



DANAKER  
Association



# Kurak Voices Toolkit

A practical guide for local leaders  
facilitating public dialogue with  
women in Kyrgyzstan



European Union  
Global Diaspora Facility

Funded by  
the European Union



Implemented by ICMPD



**ICMPD**

International Centre for  
Migration Policy Development



This toolkit was written by Aitolgon Boronbaeva, Nuraiym Toktombaeva, and the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue, with valuable contributions from project partners.

Editors: Begimai Taalaibekova, Aitolgon Boronbaeva

© 2024 Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue

© 2025 Danaker – Diaspora of Women from Kyrgyzstan

2025 - Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

Kurak Voices Toolkit is a practical guide for local leaders facilitating public dialogue with women in Kyrgyzstan that has been developed as part of the project Kurak Voices: Fostering Inclusive Public Dialogue in Kyrgyzstan.

Kurak Voices is a partnership project between:

- The Migration and Human Trafficking Council under the Speaker of the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic (MHTC)
- Association DANAHER – Diaspora of Women from Kyrgyzstan in Poland

The project benefits from the expertise of the **Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue**, and is supported by the **EU Global Diaspora Facility (EUDiF)**, implemented by the **International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)** and funded by the **European Union**.



Kurak Voices supports adult and community learning by training local and diaspora leaders in dialogue facilitation. The project promotes practical, experience-based education tailored to local realities.



The project centers women's voices and leadership. By creating safe spaces for dialogue, it challenges gender norms and empowers women to speak, lead, and shape change in their communities.



Kurak Voices connects women across regions, generations, and backgrounds. Through inclusive dialogue, it bridges divides and promotes equal participation for those often excluded.

### Disclaimer:

This publication was produced with the support of the European Union. The contents reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the EU. The EU is not responsible for any use of the information contained herein.

In the event of any divergence, ambiguity, or conflict between the English original and any translated version, the English original will prevail and be deemed the official, authoritative text.

Copyright © 2025

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means - electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise - without prior written permission from the publishers. Copying of materials or selected pages for use in workshops, training, or educational settings is encouraged and does not require prior permission, as long as the source is clearly credited.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This toolkit is the result of a collective effort rooted in collaboration, shared vision, and deep listening.

## CONTENT CONTRIBUTIONS

The first chapter is developed by the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue and draws directly from their handbook, *The Practical Approach of Public Dialogue* (pp. 11–25, 29–31, 57–77).

For more information and a deeper understanding of the methodology, the full handbook can be downloaded at [www.peace.no](http://www.peace.no).

The second chapter is grounded in real-world insights drawn from three focus group discussions and in-depth interviews:

1. NGO and community leaders in Kyrgyzstan, reflecting on their work with women across diverse contexts.
2. Women from various backgrounds in Kyrgyzstan, sharing their lived experiences.
3. Diaspora leaders from Kyrgyzstan in Europe, offering reflections on working with migrant women and maintaining transnational connections.

We express our heartfelt gratitude to all the participants who contributed their time, trust, and voices to these discussions.

**Special thanks** to the following individuals and partner organisations for their huge contributions to the development of the Kurak Voices Toolkit:

**Migration and Human Trafficking Council under the Speaker of the Kyrgyz Republic's Parliament (MHTC):**  
*Ulan Nogoibaev, Nurgul Kadyrkulova*

**Association DANAHER – Diaspora of Women from Kyrgyzstan in Poland:**  
*Begimai Taalaibekova, Gulnura Muratbekova, Nuraiym Toktombaeva, Aitolgon Boronbaeva*

**Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue in Norway:**  
*Christiane Seehausen, Astrid Folkedal Kraidy*

**EU Global Diaspora Facility (EUDiF) implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) in Belgium:**  
*Diana Hincu, Liza Bezvershenko*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>About the project</b>	<b>03</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>Purpose of the toolkit: Who should use the toolkit?</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>How to use the toolkit?</b>	<b>07</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Facilitating Public Dialogue: Principles and Practice</b>	<b>08</b>
1.1 What is dialogue?	08
1.2 Public Dialogue	10
1.3 Dialogue Facilitation	11
1.4 Objectives and tools of the dialogue facilitators	12
1.5 What is a good dialogical question?	14
1.6 Formulating the opening question	15
1.7 Deeply listening	16
1.8 Public dialogue: tasks of facilitator and co-facilitator	17
<b>Chapter 2: Voices from the Field: Reflections from Women, Local Leaders, and Diaspora Voices</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1 Focus Group 1 “Frontline Perspectives: local leaders reflect”	18
2.2 Focus Group 2 & In-depth Interviews: Being a Woman in Kyrgyzstan: Realities of Hope, Challenge, and Identity	20
2.3 Focus Group 3 “Beyond borders: Kyrgyz women diaspora leaders reimagining connection and change”	25
2.4 Conclusion: Listening Beneath the Surface	27



# PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT

The aim of the **Kurak Voices Toolkit** is to support local leaders, NGO staff, and facilitators across Kyrgyzstan in creating inclusive, respectful, and empowering spaces for public dialogue with women – particularly those from rural, vulnerable, or underrepresented communities.

According to the **National Statistical Committee**, women make up **50.55%** of the population in Kyrgyzstan, with **63.84%** residing in rural areas. Despite their demographic presence, women often face **systemic barriers**, including rights violations in both domestic and professional settings. The **Global Gender Gap Report 2024** ranks Kyrgyzstan **90th out of 146 countries** in gender equality – highlighting a persistent need to address structural inequalities.

The **Kurak Voices Toolkit** supports women's empowerment by equipping local leaders and facilitators with practical tools to create safe, inclusive spaces where women can speak openly, be heard, and take part in shaping their communities. It enables facilitators to use public dialogue as a powerful tool for exploring the complex and often sensitive challenges women face in society. It creates space to unpack issues shaped by gender norms, discrimination, and unequal access to rights and opportunities, allowing communities to listen, reflect, and move toward collective understanding and change.

It provides:

- › **Practical guidance** on how to facilitate inclusive public dialogue sessions
- › **Techniques for designing thoughtful topics and opening questions**
- › **Real insights** from local and diaspora leaders, as well as women themselves, gathered through focus group discussions across Kyrgyzstan and Europe

This toolkit is not a strict manual - it is a flexible resource meant to inspire, guide, and adapt to your unique local context. Whether you're facilitating a dialogue in a village school, a community center, or a public space, the Kurak Voices Toolkit is here to walk with you.

## WHO CAN USE THIS TOOLKIT?

- **NGO Leaders**  
Leaders and staff of non-governmental organizations who work with women on issues such as rights, empowerment, health, education, and social inclusion.
- **Community Leaders**  
Local leaders, educators, and informal influencers who engage with women in villages, towns, and neighborhoods to support community wellbeing and participation.
- **Activists**  
Individuals advocating for gender equality and social justice, or facilitating conversations around sensitive topics affecting women in various social and cultural contexts.

# HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT?

---

The **Kurak Voices Toolkit** is organized into two practical chapters designed to support facilitators in preparing for, leading, and reflecting on public dialogue sessions with women.

**Chapter 1** introduces the foundational principles and practical techniques of facilitating inclusive public dialogue. It guides facilitators through the core elements of dialogue, including how to ask meaningful questions, create safe spaces, and listen deeply. The chapter also outlines the roles and responsibilities of facilitators and co-facilitators, and provides tools for preparing and leading sessions with empathy, structure, and purpose.

**Chapter 2** presents insights from three focus group meetings and in-depth interviews conducted in April and May 2025 as part of the Kurak Voices project. These discussions brought together local leaders, women from diverse backgrounds, and diaspora leaders to explore the realities, challenges, and hopes shaping women's lives in Kyrgyzstan and beyond. Their voices provide facilitators with valuable context and lived perspectives to provide valuable real-world insights.

## Focus Group 1 “Frontline perspectives: local leaders reflect”

This focus group gathered 16 NGO and community leaders from across Kyrgyzstan who work closely with women in local settings. The session took place on April 11, 2025 in the Parliament of Kyrgyz Republic in Bishkek and explored the challenges NGO and community leaders face, the strategies they use to build trust, and the insights they've gained from supporting women in complex, often under-resourced environments.

## Focus Group 2 & In-depth Interviews: Being a Woman in Kyrgyzstan: Realities of Hope, Challenge, and Identity

This focus group, held online in April–May 2025, brought together six women from diverse social, geographic, and ethnic backgrounds across Kyrgyzstan to reflect on their everyday experiences. In addition to the group discussion, seven in-depth individual interviews were conducted in April and May 2025 to deepen understanding of the themes raised. Participants shared stories of resilience, gender-based discrimination, identity, and belonging – offering a rich and nuanced picture of what it means to be a woman in Kyrgyzstan today.

## Focus Group 3 “Beyond borders: Kyrgyz women diaspora leaders reimagining connection and change”

11 Diaspora women leaders from various European countries joined online session on 26 April 2025 to reflect on their roles in supporting migrant women and maintaining ties with Kyrgyzstan. They discussed how their leadership is shaped by distance, cultural duality, and a shared responsibility to contribute to gender equality both abroad and at home.

# CHAPTER 1: FACILITATING PUBLIC DIALOGUE: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE



## 1.1 What is dialogue?

An inclusive form of sustained and civil conversation. By this we mean inter-group and interpersonal conversations in which those present are granted an equal voice to the table, regardless of their formal status within the society.

And those at the table need to be engaged sufficient time to interrogate, deliberate and communicate.

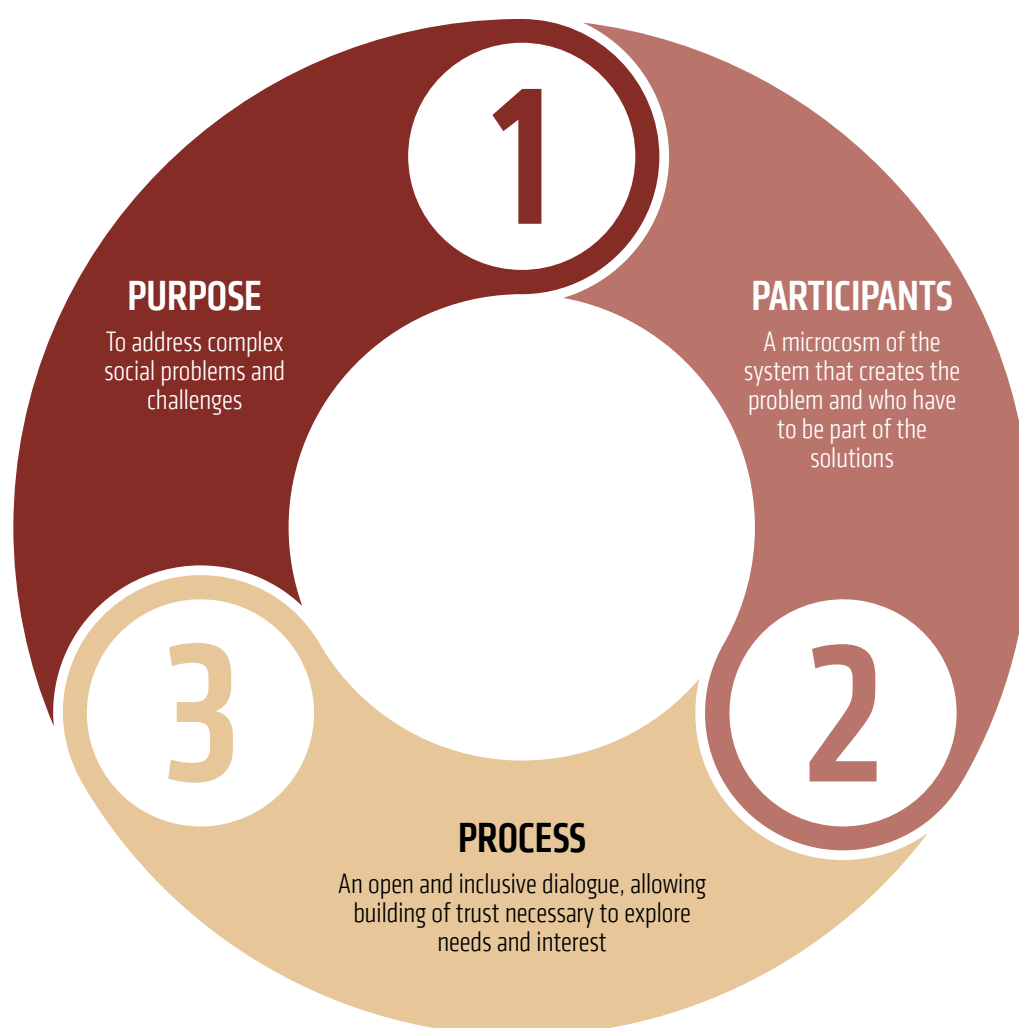
By consciously moving away from the win-lose model of traditional debate to a more equitable, safe, and sustained approach to transforming problems. This can also foster democratic governance.

It engages the heart as well as the mind. It is different from ordinary, everyday conversations since dialogue has a focus and a purpose.

Dialogue unlike debate or even discussions, is as interested in the relationship between the participants as it is in the topic or theme being explored.

