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## RELATIVE IMPACT OF ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES ON LABOUR MIGRATION FLOWS FROM CENTRAL ASIA

**ABSTRACT** Comparative studies show an ambiguous effect of the application of administrative controls on the level of migrant inflows, with the relative impact of the measures weaker than that of long-term economic or cultural factors. The case of Central Asian migration to Kazakhstan and Russia demonstrates the interplay of administrative measures and economic shocks with strategies of migrant groups and individuals. The review of recent surveys, interviews and focus groups with migrants from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan suggests that changes in the policies of destination countries have a limited impact on their own plans. The long-term determinants, such as the support provided by diasporas and the fundamental economic pull and push factors mitigate the effects of sanctions or facilitating measures.

**Key words:** determinants of migration, migration policy, labour migration, Central Asia – migration flows, Russia – migration policy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Statement of the problem and main thesis

Since 2013, the Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek labour migration to Russia and Kazakhstan has been subject to three new factors: (1) the economic crisis affecting both destination countries, significantly reducing both the number of available positions and the workers' incomes and remittances; (2) the application of administrative sanctions against migrants, resulting in fines, expulsion and re-entry bans; and (3) the facilitation of labour mobility as part of the Eurasian regional integration and introduction of new forms of legal employment in the destination countries. This provides a unique opportunity to observe the relative strength of migration control instruments, which, on the one hand, aim to reduce the scale of some migrant flows (sanctions), and on the other hand represent the first attempt at introducing selective migration management (facilitation). The effectiveness of these instruments will be considered against the backdrop of the economic crisis and long-term factors, determining the volume and composition of the Central Asian labour migration to Russia and Kazakhstan.

It will be argued that administrative rules (such as facilitation of movement of some groups of migrants or sanctions against irregular migration) of countries of destination have so far had a limited effect of influencing migratory flows between Central Asia and Russia. The explanation will be sought in assessing the relative strength of two sets of determinants. Firstly, a set of fundamental "push" and "pull" factors stimulates continued labour outflow from Central Asia. This consists, on the one hand, of well-developed migration networks, taking advantage of the largely irregular character of employment, and, on the other hand, of the scarcity of incentives for return of the migrants to the countries of origin (continued wage gap, lack of adequate jobs and weak or non-existent framework for re-integrating the returning migrants to the local labour market). Secondly, the capacity of the Central Asian states and Russia to regulate the flows of migrant workers (conducting more selective policy) has been further weakened by the impact of post-2013 economic crisis, most evident in the devaluation of currencies (rouble and tenge) and resulting drop in remittances.

Nevertheless, while the regulations are not expected to have a substantial long-term impact, they brought about certain realignment in the composition of labour migrant flows, stimulating mobility for the favoured categories of migrants (Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs) and forcing the migrants subject to sanctions and their households to adopt certain short-term strategies, such as the migration of family members. In effect, the administrative measures have exerted certain influence on the ethnic and gender composition of Central Asian labour migration.

### 1.2. Structure and sources of analysis

The article will refer to the available statistics from the countries of destination as well as to qualitative studies (surveys, interviews and focus groups), carried out recently

among Central Asian migrants to identify the short-term response and forecast the mid-term trend in the volume of labour migration to Russia and Kazakhstan as well as review migrants' strategies, relating them to the key determinants of migration. The key objective is to verify the impact of applying sanctions against irregular migrants (push factor) and of policies on regularizing their status (pull factor) on the reorientation of migration flows within a single migration area, using the case of the flow between the southern rim of Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) and Russia and Kazakhstan.

The text is organized as follows: the first section states the main thesis and summarizes the methods applied to verify it. In the second section, an overview of the theoretical framework and several background studies on the determinants of Central Asian migration is provided. First, the problem is conceptualized by reference to a number of comparative studies, analyzing the effectiveness of administrative controls on labour migrant flows, focusing in particular on the impact in the conditions of economic crises. Second, case studies of various labour migrant flows from Central Asia are discussed to establish the relative impact of economic and administrative factors in the period until 2012.

The third and fourth sections analyze the interplay between the facilitating and restrictive measures for determining the volume and directions of Central Asian migration. The third section presents the main features of the measures and reviews the dynamics of migration flows, referring to official statistics while the following part concentrates on migrant strategies in response to these measures, reflecting the results of recent surveys, interviews and focus groups, carried out with affected migrants. The sections are followed by a set of conclusions.

In addition to the analysis of relevant empirical studies, the article presents the findings of a comparative assessment, carried out by the author in 2014 as part of the work of an international team, assembled and overseen by the sub-regional coordination office of International Organization for Migration for Central Asia in Astana, Kazakhstan in the framework of the IOM Development Fund project, Mapping on Irregular Migration in Central Asia. The results of the project were published in the *Mapping on Irregular Migration in Central Asia 2014* report.<sup>1</sup> For purposes of identifying the volume and directions of migrant flows within the Central Asian region, official statistics on residence and employment of foreigners were collected from several state bodies of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, complementing the data on emigration and return of Central Asian migrants, accessed from the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation. The statistical data were then analyzed and their validity as well as drawbacks were assessed by experts in the field of migration policy from the three countries.

The current presentation draws also on field assessment, carried out by the author with the support of the sub-regional coordination office of International Organization for Migration for Central Asia in Astana in five locations in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

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<sup>1</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Mapping on Irregular Migration in Central Asia 2014*, Astana 2015.

in August-October 2015. The assessment featured interviews with national experts, government officials and community leaders as well as focus groups with Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek migrants returning from Russia and staying in, or transiting through Kazakhstan. The total of four focus groups was organized with Central Asian migrant workers subject to re-entry bans in Russia (both recent returnees and persons subject to the ban for a longer period of time), in various locations. Two of them were held in Kazakhstan (Tajiks in Almaty and Uzbeks in Shymkent) and two others in Kyrgyzstan (Kyrgyz citizens of Kyrgyz and Uzbek ethnicity in Osh). Altogether 87 migrants took part in them, out of which 38 (44%) were women. The participants represented three ethnic groups: Kyrgyz (45, of which 23 women), Uzbek (37, of which 15 women) and Tajik (5, all men). In addition, three individual interviews were held with migrant workers from Tajikistan, resident in the different cities in Kazakhstan (Aktobe, Almaty and Shymkent).

