

# Understanding the Rising NEET Phenomenon in Southern Kazakhstan

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In Kazakhstan, every fifth citizen belongs to the younger generation. Since young people are a fundamental asset to Kazakhstani society, it is critical for them to be equipped with the expertise and skills necessary to succeed in a competitive global market economy. As the experience of many other countries has shown, youth can quickly turn from an asset to a liability if left without proper education and jobs. This paper examines the worrisome rising number of youth from southern Kazakhstan who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET). In OECD countries, in particular, the NEET category is being used as an indicator of youth marginalization and disengagement.<sup>1</sup> Improving policymakers' understanding

of this growing and potentially at-risk youth group can help them elaborate more effective policies on the issue.

The urgency of understanding the rising NEET phenomenon, especially in southern Kazakhstan, is indicated by a number of data points. According to a recent OECD report,<sup>2</sup> although 96 percent of young Kazakhstanis are employed, they are often engaged in low-quality, low-paid, and high-risk jobs. Such low-quality employment is often found in the informal economy, which employed about one-third (28 percent) of young Kazakhstanis in 2016. Another segment of youth is self-employed. At the same time, the exact number of NEET varies from

region to region, with southern oblasts having the highest rates. There is almost no research devoted to the study of NEETs in Kazakhstan<sup>3</sup> and no information is available on their socio-demographic profile (category, age, poverty, time as a NEET, etc.). Thus, current employment data—which measure only formal employment—do not capture the real situation of the youth labor market in Kazakhstan, with the result that the government's numerous initiatives directed toward youth education and employment fail to reach a sizable number of young people.

In this paper, I first provide basic information on youth employment in Kazakhstan and explain the NEET phenomenon. I then give an overview of NEET youth in southern Kazakhstan. Next, I review factors that may be contributing to the rising number of such social group. Finally, bringing together extant research and new data, I offer policy recommendations for addressing the NEET phenomenon in the region.

## **The History of the NEET Phenomenon**

The NEET phenomenon first emerged in the studies of British scholars in the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> Their research explored the correlation between being in neither education nor employment as a youth and different issues, such as unemployment and poor health, in adulthood. The study found that when young people who had been out of education and employment for a period of at least six months became adults, they were more frequently unemployed or working part-time, more likely to become parents young, and/or often had physical/mental health problems.<sup>5</sup> Based on these studies, in 2001 the British government introduced a new NEET indicator to its studies of the youth labor market. The ultimate aim was for these new statistical data to eventually reduce the number of youth aged 16 to 18 who were not in education or employment.<sup>6</sup> The European labor market followed Britain in adopting NEET to supplement the youth unemployment rate indicator.<sup>7</sup> Botric & Tomic stress that it is highly important to keep the youth labor market vibrant, as this directly affects the sustainable GDP rate.<sup>8</sup>

Internationally, the description of the youth labor market is limited to two major indicators: employment and unemployment rates among youth. Bacher et al. contend, however, that youth unemployment is too narrow to capture the vulnerable group of youth because it underestimates the extent of the problem among

young adults.<sup>9</sup> Kovrova et al. also argue that NEET-focused data give a more comprehensive view of the segment of the youth population that has given up looking for work or is unwilling to join the labor market.<sup>10</sup>

In performing analysis using the NEET indicator, it is important for scholars and experts to consider three age sub-groups within NEET: 15-19, 20-24, and 25-29. Each subgroup has its own reasons for falling into the NEET category. The first sub-group often consists of school dropouts, while the second group is made up of young people who experience difficulties entering the labor market or further education. In the last sub-group, young people leaving education often find that their skills are not needed in the labor market, resulting in their inability to find employment at the same time as they may no longer have the resources to engage in further training.<sup>11</sup>

It is also important to note that the NEET phenomenon in Japan has a unique face. NEET in Japan emerged as the number of job-switchers and part-time workers began to grow, reaching nearly 2 million people in 2002.<sup>12</sup> In his study, Teo estimates that there are thousands of youths and adults “finding themselves” in their own virtual caves (so-called *hikikomori*).<sup>13</sup> He offers the example of

a 19-year-old Japanese man who lives with his middle-class parents in a two-bedroom urban apartment. For the last two years he has hardly ever left his room, spending 23 hours a day behind its closed door. He eats food prepared by

his mother who leaves trays outside his bedroom. He sleeps all day, then awakes in the evening to spend his time surfing the internet, chatting on online bulletin boards, reading manga (comic books), and playing video games.<sup>14</sup>

These individuals go uncounted in conventional labor force measurements. Teo further explains that the high number of NEETs in Japan is associated with students’ low motivation to study or with lack of resources to pay for education. At the same time, an alarming increase in mental health diagnoses—including depression, anxiety, or schizophrenia<sup>15</sup>—among youth may be making it difficult for young Japanese to enter the workforce or higher education. Thus, the case of Japan illustrates that micro-level socio-cultural patterns and macro-level factors such as the economy and access to education all contribute to the NEET phenomenon.

In a comparative context, Kazakhstan has a lower NEET rate than its neighbors and OECD countries (see Figure 1). In OECD countries, a high NEET rate is strongly correlated with low educational attainment: in 2016, the vast majority (85 percent) of all NEETs had no tertiary education. That being said, in seven OECD countries (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Japan, and Slovenia), over half of NEETs were between 25 and 29 years of age, indicating difficulties not so much in accessing higher education as in transitioning from school to work, often due to a lack of work experience and low qualifications.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 1. NEET rate in Kazakhstan and the world, 2016, %**



Sources: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) Indicator, 2018,” <https://data.oecd.org/youthinac/youth-not-in-employment-education-or-training-neet.htm>, accessed April 24, 2018; ILO statistical database, [http://www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/oracle/webcenter/portalapp/pagehierarchy/Page3.jspx?MBI\\_ID=20&\\_adf.ctrl-state=12rhv46kx3\\_54&\\_afLoop=453077140267259&\\_afWindowMode=0&\\_afWindowId=12rhv46kx3\\_51#](http://www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/oracle/webcenter/portalapp/pagehierarchy/Page3.jspx?MBI_ID=20&_adf.ctrl-state=12rhv46kx3_54&_afLoop=453077140267259&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=12rhv46kx3_51#), accessed April 24, 2018

### Theorizing the NEET Phenomenon

A high NEET rate may have a number of negative short-term as well as long-term consequences for a society. When young people struggle to find permanent employment, it puts them at a higher risk of poverty and lower levels of well-being.<sup>17</sup> Scarpetta et al.<sup>18</sup> find that “left behinds” have poorer health and are more likely to engage in criminal activity. This segment of the population also tends to have lower levels of trust in socio-political institutions and the government.<sup>19</sup>

Today, most countries accept the International Labor Organization’s (ILO) definition of and methodology on NEET. According to the ILO,<sup>20</sup> the NEET rate consists of the percentage of the population of a given age group (15-29 or 15-24) and

gender who are neither employed nor involved in further education or training. The data are normally calculated through the ILO’s Labor Force Survey (LFS), a standard household-based survey of work-related statistics, as the percentage of young people who (i) are not employed; and (ii) have not received any education or training in the four weeks prior to the survey.<sup>21</sup> As the survey aims to capture the situation of the entire labor force, it also gathers information on the labor market situation among youth and their participation in education or training programs. Most existing NEET studies use LFS data.

