medical schools and colleges particularly appealing to international students.
5) Medical universities in the Kyrgyz Republic are especially focused on attracting international students from South Asian countries, as these students are able to pay nearly 3 to 4 times more than local students. This, in turn, enhances the financial stability of local universities.

The significant increase in the number of students from South Asian countries is largely facilitated by various recruiting companies and intermediaries. In addition to their main tuition contracts, students incur additional expenses for accommodation, health insurance, visa fees, and other related costs. It is important to note that students pay separately for accommodation and other expenses associated with their stay in the Kyrgyz Republic. In 2022, Acting Minister of Health Zharkynbek Kasymbekov highlighted the economic impact of these students, stating, “One student contributes at least $7,000 to $8,000 a year to Kyrgyzstan’s economy, with some exceeding $10,000. Now, multiply these figures by 20,000. This is the amount of money circulating in this area.”[33]

It is important to keep in mind that investment attractiveness is influenced by two main groups of factors – external and internal. External factors reflect how countries can ensure security, transparency and absence of corruption, respect for the rule of law, political stability and a favorable environment for entrepreneurs. Also, a study by the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) shows that investors pay great attention to the quality of the place[34].

The "quality of a place" is becoming an increasingly significant factor in attracting the attention of both internal and external investors. For instance, many international students choose to study in large cities with well-developed and secure infrastructure. In other words, the specific characteristics of a location attract certain groups, businesses, and individuals. According to the OECD's analysis, the main indicators of a place's quality include:

- Ensuring a high level of safety
- Quality of life, measured by living costs, housing availability, quality, and affordability
- Access to reliable public services

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[31] Khaled Javeed Khan & Vishad Farid Raza 2021. Article “Specialist shortage in developing countries: comprehending delays in care” https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7802701/

[32] Bankbazaar 2025. Top five banks providing education loan for medical students https://www.bankbazaar.com/education-loan/medical-students-in-india.html

[33] Sputnik 2022. Interview with a representative of the Ministry of Health, available online https://ru.sputnik.kg/20220816/kyrgyzstan-medicinskoe-obrazovanie-usluga-ehksport-dohod-1066825732.html

[34] OECD 2022. Measuring the attractiveness of regions https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2022/09/measuring-the-attractiveness-of-regions_cc2921e6/fbe44086-en.pdf

- Proximity to major international and domestic markets
- Effective site management and multi-level coordination
- A sense of belonging and non-discriminatory treatment
- Environmental quality and convenience

Countries that want to attract investment in education often develop separate strategies or programs to export high-quality educational services. These strategies also include ensuring the safety of international students during their studies. Ensuring safe access to urban infrastructure and public spaces plays a crucial role in this process. The perception of safety in a place can be influenced by several factors:
- The low crime rate
- Stability of the country in economic and political terms
- Safe and secure communities, where physical and mental well-being are both important considerations.

The Global Peace Index (GPI)[35] ranks the safest countries in the world. This annual report is published by the Institute for Economics and Peace, which examines the security of countries for foreign citizens, including international students. For the GPI, 23 main indicators are considered. These include the crime rate, number of violent demonstrations, relations with neighboring countries, political stability, military spending, and other factors. According to recent data, some of the safest countries for international students include Austria, Singapore, Switzerland, Canada, Japan, Australia, Germany, Spain, the UK, and South Korea. France and China are partially safe for international students, according to the GPI.

In recent years, several countries, such as the United States, Turkey and the Russian Federation, have been considered unsafe for foreign citizens due to various security concerns. Despite these challenges, however, these countries continue to provide protection for international students. To address these issues, for instance, in the United States and Turkey, special campuses have been established away from major cities and areas with high crime rates. This allows students to feel safe and receive necessary services, such as secure housing, transportation, and part-time job opportunities on campus. Additionally, it is worth noting that many European countries, including the UK and several Asian countries, have implemented additional anti-discrimination measures in education to attract international students. These measures aim to prevent racism, xenophobia, and other forms of violence based on ethnicity, social status, religion, and other affiliations.

Table 3. GPI rating by country

	Countries	GPI (Global Peace Index) 2024
1	Austria	1.313
2	Singapore	1.339
3	Switzerland	1.35
4	Canada	1.449
5	Japan	1.525
6	Australia	1.536
7	Germany	1.542
8	Spain	1.597
9	UK	1.703

[35] https://www.scribd.com/document/854824281/Top-10-Safest-Countries-to-Study-Abroad

10	South Korea	1.848

Ensuring the rule of human rights, promoting security at all levels, fighting corruption, and providing quality education are all important factors that contribute to stimulating exports in the educational services sector.

2.5. Ensuring safey for international students in the Kyrgyz Republic

According to the data of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Kyrgyz Republic, over the past three years, from 2022 to 2024, a total of 359 crimes were reported towards foreign citizens from South Asian countries, including Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Among these, fraud constituted 186 cases (51%), while theft accounted for 86 cases (23%). Of the registered cases, 90 were suspended for various reasons, and 70 cases were terminated. In total, 199 criminal cases were sent to court (see Table 4). The data indicates a 54% increase in the number of crimes reported against foreign citizens in 2024 compared to 2022. On a positive note, the percentage of criminal cases that reached the court significantly improved. In 2022, only 26% of registered criminal cases went to court, while in 2024, this figure rose to 72%.

Table 4. Number of crimes committed against foreign citizens

2022				
Citizenship	**Registered**	**Terminated**	**Closed**	**Sent to the court**
Pakistan	56	16	24	16
India	22	13	4	5
Bangladesh	1	1	-	-
Total	79	30	28	21

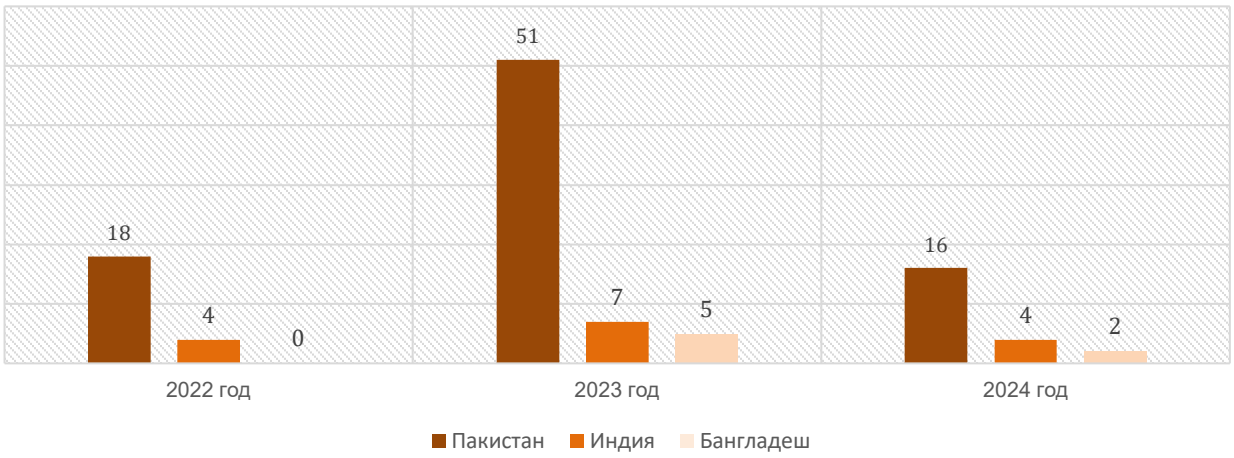
2023				
Citizenship	**Registered**	**Terminated**	**Closed**	**Sent to the court**
Pakistan	90	21	20	49
India	16	10	1	5
Bangladesh	3	2	-	1
Total	109	33	21	55

2024				
Citizenship	**Registered**	**Terminated**	**Closed**	**Sent to the court**
Pakistan	90	20	12	58
India	43	7	6	30
Bangladesh	38	-	3	35
Total	171	27	21	123

The most significant and tragic event that led to a significant outflow of foreign citizens from the Kyrgyz Republic was the series of attacks on foreign students that took place on the night of May 17-18, 2024. Internal affairs bodies initiated criminal investigations based on crimes committed under articles 207 (robbery), 216 (destruction or damage to other people's property), 194 (violation of home inviolability), 278 (riots), 280 (hooliganism) and 330 (inciting racial, ethnic, national or religious hostility) of the Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic.

These events have highlighted important security lessons for international students. In his address, President of the Kyrgyz Republic Sadyr Japarov stated, "As a result of the actions of groups who, without understanding the essence of the situation, succumbed to provocations, our people and the state came under attack. We have all witnessed the consequences of how various pieces of information and videos related to the incident that occurred on May 13 were circulated on the Internet by May 17. Yes, had law enforcement agencies taken prompt action and communicated their actions to the public in a timely manner, this likely would not have happened."[36] The President also emphasized that "the country is not developing in isolation; it is progressing while maintaining close ties with the outside world, which is essential. Kyrgyzstanis should take pride when people come to our country to study and work, just as a million Kyrgyz citizens do in other countries."

In his speech, President Japarov underscored the significance of exporting educational services: "Let us not forget that when people come from different places to prioritize their education in Kyrgyzstan, they contribute significantly to our economy. They leave behind a lot of money during their temporary stay. Don't we realize that taxes on their expenditures remain with us? Educational institutions that serve them, along with small businesses, generate profits that bring billions in revenue to our economy."



Pic. 6. The number of crimes committed by foreign citizens [37]

In 2023, the highest number of crimes committed by foreign citizens from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh was recorded. Most of these offenses are related to violations of migration laws and illegal residency in the Kyrgyz Republic. Notably, the number of crimes committed by citizens of Pakistan markedly exceeds those committed by citizens of India and Bangladesh.

According to information from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, measures are taken annually to prevent crimes and offenses among foreign students. The Ministry conducts lectures, issues

[36] Official website of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic https://president.kg/ru/news/21/25377

[37] Data of the General Prosecutor's Office provided to the Institute of Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic

methodological manuals, and carries out scheduled raid measures to enhance safety. In total, 2 lectures were held in 2022, 4 in 2023, and 6 in 2024. Similar events are planned for the second quarter of 2025. Additionally, in August 2018, two police platoons were established in various departments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The primary role of the tourist police is to ensure the safety of foreign citizens in tourist areas. They also assist tourists by providing information about the nearest and most scenic routes to attractions, hotels, and other destinations. If necessary, inspectors from the tourist police accompany foreign citizens to the relevant divisions of the internal affairs bodies.

CHAPTER 3. MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Key conclusions of the survey and analysis of the conditions of stay of international students from South Asia in the Kyrgyz Republic

Based on the analysis of open sources, as well as data collected through online surveys and semi-structured interviews with international students from South Asia, we have drawn the following general conclusions, which reflectboth the motivation for studying and the key challenges faced by students during their time in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Access to safe infrastructure

Access to housing

- 79% of respondents reported facing various difficulties when searching for housing. The main issues were related to high rental costs and discrimination against international students based on their ethnicity. Specifically, 83% of respondents indicated that landlords set high prices for foreign nationals from South Asia, while 25% experienced outright refusals due to their ethnicity. Additionally, 46% faced refusals because of language barriers.

- 47% of respondents have experienced fraud while searching for housing through intermediaries or questionable websites such as lalafo.kg and stroka.kg. In many cases, scammers impersonate landlords and request deposits, only to disappear afterward, leaving the students unable to reach them by phone. Additionally, over one-third of students have faced eviction by their landlords without any prior notice.

- Respondents faced various problems during their stay, such as: dangerous area - 29%, unfriendly neighbors - 54%, lack of basic conditions in the apartment, which includes hot water, light and gas - 16%.

- Very few respondents can afford to rent a place on their own. In fact, over 62% of respondents prefer to share a rental with someone else, which helps them save significantly on expenses. Only 8% of students can manage to rent a place by themselves.

Key findings on access to housing:

When seeking independent housing, international students often encounter fraud from various criminals and local residents. Additionally, when renting from local residents, there are often no formal contracts between tenants and landlords. This situation poses a significant risk of sudden eviction and violations of the rights of international students. Ethnic and language barriers frequently lead to challenges in securing rental housing, resulting in the denial of rights and dignity. International students have reported that the local population generally exhibits distrust towards them when renting apartments and houses, often displaying an unfriendly attitude.

Student dormitories and hostels are typically the safest and most cost-effective options for renting accommodation while pursuing your studies. However, many international students have recently

expressed concerns about personal safety and the level of protection provided by the administrations of these facilities. Despite these worries, dormitories and hostels remain the best choices for student housing.

Access to safe public transportation

- Among the most frequently encountered difficulties when moving around the city on public transport, participants noted the following problems of a discriminatory nature: unfriendly attitude of people around them (77%); language barriers (52%) and the lack of navigators in a language they understand (27%), rudeness of drivers (49%).

- 44% of respondents have experienced theft while traveling on public transport. Criminals exploit their vulnerability as helplessness and ignorance of local laws.

- When it comes to public transportation options, 85% of respondents prefer to travel around the city by bus because it is the most accessible and convenient mode of transport. Additionally, more than half of the students (54%) use minibuses, while nearly half (40%) opt for trolleybuses. A significant number of students (65%) also utilize private taxi services, as they are considered the safest option for both individual and group travel.

Key findings on access to public transport:

Public transport is generally the most accessible option for international students, with many relying on buses and minibuses. However, a significant number of these students report feelings of being unprotected and unsafe. They often encounter discrimination and unfriendly attitudes from both drivers and passengers, which can deter them from navigating the city independently. As a result, many prefer to travel in groups to avoid feeling vulnerable and to minimize the risk of discrimination. Due to concerns about potential attacks and negative interactions, many international students opt for private taxi services at night for added safety.