## 2. DETERMINANTS OF LABOUR MIGRANT FLOWS FROM CENTRAL ASIA

### 2.1. Literature review

While empirical evidence is inconclusive, a number of recent quantitative studies demonstrate that the application of restrictive measures (such as tightening of visa policies or more stringent enforcement of sanctions against resident non-nationals) has an ambiguous effect. On the one hand, migrant inflows to countries applying restrictive measures tend to decline;<sup>2</sup> on the other hand, migrant outflows from these countries decrease even more significantly, suggesting that migrants react to sanctions through settlement in the destination country.<sup>3</sup>

In response to sanctions adopted by countries of destination such as deterrence or expulsion, migrants have come up with effective counterstrategies, leading to their growing dependence on informal networks and falling into irregularity.<sup>4</sup> De Haas conceptualizes a range of responses to immigration restrictions in the broad notion of “substitution”, ranging from spatial reorientation to third countries, categorical diversion to irregular forms of migration, temporal change in the form of an increased willingness to migrate for fear of further restrictions and reverse flow or limited readiness to leave the country of destination.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> F. Ortega, G. Peri, ‘The Effect of Income and Immigration Policies on International Migration’, *Migration Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2013), pp. 47-74, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/migration/mns004>>; M. Czaika, H. De Haas, *The Effect of Visa Policies on International Migration Dynamics*, Oxford 2014 (*DEMIG/IMI Working Paper*, 89).

<sup>3</sup> M. Czaika, H. De Haas, *The Effect...*

<sup>4</sup> D. Broeders, and G. Engbersen, ‘The Fight against Illegal Migration: Identification Policies and Immigrants’ Counterstrategies’, *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 50, No. 12 (2007), pp. 1592-1609, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0002764207302470>>.

<sup>5</sup> H. De Haas, *The Determinants of International Migration*, Oxford 2011 (*DEMIG/IMI Working Paper*, 2).

The relative impact of the application of more restrictive policies is hard to estimate when other migration determinants are taken into account.<sup>6</sup> Analysis of past financial crises reveals that while economic downturns reduce labour migrant inflows to a limited extent,<sup>7</sup> they clearly influence migrants' strategies. Migrant flows prove to be resistant to contracting labour markets in the destination states as migrant workers who are laid off tend to fall into irregularity by continuing to work without authorization rather than to return home.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2. Background to the problem

The relative impact of the economic crisis on labour migrant flows has been a subject of investigation with regard to the third-largest destination country, Russia, and the main influx of migrant workers from Central Asia. An early analysis, published in 2009, considered various alternative outcomes in the wake of the financial crisis, affecting the Russian economy.<sup>9</sup> The volume of migrant inflows and of remittances were considered in three basic scenarios: (1) dramatic and sustained drop in the scale of labour migration and in the levels of remittances and resulting mass return of migrants to their countries of origin, (2) relatively small declines in both immigration and remittances with the unemployed migrants remaining in Russia and seeking other jobs, (3) short-term decreases in both migration and remittances, followed by the increased supply of new migrant workers, seeking to make up for the lost income. When observing the trends in the winter of 2008-2009, Marat found evidence for the third scenario of "replacement migration", suggesting strong resistance to external shocks.

This resistance could be attributed to the long history of labour migration from Central Asia to the urban centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg as well as Siberia. Rahmonova-Schwarz contests the common misconception that the Central Asian labour migrant flows to Russia were a direct consequence of the economic dislocation in the 1990s.<sup>10</sup> She argues that the much larger movement occurring since the late 1990s was a continuation of the outflows which had been associated with interregional migration, facilitated by urbanization and industrialization of several regions of the RSFSR exhibiting deficits of workforce in the 1970s. Noting the gradual rise of the Central Asian communities in Russia (up from 140,000 in 1970 to 248,000 in 1989), Rahmonova-

<sup>6</sup> M. Czaika, H. De Haas, 'The Effectiveness of Immigration Policies', *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (2013), pp. 487-508, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2013.00613.x>>.

<sup>7</sup> G. Beets, F. Willekens, 'The Global Economic Crisis and International Migration: An Uncertain Outlook' in *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research* (2009), pp. 19-38, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1553/populationyearbook2009s19>>.

<sup>8</sup> K. Koser, *The Impact of Financial Crises on International Migration: Lessons Learned*, Geneva 2009 (IOM Migration Research Series, 37).

<sup>9</sup> E. Marat, *Labor Migration in Central Asia. Implications of the Global Economic Crisis*, Washington 2009 (*Silk Road Paper*).

<sup>10</sup> D. Rahmonova-Schwarz, 'Migrations during the Soviet Period and in the Early Years of USSR's Disolution: A Focus on Central Asia', *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2010), pp. 9-30.

-Schwarz concludes that the early entrants from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan who opted to stay in Russia *played a crucial role in forming labor migrant networks in the 1990s*, most crucially as *significant propellers of the inflow of cheap labor force*.<sup>11</sup> These informal networks then became instrumental in lowering barriers to migrants' entry into the Russian labour market by serving as intermediaries and providing continued support, necessary to offset the low socio-economic status of Central Asian migrant workers.