Generally, a NEET group falls into two major subcategories: unemployed youth and inactive youth.<sup>22</sup> Unemployed young people include those who are without work but currently seeking employment, whereas

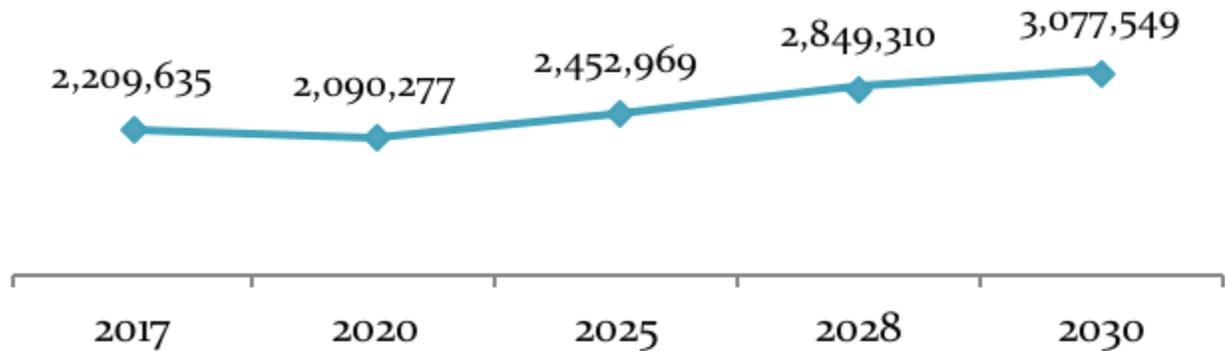
inactive youth may include voluntary NEETs, family carers, or individuals with disabilities. Driouchi & Harkat have found that urban youth and young females have a particular propensity to leave the education system and labor market.<sup>23</sup> Internationally, young people are considered NEETs whether or not they receive unemployment benefits, social assistance, or family benefits, but different countries have different methodologies for calculating how many NEETs they have.<sup>24</sup>

### Youth Labor Force and NEET in (Southern) Kazakhstan: Key Facts

#### Youth Labor Force Outlook in Kazakhstan

In 2017, young people—those between the ages of 14 and 29—constituted almost one-fourth of

**Figure 2. The projected number of youth (16-24) in the Republic of Kazakhstan by 2030 (number of people)**



Source: Ministry of the National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan

the total population of Kazakhstan (22 percent, or nearly 4 million). Figure 2 shows that by 2030, the number of young Kazakhstanis aged 16-24 is expected to increase by 30 percent.<sup>25</sup>

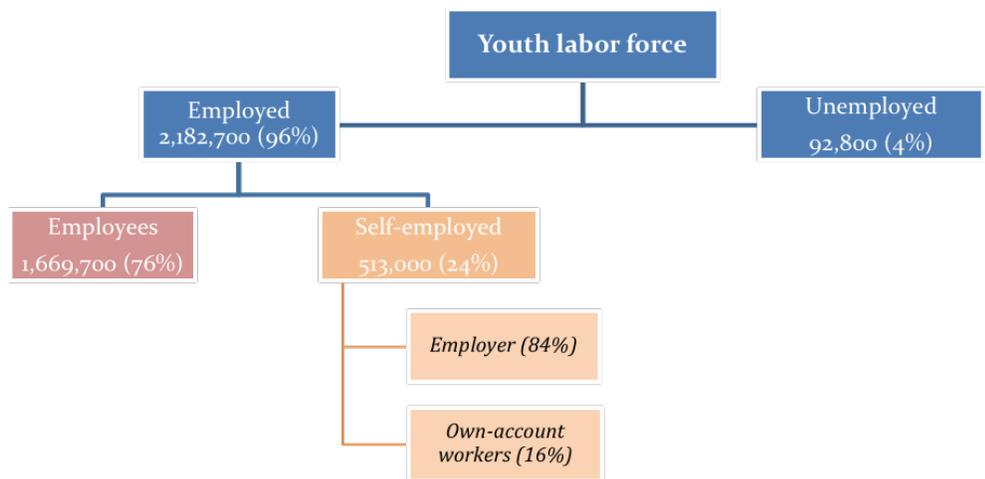
About 57 percent of Kazakhstani young adults reside in cities and more than half are men (50.4 percent). Over one-third (35 percent) were in education and more than half (55 percent) were active labor force participants in 2016.<sup>26</sup> According to the labor force statistics from that year, 96 percent of all youth were employed, while the remaining 4 percent were unemployed, a common dynamic in the youth labor market in recent years.<sup>27</sup> However, scholars debate the degree to which these figures reflect the reality of youth employment. Some argue that the high level of youth employment is an illusion because many young people work in the informal economy or are self-employed.<sup>28</sup> Figure 3 offers a more detailed picture of employed youth, breaking that category down into

employees and self-employed workers.

*Employees*<sup>29</sup> (also known as salaried workers) are workers who hold a (written or oral) job contract and are paid for their employment status.<sup>30</sup> *Self-employed*<sup>31</sup> young people are those who run their own businesses: either “employers,” who manage their own enterprise and have one or more full-time

employees, or “own-account workers,”<sup>32</sup> who work for themselves and do not hire any full-time employees to work for them.<sup>33</sup> In 2016, 16 percent of Kazakhstan’s young people (more than 80,000) were categorized as own-account workers. This classification implies that these individuals “have a tenuous hold on employment, and the line between employment and unemployment is often thin.”<sup>34</sup> A

**Figure 3. Youth labor force in Kazakhstan, 2016**



Source: Constructed by the author on the basis of data from the Statistics Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan

high proportion of own-account workers is frequently correlated with a large number of people from low-income families, from rural areas, or working in the informal sector, all of whom can be considered vulnerable in terms of their employment.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, because some employees hold a job contract based on an oral agreement and the businesses of some self-employed young people are not registered, about one-third (385,680, or 28 percent) of young Kazakhstanis<sup>36</sup> worked informally in 2017. This means that they lacked the protection of labor contracts, had lower wages, and experienced poor working conditions.<sup>37</sup> The OECD study suggests that young people often find themselves taking on unstable work in the informal economy due to their low skills.<sup>38</sup>

***NEET Youth in Kazakhstan***

In Kazakhstan, the organization that collects NEET data for

the Labor Force Survey is the Statistics Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan. NEET data are available from 2001 to 2017, but no empirical research has been conducted since that time. As of 2016, approximately 357,000 Kazakhstani youth (9.2 percent) were found to be neither employed nor enrolled in any educational institution and thus were classified as NEET.

