



*School-to-Work Transition: Risks and
Opportunities for Youth in the North
Caucasus*

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“The roots of terror lie in unemployment, ineffective social policy and low levels of education, especially among the younger generation”

~ President Putin ~

The North Caucasus



Socio-Economic Context of the North Caucasus region

- Poorest Region in Russian Federation
 - poverty rates over 40% in Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria
- Sub-Regional Disparities within Republics
- High Linguistic and Ethnic Diversity
- Historical Legacy of Forced Migration
- Highest Youth Population in Russian Federation
 - Median age in Russian Federation: 37.1
 - Median age in Tula Oblast: 41.7
 - Median age in Ingushetia: 22.2
- Context of conflict and insecurity

Difficult School-to-Work Transitions in the North Caucasus

- Highest proportion of youth idleness (% of 15-24 year olds who neither work nor study); more than double the national average
- High unemployment rates among both educated and non-educated youth
- Young people remain unemployed longer in the NC
- Unemployment and idleness cited as causes of high levels of substance abuse among youth
- Three main causes emerge from the study

Problems young people face

- Quality and relevance of education
- Employment sector lacks opportunities and transparency
- Obstacles to participation in decision-making processes

Quality and relevance of education

“I would want to receive a higher education and then find a job, but I have neither money nor connections.”

- 17-year-old, North Ossetia

“Our republic is a labor-rich, job-poor region. I think that our higher educational establishments should be closed. Every year they graduate young people that are useless in the labor market.”

- State Placement Service Official, Dagestan

Obstacles to good education

- Cost
 - Excessive costs in the form of bribes and unofficial payments
 - Particularly egregious in tertiary education, especially given the absence of standardized entrance exams for merit-based entry
- Quality
 - Poor teacher skills
 - Disparities in access to learning materials
 - Overcrowding
- Relevance to the job market
 - Falling rates of enrollment in secondary and vocational education, rising enrollment in tertiary education

Poor employment opportunities

- Education mismatch
 - focus on ‘prestige’ disciplines, stigmatization of careers in labour
 - yet opportunities available for qualified electricians, metalworkers, builders etc.
- Lack of options to pursue alternative employment strategies
 - Overwhelming willingness to take part in unpaid apprenticeships, internships
 - High level of interest in self-employment, obstacles of resources/ experience/ bureaucracy
- Lack of transparency in the job search process
 - dominated by the need for informal and personal connections, plus bribes

Feelings of Exclusion

“Unemployment in the whole republic leads to the disintegration of identity, nation, person – for which I blame our politicians.”

“It may sound silly, but to get the dole, you have to give a bribe.”

“There is a Youth Affairs Committee, but I do not know what they do. I have not heard anything about them except for negative comments”

“I had problems with authorities when the second Chechen war started and Russian Federation authorities would not differentiate Chechens from other North Caucasian peoples. Often you had to explain who you are, and that not all Caucasians, including Chechens, are killers and Wahabbists.”

“I believe there is no sense in attending those because they do as they want with or without our support”

Feelings of Exclusion

- Nowhere to turn for assistance
- Majority of study participants did not know of a single organization that worked with young people in their community
- Difficulties of movement prevent relocation to better-resourced regions (ethnic, religious prejudice)
- Obstacles to participation in decision-making processes
 - Serious capacity shortcomings among youth agencies, lack of strategy in choice of programs, target areas

Security Implications?

- Young people as witnesses to violence
- Many young people continued to feel unsafe in their communities; widespread presence of weapons
- Young people see corruption of police and other authorities as a major threat to security
 - Decline of law and order; criminality on the rise
- High levels of substance abuse
- Growing levels of religious extremism
- Violence against women

Corruption and Insecurity

The main threat [to security] is corruption of police and terrorism, which are closely interrelated”

“I do not think there will be order and safety as long as high officials accept bribes and steal from their own people.”

Policy Options

- Increase federal funding and transparency
 - better implemented and targeted programs
 - use of youth indices (demography, security, socioeconomic indicators) or other clear criteria
- Improve education quality and promote non-formal opportunities for young people outside the formal system
 - Invest in improving quality, especially in disadvantaged areas (lowest educational access and attainment)
 - Accountability mechanisms to reduce corruption and improve transparency
 - Second-chance learning, multipurpose youth centers

Policy Options con't

- More relevant preparation for the job market
 - Stronger links between general and vocational education, combinations of school and work-based learning
 - Train to fill labor demand
 - Better support to youth job-seekers, entrepreneurs
- Broader inclusion of youth stakeholders
 - Promote opportunities for active participation by young people in decision-making and consultation processes at all levels of government
 - Clearer legal, administrative, and financial mechanisms should be created to promote the growth of youth organizations
 - Better training state authorities to prevent ethnic, religious discrimination against young people



Full study available online

Some definitions used in the study

- *School-to-work transition:*
 - The transition of young people from formal or nonformal education or vocational training to working life
 - A broad interpretation, including issues of failed transitions: school drop-outs, unemployment or underemployment, etc.
- *Youth inclusion:*
 - The promotion of socio-economic opportunities for young people including young people's participation in development and decision-making

Study Objectives

- Determine access to opportunities among different groups of young people in the North Caucasus
- Explore youth needs, particularly in easing the transition from school-to-work and reducing idleness
- Identify institutions influencing young people's cultural identity and values of tolerance and peace
- Review opportunities for increasing youth participation in community processes

Methodology Overview

1. A national overview of the socio-economic situation of youth in the last decade
 - Quantitative analysis of key dimension of youth well-being
2. An analysis of the institutional and policy environment for youth issues in the North Caucasus
 - Review of legislative, budget and other policy documents
 - Interviews with youth policy stakeholders including government officials at multiple levels and civil society
3. An analysis of the major risks and opportunities facing youth in the Northern Caucasus
 - Qualitative data gathering in the North Caucasus republics on youth experiences
 - 6 republics included in the study

Qualitative Data Gathering

- Data gathered through interviews and focus groups with over 600 young people in North Caucasus region
- 6 republics/states included: Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Stavropolsky Kray
- Young people aged 13-25
- Both urban and rural locales targeted
- Final gender breakdown: 53% female, 47% male
- Variety of ethnicities, religions, language, levels of education, levels of well-being (affluent, IDP camps etc.)

Qualitative Data Gathering

- Interviews will also be conducted with other key informants:
 - Families: parents, grand-parents
 - Youth organizations: NGOs, sports, culture, service groups, etc.
 - Education stakeholders: teachers, school officials
 - Employment stakeholders: employers, job counselors, labor officials
 - Community stakeholders: local officials, youth officers
 - Religious stakeholders: leaders, religious schools