Every second international student is likely to become a victim of crime, particularly theft, while using public transport. This high risk is mainly due to a lack of awareness about the dangers associated with public transport, as well as inadequate prevention and enforcement measures by law enforcement agencies. International students frequently report having their expensive cell phones, cash, and other valuables stolen. Many students are unsure about where to seek help if they experience different types of crimes on public transport. Furthermore, reports made to law enforcement regarding individual crimes are often overlooked or ignored.

During the interviews, respondents noted that most navigation options are available only in Kyrgyz and Russian, with no English translations provided. This language barrier can make it difficult for them to navigate the city, often leading to incorrect choices when using public transport. As a result, many students resort to using online maps that offer English translations. Overall, the navigation systems in Bishkek do not cater to foreign visitors who speak English.

Access to safe and inclusive public spaces

- The most unsafe places for international students are parks and squares (37%), commercial places - cafes, supermarkets (22.7%).
- Respondents feel safest in educational institutions (55%) and religious places (27%).
- Respondents very rarely or never visit: museums and exhibitions (70%), theaters and cinemas (75%), concerts and festivals (60%), public libraries (51%), sports halls and swimming pools (73%).
- International students socialize most during visits to cafes and within educational institutions.
- In response to the question “What problems have you encountered in public places?”, the majority of respondents reported experiencing discrimination (66%), issues with freedom of movement (42%), and limitations on freedom of speech (32%).

Key findings on access to public spaces

Educational institutions often do not provide enough opportunities for international students to participate in cultural events and explore places beyond the campus. This limitation negatively impacts their socialization and ability to adapt to life in a foreign country. A significant barrier appears to be the lack of specialists and stakeholders who can lead cultural tours for international students in English. Additionally, many international students face obstacles when trying to visit public places where they can actively engage in sports. This situation reflects a sense of insecurity that international students may feel in those environments.

South Asian students often feel a sense of safety primarily within educational institutions, where they are surrounded by their communities of international students. Many universities organize events focused on learning local languages and understanding local culture, often with the support of teachers and student activists. These settings also provide students with the opportunity to explore the cultural characteristics of other international students.

Respondents often feel uncomfortable and unsafe in public spaces due to potential discrimination and unwelcoming behavior from others. Additionally, some students have expressed concerns that certain universities impose overly strict rules, which hinder their ability to freely express their opinions and themselves. Issues related to freedom of movement are particularly evident when it comes to walking in parks and squares. Many students prefer not to walk alone in these areas for fear of harassment.

Violence in public places against international students

- 64% of respondents have experienced verbal abuse and threats in public places in the last 6-12 months. Moreover, 45% of respondents have experienced emotional abuse, which includes direct intimidation, humiliation, manipulation, and insults on a regular basis.
- 42% of respondents reported being victims of physical intimidation, assault, and theft, while 14% of respondents were subjected to sexual violence and harassment.
- More than one-third of respondents reported that there was a racial or cultural element to the incidents they experienced, while another 31% of respondents declined to answer.
- Over one-third of respondents indicated that the incidents they experienced had a racial or cultural aspect, while an additional 31% chose not to respond.
- 74% of respondents believe that the local population treats them unfriendly.

Key findings

A significant number of international students from South Asia regularly experience both psychological and physical violence in public places and on public transport. This indicates a lack of measures within the local population to prevent xenophobia and racism against students from South Asia and other foreign nationals. Moreover, there is minimal information available regarding the prevention of violence targeting foreign citizens. The mental and social preparedness of the local community to welcome international students is insufficient, often resulting in verbal insults and threats. Many of the surveyed students reported frequently encountering discrimination and unfriendly attitudes from local residents.

Respondents who reported cases of sexual violence and harassment most often indicated that these incidents occurred on the street, in educational institutions or in dormitories. These data highlight the need to strengthen preventive measures aimed at eliminating gender-based violence among students. Female students are the most vulnerable group to gender-based violence, which requires special attention when developing support and protection programs.

Access to protection

- 71% of respondents affected by violence and attacks usually do not inform any organizations or responsible government agencies about the incident. International students prefer not to report cases of violence and attacks for several reasons, according to the survey:
    1) almost 30% believe that it will not change their situation;
    2) 22% think that it will not be taken seriously;
    3) 15% are afraid of the consequences (they may be expelled from the university);
    4) almost 10% believe that the process of investigation and appeals can be costly and traumatic.

- The most frequent incidents of violence and attacks occur: in public places (58%), on public transport (34%), in large shopping centres (19%), and also at home (12%).
- 42% of respondents responded that they had encountered negative attitudes also from police officers.
- In response to the question, “Have you ever faced situations where police officers demanded money from you?”49% of respondents replied “Yes,” 16% found it challenging to answer, and 32% answered “No.”
- Many respondents avoid walking alone in parks and squares due to the potential risk of attacks or harassment from both residents and law enforcement officials.

Key findings

Currently, there is no systematic and comprehensive support for international students who are victims of violence and attacks. Many of these students are left to cope with their problems on their own, which often leads to repeated incidents of violence and worsening mental health issues. Most higher education institutions lack specialized psychological assistance centers dedicated to international students, despite the extensive practices seen in educational institutions abroad. Primary psychological support is crucial in ensuring that students have access to essential protective and support services, and in motivating them to seek the appropriate assistance. However, many students are hesitant to engage with law enforcement due to past negative experiences, including instances of harassment and corruption from police officers. This significantly undermines the trust that international students have in law enforcement.

Respondents often face challenges in obtaining high-quality legal aid due to a lack of information and access to English-speaking lawyers. In many cases of violence, they seek help only from the communities of international students or from parents living abroad. Unfortunately, not all civil society organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic offer services to protect the rights of foreign citizens from South Asia. In situations where boys or girls experience abuse, they are often not accommodated in crisis centers and frequently lack access to timely and quality medical care.

Access to safe employment

- 17% of respondents combine study and work. Working students are mainly employed in the following areas: cafes and restaurants (15%), food delivery (11%), remote online work (15%), taxi (4%) and other areas.
- In response to the question, "Have you ever experienced a violation of your labor rights at work?", the following findings were reported: 12% of respondents (11 students) indicated that they had experienced confiscation of their passports, 10% (9 students) reported non-payment of wages and the absence of labor contracts, 7% (6 students) experienced violence from employers, and 6% (5 students) faced attacks from law enforcement agencies.
- When asked, “Does your educational institution have an employment department where you can receive information about your labor rights and future career?” 71% of students responded with “No,” while 22% indicated “Do not know.”
- 86% of respondents plan to return to their homeland after completing their studies, and only 3% of respondents plan to stay and work in the Kyrgyz Republic.
- In response to the question, “If you could choose a region for employment or study in another country, which would you prefer?”, the respondents provided the following answers: 36% expressed a preference for Europe, 24% chose the UK, 16% selected the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, while 10% indicated a preference for North America (USA and Canada).
- A third of international students reported difficulties in obtaining or extending their visas in Kyrgyzstan. The complaints mainly focused on the visa application process and the high costs of government fees for visa extensions.

Key findings

According to the Law "On External Migration," international students are not permitted to work while on a study visa in the Kyrgyz Republic. However, nearly one in five students attempts to balance work with their studies. During their work, they may face various violations of rights due to their vulnerable position, such as exploitation, violence from employers. Many international students have reported that universities do not conduct sufficient information campaigns on the risks of illegal employment, and there are also no dedicated employment departments to assist them.

Only 3% of international students intend to stay and work in the Kyrgyz Republic. This indicates that students from South Asia view the Kyrgyz Republic primarily as a place to receive professional education. The countries they prefer for future employment include various European nations, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, and others.

One-third of international students experience difficulties in obtaining visas. Many students expressed frustration over the requirement to first purchase a 90-day visa, followed by additional fees to extend it. They proposed that the government should provide a multiple-entry visa for students prior to their arrival and suggested that there should be a one-time fee for a visa that covers one academic year. This change would alleviate concerns about overstaying visas, incurring fines, and navigating various bureaucratic procedures related to visa issues.

3.2. Recommendations to government agencies

To the Ministry of Science, Higher Education and Innovation of the Kyrgyz Republic, educational institutions providing educational services to international students

- Organize preventive measures for international students, providing them with information about safety measures when looking for and renting accommodation, as well as about contact details and support available in case of violations of their rights and freedoms.
- Create an information guide with information about potential risks in the housing search and a list of trustworthy landlords.
- Organize mental health support services for international students in higher education institutions to provide psychological assistance in various crisis situations. These centers could also function as a referral service for appropriate assistance (legal, medical, etc.) in the future.
- Create guidelines for faculty at higher education institutions to prevent harassment, corruption, and discrimination against international students. This instruction should outline a clear process for responding to reports of such offenses.

To the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic

- Enhance efforts to combat fraud against international students involving illegal fund withdrawals from real estate rental platforms.
- Increase the number of information and prevention activities for international students aimed at raising awareness of appropriate precautions and safety measures.

To the Ministry of Labor, Social Welfare and Migration of the Kyrgyz Republic

- Conduct preventive measures for employers regarding the risks associated with employing international students illegally, as well as the potential consequences of illegal work and exploitation.
- Organize information events for international students to prevent the consequences of illegal employment and migration.
- Consider the possibility of amending the legislation governing the stay of foreign citizens studying in the Kyrgyz Republic to grant them the right to work with limited working hours.

Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic

- Add an English language option to the official website uk-jardam.gov.kg. According to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On Legal Assistance Guaranteed by the State," foreign citizens have the right to receive legal aid from the government.
- Consider the possibility of establishing a separate database of state lawyers who can provide legal services in English for foreign citizens.
- Conduct information awareness events within a "Solidarity Bus" campaign among international students to increase their literacy about their rights and opportunities.

To the Mayor's Office of Bishkek city

- Post information posters on public transportation about the unacceptability of harassment and theft, including contact information for hotlines and assistance services.
- Provide public transport navigation in English for convenient movement of foreign citizens, including foreign students.
- Organize training sessions and workshops for drivers of municipal public transportation on the principles of politeness and friendliness towards foreign citizens.

To the Ministry of Culture, Information, and Youth Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Ministry of Science, Higher Education, and Innovation of the Kyrgyz Republic, and educational institutions providing services to international students.

- Create an action plan along with methodological materials aimed at preventing discrimination, racism, and xenophobia against foreign citizens from South Asia. It is essential to highlight the positive contributions of international students from this region in these materials.
- Organize a variety of activities and outings for international students to visit local museums and theaters in English.

National Investment Agency under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic

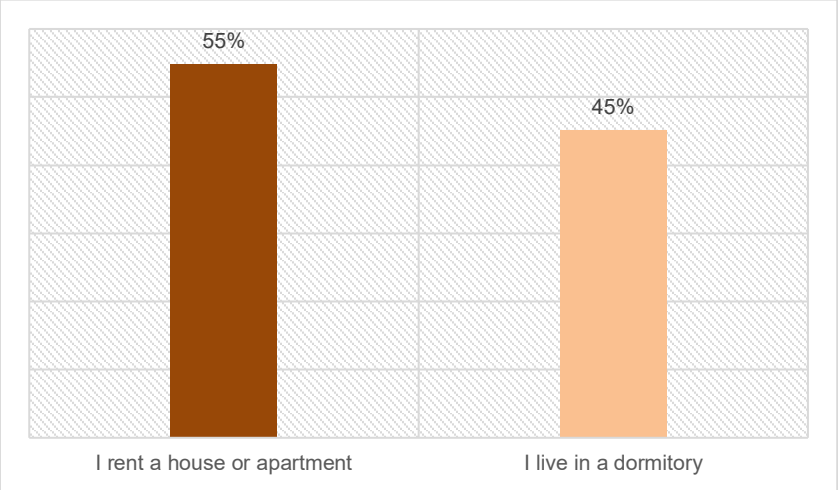
- Develop a strategic program to attract investment in education, aiming to enhance the conditions for providing educational services to international students.

CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Access to safe infrastructure

Access to safe housing

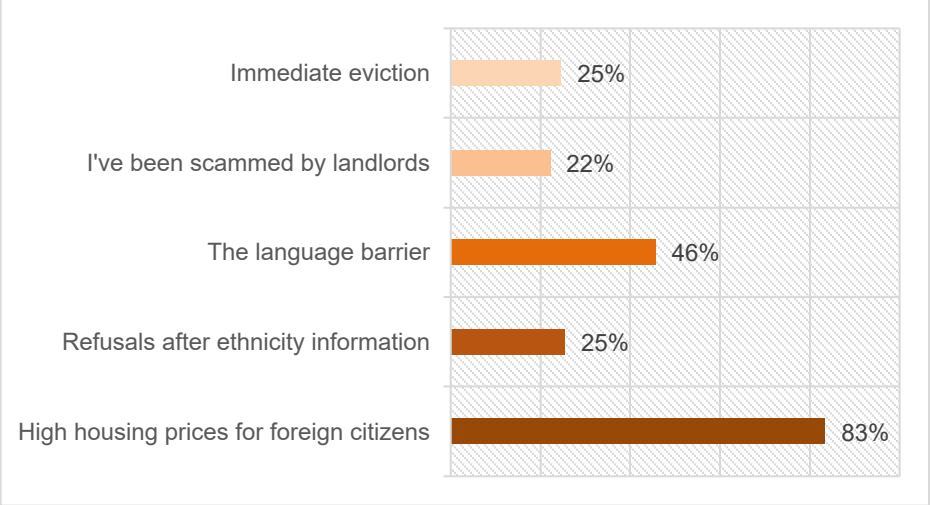
More than half of international students rent an apartment or house, making up 55% of the total. The remaining 45% live in hostels and university dormitories (see Fig. 6). It is common for students to stay in dormitories or hostels during their first two years of study. After gaining experience living in the city, many students choose to rent their own accommodations in subsequent years. Only a small percentage, about 8%, live independently in rented housing. The majority of students, 92%, share their living spaces with two or more roommates. Many students mentioned in interviews that they prefer to rent housing with other students because it is financially beneficial and provides a sense of safety.