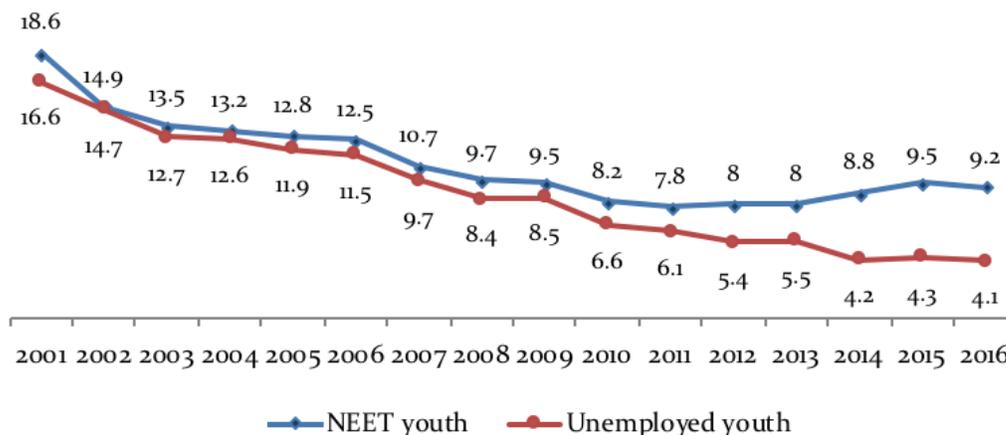
The proportion of NEETs gradually declined between 2001 and 2011, a decrease that can be explained by a reduction in youth unemployment, which is a major contributor to NEET (see Figure 4). Since 2012, however, the share of NEETs has been growing. More young Kazakhstanis have begun to withdraw from education and the labor market. This shows that, in addition to the unemployment situation, several factors have combined to drive youth to drop out of education or work. One explanation based on the OECD’s findings is that the informal sector played an illusory role

for some socio-demographic groups.<sup>39</sup> In other words, informal jobs allowed some people to be considered “employed,” when in fact they were neither self-employed nor hired by someone else (see the previous section for more details). A number of other studies<sup>40</sup> indicate that this tendency is a global one: NEET growth began in the aftermath of the financial crisis and has not stabilized. Many young people still face the challenge of a skills mismatch: they lack the competencies that would make them attractive to employers.<sup>41</sup>

***NEET Youth in Southern Kazakhstan***

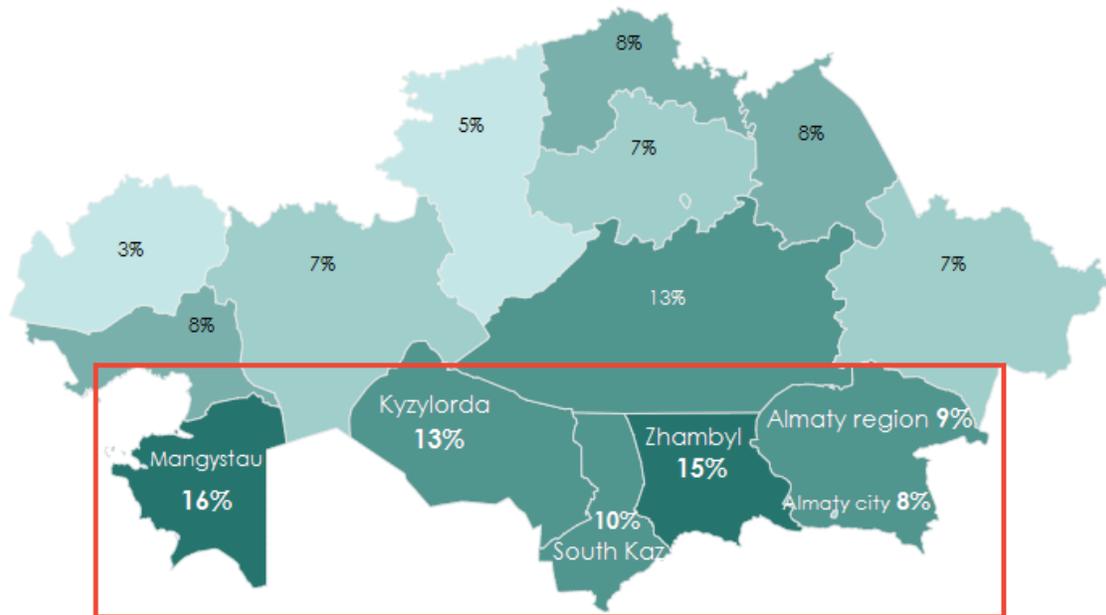
Although the proportion of NEETs varies across the country, Southern regions tend to have the highest numbers of NEETs. Officially, Southern Kazakhstan includes the Almaty, Zhambyl, South Kazakhstan, and Kyzylorda regions,<sup>42</sup> as well as Almaty city (see Figure 5). Although Mangystau oblast

**Figure 4. The proportion of NEETs in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2001-2016, %**



Source: The Statistics Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan

**Figure 5. Share of NEET youth in Kazakhstan, 2016, %**



Source: The Statistics Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan

belongs administratively to West Kazakhstan, I decided to include this oblast alongside the southern regions, since it has the highest proportion of NEETs and shares common cultural, social, and demographic features with the other southern oblasts. I also considered including Karaganda oblast in the study due to its high NEET rate, but the region’s geographical location (Central Kazakhstan) and diverse socio-economic characteristics make it too different from southern Kazakhstan.

From the location perspective, urban areas of the country’s southern regions show slightly higher rates of NEETs than rural areas. This may be explained by the fact that youths seek better jobs or educational opportunities in the cities and remain there even when neither is forthcoming.<sup>43</sup> Only in South Kazakhstan oblast and Mangystau oblast are there more rural NEETs than urban

ones.

Generally, both urban and rural areas in southern regions have high proportions of NEETs, ranging from 6 percent in South Kazakhstan oblast to 16.5 percent in Mangystau oblast (see Figure 6). The main explanation for this tendency may be the widespread informal and/or self-employment economy present in the region (see the next section).