Debate Goal: To win	Dialogue Goal: To understand
Convince	Explain
Argue	Listen
Look for the weak argument	Look for the strength in the opponent
Attack and defence	Reflection and Awareness
Moral Judge	Tolerance
Make opponent insecure	Make opponent feel safe
To change opinion is a sign of weakness	To change opinions is a sign of maturity
Create a competitive atmosphere	Create as safe space
Confronting language	Supportive language





 <b>Principles of dialogue</b>	 <b>Goals</b>	 <b>Behaviours</b>
<p>Inclusiveness</p> <p>Joint ownership</p> <p>Learning</p> <p>Humanity</p> <p>Respect and Empathy</p> <p>Humility</p> <p>Focus on needs and feelings the underlying premisses for our actions</p>	<p>Engage all parts</p> <p>Foster learning; facilitate deeper understanding</p> <p>Create the sense of safety required for openness</p> <p>Foster commitment to achieving sustainable change</p>	<p>Inquire to learn</p> <p>Share what you know</p> <p>Listen empathetically</p> <p>Reflect what you are hearing</p> <p>Explore underlying assumptions- yours and those of others</p> <p>Acknowledge emotions as well as ideas and opinions</p> <p>Reflect new knowledge or understanding</p>

## 1.2 Public dialogue

A public dialogue is a community dialogue session organized in a neutral and public space like a library, town hall or school, and is open to anyone who wants to attend. The public dialogue is about a given topic, chosen by those who have requested this gathering or the participants of the dialogue.

The idea behind a public dialogue is to talk about a topic in a non-argumentative and open-minded way. The goal is for a community to better understand the various perceptions, thoughts, and beliefs that exist among them, by providing a physical meeting place where they are invited to listen deeply to each other and ask explorative questions. As a communication method, public dialogue is particularly useful when the topics are sensitive, controversial, conflictual, or personal.

A public dialogue can be a one-time event or can be arranged several times with the same group of participants. The organizers try to ensure a diverse and somewhat representative group of participants by spreading information about the event and by contacting stakeholders in different parts of a community.

**Typical time frame:** 2-3 hours

**Set up:** A big circle, or several around each other

**Number of participants:** Between 10-100, depending on the space

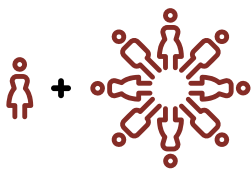
### Public dialogues are commonly used for:

- Preventing and counteract polarization, and negative friction in a local community
- Inclusive decision-making processes
- Sensitive community conversations
- In relation to events, happenings, or instances in the community
- Building and rebuilding relationships
- Encourage community members to take responsibility for a certain situation
- Processing of public traumatic events
- Strengthen people's ability to live in disagreement

## Different forms of public dialogue

### Public dialogue with introduction

A dialogue that begins with a five-minute introduction around the topic or question. The introducer must participate in the following dialogue, and should make sure to open the topic up rather than close it in.



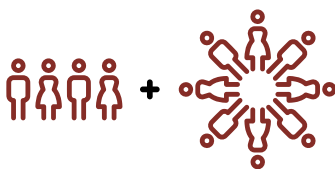
### Dialogue with groups

A dialogue that begins with several small groups reflecting on an opening question, before gathering in a big dialogue circle afterwards. This is especially useful when there are many participants, from 50 people and up, as it ensures that everyone will have a chance to speak during the session.



### Dialogue on stage

A dialogue that starts with 3-5 chosen persons in a facilitated dialogue, where the rest of the participants as an audience. After the first part, the “panellists” join the circle, and everyone participates on the same grounds. The dialogue on stage should not exceed more than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the time for the total dialogue.



### Dialogue with objects

A dialogue where participants (either a few chosen ones or whomever) are asked to bring an object as a basis for the sharing of thoughts and experiences on a given subject. It is also possible to collect objects afterwards and borrow them for an exhibition for the dialogue can continue in another way.



## 1.3 Dialogue facilitation

Dialogue Facilitation is an approach which enables people to talk together in a different manner. It is a process-based way of talking together, where empathic listening and good questions form the fundament. And inclusiveness, respect, joint ownership, and humanity are the key ingredients. Based on this a facilitation creates a safe space where participants feel respected and valued; they feel that they are entering a conversation that matters; and that they enter a process of change.

## What kind of change can happen?

The core dynamic of change in a facilitated dialogue involves people gaining perspectives about their own thoughts, and about the way in which those thought processes shape their perceptions of reality. This is something most of us normally are not aware of. We simply think, without being aware of the forces, such as memory, beliefs, emotions, and culture, that influence our thinking.

In a facilitated dialogue the listening process motivates the participants to reflect back to each other. This way the participants can begin to recognize the feelings, thoughts and perceptions of the others, and the rigidity of their own perceptions loosens up. A facilitated dialogue gives everyone an opportunity to tell their personal story in the way they want to tell it. To be listened to in that way initiates a change.

To be able to enter a process of change the participants need encouragement and support from the multi-partial facilitator. They need sufficient time for the change process to unfold naturally, and to be able to overcome their natural resistance to change.

## The dialogical moment

In a facilitated dialogue there are so-called “turning points”. Turning points can be situations where participants move away from talking in a polite and superficial manner, and start to speak honestly, taking the risk of being emotionally vulnerable, or mention values that evoke our common humanity. These turning points are therefore instances where the participants lay down their defences. These moments have to be seen and recognized by the facilitator and given back to the participants.

## From personal to societal change

Facilitated dialogue processes not only create changes on a personal level, but also on a societal level. Dialogue processes are inclusive. Background, position, titles, ethnicity matters less, it is a democratic process where everyone can participate.

These processes can result in following societal changes:

- Closing the gap between experts and the public
- Moving from distorted, simplistic understandings to revealing and accepting the complexity of societal changes
- Shifting focus from competing interests to the common good
- Placing responsibility for public policy with the public
- Strengthening the public's capacity for reasoned decision making

## 1.4 Objectives and tools of the dialogue facilitators

While you as facilitator won't have any personal goals for the content and direction of the dialogue, it can be useful to work from certain objectives in the making of the process. These objectives can guide you to better create a safe, honest, and respectful atmosphere for participants to share personal experiences and thoughts. In the public dialogue, the facilitator should aim to:

- Provide a setting and an atmosphere in which different views can be shared in an honest, open, and respectful manner.
- Ask follow-up questions to help participants express more of what they have chosen to share and, in the process, gain increased awareness of their views, how it is being perceived, and how this influences the conversation
- Encourage participants to listen to each other
- Apply the set ground rules to help create and maintain a dialogical safe space and reduce the risk of harm.

## Tools of the dialogue facilitators

As facilitator, there are certain tools available to you that will help with reaching the objectives mentioned above. Some of these tools are frequent essentials of your facilitation, others are higher up on what we can call the 'ladder of interventions' – only necessary in rare situations. The following is an overview of these tools – how to use them will be explained further along in this chapter.

**1. Opening question:** This is the question that opens the floor in public dialogue. It is not necessarily the same as the title or topic of the session.

**2. Follow-up questions:** These are questions that the facilitators ask to go deeper into something a participant has just said, all the while using the participants' own words.

**3. Ground rules:** Ground rules are guiding principles for the dialogue that concern how the group talks to each other, including any potential restrictions for the conversation.

**4. Attentiveness:** The facilitator gives attention to the participants with their body language, active listening, gaze, and communicative signaling. In this way, facilitators can influence the group to focus to the speaker. Attentiveness can also make participants feel safe, acknowledged, and important. To ensure that no participants feel neglected while others talk, the facilitator team will focus their attention differently depending on their role division.