The 1990s witnessed the rupture of many of the formal ties between Central Asia and Russia as the Soviet Union disintegrated. This was followed by the surge in migration of ethnic minorities from the countries of the region. Among them were ethnic Russians, whose exodus reached its annual peak, bringing into Russia the group of more than a million compatriots, departing from Central Asia in 1994. Nevertheless, as Laruelle observes, it was migration of ethnic Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Turkmens that helped re-establish the cultural, economic and social ties between the former center and the regions.<sup>12</sup> In the second half of the 1990s, the ratio of ethnic Russians in the emigration from Central Asia gradually decreased in favour of the outflow of the representatives of ethnic majorities from these countries (so-called "titular nationalities"). Still, until the turn of the century, the migration of the Central Asian workers to Russia had virtually no effect on the formation of sizable diasporas. In the decade of the 1990s, the majority of Central Asian diasporas in Russia grew by a small margin, and the increase was only partly the consequence of immigration, as these groups were characterized by a relatively strong demographic growth. By 2002, the number of the Kazakhs residing in Russia had risen from 636,000 in 1989 to 654,000 while the figure for the Uzbeks had increased from 97,000 to 123,000. Only the Tajiks who had fled a civil war, raging between 1992 and 1996, recorded a substantial increase of residents in Russia in that period: from 38,000 to 120,000. Other nationalities accounted for a small share of foreigners in Russia: 32,000 Kyrgyz and 33,000 Turkmens.<sup>13</sup>

However, once the transition shock was over and the Russian economy rebounded, a boost was observed in the Central Asian migration bound for Russia. Central Asian countries became the main suppliers of migrant workforce to the Russian labour market. In the 2000s, over 11 million work permits were issued to foreigners in Russia and in 2012 alone the number of legally employed non-nationals exceeded 2 million while officials and experts agreed that another 3-5 million persons worked without authorization.<sup>14</sup> According to the Federal Migration Service, migrant workers from Central Asia were among the largest national groups on the Russian labour market. In October 2013, the citizens of the five countries of the region accounted for over 47% of the total of legally resident foreigners (5.4 million out of 11.3 million). The largest group

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 20

<sup>12</sup> M. Laruelle, 'Central Asian Labor Migrants in Russia: The "Diasporization" of the Central Asian States?', *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2007), pp. 101-119.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>14</sup> M. Denisenko, Y. Varshavskaya, *Migrants at the Russian Labour Market: Characteristics, Status, Mobility*, 2013, p. 2 (*SEARCH Working Paper*, 3/21).

consisted of Uzbek nationals (3 million), followed by the citizens of Tajikistan (around 1.2 million), Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (over half a million each).<sup>15</sup> Thus, over just a decade, labour immigration boosted the size of the Central Asian diasporas in Russia, with this effect being the strongest among the Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kyrgyzs.

The explanations provided for the rise and continuation of labour migrant flows from Central Asia to Russia focus on a range of inter-related factors: economic opportunities for migrants, stabilization of socio-economic conditions in the countries of origin, and the cultural attraction. The combination of these factors leads some researchers to conclude that the migratory flows between Central Asia and Russia have a permanent and fixed character, leading to the formation of a migration system, in which Russia occupies the position of an established center, while Kazakhstan has turned into a new sub-regional center.<sup>16</sup> In this model, the primary power of attraction consists of the size of the economy of a destination country while labour supply is guaranteed by the high demographic growth and the lack of opportunities for absorbing the labour surplus within the country of origin.

### 3. MIGRATION CONTROLS AND THEIR EFFECT ON CENTRAL ASIAN LABOUR MIGRATION

#### 3.1. Changes in migration policies of destination countries and their effects

Since 2012 significant changes were gradually introduced to migration regimes in Russia and Kazakhstan, which are the main countries of destination of Central Asian workers. The changes have diverging effects – facilitating mobility of some categories of foreigners while introducing stricter controls on the movement and stay of selected groups of migrants. The simultaneous application of these measures thus may be expected to bring about changes in the composition of migrant flows into these two destination countries. The body of the article will review official statistics and results of sociological research to assess the relative impact of these changes on the volume of the Central Asian flows, setting them against other determinants of migration (general “push” and “pull” factors as well as the shocks of the economic crisis and currency devaluation).

In November 2010 members of the Single Economic Space (later transformed into the Eurasian Economic Union) – Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan – signed the agreement on legal status of migrant workers and members of their families. The Agreement came into force in 2012, relaxing the terms of residence and employment of the nationals of the three countries, legally residing in another member country of the SES. Migrant workers holding the citizenship of one of the member countries as well as their

<sup>15</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Mapping on Irregular Migration...*, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> S. Ryazantsev, O. Korneev, ‘Russia and Kazakhstan in Eurasian Migration System: Development Trends, Socio-Economic Consequences of Migration and Approaches to Regulation’ in A. Di Bartolomeo, S. Makaryan, A. Weinart (eds.), *Regional Migration Report: Russia and Central Asia*, European University Institute, Florence 2014.

family members enjoy a longer period of stay than other foreigners (30 days) during which they are not required to register their residence. Moreover, they may be employed without the need to apply for work permits or to fill designated quotas. They are also entitled to a temporary stay for the duration of their employment contract, and once it is terminated after 90 days, they may conclude a new contract with another employer. Kyrgyzstan became member of the Eurasian Economic Union in January 2015, which extended the facilitated terms to Kyrgyz citizens, working in Russia and Kazakhstan.

Russia relaxed the conditions for employment for nationals of other CIS countries as well by launching the system of work patents on 1 January 2015. CIS nationals are obliged to apply for a work patent not later than 30 days since their arrival in Russia, and must pass a test of the Russian language, laws and history within 30 days after application. Upon receipt of the patent, the migrant is free to look for employment for 60 days, and the patent authorizes an employment for a year (renewable once) outside of quotas for foreign employment.

In turn, on 1 January 2014 Kazakhstan put into effect a scheme of work patents, for which the nationals of nine countries (including Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) are eligible. Kazakhstani program also envisions patents valid for 12 months but has a narrower scope, applying only to individuals, rendering services to households (child and home care, construction and renovation of homes). The scheme was taken up by the citizens of Uzbekistan: in the first eight months of 2015, the total number of Uzbek work permit recipients reached 97,000, which represented a significant increase over 2014 (69,204). In 2014 another scheme was introduced to facilitate the employment the immigration of qualified workers in the form of a quota, authorizing, among others, specialists in the oil- and gas-extracting and processing industries. The quota was expanded to 63,290 persons (up from 37,480 the previous year).