Pic 7. The most affordable types of housing for international students from South Asia

Of the respondents, 80% reported encountering various difficulties while searching for housing in Bishkek. Foreign students primarily use the lalafo.kg mobile app and the stroka.kg and house.kg websites. The main difficulties in finding and renting housing mainly concern the following problems:

- 83% of respondents reported experiencing high rental prices set by landlords for foreign nationals from South Asia. They observed that once landlords are aware of a tenant's citizenship, it directly impacts the pricing policy. Additionally, rental prices often did not reflect the quality of the housing provided.
- 25 % of respondents reported experiencing refusals due to their ethnicity.
- 46% faced language barriers during their housing search.
- 25% were deceived and evicted by landlords without prior warning or approval; it's important for tenants to request eviction from their rented premises 2-3 days in advance.
- 22% encountered fraud while searching for housing, where criminals would ask for a deposit payment through online money transfer apps and then stop all communication.



Pic.8 The most common barriers faced by international students in Bishkek city when looking for housing.

Many respondents mentioned that at the beginning of their rental experience, landlords required a deposit equivalent to several months' rent. This significantly impacted the financial situation of the students. Additionally, some interviewees expressed concerns that landlords might not return the deposits when they moved out. Furthermore, most landlords do not sign formal agreements with tenants that clearly outline the rental conditions. This lack of documentation often jeopardizes the rights of international students, leaving them vulnerable to fraud and deception. Notably, 87.3% of respondents reported a mismatch between rental prices and the actual condition of housing in Bishkek.

Fraudulent practices in the search for housing are common among both international students and citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic[38]. Fraudsters or scammers often ask individuals to transfer deposits through online money transfer applications and then they stop answering phone calls and cut off communication. They may also request copies of personal documents from foreign students and then use intimidation tactics if those students decide to complain. Many foreign students, due to their lack of knowledge about local languages and laws, struggle to protect their rights and often do not seek help. It's important to note that the Criminal Code includes a specific section, Article 209, that addresses fraud[39] for crimes where the offender unlawfully obtains someone else's property through deception or abuse of trust.

During an interview, a respondent shared their experience while searching for an apartment:

"The last time we looked for an apartment, we were first asked to send copies of our passports. After that, we were required to deposit one hundred US dollars into an MBank account. Once we sent the money, the 'owner of the apartment' instructed us to come to a specific address. However, when we arrived, no one answered the phone, and it turned out that other people lived there."

The respondent noted, "Fraudsters often take advantage of our lack of knowledge about our rights, deceiving or intimidating us. As soon as they learn

[38] The article "How to avoid being scammed when looking for housing. Expert advice" was published in Kaktus Media in 2023. Link: https://kaktus.media/doc/491510_kak_ne_popastsia_na_ylovki_moshennikov_pri_poiske_jilia._sovety_eksperta_video.html

[39] Criminal Code 2021. Link https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/112309/edition/14072/ru

about our nationality, they start demanding even more money and impose additional conditions."

During their stay, respondents encountered various problems, such as being in a dangerous area (29%) and having unfriendly neighbors (54.2%). This often prevented students from moving freely around their rented housing and interacting with the surrounding community.

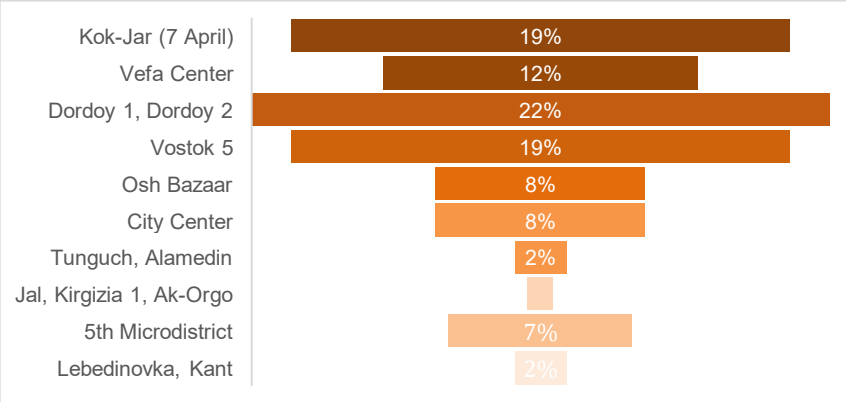
From the respondents' comments:

"Our neighbor came to our apartment without our permission and beat us up because he didn't like us from the first day because we are not like him culturally."

"Especially the older women are a big problem for me, they don't like my brownish skin and they think I am ugly and smelly. They don't care that other people in this city don't take a shower for weeks, but we Pakistanis always prefer to take a shower every day because without a shower we can't offer prayers."

Many students are generally satisfied with the basic conditions of their apartments. Only a small percentage (15.7%) reported experiencing frequent disconnections of hot water, electricity, and gas. In contrast, a significant majority (85.7%) indicated that they have access to a stable and reliable Internet, which is essential for completing homework and participating in online sessions. Most issues with utilities tend to occur for those renting housing in informal settlements around the city of Bishkek.

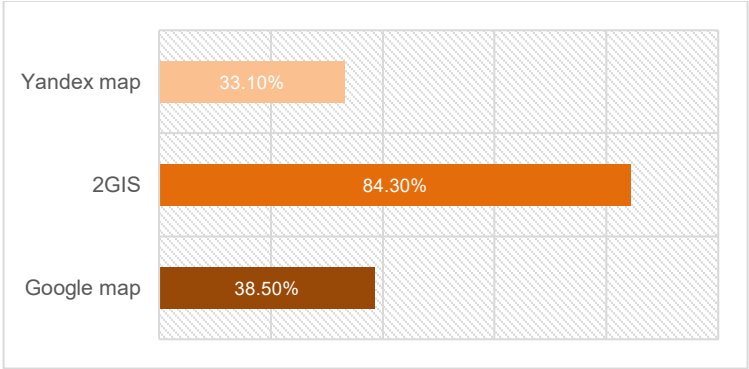
A significant percentage of surveyed international students from South Asia (93%) live far from the city center, primarily in areas such as Dordoi (22%), Vostok 5 (19%), Kok-Jar (19%), Vefa (12%), and Osh Bazaar (8%), as well as other neighborhoods in Bishkek. Only a small number of students can afford to rent housing closer to the center of Bishkek (8%). This is mainly due to the higher cost of renting in the city center. Rents in the outskirts of Bishkek are considerably lower, and landlords in these areas are often more willing to rent to international students. Additionally, hostels and dormitories associated with some medical universities are also located further from the city center.



Pic. 9. The most common places of residence for international students

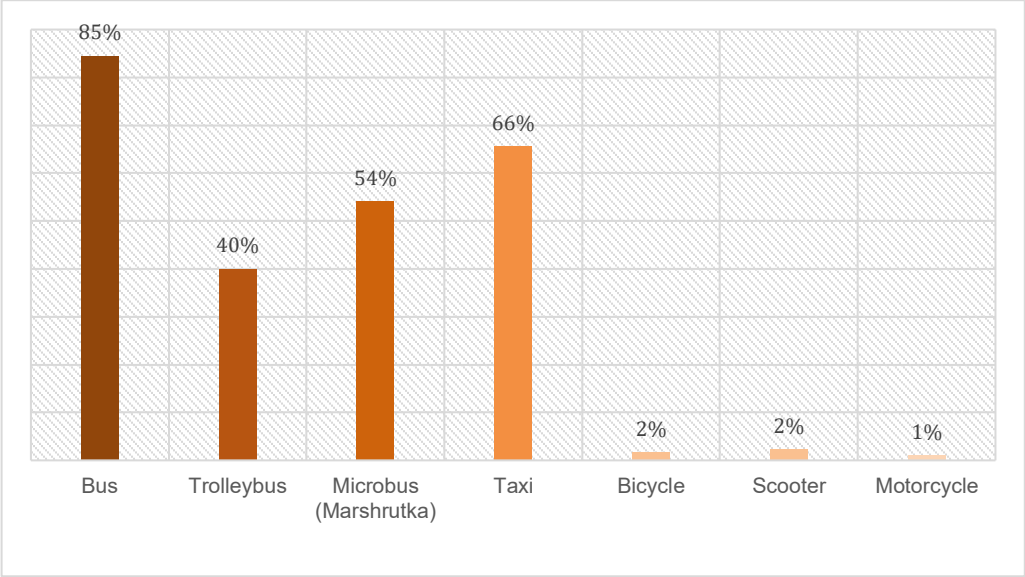
Access to safe public transport

Almost all students in Bishkek utilize available online maps to navigate the city, which help them plot routes effectively. A significant 84.3% (300) of foreign students prefer the 2GIS map, as it accurately displays the locations of various infrastructure facilities. This map also allows users to easily create routes and locate search objects. Following closely in popularity is Google Maps, which is used by more than 38% of respondents. Many are accustomed to this application from their home countries; however, they noted that Google Maps can be challenging to use for discovering new places, and some of the suggested routes may be incorrect. Additionally, Yandex Maps is steadily gaining popularity among foreign students each year.



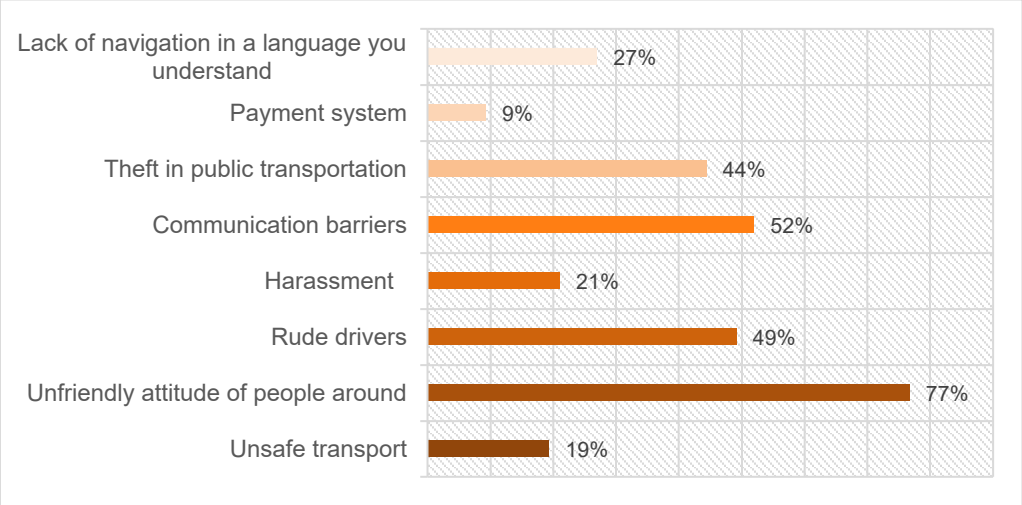
Pic.10 The most popular maps used by international students to travel around Bishkek city.

When it comes to public transport accessibility, a significant number of students (85%) prefer to travel around the city by bus due to its convenience and mobility. More than half of the students also use minibuses (54%), while slightly fewer rely on trolleybuses (40%). However, it's important to note that trolleybuses do not service all areas of Bishkek, which limits their availability for some residents. Additionally, a considerable portion of students (65%) choose private taxi services, as they are considered the safest option for both individual and group travel.



Pic.11 The most common types of transport used by international students

Participants frequently reported several challenges when using public transport in the city. The main issues identified were: an unfriendly attitude from people around them (77%); language barriers of communication difficulties (52%); theft (44%); a lack of navigators in a language they can understand (27%); rudeness from drivers (49%); harassment (21%); and concerns about unsafe transport (19%). As a result of the unwelcoming behavior of local residents, many students prefer to travel in groups of two or more.



Pic. 12. The most common problems when traveling by public transport

Almost every second respondent reported encountering theft of valuables on buses or minibuses. The most common items stolen include cell phones, wallets containing money and documents, and other valuables. Although respondents are aware that they can contact law enforcement, many choose not to, believing that their reports will not be addressed promptly and that petty theft crimes will not be thoroughly investigated. As a result, they view reporting these incidents as a waste of time and resources. Respondents who experience attacks and harassment often feel unsure about where to seek help. The Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic outlines different penalties for theft and robbery. Article 205 defines "Theft" as a crime that may result in fines or imprisonment for up to two years. In contrast, "Robbery," also outlined in Article 205, carries similar penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment for up to two years[40].

From the respondents' comments:

"While riding a crowded minibus to the university from Vostok-5, I stood next to the driver. A guy in front of me kept pushing into me due to the lack of space. When we reached my stop, I got off and checked my phone to see the time. Unfortunately, I couldn't find it; the guy in front of me had stolen it and got off at the Madina stop."

"We often experience unfriendly attitudes from drivers and other passengers in the minibus, and it's not uncommon for someone to steal mobile phones and other valuables. While we know we can file a complaint with the police, we also realize that they may not put in enough effort to resolve these crimes. This can feel like a frustrating waste of time, effort, and sometimes money. It often seems easier to just tolerate the situation and consider purchasing another phone."