**5. Silence:** The facilitator can use silence as a tool to show authority, patience, encouragement, and calmness. It can be useful to use breaks of silence in the introduction of the dialogue to make sure participants receive the information, and silence can be used to motivate participants to elaborate further after speaking. Silence can also be a way to hold space after a participant has shared something personal or powerful. Silence can also often be a natural part of the beginning of the public dialogue, sometimes occurring after the opening question has been asked. The facilitator can sit comfortably in this silence as a tool to illustrate that there is no rush and that the participants are responsible for the content.

**6. Authority:** A facilitator needs to have authority. The openness of the dialogue approach can be misused by participants who ignore ground rules and attack others' viewpoints. Having authority is not the same as being authoritarian. A facilitator's authority relies on their integrity and necessitates that they clearly explain their role and objectives. They must show that they are the person in charge with clear communication and body language, always in a respectful and multi-partial manner. Navigating authority is a difficult part of the facilitator role. It requires confidence without arrogance and sturdiness without rigidity. In the beginning of the public dialogue, facilitators show and gain authority by being in charge of the process, the time management, and the introduction. During the session, authority is shown in the asking of questions, choices for the process, and by selectively giving attention. In the end of the dialogue, facilitators have authority because they can end the session, sum it up, and have the last word.

**7. Breaks:** Breaks can be taken by the facilitator depending on the needs. It is useful to use if the participant group seem tired and unfocused, if they ask for it, or if an unexpected situation occurs. Such situations can for example be that a participant abruptly leaves the dialogue, strong emotions are persisting, or the facilitators feel they are not able to maintain a safe space or that they themselves are in need of a break.

**8. Summary:** The summary of a public dialogue is a tool for creating a collective learning experience and maintaining a safe space that gives room for a diversity of experiences.

**9. Ending the dialogue:** Ending the dialogue earlier than planned can be an option if the ground rules are continuously broken, the participants have nothing more to share, or if the situation feels out of control and there is fear of violence or an unsafe atmosphere.

## 1.5 What is a good dialogical question?

*Questions are the core and heart of any dialogue.*

The main goal in dialogue is increased understanding. A good dialogical question is the key to making this happen. It can bring out what someone is thinking but not explicitly saying, make one aware of the unconscious, help to dig deep into complex topics, highlight details, clarify disagreements, or bring up different perspectives.

**A good dialogical question is a question where I don't know the answer. I ask because I am curious, wanting to know something more – because I want to learn something from the other person, or wish to get to know them better.**

Therefore, the dialogical questions should be **open-ended**.

An open question can for example be: What do you think is important to you right now? How do you want us to work together?

This kind of question opens a space – which then can be filled with answers. It unlocks a process which can develop in any way the participants want. It creates room to offer something of oneself and to share from deep within.


**A good dialogical question gives positive focus to “the other”.** This means that the question must not include hidden criticism or accusation. If I wish to criticize another person, I can do so through a statement or reflection, where I am brave enough to present it as it is. Hiding such criticism in a question creates unclear and uninviting communication.

The question “Do you really believe your work is good enough for the board?” contains hidden criticism which can create uncertainty amongst others, regardless of whether it was phrased consciously or unconsciously.

The question “What do you think about your bad behavior during the family dinner?” can seem open to some but contains an accusation that most likely will lead to a defensive response.

**A good dialogical question is not a statement.** In many conversations questions are posed that really are statements formulated as questions.





The question “Do you think that research, which is funded by the state, is objective?” is formulated as a question, but is in reality an opinion. The asker seeks validation of their opinion or a counter-response that opens up for discussion or debate.

**A good dialogical question must be free from judgements.** All forms of judgement create uncertainty, insecurity and less willingness and eagerness to talk.

The question “How can you, who have shown an arrogant attitude towards my personal crisis, say that we now should calm down and go on?” is a condemnation disguised as a question. The response is destined to be either a defense and/or simply silence.

**A good dialogical question should not be leading or urge others to think like oneself.** Very often we ask questions, not to open for new ideas or thoughts, but as an attempt to lead someone in a specific direction.

The question “Don’t you also think it’s unfair that the indigenous population are not able to continue to use their original land?”. This is a leading and closed questions, which invites to a yes or no response, or who can feel “forced” to have an opinion or take a stance. Not only can this be experienced as quite uncomfortable, it can also push the dialogue to become a debate.

**Asking good dialogical questions is difficult. It requires awareness, concentration, and a lot of practice. When putting in the effort, mastering the art of asking questions will let you experience conversations of a very different kind. Conversations where everyone can win, in the sense that everyone are able to learn something new.**

## 1.6 Formulating the opening question

An important part of preparing for a public dialogue is the formulation of the opening question.

The opening question is not the same as the topic of the dialogue, and a lot of time and effort is needed to find one that suits the dialogue. An opening question is **an open and non-leading question** that invites a multitude of answers where participants are inspired to speak **on behalf of themselves** rather than in generalized terms. The goal of such a question is to **open up the minds and thoughts** of the participants, rather than close them off. What closes people off are angles that can make one feel defensive, confused, or uninterested. A leading opening question can make participants feel that the public dialogue is not an open space for all types of perspectives, and that the facilitators are expecting or prefer certain answers.

With these considerations in mind, an opening question should have the following qualities:

- Be short and concise
- Not include difficult terms – be as simple as possible
- Be connected to the topic of the dialogue
- Inspire the participants to speak on behalf of themselves, and share their thoughts and ideas
- Be open and not leading

An opening question in a public dialogue should assist the facilitator in their task of motivating for honest, open, and personal sharing, not make it more difficult.

*Check-points for this task:*

- Does your opening question create space for a multitude of answers and perspectives, or is it leading? Is it relevant to the whole community?
- Is it formulated in an accessible and simple manner?
- Is it more likely to invite sharing of personal stories or generalized opinions?
- How does the opening question feel when said out loud?

## 1.7 Deeply listening

The facilitator has the main responsibility for creating an atmosphere where deep listening has center stage. The facilitators' ability to listen will set a standard for the participants. In our view, listening is something very different to hearing.

Often, we are more focused on what we have to say then what the others have said. Listening, on the other hand, is a conscious process. We open our mind and hearts to really understand what the other is trying to explain, without giving in to any internal resistance and defense, even when we do not like or agree with the speaker.

Facilitators of public dialogue should follow the flow and process of the participants, listening to each word and sentence with deep curiosity and interest. This way, they can follow up with questions that assist the speaker to go deeper into what they have chosen to share, rather than what the listener is interested in. In our experience, because such questions are so connected to the speaker and so disconnected from the facilitator's own needs, judgements, and interests, many participants feel that these follow-up questions are empowering, rather than intrusive or confronting.

By deeply listening, the facilitator can notice key topics or words that has room for deeper reflection.

Such key words are often connected to something deeper within us and can tell us something about our interests and needs.

Examples of such key words are large or foreign concepts, generalizations, feelings, experiences from the past, and descriptions or moments of change. If a participant says, or "Young people don't have respect anymore", the facilitator can follow up by asking "What is respect to you?".