Parallel to these developments, the main countries of destination of Central Asian migrant workers introduced a set of administrative measures, aimed at curbing irregular stay and work of non-nationals. In 2012 a new Concept on State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation 2012-2025 was adopted, which in turn resulted in the changes in its administrative offence code and migration legislation in July 2013.<sup>17</sup> Under the new regulations, overstayers or non-nationals lacking proper residence registration as well as violators of a range of administrative regulations became liable to fines and bans on re-entry to the territory of Russia in case they committed another offence within three years. The penalties were made heavier in January 2015 as re-entry bans were extended to 5 and 10 years. While re-entry bans had been part of the Russian immigration legislation since 1996, they could be at last applied effectively through the use of a centralized database.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> On 23 July 2013, amendments were introduced in the Code of Administrative Offences, the Federal Law No. 114-FZ 'On the procedure of exiting and entering the Russian Federation' and the Federal Law No. 115-FZ 'On the legal status of foreign citizens in the Russian Federation'.

<sup>18</sup> K. Kluczevska, *Migrants' Re-entry Bans to the Russian Federation: The Tajik Story*, Bishkek 2014, p. 6 (*Central Asia Security Policy Brief*, 16).

According to the regulations, foreigners might be denied entry into the Russian Federation on the following grounds: irregular border crossing, supplying forged documents or false information, criminal liability, record of administrative liability (including unpaid taxes or fines). In effect, migrants could become subject to these sanctions through failure to comply with the administrative rules for residence and employment, such as late residence registration or late receipt of a work patent as well as attempting to submit necessary documents through third persons. While migrants in many regions of the country tended to be fined (2,000-5,000 roubles, which was increased to 15,000 in 2015), migrants residing or working without authorization in the cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg or neighbouring regions were subject to obligatory deportation.

The number of re-entry bans decreased over time: while 426,194 were issued between January and July 2014, the number dropped by a quarter to 321,205 in the first seven months of 2015. Nevertheless, by July 2015 as many as 1,460,000 foreigners had been issued re-entry bans and another 2,200,000 were considered to be at risk of falling under the ban while crossing Russia's border on account of overstaying their residence in the country. Around 500,000 persons were denied entry in all of 2015 and in January 2016, the total number of re-entry banned persons rose to 1,650,000.<sup>19</sup> While the split by nationalities of persons subject to the ban is not available, Central Asian nationals have been particularly strongly affected, and the numbers of re-entry banned migrants climbed in 2014. If in July 2014, the figure stood at 202,000 Tajik and 43,000 Kyrgyz nationals, the numbers peaked at 333,000 Tajiks (November 2015) and 193,000 Kyrgyz migrants (February 2015).

In this context, it is worth investigating the interplay of the enforcement of two contradictory migration regimes (Eurasian integration and application of sanctions) on the nationals of Kyrgyzstan, the country which joined the Eurasian Economic Union on 1 January 2015. Since February 2015, work proceeded on removing a significant part of Kyrgyz citizens from the list of re-entry banned migrants. This was carried out as part of bilateral agreements on legalization of administrative offenders and subsequent practical cooperation of Inter-Ministerial Commission of the Federal Migration Service and Ministry of Labor, Migration and Youth of Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz migrants could regularize their status on the grounds of marriage to a Russian citizen, secured employment or studies in Russia. By November 2015, as many as 75,000 Kyrgyz nationals were removed from the re-entry banned list, bringing down the number of persons subject to the ban to 118,000.<sup>20</sup>

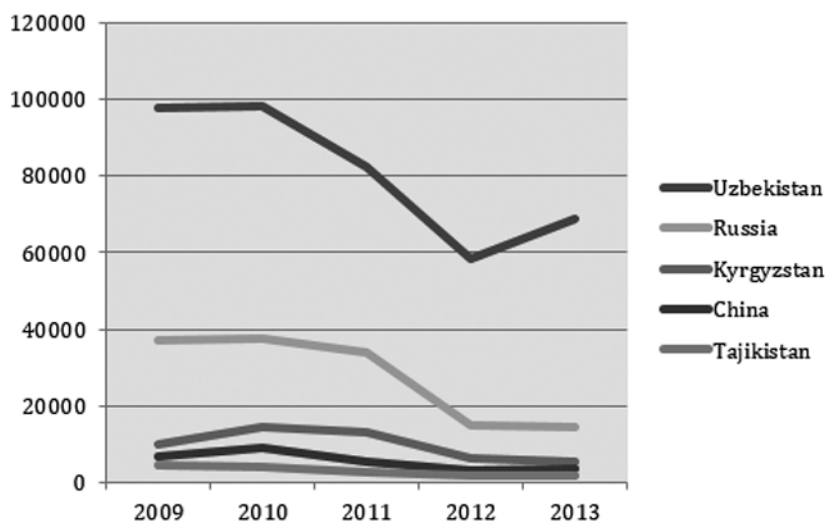
Changes in the status of various categories of migrants were reflected also in the statistics of administrative sanctions applied towards foreigners in Kazakhstan (Fig. 1). The entry into force in 2012 of the facilitated conditions for residence and employment of the citizens of Russia cut the number of Russian nationals subject to sanctions by more than a half. In turn, the number of Uzbek migrants subject to sanctions rose in

<sup>19</sup> Data of the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation.

<sup>20</sup> Data of the Ministry of Labor, Migration and Youth of the Kyrgyz Republic.

2013 by one-fifth, which was in line with the overall increase in the scale of labour immigration from Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan.

