



HELVETAS
KYRGYZSTAN

BRIEFING
NOTE 1
March 2026



Youth United for the Future

Contributing to a more cohesive society in
Kyrgyzstan

This is the first in a set of briefing notes sharing achievements and lessons learned of the Youth United for the Future project from 2017 to 2025.



The project was implemented in southern Kyrgyzstan by Helvetas Kyrgyzstan, Youth of Osh and Progress Aravan. Its aim was to contribute to a more cohesive society in which young people have a fair voice and are resilient to extremist rhetoric.



By focusing on the personal and professional development of young people, and supporting their engagement in social initiatives and public dialogue, it strengthened intergenerational relationships and improved the integration of young people into the social and economic life of southern Kyrgyzstan.



This Briefing Note presents a summary of the project and its main achievements.

Project set-up

-  **Original project goal:** to contribute to a more cohesive society in which young people have a fair voice and are resilient to extremist rhetoric.
-  **Main implementers:** Helvetas Kyrgyzstan, Youth of Osh and Progress Aravan
-  **Implementation period:** 2017-2025
-  **Geographical coverage:** Batken, Osh and Jalabad provinces of Kyrgyzstan
-  **Target groups:** young people aged 14-17, parents and teachers
-  **Funding:** Smartpeace foundation (2017-2019) and private donors to Helvetas

Youth marginalization in southern Kyrgyzstan

In the mid-2010s, there was a growing concern about the number of young men and women from southern Kyrgyzstan being recruited by armed groups fighting in Iraq and Syria. Feelings of frustration and marginalization were amongst the factors making young people vulnerable to recruitment. This was in part because of an intergenerational gap. Young people often felt that the adults in their lives did not listen to them or take their concerns seriously. Young people were also pessimistic about the future and their possibilities to find a fulfilling job. This sense of a lack of autonomy and perspectives meant young people were vulnerable to recruiters who seemed to take them seriously and offer them an opportunity to take control of their lives.



Another important element contributing to this vulnerability was a decline in young people's confidence in public authorities and community institutions more broadly. Many felt that official structures were not responsive to their needs or concerns, which reduced their willingness to engage with formal support systems and deepened their sense of exclusion. Recognising this challenge, the YOU project later prioritised creating regular opportunities for constructive engagement between young people and local government representatives, helping rebuild trust and strengthen cooperation at the community level.

Personal and professional development and social engagement

The project was designed around three pillars:



Individual, interpersonal and systemic change

The YOU project led to three big changes.

First, it changed the attitudes of young people participating in the project. They demonstrated increased self-awareness, self-confidence, improved communication skills and a more conscious approach to the future.

“We used to be quiet and reserved. No one believed we were capable of anything. But when the project started, we discovered that we had a strong spirit inside. Together with it, we realized – we can create change. And now we truly feel it.”
(Young project participant during a focus group discussion, Kara-Suu city, April 15, 2025)

“Before the lessons, my son had behavioral problems, he was disobedient. After the self-development classes, he stopped spending time idly on the streets and started showing respect for our opinions.”
(Parent during a focus group discussion, Osh, April 15,

Second, it transformed the relationships between young participants and key adults in their lives, namely teachers and parents.

Third, the project’s core training methodology was introduced into the education system, making it possible for many more young people, teachers and parents to benefit from its transformative effects

“The project awakened in us and in our students the understanding that school is not only about grades – it’s about life. I realized how important it is to see the child, to listen, to be present.”
(Teacher, School No.84, Kara-Suu)

Project evolution

The project evolved over time, to adapt to a changing context and to take account of lessons learned during implementation.

5 445

young people received the core “Tune IN” training



5 982

young people received thematic training

250 young people developed and implemented 45 social initiatives



1 670 young people participated in the career orientation training

62 young people undertook in internships



1 567 teachers were trained as trainers of the “Tune in methodology”

5 career clubs were established



Partnerships and implementation modalities

Originally Youth of Osh and Progress Aravan directly implemented the project activities, with Helvetas providing financial and strategic support, as well as developing and training trainers on the initial Tune In methodology. In the second phase, from 2020, for reasons of scale and sustainability, it was decided to work through the education system. The methodology was adapted for the school curriculum and local partners began training teachers in the methodology. An agreement was reached with the Kyrgyz Academy of Education to also train teacher trainers as master trainers who would regularly offer training courses for teachers. (More details in Briefing Note 3). In the final two years, as the focus of the project shifted increasingly to consolidating the sustainability of these systemic changes, Youth of Osh took over the lead role, and Progress Aravan’s role as an implementing partner came to an end.