These questions give the participant a space to explain more about their initial positions, but from a more personal point of view – giving the rest of the circle a better chance to understand. In comparison, if the facilitator would have asked: "What has changed with young people?" the conversation would more likely stay on a fact-based surface level where participants could end up talking more about others than themselves. This level of conversation can potentially lead to a discussion where participants feel like defending their positions instead of going deeper into what their positions mean and why they have them.

Dialogical follow-up questions are often simpler than we think, and we often end up asking "Can you say more about that?", "How do you feel about that?", "Could you please explain some more?", and "What does that mean to you?".

## 1.8 Public dialogue: tasks of facilitator and co-facilitator

Facilitator	Co- facilitator
Prepare the space for the dialogue with the co-facilitator (e.g. put the chairs in a circle).	Prepare the space for the dialogue with the facilitator (e.g. put the chairs in a circle).
The topic is given, but you must formulate an opening question for the dialogue	Formulate an opening question together with the facilitator
<p>When the participants are seated, welcome them to this dialogue, mention the topic and present yourself and your role as a facilitator.</p> <p>Say that your role is to maintain a safe space for talking about the topic. That you will ask following up questions. Say that you are responsible for the process, but not the content of this dialogue</p> <p>After that give the word to the co-facilitator.</p>	<p>Sit beside the facilitator in the circle. Present yourself and your role as a co-facilitator. Say that you assist the facilitator in this dialogue. You will hold track of those who want to talk and give the word to them, ask questions, and follow up the process and note down some key words from the dialogue for the closing.</p> <p>You will also be the timekeeper.</p>
After the co-facilitator has presented him or herself, say some introductory words about dialogue and present the ground rules.	If the facilitator misses some parts in the introduction, help them.
Depending on the number of participants you can have a presentation round or start with the opening question.	Be attentive to participants reactions – follow the process, hold track on the talking list.
<p>During the dialogue give attention to everyone, stay multi-partial the whole time, help participants to express their feelings and needs by asking follow-up questions. Acknowledge their thoughts and experiences. Do not guide nor lead them.</p> <p>Remember you are responsible for the process, but not the content.</p>	<p>Give the word to those who want to talk. Remind them of the ground rules if needed.</p> <p>If one of the participants leaves the room – follow them, talk with them, motivate them to come back.</p> <p>If some participants express strong emotions (e.g. become very angry), follow it up together with the facilitator.</p> <p>Stay multi-partial the whole time.</p> <p>Ask follow-up questions and take notes.</p>
When the co-facilitator has given you a sign that time soon is over, thank the participants for their participation and give the word to the co-facilitator.	<p>Based on your notes, give a summary. Remember not to put your own reflections or thoughts into the summary.</p> <p>After the summary, say thanks again and goodbye.</p> <p>If there is a series of dialogues, mention the time for the next dialogue and invite them to participate.</p>

## CHAPTER 2. VOICES FROM THE FIELD: REFLECTIONS FROM WOMEN, LOCAL LEADERS, AND DIASPORA VOICES

---

Chapter I shared practical tools for leading inclusive public dialogue sessions. This chapter builds on that by sharing real-life stories and reflections from three focus group discussions and in-depth interviews held in April and May 2025. These conversations involved local leaders, women living in Kyrgyzstan, and Kyrgyz diaspora leaders based in Europe. The participants came from many walks of life – NGO workers, rural activists, single mothers, and women living abroad who continue to support others in their home country.

Together, their voices paint a clear picture of everyday life for women in and beyond Kyrgyzstan – full of strength and creativity, but also shaped by serious challenges like weak services, gender inequality, and social pressure. These stories help NGO and community leaders better understand what women face as they move through public life, take care of families, migrate, and lead others.

This chapter also includes perspectives from local leaders who work closely with women, showing the difficulties they face in providing support. The voices of diaspora women add another important layer, offering insights about identity, belonging, and helping across borders. These shared experiences can guide facilitators in shaping meaningful dialogue sessions that truly reflect women's lived realities in Kyrgyzstan.

Each focus group offers a unique view into the lives of women. Focus Group 1 looks at the challenges faced by people working directly with women in Kyrgyz communities, especially in local systems and services. Focus Group 2, together with seven personal interviews, shares the voices of women from rural and low-income areas. Their stories show the stress of daily life, pressure to meet traditional expectations, and their strength in hard situations. Focus Group 3 adds a perspective from abroad, showing how Kyrgyz women living in Europe stay connected to their roots while also helping other women across borders.

Together, these stories show how gender, migration, economic status, and location all affect women's lives. This chapter helps community and NGO leaders understand those experiences and create safe, inclusive spaces where women feel heard and supported.

### 2.1 Focus Group 1 “Frontline Perspectives: Local Leaders Reflect

The first focus group brought together a diverse group of people working in local government, civil society, and grassroots initiatives. Participants included Members of Parliament, NGO and community leaders, and rural deputies. They shared a wide range of challenges and experiences from their work with women across Kyrgyzstan. Their stories highlighted both the barriers within institutions and the strength and resilience found in local communities.

## Systemic and institutional gaps

Many ongoing challenges are rooted in weak systems and institutions. Although laws exist to promote gender equality and protect women's rights, these commitments are often not fully put into practice – especially at the local level. Key areas like domestic violence prevention, support for mothers, and inclusion of people with disabilities suffer from poor enforcement and limited resources. The shortage of trained social workers and psychologists, particularly in rural and high-migration areas, makes it even harder for women to access basic support. In addition, a lack of inclusive infrastructure – such as ramps, accessible transport, and public spaces – continues to exclude women with disabilities from full participation in community life.

## Women leading grass-roots change

In parallel, women's grassroots efforts – though creative and impactful – remain largely unsupported. Many women take on informal leadership roles in their communities, running mutual aid groups, offering informal counseling, or organizing cultural and educational activities. However, these contributions often go unrecognized and unfunded, leading to burnout and frustration. The gap between institutional neglect and community need is exacerbated by regional inequality: while southern regions may benefit from targeted development programs, women in northern areas, like the Talas region often lack access to training on grant-writing, project design, or state resources.

The emotional labor involved in supporting women in vulnerable situations emerged as a significant theme. Those in facilitation and support roles often carry the weight of others' trauma, frequently without the tools or resources to offer concrete solutions. Yet the simple act of listening without judgment was seen as profoundly impactful. As one participant noted, “Even when nothing changes, they thank us for not judging them.” For many women, being heard without fear or shame is itself a rare and healing experience.

## Migration-related vulnerabilities

Migration-related vulnerabilities continue to place women at heightened risk, particularly in destinations such as Russia. Many women enter informal cohabitation arrangements that offer no legal protection, leaving them exposed to domestic violence, economic coercion, and sexual abuse – experiences that often go unreported. Barriers such as uncertain legal status, social isolation, and fear of judgment frequently prevent women from seeking help from police or family members. Social stigma remains a powerful force, compelling many to endure abuse in silence. Additionally, digital platforms like Telegram are increasingly used to recruit young women with false job offers, placing them at risk of trafficking and exploitation.