Fig. 1. Foreigners subject to administrative sanctions in Kazakhstan



Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan

### 3.2. Dynamics of migration flows

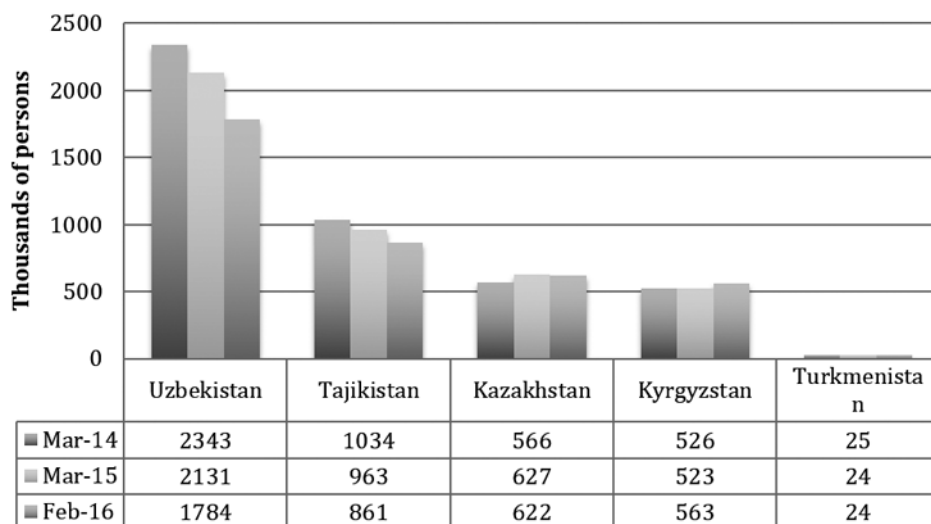
According to the data of the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation, the number of foreigners who registered their residence in the first seven months of 2015 stood at 5,267,420, which marked a nearly 10% decline compared to the corresponding period of 2014. Nationals of Central Asian countries consistently account for the majority within this figure. As of 27 August 2015, there were 2,095,000 citizens of Uzbekistan and 978,000 nationals of Tajikistan who were registered in Russia. Other sizable groups were the citizens of Kazakhstan (694,000) and Kyrgyzstan (514,000).

However, when the change in the inflows is analyzed by citizenship, two divergent trends become apparent for the period of 2014-2016 (Fig. 2). On the one hand, strong declines were observed in terms of inflows from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which are the two countries remaining outside of the Eurasian Economic Union. There were 24% fewer Uzbek nationals and 17% fewer Tajiks registered in Russia in February 2016 (compared to March 2014) with the particularly strong reductions noted in 2015. In turn, the number of the Kyrgyz nationals stabilized in 2014 and rose by 7% between March 2015 and February 2016.

Some recent developments may also be observed with regard to the gender of the outflow from individual countries within the region. Vast majority of migrants from the leading countries of origin, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, have been male, concen-

trated in certain economic sectors (trade and construction). Men have consistently accounted for over 80% of migrants from these two countries (Fig. 3). However, the share of women grew in recent months in both national groups due to the steeper declines among Uzbek and Tajik men (15-16%) as opposed to relatively smaller decreases among Uzbek women (11%) and actual slight rise among Tajik women in that period. In contrast, the two other countries, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, exhibit a more balanced structure of emigration – both in terms of gender (women accounting for over 40% of the flows in both countries) and sectoral distribution (also including services).

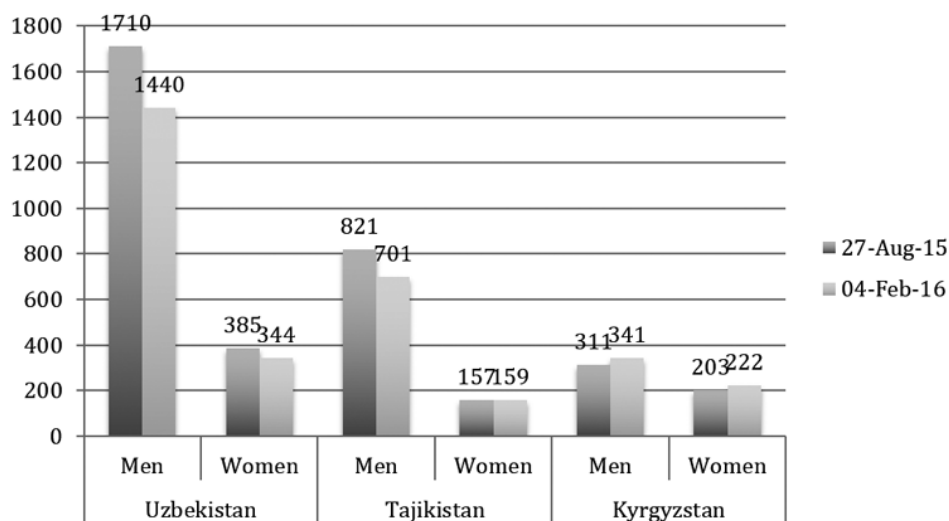
Fig. 2. Central Asian nationals registered in Russia, 2014-2016 (by citizenship)