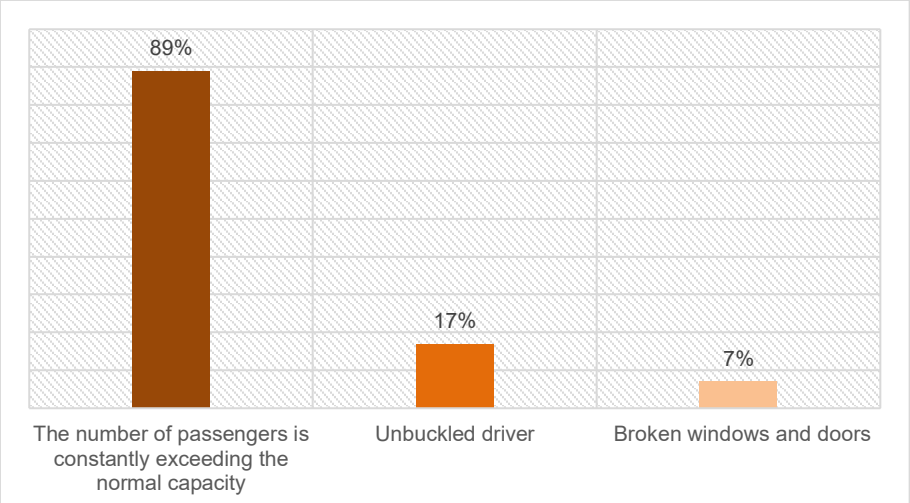
[40] Criminal Code 2021. Link: https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/112309/edition/14072/ru

Almost 80% of respondents expressed the opinion that the local population can be rude to international students from South Asia. In particular, in their comments they noted the following: “old passengers always shout at us”; “passengers talk and gossip about us right in front of us, they do not treat us kindly, especially the old ones”; “whenever students from India or Pakistan enter the bus, they cover their noses even if there is no smell and laugh at us, even insult us or tell us to give up our seats to the locals or just stand”.

From the respondent's comment:

“Some drivers don’t even stop when they see a foreign student at the bus stop. They can be rude to us for no reason. Not friendly at all. They make us feel inferior. If an elderly person comes, people will tell us to stand up first, instead of asking other younger teenagers to give up their seat, because we somehow don’t meet their expectations. This is pure discrimination. They gossip, catcall and shout right in front of us, making us feel bad and uncomfortable. They look down on us and look away.”

Overall, in addition to issues of hostility, crime, and discrimination, respondents also raised concerns about other safety conditions. Specifically, they highlighted excessive passenger numbers (89%), drivers not wearing seat belts (17%), and broken windows (7%). In their comments, they noted the following: “Drivers continue to add passengers even when there are no more seats, which often leads to clashes, conflicts, and overcrowding.” Another respondent mentioned, “The capacity is low, and drivers keep loading people onto the vehicle until it is full, which often leaves me feeling suffocated.” Additionally, concerns about poor ventilation were expressed: “The minibuses have inadequate ventilation, and the windows do not even open.”



Pic.13 Problems regarding physical safety in public transport

Transport prices are relatively affordable for international students. Most respondents indicated that the prices are average (60%) or cheap (20%). However, a minority of students (21%) felt that public transport prices are quite high. It is noteworthy that a significant number of students (69%) reported having no difficulty finding the necessary stops and transportation options near their residence and study locations. In the comments, some respondents mentioned: “We can find bus

stops in even the most remote areas when necessary. However, the fare has increased from 8 soms to 11 soms, and now to 20 soms, which feels unreasonable for ordinary passengers who rely on public transport regularly."

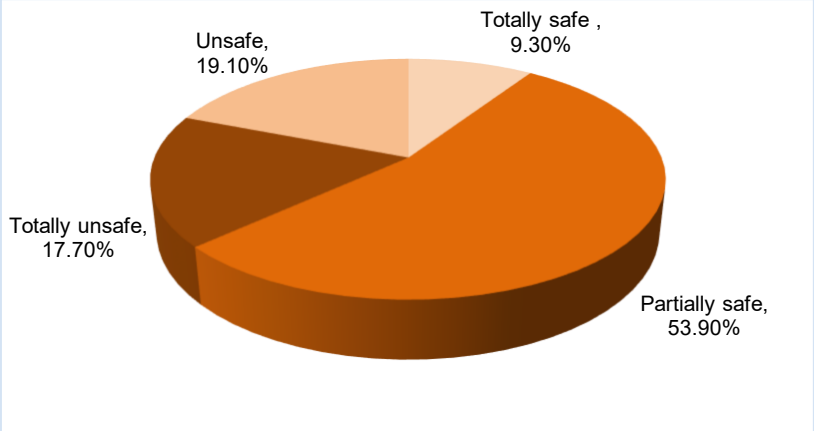
Respondents provided feedback on how to improve transport infrastructure. They suggested the following: "It is essential to install air conditioners in vehicles to ensure that people can breathe comfortably during hot weather and when there are large crowds"; "The government should provide student buses dedicated exclusively to international students, as well as transport cards for them to help prevent violence and discrimination"; "It would be beneficial if drivers had at least a basic understanding of English to avoid rude interactions with passengers"; "Buses should have navigation systems and information displayed in English for better accessibility"; "It is important to enforce rules that prevent exceeding the maximum number of passengers on buses"

4.2. Access to safe and inclusive public spaces

Enjoyable and comfortable stays in public spaces.

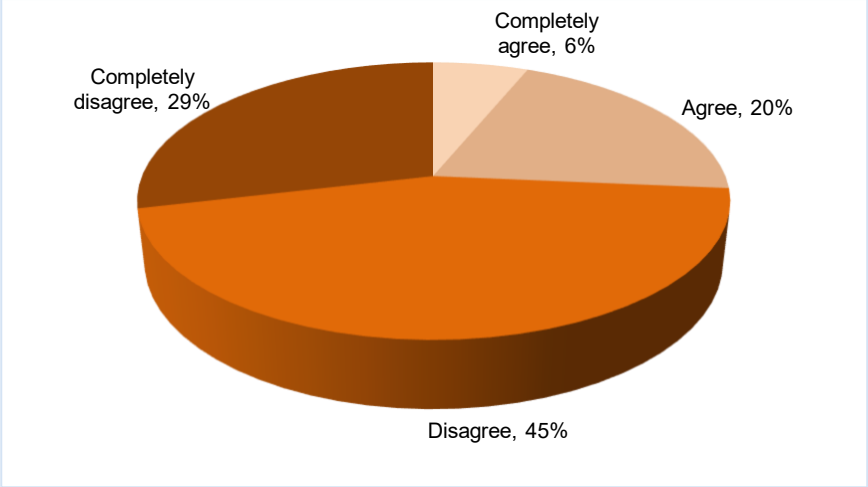
The active student life of international students is not only defined by their participation in educational activities, but also by their opportunities to engage with local culture and values in public spaces. When international students have unhindered access to these areas and feel comfortable and safe, it reflects the inclusiveness of cities and the commitment of governments to attract economic investment.

The survey revealed that over half of the respondents (54%) only felt partially safe in Bishkek, while more than a third (37%) did not feel safe at all. Only 9% reported feeling completely safe in the city. This low percentage indicates that very few international students feel entirely confident about their safety, which could impact their overall impression and well-being in Bishkek. Respondents expressed the most caution and uncertainty regarding their safety in open public spaces.



Pic. 14. How safe do international students feel in Bishkek

In response to the question, "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Do the locals of the city treat international students/citizens well?'" 45% of respondents disagreed with this statement, and 29% expressed strong disagreement. Only 20% of the participants agreed, and just 6% expressed strong agreement. Additionally, 74% of the respondents reported feeling uncomfortable around local residents and noted that they may experience discrimination from time to time.



Pic. 15. Opinion of respondents regarding the question "Do local residents of the city treat foreign students/citizens well?"

Based on the respondents' answers, it can be concluded that residents of Bishkek often display an unfriendly attitude toward foreign students from South Asia. This indicates that measures taken by responsible agencies to prevent xenophobia, racism, and discrimination against these individuals are insufficient. Respondents noted that such negative attitudes frequently manifest as verbal abuse and, at times, open harassment.

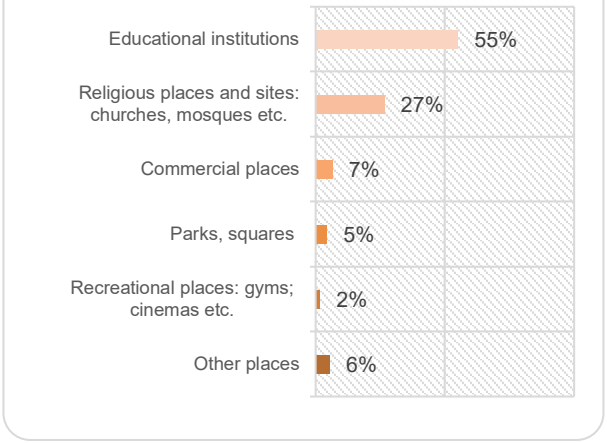
From the interview with the respondent:

"Recently, we visited another educational institution that also hosts foreign students. The security guard at this institution allowed the students from Kyrgyzstan to pass through without any questions, but he was very rude to the students from South Asia. During the check, he began tossing their belongings around and called them derogatory names. What upset me the most was that my classmates from South Asia were accustomed to such mistreatment and did not respond to the guard's behavior. To be honest, I would not tolerate such treatment, as it affects human dignity. I felt a deep sense of shame and sadness witnessing this situation. Foreign students pay significantly more than Kyrgyz citizens for their education, and they do not deserve to be treated poorly."

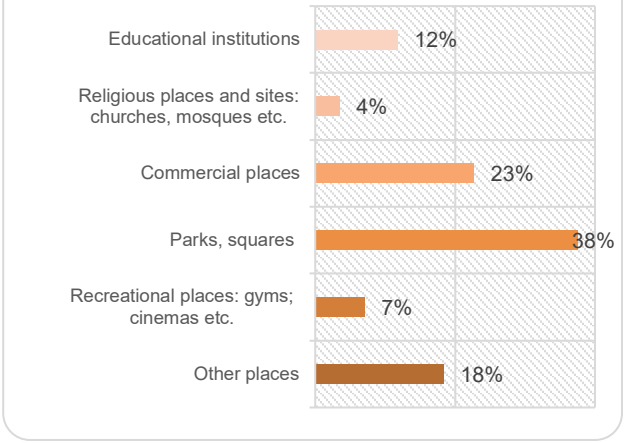
Safe and unsafe places for students

In response to the question, "In which places do you feel safe?", the most common answer was educational institutions, with 55% of respondents indicating they feel safe there. Religious places, such as mosques and churches, were mentioned by 27% of participants. In addition, when asked, "In which public places do you feel unsafe?", over a third of students (38%) pointed to parks and squares, while 23% reported feeling unsafe in commercial locations, including cafes and supermarkets. Additionally, many respondents shared specific examples of unsafe environments

for foreign students. In these comments, about 70% identified parks, squares, public transport, and large markets as particularly unsafe places.

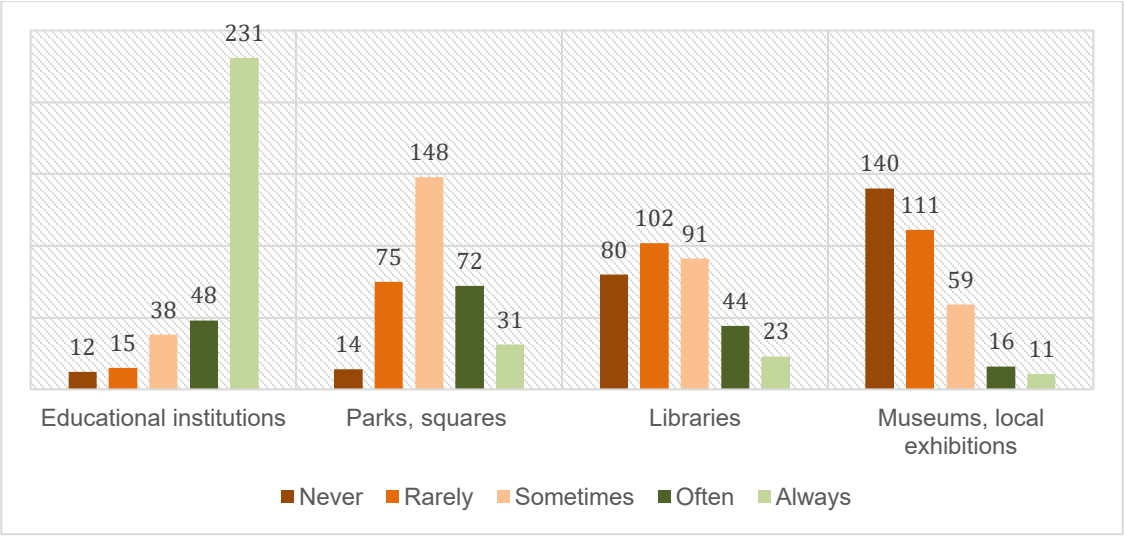


Pic. 16. In which places do you feel safe?



Pic. 17. In which public places do you feel unsafe?

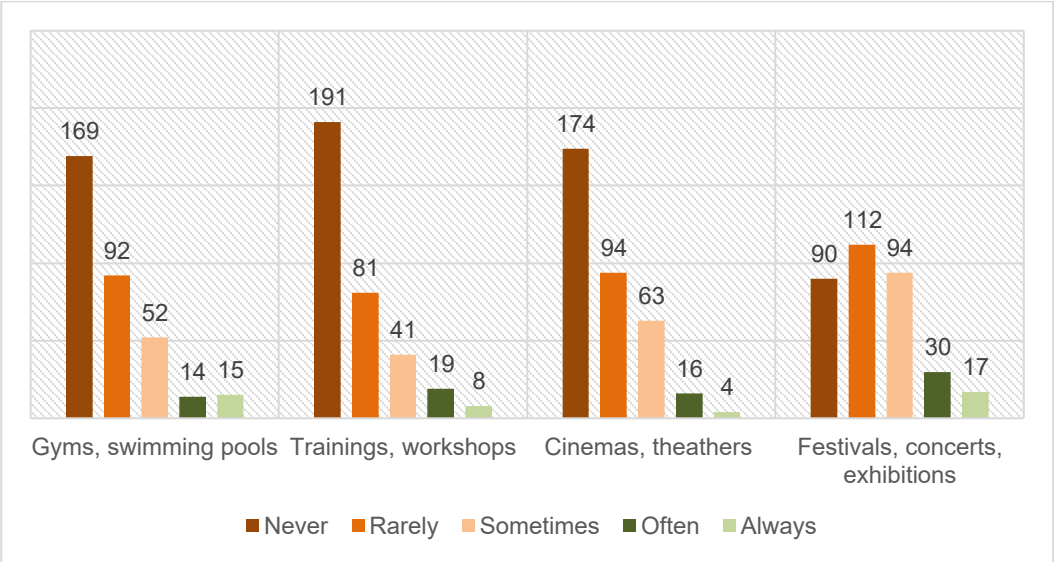
As for the most popular public places that are most often visited by foreign students, the survey results showed that respondents spend most of their time in educational institutions (65%) and sometimes visit libraries (51%); rarely or never visit: museums and exhibitions (70%) and public libraries (49%). Respondents still try to visit parks and squares at the safest time of day in their free time. Respondents also noted in their comments that they try not to walk in public places in the evening because there is a high risk that they may be subjected to various attacks, robberies and harassment.