## Gender-based violence and social stigma

The silence around gender-based violence was another troubling thread. Women in informal marriages, single mothers, and those caring for children with disabilities face high levels of stigma and are often judged rather than supported, even by their own communities. Cultural narratives that normalize suffering and discourage open discussion of abuse contribute to a climate in which GBV remains hidden. The prevailing message “a woman must endure” still shapes many women's responses to hardship, further isolating them from potential support.

## Peer networks and community resilience

Despite structural barriers, powerful examples of informal women's initiatives demonstrate grassroots resilience. The "League of Mothers," for instance, brings together hundreds of women each week to play volleyball, offering not only physical activity but also emotional solidarity. Artistic spaces, including music, painting, and traditional crafts, serve as therapeutic outlets for expression and connection. In the absence of formal support services, women often step in to assist one another with bureaucratic paperwork, caregiving responsibilities, and emotional needs. These peer-led, often intergenerational networks serve as essential lifelines, fostering mutual aid and community strength.

## Information access and awareness gaps

Information access remains a critical issue. Many women are unaware of their rights or the resources available to them. Illiteracy, language barriers, and mistrust of official institutions significantly limit their ability to engage with existing support structures. In some cases, women have expressed shock upon learning that certain support programs even exist. Without culturally relevant and locally delivered outreach, these services remain underutilized, leaving many without the help they are entitled to receive.

## Crisis response and preparedness

In border areas and more conservative communities, women often take the lead in crisis response and raising public awareness. With support from international organizations, some have introduced important ideas like "go bags" and evacuation plans to help families prepare for emergencies. These efforts show that even in restricted settings, women bring attention to urgent issues that are often overlooked. Their role in strengthening community resilience is significant—though it often goes unrecognized.

Together, these stories show both the challenges women face and the strength they bring. From dealing with weak systems and the risks of migration to providing emotional support and organizing in their communities, women are not just receiving help – they are also building and holding their families and neighborhoods together, even in difficult situations.

## 2.2 Focus Group 2 & In-depth Interviews: "Being a Woman in Kyrgyzstan: Realities of Hope, Challenge, and Identity"

This subchapter gives a deeper look into what it means to be a woman in Kyrgyzstan today. Based on focus group conversations and personal interviews, it highlights the many challenges women face – like financial stress, social pressure, and heavy family responsibilities – alongside their ongoing efforts to find strength, dignity, and self-worth. While many shared stories of hardship, they also spoke about hope, change, and the need for solidarity. These stories are not all the same – they are complex, emotional, and filled with both struggle and care.

## Navigating Womanhood: between aspiration and exhaustion

Across rural and peri-urban communities, daily life is full of contradictions. There is pride in the strength and resilience of Kyrgyz women, but also a deep sense of exhaustion. While many have the freedom to work, study, and speak openly – especially compared to more restrictive places – these freedoms often don't ease the daily pressure of survival.



The cultural expectation for Kyrgyz women to be endlessly strong, adaptive, and capable emerged as a recurring theme. They often work two or three jobs, take care of children, run the household, and carry all of this with little or no support. While the idea of the “strong Kyrgyz woman” is respected and celebrated, it can also feel like a heavy burden. As one woman said, *“We are expected to survive everything, but no one asks what it does to us inside”*. This idea of strength can make it hard to show weakness or ask for help. Over time, it teaches women to keep going no matter what – even if they feel tired, overwhelmed, or emotionally drained.

Single mother expressed her desire to become a housewife, not out of traditionalism, but from sheer exhaustion. She juggles paid work, solo parenting, and keeping a welcoming home without help. This “double shift” grows heavier under cultural rules that urge women to appear calm, self-sacrificing, and untroubled. In many homes, especially multigenerational ones, women look after children, aging parents, and spouses with little rest or support. On the other hand, older women in their fifties or sixties still support their adult children financially or by raising their grandchildren, caught in a cycle where their labor is expected but rarely acknowledged.

A recurring concern is the rise of “weak men” – men who avoid responsibility, contribute little to domestic life, or disengage from parenting. In many households, women generate income, cook, clean, raise children, and still face criticism for “not doing enough.” One reflection sums it up: *“We carry 80% of the good and the bad”*. National time-use data show that women in Kyrgyzstan devote about four hours a day to unpaid household tasks – nearly five times men’s share.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, this growing imbalance has pushed many women to become more self-reliant. Gaining financial independence, education, and work experience has given them a sense of control over their lives and opened doors that once felt out of reach. *“I know I can provide for myself and my children”*, one woman shared. *“I feel strong, and I know I can survive”*. But independence can also feel lonely – often, the more capable a woman becomes, the less support she receives.


Many women expressed a deep wish – not to give up their strength, but to stop carrying everything alone. There is a strong desire to rethink what partnership means at home, in communities, and in society. Some reflections focused on how boys and young men are raised, with recognition that even women sometimes pass down beliefs that reinforce unequal roles. While many hope their daughters will live with more freedom, confidence, and independence, there is a quiet fear that nothing will change unless the larger system does. As one woman said, *“We need to teach our sons to stand next to strong women”*.

## Kelinhood, control, and the silence of servitude

A common theme in the discussion was the belief that a woman’s role is already set – to marry, become a daughter-in-law, and take care of the home. This idea is often passed down through generations, with some women believing that staying quiet and putting others first is part of being a “good woman.” While some accepted these roles as normal, others questioned them and spoke about the need for change, where women can choose their own paths instead of following ones chosen for them.

---

1 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic and UN Women, Sustainable Development Goals and Gender in Kyrgyzstan: Statistical Publication (Bishkek: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic and UN Women, 2023), 34–36, <https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/2023/Kyrgyz-SDG-gender.pdf>.



One woman shared how being a *kelin* (daughter-in-law) felt like living in a prison. For nearly eight months, she wasn't allowed to speak during meals, her movements were restricted, and she had to serve others without respect. When she raised her concerns, her husband said it was "just the way things are." She eventually left, facing criticism from her family – but for her, it was a way to reclaim her dignity and freedom.

This story shows how many women feel unseen in their own homes. It highlights the tension between old traditions and a woman's right to feel respected and valued.

### **Living with gender-based violence: silence, judgment, and survival**

Domestic violence and its consequences came up again and again as a painful reality. One story told of a woman in a rural area who had been hospitalized many times with broken bones. Even though the abuse was severe, her sister said she couldn't leave – she had no education, no income, nowhere to go. Even her own family refused to take her in. The message she received was clear: stay and endure, because leaving felt impossible.

Another woman from a small town shared how she lived through years of abuse and infidelity. Her husband earned a good income, but she was only given money for basic needs. She had no control over finances, no education, no job, and no family support after her parents passed away. She stayed in the marriage for the sake of her six children. Her story shows how many women are trapped in dangerous situations because they have no other choice—and survival often means staying silent.

