Foreword

Kyrgyzstan has taken huge strides since gaining independence in 1991. Having embarked upon a rapid transition to a market economy, it has been equally bold in developing the political and social institutions of a modern democratic state. Although progress has not always been smooth, recent elections have demonstrated the growing stability of Kyrgyzstan’s political system, while its economy has shown great resilience in recent years.

Social protection has played a key role in Kyrgyzstan’s transition. The Government of Kyrgyzstan (GoK) has not only maintained the sizeable social insurance system that existed prior to independence but has also introduced several new social assistance and labour market policies. Social protection is the largest component of public spending, accounting for more than expenditure on health and education combined.

However, social protection provision must continue to adapt to meet a number of emerging challenges, including pervasive informality, high rates of labour migration and unemployment and the prospect of rapid growth in the elderly population. Income poverty and broader measures of deprivation have fallen dramatically since the early 2000s but remain high. The pension system achieves near-universal coverage among the elderly population but at great cost; its long-term sustainability is in doubt.

This Social Protection System Review explores ways by which social protection in Kyrgyzstan can be enhanced through a systemic approach. The GoK has committed to systematising social protection in recent social protection strategies; this Review intends to support the GoK in realising its new vision by presenting a broad vision of the sector and improving the evidence base needed for reforms to establish a coherent, sustainable and effective set of programmes.

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Mario Pezzini
Director of the Development Centre and Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Development
OECD

Isakunova Taalaikul Bazarkulovna
Minister of Labour and Social Development
Government of Kyrgyzstan
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The team was led by Alexandre Kolev, Head of the Social Cohesion Unit, under the guidance of Mario Pezzini, Director of the OECD Development Centre and Special Advisor to the OECD Secretary-General on Development and Naoko Ueda, Deputy-Director of the OECD Development Centre. The report was drafted by Riku Elovaario, Alexander Pick and Caroline Tassot, drawing from a background paper prepared by the Economic Policy Research Institute in collaboration with CASE Kyrgyzstan. Justina La provided assistance at every stage.

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Low pay and long hours are widespread. Female labour force participation is declining.

Youth unemployment is highest in urban areas. Upper secondary enrolment is rising among urban youths.

Almost all pregnant women have access to maternal health service. Pre-school provision is recovering but remains very low in rural areas.

Financial barriers to health services are higher for rural residents. Access to care is variable.

Labour productivity is very low by regional standards. Prevalence of child labour is rising in rural areas.

Youth unemployment is highest in urban areas. Youth unemployment is highest in urban areas.

Upper secondary enrolment is rising among urban youths. Lower secondary enrolment is rising among rural youths.

Youth unemployment in urban areas is lowest in the region. Youth unemployment in urban areas is lowest in the region.

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