Pic. 18. Places most frequently visited by international students

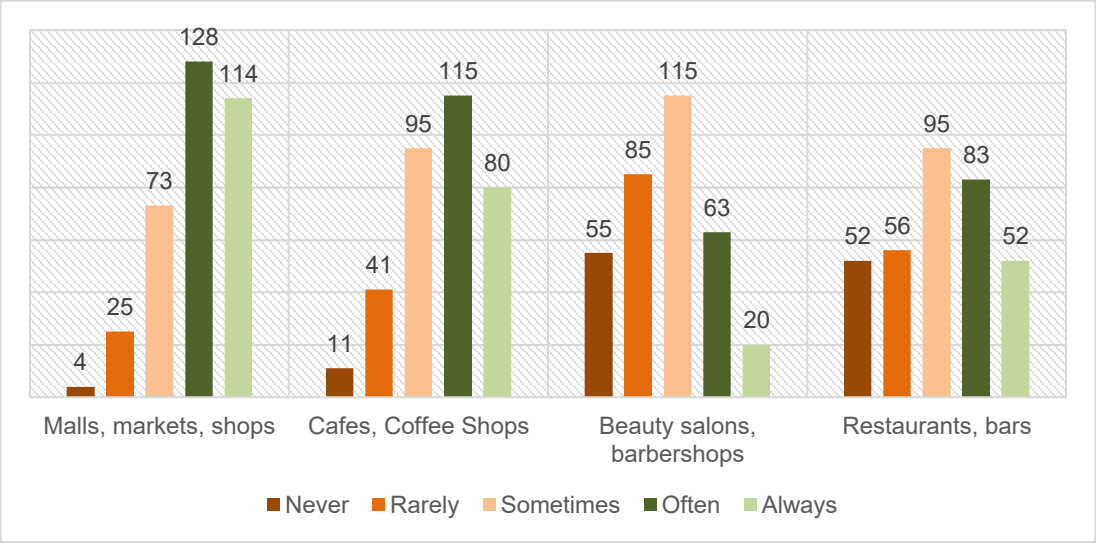
The survey results indicate that many respondents rarely visit entertainment venues during their free time. Specifically, 75.5% of respondents never go to theaters or cinemas, 60% do not attend concerts or festivals, and 73.5% avoid gyms and swimming pools. This is concerning as many

foreign students lack access to gyms where they can improve their health outside of class. Only a small number of respondents engage in activities at gyms or other cultural venues.



Pic. 19. Frequent visits to cultural places and leisure activities

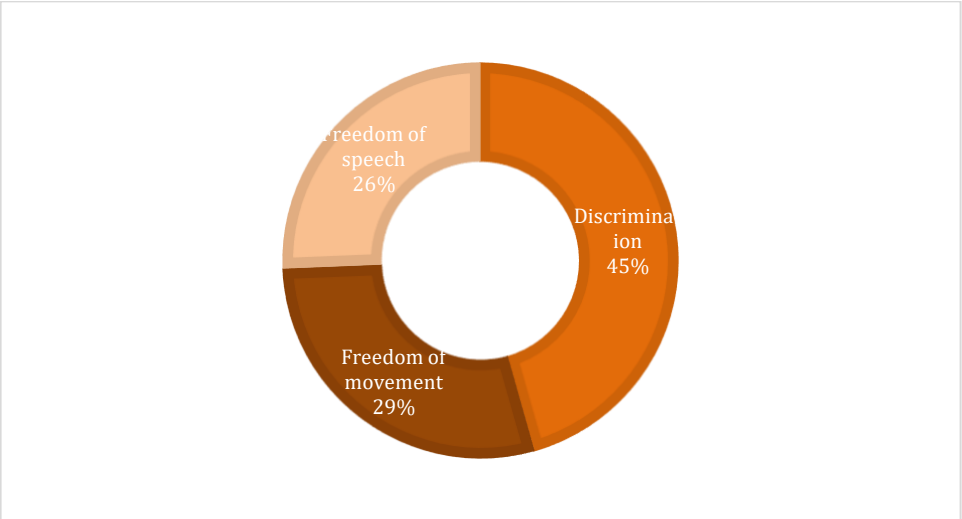
It is important to recognize that international students positively impact not only the educational services market but also the economies of small and medium-sized businesses in various sectors. According to a survey, 68% of respondents frequently visit local stores and malls, while 55% often frequent cafes and coffee shops, which are typically located near educational institutions. Additionally, about 23% of respondents regularly visit beauty salons, hairdressers, bars, and restaurants, with over a third trying to go to restaurants and bars. When asked, "In what places do you socialize besides the university?" nearly 80% of respondents indicated that they socialize in cafes and restaurants, as well as in malls and shopping centers.



Pic. 20. Frequent visits to shopping and commercial places

To the question “What problems have you encountered in public places regarding the exercise of your fundamental rights?”, the vast majority of respondents answered that they had encountered: discrimination (66%), freedom of movement (41.6%), freedom of speech (31.7%). Many respondents mentioned in their comments that they feel unable to freely and openly express their opinions on various topics. Typically, they only share their views among trusted individuals,

fearing negative consequences from others. Regarding discrimination in public places, respondents indicated that it is often linked to an unfriendly attitude from local residents.



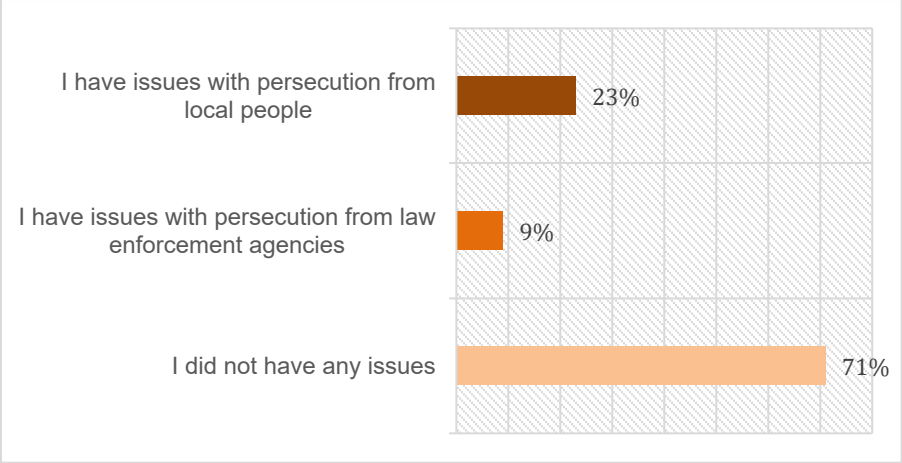
Pic. 21. The most common problems faced by international students in public places

From the comments of the respondents:

"When we go outside, the locals often look at us strangely. We are not tourists; we are students. First and foremost, we are Muslims. However, every time we go out, we feel like we can't laugh or talk normally because the locals do not seem to like us. They tell us to be quiet in our native language, and we comply because this is not our land, and we feel powerless. On buses, they push us and use offensive language; at times, they even hit us."

Access to public religious places and the exercise of the right to freedom of religion

Many international students in different countries have the fundamental right to visit religious sites that resonate with their beliefs. Educational institutions themselves often house diverse communities reflective of various faiths. As part of a recent survey, we included the question, "What problems have you encountered in public places when practicing your religion and beliefs?" The results revealed that 32% of respondents reported facing difficulties related to persecution. Specifically, 23% mentioned they experienced persecution from local citizens, while 9% reported facing persecution from law enforcement agencies.



Pic. 22. Answers to the question "What problems have you faced in public places in terms of practicing your religion and beliefs?"

Some respondents pointed out that educational institutions fail to create an environment that protects students' rights to freedom of religion and provide adequate facilities. For instance, students shared the following comments: "There is no prayer room at our university, not on any campus, which is surprising for a Muslim country. Additionally, there is no water for ablution in the bathrooms, which is the least they could provide in an Islamic country, especially since toilet paper is also often missing—particularly in hospitals, where hygiene is essential." Regarding mosques, they mentioned that women, even local ones, are not allowed into the Central Mosque, not even on Eid al-Adha (Kurban-Bairam).

In terms of discrimination and persecution, respondents highlighted the following issues:

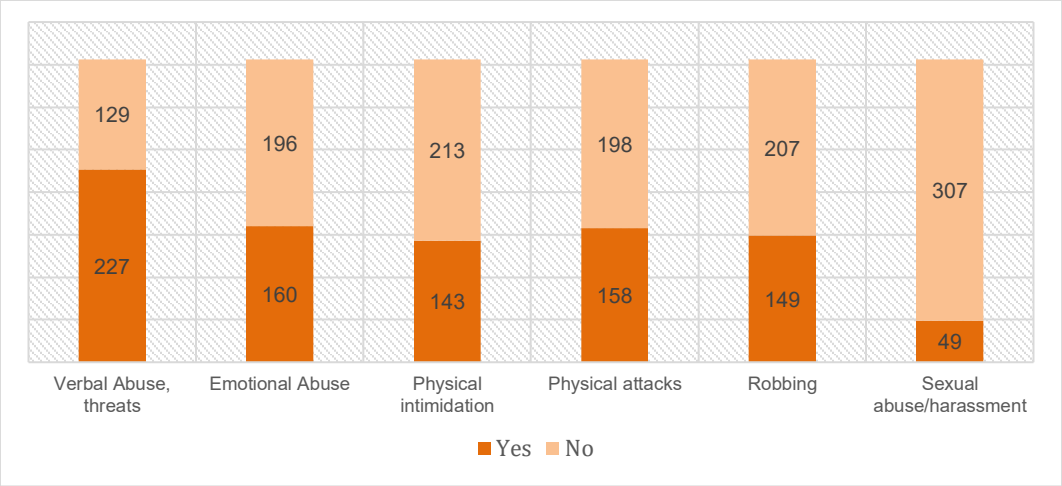
“Because I am a Christian, sometimes when I tell someone locally that I am a Christian, they begin to persecute me. Just because I live in Pakistan doesn't mean everyone here is Muslim; there are minorities as well.”

“I identify as a secular and liberal democrat, but I also adhere to the basic principles of Islam. I am a Shia Muslim. I have heard from others that Shias are not considered Muslims and are labeled as kafirs. Occasionally, I am asked about my religion and denomination. It often happens that people are hostile toward Shias due to misunderstandings.”

“In the mosque, when we are seen, some locals try to move us to the back, where even the imam's voice is barely audible. This area is designated for our Muslims.”

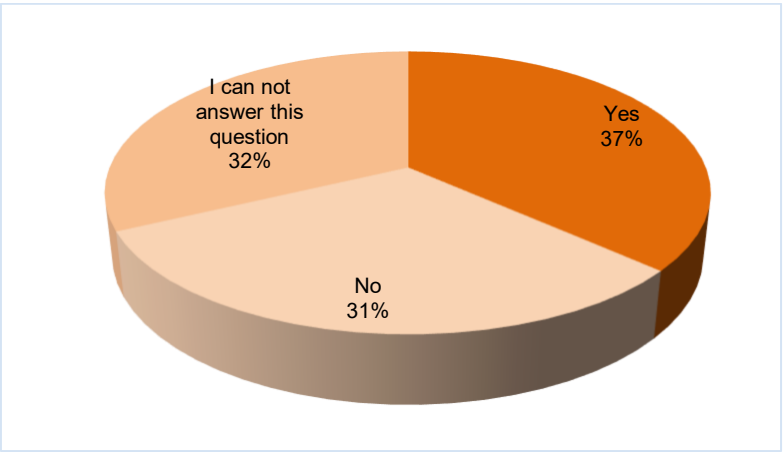
4.3. Violence in public places against international students

The survey included questions aimed at identifying the types and frequency of safety threats faced by international students in public places in Bishkek. The forms of threats included "verbal abuse," "verbal threats," "psychological violence," "physical intimidation," "physical assault," "robbery," and "sexual violence and harassment." Respondents were asked whether they had experienced any of these issues. According to the survey results, 64% of international students reported encountering verbal abuse and threats in public places within the last 6-12 months. Additionally, 45% of students indicated they had experienced emotional violence, such as intimidation, humiliation, manipulation, and insults, on a regular basis.



Pic. 23. Responses to the question: "Have you personally experienced any of the listed types of violence or attacks over the past 6-12 months while using public transport or being in public places?

According to the survey, 42% of respondents reported experiencing physical intimidation, assault, or theft. Additionally, 14% of international students indicated that they had been victims of sexual assault or harassment. More than one-third of the respondents observed that their incidents involved a racial, cultural, or religious aspect. Meanwhile, 32% of respondents chose not to provide an answer.



Pic. 24. Responses to the question: "If you experienced violence, was there a racial, religious, or cultural element to the behavior?"

Detailed description of the cases

Over half of the respondents, specifically 56%, who experienced some form of violence shared details about the incidents they faced. Analyzing their stories reveals that international students in Bishkek often encounter racism, discrimination, and aggressive behavior. These issues encompass verbal abuse, physical violence, prejudice, and social exclusion. Overall, the findings indicate a serious problem of xenophobia and intolerance, particularly towards students from South Asia.