About the project partners

Helvetas works to alleviate poverty and advance human rights in more than 30 countries and has been present in Kyrgyzstan since 1994.

“Youth of Osh” Public Association (YoO) is a progressive, women-led, youth organization contributing to peace and the development of sustainable communities. In operation since 2008, it implements projects across Kyrgyzstan, while maintaining a strong presence and expertise in the southern regions of the country.

Progress Aravan Public Foundation is a non-profit organization in southern Kyrgyzstan that implements social projects focused on youth self-awareness and personal development, prevention of extremism, and the social reintegration of vulnerable groups.

Focus topics

The focus on the personal development of young people and improvement in their relationship with adults remained a core focus of the core of the project throughout. Further details on the methodology and corresponding lessons learned are presented in Briefing Note 2.



The public dialogue component focused at the outset on strengthening peaceful public exchange about religion and democracy. However, over time this shifted to a focus on dialogue around issues of concern to young people and, specifically, to the initiatives that they developed. This allowed for closer synergies with other project activities and was also a response to the challenges of public dialogue on sensitive issues.

The focus on professional development was added in the second phase of the project from 2021. This was a recognition that young people were concerned as much about their economic prospects as their social exclusion. Two valuable outputs of this component were a professional orientation manual, which was adapted for use in schools, and the professional orientation clubs at schools established on the initiative of school students. While individual internships were valuable for those who participated, administrative and logistical challenges meant it was beyond the capacity of partners and schools to establish a sustainable internship programme. One consequence of changes in the education system introduced into the education system in 2023 was limitations on the capacity of schools to support extracurricular clubs such as professional orientation clubs.

The initial main **target group** of the project were young people aged 15-29. With the decision to focus on the education system, this was narrowed to young people aged 14-17. Criteria for selection of target districts were related to the vulnerability of young people to violent extremism. Nevertheless, within these districts, certain groups remained hard to reach, particularly religious people, young men and fathers. The most successful outreach was to women and girls.