**Discussion: Factors Contributing to NEET Growth in Urban Areas of Southern Kazakhstan**

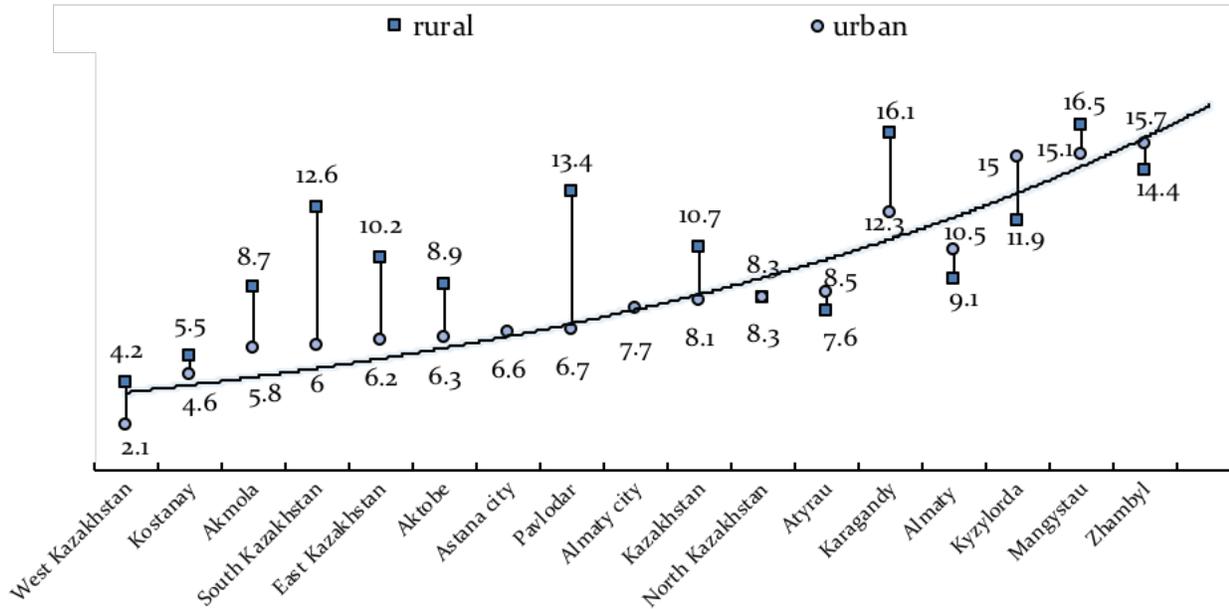
In this paper I contend that several economic and social factors have contributed to the increase in the numbers of NEETs in southern urban areas since the fluctuations of 2010-2016 (see Figure 7).

**Economic Factors**

*Shadow Economy*

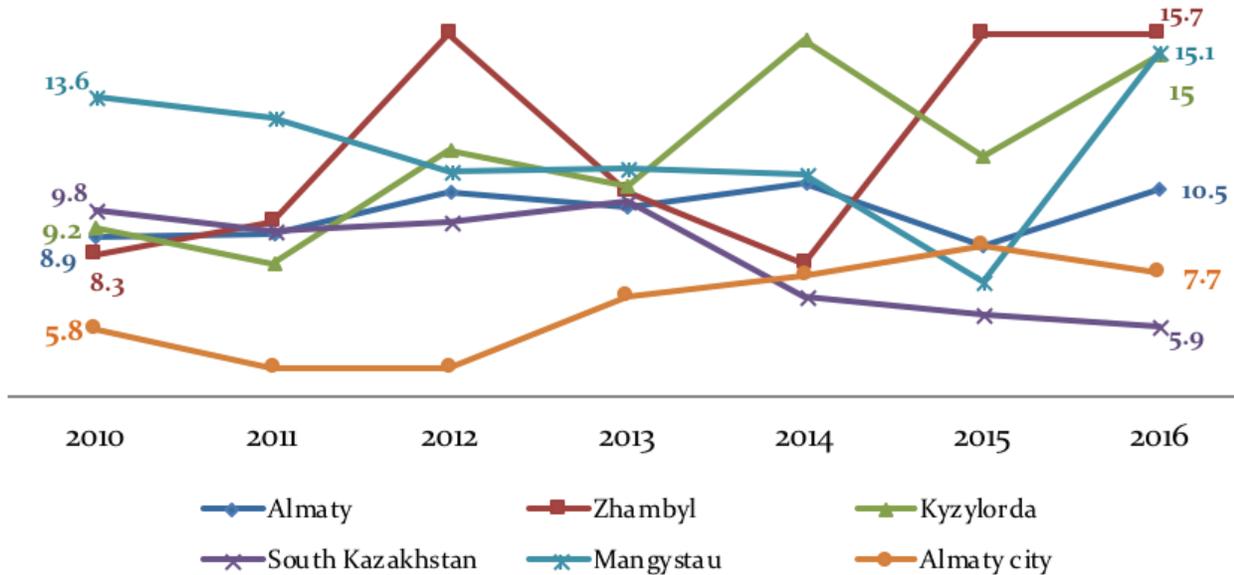
The shadow economy can contribute to a low employment rate among youth. As Kulekeyev notes, informal and shadow employment—meaning jobs that are not registered by the statistical and tax authorities—characterize the modern labor market in Kazakhstan.<sup>44</sup> An econometric study by Medina & Schneider found that the shadow economy in its various forms accounts for 40 percent of the country’s GDP.<sup>45</sup> According to Abdih, informality is so prevalent in Kazakhstan because administrative regulation and taxation overburden businesses that attempt to operate “by the book”<sup>46</sup> and even officially registered enterprises may conceal their income for the purpose of evading taxes.<sup>47</sup> The ILO study found that most of the shadow economic activity in

**Figure 6. Share of NEET youth in urban versus rural settlements, 2016, %**



Source: The Statistics Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan

**Figure 7. Urban NEET rate in Southern regions, 2010-2016, %**



Source: The Statistics Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan

the country is concentrated in southern regions.<sup>48</sup>

According to labor statistics, nearly one-third of young Kazakhstanis (385,680, or 28 percent) were engaged in informal employment in 2017.<sup>49</sup> The majority of informal workers are found in southern regions—especially Zhambyl oblast (31 percent), Almaty oblast (18.3 percent), Kyzylorda oblast (14 percent), and Almaty city (11 percent)<sup>50</sup>—but no youth-specific data are available. However, given that more than half (51 percent) of young people reside in southern regions, they are disproportionately likely to become “informal workers.” According to the ILO study,<sup>51</sup> the informal economy tends to absorb most of the growth in the labor force, especially in countries facing continuous urbanization.<sup>52</sup> As Kazakhstan urbanizes, this tendency is likewise becoming a common feature of its labor market.<sup>53</sup>

Southern regions also had a higher share of self-employed youth in 2016: 53 percent in Zhambyl; 43 percent in South Kazakhstan; 42 percent in Kyzylorda; and 19 percent in Almaty.<sup>54</sup> Self-employment is highly correlated with work in the informal sector: being a formally self-employed individual entails both paying taxes and business reporting, requiring the individual to stay on top of constant changes to regulations,<sup>55</sup> and it is therefore easier for many self-employed business people to stay in the informal sector. Being self-employed and operating an

unregistered business means that these workers make a limited contribution to the local economy, since they do not pay taxes and tend to offer only temporary or part-time work to employees.<sup>56</sup>

Alzhanova et al. found that self-employment is increasingly prevalent in monotowns. With the degradation of the industries that once dominated these cities and the consequent erosion of good jobs, young people set out on their own.<sup>57</sup> This can lead to social exclusion for young self-employed adults, who find themselves facing mistrust, indifference, and a loss of security.<sup>58</sup> Southern monotowns account for just under one-third of the total (22 of 68),<sup>59</sup> and youth in these towns may contribute to the total number of NEETs in Kazakhstan.