These stories reveal the many forms of violence women face – physical, emotional, and financial – and how society often expects them to stay quiet. There is a serious lack of trauma-informed care, safe shelters, and protection systems. What remains is judgment, shame, and a resilience that women must summon over and over again.

### **Stigma, shame, and the emotional weight of "What will people say?"**

Fear of community judgment summed up in the phrase "эл эмне дейт" ("what will people say?") shapes many women's lives. This mindset discourages women from divorcing, from expressing happiness or strength after separation, or even from staying on good terms with ex-partners. One woman, judged by her family for her looks and past divorces, asked, *"Is a woman only worth something if she has a man and a house?"*

This way of thinking often makes single mothers feel unwanted or looked down on. It increases isolation, makes it harder to speak openly, and creates pressure for women to suffer in silence to protect their family's image.

### **Intergenerational and identity shifts**

Change is starting to happen across generations. In the past, many mothers taught their daughters to follow strict gender roles. Now, more women are raising their children with equal values. They encourage learning new languages, thinking for themselves, and seeing the world in new ways. Experiences like studying, working, or even visiting other countries help women see that things can be different.

One mother shared that she chose to raise her children with trust and open conversation, instead of fear and control. She believes parenting should be based on kindness and understanding.

## The unspoken within families

One woman reflected on the ways her husband had limited her career – initially forbidding her to work, then only allowing her to teach, despite her dream of becoming a municipal leader. She described the tension of living with a man who was emotionally distant and controlling, yet still referring to him lovingly when her son appeared to join the conversation.

This moment illuminated a quiet, powerful truth: many women do not have spaces to speak honestly about the emotional contradictions in their marriages. They may keep up appearances for their children, not out of deceit, but from a deep desire to preserve the idea of fatherhood. This unspoken emotional labor – protecting children from the knowledge of a strained or unequal relationship – is rarely acknowledged.

It became clear that while some women appear content or untroubled on the surface, beneath lies a complexity that can only emerge in safe, trust-based dialogue. Creating such spaces is not just beneficial; it is necessary for women to reflect, release, and reimagine what they want for themselves and the next generation.

## Education and access to knowledge

Across different regions and backgrounds, education is seen as a key to dignity and independence. But many women still face barriers – not just to formal schooling, but also to basic life-skills training in areas like hygiene, reproductive health, and childcare. Many shared that mentorship and hands-on learning are missing in current programs, especially those focused on personal growth or job skills. Some courses are too expensive, while others feel too theoretical and not useful in daily life.

Religious classes, on the other hand, were often described as more supportive. They offer a sense of community, structure, and encouragement. This raised an important question: why can't similar welcoming spaces be created for other practical skills like sewing, nutrition, or starting a small business? Learning languages was also seen as very important – it helps women access new ideas, stories, and better opportunities for the future.

## Mental health: struggles in silence

Mental health remains a critical yet invisible concern. One mother recounted a moment when, unable to bear the emotional abuse from her own mother – who was ashamed of her for being divorced – she found herself locked in a sauna with pills and a sharp object. Only thoughts of her children stopped her. She had no professional support due to limited financial resources. Instead, she turned to journaling and solitude to survive. When she eventually left home, her relatives threatened her with social isolation unless she returned to her abuser. As she left the responsibility for caring for their old mother was put on the shoulders of other family members. She was just creating inconvenience for them. She realized that she was just seen as a caregiver, not a human being with dignity and feelings.

These stories point to an urgent need for trauma-informed care and support systems that recognize the psychological impact of daily microaggressions, poverty, and relational abuse.

## Barriers to healthcare and dignity

Many women in Kyrgyzstan struggle to access basic health care. Regular check-ups, like gynecological exams or mammograms, are often too expensive or not available in smaller towns and villages. Even when services do exist, getting to them can be difficult. Public transport is not friendly for mothers with strollers, and many rural areas have no safe or welcoming places where women can rest, meet, or care for themselves. Because of these barriers, women's health problems often go untreated, and the daily stress they carry is seen as normal rather than something that needs care and attention.

Mothers, in particular, face serious gaps in support. After giving birth, many experience postpartum depression, but this is rarely acknowledged. They are expected to care for their babies, manage the household, and stay strong – often without emotional or medical help. When women's health is ignored like this, their pain becomes invisible, and their needs go unheard.

## Workplace inequity

Many women who work outside the home face unfair and exploitative conditions. In some workplaces, managers take advantage of workers' limited knowledge of labor laws, reducing wages or taking credit for their efforts. The physical and emotional labor women provide, especially in caregiving or manual jobs, is often undervalued and poorly paid.

On top of this, many women face hostile treatment. Shouting, public criticism, and disrespect from team leaders are common, creating a work environment filled with stress and fear. But it doesn't have to be this way. In one workplace, a leader chose to treat a struggling young employee with steady respect and kindness. Over time, the young woman's behavior improved, and the work atmosphere began to shift. This shows that even in difficult settings, leadership based on dignity, patience, and care can have a powerful and lasting impact.


## Migration, mobility, and longing for change

While only a few women had direct experience with labor migration, the idea of leaving was often described as a hope for the future. Migration was seen as a way to escape poverty, pursue education, or simply find rest. It wasn't viewed as running away, but as a possible path toward a life with more dignity and opportunity.

## Women's solidarity and the desire for peer support

Despite the many challenges women face, there is a deep need for safe spaces where women can talk, listen, feel heard without judgment, and connect with others who understand their experiences. In a society where silence is often expected and emotional strength is taken for granted, these spaces offer something rare – validation, dignity, and the reminder that no one is truly alone.

Women are not asking for rescue, they are asking to be seen, to be respected, and to have room to breathe. The desire for more peer-based spaces, where women can lift one another up, reflects a deep understanding that change begins in community. When stories are shared honestly and received with care, they become tools for healing, learning, and action. Trust is built not through big programs or distant reforms, but through consistent acts of listening, empathy, and shared purpose.



What emerges from these voices is not just a picture of suffering – it is a narrative of resistance, creativity, and quiet leadership. From navigating silence at the dinner table to guiding others with kindness at work, women are constantly making space for others, even when no one makes space for them. They carry far more than their fair share – not because they should, but because they have had to.

And yet, they still hold the door open – for each other, and for future generations.

These stories remind us that dialogue is not just a method—it is an act of recognition.

It is a way of saying: *"your story matters, and so do you".*

## 2.3 Focus Group 3 “Beyond Borders: Kyrgyz Women Diaspora Leaders Reimagining Connection and Change”

This subchapter focuses on the daily lives, thoughts, and leadership roles of Kyrgyz women living in Europe. Many of them run diaspora organizations or initiatives and say that moving abroad sparked not only a personal change but also a new dedication to community, identity, and support across borders. Their stories show that migration, though marked by loss and hardship, can also be a space for reinventing themselves and building shared strength.

### Identity, belonging, and self-reinvention

For many, the migration journey began with a sense of identity loss. Separated from familiar culture, women often felt invisible, uncertain, and alone. Reconnecting with Kyrgyz traditions—like making *shyrdak* felt crafts, cooking national dishes, or celebrating holidays such as Nowruz—became a source of comfort and belonging. These cultural activities helped women feel grounded and at home in unfamiliar places.