Source: Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation

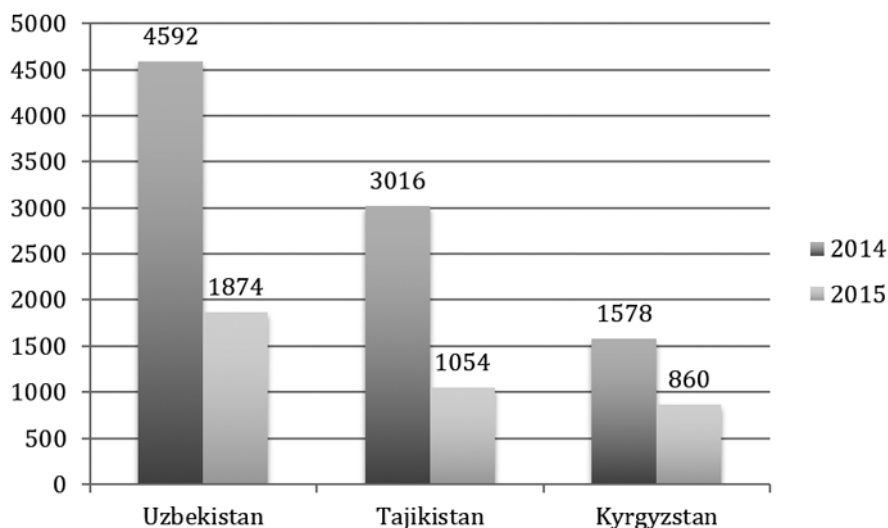
While migrant flows declined relatively little, the combination of economic crisis, currency devaluation and administrative sanctions resulted in sharp contraction in remittances (Fig. 4). The rate of decline was much higher among migrants from the countries which remained outside the Eurasian Union (65% for Tajikistan and 59% for Uzbekistan). In comparison, the drop was less dramatic (46%) in the case of Kyrgyzstan, which joined the Union in January 2015. However, the effect could only partially be linked to the efforts at reducing the number of re-entry banned Kyrgyz migrants as the alleviating measures came into force only starting in May 2015. Instead, the facilitation of conditions of residence and employment, which became effective since January 2015 could play a larger role.

Fig. 3. Central Asian nationals registered in Russia, 2015-2016 (by gender)



Source: Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation

Fig. 4. Migrant remittances from Russia to Central Asian countries (Jan-Sept 2014 vs. Jan-Sept 2015) (million USD)



Source: Central Bank of the Russian Federation

In light of the barriers to labour migration to Russia, a question may be posed as to whether another destination could not serve as at least a partial replacement for workers from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan or Uzbekistan. Although its economy is ten times

smaller than that of Russia, Kazakhstan boasts as the only Central Asian country some indicators which place it within range of Russia's performance. Kazakhstan's nominal GDP per capita stands at 12,276 compared to Russia's 12,735 USD<sup>21</sup> while since 2009 the country has consistently outperformed Russia in terms of GDP growth. In the period since 2009 also gross average monthly wages in Kazakhstan were only 25% lower than those in Russia, rising from 456 USD in 2009 to 715 USD four years later.<sup>22</sup>

Kazakhstan is also interested in attracting foreign workforce as it has been experiencing labour shortages, which is a consequence of several factors. Firstly, the larger size and diversity of the Russian labour market continue to attract some, especially qualified, workers from Kazakhstan who enjoy mobility within the Eurasian Economic Union. Secondly, the demand has been on the rise for specialists in certain sectors, driving the country's economy, such as mining and oil and gas industries or considered priorities in the country's long-term economic strategy, such as machinery and automobile sectors. Finally, interest has grown in lower-paid and unqualified immigrant workforce in construction and agriculture where shortages have arisen due to internal migration.

The waiver of the requirement for applying for work permits for the nationals of Customs Union (since January 2015, the Eurasian Economic Union), in particular for the citizens of Russia and (since January 2015) Kyrgyzstan was similarly reflected in the statistics of legal labour migration into Kazakhstan. The number of Russian citizens declaring employment or official business declined by half between 2011 and 2012 (down from 30,341 to 16,147), which paralleled the sharp contraction in the total residence registration data for this group: from 657,427 in 2011 to 328,845 in 2012 (Table 1). In turn, the number of Uzbek nationals who registered their residence climbed steadily, rising from 351,882 in 2009, reaching 404,468 in 2012 and topping at 530,683 in 2014. As in the case of the Russians, only a fraction declared employment or official business as purposes of temporary stay in Kazakhstan, but in contrast to the Russians, Uzbek nationals have stronger incentives to legalize their work as they continue to require work permits. If in 2012 only 4,034 Uzbek citizens declared either work or official business as purposes of their stay in Kazakhstan, the figure rose sharply to 12,234 in 2013 and more than doubled in 2014 when it reached 30,815 persons.

Table 1. Registered CIS temporary residents in Kazakhstan, 2009-2014

Country	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Uzbekistan	351 882	359 923	404 468	431 919	495 167	530 683
Russia	588 398	624 935	657 427	328 845	159 814	149 577
Kyrgyzstan	28 846	72 645	93 848	103 001	93 127	94 313
Azerbaijan	16 779	20 291	19 219	20 438	24 671	21 898
Tajikistan	10 965	15 397	10 915	10 193	12 917	18 463

<sup>21</sup> Data of the World Bank 2014.

<sup>22</sup> UNECE statistics.

Country	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Other	39 614	36 701	30 338	33 744	34 614	37 549
All CIS	1 036 484	1 129 892	1 216 215	928 140	820 310	852 483

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, presented in IOM 2015

However, Kazakhstan has so far only partially managed to attract nationals of other Central Asian countries to its labour market. The labour migration to Kazakhstan did not increase significantly from the other two major countries of origin – Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This could be expected with regard to Kyrgyzstan, whose nationals gained access to the Russian labour market with the country's integration into the Eurasian Economic Union. However, interest in taking up employment in Kazakhstan has been rather limited among Tajiks although some increase has been observed recently. Relative to 2014 when 980 work permits were issued to Tajik nationals, as many as 3,312 permits were granted in the first eight months of 2015.

#### 4. DETERMINANTS OF MIGRANTS' RESPONSE TO POLICY MEASURES

##### 4.1. Migration surveys and forecasts

The impact of the changes in the migration regimes of countries of destination for Central Asian migration was a subject of several studies. One aspect was the influence of the Eurasian integration on the willingness to move of the nationals of member states. A series of surveys, conducted by the Smart Solutions recruiting company prior to and directly after Kazakhstan's entry into the Customs Union with Belarus and Russia, investigated the readiness to migrate to another country of the Union among skilled professionals in Kazakhstan. While in 2011 every fifth respondent declared interest in moving to Russia, a follow-up query revealed that by September 2012, every sixth respondent had left Kazakhstan while another 13% had been in the talks with a potential employer.