All in all, the prevalence of informal work and self-employment in the south of the country suggest that Kazakhstan’s urban youth may be struggling to secure their position in the formal labor market. These two indicators may be considered contributing factors to the rise in the number of NEETs in the regions under study.

### *NEET Versus Youth Unemployment in Urban Areas*

This section presents a correlational analysis of urban NEET with urban youth unemployment rates. The youth unemployment rate is the most widely-used labor market indicator in relation to young people. As previously mentioned, unemployed young people

constitute the main sub-group within the NEET category.<sup>60</sup>

The southern regions are characterized not only, as discussed in the previous section, by a high number of self-employed and informally-employed youth, but also by a high number of unemployed youth. Generally, these regions have a higher youth unemployment rate in urban areas than in rural ones (see Appendix 2). Correlational analysis of urban NEETs and urban unemployed youth found a positive relationship between these two variables in Almaty, South Kazakhstan, and Mangystau oblasts, as well as Almaty city (see Appendix 3)—that is, the majority of NEETs in these regions are unemployed. By contrast, in Zhambyl and Kyzylorda oblasts, the increase in the number of urban NEETs is not driven by youth unemployment.

Youth unemployment is a serious problem in many countries worldwide. Accordingly, it ranks high on local political agendas.<sup>61</sup> The main issue—in Kazakhstan as elsewhere—is that there is a mismatch between the skills young people have and the employment opportunities available.<sup>62</sup> According to a recent OECD report,<sup>63</sup> 65 percent of Kazakhstani employers are not satisfied with the quality of young graduates. This makes it difficult for young people to transition from education to employment, and frequently leads to them being excluded from the labor market.

*Transition of Unqualified School Graduates to the Labor Market*

Whereas in many countries the NEET phenomenon is closely associated with abandoning education,<sup>64</sup> secondary school dropout rates are negligible in Kazakhstan. However, a large number of school leavers move directly to the labor market without training or job qualifications, especially in the south of the country.

The transition from compulsory schooling to higher education or employment is an important move for all young adults. According to Bensmen, when this transition is achieved successfully, young people have better prospects of long-term employment and economic security; they are also more likely to be lifelong learners.<sup>65</sup> In 2016,

more than 17,000 high school graduates—14,000 of whom resided in southern regions—did not continue their education in universities or vocational schools.<sup>66</sup> The majority (75 percent) of those in southern regions moved into the labor market, where they worked without any qualifications. The remaining 25 percent became unemployed or did not enter the labor market due to other social factors (such as disabilities). Despite the fact that the number of unqualified youth entering the labor market has been decreasing in recent years, it remains high (see Table 1).

Youths who choose to take time out before entering formal higher education or employment usually struggle to either return to education or find work.<sup>67</sup> This may contribute to the increase in

the number of NEETs in southern regions.

The Kazakhstani government has attempted to give youth in southern regions more opportunities to earn qualifications, as well as meet the demand for labor in other regions. One such attempt was the “Serpín” program, intended to provide educational opportunities for school graduates from the southern regions (Almaty, South Kazakhstan, Zhambyl, Kyzylorda, and Mangystau) in regions that are facing labor shortages (North Kazakhstan, East Kazakhstan, Kostanay, Petropavl, and Pavlodar). However, the available data on the Kostanay and Karaganda regions show that the share of southern graduates willing to study in other oblasts is decreasing (see Table 2). Issues such as language (southern youth

**Table 1. Proportion of school graduates who moved to the labor market without any qualifications, 2015-2017, %**

<b>Region</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
South Kazakhstan	34	30	26
Zhambyl	20	19	16
Almaty	25	21	18
Kyzylorda	12	11	7
Almaty city	14	12	5
Mangystau	17	16	11

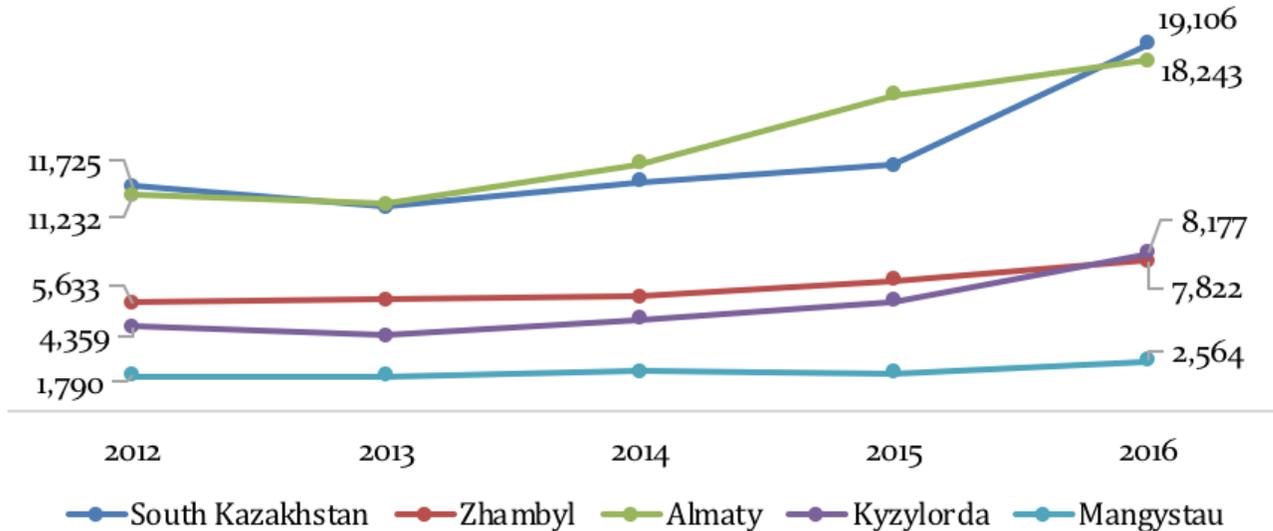
*Source: National Education Database*

**Table 2. Student enrollment under “Serpín” program in Karaganda and Kostanay regions (number of people)**

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Karaganda	170	175	50	cancelled
Kostanay	100	150	50	25

*Source: Education Departments of Karaganda and Kostanay regions*

**Figure 8. Youth outflow from rural districts in southern regions (number of people)**



Source: The Statistics Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan

are Kazakh-speaking and face difficulties in education and work in Russian-speaking northern regions), health (moving from the warm south to cold north causes allergies and severe cold), and other living conditions create obstacles to the success and further development of the program.<sup>68</sup>

### Social Factors

Youth who remain NEETs tend to come from more disadvantaged families and have low levels of educational attainment. They are, in many cases, inactive. In this section, I consider several social factors that may affect the increase in the number of NEETs in southern regions: the urban migration trend, the resettlement of ethnic repatriates, and gender issues.