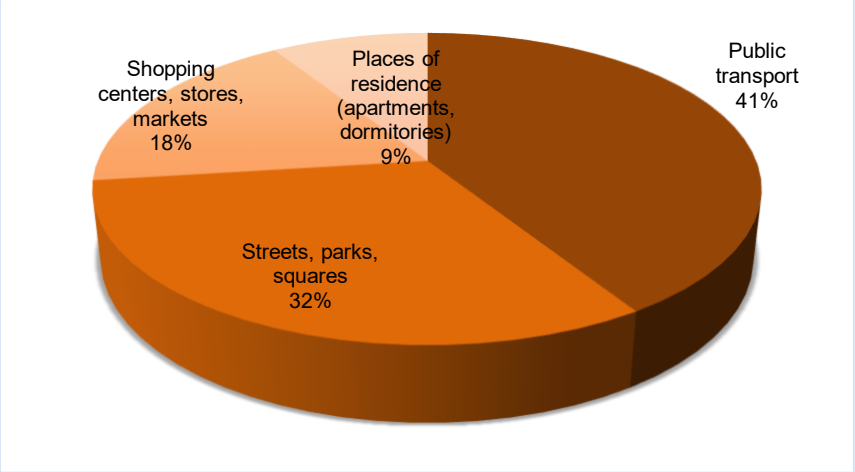
The main trends reported include verbal abuse and ridicule. Many individuals shared experiences of regular insults in Russian or Kyrgyz, stating, “We are constantly called ‘Indians’, ‘dark-skinned’, or told that ‘locals think we are inferior to them.’” Respondents also mentioned derogatory remarks such as, “Locals complain that we smell, even though we do not,” and “We face ridicule for our traditional clothing and appearance.” Several respondents recounted instances of physical attacks, including one incident where an elderly man grabbed a person's arm near Alamedin-1 while using racist slurs. Another described a situation where three local men attempted to rob them on the street, threatening them while shouting the name of their country. Some individuals even reported experiencing threats and aggression from minibus drivers or security guards in stores.

Respondents also described situations related to social isolation and biased attitudes from local residents in Bishkek. For example, constant judgmental looks: "The locals always look at us like we’re aliens," and avoidance of interaction: "Some shops and supermarkets close their doors when they see us coming in." In public transportation, they often face hostility: "In public transport, we get insulted or people act strangely." There is also bias and discrimination in educational institutions. Instances of hostility from teachers and school staff were noted: "Even our teachers told us to go back to Pakistan," which is especially painful for students who rely on support in an academic environment.

Frequent cases of robbery were mentioned, especially on the streets and in public transport: "I was robbed twice and threatened with physical harm." These findings highlight the need to improve social integration and protect international students in Bishkek. Issues of racism and xenophobia require a comprehensive approach, including educating the local population, improving the legal protection system, and providing support for affected students. One respondent noted: "We haven’t done anything wrong, but for some reason, we’re seen as a threat."

Places Where Students Most Often Encountered Violence

An analysis of the responses shows that international students in Bishkek most frequently face violence and discrimination in public spaces, especially on public transportation, as well as in places like markets, shops, university campuses, and streets. This highlights the need to strengthen social protection for foreign citizens, including educating the local population on tolerance and cultural diversity and improving legal protections to prevent violence and discrimination against international students in Bishkek.



Pic. 25. The most unsafe places for international students

Public Transportation

Most respondents identified public transportation as the main place for conflicts: "We get insulted on buses and marshrutka," or "When older women see us, they start expressing their discontent and push us." Instances of theft were also reported: "I was robbed on a bus; my phone was stolen," and "Marshrutka drivers often behave aggressively." Regarding taxi services, many female students frequently faced harassment, with drivers openly suggesting intimate contact and making inappropriate comments, such as: "Taxi drivers act very awkwardly. They smile strangely and scare me. They say weird things using a translator and ask for my contact number."

Streets and Public Spaces

Streets and parks are another risk zone: "On the streets, we are often called names, and sometimes fights even break out," and "In the park and at the Philharmonia, I was verbally insulted." Biased attitudes are highlighted: "On the street, passersby judge us by our appearance, showing contempt."

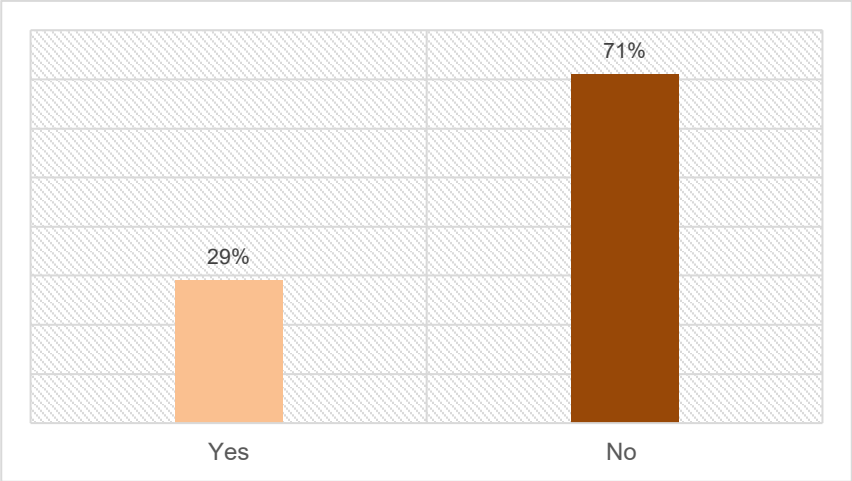
It is important to note that respondents reported not only local citizens as aggressors but also mentioned biased behavior from law enforcement officers, who often stop and check them without any valid reason.

Markets and Shops

Places like Osh Bazaar, shops, and shopping malls also witness aggression: "At the market, prices go up when they see we are foreigners," and "In stores, security guards often express their contempt."

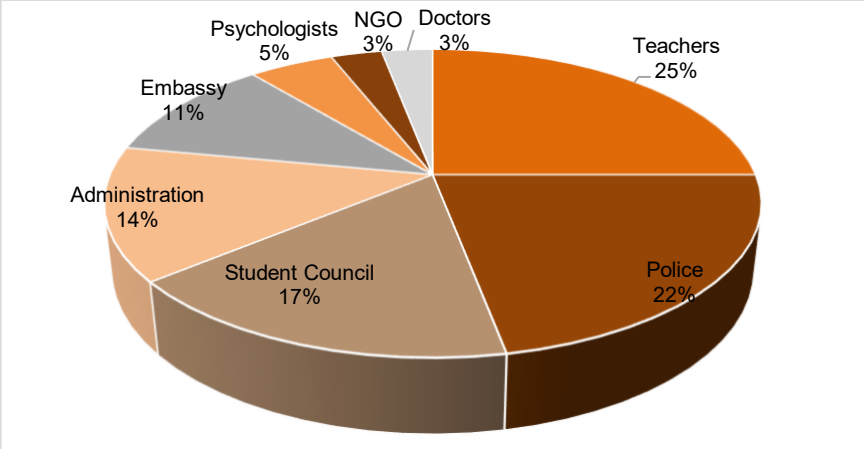
4.4. Access to protection

Due to the lack of protection and assistance services for foreign citizens in the Kyrgyzstan, it was also important to find out where respondents seek help and how they cope with the consequences of violence. When asked, "Did you report the incident (violence or assault) to anyone?" the vast majority of respondents (71%) said they did not report it to anyone, while the remaining 29% did report the incident.



Pic. 26. Response to the question "Did you report the incident to anyone?".

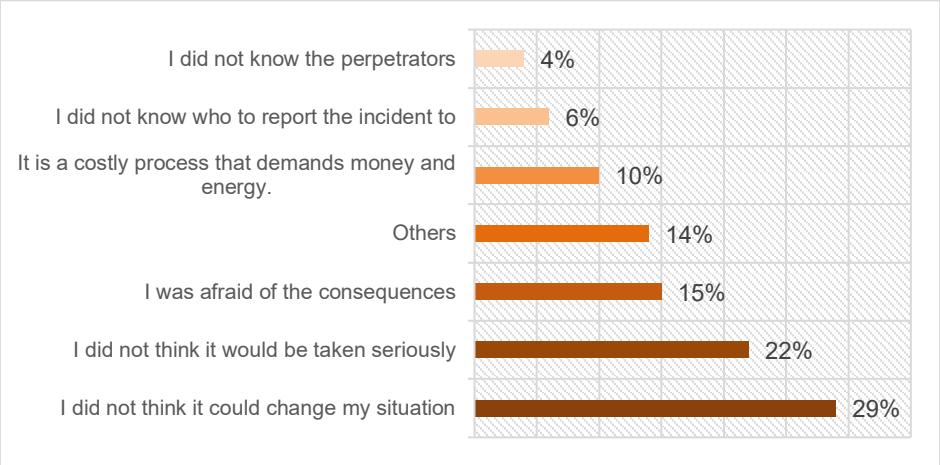
Of those who reached out to someone, the majority (39%) of respondents contacted teachers, educational institution administration, and student councils. Additionally, 17% of respondents try to reach out to student councils. It is also important to note that 22% of respondents contacted law enforcement, but students mentioned in their comments and interviews that no reaction or measures were taken by them.



Pic. 27. "If you answered yes, whom did you report the incident to?"

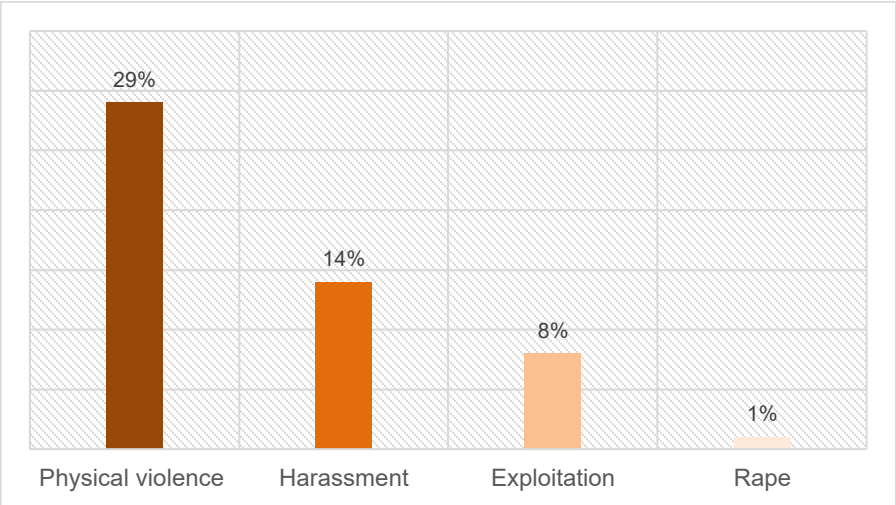
Many respondents are unaware of how to protect their rights due to a lack of knowledge of local laws and the language, and do not know how to seek legal assistance. This indicates that even the responsible services and local authorities do not give enough importance to the protection of victims and the prevention of violence against foreign citizens from South Asia. Respondents also face difficulties when seeking help from doctors and local organizations.

Among the main reasons why they do not report incidents, respondents mentioned the following factors, which point to systemic issues in protecting victims of violence and crime among international students: 29% believe it would not change their situation; 22% think it would not be taken seriously by anyone; nearly 15% of respondents were afraid of the consequences of reporting; 10% noted that it would require financial resources, and 6% mentioned they did not know where to turn in such cases.



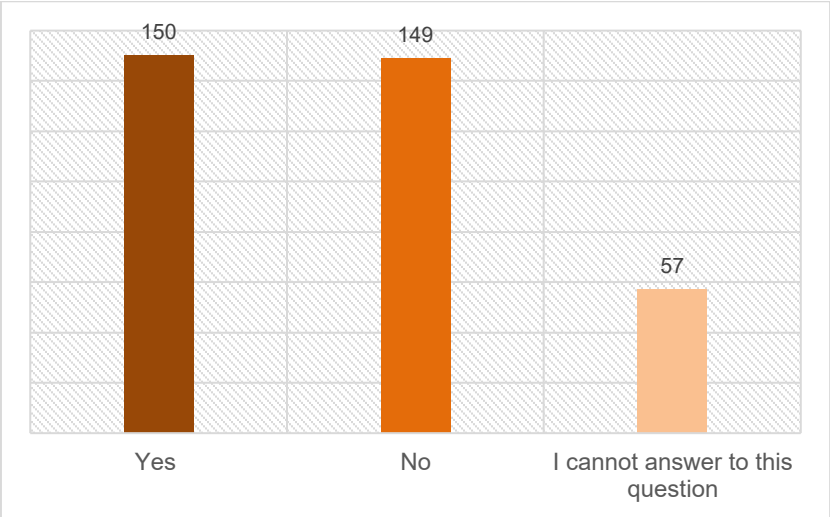
Pic. 28. Responses to the question "Why did not you report the incident?"

Regarding gender-based violence, the question "Have you ever experienced any of the following types of violence?" was also asked. From the respondents' answers, it was found that 13% had experienced harassment, 8% had been victims of both labor and sexual exploitation, and 1.4% had been raped. Additionally, 29% had been subjected to physical assault. More than 58% of these incidents occurred at the hands of strangers and unknown individuals on the street. Female respondents also noted instances where this violence came from taxi drivers, landlords, and classmates.



Pic. 29. Most common types of gender-based violence experienced by respondents

During focus groups and interviews with international students, incidents and comments related to interactions between law enforcement and individuals from South Asia were mentioned notably often. Therefore, questions on this topic were included in the survey for a more in-depth analysis. According to the survey results, 42% of respondents noted that they had encountered negative attitudes from police officers in public places, while 16% were unsure to answer this question.