The results of these surveys did not provide a clear indication as to the actual impact of the new regime on migration propensity. While the researchers, conducting the study, were led to believe that the prospects of easier conditions for entry and employment would result in a "significant increase" of the migrant flow from Kazakhstan to countries with the more attractive labour markets, the results of the survey do not unequivocally validate this conclusion. In fact, in 2012, only half as many migrants (10% respondents) actually left for Russia as there were those who had declared their willingness to do so a year earlier. This point was raised in a 2013 critique by Tulegenov and Macakova who found the study to miss *the differentiation between intentional migration and natural trends in labor force movement*.<sup>23</sup> When comparing the trends prior to

<sup>23</sup> S. Tulegenov, L. Macakova, *The Nature of Changes in Migration in Kazakhstan Since Creation of the Customs Union*. Conference paper, Prague 2013.

and following the liberalization of movement within the Customs Union in 2012, they found the effects of the economic crisis to be much more substantial than those of the Eurasian integration.<sup>24</sup>

The prospects and consequences of Kyrgyzstan's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union triggered investigation into the influence on the labour migrant flows out of the country. Vinokurov and Pereboyev present the results of quantitative and qualitative opinion polls, taken in 2012 in both the main areas of destination (Moscow, Almaty) and of origin (nine Kyrgyz regions).<sup>25</sup> They noted the persisting "push" and "pull" factors, stimulating continued labour migration from Kyrgyzstan to Russia and Kazakhstan – wage gap and labour demand. An additional „encouraging" factor was the support obtained in the destination countries from the expat community – 63% of the Kyrgyz migrants bound for Kazakhstan and 81% of those in Russia declared the use of social networks.<sup>26</sup> When asked about their migration plans, 44% of Kyrgyz migrants in Russia and 33% of those in Kazakhstan intended to return home only after a period of labour emigration of more than a year while 6% and 9% respectively declared their interest in staying in Russia and Kazakhstan permanently.<sup>27</sup> The long-term forecast of labour migration to the Eurasian Economic Union countries (Russia and Kazakhstan) projects the annual growth of 3.5% until 2030. However, the authors note that the rate *will to a large extent depend on Russian and Kazakh migration policy*.<sup>28</sup> They conclude that the policy developments are, in turn, dependent on the continued labour demand and general economic situation.

The 2015 study by experts of the National Institute of the Strategic Studies of the Kyrgyz Republic<sup>29</sup> considers the impact of the economic crisis since 2014 in Russia as well as of the introduction of administrative measures (work patents) on the levels of labour migration and of remittances to Kyrgyzstan. Analyzing the dynamics of registered immigration to Russia, the study attributes the decline of the labour inflow from January to April 2015 to the combination of economic contraction (and resulting currency devaluation) and the financial burden of the introduction of additional requirements for obtaining work patents. In turn, the recovery of Kyrgyz immigration to Russia since June 2015 was linked to the successful efforts at removing some migrants from the list of re-entry banned persons.<sup>30</sup> Tracking the diverging GDP paths – decline in 2015 and much slower growth in Russia compared to a steady increase in Kyrgyzstan – the authors forecast in the short term a significant contraction of Kyrgyz

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 1459.

<sup>25</sup> E. Vinokurov, V. Pereboyev, 'Labour Migration and Human Capital in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: Impact of Accession to the SES' in *EDB Eurasian Integration Yearbook* (2013).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>29</sup> К. Карымшаков, Б. Сулайманова, Экономическая ситуация в Российской Федерации и ее влияние на миграционные процессы в Кыргызской Республике, Бишкек 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26.

migration to Russia (over 15% decline in 2015 and nearly 4% in 2016), which should level off in 2017.<sup>31</sup>

Another study considered the impact of administrative sanctions on Central Asian migrants' socioeconomic position and their strategies. Structured interviews with 102 migrants living in various regions of Tajikistan carried out in 2013 revealed that the lack of economic opportunities at home had been the primary motive for emigration, and that the majority of re-entry banned migrants were engaged in seasonal labour migration prior to falling under the ban.<sup>32</sup> Sanctions represented a shock to 86% of the interviewed migrants, who were not aware of being liable to a re-entry ban and learned of it only while trying to cross the Russian frontier again. The unexpected nature of the ban (at that time, typically applied for the duration of three years) made the returning migrants ill-prepared for the job search at home so that over 40% of them remained unemployed for the first three months since return.

However, one of the most difficult aspects of readjustment to the realities of the labour market in Tajikistan was the decline in the standard of living for the entire household in the absence of remittances from Russia. While three-quarters of migrant workers reported sending in between 100 and 500 USD every month,<sup>33</sup> the application of the ban significantly affected the family budgets so that every third respondent admitted that their family "can hardly afford clothes" while another quarter reported problems with affording food.<sup>34</sup> It comes therefore as no surprise that almost all interviewed migrants *who were close to the expiry of their re-entry ban said that they would go to the Russian Federation again as soon as they are allowed to*.<sup>35</sup> The results of the survey as well as the analysis of the cases of re-entry banned migrants turning in to IOM for assistance lead to the conclusion that in the absence of viable re-integration programs, administrative sanctions alone are insufficient to discourage further migration, which is well-established through the use of social networks.<sup>36</sup>

## 4.2. Focus groups

To verify the impact of recent sanctions on the interest in labour migration to Russia and Kazakhstan from the traditional countries of origin in Central Asia, interviews and focus groups were carried out by IOM in August 2015 in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan among migrants expelled from Russia. The interviews and focus groups identified migrant strategies for the period of duration of the re-entry ban. The respondents were asked to present their personal migration experiences (noting the factors influencing their decision to migrate) and to describe the main hardships faced during the stay in

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> A. Meier, *Tajik Migrants with Re-entry Bans to the Russian Federation*, Dushanbe 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Russia and Kazakhstan as well as upon return to the country of origin. In addition, they brought up their immediate reaction to the re-entry bans and reviewed the coping mechanisms to deal with the problems along their migration path and outlined their plans for the future.