Informal gatherings built around these traditions created safe spaces where migrant women could speak openly about their experiences – whether loneliness, racism, or legal struggles – without fear of judgment. Through storytelling, crafts, and shared projects, women explored what it means to be Kyrgyz, to be a migrant, and to be a woman navigating life in a new country. These peer-led conversations often felt more personal and lasting than formal programs, offering emotional connection, practical advice, and a deep sense of community.

### Emotional labor and informal leadership

Many Kyrgyz women living abroad take on the role of informal leaders in their communities. They help bridge cultures, offer emotional support, and provide practical assistance to other migrant women. This includes helping with documents, guiding people through integration processes, offering shelter or childcare, and simply being someone others can rely on.

This work is almost always unpaid and emotionally exhausting. These women often feel stretched thin – caring for others while also managing their own families, jobs, or studies. Despite their commitment, they receive little recognition or financial support. Instead, they carry the weight of community care on their own shoulders, driven by a deep sense of responsibility and solidarity.

## Gender roles and support structures

Old gender rules follow people wherever they go. In many diaspora families, women are still expected to keep traditions, run the household, raise children, and ease conflicts between generations. These duties come on top of paid work, since most families rely on two incomes to cover higher living costs abroad.

Living abroad, however, can open space for change. Seeing new laws, social rules, and workplace cultures that support gender equality encourages some couples to rethink who does what. Some younger families now share housework and also support women's roles outside the home. Migration was described not just as a journey of physical relocation, but a chance to rethink family roles, sometimes leading to fairer partnerships.

## Diaspora-to-homeland linkages

Despite living abroad, diaspora members keep strong ties to Kyrgyzstan. Their commitment goes beyond nostalgia – it is expressed through concrete projects aimed at giving back. These include mentorship programs for students, educational forums, culture, and planning investments in women-led tourism, fashion, and handicrafts in regions like Talas.

They see this as a form of transnational activism - serving Kyrgyzstan from afar through influence, exchange, and bridge-building, not just the idea of returning home.

## Cultural diplomacy and soft power

Women in the diaspora have leveraged cultural heritage as a tool of connection, education, and advocacy. Initiatives such as art exhibitions, documentary films, and women's football tournaments not only promote Kyrgyz culture abroad but also provide platforms for women's leadership.

These activities function as soft power - non-political yet powerful means of visibility, recognition, and dialogue. Several initiatives gained international attention, including museum collaborations and partnerships with local European authorities, highlighting how Kyrgyz women abroad act as cultural ambassadors.

## Mental health, loneliness, and resilience

Migration carries a heavy emotional weight. In the first years abroad, many felt deep sadness, a sense of not fitting in, and even emotional collapse – losing track of who they were. Finding or building a community became a lifeline. Shared rituals, mutual help, and the simple reminder “*you are not alone*” helped women regain resilience. These words grew into networks of trust and empowerment.

This subchapter shows how diaspora women leaders not only face hard challenges but also create new paths for themselves and others. Their stories remind us that, even when borders divide, solidarity and vision can weave new futures.



## Unity and support in the Kyrgyz diaspora

Across Europe, Kyrgyz women leaders keep a tight network. Messaging groups, cultural clubs, and social-media pages link someone in Warsaw with someone in Milan in seconds. Knowing that “if I travel to Italy, there’s a Kyrgyz sister I can call” brings real peace of mind – whether for quick advice, a spare couch, or simply a familiar meal when homesickness hits.

A key force behind this connection is Danaker, which regularly brings Kyrgyz women across Europe together – both online and in person. These gatherings, much like a *kurak* quilt, stitch people together by offering a steady space to meet, exchange ideas, and build plans as a community.

Generational differences surface, but they rarely block cooperation. Joint projects – conferences, skill-sharing workshops, cultural events – are growing because planning together lets leaders learn from each other and spread culture and support across borders. Each collaboration adds another thread to a Europe-wide safety net, turning scattered communities into a strong, supportive network.

## Conclusion: Listening Beneath the Surface

Like a *kurak* quilt – made by joining many different pieces of fabric into one meaningful whole – this chapter brings together the voices of women from across Kyrgyzstan and its diaspora. Each story is shaped by a different reality: life in rural areas, migration, working with institutions, or quiet acts of care and resistance. Yet all these voices come together to show the strength, complexity, and resilience of women’s lives.

These conversations showed the real and sometimes conflicting experiences women live with –holding silence and community, tradition and change, hardship and leadership. Some lead through formal roles. Others lead through small but powerful acts like mentoring, helping, or simply listening. Their stories remind us that strength often exists alongside struggle.

This chapter makes space for many truths – for all the different roles, identities, and challenges women carry. It also shows how gender connects with things like income, geography, migration, and cultural expectations, shaping the paths women can or cannot take.

For facilitators and community leaders, this chapter offers a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, and emotional landscapes women move through every day. They call us to listen more deeply, to speak with care, and to create space where women feel seen and safe. Real dialogue starts by recognizing the layers of a woman’s life.

As you begin to design and lead dialogue sessions, let these voices guide you – not only in what is said, but in how it is received. True inclusion begins with listening beneath the surface and creating space for honesty, complexity, and healing. These stories are not just information – they are invitations to see what real change can look like. Change doesn’t come from big speeches or perfect plans, but from connection: in shared meals, quiet conversations, traditions, and trust. Like a *kurak* quilt, strong and inclusive futures are built piece by piece, by many hands, with care.

# KURAK VOICES TOOLKIT

---

**A practical guide for local leaders facilitating public dialogue with women in Kyrgyzstan**

This toolkit was designed for local community leaders, NGO staff, and facilitators across Kyrgyzstan who are working with women – especially those from vulnerable or underrepresented backgrounds.

Rooted in the voices of women, local leaders, and diaspora changemakers, this guide offers practical tools, facilitation techniques, and lived insights to help you create meaningful, inclusive dialogue spaces. Whether you're hosting a village circle, a city discussion, or a one-on-one conversation, this toolkit is here to support you.

The name **Kurak** means *patchwork* – a beautiful Kyrgyz tradition of stitching together diverse fabrics into one unified piece. Similarly, this toolkit weaves together many voices, perspectives, and practices to support meaningful social change. It celebrates the strength found in diversity, the wisdom in collective reflection, and the power of community-led transformation.

This toolkit is your companion as you help create the kinds of spaces where women feel seen, heard, and empowered to shape the future of their communities.

*Let's begin - together.*

Kurak Voices: Fostering Inclusive Dialogue for Change is a partnership project between the Migration and Human Trafficking Council under the Speaker of the Kyrgyz Republic's Parliament (MHTC) and the Association DANAHER diaspora of women from Kyrgyzstan in Poland.

The project benefits from the expertise of the **Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue**, and is supported by the **EU Global Diaspora Facility (EUDiF)**, implemented by the **International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)** and funded by the European Union.