Pic. 30. Responses to the question "Have you encountered negative attitudes from police officers in public places?"

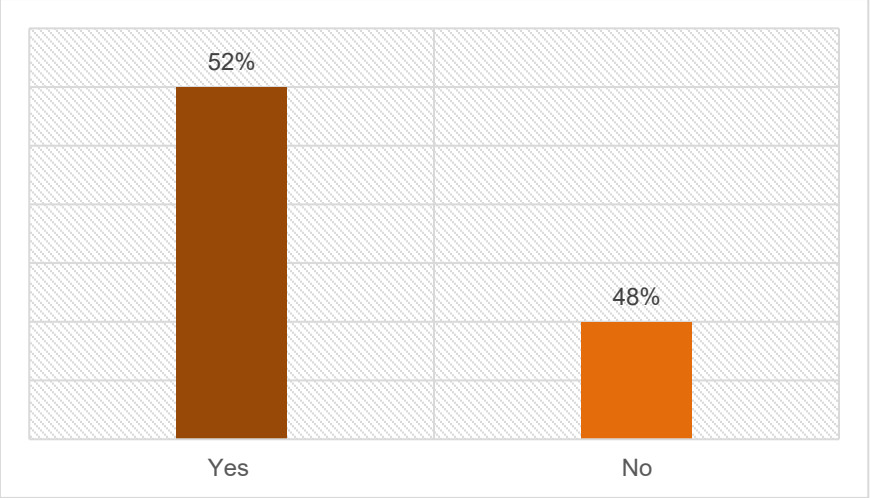
As part of the study, the question was also asked: "Have your acquaintances, classmates, or friends living in Bishkek faced negative attitudes from police officers?" To this, 56% responded affirmatively, 21% were unsure, and 27% reported that they had not observed such cases. Nearly half (50%) of the respondents confirmed that they had found themselves in situations where law enforcement officers demanded money from them in exchange for "solving problems," such as being in public places at night, smoking in prohibited areas, and other minor offenses.

From the respondents' comments:

"One day, my friend was smoking near a trash bin. He wasn't littering there, and local residents were also smoking nearby. However, the police officer approached my friend. He didn't speak Russian, so I went to help him. The officer demanded 1000 som from me, but we only had 200 som. I explained that we didn't have a larger amount, but he still asked for more money."

"The locals robbed me and my friend, and we called the police. We went with them to report the incident at the police station, and they said that if we didn't withdraw our complaint, they would file a report against us and deport us."

During focus group discussion with respondents, they also complained about the high level of corruption in some of the educational institutions where they study. Therefore, a question regarding corruption and harassment by faculty members was also included. According to the survey results, 52% of respondents reported encountering corruption from professors, while 48% had not experienced such cases. Many shared in their comments that professors might deliberately "fail" students during exams, even if they do well on their homework, openly or subtly demanding money.



Pic. 31. Responses to the question "Have you encountered instances of corruption by professors?"

From the respondents' comments:

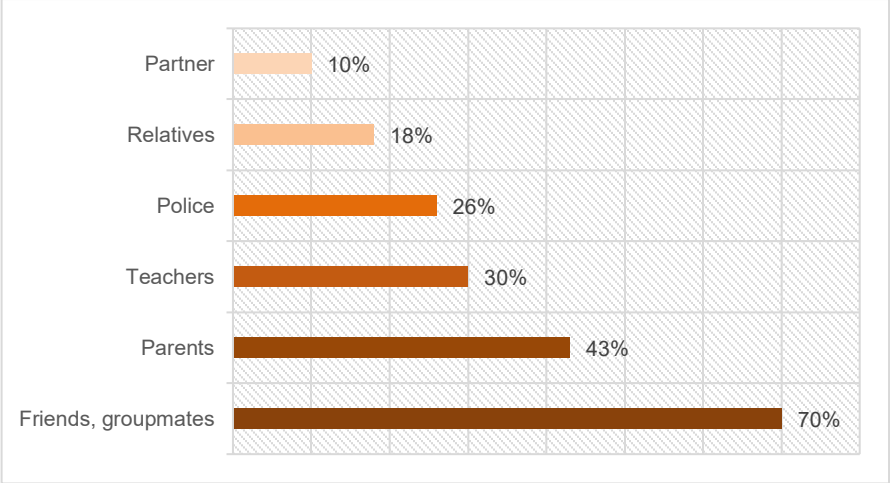
"Teachers don't conduct any sessions, and if they do, they try their best to fail us so that at the end of the semester, they can demand money to free us from subjects. Some teachers even demand large sums, between 300 and 500 dollars," (shared one of the respondents).

"Teachers ask for money despite the fact that we fulfill our duties properly, and sometimes they treat us very badly. Some teachers even make inappropriate sexual comments."

"One day, a teacher asked me if I wanted to go to the bathroom with him. I reported this to the dean, and she replied, 'Maybe it was a horrible joke.'"

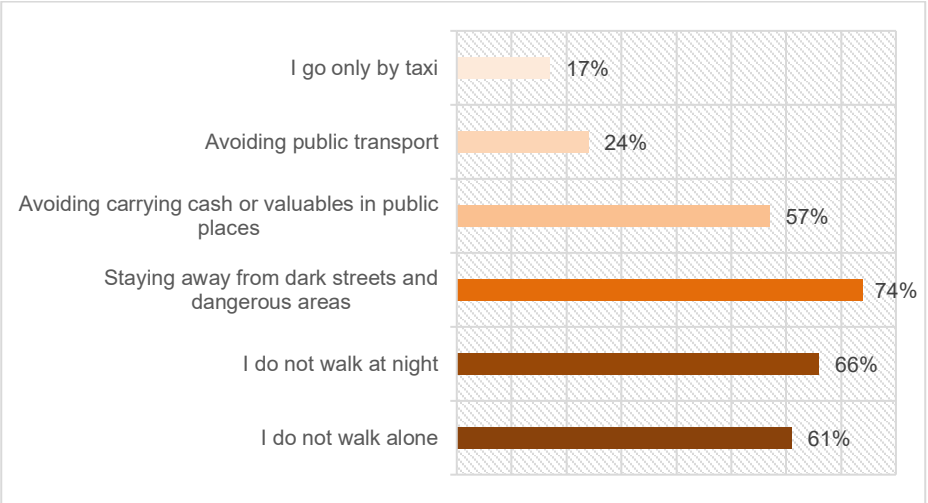
Safety measure and obstacles

Respondents were asked whom they would turn to in an emergency situation. The majority of respondents (70%) admitted that in case of serious incidents, they would share with friends and classmates. The second most common answer was parents (43%), followed by professors/teachers (30%) and the police (26%). Mostly, international students try to resolve issues related to violence and assault on their own and also turn to their parents for help.



Pic. 32. Response to the question "Who would you contact in case of an incident in the city of Bishkek?"

Respondents shared various measures they take to ensure their safety. The most common measure was "avoiding dark streets," mentioned by 74% of respondents. This was followed by: "not walking at night" (66%), "not walking alone" (61%), and "not carrying valuable items or large amounts of cash" (56%). Respondents also indicated measures such as "avoiding public transportation" and "using only taxis to get around the city."

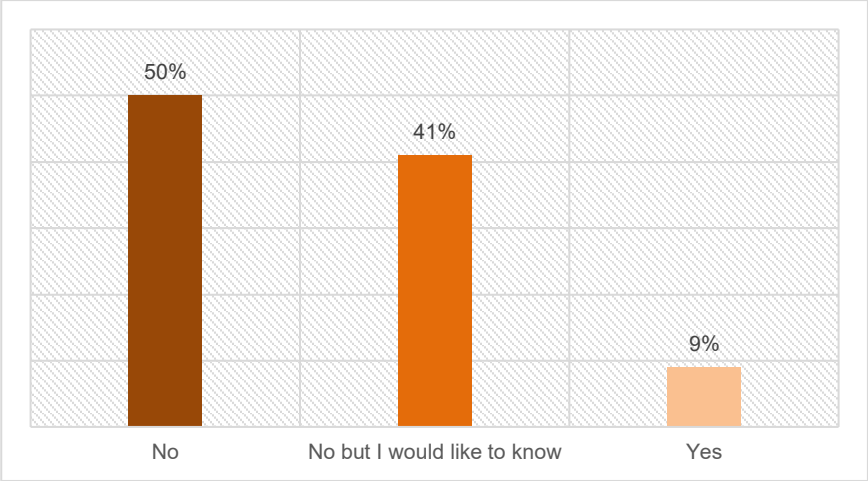


Pic. 33. Precautions taken by international students to protect themselves from attacks and violence

According to the survey, a significant barrier for students seeking help from law enforcement is the language barrier. However, respondents admitted a combination of various factors, such as corruption and recommendations from acquaintances and friends, which highlighted the pointlessness of such reports. Examples include: "The language barrier with the local police and the absence of my country's embassy," "We need to bring a interpreter, and their services are very expensive," "To participate in legal proceedings, we need a translator who demands a lot of money, and without them, we cannot proceed with our case," "Language barrier, discrimination, loss of time and money," "Due to the language barrier, it is difficult to report this to any locals." These reasons significantly reduce students' trust in law enforcement and their willingness to seek protection for their rights.

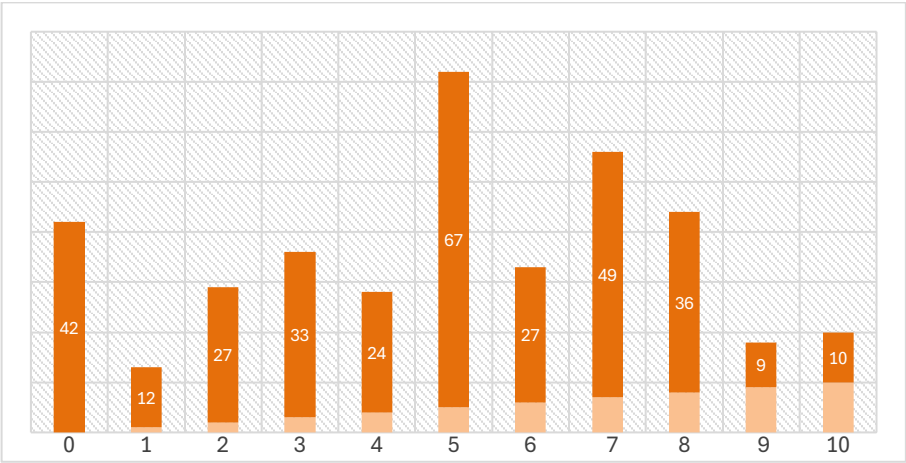
Students were asked whether they knew of any non-governmental organizations that provide legal assistance and protection to foreign students/citizens in the Kyrgyz Republic. It was revealed that

more than 90% of respondents are unaware of any organizations that can assist in providing legal protection in case of incidents or emergency situations.



Pic. 34. Respondents' answers to the question "Do you know any non-governmental organizations that provide legal assistance and protection to international students/citizens in the Kyrgyz Republic?"

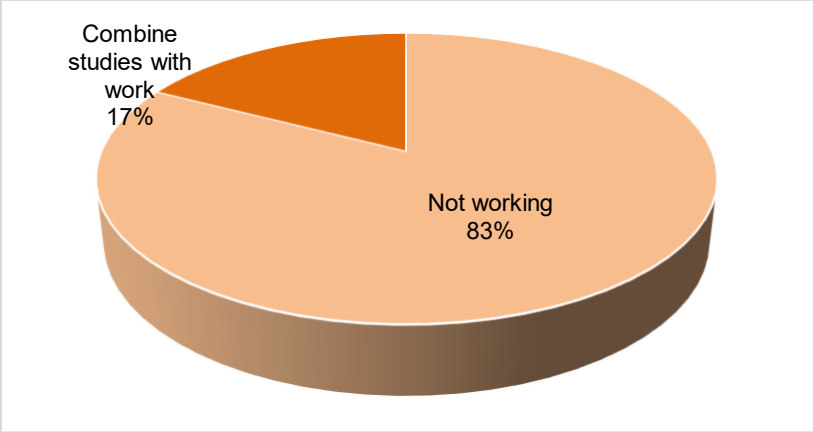
Students were asked to assess their level of safety on a scale from 0 to 10. The highest number of respondents rated it as 5 (moderate safety). There is also a significant number of zeros, indicating high concern about safety. High ratings from 8 to 10 are less common but show that some respondents feel relatively safe. Most respondents, about 42%, feel significant insecurity. The large number of zeros and low ratings indicates a widespread sense of insecurity in the city of Bishkek among international students.



Pic. 35. Assessment of the safety level on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 = unsafe, 10 = safe.

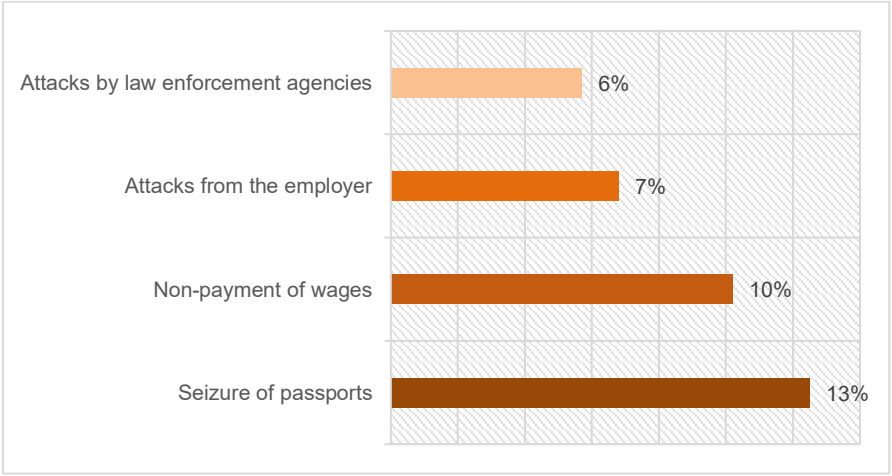
4.5. Access to safe employment

According to Article 8 of the External Migration Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, foreign nationals who come to the Kyrgyz Republic for educational purposes are not allowed to be employed in the country. However, despite legal restrictions, 17.4% of respondents combine their studies with work. Most working students are employed in the service sector: cafes and restaurants, online jobs, food delivery services, the textile industry, and taxi services. Regarding labor rights, respondents most often face issues related to the lack of employment contracts, as they often work illegally.