### Urban Migration

One of the main factors

influencing the growth in the number of urban NEETs is youth migration from rural districts to cities.<sup>69</sup> This tendency is visible in southern regions, where youths, for a variety of different reasons, tend to leave villages and settle in cities (see Figure 8).

One of the main drivers of youth outflow is poor access to proper education in rural areas. Indeed, the vast majority (87 percent) of vocational schools are located in cities.<sup>70</sup> Almost half of Kazakhstan's universities (59 of 125) are also located in southern cities.<sup>71</sup> Thus, school graduates in search of further education have little choice but to move to larger cities. Accordingly, Makhmutova's study finds that 57.4 percent of youth who have settled in Almaty city originally came for education.<sup>72</sup> They have stayed for 5-10 years (i.e. even after completing their studies), considering that they have better employment prospects and

better access to social services in the city. These employment prospects appeal even to young people without higher education: Makhmutova found that more than half (54 percent) of young migrants to Almaty city came simply because they did not have jobs in their previous locations.<sup>73</sup>

A European Training Foundation study found that a high NEET rate is associated with low educational attainment in developing countries like Armenia, Jordan, and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>74</sup> For their part, the majority of Kazakhstani NEETs have general secondary education or less.<sup>75</sup> This reinforces that having higher education often eases young people's transition to the labor market. According to the only study of NEET youth in Kazakhstan, these individuals have no knowledge of education or employment programs provided by the government.<sup>76</sup> Nor do they know about employment and youth resource

centers in their regions which could help them find education or employment. Indeed, a study conducted in Mangystau region found that only 17 percent of all unemployed people had registered as jobseekers, allowing the employment department to connect them with jobs.<sup>77</sup> This lack of knowledge persists despite the fact that 88 percent of young people are active users of the Internet and social platforms (VKontakte, WhatsApp, etc.),<sup>78</sup> implying that information about education and employment opportunities for young people is not widely distributed online and remains unclear.

In addition, these young people often lack soft and hard skills.<sup>79</sup> They do not know how to search for jobs, put together a CV, network, or impress an interviewer at a job interview. Nor are they typically proficient in multiple languages, meaning that they can communicate in only one of Kazakh or Russian.<sup>80</sup> Evidently, there is much that should be done to support these vulnerable young people. However, it is currently unclear which measures would have the highest return on investment in terms of helping NEETs integrate into society.

### Resettlement of Ethnic Repatriates

An ILO study suggests that international migration is another factor that supports the flourishing of the informal sector.<sup>81</sup> There is no reliable data on labor migration to Kazakhstan, since much of it is

irregular or not registered by official statistics. Nevertheless, it is clear that ethnic Kazakhs represent a major flow of labor migration. Since Kazakhstan gained its independence in 1991, about one million ethnic Kazakhs have returned, primarily from neighboring countries: 61.5 percent from Uzbekistan, 12 percent from Mongolia, 11.6 percent from China, 7.3 percent from Turkmenistan, 3.9 percent from the Russian Federation, and the remaining 3.7 percent from other countries. Today, repatriates (known as “Oralmans” in Kazakh) constitute 5.5 percent of the total population and around 10 percent of ethnic Kazakhs.<sup>82</sup> The resettlement of Oralmans was carried out unevenly, without taking into account the socio-economic needs of the regions, and was predetermined by their country of origin. The greatest number of Oralmans settled in the Almaty (33 percent), South Kazakhstan (24.3 percent), Mangystau (14.8 percent), and Zhambyl (7.4 percent) oblasts, with the remaining 20.5 percent

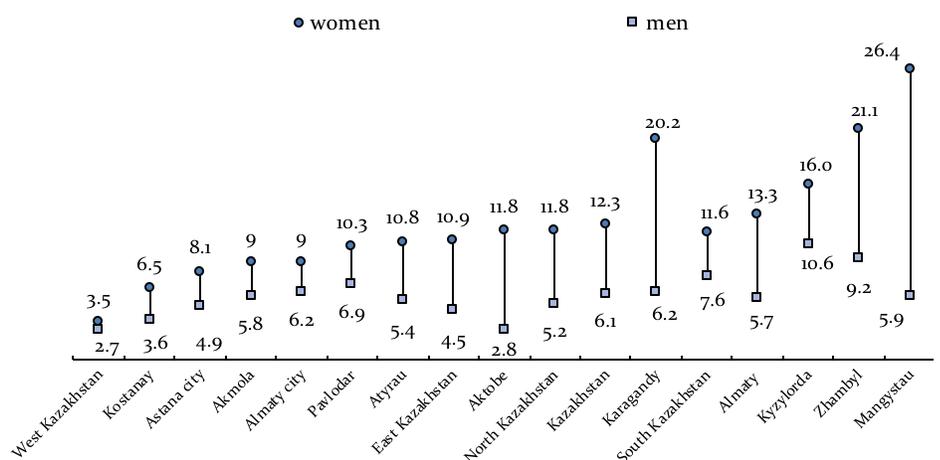
in other regions.

The vast majority (80 percent) of these ethnic repatriates thus settled in the country’s southern regions. People of working age make up 55.6 percent of them, and many of them belong to the younger generation.<sup>83</sup> Data on their education attainment show that only about one-third of them had higher (8.8 percent) or vocational education (20.5 percent) qualifications; 60.9 percent arrived with general secondary education, while 9.8 had attained no education level.<sup>84</sup> Ramos finds that a high NEET rate is associated with a high level of migration into the local labor market.<sup>85</sup> The fact that a high number of ethnic repatriates with very low educational attainment have settled in the southern oblasts may have contributed to the increasing numbers of NEETs in these regions.