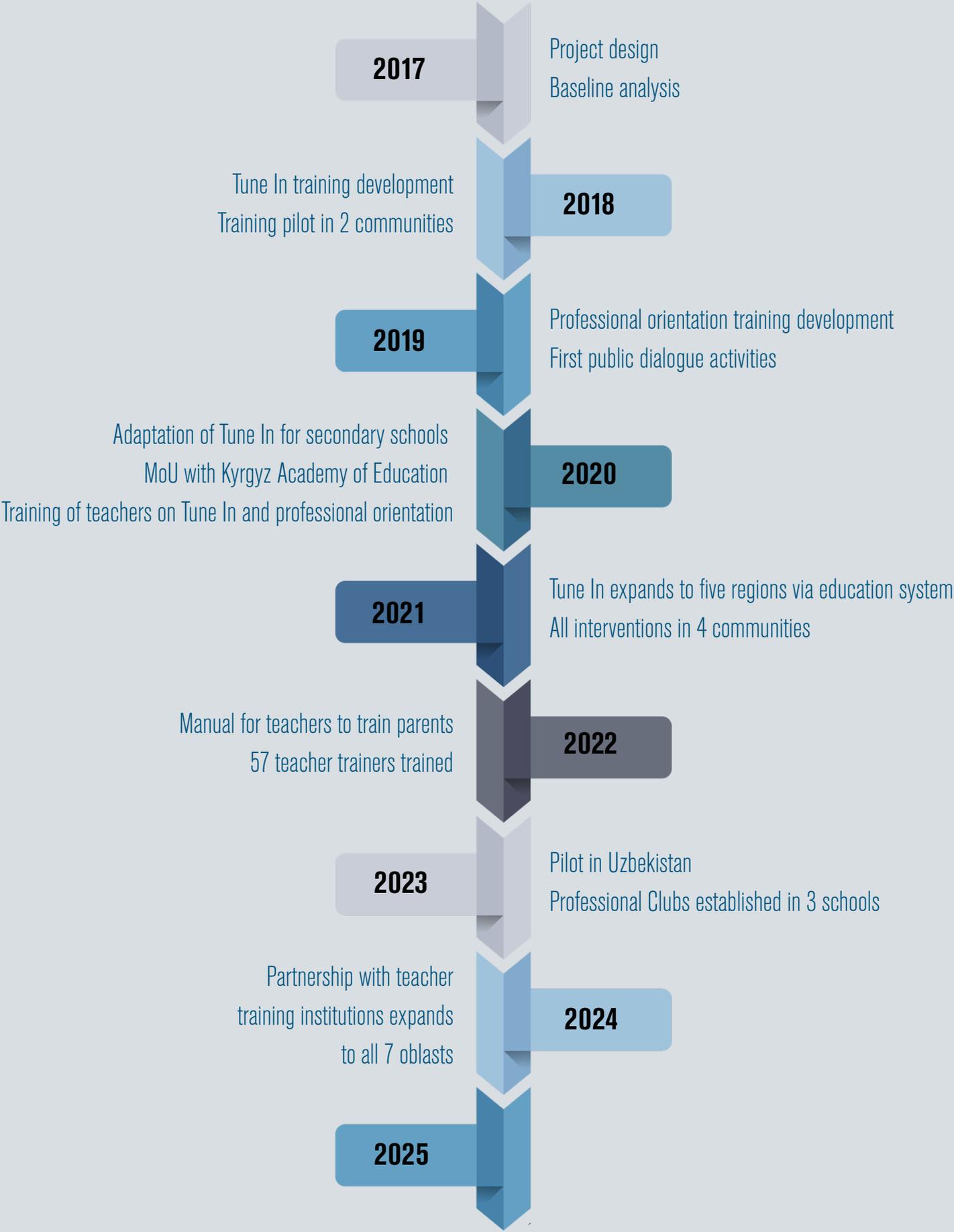


Expanding geographic coverage

The project began in Jalal-Abad and Aravan districts and gradually expanded to Jalal-Abad and Osh oblasts (including Osh city, Kara-Suu and Aravan districts). By partnering with the state Educational Teacher Training Institute the project gradually obtained national coverage.

Towards the end of 2021, the project made a strategic pivot to select four pilot locations to have an intense intervention at school, family and community level, incorporating all three components of the project: personal development; professional development; and public dialogue. Aravan, Uchkorgon, Suzak districts and some sub-districts of Osh city were selected. In 2023, Progress Aravan supported the World Association of Youth of Uzbekistan (WAYU) to pilot the project in Uzbekistan. The pilot confirmed the pertinence of the approach in the context Uzbekistan.

Timeline of the YOU project



Personal story

Banu grew up in a small village where girls were often married off at 15 or 16 years old, and opportunities for self-expression were limited. She struggled to pursue her education and career aspirations due to social and familial pressures. Before the project, Banu often withdrew, lacked confidence, and feared asserting her opinions, especially in public or with adults.



Kurbanova Davlatkan (Banu)
Jalal-Abad city, project participant

Through the **“Sen/You/YOU”** project, Banu gradually learned self-awareness, emotional management, and assertive communication. She participated in trainings, reflected on personal experiences, and gained practical skills to navigate family expectations. The project encouraged her to assert herself, engage in dialogue with elders, and pursue education on her terms. Banu developed confidence to negotiate with her parents, manage conflicts calmly, and express her views without fear.

The project also nurtured professional skills: she gained experience with team collaboration, project planning, and community engagement. Banu successfully pursued her aspiration in journalism, now working at a national TV channel, where she addresses social issues such as domestic violence. She applies the project’s tools—including meditation and communication exercises—in her personal and professional life.

Banu attributes her transformation to the project’s supportive environment, mentorship, and practical exercises. She now experiences autonomy, self-confidence, and professional growth, while maintaining constructive relationships with her family and community.