Pic. 36. The ratio of working to non-working students

Working international students in the Kyrgyz Republic belong to a special at-risk group, whose rights may be violated due to their vulnerable status and legal restrictions on employment. Regarding serious threats, working international students faced the following issues: passport confiscation (13%), non-payment of wages (10%), attacks by employers (7%), and assaults by law enforcement officers (6%). In the latter case, some respondents noted that inspections by law enforcement had increased.

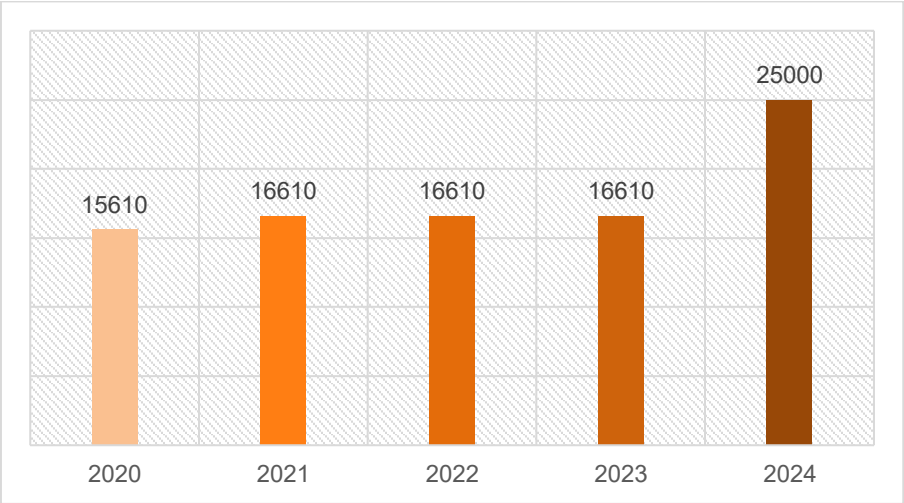


Pic. 37. Rights violations faced by international students during employment

To prevent illegal employment and illegal migration, law enforcement agencies often conduct various preventive measures among foreign citizens from South Asia. For example, in 2024, as a result of inspections, 400 foreign students were prohibited from working as delivery men, and information sessions were conducted with delivery services. A total of 1,248,500 KGS was fined to students for various violations according to 225 protocols, drawn up in accordance with the laws

of the Kyrgyz Republic. According to Article 431 of the Code of Offenses, violations by foreign citizens of the established rules of stay and labor activity result in a fine for individuals in the amount of 55 calculation indicators.

Foreign citizens from South Asia can work in the Kyrgyz Republic only if they have a "W" type work visa. Usually, work quotas are allocated to citizens from other countries in sectors where there is a significant shortage of labor. In 2024, the Kyrgyz Republic increased the foreign labor quota by 50.5% compared to previous years. As of April 2024, 67% of the quota, or 16,814 job openings, had been applied for. Of these, 47% were citizens of Bangladesh, 24% were citizens of Pakistan, and 16% were citizens of China. 63% of the quotas were allocated to the industrial (including textile), construction, and transport sectors, 13% to the mining sector, and 14% to the services and trade sectors.



Pic. 38. Quotas for foreign labor in the Kyrgyz Republic[41]

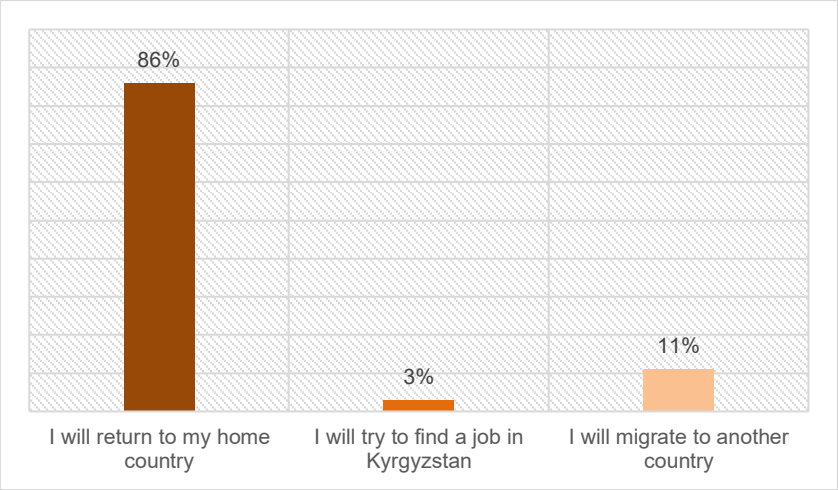
Between 2022 and 2024, there has been an increase in cases of crimes related to illegal migration and human trafficking in the Kyrgyz Republic. Experts note that the actual number of migrants from South Asia may be significantly higher, as many enter the country on tourist and student visas. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, 59 cases of illegal migration were identified in the first quarter of 2024, and 264 criminal cases have been initiated related to illegal migration.

It is important to note that many countries, where students from the Kyrgyz Republic go for studies, allow foreign students to combine study with work. In this case, depending on the country of origin, students may need to obtain additional permits or no additional permissions may be required. For example, in the Russian Federation, a foreign student who wants to combine work with study only needs a certificate from the educational institution. Additionally, in many European Union countries, foreign students can work without special permits.

Regarding future plans after studies, 86% of international students studying in the Kyrgyz Republic plan to return to their home countries after completing their education. Only 11% plan to migrate to other countries for employment or further education. It is important to note that only 3% of students want to try to find work in the Kyrgyz Republic, which is a small number of students. This

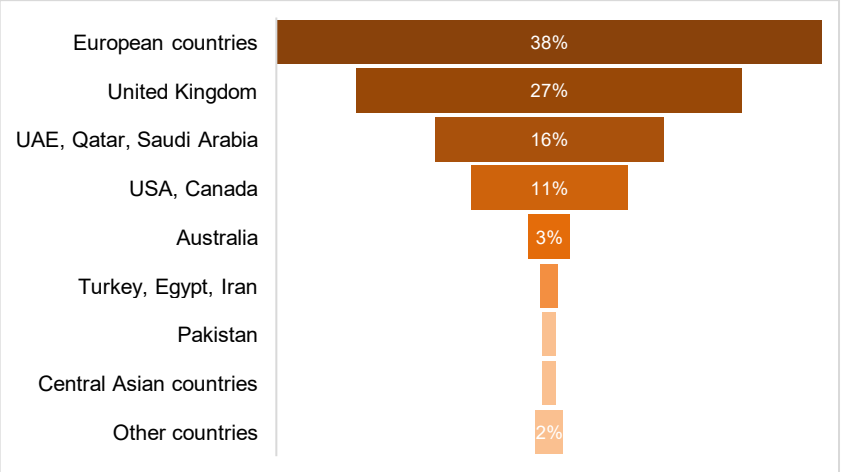
[41] Source: Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration

suggests that international students do not plan to stay in the Kyrgyz Republic; they view the country solely as an opportunity to receive professional education.



Pic. 39. Respondents' plans after graduation

Respondents were also asked, "If you are considering moving to other countries for employment in the future, which region or country would you choose?" Many respondents chose Europe (38%) and the United Kingdom (27%). The third most popular choices were countries like the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia (16%). A smaller number of respondents plan to go to the USA and Canada (11%) and also to Australia (3%). Only a few respondents selected Central Asian countries, Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, and Iran. Many respondents are drawn to the most popular countries for their rule of law and respect for human rights.



Pic. 40. Most popular countries for future employment where respondents would like to go

To track the employment process and ensure compliance with entry regulations, many universities abroad have developed employment centers to provide students with information not only about labor rights but also to help them plan their future careers in their chosen fields. Successful employment after university positively impacts university rankings. During the survey, 71% of respondents noted that universities in the Kyrgyz Republic do not have such centers where they could receive useful information about labor rights and career development.

Visa questions

Foreign students entering the Kyrgyz Republic should apply for a student visa of category "S," which is often issued for up to 90 days. Students also have the right to obtain a visa for up to 1 year if they are enrolled in educational institutions registered in the Kyrgyz Republic. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic has launched the "Electronic Visa" portal to simplify the visa application process. To obtain a visa for up to one year, admitted applicants must provide the following documents:

- A petition (request) from the educational institution, certified with a seal, indicating the student's residence address in the dormitory. If students live outside the dormitory, their registration is done based on the general registration procedures for foreign nationals and stateless persons.
- A power of attorney for a representative to submit the request on behalf of a legal or physical person;
- Passport of the foreign citizen;
- Receipt of payment for the state fee.
- A certified copy of the individual agreement between the applicant and the educational institution (indicating the duration of study), registered in the Kyrgyz Republic (in the case of applying for a long-term visa).

To obtain a visa, students typically apply through the international relations departments at universities, which assist them in submitting their visa applications. One month before the visa expiration date, students must contact the visa office and submit all the necessary documents for visa extension. When applying for a visa extension, university students have the option to receive a single-entry or multiple-entry visa. A single-entry visa allows entry into the Kyrgyz Republic only once, after which international students must reapply for a visa extension. A multiple-entry visa allows international students to leave the Kyrgyz Republic and re-enter the country any number of times during the validity period of the visa.

Table 5. Cost of Visa Extension [42]

Period	Cost in KGS	Period	Cost in KGS
3 months	6510	8 months	8755
4 months	6960	9 months	9204
5 months	7411	10 months	9655
6 months	7854	11 months	10105
7 months	8305	12 months	10546

When asked, "Have you had problems obtaining a visa?", a third of the respondents (30%) answered "Yes." The students noted that obtaining a multiple-entry visa can be very complicated, and as a result, they prefer to obtain a visa valid for up to 90 days. Almost 90% of those who faced visa issues complained about visa fees and the process of obtaining them: "We think the visa fees are quite high, and we don't understand why we have to keep getting a new visa every time we leave and re-enter the country"; "We cannot get a multiple-entry visa if we want to visit our parents during the holidays. We have to apply for a visa again every time we leave Kyrgyzstan and come back, it's such a hassle"; "The process of getting a multiple-entry visa is so painful, it requires a lot of money. I understand it's a personal matter, but we just came to study and all desire to stay in this country vanishes while going through all these procedures."

[42] This price list is provided by the visa department.

According to Article 19 of the law "On External Migration", a foreign citizen whose visa has expired and who is in the country for a purpose other than the one declared upon entry, or who violates the transit rules through the Kyrgyz Republic, will be held accountable according to the Code of Offenses of the Kyrgyz Republic. This means that for each visa violation or illegal stay in the country, international students can be held responsible, including administrative fines or even deportation for serious violations of the law. Most respondents expressed that foreign students should be provided with a multiple-entry visa or a visa for the entire period of study, as is done in other countries upon entry. For example, in Europe or the USA, many universities issue student visas for the entire period of study or a one-year visa before the student arrives in the country. This allows students not to constantly worry about the expiration of their visa.

Conclusion

Ensuring the safety of international students is a crucial human rights issue, and it also raises fundamental questions about how we manage diversity and differences in our societies. We live in an era characterized by the mass movement of people, whether from one country to another or from rural areas to large cities. Just as our students travel abroad in search of educational opportunities, international students from South Asia come to our country to pursue a quality education. While the Kyrgyz Republic is a culturally diverse society with successful models of multiculturalism, incidents involving attacks on international students demonstrate that we still have significant room for improvement and many areas to address.

We hope that the findings and recommendations from this study will serve as a foundation for developing new policies and programs aimed at creating safer and more sustainable cities for all residents, without exception. Safety is crucial for international students, not just on the streets and indoors, but also while using public transport, in educational institutions, and in public spaces. It is essential to remember that students are, above all, young individuals seeking knowledge and experience in their fields. If their educational experience is marred by discrimination and violence, we may soon find that foreign citizens associate our city, Bishkek, with negative experiences. This could deter potential investors and tourists, among other consequences.

An important aspect in developing new policies and programs to create safe public spaces and infrastructure in Bishkek is to take into account the voices of foreign citizens, including foreign students. Their perspectives are crucial, as the opinions of temporary residents are often overlooked. Involving international students and gathering their feedback will provide valuable insights into existing issues, allowing us to view problems from the standpoint of those who benefit from city services. This engagement can, in turn, positively influence urban development and attract investment overall.

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28) Code of Offenses of the Kyrgyz Republic

29) Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic

30) Labor Code of the Kyrgyz Republic

31) Article "Why does the Kyrgyz economy need foreign workers?" was published in Kaktus in 2024. Available online: https://kaktus.media/doc/501712_zachem_ekonomike_kyrgyzstana_inostrannye_rabochie_analiziryem.html

32) Kubatbek Aibashov 2024. Article "Many were brought by deception" published by Azattyk https://rus.azattyk.org/a/32937697.html

33) Article “A certificate from a university is enough – how students from the Kyrgyz Republic can find a job in Russia” was published in Sputnik in 2020. Link: https://ru.sputnik.kg/20200812/student-kvota-rabota-ucheba-trudoustrojstvo-rossiya-sng-kyrgyzstan-1049307014.html

34) Article "Best Countries for International Students to Work and Study in 2024" was published by Erudera https://erudera.com/resources/best-countries-to-work-and-study-for-international-students/

35) Requests from government agencies regarding data on foreign students and foreign citizens.