### Gender

There is a global trend that far more young women are NEETs

**Figure 9. The share of NEET women and NEET men in Kazakhstan, 2016, %**



Source: The Statistics Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan

than young men; females are much more likely to be absent from education and the labor force. This is often due to cultural expectations that women will remain at home to undertake domestic responsibilities after leaving education. In some countries, there are three or four times more female NEETs than male ones.<sup>86</sup>

A similar tendency can be observed in Kazakhstan. Figure 9 shows the gender gap among NEET youth, demonstrating that women are two to four times more likely to be NEETs than men in southern regions, with the exception of South Kazakhstan. The most concerning picture is in Mangystau region, where one in every four women is neither in employment nor in education.

The difference in the labor market status of males and females is explained by typical gender roles steering women towards taking care of a household, children or other relatives. A low mean age of women at the time of birth of their first child means that women are engaged in caretaking early and thus are unable to enter the workforce. This is particularly true because the burden of care is more heavily on the woman in developing countries than in the developed world.<sup>87</sup> Many of these women might be interested in taking on freelance or part-time work,<sup>88</sup> yet statistics suggest that the share of part-time workers decreased by 45 percent between 2012 and 2016,<sup>89</sup> implying that there are not enough of these jobs available for all the women who might want one.

To date, relatively little attention has been paid to young women who are NEET all over the world.<sup>90</sup> In order to better target integration policies, it is highly important to study the profile of NEET women and their needs in the labor market.

**Recommendations to the Government for Reducing the Proportion of NEETs in Southern Regions**

To reduce the number of young people neither working nor studying at national level, the government should:

- Conduct large-scale research to determine the profile of NEETs. No data is currently available on NEET categories (disabled, voluntary NEET, family carers, etc.), age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, education levels, etc. Alternatively, analog indicators may be added to the existing statistical surveys (eg. Labor Force Survey)
- Promote reconciliation between formal work and private and family life for women through part-time work, parental leave, online remote work, etc.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing formal short-term and informal education programs. Effective programs should be accredited in a way that will allow young people to use them as a springboard for further education or career progression.

To reduce the number of young people neither working nor studying at regional level, the government should:

- Better advertise employment and education or training

opportunities via social media, sharing all available opportunities online. Local employment and education departments, in particular, should strengthen information-sharing;

- Encourage local non-governmental organizations to assist in improving NEETs' hard and soft skills. Such efforts should be monitored to observe their outcomes and determine whether they are worth pursuing.

**Appendix 1. Share of urban and rural NEETs in Kazakhstan, %**

Region	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016	
						rural		rural		rural		rural		
Kazakhstan	8.7	7.6	8.2	7	8.5	7.4	8.7	7.2	8.2	9.4	8.1	9.0	8.1	
Akmola	8.1	7.0	6.6	7.0	7.7	5.2	7.6	6.1	4.3	5.5	5.6	6.3	5.8	8.7
Aktobe	2.7	3.7	2.5	4.7	3.4	2.4	4.3	3.8	9.5	5.6	6.4	7.8	6.3	8.9
Almaty	8.9	8.0	9.0	9.1	10.4	9.0	9.9	9.7	10.7	9.4	8.6	6.7	10.5	9.1
Atyrau	12.4	7.9	9.4	4.4	7.5	5.6	7.7	3.9	5.8	8.0	7.6	8.2	8.5	7.6
West Kazakhstan	11.9	7.8	8.9	6.1	6.8	4.9	5.3	3.7	3.5	4.7	2.7	4.2	2.1	4.2
Zhambyl	8.3	6.6	9.4	8.3	15.7	7.1	10.4	7.4	8.0	14.0	15.7	12.3	15.7	
Karagandy	10.8	8.1	9.8	5.8	9.7	8.1	7.2	5.3	12.8	12.6	12.7	12.9	12.3	
Kostanay	9.8	6.5	8.7	6.3	6.7	6.0	6.9	3.2	4.8	6.0	5.2	6.9	4.6	5.5
Kyzylorda	9.2	9.6	8.0	7.6	11.8	9.1	10.6	11.2	15.5	14.1	11.6	10.4	15.0	
Mangystau	13.6	12.9	12.9	12.1	11.1	22.9	11.2	14.6	11.0	21.3	7.4	16.2	15.1	
South Kazakhstan	9.8	6.6	9.1	6.2	9.4	5.7	10.1	4.2	6.9	8.7	6.3	11.0	5.9	
Pavlodar	8.0	2.5	8.5	2.3	7.7	2.6	7.1	3.7	6.2	2.4	5.2	3.9	6.7	
North Kazakhstan	8.0	6.7	10.9	6.3	10.9	7.5	8.7	10.9	9.6	7.0	8.7	5.1	8.3	8.3
East Kazakhstan	7.1	13.5	8.2	12.1	5.6	10.7	6.3	11.7	7.3	8.7	7.4	9.4	6.2	
Astana city	11.9	-	11.6	-	14.7	-	17.0	-	7.9	-	6.8	-	6.6	-
Almaty city	5.8	-	4.5	-	4.5	-	6.9	-	7.6	-	8.6	-	7.7	-