The study reveals that workers returning from Russia to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan or Uzbekistan retain their interest first of all in returning to the destination country. They continue to face difficulties in re-entering the labour markets in the home regions not only as a consequence of limited job opportunities in the countries of origin, but also due to the emerging clash between migrants' expectations and reality. Firstly, as confirmed by the 2013 Eurasian Development Bank study, the migrants have come to rely on informal support networks developed within the diaspora in Russia to deal with the challenges associated with irregular status of employment – wages paid late or not fully, health hazards or fraud. In contrast, many migrants either did not develop corresponding strategies back home as they took up the first employment already in Russia or stayed away from home for a sufficiently long period of time. Secondly, migrants interviewed in August 2015 reported that they were not willing to stay home for economic reasons. They considered the time spent in the home country a loss as the rates paid there to qualified workers in their sectors of employment were far lower than those on the Russian market, and the cost of living (e.g. accommodation) in the capital cities or larger urban centers would consume a large part of their savings and reduce further the household's disposable income.

The interviewed Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek migrants stress that the labour market in their home region cannot offer them adequate jobs either with regard to the wage levels or conditions of work (working hours, breaks, organization of work and relations in the workplace). The fundamental role of the wage gap is noted also by the labour officials interviewed in the regions of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to which migrants return (Aktobe, Shimkent, Osh). Schemes aiming at reintegration of the returning migrants have had limited appeal, as according to officials the returnees *do not accept local work conditions*. Kyrgyz officials admit that even the steep devaluation of the Russian rouble had only a temporary and limited effect on migrants' decisions, and already in the summer of 2015, it may be concluded that the peak of returns is over. The group that did return consisted mainly of low-skilled migrants who had been hardest hit by the devaluation of the rouble, leading to a 30% decline in remittances.

In-depth interviews with re-entry banned migrant workers helped identify some short-term and long-term strategies in response to the application of the bans. Despite the efforts at informing migrants, most respondents were unaware of being blacklisted. Interviewed Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek migrant workers are often not aware of the need to comply with administrative regulations (registration and work patent procedures). Some migrant workers report being given a re-entry ban only when contacting the Federal Migration Service months after issuing the decision. In many instances Russian border guards do not verify the status of migrants while crossing the border. They are particularly vulnerable as they are asked to pay high sums of money and are caught by

surprise with the order to leave. They are also likely to bear the costs of lost work opportunities and terminated contracts.

After several months since the introduction of more stringent regulations, migrant workers have adapted their strategies. They rarely seek to re-enter Russia irregularly for fear of further sanctions, and generally opt for finding alternative workplaces to those lost in Russia for the period of re-entry ban. Another strategy that is applied is seeking a replacement for the banned family member or acquaintance. Thus, in the short run (up to a year), the sanctions have a deterring effect only toward the migrants who became subject to them.

Nevertheless, interest is still strong among Tajik, Uzbek or Kyrgyz migrants in working in Russia. The interviewed banned migrants are likely to return to the destination country as they have already worked out a support network. In contrast, the migrant workers very rarely seek opportunities for work in other countries, often lacking information on the actual conditions of employment. "Critical mass" of compatriots is needed for migrant workers to consider another country as a long-term destination and it may be concluded that new ties and social networks need to develop, attracting them to a new destination. The interviews thus support the earlier findings, according to which the application of sanctions in the destination countries (Russia, Kazakhstan) has a limited effect on both the volume and direction of Central Asian labour migration.

## CONCLUSIONS

The impact of administrative measures on the levels of migration flows from Central Asia to Kazakhstan and Russia cannot be easily ascertained as it is difficult to separate the effects from those of other short-term factors such as diminishing labour demand and currency devaluation.

Changes in entry, residence and employment conditions applied by Russia and Kazakhstan since 2012 have had a short-term impact, bringing about certain realignment of migration flows. The most important shock factor, which reduced the inflow of affected groups (Tajiks, Uzbeks) was the enforcement of re-entry bans. Surveys among re-entry banned migrants reveal that the majority could not immediately adjust to the measure as they were unaware of being subject to it.

In the long run, more restrictive measures are not expected to affect the direction or volume of the flows. Both economic and sociological studies confirm that Russia is likely to remain the primary destination for the majority of Central Asian migrant workers due to a combination of "push" and "pull" factors. Following the initial period of strict enforcement of sanctions, Russia has sought to work out more optimal arrangements with Central Asian states, as the case of Kyrgyzstan demonstrates.

At the same time, migrants remain attracted to the Russian labour market, where strong diasporas have developed support networks, relied on for hiring, changing jobs and securing lodging. The "pull" of Russia is so strong that the re-entry banned mi-

grants do not consider other locations even when the wage levels are relatively close to those in the Russian Federation. Kazakhstan has so far not been considered as a destination by migrant workers returning from Russia (in particular by those under re-entry bans). The research confirms the findings from literature that labour migrants are not likely to divert away from the destination countries where support networks provide the necessary cushion against the economic shocks.

On the other hand, the facilitating measures, associated with the formation and enlargement of the mobility area appear to have both short-term and long-run effects as the cases of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan demonstrate. In that case, the removal of some of the barriers to residence and employment appear crucial for stimulating the movement. However, the positive effects of administrative measures are partly attributable to the presence of powerful fundamental factors as well as the existence of diasporas, offering necessary support. Where some of these factors are not present (as in the case of Kazakhstan), the measures appear to be far less effective.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge the staff of IOM missions in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan for their overall support and assistance (in particular, Mr. Dejan Keserovic, IOM Coordinator for Central Asia and Ms. Tatiana Hadjiemmanuel, Deputy Coordinator of IOM Sub-Regional Office for Central Asia as well as the national experts and government officials of Central Asian states who provided input and comments to the work of the assessment team.

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