Source: The Statistics Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan

**Appendix 2. Youth unemployment rate in urban versus rural settlements in Kazakhstan, %**

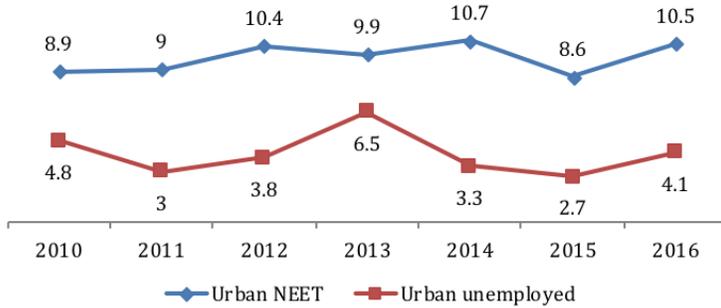
Region	2011			2012			2013			2014			2015			2016		
	T	U	R	T	U	R	T	U	R	T	U	R	T	U	R	T	U	R
Kazakhstan	6.1	6.8	5.3	5.4	6.1	4.5	5.5	6.2	4.7	4.2	5.0	3.4	4.3	4.8	3.7	4.1	4.6	3.5
Akmola	5.4	6.2	4.8	5.2	5.9	4.6	5.2	7.0	3.6	3.0	3.0	2.9	3.0	2.4	3.7	3.3	3.2	3.3
Aktobe	4.8	3.9	5.8	4.7	5.2	4.0	3.2	4.1	1.4	3.1	4.1	1.5	3.1	3.1	3.1	2.9	3.1	2.6
Almaty	3.8	3.0	4.0	3.7	3.8	3.7	6.5	6.5	6.5	3.1	3.3	3.1	2.5	2.7	2.4	3.1	4.1	2.8
Atyrau	4.5	6.3	3.2	3.5	4.1	2.9	3.5	5.3	1.6	3.2	2.3	3.9	2.4	2.3	2.5	2.2	3.2	1.4
West Kazakhstan	5.2	3.7	6.1	6.1	7.2	5.5	4.8	4.7	4.8	4.3	3.9	4.5	4.1	3.8	4.3	4.0	3.8	4.1
Zhambyl	6.5	5.6	7.0	7.9	12.0	6.0	7.4	11.0	5.6	5.2	5.4	5.1	4.9	4.7	5.0	4.3	4.3	4.2
Karagandy	6.3	6.1	6.9	5.1	5.3	4.3	4.4	4.1	5.4	4.3	4.6	3.3	5.0	5.1	4.3	5.1	5.2	4.8
Kostanay	7.5	9.0	6.3	6.0	6.0	5.9	3.5	4.9	2.4	3.6	3.6	3.7	3.2	3.0	3.4	3.2	3.5	3.0
Kyzylorda	6.6	6.2	6.9	6.5	6.2	6.7	6.7	6.8	6.7	5.1	4.1	5.6	4.6	4.1	4.8	4.8	5.0	4.7
Mangystau	7.5	7.3	7.7	4.6	5.2	3.7	7.5	7.3	7.6	5.6	4.5	7.0	4.2	3.9	4.5	4.4	4.1	4.7
South Kazakhstan	5.3	7.1	4.4	4.9	6.0	4.2	3.4	5.1	2.5	2.7	4.3	2.0	4.2	4.4	4.1	3.9	4.3	3.7
Pavlodar	6.8	9.8	1.8	5.2	7.2	2.0	6.0	7.2	3.9	2.7	3.3	1.6	3.2	3.7	2.4	3.0	3.4	2.3
North Kazakhstan	7.3	8.3	6.8	6.5	7.1	6.1	7.6	6.0	9.1	3.8	2.7	4.5	2.9	1.8	3.9	3.0	2.6	3.4
East Kazakhstan	7.3	7.8	6.6	6.0	6.8	4.6	6.3	6.6	5.8	4.4	4.5	4.3	4.3	3.8	5.2	3.1	2.4	4.4
Astana city	8.5	8.5	-	6.8	6.8	-	4.9	4.9	-	6.3	6.3	-	5.8	5.8	-	4.8	4.8	-
Almaty city	7.0	7.0	-	5.4	5.4	-	8.5	8.5	-	8.2	8.2	-	7.4	7.4	-	6.9	6.9	-

T = Total  
U = Urban  
R = Rural

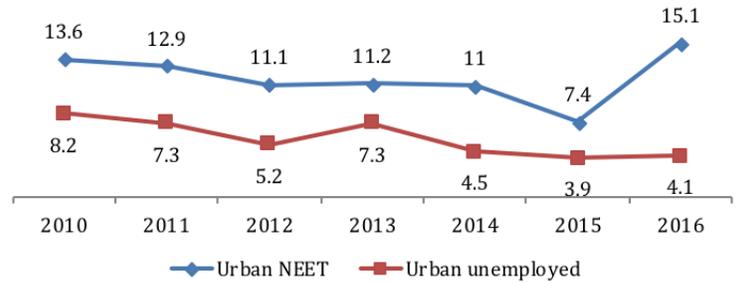
*Source: The Statistics Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan*

**Appendix 3. Correlation of variables: urban NEET and urban youth unemployment, 2010-2016, %**

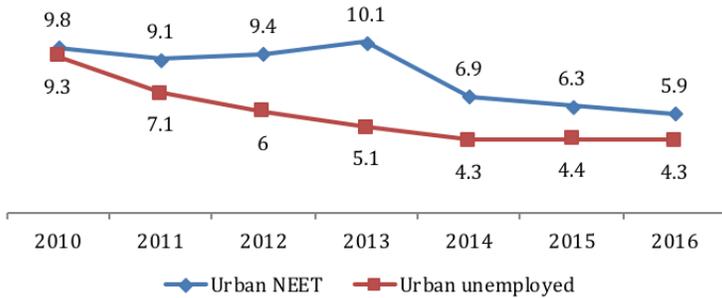
**Almaty oblast,  $r=0.2$**



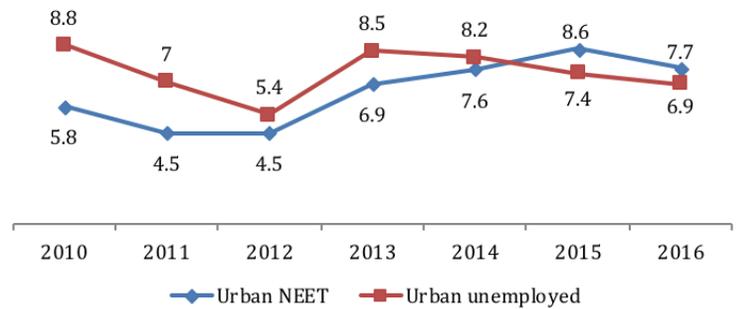
**Mangystau oblast,  $r=0.4$**



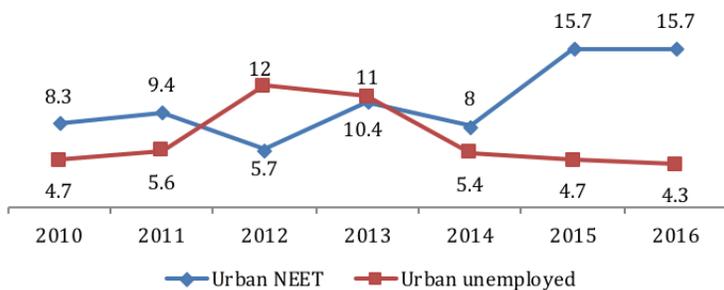
**South Kazakhstan oblast,  $r=0.7$**



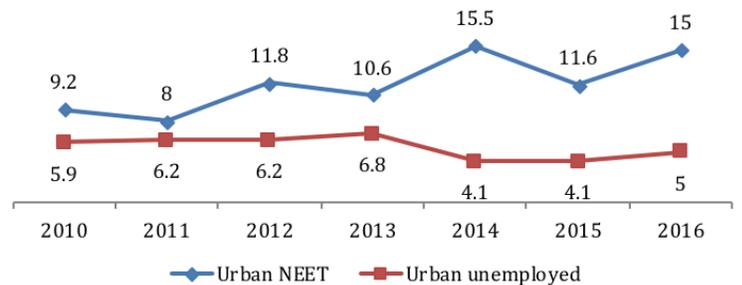
**Almaty city,  $r=0.4$**



**Zhambyl oblast,  $r=-0.5$**



**Kyzylorda oblast,  $r=-0.7$**



Source: The Statistics Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan

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- <sup>52</sup> Ibid.
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ByKeyword.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Bardak, Rubal Maseda, and Rosso, “Young People Not in Employment.”

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No region-specific information is available.

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